Few parts of American history are so interesting or have been so far-reaching in their importance as the decade from 1748 to 1758, which marked the climax of the struggle between the French and the English for the possession of the Ohio Valley. A large part of this struggle took place on local ground and should, therefore, be of paramount interest to all. It was the good fortune of this city to be able to play a most important part in the struggle in the person of one of its residents—a man whose knowledge of Indian languages, customs and traits enabled him to perform things impossible to others and at once gave him an immeasurable advantage in dealings with the Indians. I refer to George Croghan, Indian trader and fur dealer, of whom Thwaites, the eminent historian of American frontier history, says, “Next to Sir William Johnson, George Croghan was the most prominent figure among British Indian agents during the period of the later French wars and the conspiracy of Pontiac. A history of his life is therefore an epitome of the Indian relations with the whites, especially on the borders of Virginia and Pennsylvania and in the Ohio Valley. A pioneer trader and traveller, and a government agent, no other man of his time better knew the West and the counter currents that went to make up its history.”

His journals, of which several are extant, are used by Parkman in his “Conspiracy of Pontiac” (2) and by Justin Winsor in his “Narrative and Critical History of America.” (3)

Little is known of the life of Croghan previous to 1748. Born in Ireland, educated in Dublin, (4) he had come to this country a short time previous to 1744, at which time he seems first to have been licensed as a trader. (5) Establishing himself on his arrival in this country just west of the

*Read by the author, a student in the University of Pittsburgh, before the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania on May 31, 1921.
Susquehanna—then the very fringe of civilization—he made long trips into the West, carrying on an extensive trade with the Indians as far as the Lake Erie and Sandusky regions.

(6) It was on a return from one of these trips to the West that Croghan wrote a letter to the Secretary of Pennsylvania dated May 26, 1747, calling the attention of the latter to the strategic opportunity afforded the English to possess the Ohio Valley because of the turning of the Indian tribes there against the French. Croghan says in part:

"Those Indians were always in the French interest till now; but this spring almost all the Indians in the woods have declared against the French and I think this will be a fair opportunity, if pursued by some small presents, to have all the French cut off in those parts, for the Indians are very much led by anything that will tend to their own self-interest and will think a great deal of a little powder and lead at this time; besides, it will be a means of drawing those that have not yet joined." (7)

This letter, together with an Indian letter which Croghan enclosed, was presented to the Council June 8th. The Council turned it over to the Assembly, which, after some delay, acted favorably on it, but hesitated all summer long to take any definite action upon it.

Late in September another letter was received from Croghan, in which he again urged that a present of powder and lead be sent the Indians of the Lake Erie region. This time he added the significant statement that if the present were not made forthwith, the Indians would turn to the French. (8) When this letter was laid before the Council, that body promptly voted two hundred pounds to be expended for presents to the Ohio Indians.

The following year, 1748—the year in which the war between England and France known as King George's War was technically brought to a close—marked an epoch in the history of the West. Until this year no very definite steps toward a permanent occupation of this part of the continent had been taken by either the French or the English. The entire region lay very largely unexplored and, except by the Indians, almost totally unsettled. A few free-lance traders, exploiting its enormous wealth of furs, were almost
the only white men the region ever saw.

Not much longer was this fair region of America to be undisturbed. Already it was claimed by two strong rival powers, who were slowly but surely coming to realize the vital importance of this region to future colonial development. Gradually the importance of this magnificent territory made itself felt as the commerce and interests of both French and English expanded.

Thanks to the timely letters of Croghan, the Pennsylvania authorities were the first to take steps toward the possession of the Ohio Valley. In April, 1748, it fell to Croghan to carry a gift from the Pennsylvania Assembly to the Indians at Logstown, one of their important towns located on the right bank of the Ohio, eighteen miles below Pittsburgh. It must have been a picturesque, as it was a most important, expedition which slowly wound its way over the mountains to the upper Ohio. The die was cast—and the game began.

The efforts of Croghan, together with those of Conrad Weiser, the Indian interpreter for the Province, who followed him with additional gifts later in the summer, resulted in a treaty with the Indians which left Pennsylvania in control of the entire Indian trade from Logstown west to the Mississippi and north to the Michigan region. (9)

The French were unwilling that lands to which they laid claim, and which were to them the source of considerable revenue, should thus easily slip from under their control. Nor were they willing that Indians whom they considered under French rule should become not merely friendly to the English but, in addition, hostile to French interests as well.

Accordingly, the Governor-General of Canada not to be outdone, dispatched in the summer of the very next year a French officer, Celeron, accompanied by three hundred soldiers and a number of Indian allies, to reprove the Indians for opening trade relations with the English as well as to warn the latter off the land. Celeron was also to attempt, so far as possible, to remedy the damage done French trade by the treaty of Logstown made with the Indians by the English the year before. In these purposes Celeron was largely thwarted by Croghan, “the shrewd barterer and wily agent” as Justin Winsor has characterized him. Croghan arrived
on the Ohio a few days after the departure of Celeron and succeeded not only in undoing the work of the latter, but also in binding the Indians closer than ever in their allegiance to the English. (10)

In the autumn of the following year, 1750, Colonel Johnson, Indian agent for the Crown, learned from two escaped prisoners, that the French were making preparations to invade the Ohio valley the following spring. Governor Clinton of New York communicated this information to Governor Hamilton of Pennsylvania, who at once sent Croghan to the Ohio to forestall the attempts of the French to win over the Indians.

On this occasion the Indians requested that a strong house be built on the Ohio for the protection of themselves and of the English trade against the French (12). Already the English had heard through the Indians of the intentions of the French to erect two forts—one at Niagara and the other on the southern shore of Lake Erie or on the headwaters of the Allegheny River (13). The governor, thoroughly alarmed, was eager to act on the request of the Indians for a fort. The Proprietors, after reading Croghan's report on the matter, were quick to see the advantages accruing from such a fort, and offered to the Assembly, with which body they had long quarreled over Indian expenses, four hundred pounds to erect a fort and an annual appropriation of one hundred pounds to maintain it (14). The Assembly did not act favorably on this matter, but did allow the governor to give Croghan private instructions to sound the Indians on the matter, when he should arrive at Logstown in the late spring of 1751 (15).

The expedition from Canada, concerning which the English had been hearing persistent rumors, actually came into the Ohio Valley in the spring of 1751 under the leadership of Joincare. Croghan was again sent out to defeat this expedition and was very largely successful in the task. Meeting Joincare at Logstown in May, 1751, Croghan quite outwitted that clever gentleman and was able to retain the friendship of the Indians. Once more the Indians asserted their desire for a house on the Ohio (16). For his transference of this request Croghan was accused by the Assembly of misunderstanding or misrepresenting the Indians. The Assembly,
ever dilatory, and averse, on general principles, to any war measures, was only too willing to suspect that Croghan was desirous of personal gain, and on this pretext, to oppose the measure. They gave as an additional reason for their failure to build a fort at this time the impending negotiations with Virginia over boundary disputes. The erection of a fort at that time on land claimed by that state would almost certainly have caused trouble.

The failure on the part of the Pennsylvania authorities at this time to build a fort on the Ohio was fatal to English interests. It is wholly probable that if they had seen fit to heed Croghan’s advice the Ohio Valley would never have passed into the hands of the French and a large amount of bloodshed and suffering might have been spared the colonists in the border warfare which followed shortly after.

The scruples which had prevented Pennsylvania from building a fort on land claimed by Virginia, did not at all seem to prevent the Virginians from building a fort on territory claimed by Pennsylvania. The jealousy of Virginia was aroused by the monopoly of trade which Pennsylvania had secured by the important Logstown treaty of 1748. In that very year, a member of the Virginia Council, Thomas Lee by name, conceived the idea of organizing a land company to be known as the Ohio Company, whose purpose was to settle territory in the upper Ohio Valley. Preparations were pushed forward as rapidly as the nature of the project would permit; but, due to the intrigue of the French and the opposition of the Pennsylvania traders, a conference of the Indians could not be held until June, 1752. At this meeting, in which Croghan took part, the Indians denied the claim of Virginia to the Ohio lands but promised not to molest any Virginians who might wish to settle there. They also asked Virginia to erect a fort for them. They received an affirmative answer to this request, but the building of the fort commenced too late to prevent the ultimate occupation of the valley by the French (17).

During all this time the French were becoming more and more menacing. In February, 1752, Croghan had sent an appeal of the Shawnee for help to the governor. The occasion of this appeal from the Indians was the killing of thirty warriors by the French. Governor Hamilton replied
with soft words, for that was all his pacific Assembly would allow him to use (18). Meanwhile the Indians retaliated and brought down upon themselves the wrath of the French. The situation was becoming critical for the Ohio Indians.

Months passed by and the Pennsylvania Assembly did nothing. Rumors of another French invasion in larger numbers were persistent. On May 7, 1753, Croghan, among others, was present at Pine Creek, not far from Logstown, when a letter arrived from one John Fraser, a trader, with definite information as to the movements and designs of the French. Among the matters mentioned by Fraser in his letter was the intention of the French to build two forts on the Ohio (19).

The dilatory Pennsylvania Assembly was so stirred by this letter that it promptly voted an appropriation of eight hundred pounds to be used in Indian affairs. Virginia, also, promptly sent assurance of aid to the Indians. Conferences with the Indians followed. The Virginians met them at Winchester to arrange for the giving of aid and supplies. The Pennsylvanians met them soon after at Carlisle, where the Indians were given many presents and fair promises which were not kept. In both conferences Croghan was present and took an active part.

The close of the year found the English interests in the Ohio valley seriously threatened, but still in the ascendancy. During the winter most of the French withdrew to Canada, complaining that the Indians were remaining true to the English. Nevertheless, the French worked steadily toward an Indian alliance and partially succeeded in the attempt.

During this critical winter Pennsylvania remained practically inactive. Virginia showed somewhat more interest by sending young George Washington on his historic journey to the commander of the French fort, Le Boeuf, on the upper waters of the Allegheny. Croghan passed into the Ohio region soon after Washington left (20). He found the situation critical. The Indians were perhaps from fifteen hundred to two thousand in number but could hardly hope to make effective resistance against trained Frenchmen in large numbers armed with cannon. They were too scattered and too poorly equipped with ammunition even to attempt to resist the French without material assistance from the Eng-
lish. To be sure a small force of men under Croghan's half-brother, Ensign Ward, was working at the forks of the Ohio in constructing a fort for the Ohio Company, but they could not hope to resist the French. Croghan wrote to Governor Hamilton and the Secretary, urging the erection of a strong log trading-house or stockade. With a refusal to make any contribution for the defense of the Province, the Assembly adjourned on March 9, 1754 (21).

Croghan stayed at the Forks of the Ohio for a few weeks to help in the distribution of Indian goods during the building of the fort. He left about the middle of March. At this time, according to a letter of his, some seventy men were engaged in building the fort (22). About a month later this small force was compelled to surrender its uncompleted work to Contrecour, the French commander on the Ohio, who appeared with a thousand men and eighteen cannon.

The situation of the Indians friendly to the English was now extreme indeed. The Half King, their chief, notified Croghan, who in turn notified the governor, that if help were not forthcoming, the Indians would be forced to yield (23). But the governor delayed. The defeat of the inadequate expedition of Washington at Great Meadows and that of the proud Braddock, in both of which expeditions Croghan was active, completed the work of destruction. Indians who up to this time had remained neutral did not now hesitate to join the French openly.

For three years the French retained a stranglehold on the Ohio valley and, in fact, on all of Pennsylvania east to the Susquehanna. The western border became a scene of fearful and destructive Indian warfare.

In 1756, Croghan was honored by being made Deputy Commissioner of Indian Affairs for Sir William Johnson, who at that time represented the Crown for Indian affairs in America (24). In this capacity Croghan played a most important role as a mediator in a series of conferences with the Indians which lasted from July, 1756 to October, 1758, when final peace was concluded with the Western Indians. Croghan's activities in these conferences would require for their adequate treatment a paper of their own and cannot therefore be taken up here.

Sufficient be it to say that as a result of these confer-
ences in the East plus the efforts of Christian Frederick Post, the Moravian missionary, in the West, the route was opened for the successful march of General Forbes upon Duquesne. It remained only for Croghan to gather up the fruits of the victory in a treaty made at Pittsburg the following July.

(25)

The struggle for the Ohio valley was now over. In the short space of a decade the English had gained, lost and regained the fair Ohio valley. And the work of George Croghan, fur trader and Indian agent, was no small factor in bringing about the final result. The French evidently thought so, for they placed a price upon his head. It has already been pointed out in a quotation from no less an authority than Thwaites that Croghan enjoyed a prominence among British Indian agents of the later French wars rivaled only by that of Sir William Johnson. And because Sir William Johnson confined his efforts largely to the New York Indians, we may assign to George Croghan the honor of having played the most important part in that most interesting and important of period in American history—a period upon which hung the destiny of a nation and a period with which every American of whatever rank or station should be familiar—the period in which the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon in the New World was established and the first seeds of a new nation planted in its virgin soil.

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NOTES

1. Thwaites, p. 47.
2. Altogether Parkman makes some fifty references to Croghan in this work. His journals are quoted verbatim III, 168-170, and in footnote III, 137. Letters of his are quoted III, 29 and footnotes I, 189; II, 253; III, 172. References to his journals are made in footnotes I, 79, 155, 162, 185, 224; II, 58; III, 136, 157.
3. See V, 10, 498, 570, 575, 596, 610, 650; VI, 702-705.
4. Thwaites, p. 47.
6. **THWAITES**, p. 47
7. **C. R. 72.** Pa. Ars. 1, 742-743. (Liberties have been taken with spelling etc.)
9. **C. R., 287-289.**
10. **C. R., 387; Pa. Ars. II, 31.**
11. **C. R., 480-481.**
12. **C. R., 497.**
13. **WEISER, p. 246.**
14. **C. R., 515.**
15. **C. R., 515-522.**
16. **C. R., 530-540.**
17. **GIST, 231-236.**
18. **C. R., 568-570.**
19. **WEISER, p. 264; W. Trail, p. 3.**
20. **C. R., 731.**
21. **C. R., 764-765.**
22. **C. R., VI, 21.**
23. **C. R., V. 734.**
24. **C. R. VII, 354.**
25. **C. R., VIII, 382-391.**