SIMON GIRTY AND SOME OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES
By T. L. Rodgers

In looking over the history of Simon Girty, we are struck with a certain parallelism between his career and that of Benedict Arnold, another betrayer of his country. Of course, as in all parallels, it is not expedient to draw this too closely, to "point a moral or adorn a tale."

Both of these enemies of their native land were born in the same year (1741), Arnold in New England, and Girty in Pennsylvania. Both of these men, while doing good service for a time for the struggling republic, were finally the victims of evil counsel acting on minds not well established in truth and right, and this evil counsel came to them after a period of irregular living, and disappointed expectations. Both men were the means of untold injury to their country, and both, after a stormy life, died in obscurity, far from home and native land.

Of the two we would be disposed on the Scriptural ground of "where much is given, of them shall much be required" to place infinitely more blame on the New Englander than on the Pennsylvanian.

The latter was brought up on the frontier in semi-barbarism in all his earlier years—could not read or write, and though a man of natural ability, could not be expected to grow up a good citizen of the "Commonwealth"; while the former had his birth and training in the old and settled community of Connecticut, which has always been considered the "land of steady habits" and has given birth to so many of national reputation in both Church and State.

Leaving Arnold, we will now draw a short sketch of Simon Girty and his contemporaries, who, for a time had much to do with the earlier history of Pittsburgh.

The father of Simon Girty, and of the same name, Simon, emigrated from Ireland about the year 1730, it is supposed. He became an Indian trader in a small way in the Province of Pennsylvania and was located near what is now Harrisburg, at a place called Chambers' Mill. His character was of about the average to be expected in an

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Indian trader of that day. In the year 1737, he married Mary Newton, a girl of English descent, of good reputation, who in her long life checkered by many misfortunes, seems to have never been the mark for calumny or detraction. There were born to Simon and Mary Girty four sons, as follows:

Thomas in 1739; Simon in 1741; James in 1743; George in 1746.

There were no daughters born in this family.

The habits of the elder Girty were somewhat intemperate, and his occupation was not conducive to a regular life or to good citizenship. His example was, to say the least unprofitable for his little family.

Some time in 1751 he was killed in a drunken brawl by an Indian surnamed "The Fish". An avenger was at hand, and in a short time "The Fish" was killed by John Turner, a friend of the elder Girty. Some time after this tragedy Turner was married to the widow Girty.

In the year 1755 a son was born to him, and named after his father, John Turner.

Troublous times were now upon the colonists, following the fearful defeat of Braddock in July 1755. The frontiers were overrun by parties of French and Indians, with the terrible accompaniments of murder and desolation on all sides. The frightened settlers were driven to flight, or shut up in their little forts for protection. The Turner-Girty family was shut up in Fort Granville, a stockade near where Lewiston, Pa., is now located. This Fort was in charge of Major Edward Ward, with Lieutenant Armstrong as second in command. In July 1756, Ward took a part of the small force of defenders for the protection of harvesters at some miles distance, and during his absence a large force of French and Indians attacked Granville. After two or three days fighting Lieutenant Armstrong was killed, and on the promise of good treatment the fort was surrendered, John Turner himself opening the gate. One or two soldiers were tomahawked, and the other inmates of the fort, including Turner and his family, were hurried to Kittanning on the Allegheny River, which was an important Indian town, and headquarters
for most of the raids on the Pennsylvania settlements. Arriving there, a few days after John Turner was burned to death with all the accompaniments of savage barbarity, his wife and children being compelled to witness the dreadful scene.

A day or two after this barbarity, Mrs. Turner and her infant son John, then something over a year old, were carried from Kittanning to the French Fort Duquesne, where Pittsburgh now stands.

On August 18th, 1756, the infant Turner was baptized, as the record shows, by the Chaplain Denys Baron, having as Godfather and Godmother John Harrigan and Sarah Frisse, also prisoners.

The Indians then delivered mother and child to the Delaware tribe, by whom they were carried to the Ohio country.

Meantime the Girty boys remained in Kittanning, and were there when, in the early morning of September 8th, 1756, Col. John Armstrong made his heroic attack on that place, burning it, and sending to their "Happy Hunting Grounds" more than sixty of the Indian braves defending it. In the excitement Thomas Girty escaped, and was brought back to the settlements by Armstrong, but Simon, George, and James were hurried across the river by the Indians, and distributed among the tribes, Simon to the Senecas, James to the Shawnees, and George to the Delawares, who were already the custodians of his mother and half brother.

After Fort Duquesne was taken by General Forbes in November 1758 great numbers of white captives were surrendered at Ft. Pitt in 1759 in accordance with treaties. Among others, the entire Girty-Turner family was included, and were once more re-united. At this time Thomas was 20 years, and Simon about 18 years old, the other boys being correspondingly younger. For a few years afterwards the Girty family, with the untiring mother at its head, lived in the vicinity of Ft. Pitt, she having taken up a tract of land on Squirrel Hill, but in 1763, the Pontiac War drove them back for shelter to the Fort, where they remained until Col. Boquet defeated the savage hordes at Bushy Run in August 1763, and peace
was restored to the frontiers.

For ten years from this time, or to 1774, we are without an account of the Girty family. The boys had in the meantime grown up, and were employed it is supposed, in the limited occupations of a frontier settlement.

Pittsburgh was inhabited by a few hundred traders, laborers and farmers, as also by the garrison of Ft. Pitt, which was still necessary for emergencies that might arise, though the country was nominally at peace with the savages since the year 1764. The Girty boys, Simon, George, and James, having lived for a period with the Indians, were able to supplement their scant earnings in other ways by interpreting between the red men and the whites, and were in constant request for this purpose, Simon being particularly skillful as a translator. In the Dunmore War with the savages on the Ohio, it is stated that he interpreted to General Gibson the celebrated speech of Logan, the Indian Chief, which for generations has been a model of eloquence in our literature, de-claimed by thousands of school boys.

About this time (1774) the State of Virginia, claiming all the territory about the head of the Ohio, set up her courts here where they continued almost to the close of the Revolution.

The name of the Fort was changed to Dunmore, in honor of the Governor of Virginia. After the troubles incident to the breaking out of the Revolutionary War, Dunmore, who was a warm partisan of the Empire, wrote to his superiors in England, giving the names of several influential men about Pittsburgh, naming George Groghan, William Crawford, Simon Girty, and others. None of these persons, except Girty, finally associated themselves with the forces of the Crown, and at this time Girty was loyal to his country.

On February 22nd, 1775, the Virginia Court for Augusta County convened at Fort Dunmore. Present, John Connolly, Thos. Smallman, Dorsey Penticost, Wm. Goe, Justices. Among other matters it is stated that Simon Girty took the usual oaths to his Majesty's Government, subscribed the abjuration oath and test, and was ordered to be certified as a Lieutenant of the Militia of Pittsburgh
and its dependencies. In the taking of the test spoken of, by Girty, there was a certain element of humor, for this oath pertained to the matter of "Transubstantiation" or the change of the elements used in the Lord's Supper, and was the test oath first introduced by the English Government at the time of Queen Elizabeth. It is quite probable that Girty had never been inside a place of Christian worship up to this time, and could not have had any comprehension of what this military oath meant.

After the Dunmore war of 1774, the Girty family still remained at Pittsburgh, and though shortly after this the Revolution broke out, it is not known that any of them were suspected of disloyalty to the colonies. It is likely, however, that the influence of Dr. Connelly, the emissary of Governor Dunmore, and Alexander McKee, who had been Deputy Indian Agent for the Crown, was exerted to some extent on Simon Girty. However, he was employed by the colonies still as interpreter, and in other ways, and did good service for his employers. He lost his position for a time, it is supposed from prolonged "sprees" to which he was occasionally addicted all his life. Simon was appointed to some military office, probably Lieutenant, in a company which he was raising for service in the Continental Army in 1777, though he had expected to receive a Captain's commission, and was much disappointed by the outcome of his labors. However, he remained at Fort Pitt on detached service for a considerable time afterwards. Recently an old account book of 1777 and part of 1778 has been unearthed. The book belonged to Casper Reel, grandfather of our fellow member of this society, Jacob Reel, Esquire. There are accounts against Simon, James and George Girty, and John Turner, "alias Girty." In the case of Simon the prefix "Mr.," is used, but not in the other cases. The indebtedness is all satisfied except in the case of George, the youngest, who deserted to the British Crown without paying anything. The accounts show very little money paid, but payments were made by labor and materials, mostly deer skins and furs.

In the early part of 1778, Alexander McKee, before spoken of, was under decided suspicion of plotting against the colonies, and though ordered by the commanding of-
ficers to go to Lancaster, Pa., and remain there under parole until his case could be investigated, under pretext of sickness, still remained at his country place, now called McKees Rocks. McKee, who was a man of much ability, all this time was plotting an early departure for the British posts and, persuaded Simon Girty, Matthew Elliott, and one or two others to accompany him. On the night of March 28th, 1778, all took their departure for the British and Indian county, to the consternation of the post of Fort Pitt, and of the entire neighborhood around. Not long afterwards George and James Girty found means also to desert their county and joint its cruel enemies.

Thomas Girty and John Turner, Jr. still remained loyal citizens and did some service for their country during the Revolutionary War, while their renegade brothers were working all the harm possible on the other side. Thomas Girty settled on the run two miles above Allegheny, still called by his name, "Girty's Run," while John Turner settled on Squirrel Hill, where until his death in 1840, at the age of 85 years, he was much engaged as a land dealer and agent. More than one hundred years ago he dedicated an acre of land on Squirrel Hill for a burying ground "forever" and his mortal remains rest there under a large block of sandstone, inscribed with his age and date of death. If this tomb could speak what a wonderful story it could tell, for Turner lived under three flags. In his early infancy the lilies of Bourbon waved over the Pennsylvania hills, these succeeded by the Cross of St. George, and that again by the Stars and Stripes.

The mother of this family, after a life of toil and trouble such as falls to the lot of few in this world, died about 1780, and is probably buried in the "Turner Burying Ground" spoken of above, though no stone marks her last resting place.

When Simon Girty, McKee, and Elliott fled in the night of March 28th, 1778, to the Indian and British territory, as has been stated above, there was a wonderful excitement, and almost terror, in this frontier post and its vicinity, for Girty was very much in the confidence of all the military authorities herabouts, and was cognizant of an expedition being fitted up against the Indian tribes at
the head-waters of the Allegheny, near what is now Franklin. This expedition, in consequence of the flight of Girty and his companions, was abandoned. It would seem highly probably that the arch conspirator in this transaction was Alexander McKee, and that it was through his influence that Girty deserted his home and all his associates in this place, to cast in his lot with the brutal savage, and the, in some respects worse, British officers and soldiers of the North and West. Girty was very well qualified to gratiate himself with the savages, as he was master of several of their principal dialects, though he could not read or write his own language.

The first place to which the fugitives repaired was the Indian town on the site of what is now Coshocton, Ohio, where by the most brazen lying respecting the Americans, they endeavored to incite the Delaware tribe to immediate hostility against them. Fortunately the authorities at Fort Pitt were able, very shortly after, to send an embassage to Coshocton, and to dissuade the Delawares from their warlike intentions for the time being. From Coshocton, Girty and McKee proceeded to Detroit, the headquarters of the British forces. At this place De Peyster, a scion of one of the old Dutch families of New York was then in command. From this time forth Girty and McKee were actively employed under the charge of the British Commandant, and to the end of his days it is believed that Girty was in the pay of the British Crown. His almost universally cruel conduct toward his countrymen, during the Revolution, and afterward, made him hated and feared above any person probably that has ever lived in the country. Occasionally, however, he seemed to relax in his fiendlike disposition, and performed acts of great kindness to the white captives taken by the Indians, as, for instance, in the case of the celebrated Simon Kenton (one of his old comrades), who was taken prisoner and destined to torture and death but through the intercession of Girty was spared. Some other incidents would go to show that no one is quite as black as he may be painted.

One of the first important expeditions engaged in for his new masters was the invasion of Kentucky, in
which Girty held a subordinate command in a large force of British and Indians, and in which he distinguished himself with a zeal worthy of a better cause. The British and Indians made a fierce attack on Bryants Station, defended by a small force of the hardy backwoodsmen of Kentucky, but were finally driven off with considerable loss. Unfortunately a body of mounted volunteers pursued the Indians on their retreat, and were drawn into an ambuscade, where they suffered very heavy loss, and had to beat a disorderly retreat. Daniel Boone was in this company, and strongly advised against making the attack on the savages.

The year 1782, the last year of the Revolutionary War, was one of great activity on both sides, and was characterized by the number of bloody forays on the white settlements by the Indians. In many of these incursions Girty and his brothers, as well as McKee and Elliott were engaged. One of the most important events of this year was the expedition of Americans into the Ohio country, commanded by Colonel William Crawford, the old friend of George Washington. This was composed of about 500 men and marched out to the vicinity of what is now the town of Upper Sandusky. This force was surrounded and defeated by a large force of British and Indians. The Americans were compelled to retreat in a disorderly rout, losing many killed, and some prisoners, among them Colonel Crawford, himself. As soon as he was captured the Indians resolved that he should die at the stake, with all the tortures that their devilish minds could suggest. Girty was present at the torture, and when poor Crawford begged to be shot to end his misery, it is said that Girty made light of his prayer, and expressed his satisfaction at the fiendish atrocities going on, until finally death came to the relief of the victim. Girty and Crawford had been well acquainted in Pittsburgh in earlier days.

Girty's conduct at this time was so fiendish as to place him, in the eyes of the Americans, outside the pale of humanity. There are traditions, not very well verified, that he frequently visited his half brother, John Turner, on Squirrel Hill, and remained in concealment for several days at a time in Turner's barn. The last time Girty was
known to have been in this vicinity was in May 1783, when he and a small party of savages made a raid into the "Nine Mile Run" section, about six miles from Pittsburgh. After killing some of the settlers, he took prisoner a boy named Burkhart. About the time this occurred there was heard the firing of cannon at Fort Pitt in honor of the peace with Great Britain, the news of which had just reached the post. Girty asked the boy what the firing meant, and being told that peace had been declared, told the boy that he lied, and carried him off across the Allegheny, and finally to Detroit. The British Commander afterwards sent him back to his home again in safety.

Though peace was declared between the mother country and the colonies, the results were very incomplete, for the British, still holding the most of the Northwestern posts, were continually stirring up the Indians to hostility toward the Americans, and furnished them continually with arms and provisions, so as to retain their trade, and keep out the colonists from all the country North of the Ohio. In all their efforts to alienate the savages from the colonists, the Girtys (particularly Simon), McKee, and Elliott, were conspicuously active, and were always willing to excite the savages to bloodshed and murder.

In the summer of 1783 a small deputation came to the British post at Detroit from this vicinity. This consisted of John Turner and Thomas Girty, who said they represented a number of other settlers hereabouts, who would like to settle in the British Dominion if some encouragement was given them. The probability is that these persons apprehended that they would be persecuted and annoyed at their homes in Pennsylvania after the war, on account of their disloyal relations, and wished to make a change. The Commandant evidently did not give any encouragement, and the deputation returned home.

In the year 1783 Simon Girty fell a victim to "Cupid's Arrows" and married a captive American girl named Catherine Mallott, of about half his age. She had been captured at the Ohio River in 1780, and carried into the Indian Country, when Girty saw her and was immediately smitten with her charms, for she was a comely maiden of
about 19 years. She proved to be a good and true wife for him until his death in 1818, but was obliged a part of the time to leave him on account of his cruelty when his habits of intoxication had completely mastered him.

In the expedition of General Anthony Wayne to chastise the Indians in 1794, which resulted in their complete defeat and subjection at “ Fallen Timbers” we have the last mention of Girty’s activity against his countrymen, for he was among the savage horde at “ Fallen Timbers” encouraging them to fight bravely and hurl back the invaders of the sacred soil.

When Detroit and the other British posts were given up to the Americans, of course Girty did not wish to remain under the hated “Stars and Stripes,” but is related to have plunged into the Detroit River on the back of his faithful horse, and swum across that stream to the Canadian side, at the same time heaping all the maledictions, of which he was master, upon the heads of the invading “Yankee” army.

It should have been before stated that several years before this Girty had secured a farm on the Canadian side of the Detroit River of 200 acres, and put up a log house for his wife and family. This was his home for many years, and he was to be found there up to 1795, unless engaged in trading with the Indians on the southern side of the lake, or inciting them to deeds of bloodshed against his former countrymen.

After 1795 Girty remained on his farm for several years, and seems to have been fairly prosperous, though his habits of dissipation interfered with his success.

The Moravian missionaries had a station for their Indian converts near his farm, and complained that when he hired the Indians to help him in his harvests, he paid them their wages in rum, and neutralized very largely all the self denying labors of these noble Christian men for the good of the aborigines.

When the last war with Great Britain came on, the American forces landed near Girty’s farm, and he was obliged to flee farther inward to the Mohawk villages on Grand River. If he had in his youth been conversant with classical literature, he surely would have thought of this
as the "Avenging Nemesis." The American forces passed forward unconscious that they had nearly captured their arch enemy. With the Americans, (strange to say) was Girty's old acquaintance, Simon Kenton, who, though by this time quite old, was still animated by the patriotic fire of youth. At this time Girty was old and almost blind, but did not wish to throw himself on the mercy of his fearfully injured former countrymen, so fled under the charge of some of his neighbors, and remained away until about 1815, when he returned to his home. In the course of time his wife came back, and took care of him until his death in 1818. For many years before his death Girty was totally blind; was broken down in health, and was a pitiable object. Truly "the way of the transgressor is hard." His family consisted of three daughters and two sons, and it is stated that (no doubt owing to the example and instructions of the mother) their children all grew up in respectability and the esteem of the neighbors. Catherine Mallott Girty, the mother, was evidently a good woman, and performed her duty as well as possible under the circumstances. She died in Canada in 1852, after a long life filled with many romantic incidents.

Thomas Girty, the oldest brother, and the only one of the Girty name who remained loyal, removed to what is now called Girty's Run in 1792, and died in Butler County, Pa. in 1820, aged 81 years.

Simon Girty, as before noted, died in Canada near Amherstburg in 1818, aged 77 years. James Girty died also in Canada in 1817, aged 74 years. George Girty, the youngest, died on the Maumee River of the effects of a drunken debauch, in 1812, aged 66 years.

John Turner (or as he was frequently called John Girty) lived until May 1840, and died on his farm at "Squirrel Hill" near Pittsburgh. His grave, and that of his wife Susanna, is to be seen in the burying ground attached to the Mary S. Brown Memorial Church, which is the "old Turner Cemetery," before mentioned. He had accumulated considerable landed property, which he distributed by will, leaving a portion to the children of Simon Girty, his half brother, and to Joseph Munger, who was married to one of his nieces. At the time of his death he was aged 85 years.