

Desperation on the Western Pennsylvania Frontier: A 1781 Petition to Congress for More Effective Defense¹

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For the thousand or more people, living west of Laurel Hill in the region of what is now Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the year of 1781 must have been the low point of the War for American Independence. There is little question that the guerrilla tactics of the British-led Indians had taken a terrible toll on surviving residents. Delaware, Wyandots, Shawness, Potawatomes, and other nations had taken up the British cause in response to the illegal and constant incursion of whites onto their land. The spring of 1781 witnessed the "Brodhead" expedition to the Indian town we now call Coshocton, Ohio. This was a large effort for the people of the border. It resulted in the killing of a few Indian warriors, the capture and alleged killing of a few more, the burning of Indian towns and crops, and the seizure of a great deal of plunder. This and the massacre of 96 Christianized Moravian Indians — men, women, and children — at Gnadenhütten the next spring were part of the malignant racism and brutal war waged in the backcountry.²

While the people in westernmost Pennsylvania looked to the Continental Army units at Fort Pitt to protect them, those units were at half strength and in a high state of demoralization and deterioration.³ The men were poorly clothed, poorly fed, and poorly paid. This situation led to a series of petitions from men living around Fort Pitt accusing Colonel David Brodhead and his assistant quartermaster of mismanagement.⁴ 421 men of the Pittsburgh area led by Alexander Fowler were united and bold in their petitioning to the Continental Congress questioning Brodhead's integrity. This petitioning eventually led to his removal, and to his court-martial by a board of colonels, who exonerated him.

The western Pennsylvanians so despaired of their position that they sent a group of militia up the Muskingum under the command of Colonel David Williamson in the fall of 1781 to reconnoiter three deserted villages of the Moravian Indians. They were convinced that marauding Indians used these towns as temporary shelters. The militia found the villages empty except for a couple of Indians who were taken to Fort Pitt, where they were released by interim Commander Colonel Gibson. That release made the people angry at both Gibson and Williamson, and the expedition provided them no satisfaction.⁵

As a result of the faltering military effort and popular complaints, General Washington and the Congress replaced Brodhead with General William Irvine, who arrived at Fort Pitt in late September, 1781. Surveying the sad state of affairs, he reported on December 2: "I never saw troops cut so truly a

deplorable, and at the same time despicable, figure. Indeed, when I arrived, no man would believe from their appearance that they were soldiers; nay, it would be difficult to determine whether they were white men." Irvine said that he had 200 men able to fight but needed a minimum of 450.⁶

In the late fall of 1781, 105 men signed a "representation" to General Irvine with the request that he forward it to the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania and the Continental Congress. This petition is here published for the first time. It is of great value as the petitioners undoubtedly represented the general sentiment of the region: they included the rich and the poor, officers and enlisted men, and disproportionately hailed from those areas most menaced by guerrilla warfare, those north and south of Pittsburgh and bordered on the east by the Ohio and Monongohela Rivers, as the analysis below shows.

The copy of the petition in the National Archives has some illegible words, and others which can be reconstructed which are indicated below in italics. While the petition is undated, it was written after the arrival of General Irvine in the late fall of 1781. It was read by the Supreme Executive Council on February 9, 1782, and was ordered laid before the General Assembly where it was read and then tabled on February 26. On March 4 the Continental Congress referred it to a committee of three chaired by William Carroll. The passing of the document from the Council to the Assembly to Congress is noted on its outside face.

To the Honorable Brigadier General Irvine Commandant of the Western Defense

We who have the *honor of addressing* you are a Number of the Inhabitants of the Western Country who have been from the earliest Period of the War attached to the Cause of America and amongst whom a full proportion of Troops *were raised* and sent to fight the Campaigns against the British Foe, yet living as it were on the Ends of the American Earth. We seem to have been to a great degree neglected by Brethern beyond the mountains who have left us exposed to the *miss deeds of the* Savages of the Wilderness, roused and excited by the same foe which invade from the sea. While the War in that Quarter continued heavy and difficult to be supported [1½ lines unreadable] Some relief to us on the Frontier might be afforded. We would therefore beg leave to represent to your Honour the state of our suffering, our Apprehensions of further Devastation, and to mention what Measures we conceive will be necessary for our Defenses.

We are happy on the appointment of your Honour to the Department. your Arrival to the command, both from what we have heard of your character soldier and Citizen heretofore and what we have known during the short Time you have exercised – the chief military command in this Quarter: and

having this Confidence in your Disposition to conduct? our safety, we entertain no doubt will put [?] our representation [few words inked out] these Honorable bodies respectively to use. . .[two lines almost blacked out]...it altogether, for we have doubted intelligence by Prisoners who have made their escapes from different Parts of the Indian country, that flush [?] with the Success of Murder and Butchery, in our Settlements in which some Hundreds of Families have been cut to pieces, Many carried off in the Course of the past Years and more especially in the preceding summer the Savages to the Northward, Westward and Southward are making the most industrious Preparations for War, and meditate early in the ensuing spring and ever [?] And more extensive Blows to our Settlements than have ever been felt before. We are afraid [?] And have no Reason to Distrust the information that they are abundantly supplied with Ammunition by the British. Their cabins are represented as full of Powder and Ball: they are constantly employed. . .their Arms, disposing their Ammunition for use in their invasions, and We have had bo[s]ts of what they will do and in what Manor they will inundate? The whole of the Settlements on this side of the Mountains, is their constant Entertainment. The People of this country tho' from Circumstances of having been long familiar with Danger are very hardy and determined, maintaining the line of Settlement for many years with almost incredible Timourss[ness] – yet are now wholly unnerved, and entertain not a single thought but of quitting the Country altogether, unless very early in the spring, at least by the first of March a very considerable Force is sent to our [assistance] and proper Measures are adopted for our Defense. Nor is it to be wondered that we haven't taken this ultimate Resolution when from summer and sometimes even in the depth of Winter, our Neighbors, our sons, our Daughters, our Fathers and those to whom we are most nearly related, in every Valley and almost every Hill, River, and Stream within the line of settlement, have been slaughtered in their dwellings and many of them now Prisoners in the Shawnese, Wyandot and Delaware towns unless such of them have been burned alive or put to death with the [worst] torture which Savage barbarity has been able to invent thru the War with Britain excited and carried on us by the Master of the Savages in more wars [ways?] than to the People beyond the Mountains whose [homes] have been plundered and whose sons have fallen in the field or died in Prison Ships and Jails, but whose helpless women and children have more rarely been slaughtered in cold blood or taken Captive by the Indians not only has the Hand of the savage constantly invaded us, but the Apprehension of this Indian has kept us in perpetual turmoil so that for several years past, our farms have been little cultivated, we are called out constantly. . .to expell or pursue the enemy we have no confidence that our food may sustain us that for which we labor, many of us have been driven from our farm habitations, towards the River, and we are resident on the lands of others, in great indignity [?] and the

most trying Situations, and a great tract of country on all sides is wholly laid waste of Houses and Fields grown up with Bushes and Briars while the miserable Owners are the Tenants of others, formerly in circumstances far less affluent than themselves. . . This country which formerly extended near Two Hundred miles along the River. . . fifty [miles] to the Mountains is now reduced to a Wedge terminating at Fort Pitt of about Ninety in length towards Tygar's Valley and about forty miles of a near Base? The inhabitants within this lamentable Compress or a great Part. . . only the Remains of families, some want a father, some a Mother or a beloved child, that have been sacrificed in the [several words inked out] mutilated in the Relations [?], but from the little leisure, have to attend to their Employments [?], indigent almost destitute of clothing, and have no abundant Supply Necessities? Of Life. We hope, our Brethern beyond the Mountains with whom we are constant in the Common Cause of America will take our Case into consideration and by timely and effectual Assistance, rescue us from the Cruelty of the enemy, and facet [?] The last cha[nce]. . . our Misfortunes by Biposting [?] The slaughtering enemy and obliging the Remainder to take Refuge at the Seacoast and leave the Mountains the Barrier of War.

We beg leave to observe that the Measures which have been hitherto employed for the Defense of this country have been defective in Plan, as well as in the time of Operation [?], What troops have been sent amongst us, have been stationed almost wholly at Fort Pitt, which is a town of sufficient of itself to maintain the Frontier, in the same manner as Hanna's Town, against small bodies of the enemy and a large body approaching the fort, it is not tenable by almost any Number of Troops, the higher ground on the hills commanding it on every Quarter. Besides it is not a large Body approaching that we do much dread,. . . these could scarcely advance without our knowledge, and the Forces of the Country could in that Case be drawn out to encounter them, it is the secretly penetrating Parties of the Savages, against whom no Precaution of Single Families or of the Country in general can be sufficient that principally call our Attention. Those can p. . . [portage?] around the garrison at Fort Pitt, strike the settlement, and cross the River, almost before it is known that they have been amongst us. The Greatest Number then stationed at Fort Pitt or at a fine [?] Post at other Places, can be of little service to this country.

The Expeditions hitherto carried out to the Indian Country, have been insufficient and ineffectual, and have served rather to exasperate the enemy, than discourage their Invasion as Campaign can[?] Be of service to these Settlements, that will not be sufficient to traverse this whole Country and lay waste their Towns as far as the Lakes.

From these Observations, we hope your Honour, and the Honorable Bodies before whom this Address may by you be presented, will be perfectly sensible, that the following Plans and Measures of Defense alone can assist us.

That what Troops may be sent from below, and forces of Militia may be drawn from this Country may be stationed wholly beyond the Rivers, or without the lines of Settlement, on either quarter, across [?] The River and not within the Boundaries, and. . .not at one or two posts, but at many at the intervals of about seven or Ten miles, in Block Houses with about twenty five Men in a Block House, this number we well know can support a Block House against an Hundred Indians. . .while in the mean Time, a Number of such Block Houses. . .may Patrol between the Stations, and render the approach on the side of the enemy without Discovery impossible, and in this Case, should the Enemy to do Mischief, they can be no longer safe when they shall have left the River, but men from the Stations will be ready to pursue and overtake them, the Constituting of forts in our Country useless, Block Houses or Stockade forts will be sufficient against Savages. If any Place of Strength is necessary, as a Magazine of munition. . .and we conceive it is, it had much better be fixed some distance up the Monongohelia River in the Heart of the Settlement, where it may be more secure, and from which resources may be drawn to supply the Country should the British and Indian enemy conduct an invasion, or should we meditate and carry out a Campaign [against] them [from] this Quarter.

Should a Campaign be carried out and we earnestly implore that one may as soon as possible next spring, it must be weighty and formidable to a Thousand or fifteen Hundred men, will be at least necessary, and should be conducted in two Bodies, one directly Westward towards the Sandusky. . ., the other towards the Scioto and Miami Rivers, these different Bodies, like the Defense of the Country is secure in the manner as mentioned before, and after the Period of Depardation, will we conceive effectively to contribute to relieve us and perhaps discourage the Savages for the Remainder of the War.

We conceive Provisions nearly sufficient to supply the troops on these stations, or for the campaigns that may be carried out provided Money is sent into the country to purchase them, and encourage the Industry of them who only cultivate the Ground for their [living], and use the means to afford them. But ever since the commencement of the War, for all the supplies that have been drawn, Nothing or next to Nothing has been paid. Even last summer the Country was exhausted of Provisions by an Expedition projected by the State of Virginia under General Clark, faultless in the Plan, while nothing is left to repay us but depreciated State Currency, of no value. . . .Our Provisions were also wasted by a projected Campaign amongst our selves. . .the latter Part of the summer which was considered Abortive by changing and postponing the Period of the Expedition, until the People deceived, were wearied out, after Assembling for that Purpose, 'till the season was too far advanced to carry it into effect.

On this representation, we have the Honour to lay before you, we hope our Brethern beyond the Mountains, will be engaged to give us guidance they will come under what it is to see our Fellow Men, our helpless Women and Children, every week and Hour, in their Houses, in their fields, lying hacked by the Tomahawk, scalped and hurting, their throats cut by the knife of the Savages, they will consider what it is to be every Moment under Apprehensions of this Kind of Death, or of being reduced to the Necessity of quitting our Habitations and leaving every mean of subsistence behind we hope they will consider of this and make it a common Cause against the Miseries we have to Contend with, will consult our Safety. [remainder illegible].

Identity and location of the petitioners:

Who were the men who wrote and signed this petition and where did they live? The signatures are in three columns. The top signer on the left was William Leu or Lett, the top signer on the middle column was Elizah Wites, and the top signer on the right top was Thomas Cohran (likely Cochran). Did one of them write the document? This is impossible to tell. It appears that some of the signatures are in the same hand. That makes it appear that various men signed for others so that it would be impossible to know which signatures belonged to the person named. It is also apparent that some of the names are misspelled and others are difficult if not impossible to decipher.

The names of the signers appear on the list below in alphabetical order as they appear on the representation. Basic reference lists were searched for these men as to when they settled in the area by township, creek, or settlement and their township of residence on the tax lists of 1781 and 1783 – before and after the peition was signed (no list survives for 1782). The lists locate the township of residence on land grant documents and tax lists. Almost all the men on the tax lists have property, but a few have nothing taxable. There was no census until 1790 which would list every man.

The following lists were searched for these names. Numbers after the names indicate on which document they are listed:

1. Raymond M. Bell, "Dates of Settlement from Virginia Certificates, Washington County, Pennsylvania," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, 45(1957) 28-40.
2. Raymond M. Bell and Katherine Zinsser, *The 1783 Tax Lists for Washington County, Penna.*; Heritage Books, 1988. Pages 13-100 by township.
3. W. F. Horn, *The Horn Papers*, volume III, Greene County Historical Society, Hagstrom: New York, 1945.

4. Raymond M. Bell "Virginia Land Grants in Pennsylvania," *Virginia Genealogist*, 7(1963) 78-83, 103-107, 158-162.
5. W. H. Egle, M.D., editor: *Pennsylvania Archives*, Third Series, Harrisburg, PA, 1899, V. 22, pages 701-782, Effective Supply Tax for 1781 for Washington County, Pennsylvania (by township).
6. Paul W. Myers, *Westmoreland County In the American Revolution*, Closson Press; Apollo, PA, 1988. Numerous lists of continentals and militia as well as the list of men who went with Col. William Crawford to the Upper Sandusky Indian towns in June of 1782.

The Signers: Settlement and Locational Information

James Allison, (1) settled 1776 at Blaine; (4) also 1776 Buffalo Creek; (5) large landowner Cecil Twp. 1781; Sub-Lieutenant of the new Washington County Militia—Second highest ranking militia officer to sign this document. A signer of an earlier petition against Colonel Brodhead and an election official of the new county. A man of status and importance in local military and political affairs.

Jno. Armstrong, (5) four men of this name in the 1781 tax list – two in Cecil Twp., one in Cumberland and Robinson; (2) 1783 in Cecil Twp. with land and mill; went on the Moravian massacre under Col. Williamson; (6) went in June, 1782 with Col. Crawford on the expedition of the militia to Upper Sandusky.

George Atkinson, (4) settled in 1773 on Wheeling Creek; (5) Amwell Township in 1781 tax list; (2) Amwell Township in 1783.

Joseph Beeler, (1) 1776 land in Robinson and Peters Twp.; (4) 1776-1777 east fork of Chartiers Creek; (5) Peters Twp. in 1781 tax list spelled Bealor; (2) 1783 in Peters Twp. Captain in the 2nd Battallion of militia. Frontier fort on his property. An important man in the militia and defense of the area.

Daniel Bell

George Berry – resigned as Continental Army Captain at Fort Pitt 31 Dec., 1780.

Robert Blacker

John Blackburn, (1) as Blackbourne 1773 in Peters Twp.; (4) 1773 Chartiers Creek; (5) Peters Twp. in 1781 tax list; (2) land in 1783 in Peters Twp.

William Blunk, (5) in Robinson Twp. 1781 tax list.

Thomas Bond, (2) 1783 Strabane Township with land.

Jonathan Bonifre?

Will Bowmans, a William Boatman went on the massacre in March, 1782;

(2) a Wm Boatman in Cecil Twp. without land 1783.

Robert Boyd, (1) 1775 Hanover Twp.; (4) 1775 Chartiers Creek (two men?); (5) Two men in 1781 tax list – large landholders in Peters and Robinson Townships – the larger in Peters; (6) went with Col. Crawford in June of 1782 on the defeated expedition to Upper Sandusky.

Grant Brice

James Brice, (5) two James Brices in 1781 tax list – landowner in Cecil Twp. and man without land in Peters Twp.; (2) in Peters Twp. in 1783 without land.

Caleb Brown, (5) in Hopewell Twp. 1781 with no land.

Wanka Cherey, Jr.

Thomas Cherry, (4) Thomas Sherry 1774 Raccoon Creek; (5) two such men in Smith Twp. 1781, one having much more land and money.

Thomas Cohran (likely Cochran), (2) post-war Greene Twp. land on warrant 1783, so lived elsewhere in 1781.

Tobias Crane

Richard Crowley

John Dille, (5) Amwell Twp. in 1781 tax list; (2) land in Amwell Twp. 1783.

John Donahue, (3) Donahey 1771 at Cross Creek and Mt. Pleasant Twp.; (5) Cecil Twp. in 1781 tax list.

Azarah Dunn

Samuel Dunn, (5) Samuel Dunn in Cecil Twp. 1781 tax list.

Crion Each?

Thomas Each

Paich Edmond, (6) as Price Edmond in 1782 in the Westmoreland Co. militia.

Charles Eed

David Evans, (5) big landholder in Greene Twp. 1781; (2) Amwell land and mill 1783.

Nicholas Genare

Joseph Gossart

Hugh H. Gradnenld

Alexander Gray, (1) 1774 Hanover Twp.; (4) 1774 Kings Creek and Hanover Twp.; (5) Nottingham Twp. 1781 tax list; (2) Peters and Nottingham Twp. with land in 1783.

Archibald Gray, (5) Morgan Twp. 1781 tax list; (2) Morgan Twp. with land 1783.

Matthew Gray, (2) Morgan Twp. with land 1783.

John Gray, (2) Morgan Twp. with land 1783.

William Groom, (3) Morgan Twp. with land grant post-war, perhaps, elsewhere in 1783.

Alex Hasrad?

James Herr

James Hindman, (5) Strabane Twp. without land in 1781; (6) with Col. Crawford in June, 1782 on the expedition against Upper Sandusky.

George Hoge, (2) in Morgan Township with land 1783.

Robert Hoge

Trombert Hounger?

Laurance Huff, (2) in Strabane Township without land 1783.

Paul Huff

James Irvin, (2) 1783 land in Peters Twp.

Benjamin Jennings, (5) Morgan Twp. in 1781 tax list; (2) Morgan Twp. with land 1783.

David Jennings, (2) Morgan Township with land in 1783; (3) Fayette Co. land 1783.

Henry Jennings

Ebenezer Johnston

Robert Johnston, (2) land in Peters Twp. 1783; militia Ensign.

Zephemiah Johnston, (5) in Morgan and Greene Twps. in 1781; (2) land in 1783 in Morgan Twp.

Alex Kidd, (5) two men by this name in Robinson Twp. in 1781; (2) land in Robinson Twp. in 1783.

John or Jnr Lasswell

James L-she?

Jonathan Layerers

William Lett, (2) Wm Leet 1783 single no land in Strabane Twp.; (6) a militia Captain with Col. Crawford in June, 1782 on the expedition against the Indians at Upper Sandusky.

Zizza Linman?

Caleb Linsley, (5) large landowner in 1781 tax list in Amwell Twp.; (2) large landowner in Amwell Twp. 1783.

William Little, (3) 1765 Franklin N & S and Washington Boro [post-war grant]; (5) single in Peters Twp. in 1781.

Jacob Long, (1) 1773 in Peters Twp.; (4) 1773 at Chartiers Creek; (5) single in Peters Twp. in 1781 tax list.

William Long, (1) 1772 Cecil Twp.; (4) 1772 and 1774 Chartiers Creek; (5) two men of this name in Cecil and Peters Twps. 1781 tax list – the one in Cecil having twice as much land and money as the other.

John Machs?, (3) John Mackey 1776 Hanover Twp.

Micah and Jacob Mairn?

John Martin, (1) 1774 Nottingham and 1776 Hanover; (4) 1774 Mingo Creek and 1776 Raccoon Creek; (5) three men of this name in the 1781 tax list – only the man in Smith has land, the others having no land; (6) with Col.

Crawford in June, 1782 on the expedition against the Indians at Upper Sandusky.

William Masters, (5) two men of this name in the 1781 tax list – Greene and Peters Twp. – the one in Greene having no land.

George McCamblin

Jonathan McCarty, (3) John 1771 Mt. Pleasant.

John McDonald, (1) 1773 Robinson Twp.; (4) 1773 Harmon Creek, 1775 Buffalo, Short Creek and Chartiers; (5) in Smith Township in 1781 tax list; (2) in 1783 large landowner in Robinson Township with a still.

John M'Loney

James, and Thomas McMichael

John McMichael said by Paul Myers to have been from Maryland, dying in 1833 in Allegheny County where he is buried.

Elijah Mills, (6) with Col. Crawford on the June, 1782 expedition against the Indians at Upper Sandusky.

John Mills, (6) as with Elijah on the routed 'Crawford' Expedition June, 1782.

Joseph Mills, (5) in Morgan Twp. 1781 without land; (2) Morgan Twp. land 1783.

James Money, (5) in Cecil in 1781 without land.

William Nash, (2) as Nashon? 1783 Peters Twp. no land.

Henry Noble, (5) in Robinson Twp. in 1781 tax list.

Edward Parker

Sam Parkhurst, (5) in Amwell Twp. with large land holding in 1781; (2) Amwell Twp. large land owner in 1783.

Adam Patterson, (6) a Westmoreland Co. Private in Militia; and on the June, 1782 expedition against the Indians at Upper Sandusky under Col. Crawford.

Joseph L. Patterson, (5) Peters Twp. in 1781; (2) land in Peters Twp. 1783 – Paul Myers says that a man of this name was born in Ireland in 1752, emigrated in 1773 with his family, taught school, heard the Declaration of Independence read in Philadelphia, enlisted for the years 1776-1777, later came west with his family during the war, and is buried in Allegheny County.

Tob Riss, (2) as Thomas Reese 1783 in Bethlehem Twp.

William Robb, (6) On the June, 1782 expedition against the Indians at Upper Sandusky; (2) 1783 in Robinson Twp. single, no land.

Jno Robb, Jr., (5) two of this name in Peters and Robinson Twps. in 1781 – one with twice as much land as the other so Jr. probable in Peters with less; (2) 1783 Robinson Twp. with land.

Amos Sammar

Joseph Scott, (5) in Hopewell and Robinson Twps. in 1781; (2) 1783 Robinson Twp. with land.

Josh Sgmons (or Symons), (6) Josiah Simmons a militiaman in Westmoreland Co.

M solnsrvc – a distinguished and underlined signature but indecipherable.

Philip Spurgeon

Benjamin Stater?

Jack Steson?, (6) might be John Stevenson, a Second Lieutenant in the Eighth Pennsylvania Regiment stationed at Fort Pitt – if not discharged at the time then in disagreement with his officers.

John Tuisay?

Thomas Turner

George Vallandigham, (4) 1774 Chartiers Creek; (5) Large landowner in Robinson Twp. in 1781 tax list; (2) 1783 land in Robinson Twp.; at the time George Vallandigham was a commissioner of the new County of Washington; he was also Lt. Col. – Commanding Officer of the Second Battallion of Militia – highest ranking militia officer to sign this document.

Andrew Vint, (5) Andrew Vent in the 1781 tax list in Peters Twp., single with no land; (6) Andrew Vent on the ill fated expedition against the Indians at Upper Sandusky in June, 1782; (2) Peters Twp. with land in 1783

Nathaniel Wade?

Thomas Wakefield, (5) in Cecil Twp. in 1781 tax list without land.

Isaac Walker, (5) in Robinson Twp. in 1781 with large amount of land; (2) large landowner in 1783 in Robinson Twp.

Gabriel Walker, (5) in 1781 large landowner in Robinson Twp.; (2) large land owner in 1783 in Robinson Twp.

William Warden or Wardan, (2) 1783 Robinson Twp. landowner.

Elijah Wites

Location of pre-war grants of 13 men:

Only thirteen of these men held land grants from Virginia that record where they lived before this war. Sometimes dates and locations were not recorded on the grants. Furthermore, this does not include men who may have held grants from Pennsylvania. However, these 13 Virginia men had been located on land for up to ten years and more before 1781. Their locations as given on the land grants are as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Blaine and Buffalo Cr. | 2. Wheeling Cr. |
| 3. Peters Twp. | 4. Peters Twp. |
| 5. Hanover Twp., Chartiers Cr. | 6. Raccoon Cr. |
| 7. Kings Cr., Hanover Twp. | 8. Peters Twp., Chartiers Cr. |
| 9. Cecil Twp., Chartiers Cr. | 10. Nottingham and Hanover Twp. |
| 11. Mt. Pleasant | 12. Robinson Twp., Buffalo Cr. |
| 13. Chartiers Cr. | and Short Cr. |

Washington County had at least two men who were titled as gentlemen, and a few who were listed in the tax lists as esquire. Most of those titled men lived in Cecil Township. Eighteenth century social ranking was used here, and there was a wide variation in land and monetary wealth. Thirty-nine of the 105 signers are listed in the 1781 tax list. The 66 not taxed apparently had nothing taxable – no animals, land, or money or were not from Washington County. Rich, poor, and middling officer and men of the militia all signed. Some of these men such as James Allison, Joseph Beeler, and George Vallandigham held important public offices and had achieved recognition as leaders. These men, like others on this frontier, were putting themselves and their families on the line in the American cause.

The townships of the 29 signers unequivocally identified in the 1781 tax list are of interest [ten are listed more than once]. The largest number of men (6) were from Peters Township with Cecil and Robinson Townships each having 5 – all townships along the Ohio and Monongahela Rivers bordering the county on the east. The much smaller numbers were from Amwell, Greene, Nottingham, and Hopewell. There were none found in Bethlehem, Cumberland, Donegal, Fallowfield, and Somerset Townships – those to the west and south. Most signers, were therefore, from the upper, northeastern townships west of and along the rivers above and below the Fort.

Fourteen of the signers appear in the 1781 tax list, but not in the 1783 tax list. Their names and 1781 townships are as follows:

Sub-lieut James Allison, Cecil	William Blunk, Robinson
Robert Boyd, Peters and Robinson	
Thomas Cherry, Smith	John Donahue, Cecil
James Hindman, Strabane	
William Little, Peters	Jacob Long, Peters
William Long, Cecil	John Martin, Smith
William Masters, Peters	James Money, Cecil
Henry Noble, Robinson	Thomas Wakefield, Cecil

Why were these men unlisted in 1783? They may have left the area, gone uncounted, or lost everything. While it is impossible to tell, it seems likely that some of them had left as they said would happen if the war continued. It is further evident that the largest number (5 of the 14) had been in Cecil Township, and the second largest number (3) were from both Robinson and Peters Townships – all along or close to the Ohio and Monongahela Rivers. Six of these men had been settled for up to ten years: James Allison, Robert Boyd, Thomas Cherry, Jacob and William Long, and John Martin.

Thirty-six of these men were found in the 1783 tax list. The others may have gone east, had no taxable property, lived in other counties, or been omit-

ted. It is important to see in which townships the unequivocal 34 were located in 1783. The largest number (9) were in Robinson Twp., and (8) were in Morgan Twp., (7) in Peters Twp., and (5) in Amwell Twp. The smaller numbers were in Strabane, Cecil, and Bethlehem Townships. The petitioners were apparently scattered around, mostly on the northeast side of Washington County of that day. Some of the land is now in Allegheny County, having been taken out of Robinson, Cecil, Peters, and Nottingham Townships in 1788. The majority of them came from the area drained by Chartiers Creek which drains Miller's Run among others – an old settlement of prominent men and their families. That included the townships mentioned which were above and below Fort Pitt bordered on the east Ohio and Monongahela Rivers. That was the area most easily accessible to the marauding Indians.

Men with their wives and families along the big rivers and a few other men from inland signed this "petition" or representation as far as can be discovered. Among the signers were men of property and position as well as family men without much of anything. All wanted to make their desperation known to the new Commandant of the Western Division, to the government of Pennsylvania, and to the Continental Congress.

Result of This "Representation"

The Congressional Committee which examined this representation reported on April 3. It had taken five to six months for the beleaguered westerners to get a decision. In the meantime they had launched the tragic expedition up the Muskingum to Gnadenhütten. Congress' reply confirmed their judgment in taking matters into their own hands:

The Commander-in-Chief observed that General Irvine who commands at Pittsburgh, had instructions to make the best arrangements in his power for the defence of the frontiers and that two Continental Regiments had been stationed there a considerable time for that purpose which if nearly full would be in his opinion as large a force as the United States are able to support for that service, and tho' the Regiments were now weak, he had ordered them to be reinforced by the first recruits that should be raised in the States to which the Regiments belonged and that he was of opinion that the raising of the recruits is all that was necessary at present, Your committee fully concur with the General in sentiment.⁷

What Congress said, in effect, was that the petitioners were on their own. They would only receive reinforcements to fill out the Virginia and Pennsylvania regiments — soldiers of two states disputing ownership of the area. This was not the first time that the people of the western border were told they could have no more help from Congress: the people of the Upper Juniata Valley, too, were largely left on their own.⁸

Throughout 1782 and into 1785, Indian warfare continued unabated in western Pennsylvania and the Ohio Valley. In June, 1782, an expedition to the Upper Sandusky under Colonel William Crawford, who had earlier massacred Indians, resulted in his brutal death by torture and the complete route of his forces. The Indians resumed the offensive. On July 26, 1782, Major Ephraim Douglass reported that the threat of Indian raids prevented him from leaving the Fort Pitt area. He talked about the destruction of Hanna's Town, the county seat, in which nine were killed and ten taken prisoners. Throughout the west, houses were burned, farm animals destroyed, and everything of value carried away: "Hardly a day but they have been discovered in some quarter of the country, and the poor inhabitants struck with terror thro' the whole extent of our frontier." There were also whites with the raiders, and Douglass worried that in revenge for Gnadenhütten, "the Delaware renounce the idea of taking any prisoners but for cruel purposes of torture."⁹

The carnage continued. In August, Douglass reported that "the Indians appear at length to have taken up the business of killing us in good earnest. . . they have been frequently seen in our neighborhood and have killed several within a few miles of us." He wrote of one hundred Indian raiders in the area confronting "defenseless and terrified inhabitants." But they were not all that terrified: the next year Douglass admitted that "the incroachments of the white people on the settlements of the Cherokees have been repeatedly complained of."¹⁰

There are 251 pages of rosters of the various militia units, many of which patrolled the frontier during the years 1782 to 1785. In all 83 units and 1328 men continued the fight on Pennsylvania's border long after the British had surrendered.¹¹ Disgruntlement with a federal government that failed to protect its citizens continued in western Pennsylvania: Washington County was divided in its vote on the 1787 Constitution.¹² It also was the site of the Whiskey Rebellion seven years later.

Notes

1. The petition may be found in the *Papers of the Continental Congress*, file number M247, r83, 169, page 401, National Archives, Washington, D.C., and on microfilm.
2. Gregory T. Knouff, "Soldiers and Violence on the Pennsylvania Frontier," in John B. Frantz and William Pencak, eds., *Beyond Philadelphia: The American Revolution in the Pennsylvania Hinterland* (University Park, 1998), 178, 180, 186, 191, 193.
3. For the deteriorated units at Fort Pitt, see T. L. Montgomery, *Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania*, 1916, 137, 138, 146.
4. For a transcript of the three petitions of March and April, 1781 and the names of their signers, see Louise Kellogg, *Frontier Retreat on the Upper Ohio* (Madison, 1912), 356-370.
5. Many speak of the first Williamson-led expedition in the fall of 1781, while some today deny that it occurred. For first-hand evidence that it took place, see John C. Dann, *The Revolution Remembered* (Chicago, 1980), 256 and Joseph Doddridge, *Notes on the Settlement and Indian Wars* (Pittsburgh, 1912), 199.
6. Montgomery, *Frontier Forts*, 146.
7. *Journals of the Continental Congress*, vol. 22 (for 1782), (Washington, 1914), 163.
8. Tim Blessing, "The Juniata Valley," in Frantz and Pencak, eds., *Beyond Philadelphia*, 160, 163.
9. Ephraim Douglass, "Pittsburgh and Uniontown, Pennsylvania, in 1782-3," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Genealogy*, 1 (1877), 44-45.
10. *Ibid.*, 48, 49, 53.
11. *Pennsylvania Archives*, 6 ser. vol. 2, ed. T. L. Montgomery (Harrisburg, 1906), 7-258.
12. Owen S. Ireland, *Religion, Ethnicity, and Politics: Ratifying the Constitution in Pennsylvania* (University Park, 1995), 212, 265.