CHAPTER III. FRASER AT FORT CUMBERLAND, MARYLAND AND BEDFORD, PENNSYLVANIA

Fraser’s Participation in Braddock’s Expedition

Not long after John Fraser and his wife had settled at the mouth of Evitts Creek, near Fort Cumberland, Maryland, he was called upon to give his services to Braddock’s expedition against the French at Fort Duquesne, 1755. While preparations for the expedition were being made, Richard Peters of Pennsylvania expressed regret that no person or persons had been employed to keep the western Indians friendly to the British. He suggested that George Croghan, French Andrew Montour, and John Fraser, who knew the Indian dispositions and who had influence over the western Indians, should be hired. Fraser also knew well the terrain around Fort Duquesne. He, as a guide, directed General Braddock’s force around the rugged and steep ground on the north side of the Monongahela River. He directed the force past the place where his old trading post at Turtle Creek had been located. In the ensuing battle he lost clothes and baggage worth forty pounds sterling, but he was fortunate enough to return home safely and not wounded.

The Capture and Escape of Mrs. Fraser

In October, 1755, George Washington asked John Fraser to repair all the guns at Fort Cumberland. This job, however, was interrupted by an experience that halted temporarily all John Fraser’s plans. Mrs. Fraser was captured by Ohio Indians. After the defeat of General Braddock, Fort Duquesne became the gateway to the east for Indian raids. Indians appeared in large numbers near Fort Cumberland where they displayed much audacity. There Colonel Dagworthy, the commander, said that nearly one hundred persons had been killed or captured by the Indians who ravished the settlements and plantations. The men were shot or tomahawked and scalped, and the women and children

21 Deposition of Joseph Tomlinson, August 13, 1761; Deposition of Providence Mountz, October 2, 3, 1764; Deposition of Elizabeth Gist, April 28, 1783; Deposition of Daniel Cresap, John Nicholls, Elizabeth Gist, and James Gist, February 28, 1768.

were made captives. Only one of these captives, Mrs. John Fraser, returned to tell her story. The following is her story of her eighteen-month captivity and escape from the Ohio Indians.

On October 9, 1755, the Maryland Gazette reported that a man and woman going to Fort Cumberland from Fraser's place were surprised by Indians. John Fraser had started to build a gunsmith shop and had invited his neighbors to assist in the building of the shop. A few neighbors came, and the construction commenced. After dinner Mrs. Fraser requested her husband to let the hired man, Bradley, take the horses and go with her to Cumberland to procure some necessaries at the store. On their way Indians fired upon them. Her horse fell, and she fainted. When she recovered she was surrounded by Indians whose chief said, "You no die, you pretty squaw, we no hurt you." Bradley had been killed instantly and scalped. The chief asked Mrs. Fraser what the men were doing at Fraser's place. She replied that they were building another house. The chief inquired if the men were all armed. Mrs. Fraser replied that they were well armed, actually she meant that the men were "armed with flesh." In reality the men were poorly armed. If the Indians had known this, they might have massacred the whole group. Mrs. Fraser was placed on her horse and led westward into the wilderness. She suffered mental pain but was not harmed by the Indians. At night they forced her to lie on a blanket. Another blanket was placed over her with an Indian guarding at either end. Eventually carried to the village of the Miami Indians who had captured her, Mrs. Fraser was adopted into one of the principal families of the tribe and had to consider herself one of the squaws. The Indians treated her as well as they knew how. After a month of captivity, the first child of Mrs. Fraser was born. The Indians stole clothes from the frontier cabins for the infant and hoped someday to make it a warrior but at the age of three months the child died, and Mrs. Fraser had to bury it in the vicinity of the Indian village. The mental torture of being away from her husband and burying her first child was very great, however, she helped the other squaws in the corn and vegetable patches in the growing season and with the cooking in the winter. During her captivity she saw the best warriors leave for a raid into Pennsylvania. They were gone seven weeks. When they returned they had two Dutchmen, one a tanner, who were adopted into the tribe. Sometime later the warriors grew restless and planned another raid, in a few days they again left the village. The food supply left behind however,
was only enough for a week. Now the remaining men in the village had to go hunting. With only the women and children left the time for Mrs. Fraser's escape had come.

Mrs. Fraser and the two Dutchmen, who planned the escape, suffered extreme hardship in their venture. They had saved a four day supply of food and had repaired one rifle. They started in a southeasterly direction. On the second night they spotted some Indians camped by a stream and had to wade the stream for several hours to prevent dogs from tracking them. On the fourth day their precious food was gone, and the journey to civilization had to be continued without food. At first the men did not dare shoot for fear of discovery by Indians. On the sixth day a rabbit was shot, skinned, and eaten raw, a wild turkey was also shot and eaten. The next morning the men were not able to move; and rather than wait to be caught, Mrs. Fraser continued alone for nine days without much food and little protection. She arrived at a place where several trails met. While pondering which trail to take, a beautiful bird flew overhead. Deciding to follow the trail over which the bird had flown, she arrived two days later in Old Town, Maryland. Here she learned that her husband had found the hired man scalped and had searched for her. Because she had not returned home, her husband thought her dead and had remarried.

Much was made of her return home. First, Mrs. Fraser was given food and clothing by the people of Old Town. She returned home to be greeted with horn blowing, people singing, and dogs barking. When John Fraser saw his first wife again, he said, "The lost is found! The dead is alive!" Mrs. Fraser was introduced to John Fraser's second wife. Fraser himself proposed to take his second wife back to her father and allow her financial support. She was to consider herself the same as before he had married her. A big feast and celebration for the return of his first wife was planned by Fraser who had never completed the gunsmith shop he had started to build when Mrs. Fraser was captured by Indians. Now both John Fraser and his wife worked hard to make a farm from the wilderness. A good home was built, and the estate was called "Pleasant Valley" or "White Oaks." Two of Fraser's children, Margaret and Benjamin, were born there. The Frasers resided at "White Oaks" until 1759.²³

Fraser's Participation in the Forbes' Expedition

In 1758 John Fraser again contributed his services to the British army. On March 21, 1758, General Forbes asked Governor Sharp of Maryland to name someone who would go to the Ohio River and Fort Duquesne to obtain information about the enemy's situation. The governor suggested Fraser because he knew all the Ohio Indians well, by July 8, 1758, he was captain of the guides in Forbes' expedition. General Forbes ordered Fraser to attend two conferences: the first at Raystown (Bedford) July 9, and the second at Carlisle with Colonel Bouquet and all the guides on July 20. General Forbes also ordered him to contract for the "bat" horses because he knew the right people. Serving as a wagon master, Fraser left late in August, 1758, with a wagon convoy from Fort Cumberland. When the Forbes' campaign was over, John Fraser and his family became permanent residents of Bedford County, Pennsylvania.24

The Role of John Fraser at Bedford

John Fraser was a yeoman farmer, an inn keeper, and resident, at first, of Cumberland County, and, later, of Bedford County. His children, William, the first white child to be born outside Fort Bedford; James, Jane, Catherine, Mary and Amelia, were born there.

As a resident of Cumberland County Fraser's name is recorded in three law suits and on the tax rolls. He initiated an assumpsit case against Joseph Morrison. In the January term, 1771, this case was opened in the Cumberland County Common Pleas Court; but, before it could be completed, Bedford County was formed. The case was re-opened in the October term, 1771, of Bedford County Common Pleas Court. Robert Magaw was the attorney for Joseph Morrison, and Galbreath Wilson the attorney for John Fraser. In the January term, 1722, a jury composed of Henry Rhoads, David Tynard, George Sills, James Wells, Richard Wells, Senior, Richard Wells, Junior, Charles Cessna, and James Piper found Joseph Morrison guilty, fined him fifteen pounds sterling damage, and charged a six pence cost.

Another law suit started by Fraser was Fraser versus Joseph Simons, a merchant of Bedford. This was an amicable suit. Galbreath Wilson

again was Fraser's attorney, and Robert Magaw was Simon's attorney. On June 3, 1771, Joseph Simons was indebted to John Fraser for twelve pounds fourteen shillings lawful Pennsylvania currency for goods and merchandise. He had delayed payment, and finally refused to pay the debt. In the January session, 1772, of Bedford County Common Pleas Court the case was opened. Fraser received full payment of the debt.

A third law suit initiated by Fraser was John Fraser and wife versus James McCashland and wife. This was a slander suit. Galbreath Wilson was for a third time the Fraser attorney, and an attorney named Brant was the McCashland attorney. The case was opened in the January term, 1772, of Bedford County Common Pleas Court, but it was dropped.

Although he was living in Cumberland County before 1767, John Fraser never paid any taxes before that date. His taxables in 1767 were 2,150 acres of warranted land, 1000 acres along Wills Creek, and 700 acres in Garlik Cove, four town lots, three horses and four cows. In 1768 Fraser paid taxes for three hundred acres of unwarranted land. In 1769 his taxables were two lots, seated, four lots, unseated and unimproved, one out lot with ten acres sowed, three horses, and three cows. In 1770 taxes were paid for seven lots, four horses, and three cows. After 1770 John Fraser paid his taxes to Bedford County. For 1771, 1772, 1773 his taxables were the inn, four town lots, two horses, three cows, and some uncultivated land in Colerain Township.

The Redstone Mission

In 1768 the normal routine of John Fraser was interrupted by an unexpected call for service to the province. Lieutenant-Governor Penn was worried about the white settlements on Indian land. On February 3, 1768, through his guidance, the Pennsylvania assembly passed a law that prohibited white settlements on Indian land. The illegal settlers would first be warned to move. If, after thirty days, any settler remained


or returned, the governor could decree the death penalty. For the first warning the governor selected Reverend John Steele, John Allison, Christopher Lems, and James Potter to meet with the settlers at Redstone Creek. The meeting was held, and the commissioners received the promises of one hundred-fifty families to move within thirty days. These settlers never intended to move because they knew that a conference with the Indians was scheduled in May, 1768, at Fort Pitt. The conference, at which 2,000 Indians were present, was held May 7 to May 9, 1768. The participants decided to name four messengers, two Indian and two white, to go to Redstone Creek to "warn off the settlers." John Fraser and William Thompson were the white messengers. They, however, did not have a chance to carry out their duty, for the Indians refused to name any messengers, as they considered this job a white man's responsibility. The whole plan was dropped, but not before John Fraser and William Thompson received their instructions.

The instructions given to the two men were to remove the white settlers from Indian land without further delay. As soon as the four passengers had arrived at Redstone Creek, they were to assemble as many people as possible, allow the Indian messengers to deliver the message, and give a printed copy to the principal people of the settlement so that those people who lived a considerable distance from Redstone Creek might also read the message. Should any settler become stubborn and refuse to move Fraser and Thompson were to give notice that this was the final warning, that the governor would compel them to move, and that no bargains could be made with the governor. Fraser and Thompson were to take good care of the Indian messengers and treat them with much kindness. Upon their return to Bedford, they were to make their report to the governor.27

John Fraser as Justice of the Peace

On March 9, 1771, Bedford County, Pennsylvania, was created out of Cumberland County. The persons named justices of the peace were judges of the Quarter Sessions Court (Criminal Court), Orphan's Court, and Common Pleas Court. Each or all of the justices were authorized and empowered "to administer to all judges, justices, coroners, and all other officers, civic or military, the oaths of office, allegiance, and all other declarations required by law to be taken by the said

mentioned officers, and qualify every or any of them for entering upon their several or respective offices to which they are or shall be commissioned, or, as any other occasion may arise, may make it requisite and proper to tender or administer the said oaths etc. or any of them to the said and other persons until the governor's pleasure shall be further known therein." This was the power granted to the justices of the peace who were John Fraser, Robert Cluggage, Robert Hanna, William Proctor, Jr., Barnard Daugherty, Arthur St. Clair, George Wilson, William Lochry, William Crawford, Dorsey Pentecost, William McConnell, Thomas Gist, James Mulligan, and Alexander McKee. The title of Dedimus Potestatem was given to John Fraser, Barnard Daugherty, and Arthur St. Clair. Fraser and St. Clair paid two hundred pounds sterling each to use their authority. Thus in its establishment John Fraser had an important position in Bedford County, Pennsylvania.28

Because Fraser, among his judicial activities, was more active in the Quarter Sessions Court than any other court, his activities for that court from 1771 to the time of his death will be described.

The following is his record during 1771 for the Quarter Sessions Court. The first session convened April 16, 1771, but John Fraser was not present. His daughter, Margaret, was recommended to Governor Penn as an inn keeper. The next session of the Quarter Sessions Court convened July 16, and this time Fraser was present. The first case in which he participated was the case of the King versus John Mallen who was charged with felony. Mallen pleaded guilty. The judgment was that he restore the value of the stolen goods, pay a fine of six pounds sterling to the governor and his council for the support of the government, receive twenty-two lashes on his bare back between 9 A.M. and 1 P.M. the following day, and pay the cost of the prosecution.

John Fraser was present for the October session. Some of the cases started in the July session were again re-opened. One such case was Peter Ressnor, found guilty of forcible entry. Some prisoners pleaded guilty to the charges against them. One such case was James Wells, charged with riot. He was fined one shilling, the cost of the prosecution, and was put on good behavior until the next session. Wells posted a forty pound bond sterling. On November 23, 1771, John Fraser,

28 Bedford County Deed Book, volume "A", pages 1, 44, 45; Colonial Records, op cit., Volume 9, page 730, Volume 10, page 78; Bedford County Continuance Docket, April 1, 1771, to October, 1775, pages 1, 2.
Arthur St. Clair, and Barnard Daugherty were issued a special permit to hold trial for Lieutenant Robert Hamilton, charged with murdering a fellow officer, Lieutenant Tracy. Lieutenant Hamilton desired an early trial, but the judges of the Supreme Court were not able to make the long journey at that time.29

John Fraser was somewhat more active in the Quarter Sessions Court in 1772. When the January session convened, he was present. Some of the cases started in 1771 were completed in this session. One such case was Henry Spear found guilty of forcible entry and detainer. The court fined him five pounds sterling and the cost of the prosecution. A fornication case came before the court, the King versus Peter Titus. Janet Karr pleaded guilty and was fined ten pounds sterling to be paid to the governor or receive twenty-one lashes on her bare back, well laid on. She was ordered to testify at the next session of the court, and post a one hundred pound bond sterling. During this session, too, Margaret Pain, charged with felony, was found guilty. The court ordered her to restore the value of the stolen goods, receive fifteen lashes on her bare back, well laid on, the following day at 9 A.M., and pay the cost of the prosecution. In the July session Fraser was present. In the October session, at which Fraser was present, the fornication case was temporarily completed. Peter Titus was ordered to pay ten pounds sterling to the governor, pay the cost of the prosecution, and give security to the township for the maintenance of the child after May 29, 1773, and stand for trial then.30

During 1773 the judicial record of John Fraser for any court in Bedford County was brief. Fraser and George Woods, however, had another problem. They faced the problem of robbers who had invaded the eastern part of Bedford County. In a letter to Governor Penn they told about the robberies by masked bandits. For example, James McCashland was robbed of twenty-two pounds sterling and a silver watch. They suspected a number of people who resided at or near Sideling Hill, but had no proof for their suspicions. They hoped the governor

30 Bedford County Quarter Sessions Docket, Volume 1, pages 16 to 53.
would consider their problem and give whatever relief was necessary for the safety of the public generally, and in particular, the inhabitants of Bedford County. Death cut short the judicial activities of John Fraser in 1773. He did not attend any other sessions of the Quarter Sessions Court after April, 1773, or of Orphan's Court after May 21, 1773. He must have died shortly after this date, for John Fraser, as justice of the peace, did not make it a practice to miss court sessions, especially those of the Quarter Sessions Court.  

This concludes a general description of the life and services of John Fraser from 1755 to his death in 1773 with the exception of his economic activities. These activities involved a variety of things which were of significance not only in Fraser's life but in the early history of western Pennsylvania.

(To be Continued)

31 Pennsylvania Archives, op. cit., First Series Volume IV, pages 458, 459; Bedford County Orphan's Court Docket, Volume 1, page 10; Bedford County Quarter Sessions Court Docket, Volume 1, page 45.