



*The Mason-Dixon and
Proclamation Lines: Land
Surveying and Native Americans in
Pennsylvania's Borderlands*

IN JANUARY 1765, Charles Mason visited Lancaster, Pennsylvania, during winter holiday from his work on the Maryland-Pennsylvania boundary line. "What brought me here," wrote Mason, "was my curiosity to see the place where was perpetuated last Winter the Horrid and inhuman murder of 26 Indians, Men, Women and Children, leaving none alive to tell." The dead were Conestoga Indians who had "fled to the Gaol" in Lancaster in a vain effort to escape the Indian-hating vigilantes known as the Paxton Boys. The Paxton Boys broke into the jail and brutally executed and dismembered the Conestogas, peaceful dependents on the Pennsylvanian government and erstwhile neighbors of the Paxtons. "Strange it was that the Town though as large as most Market Towns in England, never offered to oppose them, . . . no honor to them!" The Paxtons, it seems, were not alone in their anti-Indian sentiments.¹

¹ Charles Mason, *The Journal of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon*, transcribed by A. Hughlett Mason (Philadelphia, 1969), 66. On the Paxton Boys, see Kevin Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost: The Paxton Boys and the Destruction of William Penn's Holy Experiment* (New York, 2009).

The astronomer Charles Mason and the land surveyor Jeremiah Dixon geodetically surveyed the long-disputed border between the colonies of Maryland and Pennsylvania. This line would eventually become ingrained in the American consciousness as the symbolic boundary between North and South. Yet while Mason and Dixon were running their line, the geographical partition that most concerned British officials and colonials was that between East and West, whites and Indians. This division, the Royal Proclamation Line of 1763, was part of Britain's efforts to regulate commerce and settlement in North America following the territorial acquisitions of the Seven Years' War.² Keeping their Indian neighbors happy was central to British policy during the 1760s, and whites were thus forbidden to settle beyond the heads of rivers flowing into the Atlantic in hopes that "the Indians may be convinced of our . . . Resolution to remove all reasonable Cause of Discontent."³ Although the Proclamation Line was initially intended to follow the Appalachian ridge, it was conceived from the start as a temporary boundary that would allow the British government to regulate westward expansion, not to prevent it altogether. However, even during the period from 1763 to 1768, the year when the treaties of Fort Stanwix and Hard Labor moved the Indian boundary line further west, the Appalachian ridge was not a clear boundary. The region was a permeable borderland in which whites and Native Americans frequently interacted and engaged in a cycle of increasingly racialized violence.⁴

Mason and Dixon's survey also encompassed these same years—1763 to 1768—and, as Charles Mason's bleak observations on the Paxton Boys' massacre suggests, their survey took place amid the ongoing bloodshed and power struggles of the mid-Atlantic borderlands.⁵ Considering the

² On the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the aftermath of the Seven Years' War, see Colin G. Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen: 1763 and the Transformation of North America* (New York, 2006); Jack M. Sosin, *Whitehall and the Wilderness: The Middle West in British Colonial Policy, 1760–1775* (Lincoln, NE, 1961).

³ The Royal Proclamation of October 7, 1763, By The King, George R.

⁴ On Indian hating and the development of racialized thought among both whites and Indians in the mid-Atlantic backcountry, see Jane T. Merritt, *At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700–1763* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003), 190–97; Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 189–236.

⁵ On the violence and struggles for land, power, and empire in the eighteenth-century backcountry, see Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier* (New York, 2007); Eric Hinderaker and Peter C. Mancall, *At the Edge of Empire: The Backcountry in British North America* (Baltimore, 2003); Michael N. McConnell, *A Country Between: The Upper Ohio Valley and Its Peoples, 1724–1774* (Lincoln, NE, 1992).

wealth of scholarship on the significance of maps and cartography to empire, it is surprising that most historians who have studied land surveying in colonial settings, including early North America, have generally done so with little reference to social, cultural, and political contexts.⁶ Furthermore, the literature on surveying as an on-site scientific practice has not been sufficiently integrated into histories of the contest for land and power in the backcountry of colonial North America.⁷

This article examines the events and context of the Mason-Dixon expedition during 1767, the year in which they crossed the Appalachian ridge to survey land in Indian territory.⁸ It was the contest for land and power between the Iroquois, Delawares, and the British—and not the visions of order and scientific precision that undergirded the Mason-Dixon and Proclamations Lines—that did the most to shape the plans, activities, and results of the western portion of the Mason-Dixon survey. This inter- and intraracial power struggle determined which individuals were chosen to participate in the 1767 expedition, their official orders, their actions during the survey, and where they decided to end the line.

The Mason-Dixon expedition highlights the extent to which surveyed lines in the borderlands of colonial North America were not just defined by colonial officials or the scientific activities of the surveyors themselves. Instead, surveyed boundaries in regions with locally powerful Native

⁶ Most histories of land surveying in colonial regions have focused on biographies of surveyors, their techniques, and their instruments. See Katherine Gordon, *Made to Measure: A History of Land Surveying in British Columbia* (Winlaw, BC, 2006); Silvio A. Bedini, *With Compass and Chain: Early American Surveyors and Their Instruments* (Frederick, MD, 2001); J. H. Andrews, *Plantation Acres: An Historical Survey of the Irish Land Surveyor and His Maps* (Belfast, Ire., 1985). There are some notable exceptions. Sarah S. Hughes examined the power struggles between elite white men in Virginia over the rights to survey, occupy, and sell land; Sarah S. Hughes, *Surveyors and Statesmen: Land Measuring in Colonial Virginia* (Richmond, VA, 1979). Giselle Byrnes studied the context and conflicts surrounding surveying Maori lands in New Zealand and argues that the Maori learned to adapt to European systems of land delineation, stop unwanted surveys, and, in certain circumstances, even benefit from them; Giselle Byrnes, *Boundary Markers: Land Surveying and the Colonization of New Zealand* (Wellington, NZ, 2001).

⁷ See Sara Stidstone Gronim, "Geography and Persuasion: Maps in British Colonial New York," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 58 (2001): 373–401; Alan Taylor, "A Kind of Warr: The Contest for Land on the Northeastern Frontier, 1750–1820," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 46 (1989): 3–26; Gregory H. Nobles, "Straight Lines and Stability: Mapping the Political Order of the Anglo-American Frontier," *Journal of American History* 80 (1993): 9–35; Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York, 2006).

⁸ For a general overview of Mason's and Dixon's careers and their work on the Maryland-Pennsylvania boundary, see Edwin Danson, *Drawing the Line: How Mason and Dixon Surveyed the Most Famous Border in America* (New York, 2001).

American groups were products of numerous on-site negotiations. These negotiations included exchanges between white officials and Indian leaders, semiformal conferences between Indian leaders from different groups, and internal debates among the members of the various groups involved in the survey. While surveying in the western borderlands, Mason and Dixon's party became a focal point around which Delaware, Iroquois, and British representatives negotiated regional power and the future shape of the region's borders through diplomacy, overtures to peace, and threats of violence.

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In 1766, Mason and Dixon were forced to call a halt to their survey. Proceeding any further west would have taken them beyond the Appalachian ridge—the proposed site of the Proclamation Line—and into Indian country. Mason made a note in the expedition's journal when they reached Savage River near the western boundary of Maryland that this was “the most Westernmost Waters, that runs to the Eastward in these parts.” The Royal Proclamation of 1763 had stated that the headwaters of rivers draining into the Atlantic would serve, for a time, as the border between the colonies and Indian country, and Mason recognized the significance of the location and its nature as a temporary boundary. He wrote that “At present the Allegeny Mountains is the Boundary between the Natives and strangers; in these parts of his Britanic Majesties Collonies.”⁹ However, Mason probably understood enough about the violence that had characterized the mid-Atlantic backcountry in recent years to know that, even though the Proclamation Line was temporary and vaguely defined, it was not to be crossed lightly.

The extension of the Mason-Dixon Line into Indian territory did not contradict British officials' plans for regulating the territory to the west of the Proclamation Line. A clear boundary separating Pennsylvania from Maryland and Virginia would have enabled British officials to realize several of the Royal Proclamation's main goals. For one, the latitudinal Mason-Dixon survey would have established a baseline for accurately delineating the tracts of land that the British planned to purchase from Native American groups, part of the orderly vision of expansion described

⁹ Mason, *Journal of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon*, 129.

in the Royal Proclamation of 1763.¹⁰ The completion of the Mason-Dixon Line would have also served to forestall future territorial conflicts between Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia that proved to be a major impediment to British regulation of the backcountry during the 1760s and '70s.¹¹

Despite British pretensions that the Proclamation Line could bring order to the backcountry, Indians and whites continued to live on both sides of the boundary, and brutal acts of violence were all too common among these groups. Yet the overall failure of the Proclamation Line to stop trading abuses, land speculation, and Indian-white conflicts from 1763 to 1768 did not change the opinion of many Indians and British officials that a formal separation was the key to peaceful coexistence. When, in 1767, "One Stump and his Servant . . . in a very inhuman manner murdered ten Indians on Susquehanna," George Croghan, an Indian trader and British official, wrote that "it evidently shews the indispensable Necessity of the Indians being removed to a greater Distance from our Settlements, and which suffer me to say, can only be done, by fixing the Boundary with them. Nothing Else will do."¹²

Western Indian groups such as the Delawares were especially pleased with the prospect of formalizing the Proclamation Line because it promised to provide them with significant protection against the encroachments of white settlers and unwanted sale of their trans-Appalachian lands. The Delawares had settled in the Ohio Country during the early eighteenth century following a series of more or less fraudulent land deals in which the British and the Six Nations of the Iroquois enriched each other at the Delawares' expense.¹³ The Six Nations, a powerful Native American confederacy centered in what is now upstate New York, had long claimed authority over the Delawares, referring to them as "women,"

¹⁰ The Royal Proclamation only prevented private citizens from making settlements beyond the Proclamation Line or purchasing land from Native American groups. The proclamation gave the superintendents of Indian affairs authority over the purchase of Native American lands. Jack M. Sosin, *The Revolutionary Frontier, 1763–1783* (New York, 1967), 11, 15.

¹¹ For examples of how boundary disputes between Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia contributed to trans-Appalachian unrest, see John Penn to Francis Fauquier, Nov. 15, 1766, in *Pennsylvania Archives*, 9 ser., 120 vols. (Philadelphia and Harrisburg, PA, 1852–1935), 4th ser., 3:327; Gen. Thomas Gage to William Johnson, Nov. 9, 1767, in James Sullivan et al., eds., *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, 14 vols. (Albany, NY, 1921–1965), 12:380.

¹² George Croghan to Benjamin Franklin, Feb. 12, 1768, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, digital edition, <http://franklinpapers.org>.

¹³ I use the terms Six Nations and Iroquois interchangeably in this article.

a subject people incapable of conducting independent land dealings.¹⁴ Colonial officials found it useful to recognize these claims as the Six Nations sold off large tracts of the Delawares' lands to whites. The Walking Purchase, a 1737 treaty in which the Six Nations and the Pennsylvania government deprived the Delawares of over a million acres of land, is the most notorious example of this arrangement. By the 1760s, the Delawares were also at risk of being dispossessed of their new lands in the Ohio Country. Not only were white migrants settling western lands at an alarming rate, but the Six Nations claimed ownership of nearly the entirety of the Ohio Country as well as authority over the Indians in it.¹⁵ Although the Six Nations had little real power in this region, the Delawares were well aware that leaders of the Six Nations might once more trade the Delawares' lands to the British for their own benefit.

Delawares and other trans-Appalachian Indian groups had reasons to cherish their Ohio Country lands that went well beyond geopolitical concerns. As Gregory Dowd has argued, the Seven Years' War and its aftermath engendered crises in both the secular and spiritual worlds of these groups, encouraging many Ohio Country Indians to embrace a new spirituality, particularly the teachings of nativist prophets such as Neolin. Although the teachings of these prophets defy easy summation, Delawares who embraced their spiritual message came to view the trans-Appalachian West as a religious and racial promised land, one that had to be purged of the corrupting influences of the British.¹⁶ In short, the Delawares had profound historical, spiritual, and practical reasons to protect their land from further incursions.

Leading officials in Maryland and Pennsylvania knew that running their colonial boundary into the Ohio Country was a delicate matter. Since they recognized Iroquois claims over the Ohio Country, colonial officials sought this group's permission before sending Mason and Dixon

¹⁴ Although there has been much scholarly debate on the meanings of the Delawares' title as women, it was a term that the Iroquois consistently employed to indicate that the Delawares did not have responsibility over the sale of their own land. See Gunlög Fur, *A Nation of Women: Gender and Colonial Encounters among the Delaware Indians* (Philadelphia, 2009), esp. chap. 5.

¹⁵ Amy C. Schutt, *Peoples of the River Valleys: The Odyssey of the Delaware Indians* (Philadelphia, 2007), 111.

¹⁶ Gregory Evans Dowd, *War under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations, and the British Empire* (Baltimore, 2002), 2–3. For more on Neolin and nativist spirituality, see Alfred A. Cave, "The Delaware Prophet Neolin: A Reappraisal," *Ethnohistory* 46 (1999): 265–90; Lee Irwin, *Coming down from Above: Prophecy, Resistance, and Renewal in Native American Religions* (Norman, OK, 2008).

across the Appalachian ridge. Maryland governor Horatio Sharpe thus asked Sir William Johnson, superintendent of Indian affairs for the northern colonies, to “endeavor to prevail on the [Iroquois] Indians to give their Consent that the [Mason-Dixon] Line may now be run” beyond the Appalachians.¹⁷ Sharpe was wise to ask for Johnson’s help. Not only did Johnson have more authority to negotiate with Native Americans than any other British official in the northern colonies, but he had a close and mutually beneficial relationship with the Iroquois that increased the regional power of the Six Nations and Britain alike.¹⁸ Indeed, Mason and Dixon relied so heavily on Johnson’s negotiations that they had to postpone the beginning of their expedition in 1767 until they received word of his success.¹⁹

On May 8, 1767, Johnson held a congress at the German Flats, New York, to gain the permission of the Six Nations to extend Mason and Dixon’s survey beyond the Proclamation Line. Johnson, though, was less interested in facilitating the Mason-Dixon survey than in the ongoing violence and atrocities that, many colonial officials feared, would soon lead to a full-scale Indian war.²⁰ He feared that the Indians in the Ohio Country would not believe British promises that the Mason-Dixon survey was merely a colonial border that would not threaten their territory. Johnson wrote that western Indians “may be apt to conceive very differently the meaning of the present Line” as an official encroachment into Indian territory—which, in effect, it was.²¹ He confided to a leading British official that he had called the German Flats congress only partially because it was “a necessary part of [his] duty for terminating these dis-

¹⁷ Horatio Sharpe to William Johnson, Dec. 28, 1766, in Sullivan et al., *Papers of Sir William Johnson*, 12:230–31.

¹⁸ See Gail D. MacLeitch, *Imperial Entanglements: Iroquois Change and Persistence on the Frontiers of Empire* (Philadelphia, 2011), esp. chap. 2.

¹⁹ Mason, *Journal of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon*, 171.

²⁰ For examples of newspapers from 1764 to 1769 that expressed the notion that a general Indian war was looming, see: “Charleston, South Carolina, Nov. 1,” *Boston Evening-Post*, Jan. 2, 1764; “Charles Town, South Carolina, Oct. 23,” *New-Hampshire Gazette, and Historical Chronicle*, Jan. 31, 1766; “Extract of a Letter from Pittsburg, Dated Octo. 10,” *Boston News-Letter and New-England Chronicle*, Nov. 26, 1767; “A Message from the Governor to the Assembly,” *Pennsylvania Chronicle, and Universal Advertiser*, Jan. 25–Feb. 1, 1768; “Extract of a Letter from Albany, Dated May 28,” *New-York Gazette; or, the Weekly Post-Boy*, June 5, 1769; “New-York, June 12,” *New-Hampshire Gazette, and Historical Chronicle*, June 23, 1769; “Philadelphia, August 17,” *Essex Gazette*, Aug.–29, 1769; “New-York, August 28,” *Providence Gazette; and Country Journal*, Aug.–Sept. 2, 1769.

²¹ William Johnson to John Penn, Jan. 15, 1767, in Sullivan et al., *Papers of Sir William Johnson*, 12:256–57.

putes" between Maryland and Pennsylvania. His "more material motive [was] satisfying them [Native Americans] on the Subject of their Inquietudes of which I had the most . . . alarming acco[un]ts, and therefore no Time was to be lost."²² Still in its planning stages, the western expedition of the Mason-Dixon Line was already getting tangled up with the ongoing disputes between British officials, white settlers, the Six Nations, and the Indians of the Ohio Country.

Johnson knew as well as anyone that Mason and Dixon's survey threatened to upset whatever order existed in the Pennsylvania-Maryland backcountry. He therefore appointed two representatives that would accompany Mason and Dixon during the trans-Appalachian phase of the survey, both of whom were well known and, Johnson hoped, would command respect among Indians in the Ohio Country.²³ The first of these was a white man named Hugh Crawford, whom Charles Mason described as "our Interpreter, who has traversed these parts for 28 years, either as an Indian Trader or Commander in his Majesty's Service in the late Wars."²⁴ Since the end of the Seven Years' War, Crawford had served in Johnson's Department of Indian Affairs as chief assistant to George Croghan—Johnson's second in command—and in 1766 Crawford acted as special liaison to Pontiac, a key figure in the nativist wars against British rule in the Great Lakes region. One witness, describing Crawford's relations with Pontiac, told Johnson that "Mr. crawford keeps the Indians in the Best order I have Ever Seen any kept in and I hop his Ezal [zeal] for the Service will Recommend him to your notice."²⁵ Crawford's appointment to Mason and Dixon's expedition suggests that Johnson not only agreed with this recommendation, but that he thought the survey might need someone who could keep potentially hostile trans-Appalachian Indians in order. Also, like Johnson and Croghan, Crawford was an active land speculator who hoped to acquire tracts in the Ohio Country. He was a member of the Suffering Traders, a group of Indian traders that sought western land grants as restitution for losses during the

²² William Johnson to Lord Shelburne, May 30, 1767, in *Collections of the Illinois Historical Library* (Springfield, IL, 1916), 11:572–74 (British Series, vol. 2).

²³ On Indian-white go-betweens and the limits of their diplomacy, see James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York, 1999).

²⁴ Mason, *Journal of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon*, 175.

²⁵ Kenneth P. Bailey, ed., *The Ohio Company Papers, 1753–1817: Being Primarily Papers of the "Suffering Traders" of Pennsylvania* (Arcata, CA, 1947), 159; Robert Roger to William Johnson, June 28, 1766, in Sullivan et al., *Papers of Sir William Johnson*, 12:120.

Seven Years' War, and may have hoped to use his place with Mason and Dixon to scout out western lands for himself and his associates.²⁶

A Mohawk chief named Hendrick was Johnson's second appointee, and, on July 16, he joined the surveyors with a contingent of Six Nations Indians that included ten other Mohawks and three Onondagas.²⁷ As the *New-York Gazette* reported in December 1767, "Sir William thought proper to send these Indians down [to the Pennsylvania-Maryland border], among whom are the famous Hendrick, and some other principle Headmen of the Mohawk Nation."²⁸ It is possible that the author of this article confused this "famous Hendrick" with the more famous Mohawk of the same name who was killed fighting alongside William Johnson during the Seven Years' War. It is unlikely, however, that this was a case of mistaken identity. That Hendrick (1692–1755) was perhaps the most well-known Mohawk of the mid-eighteenth century and his death was extensively covered in New York newspapers.²⁹ The Hendrick of Mason and Dixon's survey would have been well known—and perhaps even "famous"—in his own right. He was a leading Mohawk figure in the post-Seven Years' War era, was involved with William Johnson and land sales in the 1760s, and would act as a primary representative of the Lower Mohawks at the Fort Stanwix Treaty of 1768.³⁰

While the proprietors, Indians, and representatives attached to the Mason-Dixon survey were all significant figures in the Pennsylvania-Maryland backcountry, it is important to keep in mind that the survey

²⁶ Although Johnson acquired thousands of acres for himself through the Fort Stanwix Treaty, he did not purchase any for the Suffering Traders. See Bailey, *Ohio Company Papers*, 11, 159, 200, 223.

²⁷ Mason, *Journal of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon*, 178. It was no accident that this group consisted of Mohawks and Onondagas. The leader, Hendrick, and the majority of the expedition's Indian contingent were Mohawks, the Iroquois group with which William Johnson had the closest ties and that he had helped raise to prominence in the 1750s. The Onondagas, who had previously been the most influential of the Six Nations, may have been included in the party so as not to deprive them totally of their traditional hierarchical importance. See Richard L. Haan, "Covenant and Consensus: Iroquois and English, 1676–1760," in *Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and Their Neighbors in Indian North America, 1600–1800*, ed. Daniel K. Richter and James H. Merrell, (Syracuse, NY, 1987), 56.

²⁸ "New York, December 17, 1767," *New-York Gazette; or, the Weekly Post-Boy*, Dec. 17, 1767.

²⁹ See, for example, "Boston, September 29," *New-York Mercury*, Oct. 6, 1755. Confusing things further, another famous Mohawk named Hendrick (ca. 1660–ca. 1735) had been an important ally to the British a half century earlier. Eric Hinderaker has clarified the history of these earlier two Hendricks in a recent book; the Mason-Dixon survey adds yet another Hendrick to colonial history. Eric Hinderaker, *The Two Hendricks: Unraveling a Mohawk Mystery* (Cambridge, MA, 2010).

³⁰ For two examples of Hendrick's involvement in land negotiations, in 1764 and 1768 respectively, see Sullivan et al., *Papers of Sir William Johnson*, 11:359–60, 12:618.

itself was also impressive. This linear survey was one of the most large-scale and sophisticated scientific expeditions yet undertaken in the middle colonies of British America, and although it took place deep in the North American woods, the Mason-Dixon Line was a model of scientific precision.³¹ According to Nevil Maskelyne, British Astronomer Royal, Mason and Dixon produced “the straightest and most regular” lines ever run because the surveyors took astronomical sightings with a new kind of zenith sector, an instrument “so exact, that they found they could trace out a parallel of latitude by it, without erring above 15 or 20 yards.” In addition, Mason and Dixon used the boundary survey as an opportunity to conduct sophisticated experiments for the Royal Society, most notably measuring the length of a degree of latitude. To further ensure precision, measurements on the Mason-Dixon Line were conducted “two or three times” with both brass and fir rods whose minute variations were checked against “the height of the thermometer at the time.”³²

Turning European visions of science and order into reality in Pennsylvania’s borderlands was, however, a large and complex operation. Mason and Dixon’s astronomical measurements required cumbersome and fragile scientific instruments; dozens of axmen were needed to cut sight lines through the dense woods; assistant surveyors, horses, wagons, white and Indian guides, and a variety of helpers that might best be described as camp followers were also crucial to the progress and daily life of the expedition. Charles Mason’s journal has few logistical details, and he neglected to include specifics about the number of people involved in the 1767 expedition. He did, however, sketch the composition of the surveying party in June of 1764. Mason’s offhand entry noted that they “Engaged ax men, etc. The whole company including Steward, Tent keepers, Cooks, Chain carriers, etc. amounting to 39. Two Waggons, Eight Horses, etc.”³³ As the party of 1767 was probably larger than that

³¹ For information on the scientific instruments and techniques used to run the Mason-Dixon Line, see A. R. H., “Jeremiah Dixon’s Theodolite,” *Geographical Journal* 47 (1916): 1–3; Thomas D. Cope, “A Clock Sent Thither by the Royal Society,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 94 (1950): 260–68; Thomas D. Cope, “Degrees along the West Line, the Parallel between Maryland and Pennsylvania,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 94 (1949): 127–33; Thomas D. Cope and H. W. Robinson, “Charles Mason, Jeremiah Dixon and the Royal Society,” *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 9 (1951): 55–78.

³² Nevil Maskelyne, “Introduction to the Following Observations, Made by Messieurs Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon . . .,” and Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, “Observations for Determining the Length of a Degree of Latitude in the Provinces of Maryland and Pennsylvania, in North America,” *Philosophical Transactions* 58 (1768): 271, 272, 275.

³³ Mason, *Journal of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon*, 58.

of 1764, we get some sense of the team that penetrated and set about delineating the trans-Appalachian Indian country. The addition of the fourteen Iroquois would have made this seem a large and threatening force to Delawares living in the line's path. Indeed, this may have been part of the point: the surveying party would have resembled a small army, a precaution that the proprietors may have hoped would make potentially aggressive Delawares think twice before harassing the surveyors.

Maryland governor Horatio Sharpe believed that the Iroquois in the party were crucial to the success of the expedition, and, like William Johnson, Sharpe was nervous about potential ruptures between whites and Indians. "[T]he public Peace," claimed Sharpe, "may greatly depend on the good Usage and kind Treatment of these Deputies." Sharpe thus enjoined Mason and Dixon "not only to use them well yourselves but to be careful that they receive no Abuse or ill treatment from the Men you may employ in carrying on the said Work, and to do your utmost to protect them from the Insults of all other persons whatsoever." Also in the interest of ensuring peaceful relations, Sharpe advised that the Iroquois be given liquor no more than three times a day, and that those rations should be watered down. He knew how high tensions had become between Indians and whites and hoped to make certain that a war would not start on account of a drunken quarrel between an Iroquois chief and a white frontiersman.³⁴

Far more threatening than these potential conflicts among members of Mason and Dixon's party, however, was the chance of meeting violent resistance from Delawares that resented the combined presence of surveyors and Iroquois in a land that the Delawares considered to be theirs by both political and spiritual right. The possibility of Delaware violence began to seem all too real when a delegation of Delaware warriors arrived at an observation station the surveyors had set up twenty miles east of the Cheat River. Mason recorded that "on the 17th of August we were paid a visit by 13 Delawares; one of them a Nephew of Captain Black-Jacobs, who was killed by General Armstrong at the Kittony Town. . . . This Nephew of Black Jacobs was the tallest man I ever saw."³⁵

Although Mason and Dixon's journal does not go into any detail on what transpired during the encounter with the thirteen Delawares, it

³⁴ Horatio Sharpe et al. to Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, June 18, 1767, in Mason, *Journal of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon*, 177.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

seems that the Delawares frightened the whites and Iroquois so much that they began to desert the surveying party. Only a few days after meeting the Delawares, Mason noted in the margins of his astronomical observations that “Mr. John Green, one of the Chiefs of the Mohawk Nation, and his Nephew left us, in order to return to their own Country.”³⁶ Despite the Iroquois’s claims to control the Ohio Country and the Indians who lived there, John Green’s departure suggests that at least some Iroquois recognized that trying to enforce this claim in the face of direct Delaware opposition was risky business. It was, therefore, no surprise that the twelve remaining Iroquois in the party felt relieved when, according to Mason, “Eight Warriors of the Seneca Nation fell in with us” and traveled with the surveying party for two days. “They are one of the Six Nations,” explained Mason, “which made the Indians with us, very glad to see them.”³⁷ Hendrick and the other Native Americans in the party no doubt felt more secure traveling through the Ohio Country with eight more well-armed Iroquois near at hand.

The nerve of the whites in Mason and Dixon’s party soon began to fail as well. For one, many of the whites probably recognized that the Delawares resented surveyors, and some of the Pennsylvanians in the party may have even recalled how Delaware warriors had used surveying tools to murder fourteen settlers near Penn’s Creek in 1755.³⁸ According to historian Jane T. Merritt, the Delawares’ choice to kill these settlers with chains and axes—the iconic tools of surveyors—was a means of “taking back disputed land by embedding their marks on white bodies.”³⁹ Such memories may have been looming large in the minds of the white assistants when, on September 29, the party reached the Monongahela River, and twenty-six of Mason and Dixon’s men deserted. Mason was quite clear as to why they chose to return east. He wrote that “they would not pass the River for fear of the Shawanes [Shawnees] and Delaware Indians.” Even the mere threat of violence, it seems, was an effective way for the Delawares to further their goal of maintaining control over this region’s borders. Although Mason and Dixon “prevailed upon 15 ax men to proceed” with them and even managed to recruit a few more assistants,

³⁶ Ibid., 182.

³⁷ Ibid., 175.

³⁸ Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 278.

³⁹ Merritt, *At the Crossroads*, 184.

the survey would come to an unexpected end before the new men could be much help.⁴⁰

Although the group of thirteen Delaware warriors scared the whites and Indians in Mason and Dixon's party, the two other Delaware delegations that Mason considered worth mentioning seem to have been diplomatic in nature. A few days after the bulk of the white assistants departed and a few miles west of the Monongahela, the surveying team met a "Chief of the Delaware Nation" named Catfish, who approached the surveyors in the company of his wife and nephew. Catfish and his small retinue impressed Mason, who described them as "very well dressed nearly like Europeans."⁴¹ Although Mason did make some effort to record the meeting that followed, it seems that the details of Iroquois-Delaware discussions were beyond the astronomer's ken.

However, the few particulars of the encounter with Catfish that Mason did record demonstrate that the Delawares and Iroquois present at the meeting seem to have approached it with the pomp of a formal conference. Mason wrote that "our Chief [Hendrick] held a Council and made a Speech (and presented him with some strings of Wampom) to him; in which they acquainted them of our business there."⁴² The exchange of wampum was essential at backcountry meetings such as this, and strings of these beads were often used as a means of affirming the truth of something stated during a conference.⁴³ Indeed, Hendrick's presentation of wampum probably worked quite well to appease whatever concerns Catfish may have brought to the attention of the surveying party, for Mason noted that "He [Catfish] seemed to be very well satisfied, and promised to send the strings of Wampom to his Town."⁴⁴ As intercultural brokers, Hendrick, Hugh Crawford, and Catfish were all well aware of the significance of the delicate negotiations at this conference. Although Mason and Dixon were no fools, they lacked the years of experience needed to make sense of the complex on-site diplomacy that made their eponymous line possible beyond the Appalachian ridge.

Catfish promised that he would return to the surveying party in fifteen days, but he never came back. Yet the next Delaware dignitary to visit the party carried far more weight as a negotiator than Catfish, and may have

⁴⁰ Mason, *Journal of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon*, 187.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 174.

⁴³ Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 188.

⁴⁴ Mason, *Journal of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon*, 174.

been sent in his stead. Just as Horatio Sharpe and William Johnson had stocked the survey party with such respected negotiators as Hugh Crawford and Hendrick, the Delawares sent their own high-profile representative to meet the expedition's leaders. Among his memoranda of notable events during the trans-Appalachian phase of the expedition, Mason wrote that "At our last station, among many others came Prince Prisquetom, Brother to the King of the Delawares."⁴⁵ "Prisquetom" was how Mason identified Pisquetomen, the elder brother of such famous figures as Shingas, Delaware George, and Tamaqua, "King Beaver" of the Western Delawares.

The fact that Delaware leaders sent Pisquetomen to negotiate on their behalf suggests that they saw the survey as an important event and, perhaps, an opportunity. Pisquetomen was one of the most recognized go-betweens in land negotiations and had much experience representing the Delawares' interests at treaty conferences with the British and Six Nations.⁴⁶ As a young man, he had been part of the defrauded Delaware contingent at the Walking Purchase of 1737, an experience that made him forever wary of British plots to dispossess the Delawares of their land.⁴⁷ In 1755, Pisquetomen's suspicion turned to rage as he led a Delaware war party against white settlers near Penn's Creek.⁴⁸ After 1755, however, Pisquetomen and his brother Tamaqua became leading figures in the Delaware faction that advocated peace with the British. Most historians have believed that Pisquetomen died in 1762, yet Charles Mason's journal indicates that not only was Pisquetomen still very much alive in 1767 but that he remained active in his role as a negotiator with the British and the Iroquois.⁴⁹

Part of Pisquetomen's purpose in meeting with Mason and Dixon was probably to inspect the surveying party and keep watch on it as it proceeded westward. For Pisquetomen, Mason and Dixon's survey may have had ominous similarities with the Walking Purchase, where he had acted as a translator thirty years earlier. Much of the Walk's fraud had occurred

⁴⁵ Ibid., 175. Mason provided no hint as to the identity or intention of the "many other" visitors to the surveying party's observation station.

⁴⁶ For an example of one of Pisquetomen's experiences treating with the British, see Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 242–48.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 247.

⁴⁸ Schutt, *Peoples of the River Valleys*, 112.

⁴⁹ Michael N. McConnell, "Pisquetomen and Tamaqua: Mediating Peace in the Ohio Country," in *Northeastern Indian Lives, 1632–1816*, ed. Robert S. Grumet (Amherst, MA, 1996), 286, 292.

during the survey itself when, as Pisquetomen later told Moravian missionary Christian Frederick Post, “the young Proprietaries came and got it [the boundary] run by a straight Course by the Compass, and by that Means took in double the Quantity intended to be sold.”⁵⁰ Since Pisquetomen feared that another survey would deprive the Delawares of their lands in the Ohio Country just as the Walking Purchase had in Susquehanna, he may have considered it imperative to monitor Mason and Dixon’s doings.

Pisquetomen may have viewed Mason and Dixon’s expedition as the first step in a process he had witnessed before: a survey that enabled the Iroquois-approved sale of Delaware lands to whites. For one, the Mason-Dixon Line would provide an accurately surveyed baseline that would facilitate the survey and sale of private plots. Also, if allowed to continue to its western terminus, the Mason-Dixon Line would establish a clear boundary between the colonies of Virginia and Pennsylvania, two of the most powerful competitors for Ohio Country lands. Prior to the survey, the intersecting though undefined boundaries between, on the one hand, Indians and whites and, on the other, Pennsylvania and Virginia, had created a jurisdictionally vague borderland in which the Delawares could realize considerable local power and autonomy.

Perhaps Pisquetomen believed that the Mason-Dixon survey presented the Delawares with an opportunity for influencing the shape of the borders that would define the Ohio Country. At the time of Mason and Dixon’s 1767 expedition, many details about how and where the Indian boundary line would be implemented were still being negotiated. The Appalachian ridge boundary suggested in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 had not been fixed, and British and Indian leaders had spent the years since the proclamation debating where, in fact, the Indian boundary line would be run. The Indian boundary would not have a more definite form until the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix, a conference at which Delawares were almost entirely excluded from negotiations while the Six Nations bartered away massive tracts of the Ohio Country.⁵¹ Although Pisquetomen was obviously unaware of this eventuality, he had enough experience negotiating with the British to realize that Delawares had to

⁵⁰ Christian Frederick Post, “Journal of Christian Frederick Post,” in *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Alienation of the Delaware and Shawanese Indians from the British Interest, and into the Measures taken for recovering their Friendship* (London, 1759), 101.

⁵¹ Schutt, *People of the River Valleys*, 137.

seize any opportunity to define and defend their territory. Meeting with Mason and Dixon gave Pisquetomen a chance to negotiate directly with the men who were creating a major colonial boundary and the important Iroquois representatives that bolstered the survey's authority. The fact that this negotiation took place within the Delawares' Ohio Country lands instead of a colonial city or Iroquois town may have encouraged Pisquetomen's hopes as well.

Although Pisquetomen was known for his fiery rants and frequent swearing, he seems to have been quite civil in his talks with the surveyors.⁵² Mason wrote that Pisquetomen "spoke very good English; (and though his face is deeply furrowed with time, being 86) told me, his Brother [Tamaqua] and himself had a great mind to go and see the great King over the Waters [George III]; and make a perpetual Peace with him." While meeting with the surveyors gave Pisquetomen one occasion to state the Delawares' position without Iroquois interference, it seems that he wished to extend the scope of their independent negotiations with the British to the highest rungs of power. Yet despite his wish for a dialogue with King George, Pisquetomen made it clear that the Delawares still had little reason to trust the British. He told Mason and Dixon that although he hoped to treat directly with the king, he would not travel to England because he "was afraid he should not be sent back to his own Country."⁵³ Unfortunately, Mason only recorded his own conversations with Pisquetomen and provided no hint as to the negotiations that almost certainly took place between Pisquetomen, Hugh Crawford, and the Iroquois in the surveying party.

The meetings between Mason and Dixon's party and the Delaware delegations led by Catfish and Pisquetomen reveal that the running of the Mason-Dixon Line in Indian country was an ongoing process of negotiation. While colonial governors set the survey in motion and Mason and Dixon's scientific techniques and instruments made their line precise, conversations between Native Americans were what actually enabled the line to be run. Moreover, having no experience with the intricacies of such interactions, Mason and Dixon seem to have been only minor figures in these negotiations and, perhaps, may have been absent from many of them. The Delawares, for their part, could have stopped the survey by force at any point, but it seems that the diplomatic skills of Hendrick and

⁵² Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 242.

⁵³ Mason, *Journal of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon*, 175.

Hugh Crawford satisfied the Delawares enough that they did not directly prevent the survey from proceeding. There was also almost certainly a debate among the Delawares over what to do about the surveyors, but the details of this exchange are probably lost to history.

The extension of the Mason-Dixon Line ultimately relied on negotiations among the Iroquois in the surveying party. Some of these Iroquois simply voted with their feet, such as when John Green and his nephew chose to head home. Twenty days and twenty miles after John Green's departure, the survey reached the Cheat River where "two of the Mohawks made an objection against our passing the River." Mason was at a loss to explain why they chose this point to turn back, but the Mohawks' desire to desist was probably due to their increasing uneasiness as they pushed further into the Delawares' country. If Mason and Dixon made efforts of their own to convince the Iroquois to continue west, these pulled little weight. Instead, intra-Iroquois negotiations ensured that the survey could continue at least a little further. As Mason succinctly noted, "a Council being called, the Chiefs determined we should pass."⁵⁴

Almost a month later, the Iroquois in the surveying party reached a new consensus among themselves. They decided that the survey had gone far enough. On October 9, the expedition reached an Indian warpath at Dunkard Creek, 233 miles west of the Mason-Dixon Line's eastern origin. Mason wrote that "the Chief of the Indians which joined us on the 16th of July [Hendrick] informed us that the above mentioned War Path was the extent of his commission from the Chiefs of the Six Nations that he should go with us, with the Line; and that he would not proceed one step farther Westward."⁵⁵ Although Mason and Dixon were able to extend the line a few more miles with the assistance of their remaining white assistants, the Iroquois's refusal to continue effectively marked the western extent of the survey. Mason, Dixon, and, presumably, Hugh Crawford could not prevail upon the Iroquois guides to change their minds, so the entire expedition soon began its journey back east, with Mason and Dixon rechecking their measurements all the way. The Mason-Dixon Line was supposed to continue until it reached the fifth degree of longitude west of the Delaware River, about 80 miles west of the Appalachian ridge and 30 miles beyond where the Iroquois decided to stop.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

Mason and Dixon were not the only whites who were surprised by the survey's premature conclusion. The Mohawk and Onondaga guides had made no earlier mention that their "commission" ended at Dunkard's Creek, and it seems that Mason, Dixon, and the party's other whites treated these Iroquois well and paid them on schedule.⁵⁶ Contemporary newspapers simply claimed that the Iroquois quit because of the onset of winter.⁵⁷ William Johnson, always attuned to the political climate of the backcountry, believed that Hendrick and the other Iroquois refused to continue further west because of the "universal discontent prevailing amongst them." Johnson thought that this discontent stemmed from the constant atrocities committed by whites against Indians and the failure of the British to survey and enforce the Proclamation Line.⁵⁸

The immediate cause of the Iroquois's decision to end the expedition, however, was the party's arrival at the warpath near Dunkard Creek. It was, to use historian Nancy Shoemaker's terminology, an implicit boundary. That is, it was not a boundary settled in a treaty negotiation or on a map, but one developed through history and understood through local knowledge.⁵⁹ As Mason noted in his journal, "This Creek takes its name from a small town settled by the Dunchards . . . The Town was burnt, and most of the Inhabitants killed by the Indians in 1755."⁶⁰ For savvy observers like Hendrick, Dunkard Creek evoked the knowledge that this region was connected to the history and military potential of the Delawares. The creek was a visible reminder for the Iroquois that the Delawares, despite their label as women, were more than capable of annihilating the quickly dwindling party of Iroquois and whites. The Iroquois, and most likely the surveyors themselves, were afraid to proceed further into Delaware country, where they knew their purported authority would not protect them from a nation who had every reason to resent them and the line they were creating.

Mason and Dixon brought some of the world's most sophisticated scientific instruments and techniques across the Appalachian ridge. They planned to use astronomy as a basis for running their latitudinal line to a

⁵⁶ Sullivan et al., *Papers of Sir William Johnson*, 5:737, 6:5–6, 6:71, 6:2, 12:367, 12:401.

⁵⁷ "New-York, December 17," *New-York Gazette; or, the Weekly Post-Boy*, Dec. 17, 1767; "New York, December 14," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Dec. 24, 1767.

⁵⁸ William Johnson to Richard Peters, Jan. 8, 1768, in Sullivan et al., *Papers of Sir William Johnson*, 6:71.

⁵⁹ Nancy Shoemaker, (New York, 2004), 27–28.

⁶⁰ Mason, *Journal of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon*, 187.

spot predetermined by distant British and colonial officials. Instead, it was negotiated power on the ground that both enabled and eventually prevented the delineation of an important colonial boundary in the mid-Atlantic borderlands. Nearly all of the significant on-site negotiators during the western phase of the Mason-Dixon survey were Native Americans, most notably the Iroquois chiefs in the surveying party and the elite Delaware go-betweens with whom they discussed the fate of the boundary line. Since Mason and Dixon's survey relied on inter- and intra-national negotiations among these Native American groups, Native American conceptions of territorial limits, not those of scientifically minded Europeans, could dictate the western end of the expedition. It was, therefore, a warpath at Dunkard Creek, not intersecting lines of latitude and longitude, that marked the western limit of Pennsylvania's southern boundary for the rest of the colonial period.

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