

The British, the Indians, and Smallpox: What Actually Happened at Fort Pitt in 1763?

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An entrenched part of the multicultural canon can be summed up by quoting from a book intended for undergraduate college students: "In the 1760s the British at Fort Pitt gave blankets from the smallpox hospital to Delaware Indians as a form of germ warfare."¹ The story has been repeated time and again and has now become dogma, or so it seems. This essay will re-examine this familiar tale and what historians have alleged about it to determine what is credible about the incident at Fort Pitt.

Despite the persistence of the story, not every scholar is in agreement. In 1983, for example, Donald R. Hopkins called an exchange of letters between British General Jeffrey Amherst and Colonel Henry Bouquet suggesting that Indians be infected with smallpox via contaminated blankets "the most notorious instance of smallpox being deliberately recommended as a weapon against North American Indians." But Hopkins was compelled to observe: "The result of this conspiracy is unknown."²

Still more pertinent is the skepticism expressed by Alfred W. Crosby, whose book, *The Columbian Exchange*, made disease a subject all historians of early America had to take very seriously. In his *Ecological Imperialism* Crosby devoted an appendix to smallpox and, in a note, discussed what he called "the old legend of intentional European bacteriological warfare." Asserting that the

colonists certainly would have liked to wage such a war and did talk about giving infected blankets and such to the indigenes, and they may even have done so a few times, but by and large the legend is just that, a legend. Before the development of modern bacteriology at the end of the 19th century, diseases did not come in ampoules, and there were no refrigerators in which to store the ampoules. . . . As for infected blankets, they might or might not work. Furthermore, and most important, the intentionally transmitted disease might swing back on the white population. . . . These people were dedicated to quarantining smallpox, not to spreading it.³

The account of the British infecting Indians with smallpox during Pontiac's Rebellion of 1763 originated with Francis Parkman, whose hired research assistant found the Amherst-Bouquet correspondence in London. Parkman, who called the whole thing "detestable," printed the relevant sections. Amherst asked Bouquet "Could it not be contrived to send the *Small Pox* [sic] among those disaffected tribes of Indians?" "I will try to inoculate" the Indians, Bouquet responded, "with some blankets that may fall in their hands, and take

care not to get the disease myself." A pleased Amherst wrote back to Bouquet: "You will do well to try to inoculate the Indians by means of blankets, as well as to try every other method that can serve to extirpate this execrable race." Parkman then suggested that in 1763 smallpox at Fort Pitt did spread to the Indians.⁴

Most later versions of the fighting at Fort Pitt quoted at least part of those letters from Parkman. His condemnation of the exchange, which he first brought to public attention, has not saved Parkman from being vilified as a racist—often by those who have made the most of the Fort Pitt incident.⁵

In 1924 the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* published a journal written by William Trent, an Indian trader at Fort Pitt, which included a damning entry. For June 24, 1763, Trent wrote about a meeting with two Delaware Indians at the fort. "Out of our regard to them," a pleased Trent penned, "we gave them two Blankets and an Handkerchief out of the Small Pox Hospital. I hope it will have the desired effect."⁶

Twenty-three years later, Howard H. Peckham wrote the first major examination of Pontiac's Rebellion since Parkman. In this well-received book, Peckham described the giving to the Indians of items used by people with smallpox. He related that smallpox had been passed to the natives by these unpleasant gifts and cited the above quotation from Trent's journal. However, nowhere else in the book did Peckham cite the journal. Apparently, he paid little attention to the rest of it and nowhere mentions Trent himself. Peckham's interest was focused on Pontiac and the siege of Detroit by hostile Indians; Fort Pitt was of secondary importance to Peckham.⁷

One historian, Bernhard Knollenberg, was not impressed by Peckham's analysis of the Fort Pitt incident, which was "substantially the same as Parkman's." Knollenberg, in an article in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, went over all the documentation related to smallpox at Fort Pitt and came to a quite different conclusion than Peckham or Parkman. "It is true," Knollenberg announced, "that some British officers may be charged with what Parkman called a 'detestable' intent, but execution of the intent is not supported even by circumstantial evidence."⁸

On January 21, 1955, Knollenberg was still pleased with his article and had received some fan mail about it. When he opened a letter from Donald H. Kent, then editing Bouquet's papers, he must have been expecting more of the same. Instead, Kent informed the author that "there is direct evidence that an attempt was actually made to infect the Indians with smallpox" and "that it was an official action." The proof, found among the records of Trent's trading firm, read: "To Sundries got to Replace in kind those which were taken from people in the Hospital to Convey the Small-pox to the Indians Vizt. 2 Blankets 1 Silk Handkerchief and 1 linnen." The expense was approved by Captain Simeon Ecuyer, Fort Pitt's commander, and other British officers. Acting

as a true scholar, Knollenberg immediately sent the evidence to the periodical which printed it along with his admission: "obviously this evidence invalidates part of my article."⁹ From that point on, there seemed no doubt that the British at Fort Pitt had infected Indians with smallpox.

The multicultural revisionism of the 1980s and 1990s seemed to reinvigorate the old story. No one did more during those decades to spread and extend it than Francis Jennings. In his *Empire of Fortune*, published in 1988, he hinted that the British-unleashed smallpox caused "possibly more deaths" than the fighting; the various outbreaks of smallpox that hit the natives during the fighting of the 1750s might have been more British germ warfare. His "suspicion" was supported by no evidence except the Fort Pitt episode of 1763. In that case he has Ecuyer actually calling the hostile Indians into besieged Fort Pitt "for parley" and then giving them the infamous blankets. Jennings quotes Trent and then adds "An epidemic raged among the Delawares, after which some familiar chiefs appear no more in any account: Great Chief Shingas, for example, and his brother Pisquetomen." Bouquet's victory at Bushy Run did not save Fort Pitt, Jennings believed. Rather, it was the rampaging smallpox that saved the British. Although Jennings quoted Trent's comment printed above, he did not examine the published journal. Jennings's note gives Knollenberg's article as the source of the quotation.¹⁰

In 1993 Jennings continued his assault upon real and imagined enemies of the Indians in *The Founders of America* and the Fort Pitt incident pops up again. The British garrison "rescued itself by infecting its besiegers with smallpox," he explains, and the British thereby spread "a terrible epidemic among the Delawares." The whole affair, the author declares, is "All thoroughly documented," but not in *The Founders of America*. The relevant note refers curious readers to *Empire of Fortune*.¹¹

Jennings returned again to the Fort Pitt episode in his *Benjamin Franklin*, published in 1996. In this work, Jennings insists: "If Indian raiders who wiped out whole families deserved to be called savages, what should Amherst, Ecuyer, and Trent be called? In terms of pragmatism, their method 'worked': the siege was lifted." Trent is quoted here too, but the readers are, again, referred to *Empire of Fortune* rather than to the journal itself.¹²

The now-familiar account of the infected blankets at Fort Pitt needs revision. Logic, a better understanding of smallpox itself, and another look at the evidence call into question much of the standard rendition of the story and the ways that historians for more than a century have misrepresented the evidence. Perhaps the best place to begin is with Amherst and Bouquet where, after all, Parkman started. What were these soldiers really like?

Amherst, who commanded the British army in North America, had grown to hate Indians because of the killing of British soldiers who had surrendered at Fort William Henry in 1757, the inspiration of the famed novel *The Last of*

the Mohicans. According to Ian K. Steele, Amherst "sought to impose European definitions of war . . . more fully than had been the case to date." The initiation of Pontiac's Rebellion violated the general's idea of proper warfare. On May 29, 1763, Amherst wrote of the "Treacherous Behavior" of the Indians who had just made peace with the British: they were "Contemptible" for "Violating the most Solemn Promises of Friendship, without the Least Provocation on our Side." In July he complained of their "Temerity" and "Ingratitude." By August General Amherst wanted to be sure that the natives were "Sufficiently Punished for the Depredations and Barbarities." Only then could peace be considered: "they must first be Brought to such a State as may give us Room to hope they will Remember the Engagements they make with Us."¹³ A commander-in-chief who detested Indians and their departure from his ideas of war would have little reluctance in suggesting the dissemination of smallpox among them.

Colonel Henry Bouquet, one of the many foreigners who had joined the British Army's "Royal Americans," did not like colonial Pennsylvanians. In 1756 he was attacked in Philadelphia by a colonist with a whip. Afterward, Bouquet remarked:

Everything most abominable that nature has produced, and everything most detestable that corruption can add to it, such are the honest inhabitants of this province. A weak government puts the capstone on their insolence, and if order is not established there, the authority of the King and of his Parliament will soon be no longer recognized.¹⁴

Bouquet shared with Amherst a distaste for the Indians' violation of treaties. While at a peace conference in 1764, Bouquet lectured the attending Shawnees and Delawares:

You have dared to attack Fort Pitt, to the building of which you expressly consented, when in presence of George Croghan, Deputy Agent for Indian Affairs, I made the first Treaty with you upon the Ohio, after we had dispossessed the French of Fort Duquesne, and several of you now present, assisted at that Treaty.¹⁵

Indeed, such sentiments must have been common among British officers. Pontiac's Rebellion caused a deep, bitter, resentment against the Indians. General Thomas Gage, for example, railed about the "Rascals of the Ohio" responsible for "all this Mischief." "No Peace should be made with them," Gage insisted, "till every Measure is tried to destroy them." He would leave the "Suggestions" to those more knowledgeable. Not surprisingly, Gage would give the final approval for payment to William Trent to replace the soiled blankets given away at Fort Pitt.¹⁶

Bouquet, however, differed from Gage in one important matter. Gage was not concerned about the effects of smallpox. Bouquet was very concerned about the pox—he had never had it. And judging from the Royal Americans' doctor, Bouquet "might be apprehensive of catching the infection from me, who is so often among the Soldiers in that disease." The physician, therefore, "on purpose avoided" Bouquet. Both men were in Philadelphia during 1756 when smallpox was raging. Overall, the colonel seems to have been very health-conscious. He avoided alcohol and made sure to get plenty of exercise, which pleased the doctor. Ironically, Bouquet died of yellow fever a mere nine days after he was promoted to the military command of Pensacola, Florida, in 1765.¹⁷

Bouquet's response to Amherst's smallpox suggestion seems willing enough, but Bouquet added that he did not want to get the disease himself, and if he spread the virulent virus among the Indians, there was a good chance that he might catch it too. Smallpox would likely spring back upon its disseminator, as Crosby observes. This basic reality explains why, when Bouquet wrote to Fort Pitt's commander, he said nothing about passing on smallpox to the Indians, as Knollenberg pointed out. Nor did Bouquet do anything about spreading the disease afterward. Bouquet's response to Amherst seems to have been merely a way to deflect a bizarre idea of his superior officer. As the colonel commented in July 1763, sometimes it was better "to hide what one thinks."¹⁸ In practice, Bouquet ignored Amherst's suggestion, not out of humanitarian feelings towards the Indians, but for his own personal safety. Neither Amherst nor Bouquet actually tried germ warfare. The attempt to disseminate smallpox took place at Fort Pitt independent of both of them.

Smallpox and the Indians were a dangerous and unhappy combination. In 1773 George Croghan, who handled Indian affairs at Fort Pitt, commented that "the Small pox itt's very fatal to them and allways will be, Till they become Civilised, as Till then they Cant be brought to keep themselves Warm, and adopt Such meshurs as is Necessary in that Disorder." Croghan's observation is a criticism of how Indians dealt with fevers and diseases such as smallpox—hoping that a dousing with very cold water would cure them. This technique was ineffective against smallpox. For that matter, everything the British tried failed too until the development of inoculation, which involved giving a patient a weak case of smallpox so that the full power of the disease would be avoided. However, even inoculation sometimes proved fatal and it remained controversial among the colonists. A few years after the Fort Pitt episode, rioting against inoculation rocked Norfolk, Virginia; that colony soon severely limited the procedure. During the French and Indian War, smallpox attacked both the Delaware Indians and the colonists of Pennsylvania.¹⁹

During 1761-1763, although the war in the area was over, relations between the two groups deteriorated. James Kenny, a Quaker Indian trader, arrived at Pittsburgh, the settlement established next to Fort Pitt, in 1761. If

Pittsburgh “continues to Increase,” Kenny predicted, “it must soon be very large, which seems likely to me.” Kenny soon learned of discontent among the local Indians, one of whom wondered aloud why the British continued to improve Fort Pitt despite their overwhelming victory against the French. Kenny himself mentioned in November 1761 that the fort seemed “much Stronger than it was in times of more danger.” And, in 1762, he learned that another trader, William Trent, had made a mistake by letting the natives have goods on credit. They failed to pay the debts and Trent cut off the credit, leading to “dissatisfaction in both sides.”²⁰

Kenny, still quite new in Pittsburgh, listened to what the “Old Traders” had to say—and it was not encouraging. The old-timers forecast another war with the Indians, which the natives did not try to deny. The important Delaware White Eyes admitted to Kenny that there was war talk among them. Another Delaware bluntly predicted to some colonists “a War against us Next Spring,” but everyone dismissed his statement because “we know him to be a Rogue and Horse thief.”²¹

As a devout Quaker, Kenny was disturbed by those reports. He was also concerned about “the Imposter which is raised amongst the Delawares, in order to shew them the right way to Heaven.” A prophet had convinced the Delawares to follow his “new Plan of Religion”: reject the goods of the whites, wear only animal skins, and live “as their forefathers did.” The prophet spoke of a “Bitter Water,” which Kenny interpreted as a “Physick to purge out all that they get of the White peoples ways and Nature.” The Delawares danced and prayed “to a little God who carries the petitions and presents them to the Great Being.” Reportedly, the prophet told the Delawares “he had a Vission of Heaven where there was no White people but all Indians, and wants a total Separation from us, and for that purpose advises the Indians to Impose upon the Traders,”²² hardly welcome news to an Indian trader such as Kenny.

When the details of the treaty ending the French and Indian War reached Fort Pitt, the natives were shocked. Ever since the start of European settlement, the Indians had been able to play the English and French off against each other, but the new treaty all but removed France from the continent, to the Indians’ dismay. As Croghan explained in April 1763, the Indians around Fort Pitt “always expected Canada would be given back to the French on a Peace. They say the French had no Right to give up their Country to the English.” Kenny recorded the Delaware chief Newcomer’s reaction to the peace treaty—he was “Struck dumb for a considerable time.” Newcomer eventually declared that “the English was grown too powerful and seemed as if they would be too strong for God himself,” showing how drastically the Delawares thought the geo-political situation had shifted against them.²³

During this pivotal period, in April 1763, Croghan decided to journey to eastern Pennsylvania. Croghan, who opposed the sale of rum to the Indians as

well as giving them credit, was nonetheless popular among them. Kenny noted in his journal one Indian's remark that Croghan "was the Only Man amongst us they regarded and only for him it might be War again, and that none of us knew how to please Indians but him." Affairs at Fort Pitt rapidly worsened after Croghan's departure on April 25.²⁴

May 27 turned out to be an important day. Kenny traded with some Delawares, noting "they were in an unusual hurry, bought a Good deal of Powder and Lead and wanted more Powder but we had it not well to Spair." The Quaker noticed that his customers seemed to be "in fear and haste." That same day, Trent learned that the area's Indians had abandoned their cornfields, not a good sign for peace.²⁵

While Kenny busily traded gunpowder that day, Alexander McKee, Croghan's assistant, talked with the Delaware Turtle's Heart. The Indian asked McKee "when he tho't to go down in the Country" and was told "in Ten Days." Then, Turtle's Heart warned McKee: "the Indian desired he would go that Day or in four Days at furthest or else he should not expect to see him alive more and Signified as if the Indians was just ready to Strike us." Meanwhile, McKee's father, Thomas McKee, had been delegated by Sir William Johnson, the man responsible for Indian relations in the northern colonies, to investigate what was happening in Pennsylvania's Wyoming valley. After the death of the Delaware Teedyuscung and other Indians in Wyoming under very suspicious circumstances, squatters from New England moved onto Indian land, a disturbing matter to both the Iroquois and the Delaware. So, while war was clearly coming at Fort Pitt, McKee's father, who had left for Philadelphia, was hoping to help the Indians. The senior McKee eventually canceled his Wyoming trip because of Pontiac's Rebellion.²⁶

Turtle's Heart's warning made it plain to Ecuyer, a bit late, that the time had come to prepare Fort Pitt for battle. His men hurriedly did so on May 28. The next day the beleaguered base learned that some Delawares had killed settlers. War was at hand. The Pittsburgers entered the isolated fort.²⁷

Soon after, Trent recorded in his journal news brought by an Indian trader. This refugee, then safely at Fort Pitt, explained that he had met with prominent Delawares who, because of "the Friendship that formerly subsisted between [our] Grandfathers and the English, which has been lately renewed by us," told him about the outbreak of Pontiac's Rebellion to the westward.²⁸

The blanket affair happened on June 24. The night before "Two Delawares called for Mr. McKee and told him they wanted to speak to him in the Morning." The conference did take place on June 24 just outside of Fort Pitt. The participants were Ecuyer, McKee, Turtle's Heart, and another Delaware, "Mamaltee a Chief." The Indians tried to coax the people holed up in the fort to leave, an option that Ecuyer promptly rejected and stated that reinforcements were coming to Fort Pitt—the stronghold could easily hold out. After

conferring with their chiefs, the two Indians "returned and said they would hold fast of the Chain of friendship" but they were obviously not very believable. The Indian messengers had asked for presents—food and alcohol—"to carry us Home." Requesting gifts was common, but Ecuyer in this case seemed especially generous. Turtle's Heart and his companion received food in "large quantities"—some "600 Rations." Included among this largess was a bundle containing the soiled handkerchief and blankets, as already related, and Trent wrote in his journal of his desire that smallpox would infect the Delawares.²⁹

Could smallpox be transmitted in such a fashion? The answer is yes. During the course of the disease, a smallpox victim discharged bodily fluids loaded with the infectious virus upon his bed linen, which absorbed it. People who cleaned such things could be in danger from them. However, the smallpox virus dies quickly, even in the scabs on the ill person's body, so the newer the presence of smallpox on blankets and other goods, the greater the chance of spreading the contagion. A scientific experiment determined that infected clothing, stored in "a wooden box" could survive "as long as 66 days." The Fort Pitt items, though, do not appear to have been stored like that. The soiled material given to the Indians was not in a box but, apparently, had been wrapped up in a clean sheet of linen. Most likely, the items in question had been exposed to the air for some time. The above-mentioned experiment concluded that "when clothing was spread out on a bed and exposed to indirect light," the smallpox virus on the clothing was dead "after 7 days."³⁰

The key questions relating to the Fort Pitt episode are how fresh was the virus on the infected cloth and how were the items stored. No evidence exists to answer such questions, yet plenty of evidence suggests that either the smallpox virus was already dead on the unpleasant gifts or that the presents simply failed to fulfill Trent's ardent desire to infect the Indians.

On July 22, about a month after the deceptive gift, Trent wrote in his journal: "Gray Eyes, Wingenum, Turtle's Heart and Mamaultee, came over the River told us their Chiefs were in Council, that they waited for Custaluga who they expected that Day."³¹ This entry, which is ignored over and over again in historical accounts, shows both recipients of the soiled material alive and well—smallpox should have hit them by that time.

Trent does not mention smallpox when Turtle's Heart and his colleague reappear, nor does Trent ever mention smallpox again in his entire journal, although he surely must have sought information about the outcome of his scheme. On September 5 he talked to an Indian who had conversed with some hostile Shawnees. Trent learned that "the Delawares had all left their Towns," but, again, smallpox is not mentioned. Given the scope of the smallpox epidemic that Jennings reports, the disease should have been a major topic of conversation among Indians and the Delawares, if burdened by hordes of smallpox victims, should have had a tough time leaving the area. Yet Trent

remained silent on the subject.³² If Fort Pitt had been saved by the blanket stratagem, Trent would have done some gloating. Only one conclusion can be drawn—the plan flopped.

The only possible evidence of any effect by the soiled blankets is an entry of July 20 where Trent mentions that the Indians were using trickery “to make us believe their numbers much greater than what they are.” The Indians were shorthanded at Fort Pitt, but not because of the dubious gifts. Rather, a shortage of warriors is not surprising at the conclusion of the French and Indian War; a major war causes substantial losses. Other diseases took their toll as well. A measles epidemic in 1759 that came to Pittsburgh with some Southern soldiers surely spread to the Indians. Dysentery was present in 1761. A serious epidemic of what Kenny called “ague”—perhaps flu—hit the Shawnees especially hard the following year.³³ Smallpox too had reduced the fighting strength of the Indians, but not in the way Jennings and the others believed.

Parkman mentioned the testimony of a captive of the Indians, Gershom Hicks, and then related that smallpox hit the Indians from Fort Pitt. Although Peckham did look at Hicks’s statements, he simply repeated Parkman’s assertion, but Knollenberg, in an unrefuted section of his article, explained that Hicks reported that smallpox had first surfaced among the natives in “the spring of 1763,” not later. Smallpox had been present among the Indians well before the Fort Pitt incident took place. Hicks, an excellent witness as he was fluent in the Delaware tongue and even knew some Shawnee, also shed light on the Indians’ smallpox losses. For the year from the spring of 1763 to April 1764, “30 or 40 Mingo, as many Delawares and some Shawneese Died all of the Smallpox.” Therefore, about 100 Indians died in a year among three different tribes. Given smallpox’s usual cataclysmic effects, this outbreak was comparatively minor.³⁴

Where did the smallpox in Fort Pitt come from? To quote Parkman’s flowery rhetoric: “Fort Pitt stood far aloof in the forest, and one might journey eastward full two hundred miles, before the English settlements began to thicken.” Fort Pitt was isolated, except, of course, from Pittsburgh. The likeliest carriers were the residents of Pittsburgh who were evacuated into the fort on May 30. Smallpox appeared in the fort soon after. The question then becomes, where did the Pittsburghers get it? As smallpox had already been among the Indians, it is likely that some infected Indians spread the disease to Pittsburghers. While unusual, smallpox could, naturally enough, be transmitted from Indian to colonist. In 1759, smallpox caught by colonists from Indians at a peace conference ravaged Charleston, South Carolina, and surrounding places.³⁵

Since, as appears likely, the smallpox at Fort Pitt originated with the Indians, the blanket gambit had to have been a complete failure. Trying to infect Indians with smallpox that came from them in the first place was doomed to fail, because the Indians vulnerable to the disease had just been exposed to it.

The recent outbreak in the spring of 1763, as well as the earlier epidemic in the 1750s, should have made most of the local Indians immune to smallpox because they had had it before. Hick's testimony about Indian smallpox losses in 1763-1764 demonstrates that most of the local Indians already had immunity to the pox.

Moreover, no one can be certain that the soiled handkerchief and blankets actually reached their destination. One can imagine Turtle's Heart opening the bundle after departing from the besieged fort. In Indian society, even a used shirt was an acceptable gift—after a washing.³⁶ It would have been readily apparent by the odor that these items had not been washed. Perhaps the two Indians perceived the unwashed state of these presents as an insult and immediately dumped the bundle. As the virus had probably been absorbed into the cloth some time before, the material was no longer very infectious. Dumping the offensive gift would have defeated the scheme.

But who at Fort Pitt had dreamed up this eighteenth century version of germ warfare? Could the responsible person have been either Captain Ecuyer or Alexander McKee, the two individuals who had talked with the Indians? Simeon Ecuyer had been a captain only since April 27, 1762, barely more than a year when the incident occurred; he took over the fort's command in November 1762. The first paperwork he submitted was so inaccurate that Bouquet, in New York, had to redo it himself. At Fort Pitt Ecuyer seems to have been mostly interested in the Saturday dances and how to get the local women drunk. (Punch was usually successful although whiskey was needed for the most difficult cases.) Furthermore, Ecuyer seems to have had little experience in fighting Indians. He fired cannons at them from the fort, which brought criticism from Amherst. Cannon fire worked well against European troops, who fought in massed formations, but was usually ineffective against Indians, who ordinarily dispersed over a wide area. Instead, Amherst believed, the Indians should be allowed to get close to the fort and then killed by grapeshot, a potent antipersonnel weapon, or picked off by gunfire.³⁷ Ecuyer does not seem to have been imaginative enough to try passing on a disease.

Nor is McKee a good suspect. As Croghan's assistant, it seems improbable that he would knowingly participate in something that Croghan would never have agreed to if he had been at Fort Pitt. This statement seems especially apt for the reason that Turtle's Heart's earlier warning—without a doubt—had saved McKee's life. Because the soiled items inside a linen sheet (which Trent may have been compensated for) constituted only one bundle, McKee probably never knew what was secreted amongst the many presents handed over to Turtle's Heart. Bundling the soiled gifts inside a sheet served to conceal what was going on from those not involved in the scheme; it also was probably intended to make sure that moving those items out from the hospital would not spread disease among Fort Pitt's garrison. What little evidence exists suggests that only Ecuyer and William Trent knew what was being done.

Trent is the most logical suspect for the mastermind behind the smallpox stratagem. Captain William Trent was a militia officer whose military skills were not highly regarded, although Ecuyer, obviously inexperienced, leaned heavily on Trent, who had spent much time on the frontier. He had been a business partner of Croghan's and had helped him with Indian relations in the past. Trent had even helped Ecuyer set up the smallpox hospital in the fort after the outbreak of the disease there. In 1757 Trent had seen firsthand smallpox's effect upon Indians when, at peace talks, some of them died from it.³⁸

Indians fighting in the French and Indian War had infuriated Trent. In 1755 an anguished Trent had written about one Indian raid: "one whole family was burnt to Death in an House. The Indians destroy all before them; firing Houses, Barns, Stackyards and every thing that will burn. . . . they have killed more, and keep on killing, the woods is alive with them." By 1758 Cherokees refused to enter Pennsylvania because they believed that Trent had been responsible for an attack on their forces. To worsen his attitude, the war had greatly hurt his trade and his finances; in 1761 some Indians had tried to steal ten horses from him.³⁹

Then came Pontiac's Rebellion. Trent's business was not aided by the resumption of fighting. In addition, in his journal Trent recorded that the Indians were now at war again despite having made peace. This factor infuriated army officers and Trent probably reacted in the same way. And, in his journal, he wrote that "we" had given infected items to the Indians. Trent seems to have been seeking revenge over many things.⁴⁰

The failed attempt at germ warfare did not raise the siege of Fort Pitt. Rather, it was Bouquet's success in August 1763 at what has been dubbed the battle of Bushy Run that did so. Over 25 miles from the fort, Bouquet's relief force was ambushed. Fighting spread over two days, with heavy casualties on both sides. Bouquet won by withholding some of his soldiers from the battle and then throwing them at the surprised Indians.⁴¹ The natives' tough fighting suggests that they were not then weakened by smallpox emanating from Fort Pitt.

What about Jennings's claim that two prominent Indians, Shingas and Pisquetomen, disappeared from the record because they died from Fort Pitt's germ warfare? Shingas, in fact, does appear after the gift of soiled cloth. On July 26, 1763, well after that affair, Trent wrote: "The Indians came over Shingess, Wingenum, Grey Eyes . . . with several other Warriors. . . ." Shingas had been "very Sick" much earlier, in June 1762, according to Kenny, and one authority states that Shingas "died during the winter of 1763-1764," well after smallpox should have killed him.⁴²

As for Pisquetomen, he had had a long career dealing with the colonists. Pisquetomen does not appear in Trent's journal after the evil gift, but he is not

mentioned in it before the incident either. Kenny described Pisquetomen as an "old man" in 1759. Perhaps he died before the siege at Fort Pitt. Besides, as he was elderly (as was Shingas), he may have already had smallpox years before.⁴³

Furthermore, a list can easily be made of Indians who survived well past the toll that successful germ warfare would have taken. King Beaver, described by Kenny as "middle aged" in 1759, lived until 1769. Newcomer survived until 1776. Another Indian mentioned by Kenny, Killbuck, died in 1811. Grey Eyes was still breathing in 1773 and White Eyes made it to 1778. Turtle's Heart, who received the bundle of blankets, played a prominent role in the conference in 1764 (where he was called "young") that brought peace to the area. His comrade, Mamaltee, does disappear after his reemergence in July 1763, but, as the Delawares suffered heavily at Bushy Run, Mamaltee probably died there. Ironically, most of these Indians outlived Henry Bouquet. Posted to Florida, in 1765 he caught yellow fever, another disease he had never had, which killed him.⁴⁴

If the spreading of smallpox was, as Jennings and others insist, so successful, why did Amherst keep on raving against the Indians? On November 5, 1763 the general complained that "the whole race of Indians who have so unjustly commenced, and are still carrying on Hostilities against Us" should be "effectually reduced, and severely punished."⁴⁵ If smallpox had "reduced" the Indians, as Amherst had wished, he should have been pleased and have had no need to call for still more punishment.

Teedyuscung, at a peace conference in 1757, gave a speech meant for the British monarch which was heard by William Trent:

Now as much blood is spilt I desire you will join with me to clear this way. . . We, on our Parts, gather up the Leaves that have been sprinkled with Blood; we gather up the Blood, the Bodies, and Bones; but when we look round we see no place where to put them; but when we look up we see the Great Spirit above. It is our Duty, therefore, to join in Prayer, that he would hide these things, that they may never be seen by our Posterity, and that the Great Spirit would bless our Children, that they may hereafter Live in Love together; that it may never be in the Power of the evil spirit, or any evil-minded Persons, to cause any breach between [our] Posterity.⁴⁶

Despite Teedyuscung's wishes, evil must be exposed, not covered up. Deliberately trying to spread disease is despicable in whatever century it might take place, but the smallpox incident has been blown out of all proportion, given that it was likely a total failure. Jennings's suggestion that smallpox was also planted during the French and Indian War is unwarranted. Smallpox, widespread in that war, attacked everyone—Indians, colonists, and members of the British army—and this major outbreak of the 1750s and 1760s prob-

ably originated in French Canada in 1755.⁴⁷ The time is long overdue for what happened at Fort Pitt in 1763 to be discussed rationally and on the basis of evidence rather than unsupported and repetitious assumptions.

Notes

1. Colin G. Calloway, *The World Turned Upside Down: Indian Voices from Early America* (New York, 1994), 4. Elizabeth A. Fenn, "Biological Warfare in Eighteenth-Century North America: Beyond Jeffery Amherst," *Journal of American History*, 86 (March 2000), 1552-1580, is a useful compilation of the literature on smallpox. However, her suggestion that germ warfare involving smallpox during the 1700s may have been common is sheer conjecture. Certainly, her discussion of smallpox in Virginia is inadequate. See my article in the *Journal of Negro History*, 84 (Summer 1999) "The British, Slaves, and Smallpox in Revolutionary Virginia," 217-226.
2. Donald R. Hopkins, *Princes and Peasants: Smallpox in History* (Chicago, 1983), 246.
3. Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (New York, 1986), 345 note 38. Another incident involving smallpox and infected cloth in Spanish California during 1763 appears to have been accidental. E. Wagner Stearn and Allen E. Stearn, *The Effect of Smallpox on the Destiny of the Amerindian* (Boston, 1945), 44-45.
4. Francis Parkman, *The Conspiracy of Pontiac and the Indian War after the Conquest of Canada*, 6th ed. (1870; reprint, Boston, 1933), II, 44-45; Howard H. Peckham, *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising*, 2d ed. (1947; New York, 1961), 227n.
5. Francis Jennings, "Francis Parkman: A Brahmin among Untouchables," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 42 (1985), 305-328. See also other works by Jennings cited below.
6. Albert T. Volwiler, ed., "William Trent's Journal at Fort Pitt, 1763," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 11 (1924), 400 (cited hereafter as "Trent's Journal").
7. Peckham, *Pontiac*, 170, 170 note 11. Trent is not mentioned in the book's index.
8. Bernhard Knollenberg, "General Amherst and Germ Warfare," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 41 (1954-1955), 489-494.
9. Donald H. Kent to Knollenberg, Jan. 19, 1955, and Knollenberg to Managing Editor, Jan. 21, 1955, "Communications," *ibid.*, 762-763.
10. Francis Jennings, *Empire of Fortune: Crowns, Colonies, and Tribes in the Seven Years War in America* (New York, 1988), 200-201, 447-448, 447 note 26.
11. Jennings, *The Founders of America: How Indians Discovered the Land, Pioneered in It, and Created Great Classical Civilizations; How They Were Plunged into a Dark Age by Invasion and Conquest; and How They Are Reviving* (New York, 1993), 298-299, 425n.
12. Jennings, *Benjamin Franklin: Politician* (New York, 1996), 161, 201, 219 note 18. Apparently without intentional irony, various anonymous critics of Jennings's work are said in *Franklin* to possess both "ignorance and bias." *Ibid.*, 204.
13. Jeffrey Amherst to Sir William Johnson, May 29, July 7, July 28, Aug. 20, 1763, in James Sullivan et al, eds., *The Papers of Sir William Johnson* (Albany, N.Y., 1921-1965), IV, 193, X, 689, 733, 761 (cited hereafter as *Johnson Papers*); Ian K. Steele, *Betrayals: Fort William Henry and the "Massacre"* (New York, 1990), 145-147.
14. Henry Bouquet to [Lt. Col. John Young], Dec. 15, 1756, S. K. Stevens, Donald H. Kent et al, eds., *The Papers of Henry Bouquet* (Har-

- risburg, Pa., 1951-1984), I, 37 (cited hereafter as *Bouquet Papers*).
15. *Colonial Records of Pennsylvania: Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania* (1852-1853; reprint, New York, 1968), IX, 218 (cited hereafter as *PR*).
 16. Thomas Gage to Johnson, Aug. 12, 1763, *Johnson Papers*, X, 788; Kent to Kollenberg, Jan. 19, 1955, "Communications," 763.
 17. Dr. James Stevenson to Bouquet, Dec. 13, 1756, *Bouquet Papers*, I, 34-35; Stevenson to Bouquet, Dec. 7, 1762, Sylvester K. Stevens, Donald H. Kent, and Leo J. Roland, eds., *The Papers of Col. Henry Bouquet* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1940-1943), Series 21648, Part 2, 174 (this WPA project will hereafter be cited as *Col. Bouquet*).
 18. Bouquet to Simeon Ecuyer, July 4, 1763, *Col. Bouquet*, Series 21653, 197; Knollenberg, "General Amherst," 493.
 19. Alexander White to George Croghan, Aug. 30, 1773, in Nicholas B. Wainwright, ed., "The Opinions of George Croghan on the American Indian," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 71 (1947), 153 (cited hereafter as *PMHB*); "Queries proposed by Doctor Robertson," *Ibid.*, 155, 159; Stearn and Stearn, *Smallpox*, 39-40; John Duffy, "Smallpox and the Indians in the American Colonies," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 25 (1951), 336; Patrick Henderson, "Smallpox and Patriotism: The Norfolk Riots, 1768-1769," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 73 (1965), 413; Frank L. Dewey, "Thomas Jefferson's Law Practice: The Norfolk Anti-Inoculation Riots," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 91 (1983), 52. For the Indians' use of hot houses followed by cold water, remarkably similar to the Scandinavian sauna, see Paul Dudley, "An Account of an extraordinary Cure by Sweating in Hot Turff; with a Description of the Indian Hot-Houses," Royal Society of London, *Philosophical Transactions*, 33 (1724-1725), 129-132. For another reference to the Indians' use of water as a cure, see Duffy, "Smallpox," 338.
 20. John W. Jordan, ed., "Journal of James Kenny, 1761-1763," *PMHB*, 37 (1913), 12, 27-28, 163.
 21. *Ibid.*, 169, 179, 184.
 22. *Ibid.*, 171-173, 175, 188.
 23. *Ibid.*, 187; George Croghan to Johnson, April 24, 1763, *Johnson Papers*, X, 659-660.
 24. Kenny, "Journal 1761-1763," 186; Croghan to William Trent and Alexander Lowery, Feb. 5, 1761, *Bouquet Papers*, V, 282; Ecuyer to Bouquet, April 23, 1763, *Col. Bouquet*, Series 21649, Part 1, 107; Nicholas B. Wainwright, *George Croghan: Wilderness Diplomat* (Chapel Hill, 1959), 178, 197-198; Albert T. Volwiler, *George Croghan and the Westward Movement, 1741-1782* (Cleveland, 1926), 164.
 25. Kenny, "Journal 1761-1763," 197-198; "Trent's Journal," 393.
 26. Kenny, "Journal 1761-1763," 197-198; Lords of Trade to George III, Jan. 14, 1763, *Johnson Papers*, IV, 18; Thomas McKee to Johnson, [June 2, 1763], June 28, 1763, *ibid.*, 132, X, 720; Paul A. W. Wallace, *Indians in Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1961), 156-157, 179-180.
 27. Kenny, "Journal 1761-173," 198; "Trent's Journal," 394.
 28. "Trent's Journal," 395.
 29. *Ibid.*, 400; Bouquet to Ecuyer, July 4, 1763, *Col. Bouquet*, Series 21653, 197; Alexander McKee to Croghan, June 24, 1763, *ibid.*, Series 21655, 210. Trent clearly wrote that one handkerchief was presented to the Indians. If a linen handkerchief was also given, as has been suggested, the evil gifts would still have been wrapped up in a bundle. A piece of hospital linen would have been the logical wrapping material. Fenn, "Biological Warfare," 1554, note 5.
 30. Abram S. Benenson, "Smallpox," in Alfred S. Evans, ed., *Viral Infections of Humans: Epidemiology and Control*, 2d ed., (New York, 1984), 553; Hopkins, *Princes*, 3; Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*, 309; Kent to Knollenberg, Jan. 19, 1955, "Communications," 763. Burning the clothing of those who took care of smallpox patients was not unknown. See George Muter to Thomas Jefferson, March 8, 1781, Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, 1950-), V, 96.
 31. "Trent's Journal," 406.
 32. *Ibid.*, 411.
 33. *Ibid.*, 406; Hugh Mercer to Bouquet, March 18, 1759, *Bouquet Papers*, III, 210-211; Kenny, "Journal 1761-1763," 17, 153, 169,

- 172, 178; John W. Jordan, ed., "James Kenny's 'Journal to Ye Westward,' 1758-59," *PMHB*, 37 (1913), 419.
34. Deposition of Gershom Hicks, April 14, 1764, *Col. Bouquet*, Series 21650, Part 1, 101-102; Parkman, *Conspiracy*, II, 45n; Peckham, *Pontiac*, 170, 170n; Knollenberg, "General Amherst," 493.
35. Parkman, *Conspiracy*, II, 5; Sewell Elias Slick, *William Trent and the West* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1947), 111; Duffy, "Smallpox," 338-339.
36. William Trent to Bouquet, June 5, 1758, *Bouquet Papers*, II, 37. Of course, if the smallpox virus had already died, no infection would have occurred even if the soiled cloth had reached its destination.
37. Bouquet to Ecuyer, Nov. 25, 1762, *Col. Bouquet*, Series 21653, 160-161; Bouquet to Ecuyer, Feb. 18, 1763, *Ibid.*, 171; Amherst to Bouquet, May 2, 1762, *Ibid.*, Series 21634, 87; Ecuyer to Bouquet, Nov. 22, 1762, *Ibid.*, Series 21648, Part 2, 159; Ecuyer to Bouquet, June 26, 1763, in Sylvester K. Stevens and Donald H. Kent, eds., *Wilderness Chronicles of Northwestern Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1941), 247-248; Amherst to Bouquet, July 16, 1763, *ibid.*, 262; Wainwright, *Croghan*, 193; *Bouquet Papers*, I, 38n.
38. "Detail of Indian Affairs," n. d., Stevens and Kent, eds., *Wilderness*, 31; *PR*, VII, 517, 546; Slick, *Trent*, 112, 114; *Bouquet Papers*, V, 282n; Duffy, "Smallpox," 337.
39. Trent to James Burd, Oct. 4, 1755, *PR*, VI, 641-642; John St. Clair to Bouquet, May 31, 1758, *Bouquet Papers*, I, 403; Bouquet to Robert Monckton, May 15, 1761, *Ibid.*, V, 483; Slick, *Trent*, 126.
40. "Trent's Journal," 395, 400.
41. Lt. Gov. Hamilton to Pennsylvania Assembly, Sept. 12, 1763, *PR*, IX, 42; Peckham, *Pontiac*, 212-213; Slick, *Trent*, 124.
42. "Trent's Journal," 407; Kenny, "Journal 1761-1763," 158; Wallace, *Indians*, 178-179.
43. Kenny, "Westward," 433; Francis P. Jennings, "A Vanishing Indian: Francis Parkman Versus His Sources," *PMHB*, 87 (1963), 308.
44. Kenny, "Westward," 429; Kenny, "Journal 1761-1763," 43; *PR*, IX, 215-216; *Bouquet Papers*, I, xxvii note 17; Wallace, *Indians*, 171, 174, 176, 180; Wainwright, *Croghan*, 293; Peckham, *Pontiac*, 213.
45. Amherst to Gov. Hamilton, Nov. 5, 1763, *PR*, IX, 74-75.
46. *PR*, VII, 669-670.
47. Kenny, "Westward," 404; Duffy, "Smallpox," 336.