Some Historical Notes of South Western Pennsylvania

By James Lowry Bowman

(Continued from April Issue)

Brownsville, Fayette County, Pa.
Febry. 24, 1845

Hon. Andrew Stewart
Dr Sir

I duly recd. your favor of the 20th inst. covering a letter from Mr. Lyman C. Draper addressed to yourself making inquiry relative to the early life of some of the early Pioneers of the West—and asking me to reply thereto. Although a "backwood man" myself of just fifty years standing, I shall have to be dependent upon tradition for much of the contents of this letter. My father, however, was a settler in the West at a pretty early day and his intimate intercourse with Col. Robt. Elliott (the father of Commodore Elliott) with whom he was engaged in the Commissary department for the Western armies, made him familiar with many of the incidents of those bygone times. Col. Elliott had been an Indian trader and was acquainted with many of the principal men of the different tribes of Indians who then occupied the country, now included within the limits of the State of Ohio. My father's advanced age and loss of memory prevent him giving as minute and satisfactory a relation as he could have done some years ago. Col. Elliott, he says, knew Simon Girty and the account stated by M. Draper of his being a native of Berkely County, Va. he believes to be correct. So far as my traditionary knowledge extends, Simon Girty, came to the West in the expedition under Col. Burd in the year 1759. After the accomplishment of the object for which they were sent, and the disbandment of the troops, Girty remained in the neighborhood of Redstone Old Fort, or more properly at that period "Fort Burd", where Brownsville is now located, and occupied his time as a hunter and trapper, and remained in this section for some years thus employed until the Government engaged spies, to watch the movements of the Indians. Of this I think there can be no doubt because of his acquaintance with Col. Crawford, who also resided in the same section of country. By his employment and mode of life, Girty became familiar with the country and an expert woodman
as well, the Indian character and plans of stratagem, used by them in their warfare with the whites. When the Indians became troublesome, and scouts were employed to watch their movements and communicate intelligence, Girty engaged as one. These scouts were in detached parties, and over each party one was selected as a commander, called "a Capt. of the Spies". From the knowledge which Girty had of the country and his acquaintance with the Indian character he aspired to a Captaincy and because of his disappointment, he betook himself to the Indians and swore revenge against the Whites. That was the ostensible cause of Girty's abandonment of his friends, as related to me, in early life, and which I believe to be correct. Girty was considered by the spies in common parlance a "cunning devil" but never was supposed to be overburdened with bravery, and hence probably, the nongratification of his aspirations. After his junction with the Indians his principal theatre of action was along the Ohio river from Wheeling to the mouth of Limestone, now Maysville. He acted as a stool pigeon in decoying flat boats with emigrants descending to settle Kentucky. When a boat came in sight, Girty would appear on the beach and hail the boat, representing himself as a prisoner escaped from the Indians and beseeching them for God's sake to take him aboard and rescue him. Those on board the boat, knowing from his language and appearance that he was a white man and believing his tale correct rapidly pulled for the shore, for his relief, but so soon as she would strike the shore, the Indians placed in ambush pounced upon her, and aided by Girty inhumanly murder the whole crew. Several boats were thus decoyed and Simon Girty became the terror to emigrants. It was such deceptive acts that gave notoriety to the name of Simon Girty. It was supposed by the participant in Crawford's defeat, with whom I have conversed, that Girty planned the movements of the Indians on that occasion and possessed great control over them. Indeed the impression has been that upon recognition of Girty by Col. Crawford when a prisoner, he asked his protection as an old acquaintance and that with savage ferocity Girty not only refused but actively aided in burning him. It would however appear that this is incorrect if the Wyandotte Indians account is to be credited, as related to Mr. Joseph McCutcheon and by that gentleman given us over his own signature in 1843 in the 6th No. of the 2 Vol. of the American Pioneer, a periodical published at Cincinnati.
by Jno. S. Williams. I have a personal knowledge of Mr. McCutcheon and there cannot be a doubt that he therein states that he received from the Indians, in 1839 met in the nation with old Walpole, a full breed, one of the Chiefs of the Wyandotte tribe. He told that he was in the action which resulted in the defeat of Crawford. I was in hopes of extracting from him considerable information relative thereto but he was so drunk I was unable to do so. Lest Mr. Draper may not be in possession of the Vol. referred to I give herein the whole of Mr. McCutcheon’s letter. This letter establishes in my humble opinion the fact that Girty’s early association in the West, was in that section around Fort Redstone. Where else would Col Crawford and Girty “know each other so well”?

The James and William Harrod were probably natives of Virginia, they may have tarried awhile on the Monongahela on their way to Kentucky, I feel very sure that Col. Wm. Harrod did not return to reside in this section at the time mentioned by Mr. Draper. At that early day my father knew almost every person in this region, and had Col. Harrod resided here, being a conspicuous man, he would doubtless have some knowledge of him or some of his descendants. He says he never knew of any of that name here. Mr. Draper can doubtless get some information by addressing a letter to John McCaddon formerly of this place, now of NewArk Licking Co. Ohio. He is quite aged but a man of some intelligence and very willing to communicate. He was in one of the expeditions of George Rogers Clark, as I have heard him relate and probably the very one with which Col. Harrod was connected.

I knew Mrs. Springer the widow of Maj. Springer and daughter of Col. Crawford—she is dead I believe. I know of no child of his now living, information relative thereto could be obtained by addressing Daniel Rogers of Connellsville Fayette County Pa.

Col. David Williamson resided near West Middletown Washington County Pa. During my sojourn at school at Washington Pa. about 30 years ago, I often saw Col. Williamson in the prison door of that county and when he died, although a youth at the time, I sympathised for his situation and thought if I were a man I would liberate him. As the last tribute of respect to the remains of one who in life although unfortunate, had shown a disposition to do some good to his country I attended his funeral. Indebtedness was the cause of his imprisonment, and it was al-
leged on the part of his creditors that he had transferred his property without consideration to avoid the payment. Of course he could not be released under the then existing insolvent laws of Pennsylvania without giving up his property or committing perjury. He would do neither,—and therefore remained in prison several years. He was in person a spare man of about six feet high and even in his advanced years as straight as a ramrod with a fine glowing penetrating eye. For further information I would refer Mr. Draper to Judge McKeever or Thos. McCabe of West Middletown Washington County Pa., they must have a knowledge of the Col. and his family.

Of Col. Laughrey and his family I can give no information; they must have been from Westmoreland Co. I presume.

Andrew Linn and William Linn, brothers, were natives of Louden Co. Virginia. They came to the Redstone country in the year 1767 and “took up” a tract of land on Redstone Creek two miles from the site of the old Fort Redstone. Andrew remained on this tract until the time of his death about 30 years ago. Success attended his efforts and he was enabled to devise each of his four sons a valuable tract of land in the neighborhood of his own. William Linn was a bold adventurous man, and took an active part as a scout against the Indians along the Ohio river and was in several engagements evincing much bravery and skill in the frontier mode.*

* A letter unsigned but in the handwriting of James Lowry Bowman,

E. H. B.