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The Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania

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THE FRONTIER FORTS OF PENNSYLVANIA.<sup>1</sup>

These volumes embody the result of the investigations of a Commission appointed by the Governor under an Act of Assembly, passed in 1893, providing for ascertaining the sites of the Provincial forts. Their publication will prove a very important aid to the study of our Provincial history. They are valuable not only because they tell us why the Provincial map of the State along the Blue Mountains and on the frontier farther westward is dotted with fortified posts to secure each eligible position, and because they tell us what service these posts rendered, but also because they refute the commonly received opinion that the Quakers, who were supposed to have held a majority in the Assembly prior to the Revolution, refused to erect forts or raise troops for the defence of the inhabitants of the frontier against the hostile French and Indians. It is time that the truth in this matter should be known, and we may well forgive the poor printing and the still poorer binding in which the result of the labors of this Commission is preserved in consideration of the great value of the material for our State history, which it for the first time has made accessible.

It would appear from these volumes that, so far from the Province having been defenceless during the French and Indian wars, that there were erected during the campaigns of 1755-58, and that of 1763 (Pontiac's war), no less than two hundred and seven forts, large and small, on the frontier by the order and at the expense of the Assembly of the Province, and that these were garrisoned by troops in its pay.

This statement is so greatly at variance with that made in a petition presented in 1756 to the English Board of Trade and signed by some of the most respectable inhabitants of Phil-

<sup>1</sup> "Report of the Commission to Locate the Sites of the Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania." Two volumes. State Printer, 1896.

adelphia, which asserts that the Colony was then in "a naked and defenceless state, and that it had not armed a single man, nor at the public expense provided a single fortification," that it calls for a careful scrutiny.

The Governor appointed a Commission, under the Act, of men of high character, who from long experience had become experts in business of this sort, and whose investigations might bear the stamp of official verity. These gentlemen were John M. Buckalew, Sheldon Reynolds, Henry M. M. Richards, J. G. Weiser, and George Dallas Albert. They divided the territory for exploration and survey into five distinct sections. They seem to have been most careful in their search for the sites of the forts, each one having had charge of the account of a distinct portion of the territory occupied by these posts, and each has given the story not merely of the location, size, and character of the forts in his district, but also of the circumstances which made them memorable by their connection with the defence of the frontier. Of the more important forts, as well as of many of the block-houses and their surroundings, elaborate plans and maps are given, so that nothing is wanting to enable us to form a correct idea of the chain of posts which guarded the frontier and their dependence upon each other, and the manner in which, when in charge of competent garrisons, they served as barriers to the incursions of the savages. It will be observed, on examining these maps, that this chain of forts formed two distinct barriers to an enemy coming from the west, the outer one guarding what was the frontier against the French, in 1763, along the east bank of the Ohio (Allegheny) River from Kittanning to the southwestern corner of the State, and the other extending along the Kittatinny Hills, or Blue Mountains, from Easton to the Susquehanna at Harrisburg. The latter, or interior, line was specially intended to guard against Indian raids. Between the outer or western line and that on the Blue Mountains was another chain of forts, of which the principal were Lowther at Carlisle, Morris and Franklin at Shippensburg, Granville at Lewistown, Shirley and Littleton at Bed-

ford, and Loudoun in Franklin County. The frontier was thus guarded by these three lines in Pontiac's war in 1763, and, although the posts were in reasonable proximity to each other, it was found impossible, notwithstanding the efforts of their garrisons, to prevent many murders by the Indians of the inhabitants scattered around them. Other colonies besides Pennsylvania were, unfortunately, in the same condition. Virginia lost more by Indian murders than ourselves, and, with all their efforts, the inhabitants on the New England frontiers suffered greatly, as is well known, from scalping Indians.

The Indian war broke out shortly after Braddock's defeat, in July, 1755, and the first murderous raids of the savages occurred at various times from October, 1755, and during the year 1756. The settlements along the Blue Mountains were, as we have said, very much scattered, and the miserable habitants fell victims to the merciless savages even when forts intended for their protection were not far distant from their habitations. The hope of their serving as places of refuge to those who were exposed had been one of the chief reasons for their establishment. The forts, in this respect, do not seem to have answered the expectations of those who erected them. It must not be forgotten that the incursions of the Indians which were on the most extensive scale and the most successful were made at points not far distant from some of the principal forts, the invaders not being deterred by the defence they presented. Thus, the attack upon the Harris party was made at a point not far from Fort Hunter; that upon Gnadenhütten, near Fort Allen and Fort Norris; and that upon Tulpehocken, at a point near Fort Northkill. At this time—that is, in the early part of the Indian war—the Province had two regiments, amounting to eleven hundred men, in commission,—the one commanded by Dr. Franklin, on the northeastern frontier, and the other by Conrad Weiser,—besides a large number of men composing the garrisons of the different posts. The cost of these fortifications on the frontier was said to have been more than eighty thousand pounds, and the equipment and subsistence

of the men necessarily a large sum. One reason, perhaps, of the ill success of the Provincial troops in protecting the inhabitants was the want of a proper discipline and training of the soldiers. It was the opinion of those who had had the longest experience in Indian warfare that the troops should not have been cooped up in garrisons, but should have been employed as rangers, and kept actively engaged in patrolling the exposed districts. The forts formed a barrier, however, which neither the French nor the Indians ever could pass so as to retain a permanent footing to the eastward. They seem to have failed in accomplishing the end for which they were built, owing to the peculiar mode of warfare adopted by the Indians.

The story of the employment of the Provincial troops and the methods which were adopted to secure money for their pay and subsistence forms one of the most interesting chapters in our Provincial history, and one which embodies, perhaps, more fully than any other the nature and outcome of the perpetual dispute between the Proprietary and the Assembly of the Province as to their respective rights and powers in the government of the Province. The unexpected result of Braddock's expedition had driven the inhabitants of the Province—not merely those on the frontier (at that time hardly more than a hundred miles from the chief city), but also throughout the whole Province—into a panic which demanded efficient and immediate armed protection. A controversy had long existed between the Governor (Morris) and the Assembly on fundamental questions in regard to their respective powers which it became necessary to settle without delay, in order to ascertain to which of the two departments of government—the executive or the legislative—the power of raising and equipping an army and of providing money for their pay and subsistence belonged. Of course, all parties agreed that something should be done to protect the inhabitants on the frontier made defenceless by the defeat of Braddock, and the only question between the Governor, supported by the Proprietary party, and those who opposed the measures proposed by him to prevent further incursions of

the Indians was, that the Governor proposed that the troops should form a Provincial militia, over which the Provincial authorities—that is, the Governor and his friends—should have complete control, especially in the appointment of all the officers, and that the money for their pay and equipment should be raised by a tax, from the payment of which the Proprietary estates should be exempted; while their opponents contended that the military force should be composed of volunteers, and that the tax imposed to raise money to support them should be levied upon all the estates in the Province, those of the Proprietaries *not* excepted.

The defeat of Braddock occurred on the 10th of July, 1755. On the arrival of the news at Philadelphia, the Governor, on July 26, convened the Assembly. On the second day of the session the Assembly granted an aid to the Crown of fifty thousand pounds, to be repaid by a tax upon all the estates in the Province, including those of the Proprietaries. The Governor insisted that the latter should be exempt, but the Assembly was obstinate, resting upon its rights under the charter, and insisting that it taxed the Proprietaries' estates as private and not as official property. These discussions caused great delay. Various schemes were proposed to induce the Governor to agree to the action of the Assembly, when, on November 22, 1755, the Proprietaries in England having sent word that if the Assembly would refrain from taxing their estates they would make the Province a present of five thousand pounds, the bill granting fifty thousand pounds for the use of the Crown and exempting the Proprietary estates from taxation was at last passed. It would appear, therefore, that the Assembly was perfectly willing to vote a general tax for this purpose, but that the Proprietaries—by far the largest private landholders in the Province—had instructed their Governor not to agree to any laws, no matter how essential to the safety of the Province they might be, by which the returns from their lands might be lessened.

At the same time was passed "An act for the better ordering and regulating such as are willing and desirous of

being united for military purposes." This act was also very distasteful to the Governor, who desired that a compulsory militia bill should be enacted giving him the sole power of the appointment of the officers and of the disbursement of the money provided for military purposes. However, the Assembly persisted, and the Governor was obliged to depend upon such a military force as the Assembly could be induced to give him. We are told in the petition, to which we have referred, of certain members of the Proprietary party in Pennsylvania, which was argued before the Lords of Trade on the 26th of February, 1756, that notwithstanding these acts adopted by the Assembly, "that Pennsylvania is the only one of the Colonies which has not armed a single man, nor at the public expense provided a single fortification to shelter the unhappy inhabitants from the continual inroads of a merciless enemy." This statement is the basis of the old calumny against the Assembly. And yet on the *3d of February, 1756*, Governor Morris, the deputy and agent of the Penns during the whole course of this dispute, sent a message to the Assembly in which he says "that everything possible (of course by virtue of these acts) had been done for the security of the Province, that a chain of forts and block-houses extending from the River Delaware along the Kittatinny Hills to the Maryland line was then almost complete, that they were placed at the most important passes, at convenient distances, and were all garrisoned with detachments in the pay of the Province, and he believed, in case the officers and men posted in them did their duty, they would prove a protection against such parties as had hitherto appeared on their borders."

And yet the Board of Trade had the hardihood to declare that the measures taken by the Assembly for the defence of the Province were improper, inadequate, and ineffectual! It may be that the persons who signed this petition, when they affixed their names to it, sincerely believed that the state of the Province was so deplorable that it justified the request made in the petition that the Quakers should be disqualified from sitting any longer as members of the

Assembly, because they would not vote for warlike measures; but on the 26th of February, 1756, when the Penns, their agents and lawyers in London, must have known that the allegations in the petition had been proved false by the event, it is hard to understand what defence can be made for imposing such absurd falsehoods on the Board of Trade.

The Board, misled by such statements, was forced to conclude "that there was no cause to hope for other measures while the majority of the Assembly consisted of persons whose avowed principles were against military service." This allegation, equally unfounded with that concerning the inadequacy of the measures adopted by the Assembly for the defence of the Province, leads to the inquiry how far the Quakers were concerned in the legislation of that period.

While many Quakers have, as is well known, conscientious scruples against bearing arms for any purpose, yet it is equally well known that on many occasions in the history of the Province they voted, while members of the Assembly, large sums for the "King's use,"—that is, for purposes more or less of a military character. At this particular crisis they voted for the "Supply Bill" granting fifty-five thousand pounds; ten thousand pounds to supply General Braddock's forces, and the same sum to be expended in provisions for the New York and New England forces under General Shirley at Crown Point. Although the Quakers did not hesitate to proclaim their well-known principles in regard to war at this time, and although they had a very deep conviction of the wrong done to the Delawares and Shawanees by the Proprietary government, they were not able to induce the Assembly to adopt their views, that body having indefinitely postponed a proposition to delay, at least, a war against these tribes. It is not to be forgotten, too, that it was owing to the kindly intervention and conciliation of these people that peace with the Indians was at last secured. But the conduct of the Quakers, for another reason, deserves credit rather than reproach from those who urged that the Indians should be crushed by force of arms.



A number of them voluntarily quitted their seats in the Assembly of 1756. The most scrupulous among them did not desire to be concerned in the war declared by the Governor against the Delawares and Shawanees, but they were not disposed to obstruct military measures in time of war. Hence a number of them voluntarily gave up their seats in 1756, others requested their friends not to vote for them at the ensuing election; nor did any Quaker stand as a candidate or request any one to vote for him at that election. Four Quakers were nevertheless chosen, but they refused to serve. The result was that in a House composed of thirty-six members, there were but twelve Quakers, and they held the opinion that the government should be supported in defence of the country; so that the Quaker majority in the Assembly was then lost and, it may be added, was never regained.

Such is the true story of the line of defence along the Blue Mountains which our fathers established for the protection of those who dwelt on the frontiers. We have not space here to give an account of the forts in the western part of the State, which is the less needed because of the admirable history of them contained in the second volume of this book. We trust that we have shown that our fathers did not allow their fellow-subjects on the frontier to perish by Indian raids for want of such aid as their money could give them, and that the Quakers especially are chargeable with no such cold-blooded cruelty.