

Dark Legend and Sad Reality: Peck's *Wyoming* and Civil War

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Introduction

In 1858, the Reverend George Peck, D.D. (1797-1876), a nationally acclaimed pastor, editor, author and educator for the nineteenth century Methodist Episcopal Church, released *Wyoming: Its History, Stirring Incidents, and Romantic Adventures*, a local history published by Harper and Brothers, New York, and illustrated by Lossing and Barritt. As a longtime resident of Wilkes-Barre, a small town located on the Susquehanna River in the Wyoming Valley of northeastern Pennsylvania, Peck's apparent purpose in writing *Wyoming* was to relate the colorful local history of the region he called home. In presenting deliberately selective accounts of both the Wyoming Massacre of 1778 and the Yankee-Pennamite Wars, however, Peck's *Wyoming* described, in great detail, some of the earliest episodes of revolution, rebellion and civil strife to occur in the United States. These were timely topics for an author to address. Tensions that had been rising for over a decade as to whether or not slavery would be allowed in America's newly established western territories were acknowledged in Lincoln's "House Divided" speech of 1858, and by 1861, the year after Harper and Brothers released *Wyoming* in a second edition, the nation had plunged into civil war. As a perceptive critic of these bitter conflicts, Peck used *Wyoming's* popular local history format to evaluate the integrity of the American union, the evils of slavery, and the dangers of insurrection without offending or alienating any of the parties he hoped to address: as professed by Peck himself, "tales of sad reality" lay hidden within *Wyoming's* "dark legends of border war."¹

Integrity of the Union

In using *Wyoming's* local history format to comment on civil war, Peck took advantage of nineteenth-century trends in publishing to promote his ideas on a national scale. As the public school movements of the 1840's provided increased opportunities for education, and the emergence of new technologies and distribution networks in the publishing industry led to a greater availability of printed materials, reading became a widespread practice in the United States.² By 1858, Wyoming was well-represented in this burgeoning literary culture. From 1769 through 1784, conflicting land charters to this fertile valley, granted to settlers from both Pennsylvania and Connecticut, resulted in a series of battles known as the Yankee-Pennamite Wars. In the midst of this struggle, the Wyoming "Massacre" occurred in 1778, a famed battle of the American

Revolution in which British, Tory, and Iroquois forces attacked the Connecticut settlement at Wyoming, killing and capturing Yankee troops, and forcing the survivors to flee. Tales of these events appeared in writings by Hector St. John de Crevecoeur as early as 1787. Crevecoeur, who had witnessed the aftermath of the Wyoming Massacre in 1778, called for a bard to mourn the tragedy that befell this thriving but doomed community: in 1809 that call was answered by the Scottish poet Thomas Campbell, whose epic *Gertrude of Wyoming* told of a young love found in paradise but wasted by war. *Gertrude* was a great success, and, through the countless works of art and literature produced in its wake, the fame and saleability of the Wyoming story, as well as the importance of the moral values it inspired, were ensured.³

Precedents for representing Wyoming in text and image were further popularized and developed in works like *American Scenery*, the product of the American author Nathaniel Parker Willis and the English artist William Henry Bartlett. Researched and written between 1836 and 1838, and published by George Virtue, London, in 1840, *American Scenery* contained illustrations and narratives designed to distance the unpleasant aspects of the Wyoming conflicts in space and time, and to maintain the illusion that the valley existed as a safe and settled landscape.⁴ As the controversial beginnings of a hazardous mining industry transformed Wyoming, this use of romantic distancing increased. By the 1850's, illustrated travel articles in the *Portfolio*, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, and *Gleason's Pictorial* consistently paired panoramic views of Wyoming with descriptions of its mineral wealth, rarely acknowledging that the development of one compromised the existence of the other. The popularity of local histories of Wyoming produced during this era was also related to the works' romantic content. Somber, sensible narratives like Isaac Chapman's *Sketch of the History of Wyoming*, written in 1818 and published by Sharp D. Lewis, Wilkes-Barre, in 1830, and Charles Miner's *History of Wyoming*, published by J. Crissy, Philadelphia, in 1845, reached only a limited audience. William Stone's *Poetry and History of the Wyoming Valley*, however, which contained a complete reprint of Campbell's *Gertrude*, was repeatedly released by a number of publishers, including Wiley and Putnam, New York, in 1841; M.H. Neuman, New York, in 1844; and J. Munsell, Albany, in 1864 and 1871. As the disparity between real and ideal perceptions of Wyoming grew, few authors and artists were willing to directly address the valley's past in relation to its present. One notable exception, and the one most closely related to Peck's *Wyoming*, was Benson J. Lossing.

Recognized today as a prolific and popular nineteenth century historian/engraver, Lossing first achieved critical acclaim with his *Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution*. This ambitious two-volume work was researched, written and illustrated by Lossing between 1848 and 1850, and was first released by Harper and Brothers in thirty installments between 1850 and 1852. By May, 1855,

the publishers recorded a sale total of 11,431 two-volume sets, 1,541 copies of Volume One, and 1,990 copies of Volume Two; given the work's popularity, later reprints appeared in 1855 and 1859.⁵ In the *Field-Book*, Lossing hoped to popularize history for patriotic purposes by presenting narratives of his visits to famous battlefields of the American Revolution in an open-ended, travelogue style. Readers of the *Field-Book* were encouraged to make direct connections between their own experiences and the past; in doing so, they were also encouraged to accept and defend established American ideals.⁶ In a decade when sectional tensions threatened American unity, an article in the *Methodist Quarterly Review* of July, 1850, noted the valuable potential of such a work, stating that "the remembrances of the Revolution are among the surest bonds of union, and the surest pledges of virtue, for the people of these States[;] and such a work as this, combining high art with pure patriotism and sound morality, deserves a wide diffusion among the people of every part of the land."⁷

In conjunction with earlier publications emphasizing the tragedy and beauty of Wyoming, Lossing's *Field-Book*, which contained a 40-page section on the region, stood as an excellent example of how history, and, in particular, the history of Wyoming, might be adapted and distributed to serve a popular, yet patriotic end. Based on this successful precedent, Peck's *Wyoming* picked up where Lossing's *Field-Book* left off. As an expanded narrative of the events at Wyoming, the 432-page volume was comprised of a series of "historic scenes," wherein "each story [was]...a complete picture in itself, and yet [was]...a necessary part of the whole."⁸ In keeping with the personalized and interactive approach to history popularized by Lossing, these scenes were presented by Peck as a compilation of interviews with Wyoming residents, rather than a strict chronological recounting of past events. Individual episodes from the Wyoming saga were illustrated in 33 woodcuts by Lossing and Barritt, many of which had done previous duty as part of the *Field-Book*. *Wyoming*, like the *Field-Book*, was published by Harper and Brothers, New York, in first, second and third editions in 1858, 1860 and 1872; prior to its initial release, the text was also previewed as "The Romance of Wyoming," an illustrated promotional article published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* of August, 1858. As a practical publishing house, Harper and Brothers recognized that sales and publicity generated by Peck's *Wyoming* reinforced interest in reprints of the *Field-Book*, and vice versa. This relationship was made clear in a letter from George M. Elliott of the Harper Brothers Agency Department, written to Peck on January 5, 1859:

Mr. James Harper suggests that, in view of your extensive acquaintance and influence, you could, perhaps, secure us some valuable agents for the 'Field Book of the Revolution.' A new, revised edition of the work has been prepared, and it will hereafter be sold only through

agents. Any man should feel a patriotic pride in extending the circulation of a work so truly *National* in its character. The early history of our country, during its protracted struggle for liberty, should be read and pondered at every American fireside, that the patriotism which animated the founders of our republic may be kept alive in the hearts of those who enjoy its blessings. Our youth should be infused with its spirit, that they may learn to love, and cherish a desire to defend, the liberties they inherit.⁹

In addition to the moral virtues of the *Field-Book*, Elliott saw fit to note “from the success that some of the agents who have started out for it are having, I feel warranted in saying that competent men can realize, in the sale of it, from \$1000 to \$1500 a year, above all expenses.”¹⁰

During the summer of 1858, the combined efforts of Peck, Lossing, and the Harpers bore fruit, and *Wyoming* was reviewed in glowing terms. In July, 1858, *Knickerbocker* praised the work for its accuracy and intimacy, noting that while *Wyoming* was “a melancholy recital, almost painful to read,” the work was “nevertheless pregnant with interest” and “well-authenticated facts.”¹¹ The review further commended Peck for presenting “independent views of...[Wyoming’s] historic drama from many different standpoints” and for describing heroes who reflected not only “the lights and shadows of their own character and actions,” but “gave separate versions of the eventful scenes through which they passed.”¹² Similarly, a notice published in the *Methodist Quarterly Review* of the same month stated that while “poetry and fiction, picture and history, have all taken turn, like so many muses, in giving touch to . . . [Wyoming’s] celebrity . . . the gravest of muses, History, comes last, dispersing, indeed, some of the illusions of the former performances, but placing the objects in the clear and closing light of truth.”¹³ After assuming the “the grave and masculine guise of a doctor of divinity,” History had set the record straight in *Wyoming*, causing the editors of the *Methodist Quarterly Review* to “consider the case closed with judicial accuracy, though its facts are summed up with more than ordinary judicial vivacity.”¹⁴

Despite its local history format, *Wyoming* was also well-received in regions beyond the northeast. The Richmond-based *Southern Literary Messenger*, in a review of June, 1858, acknowledged that “Wyoming is classic ground, and a great deal has been written about it. . . .Dr. Peck has done an acceptable service in collecting and arranging in proper form all the facts connected with the history of the valley.”¹⁵ Further, Peck’s work was found to be enhanced by “numerous wood-cuts . . . [produced] mostly from drawings on the spot and . . . executed in the very best manner of the Harpers,” and was applauded for its index, “a feature . . . [found] wanting in so large a majority of American publications.”¹⁶ Finally, *Wyoming* found favor among its critics in terms of

pricing and production. Sold at an estimated retail cost of \$1.75, *Wyoming* was a work that the average reader could afford.¹⁷ In October, 1858, Z. Paddock's article on "Wyoming" found in the *Methodist Quarterly Review* assured audiences that the volume was, indeed, a value, since any of *Wyoming's* chapters, "taken separately, is worth more than the price of the whole book."

¹⁸ The laudatory 10-page review saw promise for *Wyoming* even in the work's spelling errors, reasoning that "perfect typographical accuracy is among the most difficult things to be acquired in this imperfect state. The Harpers are, we suppose, if not at the head, at least in the first class of publishers in the United States. But even they blunder sometimes. . . . In the next edition, however, for we expect the book will be published for years to come, these little errors can be, doubtless will be, corrected." ¹⁹

While critically received as an interesting and accurate presentation of history, Peck's *Wyoming* was more than a skillful and appealing reiteration of historical facts and debates. Instead, the work reinterpreted Wyoming's inherently American themes of unity, captivity and civil conflict with contemporary clarity and relevance, giving nineteenth century readers insights into the issues of solidarity, slavery, and secession that shaped their daily lives. This aspect of *Wyoming* was carefully delineated in Paddock's "Wyoming," which noted:

It is not wonderful that a portion of our country so rich in itself, and so thrilling in historic reminiscences, should have excited extraordinary attention. It would be surprising if it had been otherwise. The bards of the Revolution embalmed it in song, and Campbell's Gertrude made it classic ground. The fame of it has 'gone out into all the world,' and no American tourist can be regarded as having completed his task until he shall have visited Wyoming. So much has been said of it, indeed, as well by the historian and the journalist as by the poet, that it would seem as if the theme must have been exhausted years since. Not so, however. In historic wealth, as in its own physical resources, Wyoming seems to be, if not absolutely inexhaustible, at least unexhausted. Neither Chapman, nor Stone, nor Miner, each of whom attempted an elaborate history, has used up all the material. Nor have their deficiencies been supplied by the incidental allusions of those general histories of our country which have, from time to time, been written. Something more was still wanting, and the book named at the head of this article happily supplies the desideratum. It not only corrects numerous errors in previous histories, but it opens veins that had never before been worked. . . .

The author's style is admirably adapted to his theme. It is simple, chaste, and perspicuous. The reader is never perplexed to find out Dr. Peck's meaning....It writes itself as with a pen of iron on the tablet of the soul.²⁰

The "new vein " which Peck sought to work in *Wyoming* was the relevance of the region's history to the contemporary threat of civil war, and to the reconciliation he hoped to achieve.

The primary issue addressed by Peck in *Wyoming*, and the issue that informed all of the work's subsequent dialogues, was the integrity of the American union. In the first section of *Wyoming*, which included the work's preface and Chapters I through V, Peck outlined his reasons for producing the local history, and expressed his hopes for his country's future, stating:

The events herein recorded constitute a part of the wonderful history of the early development and fearful struggles of America, and we believe they will not fall behind any portion of that story in exciting interest. . . .

[W]e publish the result of our labors, hoping that it may both interest and instruct the reading community. The work, so far as we are concerned, has been a 'labor of love,' and our desire is that it may inspire in the reader a spirit of enlarged patriotism, noble heroism, patient endurance under severe trials, and gratitude to God.²¹

Two full-page illustrations found in this section, "Zinzendorf Providentially Delivered," and "The Myers House," with their accompanying texts, set the tone for this reaffirmation of faith in a peaceful, united nation. Both narratives and images were closely tied to Peck's own experiences as a minister to and resident of Wyoming. By establishing parallels between events at Wyoming and his own personal and professional identity as a clergyman and author of New England descent, Peck positioned himself in relation to both historical and contemporary dialogues on civil war, and encouraged his readers to do the same.

As the frontispiece to *Wyoming*, the image of "Zinzendorf Providentially Delivered," in conjunction with texts found in Chapter I, immediately introduced nineteenth century readers to Peck's intentions in producing his work, and to his all-encompassing message of reconciliation. (Figure 1). As explained by Peck, Nicolaus Ludwig, Count von Zinzendorf, a Moravian religious leader, came to Wyoming in 1742, hoping to convert the region's Native American population to Christianity. The natives, by contrast, were suspicious of the stranger. They resolved one night to murder the missionary



Figure 1.
"Zinzendorf
Providentially
Delivered," in
George Peck,
Wyoming:
Its History,
Stirring Incidents
and Romantic
Adventures,
New York: Harper
and Brothers,
1858. Frontispiece.

in his sleep, and sent a war party to his camp near the river. Upon reaching the camp, however:

A few warriors selected for the purpose stealthily approached the tent of the unsuspecting stranger by night to accomplish their designs, when a strange providence interfered. Peeping through an opening of the tent, they saw a huge rattlesnake crawl over the feet of the visitor without interrupting his composure as he sat upon a bundle of weeds engaged in writing. Considering that he was protected by the

Great Spirit, they departed without offering him the least molestation.²²

Zinzendorf, as a devout Christian, used his missions to spread a message of peace and fellowship, and despite great challenges, was blessed and protected in this enterprise by the grace of God. Accordingly, Zinzendorf was depicted by Lossing and Barritt as a man of devotions, patiently writing by a fire in his shadowy tent. The dangers he faced and the deliverance he received were also duly represented: to the left of Zinzendorf, two knife-wielding natives peered through the tent flap, gazing in astonishment at a very sizable serpent which crawled across the missionary's foot. In choosing to begin *Wyoming* with the story of Zinzendorf, Peck clearly demonstrated his profound belief that disaster could be averted by faith, and defined his own historical position as a clergyman, author, and social critic. Traditionally, the frontispiece of a book was the place reserved for a portrait of the work's author: physical, cultural and denominational differences notwithstanding, Peck identified himself as Zinzendorf, a minister to Wyoming who pitted faith against violence in times of crisis, and sought to express that faith in the form of the written word.

The Zinzendorf image served as an analogy for Peck's life in terms of his service in missions, his commitment to writing, and his experiences with conflict. The name of the Reverend George Peck, D.D., is scarcely known today, save in the historical context of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the fame of this prolific ecclesiastical author pales in comparison with that of his literary grandson, Stephen Crane. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, Peck, as a figure whose legendary status rivaled Wyoming's own, "was a member of perhaps the most famous family of Methodist ministers in the United States, five of his brothers, two of his sons, and several of his nephews having been distinguished preachers."²³ Born in Middlefield, New York, in 1797, Peck was one of many young men who entered the Methodist ministry in the early 1800s as part of the Second Great Awakening, an intense period of religious fervor and diversification marked by the rise of "popular" Protestant denominations.²⁴ In response to shifting demographics caused by high birth rates and the availability of land, the new Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian movements born of the Second Great Awakening drew their membership from a pool of Americans more numerous and mobile than ever before. Between 1776 and 1845, the population of the United States grew from two and a half to twenty million people, and young people increasingly left the homes of their parents to seek property and employment in fledgling cities and western frontiers. In order to establish congregations in these distant regions, new denominations initiated ambitious outreach campaigns, accompanied by dramatic increases in clergy, and advocated personalized expressions of spirituality, manifested in the popular form of revivals. While most Protestant

churches prospered during this period, Methodism, especially, attracted both converts and clergy at a rate that terrified the competition: after “starting from scratch” just prior to the Revolution, Methodist membership numbered a quarter million by 1820, and doubled by 1830.²⁵

The Methodist initiative was successful largely due to the efforts of Bishop Francis Ashbury, an unrelenting organizer who, during the late eighteenth century, structured the efforts of the Methodist clergy in accordance with a “travelling plan” that emphasized a commitment to the circumference rather than the center. The significance of this strategy was outlined in a statement from the Methodist Conference of 1792:

*Our grand plan, in all its parts, leads to an itinerant ministry. Our bishops are travelling bishops. All the different order which compose our conferences are employed in the travelling line; and our local preachers are, in some degree, travelling preachers. Everything is kept moving as far as possible; and we will be bold to say, that, next to the grace of God, there is nothing like this for keeping the whole body alive from the centre to the circumference, and for the continual extension of that circumference on every hand.*²⁶

The figure at the forefront of this expansive enterprise was the Methodist circuit rider, a typically young, single, devout and underpaid clergyman who, by means of a horse, would ride out to obscure communities within his circuit, and fulfill the duties of a “travelling” preacher. Methodist circuit riders were regular visitors to the Peck home, and Peck joined their ranks in 1816, at the age of nineteen. In their charge to minister to all people, however, regardless of social class or physical location, circuit riders often sacrificed their physical well-being, and the difficulties of constant riding, exposure to wind and rain, hazardous roadways, and makeshift accommodations took their toll. In the 1860s, Abel Stevens estimated that “nearly half of the first six hundred and fifty Methodist preachers died before they were thirty years old,” while modern scholar Nathan Hatch has noted that “over 60 percent of itinerants who died in Methodist service before 1819 did so under forty years of age.”²⁷ In light of this aggressive commitment to outreach and conversion, the Methodist ministry has been described as “a militarily organized mission,” dedicated to the saving of souls at all costs.²⁸ During the early part of his career, Peck served five years on the Broome and Wyoming circuits of southern New York and northeastern Pennsylvania. If the image of Zinzendorf did not portray the physical likeness of Peck, it clearly represented the spiritual and professional identity of a man who recognized his predecessor in a religious leader who, in the name of religion, had faced hardships along the Susquehanna a century

before.

If the early nineteenth century saw a rise in the number of clergy devoted to spreading the new “popular” denominations, it also saw the emergence of a democratic urge among Protestant churches to unite the forces of the press and the pulpit, thereby drawing upon and contributing to increasing numbers of American authors and readers. Once again, the Methodist church took the lead in these outreach activities, producing and distributing printed materials on an unprecedented scale. The Methodist Book Concern, established in 1784 to produce books, tracts, religious papers and Bibles, was and is recognized as the oldest publishing house in America, while the *Methodist Christian Advocate and Journal*, which began publication in New York in 1826, was one of the first newspapers to reach a national audience, and within two years had a weekly circulation of fifteen thousand copies — one of the largest circulation figures in the world at that time.²⁹ Methodist publications were distributed to broad audiences via the circuit riders, who also doubled as booksellers, and Peck was first introduced to the publishing industry in this capacity. Soon, however, Peck’s talents as author and editor were also recognized, and eventually led to editorial appointments with both the *Methodist Quarterly Review* (1840-1848) and *New York Christian Advocate* (1848-1852).³⁰ This commitment to producing literature in the service of religion was clearly represented in Peck’s interpretation of Zinzendorf, whose involvement with writing was equated with spiritual transcendence.

Finally, however, the most profound attribute shared by Peck and Zinzendorf, as represented in *Wyoming*, was their experience of a conflict based on racial difference. For Zinzendorf, this experience stemmed from the Wyoming natives’ suspicion of a culture different from their own; for Peck, it was a schism in the Methodist church that both “presaged and provoked” the Civil War.³¹ By the end of the 1840s, the Methodist church, like most of the new Protestant denominations, experienced an organizational split as its northern and southern factions struggled with the religious implications of slavery. Since the national ties established by these evangelical churches in the early nineteenth century helped to link diverse segments of the United States, the churches, as they divided, “broke a primary bond of national unity, encouraged the myth of ‘peaceable secession,’ established a precedent of sectional independence, reinforced the growing alienation between North and South by cultivating distorted images of ‘the other side,’ and exacerbated the moral outrage that each section felt against the other.”³² As a prominent church official elected to the Methodist General Conference for thirteen consecutive terms (1824-1872), Peck experienced these early intimations of “civil war” within the Methodist church firsthand. In 1844, as chairman of the General Conference’s Committee on Slavery, Peck stood at the heart of the controversy surrounding Bishop James Andrew, a church official whose

ecclesiastical appointment was contested due to his ownership of slaves. Unable to reconcile the spiritual and political interests of its northern abolitionists and southern slaveholders, the Methodist Episcopal Church adopted a formal Plan of Separation, and split the national organization of the church in two.³³ Symptomatic of the larger American experience, this break foreshadowed all-pervasive social and political conflicts which, sixteen years later, divided the United States as well.

Peck's response to slavery, as a problem of both church and state, informed the texts and images of *Wyoming*. When forced to state his position on slavery, Peck, as a northern minister, readily voiced his objections to the practice on moral grounds. As a committed and conscientious administrator, Peck was also determined to foster peace between opposing factions of the Methodist church. Fearing that inflammatory debates on slavery would bring "only evil continually," he refused to address the subject in any but the most temperate terms.³⁴ Northern colleagues, angered by Peck's uncompromising refusal to publish condemnations of slavery in church journals, berated him for his "cowardice" and "noncommittalism," while southern associates, incensed by the moderate logic of works like his *Slavery and the Episcopacy* of 1845, denounced him at a mock funeral in Richmond, Virginia.³⁵ In later years, as the battles over slavery fought within the confines of the church became apparent in American politics as a whole, Peck, whose views on slavery were shaped in a spiritual context, expressed his convictions in secular terms. In his work as a clergyman, Peck called upon the power of the written word "to close old controversies, and . . . minister, as far as possible, to the peace of the church."³⁶ As a popular author, Peck spoke once more as a mediator, and sought to engage his lay audiences in a dialogue concerning slavery and civil war presented in an appealing, rather than aggressive way. When facing the civil crises of the 1850s, Peck advocated patience, rather than passion, in hopes that enemies of his own day, like those of Zinzendorf's, might abandon violent plans if given time to see grace and reason.

In the story and image of "Zinzendorf Providentially Delivered," Peck called for the peaceful resolution of conflicts grounded in issues of culture and race. In *Wyoming's* second vignette, "The Myers House," found in Chapter IV, he developed this call for cooperation into a full-scale statement on the importance of maintaining a unified national identity that would transcend regional difference (Figure 2). Narratives in this chapter focused on the experiences Martha Bennet Myers, the daughter of an early Connecticut settler in Wyoming who grew up in the valley during the Yankee-Pennamite Wars. While many of Mrs. Myers' childhood remembrances were included in this chapter, Peck particularly emphasized her adult life: in 1787, Martha Bennet married Philip Myers of Maryland, and the couple built a homestead on a lot given to them by the bride's father. Described as a crude but comfortable

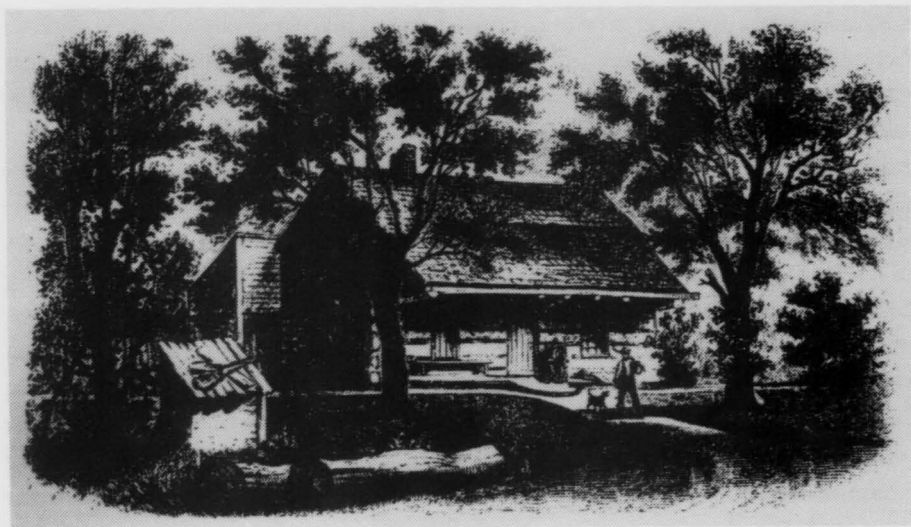


Figure 2. "The Myers House," in George Peck, *Wyoming: Its History, Stirring Incidents and Romantic Adventures*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1858. 192.

dwelling, "The Myers House" was "constructed of yellow pine logs, hewed, and pointed with lime mortar, and lined on the inside."³⁷ This house, which became the focal point of the chapter, weathered the winds of change and sheltered the Myers family for generations. As noted by Peck, the "old relic still stands, and, if no violence is done to it, with reasonable repairs may live to see the opening of the next century."³⁸ By the time of the Bennet-Myers marriage, Wyoming had entered a new era of harmony and maturity: "the storm of war had blown over, old grudges between the two classes of settlers were fast fading away, and society was assuming a condition of stability and prosperity."³⁹ For Peck, "The Myers House," in keeping with past representations of Wyoming as a settled center in the wilderness, symbolized the integrity of the American union in times of distress. As an alternative to the grief and danger of a "House Divided," Peck's story and image of "The Myers House" described the promise and potential of a "house united," built upon the foundations of family and community, and maintained through the ideals of responsibility and perseverance.

The issues of regional and national identity addressed in Peck's "The Myers House" are closely tied to what contemporary scholar Lawrence Buell describes as the "concept of Puritan ancestry."⁴⁰ As the history of a region claimed and cultivated by Connecticut settlers, *Wyoming* recorded and valorized a specific set of actions and ideals identified with the culture of New England. In this, the work was part of a larger trend: since the time of the American Revolution, Buell notes, the New England states had produced numerous authors intent on chronicling the illustrious deeds of their forefathers, while "almost half of the historical societies founded in America between 1790 and 1830 were New

England-based or devoted to the memorialization of the New England past.”

⁴¹ Due, in part, to the proliferation of these publications and organizations, a stereotypical New England identity emerged, grounded, especially, in what were perceived to be the spiritual and democratic ideals of the Puritans. By the mid-nineteenth century, this regional identity, which emphasized the value of piety, independence, and ingenuity, was widely recognized as an essential component of the national one: while countless other regional identities contributed to the American consciousness, the myth of the New England Puritan, clad in righteous initiative, appealed to a nation intent on westward expansion and commercial conquest by suggesting that progress was, indeed, divine.⁴²

Within the parameters of this ideological genealogy, Peck himself was accorded a privileged place. On June 10, 1819, this youngest son of a blacksmith from Danbury, Connecticut, married Mary Myers, the third daughter of Philip and Martha Bennet Myers, and became, by extension, a member of the respected Bennet family of Wyoming.⁴³ These personal ties to both Wyoming and its New England traditions lent credibility Peck's writings on the subject, and were readily noted by authors and readers versed in other works on the region. Historians of Wyoming had long considered Mrs. Myers to be one of the most reliable witnesses to colonial events in the valley, and as stated by Peck:

Mrs. Myers was visited by Professor Silliman previous to her blindness. Mr. Miner gives an account of the visit in his history. Colonel Stone and Mr. Lossing, in turn, with other interesting tourists and authors, called upon her, as the most accurate chronicler of the stirring and romantic events of the early history of Wyoming. All make honorable mention of her. Her accurate memory of the scenes which came under her own observation, and those which were a matter of common report and universal belief in olden time, is remarked with admiration by the authors above referred to. But those alone who have been accustomed to hear these events related for years are prepared fully to appreciate her extreme accuracy of recollection. Her children, who heard her stories hundreds of times, we will venture to say, never caught her in a single contradiction or a material variation in relating the same facts.⁴⁴

Similarly, Paddock argued that Peck's familial ties to Wyoming provided him with special insights to his topic, stating that “for a task of this kind Dr. Peck has rare facilities. Conjurally connected with some of the principal actors in the drama, and long a resident in the valley, his opportunities for the personal collection and verification of facts are unequalled. That he is both capable

and trustworthy, it were needless to affirm.”⁴⁵

The New England identity, however, for all its noble ideals of liberty and enterprise, could also become repressive and limiting. In a passage meant to describe the virtues—and vices—of Wyoming, Paddock paid backhanded tribute to the region’s staunch New England ethic, noting:

Religion has prospered here. Missionary enterprise opened the way into these secluded regions. Probably the first white man to ever set foot upon the soil was that apostle of the *Unitas Fratrum*, COUNT ZINZENDORF, who crossed the Atlantic with the sole view to teach the red man the way to heaven, and who, in 1742, with his interpreter, erected his tent near the principal Indian village. From that day God has not been without a witness in Wyoming Valley. Churches have been formed, and places of worship erected. The stringent moral views of New England have, *ab origine*, exerted a controlling influence over the habits of the people. Order and morality have held a decided preponderance, while science and letters have been more or less cultivated. Though the very copious influx of a foreign population, drawn hither by the mineral discoveries of the valley, has doubtless retarded rather than promoted the advancement of intelligence and virtue, still social polish and evangelical religion are prominent characteristics of the Wyoming community.⁴⁶

Paddock’s passage indicated that the popularization of the New England identity, while based in part on general appeal, could also be motivated by a fear of change and transformation. As urbanization, industrialization, and immigration forever altered the social and economic structures of the colonial era, and the once powerful New England regions experienced a loss of political influence nationally, Buell proposes that the myth of a Puritan-based American identity offered the old enclaves some degree of reassurance and consolation.⁴⁷ In this way, the New England identity, based on a nostalgic valorization of the past, could become both a defense against an uncertain future, and an agent of discrimination, suspicion, and hostility. Thus, while Peck’s authority in recording Wyoming’s New England heritage was undisputed, the challenge to his presentation of that heritage lay in whether or not the New England identity could be reconstructed in open and inclusive terms.

By carefully negotiating the space for interpretation that existed between the patriotic and prejudicial aspects of the New England identity, Peck, in *Wyoming*, consistently positioned discussions of Wyoming’s regional history and identity within the broader context of the nation at large. As a Methodist minister in the first half of the nineteenth century, Peck’s ecclesiastical career had been built on his ability to integrate these spheres of activity. During this

period, American religious organizations, which had once focused on the importance of local congregations, shifted their attentions to the nation as a whole. Clergymen, traditionally viewed as community officials, were now perceived as professionals connected to nationwide initiatives in which they were expected to participate.⁴⁸ Accordingly, Peck ministered to congregations in his native regions of southern New York and northeastern Pennsylvania for more than fifty years. At the same time, however, he was active, at national levels, in the Methodist General Assembly and the Methodist Book Concern. As in his work as a clergyman, Peck, as an author and social critic, embraced his local ties while maintaining a national perspective, so that *Wyoming* was strengthened, rather than limited by them. Without this larger awareness of national concerns, a history of Wyoming, written by a resident of the region and based on the testimony of his aged mother-in-law, could have easily run the risk of provincialism. With it, Peck's careful reinterpretation of personal symbols like "The Myers House" became extended metaphors for the American experience: by the welcoming an anxious public into his family homestead, Peck sought to shelter a nation from dissention and fear.

Peck's efforts to reinterpret, rather than merely restate, narratives concerning the Myers House and the New England identity were evidenced in numerous passages found adjacent to the "Myers House" illustration. In a direct attempt to link Mrs. Myers' recollections of colonial Wyoming with the events of his day, Peck was quick to inform his readers that Mrs. Myers herself, despite her advanced age, "continued, to the last point of life, to remember recent occurrences as well as those which transpired in the days of her youthful vigor."⁴⁹ In this way, Peck assured his audience that the present would be no less important, historically, than the past, and implied that the will and judgment of the current generation might be shaped, but not overshadowed, by the decisions of previous ones.

Similarly, Mrs. Myers' choice of a husband modified, rather than emulated traditions firmly established by her New England forebears. The importance of familial bonds at Wyoming, and the restrictive nature of kinship networks established between its early Yankee settlers has been noted by historians of Wyoming since the time of Miner, and Peck records that, as a young woman, Martha Bennet was duly engaged to William Smith, a young man from a respected Wyoming family. Tragically, Smith was killed by Pennamites after the Revolution during a local conflict waged as part of Wyoming's ongoing "unnatural civil war."⁵⁰ For a time, "Miss Bennet was disconsolate, and...thought to spend her life in a state of celibacy."⁵¹ Soon, however, "a newcomer mingled in this scene:" in 1785, Philip Myers of Maryland joined his brother Lawrence, a lawyer and veteran of the Revolutionary War, who "had come to Wyoming, and married, and become identified with the New England settlers." Shortly thereafter, Philip Myers "sought the hand of Martha

Bennet, and they were joined in marriage. . . .”⁵² Contrary to tradition, the Bennet-Myers marriage united parties from the north and south to create a bond that expanded, rather than eradicated the bride’s New England heritage. Therefore, Peck implied, the marriage served as a model for the United States itself, which, while threatened with civil war, could still “wed” members of opposing parties to create a harmonious nation rooted in American traditions of democracy.

Finally, interpretations of “The Myers House” as a symbol of unity, rather than exclusivity, were strengthened when narratives and images concerning Mrs. Myers and her experiences found in Peck’s *Wyoming* were compared to those in Lossing’s *Field-Book*. Lossing, in interviewing Mrs. Myers, stated:

She was sixteen years old at the time of the massacre, and was in Forty Fort when it surrendered. . . . Her father’s house was near the fort, and for a week after the surrender it was spared, while others were plundered and destroyed. Every morning when she arose her first thought was their house, and she would go early to see if it was safe. One morning as she looked she saw the flames burst through the roof, and in an hour it was a heap of embers.⁵³

In a marked departure from Lossing, Peck emphasized the importance of continuity and regeneration in his tale of “The Myers House,” identifying the structure not as a lost childhood residence, but as a new home, erected by Mrs. Myers and her husband on land given to them by her family: the father’s house had burned, but the daughter’s house would survive.⁵⁴ This vision of “The Myers House” as the work of a new generation, built with the help of one’s forefathers, rather than merely inherited from them, reflected Peck’s personal commitment to the ideals of a revitalized American union, which, while it honored the traditions of the past, was not afraid to amend them for the sake of future generations.

Evils of Slavery

Despite his dedication to national peace and solidarity, Peck’s aim in producing *Wyoming* was not merely to express personal opinions on the state of the union, but to educate the public concerning the spiritual and political evils of slavery. To this end, the popular local history format of *Wyoming* was again beneficial. The concept of “popular” literature, as recognized today, is difficult to define in terms of the nineteenth century, since the academic historical profession was not standardized in the United States until after 1880, and authors prior to that time produced works for both scholarly and commercial reasons.⁵⁵ In the years before the Civil War, reading was considered to be a serious, rather than recreational pursuit, the purpose of which was

moral or intellectual improvement. Works deemed suitable for a "popular" audience focused on history, travel, and education; extravagant and scandalous novels produced during the time elicited suspicion and scorn.⁵⁶ Thus, while Lossing, in his preface to the *Field-Book*, lamented that "the exciting literature of the day,...so cheaply published and so widely diffused, has produced a degree of mental dissipation throughout our land, destructive, in its tendency, to sober and rational desires for imbibing useful knowledge," the editors of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* could also state that "the literature which . . . holds up to a people a glass wherein they see a magic reflection of themselves . . . as they appear lifted into the world of art...is true popular literature."⁵⁷ In an era when heated political issues were often treated with what contemporary scholar Lewis Saum calls "benign avoidance," the narratives of *Wyoming* were just as useful as its format in providing Peck with a mirror capable of reflecting the concerns of his time.⁵⁸

Building upon and moving beyond established texts and images, Peck carefully exploited the proven capacities of the Wyoming story to excite sympathy for the oppressed and to distance issues of race in order to address, rather than avoid, the controversial subject of slavery, and to call for its extirpation.. Since their earliest appearance, narratives of Wyoming had been used to evoke compassion for the disenfranchised by emphasizing the plight of the region's Yankee refugees. Miner noted that the vocabulary of Wyoming was first adapted to win support for the Revolutionary War when several weeks after the Wyoming Massacre, an exaggerated account of the event:

circulated, not only in the United Colonies, but throughout every Nation in Europe, was calculated to arouse the most powerful emotions of the human soul—pity for American suffering—detestation of blackest perfidy—and horror at the unheard of cruelty on the part of Great Britain and her Savage allies: and hence to strengthen our cause, by bringing popular sentiment to bear in our favor at both home and abroad.⁵⁹

In addition to building support for the oppressed, narratives of Wyoming were also used to mask racial tensions. Whether framed in the context of the Yankee-Pennamite, Revolutionary, or Civil Wars, the fact that conflict could arise between groups sharing a common social and racial heritage was difficult for Americans to accept. In local histories of Wyoming, the presence of a cultural "other," in the form of Native Americans, allowed this unpleasant issue to be conveniently avoided. As a third party possessing social and racial characteristics not common to those of European heritage, Native Americans quickly became scapegoats for the most violent acts at Wyoming. Despite the role of Tory and Pennamite forces in the Wyoming conflicts, early paintings

and prints depicting these events, including J.C. Vanderburch's eighteenth century representation of the "Disastre de Vioming," engraved by Augustin-Francois Le Maitre in the early nineteenth century; F.O.C. Darley's "Wyoming," engraved by J.C. McRae circa 1852; and Alonso Chappel's "Massacre at Wyoming" engraved for Dawson's *Battles of the United States* in 1858, all focused on the destructive actions of Native Americans set against the heroism and suffering of the Yankee settlers.⁶⁰ As interpreted by modern scholar Roger Stein, such representations of Native American aggressors, common during the 1850's, "gave shape to the contemporary fear of slave uprisings, [and] of the violent reprisal of the repressed racial 'other'." ⁶¹

As an admitted opponent of slavery, Peck developed the symbolic narratives of *Wyoming* most extensively in those episodes of violence and abuse that might be used to champion human rights. In *Wyoming's* second major thematic section, which encompassed Chapters VI through XIII, a series of particularly violent and dramatic Lossing and Barritt illustrations appeared: "The Indian Triumph" at Lackawanna; "The Capture of Frances Slocum;" the "Slaughter of the Indians by the Bennets and Hammond;" and "Bidlack's Escape." Centered on acts of humiliation, abduction and escape, the images, and the episodes they illustrated, recalled hotly debated aspects of slavery, including the inhumane treatment of slaves; the stealing of slaves from their homeland and the selling of slave children away from their parents; and the rights of runaway slaves under the provisions of the Fugitive Slave Law. The terminology used by Peck in describing the major characters in *Wyoming* further reinforced this context: the experiences of "fugitive" Connecticut settlers following the Wyoming Massacre were likened to the experiences of slaves, while the oppression that they suffered at the hands of "savage" Native Americans was presented as a parallel to the cruel tenets of slavery. In this way, Peck described episodes of interracial violence common to the slave condition while maintaining a necessary distance from a volatile topic. At the same time, through race reversal, he garnered sympathy for a racial "other", echoing a method used by black authors, who often related accounts of the slave condition in the guise of white narrators, thereby engaging what might otherwise be a hostile white audience.⁶² When viewed in this context, the symbolism of "Zinzendorf Providentially Delivered" became even more apparent: Peck, as the clergyman seeking to maintain peace through the written word, worked to oppose the threat of violence engendered by the "savage" institution of slavery.

The danger in Peck's *Wyoming* surfaced as ethnocentrism, which became a tool for both liberation and discrimination, as one minority group was defended at the expense of another. In their symbolic role as "savages," *Wyoming's* Native Americans were presented in a negative light not wholly in keeping with Peck's own progressive racial views. In his sermon *National Evils and Their Remedy* of 1841, Peck acknowledged that the United States had been guilty of not

only “*most cruelly oppressing the African race,*” but had also “*driven out the natives, the original owners of the soil, from their homes, and from the graves of their FATHERS.*”⁶³ These sentiments were further developed in a later sermon on “The Secession Devil,” which warned:

one compulsory move after another, westward, has brought them [the Native Americans] to many sad extremities, and to the very verge of despair. The government has not always kept the faith of treaties with these poor savages. Too often have voracious land-pirates and unscrupulous state authorities found the means of using the United States Government as a tool for the achievement of stupendous robberies inflicted upon the native tribes. As a nation we have to plead guilty to this fearful indictment, and throw ourselves upon the mercy of the court of heaven.⁶⁴

Given these statements, Peck's prejudicial depictions of Connecticut settlers and Native Americans must be read as symbolic representations of actions and ideas, rather than individuals. In appropriating the racial stereotypes of the Wyoming narratives, Peck sought not to condemn the actions of another culture, but the elements of dissension and inhumanity within his own.

In the paired pictures and texts of the second section of *Wyoming*, Peck examined slavery as a staged series of conditions, practices, and outcomes. The first condition of slavery, which informed and gave rise to all of the cruel actions to follow, was a lack of respect for human dignity, and the willingness of one individual to treat another with impudence and malice. The subject of *Wyoming* afforded Peck ample opportunity to discuss acts of both physical and emotional cruelty: In an episode identified as “The Indian Triumph,” the insensitivity of the victorious British, Tory and Iroquois forces towards the Connecticut settlers was demonstrated outside the fort at Lackawanna following the Wyoming Massacre (Figure 3). On the night of July 3, 1778, the inhabitants of Lackawanna heard screams and battle cries from across the river at Wyoming. Knowing that the war parties would be upon them by daybreak, the frightened settlers raised a sheet upon the river bank, in order that their lives be spared. The flag of truce was discovered, and the Lackawanna blockhouse was surrendered to the British and Indians, who proceeded to tear down the pickets around the fortress and paint the settlers, signifying their status as prisoners of war.⁶⁵ As the occupation of the blockhouse continued, the conquerors' heartless nature was revealed to the terrified settlers when an old squaw, carrying seventeen scalps, confiscated a horse and side-saddle belonging to a Lackawanna woman. Holding the scalps and a looking glass, she mounted the mare backwards, and paraded past the settlers outside of the fortress wall, mocking the loss of their loved ones. While the settlers of Lackawanna were not physically

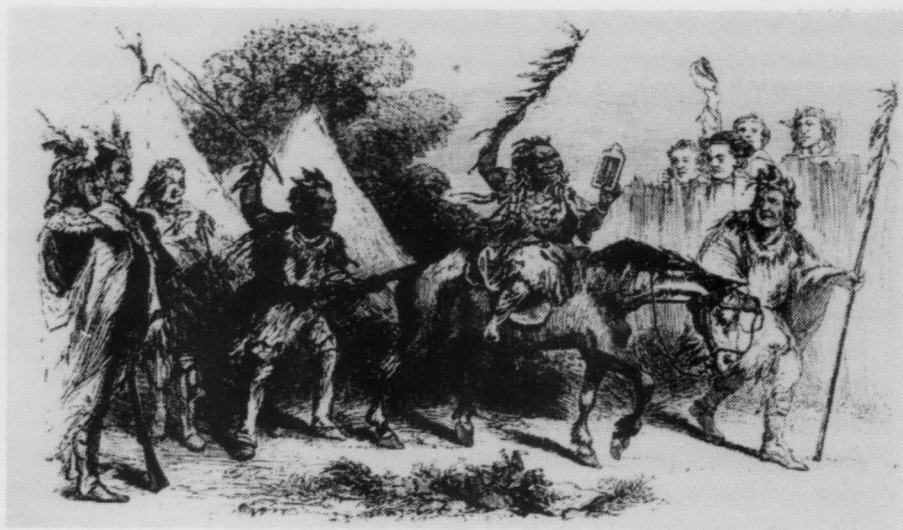


Figure 3. "The Indian Triumph," in George Peck, *Wyoming: Its History, Stirring Incidents and Romantic Adventures*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1858. 224.

harmful, the emotional pain inflicted upon them by this "old limb of Satan" was so great that the men of the settlement would have killed her, had they not feared for the safety of their wives and children.⁶⁶

The lack of compassion for human suffering demonstrated in "The Indian Triumph" was a sign of savagery. Slavery, too, was an institution built on such a foundation, for, as noted by Peck in his autobiography:

Slavery tends to make the master-race bold, arrogant, conceited, savage, unscrupulous, and remorseless. He who would uphold it must neither fear God nor regard man. It is a despotism which is brutal in all its instincts, and blind to justice, honor, humanity, everything but its own sordid interests.⁶⁷

In "The Indian Triumph," the cruelty of the Lackawanna conquerors, as demonstrated by a "savage" squaw, symbolized the brutal practices of white southern slaveholders, while the emotional pain of the Lackawanna settlers mirrored the sufferings of enslaved blacks. By carefully adjusting the racial identities of the vanquishers and vanquished, Peck evoked empathy for the disenfranchised, represented as whites for a white audience, and condemned acts of oppression, attributed at Wyoming, for the psychological comfort of his white readers, to "savage" Native Americans. The painting of prisoners' faces frequently noted by Peck in *Wyoming* further contextualized the plight of the settlers in terms of slavery: as explained by Lossing in the *Field-Book*,



Figure 4. "The Capture of Frances Slocum," in George Peck, *Wyoming: Its History, Stirring Incidents and Romantic Adventures*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1858. 241.

Native Americans at Wyoming painted their hostages faces black.⁶⁸

A second story used by Peck to examine the practices of slavery was that of Frances Slocum, the often discussed "Lost Sister of Wyoming." Here, the ultimate "savage" act was the theft of a human being, in this case the abduction of a child from its mother. Frances was the daughter of Jonathan Slocum, a Quaker settler who, due to his non-violent beliefs, enjoyed a peaceful relationship with the natives of Wyoming. His son Giles, however, "not practicing upon the principles in which he had been trained at home," fought in the Wyoming Massacre with the Connecticut settlers.⁶⁹ In retaliation for this breach of faith, a tribe of Delawares attacked the Slocum homestead on November 2, 1778, killing a neighbor boy and carrying off his brother, a black servant girl, and five-year-old Frances. The Lossing and Barritt illustration of "The Capture of Frances Slocum" closely followed Peck's narrative in depicting the details of this event (Figure 4). A tiny figure of a young girl, arms outstretched, was shown being carried off by Indians, as her mother, also with arms outstretched, called to her child from the cabin door. Included in the illustration were the figures of the murdered neighbor, as well as his brother and the black servant girl, both of whom were struggling against their captors.

While the abduction of Frances Slocum was clearly a tragic event, the fate of Frances herself, as described by Peck in the later parts of his narrative, was not altogether unhappy. Adopted by her Native American captors, Frances was treated kindly, and, as an adult, became the wife of a chief, the mother of two daughters, and a wealthy, respected member of her tribe. In Peck's retelling

of the event, the figure truly victimized by the abduction was Mrs. Slocum. Although Mrs. Slocum's husband and father were killed in raids on the Slocum property shortly after Frances' kidnapping, "the dead were forgotten, but the mother's heart never ceased to yearn for her fair-haired child, who had been borne away to a fate which seemed worse than death."⁷⁰ The woman searched for her daughter, but to no avail; while Frances and her siblings were reunited in 1835, "the mother went to her grave sorrowing, full of years."⁷¹

Child-stealing was condemned by Peck on the grounds that those who would perpetuate such a crime must "enter into no analysis of civil society, distinguishing between the innocent and the guilty, but...often strike the innocent — even break the hearts of unoffending mothers."⁷² Child-stealing was an act of ignorant "savages" who could not understand the concepts of freedom and individuality that formed the basis of a humanistic society; similarly, these principles were denied by those who would trade and own slaves. Passages echoing Peck's condemnations of child-stealers were included in the Wyoming Conference's resolution "On Slavery," from 1860, which stated that "real slaveholders have no right in the Church of God, where...men-stealers are classed in moral turpitude with liars, murderers of parents, man-slayers, and perjured persons."⁷³ Further, as noted by Peck in his sermon on "Slavery":

It is quite enough for one of humane, not to say Christian, feelings to know that the enslavement of the African race originated in the nefarious slave-trade, to beget in his soul an abhorrence of the system of slavery as it has been practiced in the southern states. Those who brought the poor Africans from their peaceful haunts were 'man-stealers,' and those who bought them were parties to their enormous guilt. It was the market made for slaves in America that stimulated the trade, and that furnished the occasion for all the measures of barbarous cruelty which were incident to the slave-trade. If a man cannot purchase stolen goods, knowing them to be such, without involving himself in the guilt of the theft, how could the planter purchase negroes stolen from Africa, knowing them to have been stolen and forcibly brought away from their own country, without partaking of the guilt of man-stealing.⁷⁴

Thus, even the kindest slave owner was party to this guilt, and ran the risk of being damned.

In the story of Frances Slocum, symbolic racial shifts, contextualized by the figure of the black servant girl being abducted by "savages," were again evident in *Wyoming*. Clear comparisons existed between the abduction of the white child of Wyoming and the southern practices of trading in African slaves, brought forcibly to the United States from their homeland, and of selling

slaves away from their natural families, thereby separating parents and children. White audiences of the nineteenth century, while ambivalent about the details of the southern slave trade, would certainly have been moved by the plight of a white woman, who, bereft of a father and husband, never ceased to yearn for her missing daughter. The figure of Mrs. Slocum alerted audiences to the painful consequences of human abduction and captivity, and encouraged them to reject these practices. Should the example of Mrs. Slocum fail, one further warning against denying freedom to another human being was embedded by Peck in the figure of the grown Frances, known in her adult life as Ma-Con-Na-Qua. In speaking of the reunion between Frances and her family, Peck noted that, despite their joy at finding their sister, the Slocums were "afflicted" by the fact that Frances "had become an Indian in everything excepting her parentage, and that she was, in fact, a *heathen*." ⁷⁵ As one taken captive by force, Frances no longer controlled the destiny of her soul, and was therefore no longer accountable for it. Instead, as explained by Peck in the context of slavery, the captor or slaveholder was responsible for the actions, life, character and eternal destiny of the abducted person. Thus, slaveholding, even in its mildest form, involved "too great a responsibility for any human being, and by a good conscience should be shunned as the gates of hell." ⁷⁶

In *Wyoming*, the final, desperate outcome of slavery, as embodied in circumstances surrounding the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, was symbolically represented by Peck in the tale and image of the "Slaughter of Indians by the Bennets and Hammond" (Figure 5). In this vignette, three Yankee settlers, Andrew Bennet, Thomas Bennet and Lebbeus Hammond, left the Wyoming settlement to visit their nearby fields, but were seized by a Tory and Iroquois war party. The prisoners were harassed by their captors during the day; at nightfall, they were told that they would be killed the next morning. Fearing for their lives, the "fugitives" became desperate, and made a bold attempt to escape by seizing their captors' weapons. In the struggle that ensued, Thomas Bennet stabbed one Indian with a spear, while Lebbeus Hammond killed another with an ax, leaving him to fall into the campfire. Andrew Bennet bludgeoned a third with the butt of a rifle. The brutality of this event, from the upraised weapons of the "fugitives" to the sparks flying from the body of the "savage" in the campfire, was depicted by Lossing and Barritt in literal detail. ⁷⁷

When framed in terms of slavery, the issues of abduction and escape addressed in the story of the Bennets and Hammond were not unknown to Peck. As a resident of the Wyoming Valley, Peck had several opportunities to witness the mechanics of the Fugitive Slave Law in action. In the 1840's and 1850's, one of the major routes of the Underground Railroad passed through this region, as slaves who had fled to the free state of Pennsylvania moved north along the Susquehanna through "stations" in Harrisburg, Wilkes-Barre,



Figure 5. "Slaughter of the Indians by the Bennets and Hammond," in George Peck, *Wyoming: Its History, Stirring Incidents and Romantic Adventures*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1858. 298.

the Hyde Park section of Scranton, Clarks Green, Waverly, Fleetville, Factoryville, and Montrose, to cross through New York State and into Canada.⁷⁸ Despite the conservative, Democratic sentiments that prevailed in Wilkes-Barre, and found expression in events like a "Friends of the Union" meeting in 1842, organized to "oppose the mischievous spirit of abolition," abolitionists were active in the city, and "stations" for the Underground Railroad were set up at the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, and at the home and business of William Gildersleeve, a local merchant.⁷⁹ As an admitted advocate of abolition, Gildersleeve invited the Reverend John Cross to Wilkes-Barre in 1837 to speak on the subject; in 1839, he invited Charles C. Burleigh to the city for the same purpose. Both presentations met with disastrous results, as the Cross lecture, held at Gildersleeve's home, was interrupted when townspeople sacked the residence, and a similar riot at the Burleigh lecture ended with Gildersleeve being painted black with hatter's dye and paraded through town on a rail.⁸⁰ Given the city's mixed sentiments, confrontations involving the capture of fugitive slaves also occurred. Under the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, Jamison Harvey, a mine operator in Plymouth and descendant of an old Wyoming family, reportedly became the first defendant charged for harboring a runaway slave. In order to avoid prosecution, Harvey paid the slave owner a settlement fee, and the slave, Hansen, was returned to his master. In 1852, James Phillips, a Negro who had resided in Wilkes-Barre for fourteen years, was arrested as a runaway slave and returned to his owner in Virginia. Finally, the most spectacular attempt to repossess a fugitive slave occurred in

Wilkes-Barre in 1853, when William Thomas, a runaway slave who was working as a waiter in a Wilkes-Barre hotel, was seized by slave hunters as he served breakfast to the hotel guests. A crowd gathered and a violent struggle ensued, during which Thomas broke from his captors and dove into the Susquehanna River. The sympathies of the crowd were with him, and, as the slave hunters withdrew, fearing for their safety, Thomas succeeded in escaping to another section of town.⁸¹ As noted by Peck in his autobiography, a knowledge of the events involving Gildersleeve and Thomas were "necessary to a faithful picture of the times," as the Thomas incident, especially, "had a marked effect upon public opinion in the valley."⁸²

As an ecclesiastical author, Peck had grappled with the problem of how he might renounce the cruelties of slavery without endangering or alienating any of the already antagonistic factions which existed within the Methodist Episcopal Church. In describing his editorship of the *New York Christian Advocate*, Peck noted:

The Southern Methodist papers kept up a constant war against the North, and it became my duty to correct some of their more glaring misrepresentations. Our collisions were sometimes unpleasant . . . still I tried to avoid acrimony. . . . The abrogation of the Missouri Compromise, and the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, many of whose features were unjust and irritating, kindled anew the fires of controversy, and thoroughly aroused the north to a sense of the aggressive character of the slave power. Even the religious journals could not keep free of the agitation which pervaded the land.

As editor of the [New York] *Advocate*, I was placed in a difficult position. I had always hated slavery, and now fully sympathized with the people of the free States in their opposition to the encroachments of the South. While I shared the public indignation against the slave hunters, I believed that only evil would result from my admitting into the columns of the paper the discussion of the Fugitive Slave Law and kindred topics.⁸³

The popular narratives of *Wyoming* provided what the pages of the *Advocate* could not: a non-threatening forum for the presentation of comments on the Fugitive Slave Law. In the Thomas affair, which "made more abolitionists in an hour than all the antislavery lectures and publications had done in years," Peck had a ready example of how emotion might be used to sway public opinion.⁸⁴ The capture of Thomas "showed the real character of the institution of slavery, and illustrated the brutal measures inseparable from its maintenance."

⁸⁵ In the "Slaughter of the Indians by the Bennets and Hammond," Peck



Figure 6. "Bidlack's Escape," in George Peck, *Wyoming: Its History, Stirring Incidents and Romantic Adventures*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1858. 338.

reiterated the conditions of the Thomas event. Like Thomas, the Bennets and Hammond, removed from their lands by force, resorted to violence as a means of self-defense, fighting against their captors and fleeing for lives.

If, as outlined under the Fugitive Slave Law, the right of slave owners to recapture escaped slaves could end only in violent conflict, another alternative to the law's provisions was suggested by Peck in the tale of "Bidlack's Escape" (Figure 6). Within the texts of *Wyoming*, the chapter containing the story and image of "Bidlack's Escape" was the fourth and final component in a series of chapters detailing the "capture and escape" of numerous Wyoming residents, beginning with the Bennets and Hammond and moving through Jonah Rogers, Moses Van Campen, Peter Pence, Abram Pike, and George Ransom, among others. In keeping with the events surrounding the capture and escape of the Bennets and Hammond, all of the figures discussed in the first three of these chapters were taken captive by Native Americans in the wake of the Wyoming Massacre. In addition, all used violence to regain their freedom, and risked their lives in doing so, reasoning, like Abram Pike, that one must either be "a free man or a dead man."⁸⁶ By contrast, Benjamin Bidlack, a Wyoming resident who had served with Washington during the Revolutionary War, was taken prisoner by the Pennsylvanians at Sunbury "some time before the conclusion of the last Pennamite and Yankee war."⁸⁷ A heavy drinker and gifted storyteller, Bidlack soon became a favorite of his Pennamite guards, who would ply him with drinks in return for a tale or song. While the guards enjoyed the antics of their clever charge, Peck explained the true nature of this apparently amiable relationship:

As Bidlack seemed to enjoy the company of his new associates, they began to regard him as a sort of fixture of the place, and to suppose that perhaps to be lionized would be thought a fair compensation for his loss of liberty; but they did not know the man. He was always ready to make the best possible shift when under pressure. He would be merry in prison if in prison he must be, but it was not a place to his taste at all. Liberty had cost him too much to be bargained away for a mess of pottage.⁸⁸

One evening, Bidlack, being crafty as well as entertaining, introduced a new drinking song called "The Swagging Old Man." In order that the "swagger" necessary to the lyrics might be demonstrated, Bidlack begged leave from his merry jailers to dance upon the stoop of his cell. Permission was granted, and once across the threshold, Bidlack fled, making his way back to Wyoming. The Pennamites first attempted to pursue the "fugitive" in consternation, but soon gave up the chase with good humor, "more regretting the loss of the amusement which Bidlack had afforded them while detained as a prisoner, than the success of the ruse he had practiced upon them."⁸⁹ The corresponding illustration to this narrative depicted the wily Connecticut settler fleeing from his prison, coattails flying, as his Pennamite oppressors pursued him in exaggerated comic haste.

Offered as an alternative to the bloody consequences of the Fugitive Slave Law outlined in the "Slaughter of the Indians by the Bennets and Hammond," Peck's tale of "Bidlack's Escape" took issue with two concepts fundamental to slaveowners' rights under the law's provisions. The first of these, put forth by many slaveowners, was the argument that slaves, if well-treated, actually enjoyed slavery, and wanted to remain under their owner's protection. Peck disputed this notion by contrasting Bidlack's apparent love of prison life with his true thoughts on liberty. Like Bidlack, even the most favored slave would want to escape from captivity, as no amount of care or indulgence could compensate for the loss of free will. Second, the escape of a slave, as outlined in the context of "Bidlack's Escape," posed no real loss or threat to the slaveowner. While slaveholders argued for their right to reclaim escaped slaves as lost property, Peck argued that this "property," was, in itself, hardly a necessity. Despite the view that slave labor was essential to the economy of the South, the possession of slaves, like the confinement of Bidlack, was an amusing pastime. The escape of a slave struck a blow not to the security of the South, but to the pride of the slaveholder.

For Peck, this pride proved to be the dividing issue in conflicts between slaveholders and slaves, as well as northern and southern adversaries; by symbolically taming this pride in the tale of "Bidlack's Escape," Peck offered a

method of resolution for both. As a “fugitive” who was captured, then escaped, Bidlack, like his predecessors in *Wyoming*, still symbolized the slave condition. As a prisoner of the last Yankee-Pennamite Wars, taken captive by white, rather than “savage” enemies, the figure of Bidlack also alluded to civil conflicts among whites. This absence of “savage” enemies in the tale of Bidlack served Peck’s purposes well. In interpretations focusing on Bidlack’s symbolic status as a fugitive slave, his adversaries’ lighthearted acceptance of his escape, signified by their white race, indicated that if slaveholders were willing to forego their vanity and treat runaway slaves with leniency, they too would act as civilized beings, no longer debased by the “savage” institution of slavery. Further, in keeping with Peck’s practice of distancing controversial topics, the amiable resolution of conflict between Bidlack and his white captors implied that truly violent acts were unnecessary among whites. In “Bidlack’s Escape,” the racial and cultural ties shared by opposing white factions were strong enough to overcome the social and political differences that divided them, so that conflict was resolved with civility and humor. By following the example of Bidlack and the Pennamites, northern and southern factions in the United States might put aside their differences in an easy and tolerant manner.

Cost of Insurrection

Despite Peck’s renouncement of slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law on moral grounds, the dangers of independent aggressive action, whether intended to support or destroy this “barbaric institution,” figured prominently in *Wyoming’s* dialogues on civil conflict and its resolution. Based on his experiences with the schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church, Peck warned against the overzealous passion of radical abolitionism, and contested measures of extreme violence and illegality when a legitimate recourse existed for opposing parties under the just provisions of law. Laws which constituted an abuse of power needed to be challenged for humanitarian reasons, but the authority of an honest and democratic government, which effectively protected the rights of its citizens, was not to be circumvented. As explained in Peck’s sermon “Our Heritage:”

Subjection or obedience to law is necessary to the existence of government, and it is but reasonable that we should be subject to the power that gives us protection. . . . Rebellion against a legitimate government is rebellion against God, and a high crime. A Christian cannot be, in the true sense of the term, a rebel, nor can a rebel be a Christian. An individual is indeed justified in refusing obedience to a law which is plainly contrary to divine law. . . . If he is restrained by his conscience, he is bound to refuse obedience, and, if need be, suffer martyrdom.

Again, when a government tramples upon the rights of the governed, and becomes intolerably oppressive, and there remains no other mode of redress, the people may resort to revolution....In a representative government like ours, it is indeed difficult to conceive of a case in which the redress of grievances is beyond the reach of the law, and where, consequently, rebellion would be justifiable. In all cases which may be rationally supposed, resistance to the constitutional authorities would be a high crime against God and against society.⁹⁰

If a group of citizens should break faith with a just government, they would be held accountable for a truly evil crime: secession.

The distinction between moral protest and open rebellion described by Peck was also articulated by others involved in the production of *Wyoming*. Lossing, in an attempt to uniformly represent both northern and southern viewpoints in his historical works, often invoked the ire of extremists on both sides: southern reviewers objected to Lossing's *Our Countrymen* of 1855 on the grounds that it praised too highly the accomplishments of the black women Phyllis Wheatley and Catharine Ferguson, while *The Independent*, a religious newspaper edited by Henry Ward Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, criticized his *Pictorial History of the United States* of 1855 for its perceived lack of support for the abolitionist movement. Exasperated, Lossing berated both parties, stating "I am no abolitionist, as the term is used. Far from it. But my friend, it is from such expressions of *prejudice* as these on the one side, and the over-zealous ebullitions of *fanaticism* on the other, that all sectional heart-burnings in our land are born."⁹¹ Further, Lossing declared, "if our Union is ever *destroyed*, it will be the work of *fanatics* of the North and South."⁹² The publishing house of Harper and Brothers also saw the fine line between individual thought and anarchy. In 1857, June and October issues of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* contained "Editor's Table" articles discussing the American mind. *Harper's* divided the American public into three segments, the majority of which was "decent, orderly, respectable, intelligent and productive."⁹³ At either extreme were "violent reformers" who had made an obsession of "free-will and personal responsibility," and traditionalists who defended "national sins simply as necessary events in the nation's progress to glory."⁹⁴

Given the views held by *Wyoming's* author, illustrator and publisher, it is not surprising that the final section of the work contained ominous narratives alluding to the national consequences of rash and radical actions. In Chapters XIV through XXII of *Wyoming*, Peck, having asserted his belief in the sanctity of the American union, and argued for a voluntary end to slavery on moral grounds, concluded his work with a dark prediction of the evils to come should

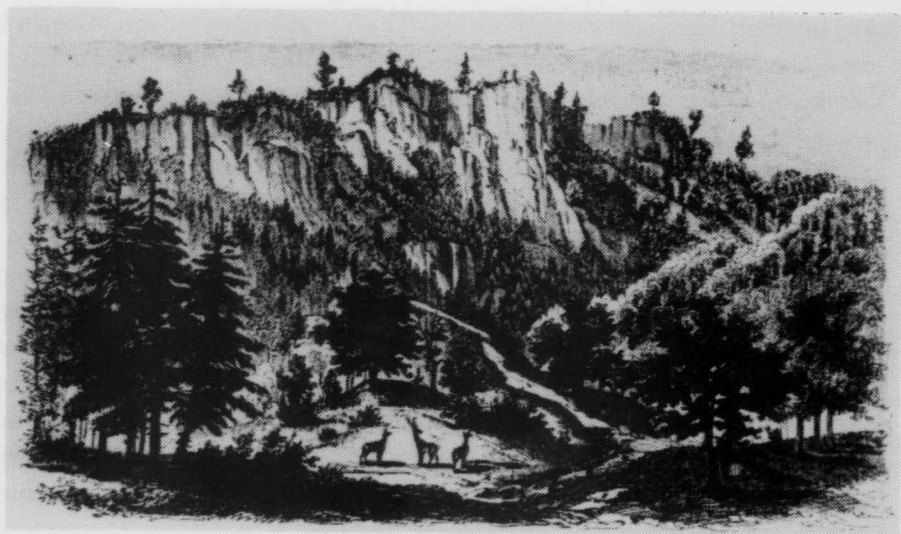


Figure 7. "Campbell's Ledge," in George Peck, *Wyoming: Its History, Stirring Incidents and Romantic Adventures*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1858. 345.

northern and southern adversaries fail to resolve their differences within the established structures of national government. The tales and images of "Campbell's Ledge"; the "Escape of Rufus Benner"; and "The Fratricide's Fate" alluded to an American fall from grace; government retaliation against wild and unauthorized forces; and the personal damnation of those bold enough to renounce the sacred covenants of God, country and family. In its most optimistic moments, *Wyoming* offered its readers hope in a harmonious resolution to their trials; barring this resolution, it warned of the cost of insurrection.

In *Wyoming*, the dangerous potential of human passions was first demonstrated through the story and image of a local landmark known as "Campbell's Ledge," a high precipice located at the head of the Wyoming Valley, where the Susquehanna and Lackawanna Rivers cut through the surrounding mountain range (Figure 7). In an essay contributed to the volume, the Reverend L. W. Peck described a visit to the site, and related its "wild legend":

A man named Campbell was pursued by the Indians. He had taken refuge in the ravines of the mountain. . . . But the fierce Red Men are on his track. He is an old enemy, and is singled out for special torture. . . . One glance behind him shows him that escape is utterly hopeless. The shouts of the savages are heard as they rush upon their prey. With a scream of defiance, he leaps into the friendly arms of death.

The solemn traditions of the olden time were stealing around me like

an enchanter's spell as I gazed down upon the plain and the river where once my kindred struggled with the dusky foe. A loud yell, as if a thousand Indian warriors were in the wood, started me to my feet; it was the whistle of the locomotive, which told of civilization bursting through the ancient gloom.⁹⁵

The accompanying illustration of "Campbell's Ledge" depicted a pastoral landscape, complete with serenely grazing deer. One small detail marred the tranquillity of the scene: high on Campbell's Ledge stood two tiny figures, whose silhouettes revealed the forms of spears and feathers, while midway between the cliff and the ground was the figure of Campbell, falling into the arms of death.

More than a flight of literary fancy, Peck's chapter on "Campbell's Ledge" drew upon popular nineteenth century concepts of America as a "New Eden" to remind readers of the blessings of their land, and to warn that this paradise, like the biblical one, might be lost due to unrestrained emotion. The Lossing and Barritt illustration of "Campbell's Ledge" first appeared in "The Romance of Wyoming" under its alternate and more benign local name of "Dial Rock." Here, the image was used in the familiar garden context of the Romantic era, and, accompanied by glowing descriptions of Wyoming's fertile plains, testified to the beauty and bounty of the valley. As the "Campbell's Ledge" of *Wyoming*, the image represented an idyllic landscape haunted by tragedy. Taken in the context of Campbell's suicide, the ledge warned of a "fall" from grace, where the promises of peace and plenty inherent in the land's natural richness were shattered by the forces of passion and savagery. The shifts of tense found in the narrator's accompanying description of a nostalgic reverie interrupted by a locomotive whistle served to remind readers that the conditions surrounding Campbell's precarious situation were also relevant to their own edgy age. Peck described this uneasy era when writing of his years as editor for the *New York Christian Advocate* between 1848 and 1852, stating that:

supporters of the paper were, as a body, apprehensive of coming evil. The hour was full of peril. There was danger, not that the nation would sink into slumber over a great wrong, but that the passions of men would hurl us into some great gulf of disaster. . . . I knew that I could at any time write an editorial of half a column which would not only wreck the Advocate, but intensify an agitation which was already sufficiently dangerous to the national peace.⁹⁶

Peck, like Campbell, was a man pushed to the brink of tragedy by the racial tensions of his time. If he, like Campbell, surrendered to passion, nothing less than paradise would be lost. Overzealous acts of others in defending or condemning slavery would also push the nation towards the "bloody chasm of

fratricidal war.”⁹⁷

If, in the heat of passion, opposing factions should cross the brink of reason and plunge into the abyss of war, retaliation against the rebels of a legitimate government, as described in Peck’s retelling of the “Escape of Rufus Bennet” would be fully justified and officially sanctioned (See Front Cover). Rufus Bennet, a Connecticut youth caught up in the terrors of the Wyoming Massacre, was pursued by a party of attacking Indians. Seeing the plight of the young man, Colonel Zebulon Butler, a Yankee commander in the field, rode his horse past Bennet, who, in order to more speedily escape his tormentors, grabbed on to the horse’s tail. The chase continued until the parties passed over a fallen log, behind which Richard Inman, also a Yankee soldier, lay hidden, armed with a gun and ready for battle. Butler gestured to Inman with his sword, instructing him to “Shoot that Indian!”⁹⁸ The details of this dramatic moment, including the spear-wielding Indian; the exhausted Bennet, clinging to the horse’s tail; the powerful and imposing colonel, mounted on horseback; and the prone sharpshooter Inman; were carefully represented in the Lossing and Barritt illustration.

While the “Escape of Rufus Bennet” depicted a scene from Wyoming lore, it also depicted an instance in which a military official authorized an aggressive action against a hostile party in order to defend one who was weak and defenseless. In Peck’s publication of 1858, such a depiction of officially sanctioned violence became a premonition of civil war: should the necessity arise, the pursuit of a helpless “fugitive,” or slave, by “savage” forces, or the supporters of slavery, would be ended when a colonel, or legitimate government official, called his troops into action. The justification for such an act was explained in Peck’s sermon “Our Heritage,” which exploded with imagery also found in the “Escape of Rufus Bennet”:

I take the position that armed resistance to an armed rebellion is right, and that it is the solemn duty of the government.

If the civil power ‘bears not the sword in vain,’ here is an occasion for its being drawn from its scabbard. The war on the part of the government is a necessary and a righteous war. . . . It is a war for a government against anarchy; a war for freedom against usurpation and despotism. If government has a divine commission to protect itself, and protect the weak and helpless against oppression and despotic rule, the government of the United States is bound to oppose force to force, and to crush out this foul spirit of rebellion. It is a war of civilization against barbarism, of liberty against slavery, of order against confusion, of right against wrong. If ever the sword was drawn in a holy cause, it is so in the present war of the United States government against the great southern rebels.⁹⁹

In this way, government became “a mighty power for good,” while those who rebelled against it earned the fearful retribution of God.¹⁰⁰

The importance of officially sanctioned violence to *Wyoming's* dialogues on civil conflict was further reinforced when the tale of Rufus Bennet, as told by Peck, was contrasted with that related by Lossing: in the *Field-Book*, the event that formed the basis for Peck's heroic tale of unified military action was presented as one of two separate incidents. In the first, a nameless settler, pursued by Indians, took hold of the tail of Colonel Butler's horse in order to speed his escape from his attackers. Nearby, a Yankee soldier, who had bolstered his courage for battle with strong drink, was lying behind a log in a stupor. According to Lossing, as the ensemble “passed the spot where the inebriate had just awakened, perfectly sober, the man at the tail shouted to him to shoot the pursuing savage.”¹⁰¹ Subsequent lines in Lossing's narrative noted that “near the same spot Rufus Bennet was pursued by an Indian,” and, as Bennet's gun was empty, the native was shot by a fellow settler, Richard Inman.¹⁰² Peck, in combining and altering these narratives, was careful to identify all those involved in the drama, and to eliminate the presence of alcohol. Most importantly, the command to attack in Peck's narrative came not from a nameless soldier, but from a recognized military official.

Peck believed that, through calm thought and careful compromise, the political tensions of his age might be resolved. If passion should prevail, war and retribution would come. As a final warning that the price of violence would be high, Peck, in the story and depiction of “The Fratricide's Fate,” placed the blame for and consequences of unjust rebellion and senseless bloodshed squarely where he believed they belonged: on the physical body and eternal soul of the secessionist who dared to challenge the laws of God and humanity for the sake of personal gain (Figure 8). Peck's chilling tale of “The Fratricide's Fate” revolved around the legend of John and Henry Pencil, two Yankee brothers who, after settling in Wyoming, adopted opposing political views. During the Revolutionary War, Henry fought with the Patriots, and John with the Tories. This conflict of interest turned fatal during the Wyoming Massacre, when the brothers met on Monocasy Island after the battle. Recognizing his brother, Henry pleaded for mercy, but John murdered him. This act was an abomination of nature, as the bulk of Peck's three-page narrative demonstrated. After briefly describing the fratricide as “the story of a Tory shooting his brother on Monocasy Island on the day of the battle,” Peck rapidly launched into his description of “The Fratricide's Fate,” a passage intended to satisfy the curiosity of his readers, who having already been familiar with the basic facts surrounding the fratricide itself, would “naturally desire to know something of the subsequent history of the perpetrator of so unnatural and barbarous a deed.”¹⁰³ Following the murder of his brother, John fled



Figure 8. "The Fratricide's Fate," in George Peck, *Wyoming: Its History, Stirring Incidents and Romantic Adventures*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1858. 374.

Wyoming and settled with the Indians in Canada. Recognizing him as wicked, the Indians rejected John, who soon met a brutal death when, alone in the wilderness, "the miserable wretch was killed and devoured [by wolves], an end well becoming such a monster."¹⁰⁴ As this terse notation could not fully communicate the grisly circumstances of Pencil's death, Peck further described the sinner's awful end in graphic verse:

John Pencil wander'd outcast and alone.
 The Indians shunned him - were themselves afraid
 The awful deed softened their hearts of stone
 They thought his company a curse was made.

He tried to flee; Conscience always pursued,
 And found him ev'ry where - asleep, awake;
 His brother's blood was in his soul imbued,
 Himself a fiend, and it a burning lake.

The hungry, ravenous wolves pursued him twice;
 As many times the Indian saved his life;
 They thought, "Great Spirit angry" at his vice,
 And would not save again: they came on thrice.

And, seizing him, his limbs from limb they tore,
 And cracked his living bones with bloody jaw,
 And quench'd their thirst upon his gore,
 And yet alive his flesh they tear and gnaw.

Some scatter'd bones, uncover'd in the wood,
 Now mark the spot where died the fratricide;
 Where he by living inches served for food,
 Because by him his brother Henry died.

Oh justice! Retribution, it is right
 That thou shouldst fix upon the soul thy doom,
 And on the body exercise thy might
 And stigmatize the name beyond the tomb.¹⁰⁵

Justice, then, for the immoral acts committed by a brother against his brother, was divinely served: the Lossing and Barritt illustration accompanying Peck's poem showed John Pencil, alone in the wilderness, vainly swinging a small club in an attempt to drive off the attacking wolves.¹⁰⁶

When viewed in relation to the strained political context of 1858, the meaning of "The Fratricide's Fate" was clear. Having struck down his brother for an unholy cause, John Pencil was the embodiment of evil, and was subject to divine vengeance and retribution. For Pencil, all hope of redemption was past. No human needed to pass judgment upon him, as punishment for his actions came directly from God. Pencil, as a white man willing to strike down his brother, was linked to the southern secessionists, who in order to further their own political causes, were willing to wage war on their "brothers" to the north. While other narratives and images concerning the Pencil brothers, including Lossing's brief footnote on the fratricide in the *Field-Book*, and the nineteenth century print of the "Fratricide at Wyoming" by Armytage and Warren, focused on details of the actual murder, Peck, by emphasizing the agony of "The Fratricide's Fate," sought to demonstrate the grave moral costs associated with rebellion.

Conclusion

In *Wyoming*, Peck, by contrasting the dangers of conflict with promises of reconciliation, sought to assure his readers that, while the political crises they faced in 1858 were severe, they might yet be harmoniously resolved. One final image and narrative, printed in both "The Romance of Wyoming" and *Wyoming* itself, served as a reminder of the strength and integrity of the American union. Described by Peck as a natural wonder and ancient landmark, "The Umbrella Tree" was a pine with spreading branches that stood on a hillside above Wyoming (See Back Cover). While some argued that the unique shape of "The Umbrella Tree" was due to human intervention, and that the lower limbs of the tree had been cut off prior to the Wyoming Massacre as a sign of war, Peck maintained that the tree stood just as God had made it, its limbs

showing no sudden fracture, nor giving evidence of having been cut off. In this, "The Umbrella Tree," like "The Myers House," was a symbol of solidarity and endurance. A passage printed adjacent to the illustration in "The Romance of Wyoming" further reinforced these ideals:

Half a century of peace and prosperity has almost effaced the memory of the troublous years that preceeded, as another half century will efface the memory of the bitter contests that now rage around us. Hot-headed zealots and unscrupulous partisans were among our fathers, as they are with us, and will be with our children. Their unjust schemes and selfish plans have died, are dying, and will die, with them. The conservative element will in the end be too strong for them.¹⁰⁷

Peck's work, in this respect, was filled with faith and confidence in the human potential for reason and righteousness. As a mediated discussion of civil strife, presented in terms of symbolic texts and images, *Wyoming* was a magnificent publication, whose form did justice to its author's high moral and social aims. Within the realm of practical action, *Wyoming* proved to be less successful in curbing the tide of civil unrest than Peck may have hoped. In December, 1860, South Carolina seceded from the union, and in April, 1861, Fort Sumter was taken by Confederate troops. For the next four years, armies of the North and South would confront each other in the great battles of the Civil War, and "unity" would not prevail until April, 1865, when Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomatox.

Despite the strength of Peck's convictions, *Wyoming* had its flaws. In using the legends of *Wyoming* as symbolic commentaries, Peck clearly sought to address the controversies of his time in a distanced and non-threatening way. The ways in which individual readers responded to the volume are more difficult to discern. Individual interpretations of symbols depend upon personal systems of meaning grounded in a shared social context. Thus, while *Wyoming's* loaded narratives and illustrations could be interpreted in diverse ways, it is probable that the work's allusions to civil strife struck a clear chord in the hearts and minds of readers attuned to the controversial political climate of the 1850s. The very subtlety that allowed *Wyoming* to function in this precarious context would also have made the work seem passive in comparison with more radical debates. By 1861, Peck himself had abandoned the strategies of discreet dialogue in favor of aggressive argument, stating:

The war spirit now ran high....The south, in its madness, had plunged the nation into the horrors of fratricidal war. The only alternative left us was either to resist with all our strength, or be torn in pieces. I saw

no way to escape national destruction but by the most vigorous and determined resistance. Consequently, every-where upon my district, I denounced the crime of the South, and explained what I held to be the duty of the Christian citizen.¹⁰⁸

If, in light of the Civil War, Peck's pacificistic methods changed, his message did not: repeatedly, the clergyman called for an end to war, that the American union might be restored.

The texts and images of *Wyoming* could also give rise to serious interpretational discrepancies when dominant social ideologies not only reinforced the symbolic messages that Peck hoped to convey, but also ran counter to them. Peck's practice of drawing parallels between the "savage" aspects of slavery and the actions of Native Americans during the Wyoming Massacre could be misconstrued in this way. If, in 1858, the issue of slavery divided North and South, most Americans unanimously agreed that the nation must expand to the west. Native American resistance to this expansion was countered with military force, and racial stereotypes like Peck's "savage" facilitated, rather than deterred, public acceptance of aggressive action in the western conflicts of the 1860s and 1870s. Dark legends of border war became a sad reality for a second Wyoming of the west, a frontier territory named, like the Wyoming of Pennsylvania, for its "great plains."¹⁰⁹ In 1851, the first treaty of Fort Laramie established boundaries within what would become the state of Wyoming for Native Americans belonging to the Sioux, Crow, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe tribes. In 1854, conflict broke out between the Sioux and soldiers at Fort Laramie, and on December 21, 1866, Sioux warriors, led by Red Cloud and Crazy Horse, attacked soldiers in north-central Wyoming. If read in the context of this second Wyoming, Peck's work was less than liberating.

Today, as the metaphors of *Wyoming* become ever more distant from the historical contexts in which they were meant to be understood, Peck's work again runs the risk of misinterpretation. *Wyoming's* deliberately stereotypical representations of Native Americans are misread in strictly racial terms, while its strategically altered accounts of "local history" are dismissed for lack of academic integrity. As an author and editor, Peck would have known of these interpretational risks, inherent in all works of art and literature; for the sake of maintaining *Wyoming's* commitment to the ideals of compromise and reconciliation, he embraced them. For audiences past and present, the value of critical thought and action that might be sparked through the interactive dialogues of *Wyoming* far outweighed the possible dangers of misrepresentation that also resided within them. Here, as in other facets of his illustrious and controversial career, Peck took his position deliberately, "knowing well what it would cost."¹¹⁰

Notes

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