
The Historical Accuracy of the Captivity Narrative of Doctor John Knight

by Parker B. Brown

EARLY on the morning of Independence Day, 1782, Doctor John Knight was carried into Fort McIntosh on a blanket by white hunters who had found him after his escape from Indians. He was injured, barely coherent, and starving.¹ The following day he was moved to Fort Pitt to recuperate. The news he brought fell like a heavy ax upon frontier communities already shaken by dread and grief. He and Col. William Crawford had been captured by vengeful Delaware Indians after the defeat of American militia at Sandusky (now Upper Sandusky, Ohio). Even worse, Knight had had to watch the agonizing death of his friend at a torture stake.²

The army surgeon's chronicle of horror was as dramatic as it was woeful. It drew to the invalid's bedside a lawyer, Hugh H. Brackenridge, who wrote it down.³ Brackenridge edited what he learned,

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- 1 John C. Fredricksen, "Kentucky at the Thames, 1813," *Register at the Kentucky Historical Society* 83 (Spring 1985) 2:98.
- 2 The friendship began about 1773 after Knight commenced his indentured service at the farm of William Crawford in Westmoreland County, Pa. Well-liked by the family, he tutored the Crawford children. Before coming to America as a stowaway, Knight studied medicine at the University of Aberdeen. With the outbreak of the Revolution, he enlisted in the West Augusta (13th Virginia) Regiment commanded by William Crawford and participated in the battles at Brandywine and Germantown. With that regiment's return to Fort Pitt, Knight was appointed its paymaster, then a surgeon's mate, and finally a surgeon (through Crawford's intercession). For the expedition to Sandusky, Crawford asked for and got Knight's services as a surgeon.
- 3 Born in Scotland in 1748, Brackenridge immigrated to Pennsylvania in 1753. Engaged initially as one of Washington's army chaplains, Brackenridge later became a schoolmaster in Maryland, a poet and satirist, and finally a political magazine publisher. He read law at Annapolis, Md., and set out for the western frontier in 1781. Prior to editing *Doctor Knight's Narrative*, Brackenridge wrote two theatrical tragedies (1776 and 1777) about military heroes who died in battle, and delivered in 1779 an oratorical eulogy for American patriots "fallen in the contest with Great Britain." He is cited as the founder of the forerunner of the University of Pittsburgh, 1786-87.

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transforming the recollections into a piece of virulent anti-Indian, anti-British propaganda calculated to arouse public attention and patriotism. The published narrative of the captivity is now commonly found in collections of such literature.⁴

One would suppose that the degree of historical accuracy in *Doctor Knight's Narrative* has already been determined. On the contrary, respected histories have accepted it word-for-word. Only in the past fifty years have scholars of North American literature, history, and ethnology studied seriously the captivity genre. Though their efforts have been broad in scope, the problem of assessing the accuracy of individual narratives has not been addressed.⁵

The object of the research reported here was to find a means of distinguishing fact from fiction in the published narrative attributed to the surgeon. How much did the editor delete from what Knight told him? How much did the editor add?

For study, the narrative was separated into three segments: (1) the march of the army to Sandusky and the battle there, (2) the capture and torture of Colonel Crawford, and (3) the escape and flight of the surgeon. The last segment, composed of a physical description of the Indian guard with accounts of Knight's escape and desperate search for food, undoubtedly originated with the doctor. However, it is unlikely that he gave the detailed description of the wilderness included in the text. His rapidly deteriorating condition from starvation and exposure made this improbable. More likely, Brackenridge inserted the enthusiastic reports of rich soil, good timber, and plentiful wild game. The lust of whites for tribal hunting grounds beyond the Ohio River was insatiable. The picture of a natural paradise would be welcome.⁶

4 The captivity narratives of Doctor Knight and the expedition guide, John Slover, were printed together in the *Freeman's Journal* in Philadelphia, Volume 3 (Apr. 30-May 21, 1783): 106-09. The edition of the narrative cited in this article is in Hugh H. Brackenridge, *Indian Atrocities* (Cincinnati, 1867), 2-30.

5 Phillips D. Carleton, "The Indian Captivity," *American Literature* 15 (May 1943): 169-80; Roy H. Pearce, "The Significances of Captivity Narratives," *American Literature* 19 (Mar. 1947): 1-20; Dwight L. Smith, "Shawnee Captivity Ethnology," *Ethnohistory* 2 (Winter 1955): 29-41. For recent overviews of this genre, see the introduction (xiii-xxx) to James Levernier and Hennig Cohen, *The Indians and Their Captives* (Westport, Conn., 1977); and Wilcolm E. Washburn's introduction (xi-lviii) to Alden T. Vaughan, *Narratives of North American Indian Captivity: Selective Bibliography* (New York, 1983).

6 Brackenridge, *Indian Atrocities*, 29-30; Thomas P. Abernethy, *Western Lands and the American Revolution* (New York, 1937), 267-68; *Virginia Historical Magazine* 42 (Jan. 1934): 143-44.

The opening portion of the narrative regarding the march and battle is also apparently factual. One could wish that the surgeon had said more about his experiences during those events, but so far as he went, nothing related conflicted with the accounts others gave.

The middle portion is most historically suspect. Here the editor had several objectives in mind when he polished his notes. He desired, first, to produce a popular, salable story. He also wanted to stir the western populace into such a rage that it would immediately rise up to turn back marauding war parties and revenge the tortured commander, Col. Crawford. In addition, he wished to shame eastern politicians so that they would release more government troops for frontier duty. To do this, Brackenridge accented every gruesome aspect of Crawford's ordeal. In so doing, he ignored important Indian motivations and circumstances, omitted significant recollections, and unjustly besmirched the character of Simon Girty, the British agent.⁷

Some facts are missing from the published writing for predictable reasons. The surgeon, after all, was not always with his commander; as he admitted, Crawford was sometimes out of hearing. Knight was also unfamiliar with Indian languages. In addition, he was at times terrorized ("repeatedly threw the scalp in my face"), and it is not surprising that his report was incomplete.

Despite this, nothing in the published narrative suggests that Doctor Knight deliberately misled or lied. The surgeon was, as later pictured by his superior officer at Fort Pitt, "a man of undoubted veracity."⁸ It is thus the editing that concerns us. Did Brackenridge, to guarantee the patriotic immortality and monetary success of the narrative, knowingly suppress pertinent facts and misrepresent significantly the behavior of participants in Crawford's captivity?

The answer is yes. To begin with, Brackenridge effectively side-tracked any and all rival versions. When the writing was finished, he attached a letter to the printer with the intention that it also should be published (as it subsequently was). It read in part:

I saw Knight on his being brought into the garrison at Pittsburgh; he was weak and scarcely able to articulate. When he began to be able to speak a

⁷ In March 1778, Simon Girty deserted from the Fort Pitt garrison to Detroit where the British hired him as their agent and interpreter to Wyandots living on the Upper Sandusky River. Required to participate in Indian raids on American settlements, Girty led the attack in 1779 upon Fort Laurens, and in 1782 assisted the Wyandots in defeating Crawford's army. In this article, the names *Simon Girty* and *Girty* refer to the above individual, whereas *James Girty* refers to his brother.

⁸ Consul Willshire Butterfield, *Washington-Irvine Correspondence* (Madison, 1882), 127.

little, his Scottish dialect was much broader than it had been when I knew him before. This I remarked as usual with persons in a fever, or sick, they return to the vernacular tongue of their early years. It was three weeks before he was able to give any thing like a continued account of his sufferings.⁹

Why did Brackenridge go to such length to picture Knight as unintelligible until he interviewed the doctor three weeks after his return? Furthermore, why did Brackenridge state in his covering letter that Knight himself wrote out the narrative and gave it to him, a falsehood he admitted years later when writing another publisher?¹⁰ Obviously the editor was anxious to establish his record of Knight's statements as most authoritative, mindful that the notes taken by other parties at the fort were already circulating and might be in print before his account could reach a Philadelphia press. As it turned out, several detailed communications quoting Knight were on their way east within a month after Knight's return. Brig. Gen. William Irvine wrote George Washington and President William Moore of the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council.¹¹ Two other letters, longer and even more detailed, were written by Maj. William Croghan and John Hardin to William Davies, the Virginia War Commissioner at Richmond.¹² On July 23, 1782, an anonymous letter from Fort Pitt dated July 5 — the day after Knight's return — appeared in the *Pennsylvania Journal and Advertiser*.¹³ Interestingly, it was not until September 6 that Col. John Gibson wrote from the frontier yet another letter in which "a narrative of Doctor Knight" was included.¹⁴ Whether that enclosure was a copy of Brackenridge's writing is impossible to say, because unfortunately it is now missing.

More lay behind the editor's claim of supremacy for his version, however, than a fear of being upstaged. One of Doctor Knight's recollections had to be deleted because it was too controversial: Knight said that Crawford was burned in revenge for a massacre of Indians at Gnadenhütten three months earlier. In that raid by American militia under Lt. Col. David Williamson, ninety Christian Delawares, including thirteen infants, were bludgeoned and scalped. Even as Brackenridge edited Knight's narrative, the massacre of Moravians was still

9 Joseph Pritts, *Incidents of Border Life* (Chambersburg, 1839), 130.

10 Pritts, *Incidents*, 130, 166.

11 Butterfield, *Washington-Irvine Correspondence*, 249-50, 126-27.

12 Croghan manuscript letter, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis; William P. Palmer, *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts* (Richmond, 1884), 3:235.

13 Butterfield, *Washington-Irvine Correspondence*, 375-76.

14 Palmer, *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, 3:286.

being denounced in some quarters and vigorously defended in others. If the captivity narrative was to inspire and unify the war-weary populace, that divisive subject and its resultant Indian justification for torturing Crawford had to be suppressed. Brackenridge therefore tiptoed past the statement connecting the massacre and burning, hoping that when his version of Crawford's death appeared, readers of earlier reports would not notice the omission.

Having disposed of this difficulty, the editor faced yet another. On the night before Crawford's death, a long council meeting took place at Pipe's Town. Crawford did not, as implied by the printed narrative, go to a stake without a hearing. All charges against him were aired. The surgeon surely told Brackenridge this, but how could the narrative mention the council without stirring curiosity as to what transpired? Readers were therefore kept ignorant of the council and its deliberations.

This decision, though, did not deliver Brackenridge from the editorial thicket. The elimination of the council from the narrative left obvious gaps in time unaccounted for between Crawford's capture and death. To hide these gaps Brackenridge engaged in some sleight of hand. Even today, the editing would be undiscernible were it not for the July 6 letter of Maj. William Croghan. In it, Knight is quoted as saying that he and Crawford began their return with guards to Sandusky *two* days after their capture rather than *three* days, as the narrative indicates. He also said that they were confined at Pipe's Town the night before Crawford's torture rather than some miles away, a fact corroborated by Indian sources.¹⁵ Hence it is transparent that Brackenridge severely compressed the time period leading up to the burning, a decision that accelerated the action and eliminated the gap left by the omission of the Indian council. The editor proceeded to crowd into a single day the parade north from Old Wyandot Town, the slaying of nine Americans, the gauntlet, and the burning of Crawford. He also set the earlier return of captives to Sandusky (Old Wyandot Town) twenty-four hours after it actually happened. He closed the gap created by this tardy return by simply skipping the day of June 8 in the published narrative.

As if this were not enough, Brackenridge then rewrote history by misrepresenting the attitude and actions of Simon Girty, the British

15 Peter Dooyentate Clarke, *Origin and Traditional History of the Wyandots* (Toronto, 1870), 77; *The American Pioneer* 2 (1843): 11, 284; Lyman Cope-land Draper Collection (Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison) MSS 3 S 80, 11 YY 12.

agent and interpreter.¹⁶ This becomes obvious when Canadian as well as American testimony is examined, especially that from white Indian captives either present at the burning or in a position to know what happened.¹⁷

Several conclusions challenge the usual depiction of Girty based upon *Doctor Knight's Narrative*. For one thing, Simon Girty and Col. Crawford were still friends at the time of the Sandusky expedition, despite Girty's desertion from the American cause four years before. It is consequently not unusual that, following his capture, Crawford asked to see Girty, or that during their meeting Girty promised to do everything he could to obtain Crawford's freedom.¹⁸ They had been friends and comrades in arms during Dunmore's war of 1774. Afterwards, it was Crawford who secured for Girty a military promotion at Fort Pitt, and still later, Crawford who helped gain Girty's release from the fort's jail when Girty was accused of treason. From time to time during this period, these men enjoyed camaraderie at the Crawford tavern-home, and during the winter of 1778, they rode together on the abortive Squaw Campaign.¹⁹

16 In her old age, Simon Girty's wife is reported to have "declaimed against Dr. Knight's narrative — that nearly all [the doctor] said against Girty was either utterly untrue or greatly exaggerated" (Draper MSS 17 S 192). There is little question that, while other factors combined to force Simon Girty into Canadian exile to escape capture by Americans and probable hanging, the notoriety thrust upon him by the surgeon's narrative proved extremely damaging. Girty died in 1818, alcoholic and blind, near Fort Malden, Upper Canada.

17 The testimony of three out of nine Indian captives was found most reliable and persuasive concerning Girty's involvement: Elizabeth Turner McCormick (Draper MSS 17 S 191-92, 204-05), Cornelius Quick (Draper MSS 10 E 146-47, 155-58), and Michael Walters (*The Journal of Michael Walters, A Member of the Expedition Against Sandusky in the Year 1782*, ed. J. P. MacLean, Tract 89, Volume 14 [1899], Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland). While less clear at points, the testimony of three other captives was partially of value: Stephen Chilton (Draper MSS 11 CC 264-68), Joseph Jackson (Draper MSS 11 C 62), and Ambrose White (Draper MSS 12 CC 126-27).

18 The statement of Crawford that "Girty had promised to do every thing in his power for him" was retained by Brackenridge in order to blacken further Girty's character when later the British agent was shown in his narrative to have participated actively in the torture of the officer.

19 Draper MSS 3 S 6, 8, 16, 28, 80, 152; 25 S 167. In the "Squaw Campaign," Brig. Gen. Edward Hand, with a force of 500 militia, attempted to reach and seize British boats and naval stores on Lake Erie. Turned back by miserable winter weather, the frustrated militia fell instead upon peaceful Delaware camps at Sickeunk (the Salt Spring) and one of the Kuskuskies. Captain Pipe's brother (a friend of the Americans), two squaws, and a boy were

Secondly, Girty strove earnestly to save Crawford's life, even to the point of being himself threatened with torture at a stake. In this, the behavior of Girty is consistent with that which he showed other American captives held by Indians before and after the burning of Crawford.²⁰

Finally, evidence strongly indicates that the following passage in *Doctor Knight's Narrative* is inaccurate as it relates to the identity of the person who mocked Crawford:

In the midst of these extreme tortures, Crawford called to Simon Girty and begged him to shoot him; but Girty making no answer he called again. Girty, then, by way of derision, told the Colonel he had no gun, at the same time turning about to an Indian who was behind him, laughed heartily, and by all his gestures seemed delighted at the horrid scene.²¹

The spectator who mocked Crawford was not Simon Girty, who had already left the scene of torture.²² It was Simon's younger brother, James, another British partisan with a reputation for the cruel abuse he directed toward Americans captured by Indians.²³

The historical accuracy of *Doctor Knight's Narrative* can now be ascertained. For purposes of comparison, a summary of Knight's account of the Crawford captivity appears on the left below, and a fresh reconstruction of the same days on the right.

slain. Captain Pipe's mother was wounded but escaped.

It is also noteworthy that Knight and Simon Girty were acquainted before the Sandusky Expedition, although whether theirs was a friendship cannot be said from available evidence. Certainly a mutual respect existed, judging from their behavior. Before the fighting at Sandusky, the doctor saved Girty from being shot by a militiaman during a parley with Crawford under a flag of truce (Draper MSS 10 E 155-56, 16 S 271).

20 Draper MSS 11 C 62, 10 E 147, 8 J 177/178, 16 S 268, 17 S 205, 5 BB 112 and 119. See also George W. Hill, *The Captivity of Jonathan Alder by the Ohio Shawnees, 1782* (1877), 21 at the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, Fremont, Ohio; and Logan Esarey, "Indian Captives in Early Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History* 9 (1913): 107-08.

21 Brackenridge, *Indian Atrocities*, 23-24.

22 Draper MSS 10 E 147, 17 S 191-92, 11 CC 267; *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 19 (Jan. 1911): 71. The confusion of Simon Girty with his brother, James, appears to have originated with Doctor Knight rather than the editor, Brackenridge. Before the torture began, Crawford asked Simon Girty to shoot him to which Simon replied that he "dared not" lest he forfeit his life. While being tortured, Crawford again appealed for a mercy-shot, this time of James who responded as stated in the narrative. In Knight's recounting, James' reply was attributed to Simon.

23 Brackenridge, *Indian Atrocities*, 47-48; Draper MSS 5 BB 112; Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio* (Newark, 1899) 1:909.

KNIGHT

BROWN

Friday, June 7

Endeavoring to overtake his retreating troops, Crawford (accompanied by Knight, "Capt. Biggs," "Lieutenant Ashley," and two unnamed militiamen) follows a road eastward. Delaware Indians leap from ambush and capture Crawford and Knight. The other men escape. The captives are taken to a nearby Indian camp.

Knight's account is essentially accurate. Evidence now identifies the "Lieutenant Ashley" as En. Hankerson Ashby of Dean's Company, and one of the unnamed militiamen as Priv. James Mitchell of Biggs' Company.²⁴

Saturday, June 8

Nothing is recorded for this day in the published narrative.

Crawford, Knight, and six other soldiers are held captive throughout this day at "Wingenund's Camp." Eight Chippewa braves arrive with two more captives — Michael Walters and Christopher Coffman of Beason's Company — but leave abruptly lest their captives be stolen from them by excited Delawares.²⁵ Five Delawares later come into the camp with scalps, an occurrence that Brackenridge locates a day later in his published narrative.

Sunday, June 9

"On Sunday evening five Delawares . . . brought back to the camp, where we lay, Captain Biggs' and Lieutenant Ashley's scalps, . . . they also brought in Biggs' horse and mine, they told us the other two men got away from them."

All the captives but Crawford are taken under guard to Old Wyandot Town and held overnight. Crawford is escorted to the Half King's Town to see Simon Girty. The renegade tells Crawford that the Delawares are enraged over the Gnadenhütten massacre. Crawford denies involvement in it. Crawford asks if Girty can ransom him, saying he will divulge military intelligence in exchange for his freedom, but nothing less will pry the information from him. Girty replies that he will try to ransom him, but urges Crawford to attempt an escape that night, offering assistance. Crawford is fatigued and discouraged, and will not

24 Parker B. Brown, "Compilation of Notes on Western Revolutionary War Militia and Wood Rangers Associated with the Sandusky Expedition of 1782," 1:27-28, unpublished typescript; and pension declaration, "Mitchell, James, Va. Elizabeth. R.7270," National Archives.

25 Walters, *Journal*, 183.

make the attempt. Nevertheless Girty gives assurance that he will do all he can to save Crawford. The meeting ends with this, and Crawford is confined for the night at the Half King's Town.

Monday, June 10

The captives are paraded en route to "Sandusky." Eleven prisoners are accompanied by seventeen guards initially, but soon Crawford and two braves leave the column for the Half King's Town where Crawford is permitted to see Simon Girty. Knight and the remaining captives reach Old Wyandot Town by nightfall.

Captain Pipe comes to Old Wyandot Town in the morning. He paints the faces of captives there black. When Crawford rejoins the prisoners, his face is blackened also. The march northward is resumed, during which four captives are slain separately on the road and five more together when an unnamed village is reached. Crawford and Knight, however, are kept separate under guard. They endure a gauntlet,²⁶ and then continue to Pipe's Town where, in the evening, Crawford goes before a council for judgment. Girty, as an interpreter, pleads for Crawford's life, but a shower of condemnation falls upon the officer. He is accused of participating in the Gnadenhütten massacre. This he denies vigorously, declaring that he "very much favored the Indians at the Mahoning salt licks," an admission that immediately self-incriminates.²⁷ A storm of angry denunciation again breaks upon Crawford as Captain Pipe's relatives recognize Crawford as part of the militia force that attacked Delawares during the Squaw Campaign. Girty now pleads anew for the life of his friend, offering more and more ransom. He is informed that Crawford can be spared only if he, Girty, will take his place at the stake. Girty falls silent, and judgment is passed upon Crawford — death by fire.

Tuesday, June 11

Crawford is returned to the captives at Old Wyandot Town, and the faces of all are blackened. Under guard the

In the afternoon, the two captives are escorted from Pipe's Town to the ceremonial area, a grove of oaks.

²⁶ A gauntlet refers to an Iroquoian practice of having captives run between two lines of people who attempt to hit or burn them.

²⁷ Draper MSS 4 S 185.

captives start the parade northward past an unnamed village toward Pipe's Town. Four captives are killed separately on the road, and a group of five is killed by squaws and young boys outside the village. Crawford and Knight, however, are kept separate from the others and survive. Both have brief encounters with Girty when the march resumes.²⁹

At the stake, Crawford is stripped. Captain Pipe makes a speech. Crawford's ears are cut off, and firebrands and burning gun powder are applied to his body from neck to foot. Crawford begs Simon Girty to shoot him, but Girty says he has no gun and laughs. Girty then approaches the doctor, swearing that he too will suffer death "in all its extremities." He tries to engage in conversation, but the doctor ignores him.³¹ Meanwhile, Crawford prays.

The torture goes on for nearly two hours before Crawford collapses. "They then scalped him and repeatedly threw the scalp in my face, telling me 'that was my great captain.'" An old squaw shovels hot coals on Crawford's head and back, and Indians stand him on his feet. He "seemed more insensible of pain than before." At this point Knight is led away to Pipe's Town.

Several hundred Indians already mill about as preparations are completed at the stake. Crawford prays.²⁸

Simon Girty once more appeals to Captain Pipe, promising additional ransom. "Say one more word," the chief warns, "and I will make another stake to burn you." Girty says no more.

After a speech by Captain Pipe, Crawford's ears are cut off and the torture with fire commences. English traders arrive, summoned by Simon Girty to help save Crawford. They are too late — Crawford is beyond saving.³⁰

Seeing Simon Girty in the crowd, Crawford pleads to be shot. Girty replies that he dare not. As it is, he is threatened by angry Indians. He chooses to leave rather than to continue watching.

Turning to James Girty, Crawford appeals to him only to be mocked. After nearly two hours he sprawls exhausted in the ashes. The apostate Moravian Delaware, Joseph, leaps forward to scalp him.³² An Old Cherokee Squaw then heaps hot coals on Crawford's head and back, and he is made to stand and walk again around the stake as the torture resumes.³³ Knight is now led away to Pipe's Town. Craw-

28 The prayer ("besought the Almighty to have mercy on his soul, spoke very low") is placed by the editor where it is in the printed narrative for maximum literary effect. Skutash, a Wyandot guard and spectator, related later that Crawford prayed at the stake before the ritual torture began — "talked much God and all the time looking up" (Shellhouse letter, C. W. Butterfield Scrapbooks, Series 3, Number 8:70, Western Reserve Historical Society).

29 Here in the narrative Simon Girty is pictured as verbally abusing Doctor Knight ("called me a damned rascal"). This abuse has all the earmarks of being an editorial interpolation.

30 Draper MSS 11 E 5.

31 The lengthy monologue by Simon Girty at this point regarding patriot enemies ("ill will for Col. Gibson") appears to have been told by Knight after his return to Fort Pitt. The Girty speech is not particularly relevant to the events of the moment, and was probably inserted in the narrative by Brackenridge as "filler" and to stress Girty's being an American traitor.

32 David Zeisberger's diary (i, 431) as quoted by William E. Connelley (editor) in *A narrative of the mission of the United brethren among the Delaware and Mohegan Indians from its commencement in the year 1740 to the close of the year 1808 by John Heckewelder . . .* (Cleveland, 1907), 447.

33 Shellhouse letter, Butterfield Scrapbooks, Series 3, Number 8:71. William

ford finally falls a last time, and his body is dragged to a fire and burned. The crowd disperses at sundown.

We may be sure that *Doctor Knight's Narrative* was an immediate success in every way. Its depiction of a brave officer's death at the hands of fiendish savages drew wide admiration. Scenes of rolling landscape, gurgling brooks, and fertile soil delighted eastern land speculators and western squatter-farmers.³⁴ Though a year elapsed before the narrative was printed, the delay apparently did nothing to reduce its appeal. If anything, the delay probably increased public interest, for all the while the ballad, "Crawford's Defeat," was being sung.³⁵ Actually, the edited tale seems to have taken on a life of its own quite apart from the doctor's original experience, a phenomenon common to many of the captivity favorites. Wilcolm E. Washburn states of such literature: "Whether factual or fictitious, religious or secular, propagandistic or naive, [the captivities] gripped the imagination of their contemporary audiences. They were bought by the thousands and often read to pieces."³⁶

The newspaper debut of the captivity in 1783 was followed by American reprints that spanned more than eighty years.³⁷ The publication dates are revealing. Each publisher obviously strove to capitalize on the most recent Indian sensation. The *New Haven* (Connecticut) *Gazette*, for instance, carried the Knight captivity in 1788 when Indian raids on the Ohio frontier were increasing. Two reprints then appeared in Massachusetts between 1798 and 1813 when Tecumseh, the gifted Shawnee strategist, united many in the western tribes in armed opposition to the advancing Americans. The persistent friction between settler and Indian is reflected in the reprintings of 1822 (Lexington, Kentucky), 1843 (Nashville, Tennessee), and 1867 (Cin-

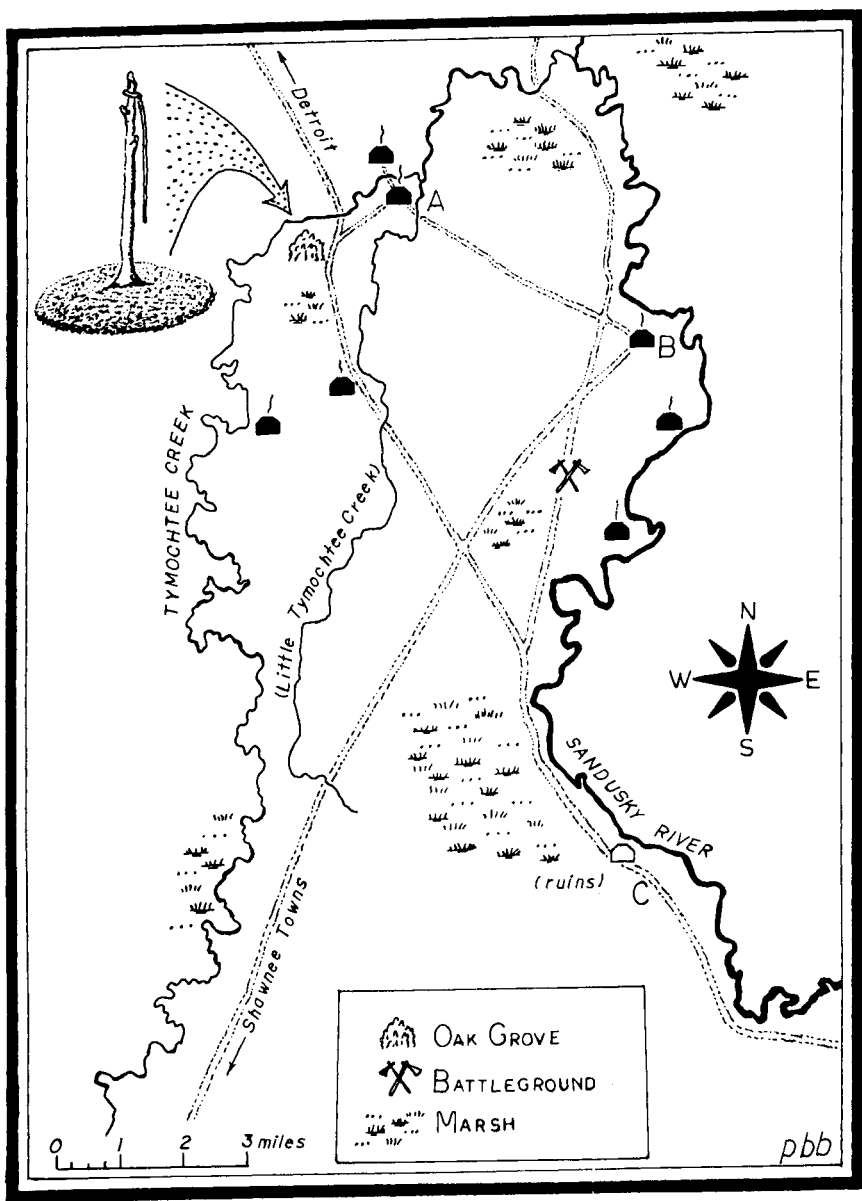
E. Connelley, *Provisional Government of Nebraska Territory and the Journals of William Walker* (Lincoln, 1899), 195, note 1.

³⁴ *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 42 (Apr. 1934) 2, 143-44; *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 43 (1934), 275-77; Russell J. Ferguson, *Early Western Pennsylvania Politics* (Pittsburgh, 1938), 13-15, 21-23, 32-33.

³⁵ Parker B. Brown, "'Crawford's Defeat': A Ballad," *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 64 (Oct. 1981): 311-12, 316.

³⁶ Vaughan, *Narratives of North American Indian Captivity*, lii-liii.

³⁷ Charles Evans' *American Biography* 6 (1941): Item 17883 states that there was a London edition also, but R. W. G. Vail asserts that "we have never heard of a copy" (*The Voice of the Old Frontier* [New York, 1970 reprint], 444).



Map of the Sandusky Towns in 1782 including Pipe's Town (A), Half King's Town (B), and the Old Wyandot Town ruins (C). Only relevant waterways and travel arteries are shown (map drawn by author).

cinnati, Ohio). At each juncture, Indian-white violence filled news headlines: bitter clashes in the Old Northwest (Ohio) and in Oregon, the Minnesota Sioux Uprising, the Chivington Massacre, and finally Custer's attack upon the Southern Cheyenne under Black Kettle. With each new crisis, another army of avid readers was recruited. Not until after the Civil War did a reprint of Knight's narrative fail to sell out.³⁸

To say then, that the impact of this captivity was considerable is to understate the enthusiasm of its recipients. Editors of other captivities were so envious of *Doctor Knight's Narrative* that they incorporated portions of it into their own productions, despite the fact that their hero or heroine never had contact with either Crawford or Knight. The narrative of Mary Jemison is an example of this manipulation, and one version of Margaret Handley Erskin's memoirs is another.³⁹

The narrative of Doctor Knight contributed significantly to the feud-like circumstances that prevailed throughout the Old Northwest in the late 1700s and early 1800s. For example, when whites penetrated previously hostile territory, indiscriminate vengeance exacted upon Indians was rampant. Hunters preceding and following surveying teams in Ohio remembered well "Bloody '82." Indian men identified as having fought at Sandusky and tortured Crawford were singled out for special treatment during Wayne's military triumph at Fallen Timbers. Judging from reports gathered by Lyman Copeland Draper, it is possible that as many warriors, if not more, perished from ambush as from the white man's liquor and diseases. Tutelu, the Delaware from whom Doctor Knight escaped, was stalked and killed by tavern patrons at Zanesville in 1803.⁴⁰ It is remarkable that Captain Pipe was never assassinated for his part in the death of Crawford.⁴¹

It was the narrative's unabashed stereotyping of enemies, however, that in the long run wrought devastating effects upon the traditional foes of the United States. The repeated printings indelibly etched upon many minds the picture of Indians as deceitful, carnage-prone,

38 Vail, *The Voice*, 314-15, 443-44.

39 James E. Seaver, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (New York, 1956), 190-97; Draper MSS 8 ZZ 30.

40 A. J. Baughman, *History of Richland County, Ohio* (Chicago, 1908) 1:145; Draper MSS 9 S 103.

41 Draper MSS 15 E 66. "Old Captain Pipe" survived the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794, attended the Indian feast at Greentown (present-day Ashland County, Ohio) in 1811, and according to the best evidence, died peacefully in Canada in his seventies about 1813-1814.

and cruel. Earlier in his writings, Brackenridge scoffed at the European idealization of native Americans as innocent flower children skipping benignly about the American wilderness. To him, Indians were "animals" deserving of extermination. They were incapable of negotiating peace treaties in good faith. What right had savages to hold any territory as their own when they persisted in leaving the land uncleared of forest and untilled? While his attitude toward Indians changed a few years later, this negative view dominated his editing of Knight's narrative and became an almost universally-held opinion.⁴²

Largely because of the editing, the writing stereotyped the American loyalist as much as the Indian. At the close of the Revolution, the spoils (as in all wars) belonged to the victors, including the privilege of recording who did what and why. The victorious therefore seem without blemish, and the vanquished without redeeming trait. In contrast to such biased treatment, Howard Swiggett in more recent times has approached the subject of American loyalists without resorting to tar and feathers or whitewash. "Our enemies in the Revolution," he reasons, "were human fellows, but little different from the run of patriots, with much the same motives and hopes. They were not all murderers. We were not all Galahads."⁴³

The figure of Col. Crawford in the narrative is also stereotypical. This is not to deny that he was physically strong, courageous, and religiously devout, but only to admit that these qualities were accentuated to the exclusion of others less attractive in order to represent him as the pioneer soldier without peer. Thus are heroes born, and Brackenridge was a skilled midwife. Because of his editing, Crawford attained in death a stature that, had he survived the expedition, he surely would not have enjoyed. For an accurate, balanced assessment of Crawford, the officer's fitness report prepared by Lt. John Rose after the campaign is "must" reading.⁴⁴

42 In 1785, Brackenridge in a Pittsburgh court defended an Indian accused of murdering two white men, a decision that so angered frontiersmen that they threatened to storm the jail and lynch the accused while he was awaiting his trial. An account sympathetic to the Indian was printed soon after, "The Trial of Mamachtaga," in which readers were subtly led to recognize in the Indian some civilized qualities and in the white spectators a fundamental savagery. Brackenridge was the author.

43 Howard Swiggett, *War Out of Niagara* (New York, 1933), vii-viii, xx.

44 John Rose, *Journal of a Volunteer Expedition to Sandusky, from May 24 to June 13, 1782* (New York, 1969), 293. For an earlier impression of Crawford's performance as an officer, see the manuscript letterbox of Colonel Daniel Brodhead (Fort Pitt commandant 1778-1781) at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

To summarize what has been learned, it is apparent from the analysis and reconstruction that the factual yield in *Doctor Knight's Narrative* is less than historians have traditionally supposed. Concerning Crawford's captivity, more of historical significance has been hidden than revealed.

How much of a discrepancy between fact and fantasy is present in other printed captivities is impossible to say. Comparable analyses of individual narratives do not exist, at least to my knowledge. The need for such studies, where sufficient data permit, is great. Otherwise "the tendency, even among professional scholars, to accept stereotypes, to copy uncritically from previous works when a reinvestigation of the sources is called for" will continue to leave mysteries unsolved and history uncorrected.⁴⁵ As Francis Paul Prucha has wisely said, accurate knowledge is the first requisite for credible research.

History is a legitimate scholarly discipline, whose purpose is to reconstruct the past as accurately as the intelligence of the historian and the fullness of historical sources permit. Its purpose is to supply enlightenment, understanding, and perspective and to provide sound information on which balanced judgments can be based.⁴⁶

Captivity narratives deserve such dedicated scrutiny. ■

⁴⁵ Prucha is quoted from his 1972 address ("Doing Indian History") to the National Archives Conference on Research in the History of Indian-White Relations (Prucha, *Indian Policy in the United States* [Lincoln, 1981], 8).

⁴⁶ Prucha, *Indian Policy*, 5, 6.