

Ewing Settlers of Southwestern Pennsylvania Part 6: Life on the Frontier: Frontiersmen and 'Boyz II Men'

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The Early Frontier

In the mid-to-late-eighteenth century, the western lands of Pennsylvania – roughly from Erie south though Pittsburgh to the border with West Virginia and then west into the Ohio Valley – were a hunting ground for the Six Nations of the Iroquois.¹ Game was plentiful in the dense forests: wolves, bear, mountain lions, elk and antelope. Medicinal oils were readily obtained from the area's geese, rattlesnakes, wild game and skunks. Medicinal herbs could easily be obtained from Sassafras, Snakeroot, Dogwood and the bark of several trees. There were large groves of tasty-fruit plants and trees – Wild Plum, Wild Cherry, Papaw, Crab Apple among others – and nut-bearing trees – Oaks, Hickory, Walnut etc.

The region was populated – very sparsely – by people from many heritages. Seneca had long resided in the area as keepers of the 'western door' on behalf of the Six Nations of the Iroquois. They protected the area from incursions by the Indians living in the Great Lakes region to the west.

The French claimed sovereignty by right of discovery, not only to connect their Canadian and Louisiana settlements but also as a source of pelts for their fur trade. They built forts in the area and established small settlements.

Refugee Indians from the east also resided in the area. The Iroquois had conquered the Delaware (Lenni Lenape) who primarily resided in New Jersey but also to the north into New York. The Iroquois had permitted the Shawnee to join the Delaware when the Shawnee were driven out of the Georgia-to-Florida area by the Cherokee and Catawba. The Delaware and Shawnee migrated to western Pennsylvania when the Iroquois sold² their east-coast land to the British and told the Delaware and Shawnee to "Go West."

Shawnee refugees established the village of Logstown about twenty miles downriver (west) from Pittsburgh along the Ohio. The French added several log cabins with stone chimneys. It was, however, a rather small settlement comprising thirty or so cabins and only slightly more Indian dwellings. Logstown became a major trade and council site.

The Mingo were a small group who migrated from the north – significant because of their role in the subsequent start of the French and Indian War (see below) and because one of the major trails that crisscrossed the area was named after them.³ They were Iroquois who migrated to the area in the mid-

¹ Originally, five New England tribes comprised the Iroquois League – Seneca, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Mohawk. The Tuscarora subsequently joined the League, and the collective became known as the Six Nations.

² Indians did not – and still do not – believe in land ownership. To them, land is for everyone to share and revere. But the Iroquois soon learned, and capitalized upon, the concept of land ownership when they found that the immigrants were willing to trade valuable goods for land.

³ The Mingo Trail passes very close to the land along Robinson's Run settled by Squire James Ewing (1732-1825).

eighteenth century. The English called them *mingos*, a corruption of *mingwe*, an Algonquin word meaning 'stealthy' or 'treacherous'.

In addition to the mix of French and Indians, trappers and traders travelled back and forth to support the eastern market for beaver, and other fur, pelts. The trappers' presence is reflected in the names of several runs – small creeks – along which they worked: Pinkerton's Run, Campbell's Run, Robinson's Run and Riddle's Run among them. Inter-marriage led to half-breed trappers and hunters who resided in the area.

There was a very high degree of camaraderie, bonhomie amongst the area's French, transient trappers/traders, resident half-breeds, Seneca, Delaware, Shawnee and Mingo. The Indians trusted neither each other nor the non-Indians. But tolerance was high, helped along by various Indian councils, and there were few, if any, conflicts. The French did much to foster the general 'sense of peace' by not displacing the native residents and by respecting their customs and values.

Then came the worldwide Seven Years' War (1756-1763). It actually started in America – specifically in the Pittsburgh area – in 1754. As previously indicated, the French claimed the Mississippi and Ohio valleys both to support their valuable fur trade and as a right-of-passage corridor between their colonies to the north, in Canada, and to the south, in Louisiana. The British claimed regions along the coast and considered these claims to extend without limit to the west. They, too, looked to the west to support their blossoming fur trade as well as their perception of what 'colonization' meant. Conflicts inevitably resulted.

Assaults on each other's forts led to heightened sensitivities, indignation and strong feelings between the British and the French. In 1754, Robert Dinwiddie, the British Lieutenant Governor of Virginia, sent George Washington to the region with a gentlemanly but stern request for the French to leave the Ohio Valley Area.⁴ The French did not feel "obliged to obey",⁵ pointing out that they had explored and claimed the area nearly a century earlier. Washington's sole accomplishment on this western excursion was to liaise with a small band of Mingo who, for various reasons and unlike many of the area's other Indian residents, hated the French.

In response to the French rejection, Dinwiddie sent a platoon⁶ to the area to establish a stockade as a base from which to expel the French. The platoon built the stockade on the site of the subsequent Fort Pitt at the confluence of the Allegheny, Ohio and Monongahela Rivers. The stockade was attacked by the French, and the British were over-run and allowed to retreat.⁷ Dinwiddie also sent George Washington with a larger contingent⁸ to support the first-on-the-scene platoon. Washington found the

⁴ Virginia and Pennsylvania both considered the southwestern Pennsylvania area surrounding Pittsburgh to be within the westward extension of their colonies. This later led to conflicts when both colonies issued, first, warrants and, later, patents for the land. Much to the credit of the settlers, these conflicts were much more often than not resolved by congenial negotiation and a handshake.

⁵ Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_and_Indian_War)

⁶ Platoon: 75-200 soldiers led by a Lieutenant.

⁷ Allowing a defeated adversary to retreat was a major principle of the European, gentlemanly style of warfare. In contrast, Indians, when they won a battle, would massacre any enemy combatants left living.

⁸ I am not totally sure, but this contingent was probably a company comprised of several platoons. If so, George Washington would have been considered a Lieutenant Colonel; at least he was a Lieutenant who commanded Lieutenants who, in turn, commanded their platoons.

stockade deserted and re-connected with the Mingo. With a small group of soldiers and the Mingo, Washington approached a French scouting party. The exchange between the French and Washington (the British) was gentlemanly as was the practice in European-style warfare.⁹

The Mingo, however, did not subscribe to the British style of warfare. They set upon the French and massacred and scalped them, perhaps out of hatred, perhaps in an attempt to impress the British with their allegiance, most certainly because that was their way of conducting guerrilla-style warfare, well-honed through many engagements between Indian tribes for many decades. Thus began the French and Indian War.

The Seneca, Delaware and Shawnee readily sided with the French. They had, after all, been repeatedly displaced by the British from various regions. Spurred on by the French, and incentivized by bounties (typically \$100) for scalps,¹⁰ the Indians fiercely and frequently attacked the British.

On the other hand, the Scots-Irish, among others, sided with the British. This included many Scots-Irish from the Upper Chesapeake Bay area who subsequently settled the southwestern Pennsylvania area. The Scots-Irish rejected the British gentlemanly and canon-based warfare style which had led to the spectacular defeat of Braddock's forces at the Battle of the Monongahela.¹¹ The Scots-Irish, instead, fought Indian-style with small, mobile squads¹² infiltrating an area, attacking the enemy from the shelter of trees or the high-ground in gullies, and then scattering (but not retreating) in many directions, eventually to re-group at some pre-identified location.

This guerilla-warfare style has been extensively described with respect to Rogers' Rangers, a 'rapidly deployable light infantry force tasked with reconnaissance and conducting special operations against distant targets',¹³ To my knowledge, none of the Upper Chesapeake Bay-area Scots-Irish fought with Rogers' Rangers.¹⁴ But they certainly learned, probably through terrifying experience, many of the same tactics.¹⁵

I have tried but have found nothing in the surviving records about the involvement of the Scots-Irish, or, more specifically, my Scots-Irish ancestors, in the French and Indian War. Therefore, let me fast-forward to the end of this war. The French and Indian War started to wind down, with British victories

⁹ This and other aspects of the French and Indian War are well-treated in PBS's excellent video *The War That Made America*. Go to shopPBS.org to purchase this excellent, insightful video. Alternatively, watch for a rerun on your local PBS station.

¹⁰ It appears, however, that very few bounties were actually paid for scalps. [Eckert, Allan W. *That Dark and Bloody River*, Bantam Books, 1996.]

¹¹ Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Braddock_expedition)

¹² Squad: At most around ten-to-twelve men and often less than a handful of men.

¹³ Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rogers_rangers)

¹⁴ During the French and Indian War, Rogers' Rangers fought in the New England theater, primarily in western New York. They subsequently participated, in 1763/1764, in the response to Pontiac's Rebellion which was partially fought in the southwestern Pennsylvania area. I have not found, however, that any Upper Chesapeake Bay-area Scots-Irish (at least none of my ancestors) were ever part of a Rogers' Rangers corps.

¹⁵ Robert Rogers developed a list of twenty-eight *Rules of Rangers* as a training manual. The manual makes for quite interesting reading and provides many insights into the frontier-warfare style which emulated the Indian-warfare style. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rangers_Standing_Orders.

outweighing French defeats, toward the end of 1762. The French and Indian War (and the Seven Years War) was officially concluded by the Treaty of Paris in February 1763.

With the treaty's signing – with the 'scratch of a pen'¹⁶ – the complexion of Pennsylvania's western lands changed quite dramatically, literally overnight. The land to the west of the Alleghenies, out to an unspecified point beyond Pittsburgh, was now in the hands of the British rather than the French.

The French were not entirely land-less however. They moved farther west into the Great Lakes region from where they encouraged the Indians to resist the British. The Indians became "savage allies, treacherously instigated by the French, [and] though professedly at peace with England, carried on a more furious and desolating war than ever against the frontier settlers."¹⁷

Thus began a thirty-year period in the history of Pennsylvania's western lands in general, and southwestern Pennsylvania in particular, during which settlers faced extreme, terrifying dangers in the course of establishing homesteads. The British had been awarded the land but, because their resources had been depleted by waging the French and Indian War (and the Seven Years' War in general), they concluded they could not protect settlers venturing west of the Alleghenies and prohibited settlement of the 'Indian Land' west of a Line of Demarcation that ran down the Appalachian ridges.

Settlement west of the demarcation line happened anyway, especially because Pittsburgh was an important gateway for shipping goods to and from the west and south, along first the Ohio and then the Mississippi River. Many settlers, Scots-Irish among them, migrated to the area and squatted, establishing tomahawk claims by marking the corners of their claims with notches in trees.¹⁸

Resistance first came with Pontiac's Rebellion, begun in mid-1763 and lasting, in the main, only nine months. After the end of the rebellion, settlement of the land was sporadic until the land west of the Alleghenies was officially opened for settlement in April 1769 as a result of the Treaty of Fort Stanwix.¹⁹

The Treaty of Fort Stanwix was signed at Fort Stanwix near Rome, N.Y., on November 5, 1768. ...

An agreement was reached with the Indians of the Six Nations, and their "nephews", the Delawares and the Shawnees, on a [boundary] line between the Indians and the Middle

¹⁶ Calloway, Colin G. *The Scratch of a Pen: 1763 and the Transformation of North America*, Oxford University Press, 2006.

¹⁷ Smith, Joseph (Editor). *Old Redstone or, Historical Sketches of Western Presbyterianism, its Early Ministers, its Perilous Times, and its First Records*, (Philadelphia) Lippincott, Gambo & Co., 1854, pg. 29. Available via Google's Books Project; go to books.google.com and search for 'old redstone joseph smith'. Also available for free download (PDF, 25MB) at www.archive.org/details/oldredstoneor00smit. A reprint is available for purchase from amazon.com. [Short Citation: *Smith - Redstone*]

Short Citations are used in later footnotes to refer back to full citations given in previous footnotes.

¹⁸ I have heard that descendants of early Washington, Pennsylvania, area settlers did not think all that kindly of George Washington. It appears that when the land was eventually opened for settlement, in 1769, Washington went out to the many thousands of acres he was awarded for his 'successes' in the French and Indian War, evicted the squatters, and then offered to sell back to them the land which they had homesteaded.

¹⁹ Eckman, Herbert Wm. *Treaty of Fort Stanwix in Armstrong County, Pa.*, 2008. See www.pa-roots.com/armstrong/landwarrantees/treatyoffortstanwix.html

Colonies. Within this [boundary] a purchase was made by the Proprietors of the Province of Pa. This purchase by the Penns was called at the time "The New Purchase". ...

The New Purchase was a large swath of land that ran from the northeast corner of the colony to the southeast corner. In present Armstrong county the northern [boundary] of the New Purchase, called "The Purchase Line" ran on a course North 80° West from Cherry Tree on the present eastern Indiana County Line westward to Kittanning entering Armstrong County near Sagamore. From Kittanning the [boundary] went down the Allegheny River to the Kiskiminetas River, then up the Kiskiminetas River to the present southeast corner of the present county. In 1769 the New Purchase area in present Armstrong County was assigned to Cumberland County, then to Bedford County when it was formed in 1771, and then to Westmoreland County when it was formed in 1773. Warrants for land in the present Armstrong County area can be found in one of those three counties depending on the warrant date. ...

The Feb. 3, 1769 advertisement for the opening of the Land Office in Philadelphia stated that applications would be received on April 3, 1769 for lands within the New Purchase area with the terms being a maximum acreage of three hundred acres at the rate of 5 Pounds sterling per 100 acres, surveys to be made and returned within six months, the whole purchase money to be paid in one payment, and the patent taken out within twelve months from date of application with interest and quit rent from six months after application date.

Officer's and Gentlemen's Applications were accepted before the general opening of the New Purchase area on April 3, 1769.

The Land Office in Philadelphia received 2,700-plus applications in a matter of a few weeks. It is estimated that within two years there were ten thousand homesteaders in the upper Ohio Valley, the area along the Ohio from Pittsburgh west, with settlement mostly to the south of the Ohio.

As can be expected, the Indians – both those residing in the area and those who considered the area to be their hunting ground – reacted very negatively. The French had been cordial, even benign, conquerors, claiming the area but not usurping land or making extensive settlements. The British were quite the opposite. They considered the land to be available to anyone from the coastal regions willing to obtain a warrant, establish a claim, have it surveyed, homestead the land, and pay for a patent showing ownership. With the settlers, and to protect them, came British forts. The Line of Demarcation was eliminated in 1769 but, in reality, it just gradually crept farther and farther west, first to the Ohio River, and then to similar, landform-defined, lines farther and farther west.²⁰

Indian resistance was sporadic and terrifying with frequent Indian raids resulting in extensive destruction to settlers' homes, cattle, horses and crops; the massacre and scalping of many settlers from babies to grandparents; and the taking of children, teens and mothers as captives, many of whom became subjects of Ancient Roman-style 'fun-and-game evenings' on the way back to the raiding Indian's

²⁰ Allan W. Eckert's extensive research has led to several historical novels that chronicle the history of the Ohio Valley before, during and after the French and Indian War. His *That Dark and Bloody River* (Bantam Books, 1996) is a summary of sorts; be warned that it is quite gory in spots and quite long, 880 pages. His other (equally long) books – among them: *The Frontiersman*, *A Sorrow in Our Heart*, *The Wilderness War*, *Wilderness Empire*, *The Conquerors* and *Twilight of Empire* – provide a wealth of well-researched, well-documented and well-explained information about the 1750-1800 history of the southwestern Pennsylvania area.

communities. Many descendants of these settlers – myself included – have contemporary and oral-history accounts of how stressful and terrifying this period was.²¹

Such was the state of affairs until 1793/1794 when hostilities between the Indians and the settlers finally, conclusively, ended. As reported in *The Pittsburgh Gazette*:

The Pittsburgh Gazette, Saturday, January 5, 1795. American Affairs. Stockbridge, Dec. 9.

A treaty is concluded between the United States and the Indians of the six nations. – A gentleman who late the place of treaty since its conclusion, has favored us with a copy of the principal articles of it: viz.

The United States relinquish all claim to the lands known by the Oneida, [Onondaga] and Cayuga reservations, and a tract of country bounded as follows – beginning at the North-West corner of a tract of land held by the six nations to Phelps and Gorham; thence [Westerly] along the South shore of lake Ontario, to Johnson's landing place; thence a straight line to the main fork of Stedman's creek, which empties into [the] Niagara river, above fort Slusher;²² thence down said creek to said river; thence along said river and the South shore of lake Erie, to the North East corner of a tract of land sold by the United States to the state of Pennsylvania; thence along the Eastern boundary of said tract South to the North line of Pennsylvania; thence East to the South-West corner of Phelps and Gorham's tract; thence Northwardly along the Western boundary of Phelps and Gorham's tract to the place of beginning.

The United States agree to pay the six nations an annuity forever of 4,500 dollars, and to deliver to them at this treaty 10,000 dollars worth of goods.

In confirmation of which, the six nations relinquish their claims to all other lands (within the United States) to the United States, and also grant the privilege of [wagon] road ... sort ... in ... of the creeks or [harbors] within their country.²³

For three decades – from 1763/1764 to 1793/1794 – Scots/Irish settlers of southwestern Pennsylvania had eked out a subsistence-level existence and faced all sorts of dangers from wild animals to disease to Indians raids. Why, you might ask? Most simply because they were Scots-Irish, constantly looking for

²¹ To be balanced: the settlers were often equally vicious. Witness, for example, the atrocious Clendenin Massacre (see *John Ewing and the Clendenin Massacre*, West Virginia Archives and History, available at www.WVCulture.org/history/settlement/clendeninmassacre01.html).

²² From Speirs, Harriet Strong. *A Brief Sketch of the Life of Louis Neeley, Sr.*, Privately Distributed Manuscript, 1935, available via Google Docs (go to docs.google.com and search for 'harriet strong speirs'): 'Fort Slusher' was the colloquial spelling of what was properly Fort Schlosser. This fort was the southern terminus of the portage road around Niagara Falls from Lewiston. The fort was located a few miles south of the present Niagara Falls, New York and across the river from the present Chippewa, Ontario. Until the western forts were given to the United States following the July treaty in 1769, Fort Schlosser was a British post. However, from 1769 it has been American.

²³ I inherited an original of this two-page issue of *The Pittsburgh Gazette* from my father in 1973. For thirty-plus years, I have puzzled over why this single issue of the *Gazette* – no other issues accompanied it – was important enough to have been saved with my family's documents and memorabilia. I looked at the many advertisements to see if they referred to anyone from my family; none did. I looked at the stories about events to see how they might relate to my family; there was no clear connection. It was just now that I realized that, most probably, this issue was important because of this item announcing the end of hostilities with the Indians. My ancestors could finally, at this point, live in relative peace, free from Indian raids.

relief from religious and government persecution and seeking an honest, good life based solely on their personal values, heritage, beliefs, maxims, strengths and pride.

Another good question is: How did they do it? How did they survive in the face of almost overwhelming odds? That is what this and subsequent articles are all about, starting, in this article, with some basics.

Frontier Survival

For one, the Scots-Irish survived by building forts here and there, one on my ancestor's, Squire James Ewing's, land.²⁴ These small forts were positioned so that no one had to dash more than about three miles whenever a Fort-Up alarm was shouted out to indicate an Indian raiding party in the neighborhood.

For two, the Scots-Irish survived by establishing a community protection service.²⁵

Although there was no legal compulsion to the performance of military duty, yet every man of full age and size was expected to do his full share of public service. If he did not do so, he was "hated out as a coward." Even the want of any article of war equipments, such as ammunition, a sharp, flint, a priming-wire, a scalping-knife, or tomahawk, was thought disgraceful. A man who, without a reasonable cause, failed to go on a scout or campaign when it came to his turn, met with an expression of indignation in the countenances of all his neighbors, and epithets of dishonor were fastened upon him without mercy.

This mode of chastisement was like [that used by] the Greeks. It was a public expression, in various ways, of a general sentiment of indignation against such as transgressed the moral maxims to which they belonged. This commonly resulted either in the reformation or banishment of the person against whom it was directed.

Further:

The athletic sports of running, jumping, and wrestling, were the pastimes of boys in common with men. A well-grown boy, at the age of twelve or thirteen years, was furnished with a small rifle and a shot-pouch. He then became a fort-soldier, and had his port-hole assigned to him. Hunting squirrels, turkeys, and raccoons, soon made him expert in the use of his gun.²⁶

For three, the Scots-Irish survived by falling back on the skills they learned, probably by participating in the French and Indian War, about how to fight the Indians on their own terms. The most capable fighters – Rangers, of whom my ancestor Squire James Ewing was one²⁷ – often risked life and limb to

²⁴ See www.ewingfamilyassociation.org/Project_SWPA_OtherInformation.html for a map showing this fort's location.

²⁵ *Smith - Redstone*, pp. 103-104.

²⁶ *Smith - Redstone*, p. 102.

²⁷ Circa 1780, [Squire James Ewing] was a Ranger in Washington Co, PA. – From Ardingner, Dennis. *Descendants of James Ewing, Squire*, 18 July 1998. "James Ewing ... appears as a Ranger in Washington County. Reference, Pennsylvania Archives, 3rd series, volume 23, page 199." – From MacKinney, Gertrude (State Library, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), *James Ewing Revolutionary War Service*, 18 Jan 1933, a letter to Jane Rovensky, Greenwich, Connecticut. In 4 Sep 1782, [Squire James Ewing] served in 4th Co, Capt Robert Miller, Washington Co Militia. – From Riddle, William E. *Descendancy Charts for Allegheny Co Ewings*, December 1999. "James Ewing served in the 4th Company commanded by Captain Robert Miller, September 4, 1782, Washington County Militia, War of the Revolution. Reference, Pennsylvania Archives, 6th series, volume 2, pages 150 and 155" – From MacKinney,

protect the community. Two or three Rangers would go out on scouting forays to see if Indians were approaching on a raid. More often than not, they would return with an "All's Well" message; sometimes they would rush back shouting "Fort Up," announcing that a raiding party was in the area. Sometimes Rangers would infiltrate Indian camps, disguising themselves in Indian garb and face-paint, to get a sense of what the Indians were planning out into the future. Being a Ranger was a demanding, exciting life, well-suited to the at-the-edge temperament of some Scots-Irish frontiersmen.

For four, the Scots-Irish survived by having a community-based (and most often church-based) sense of what 'proper' people should do with respect to satisfying debts, courting and marrying, worshiping God, celebrating communion, punishing transgressions (thievery, fornication, brawls, etc.), settling land- and property-ownership conflicts, handling the orphaning of children, holding home- and barn-raising events welcoming new arrivals, satisfying a thirst for whiskey, responding to the (unthinkable!) taxation of whiskey production by a central government, and so forth.

At this point in the evolution of southwestern Pennsylvania – from the end of the French and Indian War through the Revolutionary war to the turn of the century – southwestern Pennsylvania settlers were very much on their own. They were free to do things as they saw fit but responsible to make sure, through community action, that anarchy was not result. All in all, they did a quite admirable job!

This Article's Focus

Much can be reported about the life and times of the Scots-Irish who settled the southwestern Pennsylvania area and suffered through the difficult 1763/1764-1793/1794 period, a baker's dozen or so of my ancestors included. I have previously written about my Ewing ancestors who settled Allegheny County.^{28,29} Others have written about their Ewing ancestors in Fayette County,^{30,31} and these articles included information about the history of Uniontown, Fayette County, Pennsylvania, and the Nemaquin Trail, an Indian trail that traversed the area and was later the basis for, first, Braddock's Road, and then the National Highway, and, currently, Route 40.

Gertrude (State Library, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), *James Ewing Revolutionary War Service*, 18 Jan 1933, a letter to Jane Rovensky, Greenwich, Connecticut. 4 Sep 1982. "To Whom It May Concern: I hereby certify that the name of James Ewing appears on the list of Captain Robert Miller's Militia return of the Fifth Class of the Fourth Company, Washington Militia in the War of the Revolution – the name of James Ewing appears in the Fifth Class of the muster roll of Captain Millers of Militia in the Washington County, state of Pennsylvania, War of the Revolution." – From *Letter to Jane Ray Mullalley*. Notes from reviewing this letter concerning James Ewing (1733-1825)'s Revolutionary War service are in the author's notes: 1973-00-00:0002.

²⁸ Riddle, William E. Some James Ewing of Inch Descendants. *J. Clan Ewing*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (February 2007), pp. 21-28. Available online at www.ewingfamilyassociation.org/SW_PA_Ewings/Document_SWPA_Part_01.html.

²⁹ Riddle, William E. William, Grandson of Squire James Ewing. *J. Clan Ewing*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (May 2007), pp. 33-40. Available online at www.ewingfamilyassociation.org/SW_PA_Ewings/Document_SWPA_Part_02.html.

³⁰ Ewing, Joseph Neff Jr., Virginia Ewing Okie and William E. Riddle. Nathaniel Ewing (1794-1874), *J. Clan Ewing*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (June 2008), pp. 35-41. Available online at www.ewingfamilyassociation.org/SW_PA_Ewings/Document_SWPA_Part_04.html.

³¹ Ewing, J. David, Virginia Ewing Okie and William E. Riddle. Uniontown History, *J. Clan Ewing*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (November 2009), pp. 62-66. Available online at www.ewingfamilyassociation.org/SW_PA_Ewings/Document_SWPA_Part_05.html.

I have also previously written about the 1788 founding of the Montours Presbyterian Church – the first rural Presbyterian Church in the Allegheny County area.³² This article provides some insights into what church life was like at the time. It also describes the homesteading by Squire James Ewing (1732-1825), my great-great-great-grandfather.

With this article, I turn from talking about my ancestors to talking about the life and times of the Scots-Irish in general on the southwestern Pennsylvania frontier in the period from the early 1760's to the end of the century. I may dip back to pre-1760's and sneak forward to post-1800, but these excursions will be brief.

The possible subjects are many: forts, rangers, home- and barn-raising, communion services, church-based 'courts', whiskey stilleries, Sunday Schools, the 'taking-in' of orphans, the Whiskey Rebellion, etc.

I'll start here, in this article, with a simple, extremely basic, focus on how adult males dressed, how they armed themselves, and how young males learned the skills needed as adults (Boyz II Men).

Sources

I have already cited several sources. Among them, Wikipedia³³ is a very valuable general resource. Take a subject – for example, Pontiac's Rebellion – look it up on Wikipedia and you will find a wealth of (not always but very largely accurate) information.

I have also already cited Joseph Smith's history of the Redstone Presbytery: *Old Redstone or, Historical Sketches of Western Presbyterianism, its Early Ministers, its Perilous Times, and its First Records*, published in 1854.³⁴ His focus is on the southwestern Pennsylvania area's Presbyterian ecclesiastical history. But he also extensively treats historical and cultural aspects of the area's settlement.

Smith extensively quotes from Dr. Joseph Doddridge's personally printed *Notes on the Settlement Of the Western Parts of Virginia and Pennsylvania from 1763 to 1783, inclusive, together with a Review of the State of Society and Manners of the First Settlers of the Western Country*.^{35,36} Doddridge was born

³² Riddle, William E. James Ewing and the Founding of the Montours Presbyterian Church, *J. Clan Ewing*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (June 2008), pp. 44-51. Available online at www.ewingfamilyassociation.org/SW_PA_Ewings/Document_SWPA_Part_03.html.

³³ en.wikipedia.org

³⁴ *Smith - Redstone*

³⁵ Doddridge, Joseph. *Notes on the Settlement and Indian wars Of the Western Parts of Virginia and Pennsylvania from 1763 to 1783, inclusive, together with a Review of the State of Society and Manners of the First Settlers of the Western Country*. Privately printed at the office of the Wellsburg, Va., Gazette, 1824. The first edition is available online for free download (PDF, 19MB) at www.archive.org/details/notesonsettlemen00dodd. A second edition, with a *Memoire of the Author by His Daughter Narcissa Doddridge* and edited by Alfred Williams was published by J. Munsell (Albany, N. Y.) in 1876. It is available online at digital.library.pitt.edu/cgi-bin/t/text/text-idx?c=pitttext;view=toc;idno=00age8892m.

A third edition was published by The New Werner Company (Akron, Ohio) in 1912 "with the addition of new and valuable material. By John S. Ritenour and Wm. T. Lindsey." This third edition is available via Google's Books Project; go to books.google.com and search for 'doddridge notes settlement'. A reprint of the third edition is also available for purchase from Amazon.com. [Short Citation: *Doddridge - Notes*]

in southwestern Pennsylvania in 1769, was educated at Jefferson Academy in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, and was ordained in the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1792. Being one of the pioneers, his *Notes* ... provides a very important contemporary description, based on his personal experience, of the settlers' lives and times.

Frontiersmen Garb

Southwestern Pennsylvania frontiersmen dressed according to the needs of their environment, the resources provided by their environment, and their day-to-day and community-protection activities:

On the frontier and particularly amongst those who were much in the habit of hunting, and going on scouts, and campaigns, the dress of the men was partly [Indian], and partly that of civilized Nations.³⁷

"The hunting shirt was universally worn. This was a kind of loose frock, reaching halfway down the thighs, with large sleeves, open before, and so wide as to lap over a foot or more when belted. The cape was large, and sometimes handsomely fringed with [an unraveled] piece of cloth of a different [color] from that of the hunting shirt itself." Both, however, were of 'Linsey-woolsey'.³⁸ The most common color was blue ...³⁹

The bosom of this dress served as a wallet to hold a chunk of bread, cakes, [jerk], tow for wiping the barrel of the rifle, or any other necessary for the hunter or warrior. The belt which was always tied behind answered several purposes, besides that of holding the dress together. – In cold weather the mittens, and sometimes the bullet-bag occupied the front part of it. To the right side was suspended the tomahawk and to the left the scalping knife in its leathern sheath.⁴⁰

The hunting shirt was generally made of linsey, sometimes of coarse linen, and a few of dressed deer skins. These last were very cold and uncomfortable in wet weather. The shirt and jacket were of the common fashion. A pair of drawers or breeches or [leggings], were the dress of the thighs, and legs.⁴¹



Frontiersman

(From: Wright, J. E. and Doris S. Corbett. *Pioneer Life in Western Pennsylvania*, (Pennsylvania) University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996)

³⁶ 'Personally printed' was evidently in the extreme. According to the Hon. S. W. Pennypacker, once a Governor of Pennsylvania and a lover of old books, Dr. Doddridge "folded the paper on which it was printed and tanned the leather with which it was bound."

³⁷ *Doddridge - Notes*, p. 113.

³⁸ Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linsey-woolsey): Linsey-woolsey: [A] coarse twill or plain-woven fabric woven with a linen warp and a woollen weft. Similar fabrics woven with a cotton warp and woollen weft in Colonial America were also called linsey-woolsey or wincey.

³⁹ *Smith - Redstone*, p. 97. (quoting from *Doddridge - Notes*)

⁴⁰ *Smith - Redstone*, p. 97.

A pair of moccasins answered for the feet much better than shoes. These were made of dressed deer skin. They were mostly made of a single piece with a gathering seam along the top of the foot, and another from the bottom of the heel, without gathers as high as the ankle joint or a little higher. Flaps were left on each side to reach some distance up the legs. These were nicely adapted to the ankles, and lower part of the leg by thongs of deer skin, so that no dust, gravel, or snow could get within the moccasins.⁴²

The moccasins in ordinary use cost but a few hours' [labor] to make them. [It] was done by an instrument denominated a moccasin awl, which was made of the backspring of an old claspknife.⁴³ This awl with its buckshorn handle was an appendage of every shot pouch strap, together with a roll of buckskin for mending the moccasins. ... This was the [labor] of almost every evening. ...⁴⁴

They were sewed together and patched with deer skin thongs, or whangs as they were commonly called. In cold weather the moccasins were well stuffed with deer's hair, or dry leaves, so as to keep the feet comfortably warm; but in wet weather it was usually said that wearing them was 'A decent way of going barefooted;' and such was the fact, owing to the spongy texture of the leather of which they were made.⁴⁵

Owing to this defective covering of the feet more than to any other circumstance the greater number of our hunters and warriors were afflicted with the rheumatism in their limbs. Of this disease they were all apprehensive in cold or wet weather, and therefore always slept with their feet to the fire to prevent or cure it as well they could. This practice unquestionably had a very salutary effect, and prevented many of them from becoming confirmed cripples in early life.⁴⁶

Learning the Skills

According to Doddridge:⁴⁷

One important pastime of our boys, was that of imitating the notes or noise of every bird and beast in the woods. This faculty was not merely a pastime; but a very necessary part of education, on account of its utility in certain circumstances. The imitations of the gobblers, and other sounds of wild turkeys, often brought the keen-eyed, and [ever] watchful tenants of the forest within the reach of the rifle. The bleating of the fawn brought its [dame] to her death in the same way. The hunter often collected a company of mopish owls on the trees about his camp, and amused himself with their hoarse screaming; his howl would raise and obtain

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² *Smith - Redstone*, p. 98.

⁴³ Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pocket_knife): A pocketknife [also known as a claspknife] is a folding knife with one or more blades that fit inside the handle that can still fit in a pocket. Blades can range from 1/2 inch to as much as 12 inches in length, but a more typical blade length is 2 to 6 inches.

⁴⁴ *Smith - Redstone*, p. 98.

⁴⁵ *Doddridge - Notes*, p. 114.

⁴⁶ *Doddridge - Notes*, pp. 114-115.

⁴⁷ *Doddridge - Notes*, pp. 157-158.

responses from a pack of wolves, so as to inform him of their neighborhood, as well as guard him against their depredations.

This imitative faculty was sometimes requisite as a measure of precaution in war. The Indians, when scattered about in a neighborhood, often collected together by imitating turkeys by day, and wolves or owls by night. In similar situations, our people did the same. I have often witnessed the consternation of a whole neighborhood, in consequence of a few screeches of owls. An early and correct use of this imitative faculty was considered as an indication that its possessor would become, in due time, a good hunter, and a valiant warrior.

Throwing the tomahawk was another boyish sport; in which many acquired considerable skill. The tomahawk, with its handle of a certain length, will make a given number of turns in a given distance. Say in five steps, it will strike with the edge, with the handle downwards – at the distance of seven and a half, it will strike with the edge, the handle upwards, and so on. A little experience enabled the boy to measure the distance with his eye, when walking through the woods, and strike a tree with his tomahawk in any way he chose.

Kentucky Longrifle

Early in the colonization of America, the musket⁴⁸ was the weapon of choice. It was widely manufactured in Europe, shipped to the colonies and used in hunting game and defending against natives.

The musket was soon replaced by the much more effective Kentucky Longrifle, named both for its extreme length and where it was commonly used – Kentucky – rather than where it was manufactured – mainly in southeastern Pennsylvania. The rifled Kentucky longrifle had triple the economy, range and accuracy of the smooth-bore Musket.⁴⁹

There developed in the latter days of the American colonies, a uniquely American firearm. From early in the 19th century this unique weapon came to be known as the Kentucky Rifle. Extensive research over the past four decades makes it clear that the Kentucky Rifle, as it is popularly known, was produced along the frontier in many colonies and states following the westward expansion of our nation. We now commonly refer to the Pennsylvania rifle, Maryland rifle, Virginia rifle, North Carolina rifle and Tennessee rifle as well as the Kentucky rifle. Many just refer to it as a longrifle. It was simply known as a rifled gun during the 18th century. We will call it the American longrifle.

The American longrifle began to evolve from the European forms [originated in Germany in the 1400s] during the second quarter of the 18th century along the Pennsylvania frontier, in and about Lancaster, Pennsylvania. It emerged as an unique American creation following the French and Indian War. ...

No technological development occurs in a vacuum, and the American longrifle as a technological as well as an artistic development was no exception. It is generally accepted that the American longrifle evolved from the Jaeger rifle brought to the colonies by German

⁴⁸ Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musket): Musket: [A] muzzle-loaded, smooth bore long gun, intended to be fired from the shoulder.

⁴⁹ www.AmericanLongrifles.com/american-longrifle-kentucky-rifle-story.htm

gunsmiths in the early 1700's and most certainly imported in some quantity along with English arms up until the American Revolution. The Jaeger was a short, stocky, usually large caliber, flintlock⁵⁰ rifle designed for hunting by the well to do in the fields and forests of Europe. At one time, some thought that rifling and a patched ball were innovations unique to the American longrifle. They weren't. These things were known to European gunsmiths for at least two centuries before the American longrifle and were incorporated into the Jaeger. ...

That begs the question, why were changes made? Well, the standard answer has been something along the lines that the American longhunter needed an economical, accurate, and long range gun to put food on the table, take skins for cash, and protect their families from Indian raiders. The Jaeger rifle was accurate but it was not necessarily a long range gun or economical in terms of lead. It has been thought that in order to accommodate the needs of the longhunter, the early gunsmiths started to elongate the barrel and reduce the caliber of their rifles. These two design changes did three basic things; increase accuracy and range, and decrease the amount of lead used for bullets. It is easy to see how a longer barrel could increase accuracy for long range shots, but the added length also allowed for the effective use of larger powder loads to support those long range shots. The more powder you put down the barrel, the more time and therefore more barrel length you need for the powder to fully combust. The potential to use higher powder loads and the higher muzzle velocity that that produces also supports the use of smaller balls. A smaller ball with a fully combusted higher powder load can have the same impact energy as a larger ball with a smaller charge. The higher muzzle velocity will also give you a flatter ballistic trajectory and longer range. Lastly, the smaller ball size means less lead to buy and carry and less powder for small game at short distances. All in all, the American longhunter got economy along with the ability to make long range shots and take down large game if needed.

The Kentucky longrifle was very long:

Just why the [Kentucky] rifle developed its characteristic long barrel (up to four feet) is a matter of some conjecture. The German gunsmiths working in America would have been very familiar with German rifles, which seldom had barrels longer than 30 inches, and often had barrels much shorter. The main reason is the longer barrel gave the black powder — which burns slower than modern powders — more time to burn, increasing the muzzle velocity and hence the accuracy. (A rule of thumb used by some gunsmiths was to make the rifle no longer than the height of a customer's chin because of the necessity of seeing the muzzle while loading.) The longer barrel also allowed for finer sighting and thus greater accuracy. Although some speculation would have it that a longer gun was easier to load from horseback by resting the butt of the rifle on the ground, this was not a consideration, as the rifles were not exclusively used from horseback, and making rifles long enough to be loaded in this fashion would make them inconveniently long to be loaded while on foot. For whatever reason, by the 1750s it was

⁵⁰ Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flintlock): Flintlocks may be any type of small arm: long gun or pistol, smoothbore or rifle, muzzleloader or breechloader. Most flintlock firearms are single-shot muzzle loaders. Because of the time needed to reload (experts could reload a smooth-bore, muzzle-loading musket in 15 seconds), these weapons were sometimes produced with two, three, four or more barrels for multiple shots, but these designs tended to be costly to make and unreliable. It was less expensive and more reliable to carry several single-shot weapons instead.

common to see frontiersmen carrying a new and distinctive style of rifle that was used with great skill to provide tens of thousands of deer hides for the British leather industry.⁵¹

The Longrifle, used by skilled riflemen, was extremely accurate:

The longrifle is said by modern experts to have a range of 80 to 100 yards [about the same as a musket]. This figure is meant for the normal or novice user. A trained, experienced shooter who knows how to take variables into account such as (gunpowder) load, windage, drop, etc. can easily extend the medium range of the long rifle to 400-500 yards.⁵²

In fact:⁵³

Col George Hanger, a British officer, became very interested in the [Kentucky] rifle after he witnessed his bugler's horse shot out from under him at a distance, which he measured several times himself, of "full 400 yards", and he learned all he could of the weapon. He writes:

"I have many times asked the American backwoodsman what was the most their best marksmen could do; they have constantly told me that an expert marksman, provided he can draw good & true sight, can hit the head of a man at 200 yards."

Somewhat amazingly, the best Rangers – the best of the best – could reload their longrifles while on a dead run, dodging arrows and tomahawks and whatever, as they weaved from tree to tree and jumped from downed tree to downed tree. It was sort of a mid-1700s Darwinian exercise. Understandably, young frontiersmen, issued a longrifle practically at birth and hearing stories about the feats of their fathers and uncles, constantly and conscientiously practiced their rifle-handling skills.

Powderhorns

Some of a frontiersman's longrifle-handling skills were due to their powderhorns. Powderhorns held the powder that, when dumped into the rifle, stamped down, followed by a rifle ball, and ignited, propelled the rifle ball toward, and hopefully into, the target. Powderhorns were essential to the effectiveness of the frontiersmen.

Powderhorns were an American invention, almost an art form. Most were crudely essential, only what was needed to hold powder and deliver it into a rifle. Some were made of elegantly



Squire James Ewing's Powderhorn
(Currently owned by the author.)

Note the twist to the right indicating that it was hung on his left side and he was a right-handed marksman.

⁵¹ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_rifle

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Brown, M. L. *Firearms in Colonial America: The Impact on History and Technology: 1492-1792*, Smithsonian, 1980. Quoted on frontierfolk.org/ky-lr.htm.

carved scrimshaw. All were a statement to the individualism of the frontiersman who carried it. A powderhorn documented the adventures and trials of its owner, sometimes by visible marks, more often by the marks' interpretations told by its owner.

Made of cow horn, a powderhorn had a left or a right twist. Right-handed frontiersmen would choose one having a right twist, thereby lying comfortably flat against his left side and allowing him to load a longrifle charge with his left hand. The opposite was true for a left-handed frontiersman.

To make a powderhorn, a hollow horn was cut at both ends and then scraped on the inside. Caps made of metal or wood were attached to the ends to hold the powder in. To load an Kentucky longrifle, the cap on the small end of the horn was removed, and the powder was poured to a measure for the correct charge.

In Sum

The clothing, armaments and training of southwestern Pennsylvania frontiersmen were survival- and defense-oriented.

Bragging rights often spurred them on, and more than a small handful of particularly brazen frontiersmen took extreme chances. If they lived to tell about their exploits, these frontiersmen boasted to any and all who would listen as well as buy them a whiskey to loosen their tongues and embellish their memories.

The vast majority of frontiersmen, however, merely defended their homesteads and, whenever called upon, scouted out to the west in defense of their homesteads and communities. Their clothing was made from what was available – linsey-woolsey and deer skins. Their clothing and moccasin designs purposively and experientially evolved to allow stealthy movement in the wild without self-revealing noise and with a blending into the background. Their hand-to-hand defenses – knives and tomahawks – matched those of their Indian adversaries.

Their success depended on their innate skills and experiences. Their Kentucky longrifles gave them a slight advantage, being able to draw a bead on and engage their adversaries from a goodly distance. The Darwinian most-successful were able to agilely weave through the forest, in pursuit or in escape, jumping from downed tree to downed tree to cover their tracks, snuggling into rotted-out or lightning-struck trees to avoid detection, jumping into a pond and imitating frogs, reducing their heartbeat and breathing to less than a hovering butterfly. Whatever was needed to conceal their presence while remaining ready to fight at an instant.

A Look to Future Articles

All of this was basically offensive – it allowed frontiersmen to seek out their adversaries and succeed whenever they decided to engage. But, what happened when the scouts returned to their communities and shouted "Fort Up"? What did the settlers do day-to-day when they were not under the threat of an Indian raid? What was the role of women? These and other aspects of Life on the Frontier will be the focus of future articles.

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