

Born near present-day Harrisburg, Pa., and buried in Canada with British military honors, Simon Girty roamed the vast Ohio Country for more than a quarter-century. Readers of history know him as a villainous woodsman who often preferred the company of native Americans to white people. But was he so different from other men who walked the fuzzy lines of allegiance on a brutal, chaotic frontier?





The Causes and Accuracy of the Reputation of Simon Girty in American History

by David G. Colwell

A DETACHMENT of British soldiers in 1818 honored Simon Girty as a respected subject of Great Britain when they buried him with military honors in Canada.¹ Yet he also died bearing one of the most infamous reputations in American history, a reputation both for treason and savage barbarism earned while fighting with the Indians and British against the Americans during the Revolution. Sometimes reporting fact, sometimes writing pure fantasy, generations of historians have plumbed the depths of the English language in depicting Girty as the epitome of evil:

- "Heartless and bloodthirsty...scourge of the frontier."²
- "this White beast in human form."³
- "A monster...a wretched miscreant...scheming outlaw...so brutal, depraved and wicked a wretch."⁴
- "Fearsome symbol of villainy."⁵
- "A byword for infamy."⁶
- "The shrieks and groans of helpless women and children, while butchered in the most horrid form by ruthless savages, were music to his soul."⁷

Although Girty was illiterate and left no written record, the actual facts of his life are reasonably well known. But the reasons why Girty, who was far from unique in joining the Loyalist side during the Revolution, should have become such a symbol of depravity have never been explicitly presented. In this article, I explore those reasons and their validity, and attempt to decide whether Girty deserved his reputation.

Simon Girty, the second of four Girty brothers, was born in 1741 on the eastern bank of the Susquehanna River, five miles above the present site of Harrisburg.⁸ In 1749 his father, Simon Girty, Sr., a pack-horse driver, a small-time Indian trader, and reputedly a drinker and a brawler, moved his family across the river, where he squatted on land owned by Indians. When they complained, Pennsylvania's colonial authorities responded in 1750 by driving Simon Girty, Sr., and other squatters off their land and burning down their cabins.⁹ Having seen his home burned down, Simon Girty, age 9, moved with his family back

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across the Susquehanna. A few months later Girty Sr. was killed in a drunken brawl.¹⁰ His widow married one John Turner in 1753; a year later, a son, John Jr., was born, a half-brother to the four Girty boys.

When land on the western side of the Susquehanna was purchased from the Indians, John Turner moved his family back across the river in 1755. French-led Indians attacked Pennsylvania's frontier settlements during the Seven Years War; in July 1756 Indians captured the family. Turner was tortured and burned at the stake before the eyes of his family members, all of whom (except the oldest boy, who escaped) were forced to live with the Indians for varying periods.¹¹

Simon spent three years with the Delawares, learning their language and wilderness survival skills. He survived chiefly by working as an interpreter for traders and others who had dealings with the Indians. For the next 15 years references to him are scanty. He probably was fluent in the Delaware language — he was on friendly terms with a Delaware leader¹² — and records show he voted in 1771 at the first elections in Bedford County.¹³ In 1772 two young missionaries, en route to Indian villages in present-day Ohio, met Girty while he was serving as an interpreter to Seneca Chief Kayahsota.¹⁴ Girty is next heard from when he joined George Rogers Clark and Simon Kenton, among others, as a scout and interpreter during the 1774 campaign against the Shawnees launched by Virginia Gov. John Murray, Earl of Dunmore. Girty performed well. After a bloody stand-off at the Battle of Point Pleasant on the Kanawha River, Girty was one of those sent to Shawnee Chief Cornstalk to initiate peace talks and later to negotiate with Chief Logan, a well known Mingo leader, whose family had been murdered by white settlers.¹⁵

For his good service Girty was appointed a 2nd Lieutenant in the Virginia militia organized at Fort Pitt, renamed Fort Dunmore, where John Connolly, a firm Loyalist, was Dunmore's agent. At this time Connolly supplied to Dunmore a list of those considered to be loyal to the Crown. Girty's name was on the list, which was forwarded to the British authorities at Detroit.¹⁶ When hostilities broke out between British and Americans in April 1775, however, Girty supported the American side. He served as interpreter in July 1775 for James Wood, a Virginia commissioner to the Indians. Hoping to keep the Indians at least neutral, the two men traveled to Indian settlements beyond the frontier to invite the tribes to a meeting at Fort Pitt, where the tribes

subsequently pledged peace, friendship, and neutrality.¹⁷

Not long afterwards, Girty was appointed an official interpreter with the Iroquois, but in August 1776, after only five months in the post, he was discharged for "ill behavior," possibly for drunkenness or fighting.¹⁸ A few months later, Girty came under suspicion for Loyalist leanings, probably because of his association with such known Tories as Connolly and Alexander McKee, a leading Indian trader and former British Indian agent. Girty was jailed for suspected treachery, but escaped and gave himself up again when he learned that the authorities had taken his half-brother, John Turner, in his stead. He was subsequently found innocent of the charges.¹⁹ He then helped to recruit men for the American army, for which he hoped to receive a captain's commission, but he was once again commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant.²⁰ In December 1777 Girty was sent as a messenger to the Senecas by Gen. Edward Hand, the Continental Army commander at Fort Pitt.²¹

During this period, the war on the western frontier was intensifying. Henry Hamilton, lieutenant governor and Indian agent at Detroit, had received orders in June 1777 to unleash the Indians in British-led attacks on American frontier settlements. Although news of Burgoyne's defeat and surrender in October temporarily undermined Indian support of the British, the murder of Shawnee Chief Cornstalk in November, while on a peaceful mission to an American camp, turned that powerful and warlike tribe permanently against the Americans.²²

Gen. Hand then determined to go on the offensive against the Indians in February 1778. Gathering a force of 400 men, he set out to attack Indian settlements in Ohio with Girty serving as a respected guide. The campaign killed one Indian warrior (a brother of Delaware Indian leader, Captain Pipe), three women, and one boy, and became known contemptuously as the "Squaw War." One other Indian woman (the mother of Captain Pipe) was wounded.²³

On March 28, 1778, shortly after returning to Fort Pitt, Girty, in company with Loyalists Alexander McKee, Matthew Elliott and four others, fled to join the British at Detroit.²⁴ Why he did so has been a matter of speculation for two centuries. Many authors imply some wicked and sinister motive. There are many extant reports that Girty was unhappy at not receiving an American military rank commensurate with what he considered his abilities, that he was offended when men he considered inferior in ability were promoted over him, and that he was not properly paid by the Americans for his services as interpreter.²⁵ But the underlying cause may have been no more than his friendship with McKee and the fact that he felt more comfortable with the Indians, by whom he was liked and respected.

Although McKee and Elliott both became officers in the British Indian Department, Girty never received a commission and never rose higher than interpreter. With his knowledge of Indian languages and the respected position he held among the Indians, he became a valuable asset to the British forces on the western frontier. The British sent him first to live with the Mingoës and later to the Wyandots, with whom he remained on close terms for many years. During the Revolution, he participated in British and Indian attacks on the American frontier, of which the best known were the successful ambush and subsequent siege at Fort Laurens in Ohio; raids on such Kentucky settlements as Ruddle's, Martin's, and Bryant's stations; the ambush and destruction of Col. David Rodgers's keelboat flotilla poling supplies and ammunition from St. Louis up the Ohio River to Fort Pitt; the defeat of Col. Crawford's expedition at the Sandusky Indian villages; and the rout of American forces at the Battle of Blue Licks in Kentucky, the last battle of the Revolution. Later he fought bravely with the Wyandots at the notable Indian victory over Gen. Arthur St. Clair in 1791. Rarely in command of any raiding parties, which were usually led by British officers, Girty became a legendary and evil figure on the frontier: every Indian attack and ambush came to be attributed to him.²⁶

When the Revolution ended, Girty married Catherine Malott, a white girl held captive for three years by Indians, and settled near Detroit on a tract of land granted him by the British,²⁷ who maintained their presence south of the Great Lakes after the Revolution in an effort to preserve their control of the area's lucrative fur trade. Following Gen. Anthony Wayne's decisive defeat of the Indians at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794, the British finally evacuated Detroit in 1796 and Girty moved across the Detroit River to Ontario. There he lived on his farm, separated from his wife, going blind, and drinking heavily, at last to die in his bed in 1818, at age 77.²⁸

DURING THE course of the Revolution, thousands of Loyalists remained faithful to the mother country. Some left the American colonies, voluntarily or involuntarily, in order to remain under the British flag. Others, of whom the best known are probably Girty and Benedict Arnold, were turncoats and traitors who at one time fought for the Americans and later switched to support the British. Girty, like Arnold, had received a commission in the American forces and had served as an official guide and interpreter. Yet he fled Fort Pitt to serve with Britain's

Indian allies for five years during the Revolution and fought with the Indians when they resisted American encroachment into Ohio after the Revolution. As a traitor, his reputation would necessarily be blackened in the history of this country. But many in the colonies chose to fight with the British. That alone cannot explain Girty's reputation.

Simon Girty was also a traitor of another kind. Worse than his support of the British in the eyes of Americans was his association with Indians attacking white settlers on the frontier. American history paints the early immigrants as brave settlers who came to America to create a land of freedom and equality. Many of the early settlers, however, were narrow-minded and intolerant of those different from themselves. Many who came to America seeking freedom were prepared to deny it to others, particularly to the Indians, universally considered an inferior race. Indian values and customs bore little relationship to those of European settlers; they lived in a society which, to Europeans, seemed to lack government or law; and they were heathen. As such, they were an affront to all right-thinking whites, many of whom regarded Indians as little better than animals:

the nature of an Indian is fierce and cruel...and an extirpation of them would be useful to the world, and honorable to those who can effect it.²⁹

I subjoin some observations with regard to the animals, vulgarly called Indians...They have the shapes of men and may be of the human species, but certainly in their present state they approach nearer the character of Devils...are not the whole Indian nations murderers?³⁰

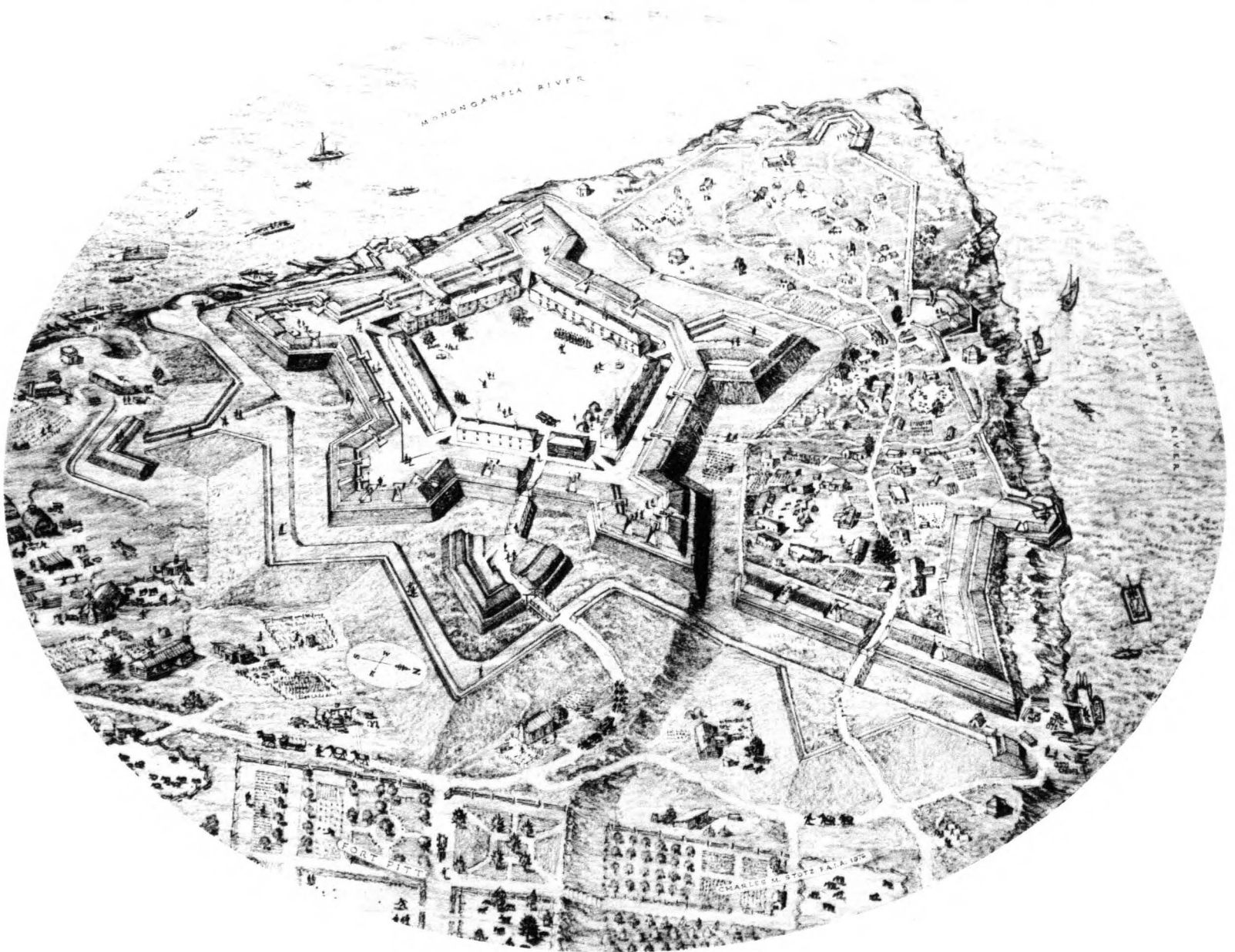
As to the natives of this country I find them entirely savage and wild...proficient in all wickedness and godlessness; devilish men, who serve nobody but the Devil.³¹

They act like wolves and are to be dealt withall as wolves.³²

That some white Europeans of their own free choice preferred to live among the Indians was an insult to deeply held values of white colonial America. Those who made that choice were renegades, challenging assumptions of white superiority, and traitors to a standard of racial and cultural purity which was part of America's colonial heritage. Such was Simon Girty, who chose to return to the Indians nearly 20 years after he had been freed from captivity. When Girty fought with the savage "wolves" against the whites, his name was permanently disgraced.

Girty's first assignment from commanders at Fort Pitt came in 1774, as an interpreter for the British in Indian negotiations. His work during this period of great westward migration and colonial warfare took him again and again to Fort Pitt — but seldom east of it.

But neither can those actions account solely for Girty's reputation. There were thousands of whites held captive by Indians in the course of American history. Many of them freely chose to remain with the Indians when given the choice. Yet their reputations bear no similarity to Simon Girty's. Many whites also chose to fight against the Americans during the Revolution. One author states that there were perhaps 100 whites who lived and/or fought with the Indians on the western frontier.³³ Only three weeks after Girty fled Fort Pitt, for example, another party of 20 soldiers deserted. Some were caught, some shot, and some hanged, but several escaped to join the British Indians.³⁴ After Lt. Gov. Hamilton had dispatched 15



parties of Indians and British officers, as well as rangers and interpreters, to attack American frontier settlements in 1777,³⁵ he forwarded to military superiors in England a list of 25 individuals, many of them with French names, who had joined with tribal leaders allied with Britain in those attacks.³⁶ Other examples include Walter Butler and other white Loyalists who joined the Iroquois in raids on American settlements in New York; still other whites fought with the Indians against the Americans on the Tennessee frontier.³⁷

Simon Girty, then, did not stand alone as a traitor to his country and his race. To explain his enduring legend, we must look to two specific sources: the reports and letters of the Moravian missionaries to the Delaware Indians on the Ohio frontier during the Revolution, and the report of Dr. John Knight regarding Girty's behavior during the torture and burning of Col. William Crawford in 1782.

THE UNITED Brethren, an evangelical sect originating in Europe and known in America as the Moravians, chose as their mission the conversion of American Indians to Christianity. Achieving limited success with missions founded in New England and New York, they shifted their efforts to Pennsylvania in 1748, and there encountered the Delaware Indians, perhaps the most peaceably inclined of all the Atlantic Coast tribes. The Moravians settled a few hundred Delawares and Mohegans at Pennsylvania missions and taught them farming and Christianity. During the Seven Years War, the Moravian Indians were threatened and attacked both by marauding Indians allied with the French and by frontier settlers who made little distinction between friendly and hostile Indians. Following the war, the missions moved westward several times to escape the hostility of the frontiersmen; in 1770, they relocated beyond the frontier into as yet unsettled Ohio, where they ultimately established several mission villages on the Muskingum River, of which the largest was Gnadenhutten. Two of the Moravian missionaries in Ohio were John Heckewelder and David Zeisberger. To these two men Simon Girty owes much of his notorious reputation.

During the Revolution, these two dwelt with several hundred Christian Indians, mostly Delawares, in the wilderness between Fort Pitt, westernmost outpost of the American frontier, and Detroit, British headquarters for the Ohio country. The missions there were surrounded by settlements of other Indian tribes. While some Indians stayed neutral in the early phases of the war, most ultimately joined the British. The Delawares were the last to take up arms and they were divided. Some joined the British in raids on the American frontier; some stayed neutral, tending to favor the Americans, but not joining the fighting. The Moravian Delawares took no part in the fighting, but because many of their nearby Delaware relatives were hostile to the Americans, they

were always suspected of joining in attacks on American settlers. Although the Moravian Delawares remained neutral, the missionaries, Heckewelder and Zeisberger, did not. Their sympathies lay wholly with the American cause.

When Simon Girty reached Detroit in 1778, he lived first with the Mingoes and subsequently with the Wyandots. Both tribes' villages were in the Ohio wilderness, not far from the Moravian towns. News spread fast among the Ohio Indians: Girty's movements usually became quickly known to the two missionaries. Raiding parties of Indians hostile to the Americans often visited friends and relatives among the peaceful Indians at the mission villages; any news they bore promptly came to the attention of Zeisberger and Heckewelder, who secretly passed on all information to Fort Pitt. Their biased and often untruthful reports of the British, their Indian allies, and Girty became known far and wide.

Zeisberger had commenced reporting to the American authorities in 1777 on the activities of both the Indians in Ohio and the British forces operating out of Detroit. Heckewelder, whose reports were particularly exaggerated and melodramatic, falsely reported that early in 1778 Lt. Gov. Hamilton had sent a letter to Zeisberger commanding him and the mission Indians "to turn out and fight the American people..." and that Hamilton would "punish all such as did not obey his orders."³⁸ Hamilton never sent such a letter, though he did write Zeisberger promising safe conduct to all who chose to join the British and requesting him to distribute affidavits signed by American captives of the British testifying to their good treatment as prisoners at Detroit.³⁹

Early in 1779 Hamilton ordered Girty to take a small party of Indians to reconnoiter the American frontier post of Fort Laurens, northwest of Fort Pitt. Girty, always something of a braggart, boasted among the Delawares in their Ohio villages that he would take the scalp of the small fort's commander. Killbuck, a pro-American Delaware leader, passed the information along to Zeisberger, who promptly informed Col. John Gibson, the American commander at Fort Laurens. When Girty reached the vicinity of the fort, his band successfully ambushed a 16-man party of American soldiers, killing two, wounding four, and taking one prisoner. They also captured dispatches from Fort Laurens which included not only letters from Gibson to the authorities at Fort Pitt, but also copies of letters written by the missionaries informing Gibson of Girty's plans.⁴⁰ Girty's subsequent hostility toward the missionaries was unwavering. After the successful ambush at Fort Laurens, Girty's notoriety grew on the western frontier. Col. Lachlan McIntosh, who had succeeded Gen. Hand as commander at Fort Pitt, wrote George Washington to inform him of Girty's exploit, spreading what was becoming the infamous legend of Simon Girty.⁴¹

Later, on June 29, 1779, a letter in Heckewelder's handwriting headed "Secret Matters" and bearing the signature "O.L."

(assumed to be a pseudonym since the missionaries had learned that their dispatches might be intercepted), informed the Americans that "Simon Girty is gone...to fetch a packet of letters out of a hollow tree. I understand somewhere about Fort Pitt."⁴² As the missionaries served as Americans spies, so were there also British Loyalists at Fort Pitt spying for the other side.

As Girty neared Fort Pitt to pick up the letters in July, a small party of Indians under Capt. Brady and John Montour, a well-known Delaware half-breed, tried but failed to capture him. Heckewelder wrote on July 8, 1779, that he had waited impatiently for a chance to send letters to the American side, and that Girty had evaded capture and successfully obtained the packet of letters.⁴³

The missionaries did not regard their activities as spying on behalf of one side in the revolutionary conflict. A later Moravian biographer of Zeisberger described their thinking:

[T]hese acts were not the acts of American spies. They were not performed in the interests of the Americans politically considered. They were done in the name of the Prince of Peace...(the missionaries) followed the higher law, the law of God, which supersedes every other.⁴⁴

From sheer proximity, the missionaries heard much of Simon Girty and continued to report fact and fiction about him throughout the war. In their anger at him their language became intemperate and irrational. Heckewelder reported, for example, that Girty and eight Indians ambushed Zeisberger, intending to kill him, and were only prevented from doing so by the presence of Zeisberger's two Delaware companions — an unlikely story.⁴⁵ He further reported that frequent but unsuccessful attempts were made to murder the missionaries at their settlements.⁴⁶ In fact, had Girty and the British determined to kill the missionaries, who were surrounded by hostile Indians, it would have been a simple task.

Heckewelder reported another meeting with Girty, who had been drinking and probably took pleasure in taunting the missionaries. Girty, wrote Heckewelder,

behaved like a madman...swore the most horrid oaths respecting us... "that he never would leave the house, until he had split our heads in two, and made our brains stick to the walls of the room" ...He appeared like a host of evil spirits...this White beast in human form...this wicked white savage.⁴⁷

Theodore Roosevelt, in *The Winning of the West*, referred to the two missionaries, "whose untruthfulness (especially Heckewelder's) is clearly demonstrated,"⁴⁸ a conclusion which a careful reading of their reports justifies. With such character witnesses, Americans came to believe Girty's evil presence lurked behind every Indian ambush on the frontier.

In addition to Girty's general disrepute as a traitor, a specific incident was directly responsible for the abiding villainy of his name in American history: the death by torture of Col. William Crawford.

THE IMMEDIATE circumstances of Col. William Crawford's death involved the Moravian mission at Gnadenhutten. In 1781, the British decided to move the Moravian missions further from the Americans and closer to Detroit, both to limit the missionaries' communication with Americans and to provide greater security for the Delaware converts. On short notice in early September 1781, the missions were moved from the Muskingum River and reestablished on the Sandusky 100 miles to the west; the Indians were forced to move before their corn had ripened. Close to starvation the following winter, the Indians received permission to return temporarily to the former site of the mission to gather up the unharvested corn. Some 150 mission Indians returned to Gnadenhutten and, by early March 1782, had harvested most of the corn.

During the winter of 1782 marauding Indians were active on the frontier near Fort Pitt.⁴⁹ The attacks enraged frontier settlers who were convinced that mission Indians were involved. In February a force of 100 American militiamen under Col. David Williamson marched into the Ohio country determined to teach the Indians a lesson; and on March 6, 1782 they found the mission Indians gathering corn at Gnadenhutten. The Americans collected the unarmed Indians and took them to two "slaughter-houses," where Williamson's men butchered 42 Indian men, 20 women, and 34 children as they knelt and prayed.⁵⁰ Two Indian youths escaped to tell the tale. After unsuccessful inquiries into the matter, Gen. William Irvine, commander at Fort Pitt, concluded that ascertaining the truth about the affair was hopeless. He wrote:

it will be almost impossible ever to obtain a just account of the conduct of the militia...if...an inquiry should appear serious, they (the members of the militia) are not obliged nor will they give evidence... I am of the opinion further inquiry into the matter will...be fruitless.⁵¹

The affair was over but it was not forgotten, most certainly not by the Delawares.

On May 25, 1782, another American expedition numbering 500 officers and men set out into Ohio for the Sandusky River settlements of hostile Indians. Led by Col. William Crawford, the force included Col. Williamson and most of the men who had been at Gnadenhutten three months earlier. At the Sandusky, they ran into Wyandots with whom Simon Girty was serving, Shawnees, Delawares, and Mingoes as well as a detachment of Butler's Rangers from Detroit under the command of British Capt. William Caldwell. The battle continued for two days. By nightfall of the second day, as the Indians extended their lines in an attempt to encircle the American position, the Americans concluded that prospects for success were minimal. When the Americans withdrew in undisciplined fashion, their retreat became a rout, and many were killed, wounded, and taken prisoner.⁵² One of the prisoners was Col. Crawford. His death by torture in the presence of Simon Girty has blackened Girty's reputation throughout the course of American history.

Crawford's captors were Delawares. Since many of their more peaceably inclined relatives had been butchered at the Gnadenhutten mission a few weeks before, the Delawares extended no mercy to Americans who fell into their hands. An eyewitness account of Crawford's death was provided by Dr. John Knight, who, sent by Gen. Irvine to accompany the expedition, was captured by the Indians with Crawford and others, and later escaped. A party of 11 captives, including Crawford and Knight, was marched to the Indian villages on the Sandusky. In his published account of the affair, Knight reported that after his capture Crawford spoke to Girty to seek his assistance, since the men had long been friends.⁵³ Girty told Crawford that he "would do everything in his power for him, but that the Indians were very much enraged against the prisoners."⁵⁴ The nine other prisoners led off the march to the Indian villages. Knight and Crawford found four tomahawked and scalped along the way; when they caught up to the other five, they found them alive and seated on the ground, where Indian women and boys presently fell on them, tomahawked and scalped them.

The next day, Crawford was stripped and tied to a stake by the fire. Girty confirmed to Crawford that the Indians intended to burn him; the Indians then fired their guns at Crawford, without shot, so that he received at least 70 powder burns "from his feet up to his neck." They cut off his ears and took burning poles from

the fire and thrust them into his body, then threw burning coals and embers from the fire on him. Crawford, Knight reported, called to Simon Girty and begged of him to shoot him...Girty then, by way of derision, told the Colonel he had no gun, at the same time...laughing heartily, and by all his gestures seemed delighted at the horrid scene.⁵⁵

Knight's story was first published in a 1783 pamphlet and frequently reprinted thereafter. The description of laughter while Crawford endured his death agony permanently stained Girty's reputation. There is no other instance at which Girty was reported to have shown amusement as whites were tortured, and there are conflicting reports of Girty's behavior at Crawford's death. Like many grisly episodes in American history, the actual truth is not found in the most popular versions, and is, in fact, some combination of all the accounts.

After Knight escaped from his captors, he wandered through the Ohio wilderness for three weeks before he finally arrived at Pittsburgh near starvation and in poor physical condition. While the basic account of Crawford's death was told by Knight, there were a number of other American reports based on his tale. One report was that of Maj. William Croghan, on July 6, 1782:

[The Indians] continued torturing [Crawford!] for about two hours, when he begged of Simon Girty, a white renegade, who was standing by, to shoot him, when the fellow answered, "don't you see I have no gun?"⁵⁶

Col. Crawford was a close friend of George Washington's. Gen. Irvine, commander at Pittsburgh, had the unhappy responsibility of informing Washington of Crawford's death; he wrote Washington on July 11, 1782:

[Crawford] begged of Girty to shoot him but he paid no regard to the request... sundry Indians (stated) that not a single soul should in the future escape torture; and gave, as a reason, for this conduct, the Moravian affair...⁵⁷

Neither writer described Girty laughing at Crawford's agony; both must have received their information from Knight. Another letter from Fort Pitt, however, also dated July 6, 1782, and printed in the *Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser* on July 23, 1782, reported that Crawford "begged one Simon Girty, whom he formerly knew at Fort Pitt, to shoot him, but Girty said with a laugh he had no gun, that examples must take place."⁵⁸

An additional letter dated July 28, 1782, reported: The traitor, Simon Girty, was standing by; the Colonel cried out to him "No mercy — only shoot me," to which his reply was, "Crawford, I have no gun," with a laugh — "how can you expect any other (treatment) — this is retaliation for the Moravians that were murdered last spring."⁵⁹

The most detailed account of the incident was Dr. Knight's own narrative, forwarded to a printer for publication by Hugh



Girty earned his blackest mark of all for his supposed role in the 1782 revenge killing of Col. William Crawford by Delaware Indians. However, proof of the viciousness attributed to him doesn't exist. This fascinating oil painting, recreating Crawford's torture, was done in 1906 by Edward Lepper. The painting presents many inaccuracies about Native American culture, such as the feathered headdresses, which were used only by Great Plains Indians. Lepper's interpretation has Girty, on the white horse, appearing to direct the Indians, while a British officer, to the left, looks on. The bound prisoner with blackened face to the right is Dr. Knight. (See page 37-40.)

Henry Brackenridge in August 1782, but not published until the following year.⁶⁰ He initially stated that Dr. Knight wrote out his own account at his request;⁶¹ later Brackenridge retracted this assertion and stated that he himself had written the account based on Knight's own tale.⁶² A thorough and detailed analysis of Knight's narrative by Parker B. Brown makes clear that the narrative was shaped by Brackenridge for its maximum propaganda value and aimed at arousing Americans to anger at the barbaric practices of the British and their Indian allies on the western frontier.⁶³ In the process, Brackenridge fanned pre-existing American animosity toward Girty, an easy and inflammatory target, permanently defiling Girty's reputation.

The American reports of the affair, based on Brackenridge's

presentation of Knight's story, however, are not the only surviving accounts of Girty's behavior. There are many contrary accounts of Crawford's torture. Most of those differing accounts are from British sources; some are from American sources. Omitted entirely from this article are the many subsequent statements by Girty family members, all of which vehemently deny that part of Knight's story dealing with Simon Girty.⁶⁴

There is the tale of Mrs. Alexander McCormick, for example, as related by her son, John McCormick.⁶⁵ She was present at the torture of Crawford. Her son reported in 1863 that his mother repeatedly said, that all the prisoners — she among them — were made to witness the burning of Col. Crawford.... She said Girty really did everything that a mortal man could to save Crawford. Girty told Crawford that only one Indian would have charge of him during the night, & next day he was doomed to the stake; that the Indians would be almost certain to go to sleep, when Crawford could get away, repair to Girty's camp, where he would find his (Girty's) horse ready saddled, & Girty's negro there in waiting to go with him on the road towards Detroit.... Crawford made no reply — seemed disheartened, with no pluck to make the effort. "This, my friend," said Girty, "is all I can do for you." Girty in Indian council had offered the Indians his negro, his horse, rifle, and some valuable wampum...but they said no — could not release him unless he would consent to take Crawford's place at the stake. Girty shed tears while witnessing Crawford's agonies at the stake, & ever after always spoke of Crawford in the tenderest terms as a particular friend.

Mrs. McCormick visited Pittsburgh after the Revolution and told this story there, "but little heed was given to her statements." John McCormick emphasized that his mother knew this "of her own knowledge;" he had "heard her say it fifty times."⁶⁶

There is a similar story from a 13-year-old prisoner present at the torture of Crawford. In an affidavit sworn before a notary in 1849, he attested that

Simon Girty offered to purchase from the Indians the body and life of Col. Crawford. [He] offered them money and his horse and his rifle with liquors if they would save his life. The Indian chiefs asked Girty if he would take his place, and the Indians became very angry and threatened to kill him if he did not desist and he was obliged to leave them.⁶⁷

Capt. William Caldwell led the force of British Rangers who fought in the battle at the Sandusky River. His son, also named Capt. William Caldwell, reported that he "heard his father and others of the Rangers, called Old Rangers, say that Simon Girty used all the means in his power to save Crawford's life. Offered all he was worth."⁶⁸ Some years later, Caldwell repeated the story, adding that the Indians insisted that "Crawford had unmercifully destroyed the Moravians, killing & burning them, & nothing could now save him." He also reported that "Col. McKee, Col. Caldwell, & Col. Elliott" believed Girty did everything he could have.⁶⁹

Another account came in 1857. William Walker, whose father had been captured by the Wyandots and had become a government interpreter for them,⁷⁰ said he had learned from his father and the Wyandots that Girty "did evince an anxiety to save the unhappy prisoner." Even the Wyandots, wrote Walker, "give him this credit."⁷⁰ But then the Delaware leader Captain Pipe threatened Girty: "If you say one word more on that subject I will plant another stake for you and burn you alongside the white chief."⁷¹ One nineteenth century authority, whose personal papers comprise a valuable university archive, summarized in his notes a number of letters from Walker who concluded that Girty had tried to save Crawford. "But the Delawares had Crawford as their prisoner, & Girty never had much influence — & none with the Delawares."⁷²

There are also reports of Girty seeking out Crawford at night during the two day battle to warn him to retreat. Most of these reports seem to emanate from Wyandot sources. Girty, of course, was closely associated with the Wyandots for many years before and after the Sandusky battle, and these accounts should be viewed with respect. William Walker, who grew up among the Wyandots, believed the Indians paid little attention to Girty's pleas for Crawford's life because they had learned of Girty's secret attempt to advise Crawford of a safe retreat route, of which "destroyed what little confidence they had" in Girty's allegiances.⁷³

Statements by the 13-year-old witness seem to confirm this point. He recalled hearing the Indians say that "Girty went to Col. Crawford's encampment and advised him to retreat. Told him that he would be surrounded and cut off next morning. The Indians were displeased with Girty for doing so."⁷⁴

Another report to the same effect appeared in an 1843 article, based on information reported to have been derived from the Wyandots.⁷⁵ A similar report came from descendants of three brothers named Edgington who had served with Crawford during the Sandusky campaign: "Before the fight, Crawford & Girty were in consultation, & Jesse Edgington would have shot Girty but for Dr. Knight, who declared it would be an act of treachery."⁷⁶

Most historians have recognized that there was little Girty could do. While friendly with the Delawares, Girty's chief influence was with the Wyandots, among whom he lived. He had negligible influence among the Delawares, who regarded the murder of their kin at Gnadenhutten as consummate treachery and utter betrayal: white men had induced those Indians to forsake their traditional way of life and settle at the Moravian missions and white men had then killed them. Although there are additional suggestions that Capt. Pipe was angry with Crawford over the shooting of his brother and wounding of his mother during the Squaw War four years earlier,⁷⁷ it was the massacre at Gnadenhutten which made inevitable the death of Crawford and all other Americans captured by the Delawares. Even Heckewelder, Girty's worst enemy, wrote that "it was not in the power of

any man" to save Crawford after his capture. As for the allegation that Girty was heard to laugh at Crawford's death scene, the record is clouded, but it seems likely that Knight's story was recast in more dramatic and less accurate fashion by Brackenridge to maximize its propaganda value.⁷⁸

There is another element of Simon Girty's history which should be reviewed before a final judgment about his reputation is reached: the stories told of his behavior by the many white captives of the Indians who came in contact with him. It is indisputable that Girty offered assistance to many captives. The most famous such account concerns Girty's rescue from certain death of his old friend, Simon Kenton, second only to Daniel Boone in reputation as a western frontiersman.⁷⁹ Kenton's face had already been blackened (the Indian mark for one condemned to die) when Girty appeared. Said Kenton:

He was good to me; when he came up to me, when the Ingins had me painted black...He flung his arms around me and cried like a child...He made a speech to the Ingins...and told them if they meant to do him a favor, they must do it now, and save my life...Girty, afterwards...cried to me like a child, often, and told me he was sorry of the part he took against the whites — that he was too hasty. Yes, I tell you, Girty was good to me.⁸⁰

Margaret Paulee, age 23, was among a small party of white settlers proceeding to Kentucky when captured by Indians in 1779. Her husband, infant daughter, and others in the party were killed. Paulee, who spent five years with the Indians before being freed for ransom, reported years later that she was relieved by "Simon Girty, who soon after I was captured came to see me and informed us that we need not fear on that score, that they were not the people to compel any one to such a course...."⁸¹

Another captive, Mrs. Thomas Cunningham, was taken to her captors' village in 1785. One evening, she said, "the Great captain Simon Girty" arrived in camp. She "laid hold of his

stirrup, and implored... [him] to perform an act of generous, disinterested benevolence." The ransom he paid led to her release. In fact, there are several other similar documented reports of Girty's unwavering kindness to frontier people in need.⁸²

A different and rare opinion of Girty was offered by O.M. Spencer, an Indian captive in 1791, who visited another Indian village with his captors and met Girty there:

[H]is dark shaggy hair, his low forehead; his brows contracted and meeting above his short flat nose; his gray sunken eyes, averting the ingenuous gaze; his lips thin and compressed, and the dark and sinister expression of his countenance, to me seemed the very picture of a villain...He spoke of the wrongs he had received at the hands of his countrymen, and with fiendish exultation of the revenge he had taken...His presence and conversation having rendered my situation painful, I was not a little relieved when a few hours after, ending our visit, we returned to our quiet lodge on the bank of the Maumee.⁸³

It may be that Girty had been drinking on this occasion. All sources agree that Girty was fond of the bottle and became mean and ugly when in his cups. Joseph Van Bebber, for example, a 13-year-old captive of the Indians, was taken as a prisoner to Detroit and subsequently reported Girty to be "an affable man, but extremely intemperate."⁸⁴

THE EVIDENCE of Girty's help and kindness to captives held by the Indians is convincing. In the light of such character testimony, it is impossible to accept Dr. Knight's account of his behavior at Crawford's death, as written by Brackenridge. There is no believable evidence that Girty participated cheerfully in the torture of Crawford or of any other American prisoners held by Indians. And there is extensive evidence to the contrary.

Simon Girty lived as the frontier demanded: inhumanity often was meted out to innocent and guilty alike. Human character, like history itself, is never painted in black and white, but only in shades of gray. Girty was no angel, but cruelty was dispensed by all sides during the years leading up to Revolution. Savagery claimed no one flag; barbarity knew no racial boundaries. But an Indian attack on settlers in frontier America was an "atrocious" or a "massacre." An American attack on Indians was

most often merely termed an “incident” or a “battle.” Americans of that period rarely exhibited dispassionate objectivity, and it’s clear this is one reason that Girty’s reputation has suffered so profoundly.

Girty was a casualty of negative publicity spread by the Moravian missionaries: no other participant in the fighting on the western frontier received such frequent and adverse contemporaneous publicity. His supposed laughter as Crawford died is a major cause for his notoriety. It was that laughter which caused Stephen Vincent Benet to describe Girty as a man “who saw white men burned at the stake and whooped with the Indians to see them burn,”⁸⁵ — and it is thus that Girty has come down to us through two centuries. 🍷

Notes

¹ Lyman Copeland Draper Manuscript Collection, 1980 Microfilm Edition, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, Wis., Mss 17 S 244. (Hereafter cited, for example, as “Draper 17 S 244.”)

² R.E. Banta, *The Ohio* (New York, 1949), 230, 238.

³ John Heckewelder, *Narrative of the Mission of the United Brethren among the Delaware and Mohegan Indians* (Philadelphia, 1820), 437.

⁴ Consul Willshire Butterfield, *The History of the Girtys* (Cincinnati, 1890), 394, 395, 396.

⁵ Russel B. Nye, “Simon Girty,” *A Baker’s Dozen* (East Lansing, Mich., 1956), 115.

⁶ Reginald Horsman, *Matthew Elliott, British Indian Agent* (Detroit, 1964), 19.

⁷ Jared Sparks, “Daniel Boone,” *The Library of American Biography* (Boston, 1847), 111.

⁸ For a concise story of Girty’s life, with interesting conclusions about the psychology of life in the early Ohio Country, see James K. Richards, “A Clash of Cultures: Simon Girty and the Struggle for the Frontier,” *Timeline*, June-July 1985, 2-17; on Simon Girty’s early years, see Butterfield, *Girtys*, 2-9; Thomas Boyd, *Simon Girty: The White Savage* (New York, 1928), 29-31.

⁹ I. Daniel Rupp, *The History and Topography of Dauphin, Cumberland, Franklin, Bedford, Adams, and Perry Counties* (Lancaster City, Pa., 1846), 381.

¹⁰ Fantasies about Simon Girty’s life start with the death of his father. Most historians report that an Indian named “Fish” killed Girty, Sr. in a drunken fight. (See, for example, Butterfield, 5; Boyd, 30; George W. Ranck, “Girty, the White Indian,” *Magazine of American History* XV, Jan.-June 1886, 257.) That story is incorrect. The Girtys’ own family history, as reported in 1849 (Draper 10 E 144), is that Simon Girty, Sr. and one James Sanders fought a duel. They both missed, took out their swords and when Girty slipped and fell, Sanders ran him through. This story is probably not far from the truth, for in the Spring of 1751 George Croghan, a prominent Indian trader, brought one Samuel Saunders back from the Ohio country to stand trial in the matter of Girty’s death. Saunders was duly convicted of manslaughter in May 1751. (Nicholas B. Wainwright, *George Croghan: Wilderness Diplomat* [Chapel Hill, 1959], 39; *Virginia Gazette*, May 24, 1751, page 3, col. 1.)

¹¹ Thomas P. Gordon, *The History of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1829), 619. The oldest boy in the family escaped, while Mrs. Girty and the baby were held but later released by the Indians. The three younger Girty boys were carried off by the Indians — James to the Shawnees, George to the Delawares, and Simon to the Senecas — and lived with the tribes for three years. When peace returned in 1759 the boys were released and returned to Pittsburgh, all three having acquired deep knowledge of their respective tribe’s language.

¹² Butterfield, 19.

¹³ Butterfield, 20; Draper 3 S 18.

¹⁴ James Axtell, *The Invasion Within* (New York, 1985), 264.

¹⁵ Butterfield, 28-29.

¹⁶ Butterfield, 32-33.

¹⁷ Reuben Gold Thwaites and Louise Phelps Kellogg, eds., *The Revolution on the Upper Ohio, 1775-1777* (Madison, Wis., 1908), xiii. The British were also active among the western Indians and enjoyed more support among them than the Americans: not only did the British offer a better supply of trade goods, but the French traders, who had always enjoyed good relations with the Indians, were regularly to be found on the British side. The British enjoyed general support among all Indians except the Delawares, long one of the most peaceful tribes, and the Shawnees, still mindful of their losses at Point Pleasant. Both tribes initially sought to remain out of the conflict.

¹⁸ Butterfield, 38.

¹⁹ Letters of Col. John Gibson to Gen. Edward Hand, Sept. 4, 1777, and of Gen. Hand to Congress, Dec. 21, 1777, in Thwaites and Kellogg, eds., *Frontier Defense on the Upper Ohio, 1777-1778* (Madison, 1912), 73, 184-85; Draper 3 E 149. Simon Girty’s relationship with his half-brother must have been close. Prior to his subsequent flight from Pittsburgh, Girty turned over his property there to Turner, since the property of Loyalists was subject to forfeiture. Probably Girty also left his will with Turner at that time. Years later, in 1804, he wrote Turner from Canada to tell him he was making a new will and to ask that Turner send the old one to him (Draper 12 U 16). The letter was signed with Simon Girty’s “X.” There are also reports of Girty visiting Turner in secret after the Revolution (Draper 12 U 34, 20 S 201-202) and of Turner visiting Girty in Canada (Draper 20 S 203). In yet another letter Girty wrote Turner from Canada that he might visit him, going by way of Presque Isle (Draper 12 U 17). Turner included Girty’s children in his own will (Draper 12 U 35).

²⁰ Boyd, 57. Thwaites and Kellogg, 172, fn. 36.

²¹ Letter from Col. John Gibson to George Washington, Dec. 5, 1777, in Thwaites and Kellogg, 172-73.

²² John Monette, M.D., *History of the Discovery and Settlement of the Valley of the Mississippi II* (New York, 1846), 94. Consul Willshire Butterfield, ed., *Washington-Irvine Correspondence* (Madison, Wis., 1882), 14.

²³ “A small Indian boy out with a gun shooting birds was discovered and killed, and several claimed the honor; and it was left to Girty to decide, and his decision was that one Zach. Connell killed the lad.” (Recollections of Samuel Murphy, in Draper 3 S 31; Butterfield, *Washington-Irvine*, 15-16).

²⁴ Various letters dated March 30 and 31, 1778, in Thwaites and Kellogg, 249-56.

²⁵ Draper 11 C 62(33); 11 E 2; 11 E 17; 11 E 53; 11 E 65; 3 S 19; 17 S 206; 9 NN 164.

²⁶ Typical of the way in which Girty was seen as responsible for events on the frontier are these two totally contradictory reports:

(1) “After his junction with the savages his principle theatre of action was along the Ohio River...He was used a stool pigeon in decoying flatboats in which were immigrants descending the river. When a boat hove 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 rescue him by taking him on board...but so soon as the boat reached the shore, the Indians placed in ambush hard by, pounced upon her and aided by Girty would inhumanly murder the whole crew.” (Draper 11 E 2)

(2) Thomas Marshall and family, floating down the Ohio in 1785, reported that he

was hailed in English by a white man on the north shore, who identified himself as James Girty, Simon's brother:

He had been posted there by the order of his brother, Simon, to warn all boats of the danger of permitting themselves to be decoyed ashore. The Indians had become jealous of him, and he had lost that influence which he formerly held among them. He deeply regretted the injury which he had inflicted upon his countrymen and wished to be restored to their society. In order to convince them of the sincerity of his regret, he had directed him to warn all boats of the snares spread for them. Every effort would be made to draw passengers ashore. White men would appear on the bank, and children would be heard to supplicate for mercy. But, continued he, "do you keep the middle of the river, and steel your heart against every mournful application which you may receive." (Charles McKnight, *Our Western Border* [Philadelphia, 1876], 618-19).

²⁷ T.L. Rodgers, "Simon Girty and Some of His Contemporaries," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 8, No. 3 (July 1925), 156.

²⁸ In the same 1804 letter in which Girty asked his half-brother, John Turner, to forward his original will, Girty wrote: "Dr Brother I have to inform you that a separation took place six years back between me and my wife she remains with her Brother and my Children & myself live together..." (Draper 12 U 16)

²⁹ Letter dated Aug. 3, 1782, "To the Public" from Francis Bailey, Printer, included in the 1783 original edition of *Narratives of the Perils and Sufferings of Dr. Knight and John Slover among the Indians* (Cincinnati, 1867), 5-6.

³⁰ Letter from H. Brackenridge printed in *Knight and Slover*, 63-65.

³¹ Letter of Jonas Michaelius to Adrianus Smoutius, 1628, in J. Franklin Jameson, ed., *Narratives of New Netherland, 1609-1664* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 126, quoted in Herbert C. Kraft, *The Lenape* (Newark, N.J., 1986), 2.

³² Letter from Solomon Stoddard to Joseph Dudley, Oct. 22, 1703, in *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 24 (1870), 269-70; quoted in James Axtell, *The European and the Indian* (New York, 1981), 142.

³³ Boyd, 108.

³⁴ Letter from Col. John Proctor to Pennsylvania President Wharton, April 26, 1778, *Pennsylvania Archives* VI, 445; Butterfield, *Washington-Irvine*, 18, and fns. 1-5; Edmund De Schweinitz, *The Life and Times of David Zeisberger* (Philadelphia, 1870), 463.

³⁵ Consul Willshire Butterfield, *History of George Rogers Clark's Conquest of the Illinois and the Wabash Towns, 1778 and 1779* (Boston, 1972 [reprint]), 45-46, quoting letters of Hamilton to Germain, July 24 and 27, 1777.

³⁶ Hamilton letter of Sept. 1778, in *Report of the Pioneer Society of the State of Michigan* IX (Lansing, 1908), 470.

³⁷ Colin G. Calloway, "Neither White nor Red: White Renegades on the American Indian Frontier," *Western Historical Quarterly* XVII, No. 1 (Jan. 1986), 57.

³⁸ Heckewelder, 169.

³⁹ Report of the Pioneer Society of the State of Michigan, 432.

⁴⁰ Butterfield, *Washington-Irvine*, 31, and fn. 4; Butterfield, Girtys, 89; Earl P. Olmstead, unpublished manuscript of volume II of his biography of David Zeisberger, 413. Girty and Gibson knew each other. On learning of Girty's threat to take his scalp, Gibson wrote in one letter, "Mr. Girty has not yet made his appearance; I hope, if he does, to prevent his taking my scalp." (Gibson to Col. Morgan, Jan. 22, 1779) In another letter Gibson wrote, "I hope, if Mr. Girty comes to pay a visit, I shall be able to repay him." (Gibson to Gen. McIntosh, Jan. 22, 1779) Both letters are quoted in Butterfield, *Girtys*, 89. Girty captured both of these letters.

⁴¹ Letter of McIntosh to Washington, March 12, 1779, in Louise Phelps Kellogg, *Frontier Advance on the Upper Ohio, 1778-1779* (Madison, 1916), 240.

⁴² Letter from "O.L." to Col. Brodhead at Fort Pitt, June 29, 1779, in Kellogg, 382-83.

⁴³ Letters from Col. Daniel Brodhead to Col. Stephen Bayard, July 1, 1779; from Col. George Woods to Thomas Urie, July 4, 1779; and from Heckewelder to Col. Brodhead, July 8, 1779, all in Kellogg, 384-85.

⁴⁴ De Schweinitz, 488.

⁴⁵ Heckewelder, 205; Olmstead, unpub. ms. on Zeisberger, 424-25.

⁴⁶ Heckewelder, 226, 230.

⁴⁷ Heckewelder, 333-34.

⁴⁸ Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West*, vol. 2 (New York, 1889), 159, fn. 1.

⁴⁹ Butterfield, *Washington-Irvine*, 99-100, fn 2; Monette, 128-29.

⁵⁰ Accounts of the massacre may be found in Butterfield, *Washington-Irvine*, 99-103 and fns.; 126-32 and fns.; 236-47 and fns.; 288-95 and fns.; 341-45 and fns; also Boyd, 132ff; Heckewelder, 310ff; De Schweinitz, 544ff.

⁵¹ Letter from Irvine to William Moore, May 9, 1782, in Butterfield, *Washington-Irvine*, 241-42.

⁵² Butterfield, *Washington-Irvine*, 289ff, 366ff, and fns.; Butterfield, *Girtys*, 169ff; Banta, 161. An objective account of the expedition and the performance of its officers and men may be found in Baron Rosenthal, *Journal of a Volunteer Expedition to Sandusky* (New York, 1969 [reprint]). Using the alias "John Rose," Rosenthal, a Russian nobleman of Baltic descent and a man of professional military training, became a friend of Washington's and a particular friend of Gen. Irvine, who appointed him to his staff. Irvine sent Rosenthal, commissioned a major, as an aide to Crawford on the Sandusky expedition.

⁵³ Crawford and Girty had served together in Lord Dunmore's War in 1774 and under Gen. Hand in the 1778 "Squaw War." One observer reported, "When Crawford was taken in '82, Girty tried to save him, for many a time he had eaten & drank at Crawford's & enjoyed his hospitality." (Narrative of James Chambers, Draper 3 S 80).

⁵⁴ Knight and Slover, 20.

⁵⁵ Knight and Slover, 22-24.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Butterfield, *Washington-Irvine*, 293.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Butterfield, *Washington-Irvine*, 126-27.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Butterfield, *Washington-Irvine*, 375-76 fn.

⁵⁹ Letter of Maj. John Hardin to Col. Wm. Davies July 28, 1782, in James Alton, ed., *George Rogers Clark Papers, 1781-1784* (Springfield, Ill., c. 1926), 79-81. That the behavior of the Indians was understandable vengeance was certainly the opinion of Washington, who responded to Irvine's letter informing him of Crawford's death: "I lament the failure of the former expedition and am particularly affected with the disastrous fate of Colonel Crawford. No other than the extremest of tortures that could be inflicted by the savages, I think, could have been expected by those who were unhappy enough to fall into their hands; especially under the present exasperation of their minds, for the treatment given their Moravian friends." (Letter from Washington to Irvine, Aug. 6, 1782, in Butterfield, *Washington-Irvine*, 131-32)

⁶⁰ Brackenridge was a young lawyer practicing at Fort Pitt. He was a 1771 graduate of Princeton (then the College of New Jersey) and a classmate and friend of James Madison and Philip Freneau. He shared rooms for a time with William Bradford of the class of 1772, later U.S. attorney general. Brackenridge studied theology and later law, and became variously a school teacher, military chaplain, lawyer, and judge. He wrote two plays, a satirical novel, and poetry, among other literary efforts. A brilliant intellect, he gave the Latin salutatory address at his college graduation. He was scornful of those less intelligent, impatient of the opinions of others, and a propagandist for the cause of the Revolution. In 1774 Bradford wrote Madison of Brackenridge: "If I may be allowed to judge he appears to have rather a strong and masculine Genius than a just & delicate taste: Imagination is his province." (*The Papers of James Madison*, vol. I [Chicago, 1962], 126)

⁶¹ *Knight and Slover*, 7.

⁶² Joseph Pritts, *Incidents of Border Life* (New York, 1977 [reprint]), 156.

⁶³ Parker B. Brown, "The Historical Accuracy of the Captivity Narrative of Doctor John Knight," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 70, No. 1 (Jan. 1987), 53-67.

⁶⁴ For the opinions of Simon Girty, his family and descendants, see Draper 10 E 2; 10 E 146; 11 C 62 (33); 17 S 191; 20 S 200.

⁶⁵ Alexander McCormick, John's father, an immigrant from Ireland, was an Indian trader. Favorably inclined to the Americans, he sometimes provided the Moravian missionaries with intelligence about the Wyandots and the British forces at Detroit. He was taken prisoner by Indians and held until he agreed to buy his goods from the British at Detroit rather than the Americans at Fort Pitt. In 1785 he married Elizabeth Turner, who had been captured by the Wyandots as a young girl and held by them for some years. The McCormicks removed to Canada in 1796, and Mrs. McCormick died in 1838. (Olmstead, unpub. ms., 423; Draper 17 S 201-203)

⁶⁶ Draper 17 S 204-205.

⁶⁷ Draper 10 E 152.

⁶⁸ Draper 10 E 153.

⁶⁹ Draper 17 S 212.

⁷⁰ Draper 11 U 12; 11 U 12 (5); 11 U 14.

⁷¹ Draper 11 U 10 (3).

⁷² Draper 11 U 30.

⁷³ Draper 11 U 10 (3).

⁷⁴ Draper 10 E 155-56.

⁷⁵ Draper 11 E 2-5.

⁷⁶ Draper 16 S 271.

⁷⁷ Draper 3 S 32; 3 S 80.

⁷⁸ Heckewelder, 339. Did Girty laugh? As a matter of pure speculation it is conceivable that a man, facing the certainty that an old friend was about to die in a peculiarly horrible way and there was nothing he could do about it, might make any number of

sounds that could be confused for an embarrassed laugh. If Knight reported that Girty gave a low laugh, it is certainly within the realm of possibility that Brackenridge, whose “province was imagination,” could turn it into a hearty one. One historian believes that it was not Simon Girty at all, but his brother, James, who laughed, and that Simon Girty had left the scene before Crawford’s death. (Brown, *Accuracy*, 59; see also Draper 10 E 156) The principal source of those reports, however, is the Girty family; Simon Girty himself declared later that he was not within 50 miles of the scene when Crawford died. Girty’s camp apparently was some distance from the Delawares’ and he may well have retired before the very end of Crawford’s suffering. (Draper 9 NN 166) It should also be remembered that two of the earliest letters from Fort Pitt after Dr. Knight’s arrival there — Maj. Croghan’s and General Irvine’s (quoted earlier) — made no mention of any laughter. Had Dr. Knight’s original account of the affair included a description of Girty laughing heartily, it is probable that the letters of Croghan and Irvine would have included such a despicable particular.

⁷⁹ For the famous story of Kenton’s rescue by Girty, see F.W. Thomas, “A Visit to Simon Kenton,” *Sketches of Character and Tales Founded on Fact* (Louisville, 1849), 74-90; Monette, *Mississippi Valley*, 67-71; Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of the Great West* (Cincinnati, 1854), 133-35.

⁸⁰ Thomas, 87.

⁸¹ John H. Moore, “A Captive of the Shawnees, 1779-1784,” *West Virginia History* 23, No. 4 (July 1962), 290.

⁸² Alexander Scott Withers, *Chronicles of Border Warfare* (Cincinnati, 1895), 372. Other well-attested reports include:

•Jonathan Alder, who was for many years a captive among the Indians, and had occasion to know the renegade well, said that Girty was a warm friend to many prisoners, and that he had known him to purchase, at his own expense, several boys who were prisoners, and take them to the British to be educated. (McKnight, 421)

•Samuel Murphy, who knew Simon Girty, was captured in 1781 and taken as a prisoner to Detroit, where Girty “asked if anyone there knew him? Murphy replied he knew him at Pittsburgh, but Girty could not recollect him; Murphy was wounded and under the care of British surgeons. When Girty left the prison, Murphy shortly after recd. a new handkerchief, with about a pound of tea, & five or six pounds of sugar, a present from Simon Girty. ‘Girty was good and kind to me. This is as true as you are sitting there,’” says Murphy. (Draper 3 S 21)

•Mrs. McCormick, whose account of Girty’s actions after Crawford’s capture has already been related, and who was a captive of the Indians for a number of years, stated that “Girty was good to prisoners, & did not merit the opprobrium heaped upon him by the Americans.” (Draper 17 S 205) She also reported that Girty helped to ransom John Quick, his wife, and 10 children, who had been taken by the Indians “& when Girty could not get them to consent to sell, he would steal them off.” (Draper 17 S 207)

•In 1782, members of the Polke family had been captured by the Indians. With Jonathan Zane as his guide, Capt. Polke came the next year to Simon Girty’s residence on the Sandusky to ask for his help in recovering his family. Girty received them with “friendship” and advised Zane not to continue since the Indians knew he had served as guide for Crawford’s expedition the previous year. Upon receipt of this advice, Zane returned home and Girty provided an Indian guide to take Polke to Detroit where he was successful in his mission. As he returned, he stopped again at Girty’s residence. Thomas Girty, the Girty brother who had remained loyal to the Americans during the Revolution, was visiting at the time, and Simon arranged for his brother to accompany the Polke party on their return journey, thinking it would add to their safety:

From Sandusky Simon Girty accompanied them a few miles, passing over the battlefield of the late Colonel Crawford. Here he pointed out the different movements of the enemy, saying that had Colonel Crawford continued the pursuit some ten minutes longer at the commencement of the battle, he would have defeated them, as at the time he stopped the advance of his troops, which he did fearing an ambush, the Indians were about commencing a general retreat. (Logan Esarey, “Indian Captives in Early Indiana,” *Indiana Magazine of History* IX, No. 2, 107)

•Thomas Edgington, captured by the Indians in 1782, reported that he was “well treated” by Simon Girty after his capture. He was subsequently taken to Detroit and ransomed. (Draper 2 S 294)

•In 1793, William May, a private in the American army, was captured by Indians in Ohio. He reported that he “was condemned to die; but saved by Simon Girty.” (Boyd, *White Savage*, 8, quoted in *American State Papers*, Indian affairs I, 242)

⁸³ Milo Milton Quaife, ed., *The Indian Captivity of O.M. Spencer* (Chicago, 1917), 92-93.

⁸⁴ Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Virginia* (Charleston, S.C., 1845), 367.

⁸⁵ Stephen Vincent Benet, *The Devil and Daniel Webster* (New York, 1937), 43.

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Visualizing the Industrial Landscape

Page 5-20 All photographs courtesy George Westinghouse Museum, Wilmerding, Pa.

Brownsville’s Steamboat *Enterprize* and Pittsburgh’s Supply of General Jackson’s Army

Page 23 Courtesy R.W. Norton Gallery, Shreveport, La.

Page 24 Top from *Mississippi Steamboatman: The Story of Henry Miller Shreve*, by Edith McCall; bottom photo by Paul Roberts, editor.

Page 26 Charcoal and chalk drawing of Shreve is attributed to George D’Almaine (1800-1893). Courtesy National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

The Causes and Accuracy of the Reputation of Simon Girty in America History

Page 31-32 “The British Colonies in North America,” William

Faden, engraver, 1777. Courtesy Archives of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, 18th Century Map Collection.

Page 34 From *Outposts of the War for Empire*, by Charles Morse Stotz (Pittsburgh, 1985). Drawing by Stotz.

Page 38 “Crawford at the Stake” by Edward Lepper. Oil on canvas, 54 x 72 inches, 1906. Seneca County, Ohio, Museum. Reproduction courtesy *Timeline*, Ohio Historical Society.

Bookcase

Page 46 Bottom, courtesy Herb Ferguson; top, courtesy Archives of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania.

Director’s Gallery

Page 48 Photograph by Marilyn Erwin, Director of Publications.