

“Idle tales of some designing Men”: Yankees, Pennamites, Politicians and Proprietors in Pennsylvania’s Wyoming Valley, c. 1754 - 1810

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¹ See Paul B. Moyer, Wild Yankees: The Struggle for Independence along Pennsylvania's Revolutionary Frontier. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2007 (65)

Introduction

On June 26, 1788, a party of backcountry insurgents entered Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, forced their way into the home of Luzerne county clerk Timothy Pickering and, dressed in Indian garb with their faces painted black, kidnapped him in front of his wife Rebecca and nine-month old son.² The kidnapers, a group of about a dozen or so men with roots in New England, perpetrated this criminal act with the goal of securing the release of one John Franklin, Pickering's most incorrigible political opponent, from the Philadelphia jail where he was being held under charges of treason.³ Franklin had been named a conspirator in a "Designe of forming a New State which Is To Include Wioming & also To Include the Ginece & Teretorey of Lands Claimed by New Yorke"; this alleged act of treason gave Timothy Pickering and six Pennsylvania sheriff's deputies just cause to enter Wilkes-Barre and arrest Franklin on the night of October 2, 1787.⁴ In the end, the kidnapers' plot was unsuccessful: Pickering was released on July 15, 1788, having spent less than a month in captivity (his captors even wrote him an extended apology), and John Franklin was not released from prison until September of the following year. Nevertheless, despite being marred by futility, the kidnapping of Timothy Pickering encapsulates the most notable and climactic stage of what has become known as the Wyoming Controversy, a six-decade long struggle between the colonies (and later states) of Pennsylvania and Connecticut for the rights to land located along Pennsylvania's northeast frontier.⁵

The Wyoming Controversy, elsewhere referred to as the Wyoming Crisis or the Pennamite-

² Deposition of Andrew Ellicott, July 7, 1788, SCP 9:394-396 and Paul B. Moyer, Wild Yankees: The Struggle for Independence along Pennsylvania's Revolutionary Frontier. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2007 (65)

³ Proclamation of the Pennsylvania Council, July 8, 1788, SCP 9:397.

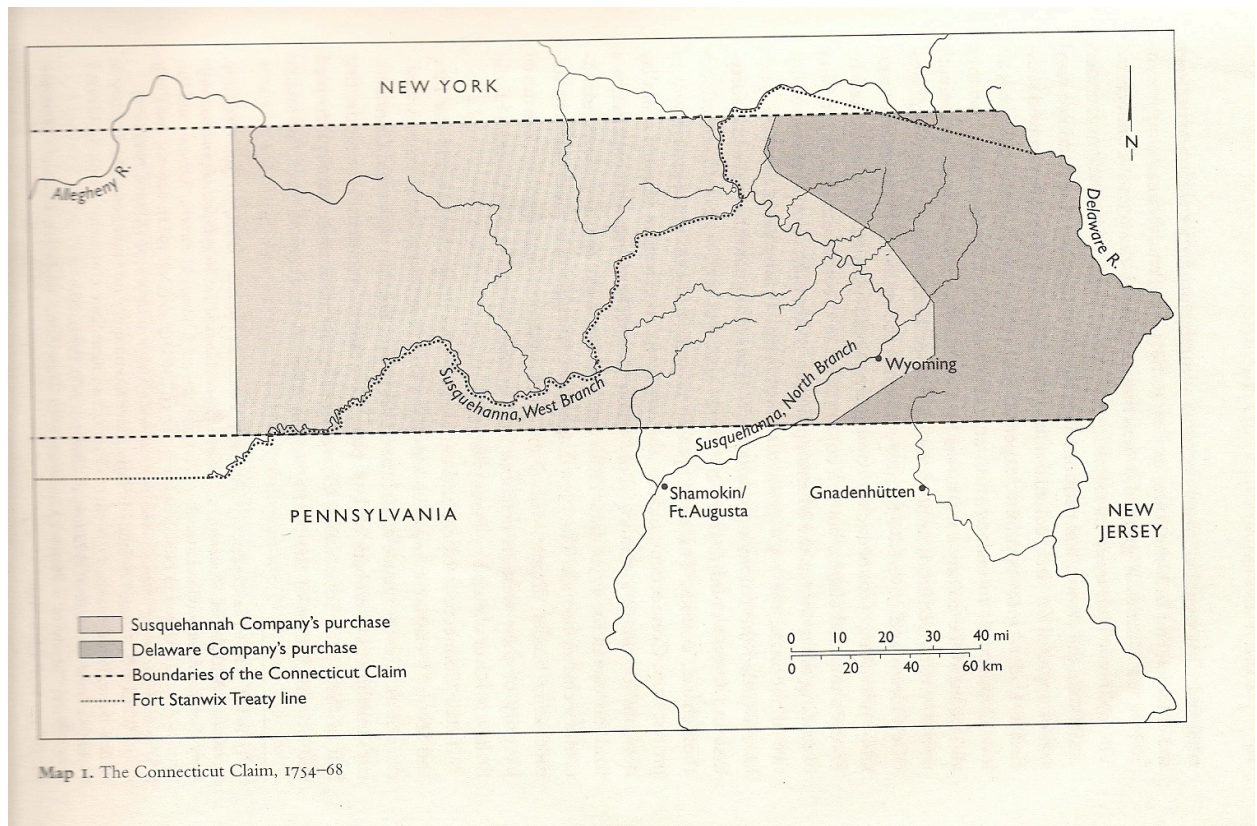
⁴ William Hooker Smith, Samuel Hover, and Abraham Westbrook to William Montgomery, May 14th 1786, SCP 8:326-327; Julian P. Boyd "Attempts to Form New States in New York and Pennsylvania, 1786-96." *New York State Historical Association Quarterly Journal* 12 (July 1931) (264-66; Moyer (72).

⁵ John Hyde, Jr., and Others to Timothy Pickering, July 15, 1788, SCP 9:409-410 and Moyer (99).

Yankee Wars, was an exceedingly complicated affair that played out along two major fronts. It was on the one hand a jurisdictional dispute, played out in the legal arena between the governments of Pennsylvania and Connecticut - both colonies claimed suzerainty rights over Pennsylvania's northeast backcountry region, and both were determined to fight for these rights in courts of law. Connecticut and Pennsylvania land companies, which consisted of groups of wealthy gentlemen speculators with purchase rights to territories in Pennsylvania, participated as well in this dimension of the controversy. The jurisdictional phase of the Wyoming Crisis concluded with the Trenton Decree of 1782, the terms of which awarded the disputed territory both formally and legally to the state of Pennsylvania. There was also a frontier conflict – arguably the most lengthy, bloody and divisive frontier conflict in American history – involving rival groups of settlers from Pennsylvania and Connecticut, the indigenous Americans who inhabited the region prior to European immigration, and, in the later stages of the dispute, government officials representing the state of Pennsylvania and backcountry yeomen farmers determined to protect their hard-won manifestations of agrarian independence, realized as the combination of material self-sufficiency and absolute ownership of land free from feudal obligations. These were the men and women who fought, bled and died in their efforts to secure legitimate rights to soil in Pennsylvania's rolling northeast backcountry.

The Wyoming Controversy takes its name from the Wyoming Valley region of Northeast Pennsylvania, which straddles a twenty-mile section of the north branch of the Susquehanna River, from the mouth of the Nanticoke Creek in the south to that of the Lackawanna River in the north.⁶ However, the episodes of frontier conflict that characterized the dispute were not strictly confined to this geographic region, and the word “Wyoming” – a corruption of the Delaware word *Maughwauwam*, or “the large plains” – referred in the

⁶ Moyer (1).



eighteenth century to the large expanse of hill and valley country covering roughly the entirety of the Pennsylvania Northeast.⁷ By the nineteenth century, many Americans living near Northeast Pennsylvania attributed a different meaning to the word “Wyoming”: rather than “the large plains”, they believed it meant “field of blood”, a profound testament to the region’s bloody and divisive history.⁸

The origins of the Wyoming dispute lie partly in the overlapping charters of the Pennsylvania and Connecticut colonies, as well as in Indian traditions of land tenure and soil rights that differed markedly from European custom in that they allowed multiple purchasers the opportunity to buy and own simultaneously the same tract of land. Taken together these two factors allowed land-hungry Connecticut settlers to purchase two types of land in Pennsylvania: (1) unsettled and unclaimed lands whose soil rights would later be asserted by Native Americans, as

⁷ Moyer (1).

⁸ Charles Miner, *History of Wyoming*. Philadelphia, 1845, xi, xv and Moyer (1)

well as settlers who obtained Pennsylvania titles for their purchases; and (2) frontier land formally claimed but not yet occupied by residents of the Pennsylvania colony, including land already purchased by wealthy Pennsylvanian gentlemen speculators (those who held grantee deeds but did not occupy the land physically). These factors combined allowed Connecticut claimants to claim legal precedent for their actions. Pressured by a variety of social, economic and demographic factors, including Connecticut's relative dearth of unoccupied and arable land compared to other mid-eighteenth century British colonies, as well as a population explosion that began to exert significant demographic pressure on its citizens around 1750, Connecticut Yankees hungry for land began in the mid-eighteenth century to look towards Pennsylvania.

Organized into the Susquehannah and Delaware companies, Connecticut settlers (who soon came to be known derisively as "Yankees" in the eyes of Pennsylvanians) first began to purchase land in the Wyoming Valley from the Iroquois League at the Albany Congress of 1754.⁹ Pennsylvania land companies and government agents resisted these moves – described by one Pennsylvania official as the "Idle tales of some designing Men from New England" - unsuccessfully in court; later, once Yankees began to arrive in the region en masse and began their gradual yet effectual displacement of settlers from Pennsylvania (called "Pennamites"), Pennsylvania claimants resorted to intimidation tactics and brute force.¹⁰ These actions Yankee settlers enthusiastically responded to in kind. Through the 1760s and early 1770s Yankees and Pennamites, as well as indigenous Americans, fought for control of the region and possession of the land. The conflict was characterized by episodes of agrarian unrest and frontier violence that would soon come to be endemic to the Pennsylvania Northeast. One notable outcome of the Wyoming Crisis was the elimination of Native American soil rights in Northeast Pennsylvania, a

⁹ The Delaware Company, and all of its holdings, was incorporated into the Susquehannah Company early on in the Wyoming dispute.

¹⁰ Robert Hunter Morris to Daniel Brodhead, Nov. 20, 1754, SCP 1: 166.

process that left Pennsylvania's northeast backcountry forever scarred with the legacy of racialized Indian-European conflict. In 1774 the Connecticut colony officially annexed the Wyoming Valley and renamed it Westmoreland County, a move that was ultimately sanctioned by the Continental Congress two years later.¹¹ At this point in its development the controversy was largely one between groups of rival Pennamite and Yankee settlers anxious to protect their farmsteads and fearful of being dispossessed of their home, crops, livestock and livelihood.

For eight years of its history, Northeast Pennsylvania – including the region centered on the present-day Scranton-Wilkes-Barre metropolitan area- formally and legally belonged to Connecticut. However, the federal government of the newly created United States returned the contested area to Pennsylvania by way of the 1782 Trenton Decree, thereby bringing the jurisdictional dimension of the conflict to a close (the government of Connecticut respected this decision). Though successful in negotiating the official jurisdictional battle with Connecticut and its affiliate the Susquehannah Company, the government of Pennsylvania only witnessed Yankee-Pennamite altercations increase in frequency and intensity through the late 1780s and 1790s. Throughout this period violence occurred not only between Yankee and Pennamite settlers but also between Yankee yeomen farmers – called “Wild Yankees by Paul Moyer - and Pennsylvania officials (such as Timothy Pickering) who sought to impose Pennsylvania's authority and land tenure laws over the region. The moniker “Pennamite-Yankee Wars” applies most appropriately to the Wyoming dispute at this point in its development. By the late 1780s the Wyoming Controversy had truly become a crisis, as the fledging and fragile nature of the nascent United States of America seemed poised to collapse at any moment, arousing fears of a Yankee secessionist plot in the minds of Pennsylvania's political elites. However, following a short-lived revitalization of the

¹¹ The Connecticut Assembly initially opposed the Susquehannah Company's endeavor to settle in Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley; by 1771 the situation had changed and the Connecticut Assembly actively supported and defended its claim in Northeast Pennsylvania.

Wild Yankee insurgency in the early 1790s, a combination of factors, including most notably the politics of compromise and consolidation practiced by Pennsylvania politicians in the later years of the dispute, contributed to the gradual disappearance of the sporadic frontier violence that characterized the Wyoming Controversy. Pennsylvania's northeast frontier was, for all intents and purposes, pacified by 1810.

The Wyoming Controversy was just one instance of a general phenomenon of frontier violence and agrarian unrest that became endemic to the American backcountry frontier during the decades surrounding the American Revolution. Paul Moyer, one of the preeminent contemporary historians of the Wyoming Controversy, defines America's revolutionary frontier as a "crescent-shaped swath of territory from Maine to Georgia that settlers and land developers claimed and occupied during the era of the American Revolution"; it was in this arena that yeoman farmers battled gentleman proprietors and hostile Indians (as well as each other) over differing conceptions of property, power and the meaning of the Revolution.¹² From the 1660s until the Revolutionary War, agrarians based in Newark and other northern New Jersey towns struggled against that colony's proprietors for legitimate rights to property; the conflict came to a head during the 1740s and 1750s when scores of angry and threatened yeomen "assaulted royal jails, attacked [Royal] officials who supported the proprietors' claims, and terrorized the great gentry's clients in the countryside".¹³ Between 1760 and 1820, Massachusetts "Liberty Men" – or to their opponents, "White Indians" – waged a backcountry rebellion against the proprietors and gentry of Massachusetts; out of this conflict was created the state of Maine.¹⁴

Backcountry agrarian violence affected the American South as well: yeomen inhabiting South Carolina's Rocky Mount District forcefully battled claims made by wealthy, non-resident

¹² Moyer (6).

¹³ McConville (2).

¹⁴ Taylor, Alan (3).

gentlemen speculators during the 1760s; a similar situation was extant during the same period in North Carolina's Granville District. Between 1785 and 1810 western Kentucky's Green River Country was plagued by episodes of agrarian unrest initiated by stubborn small-holders anxious to protect their land and property from the claims of gentrified speculators.

Agrarian unrest in the eighteenth-century American backcountry took on many forms, all of which were present to some degree during the Wyoming Controversy. Violence occurred between competing groups of settlers, who often held deeds to the same tract of land issued by different states involved in a jurisdictional controversy. Unrest of this sort typified frontier violence in Northern New England, where New Hampshire settlers, led by the Revolutionary War hero Ethan Allen and calling themselves "Green Mountain Boys", waged a protracted struggle for property and power with settlers from the colony (and later state) of New York between 1760 and 1791, leading to the creation of the state of Vermont.¹⁵ This sort of violence defined the Wyoming Crisis as well, and provides the origins for the moniker "Pennamite-Yankee Wars". Pennsylvania claimants frequently came into armed conflict with Connecticut claimants during the Wyoming affair; these violent encounters were prefigured and colored by decades of Indian-settler warfare, which ravaged Northeast Pennsylvania during the second half of the eighteenth century. Later, post-Trenton, when Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley had become inhabited mainly by Connecticut claimants yet was still formally controlled by a proprietary government hostile to their interests, settler-on-settler frontier violence took place between Yankees loyal to Connecticut and Yankees willing to accommodate themselves to Pennsylvania's political authority (though not actually from Pennsylvania, these "traitorous" Yankees were conceived of as "Pennamites" in the eyes of the more zealous New Englanders).

¹⁵ Moyer (7), also see Michel A. Bellesiles, Revolutionary Outlaws: Ethan Allen and the Struggle for Independence on the Early American Frontier. Charlottesville, VA, 1993.

Agrarian unrest took on additional forms as well in the early American backcountry. Paramount among these was a manifestation of class conflict played out between yeomen farmers and the gentrified class of Colonial American society, the gentlemen proprietors and wealthy speculators who owned land only to sell it to others. These groups held diametrically opposed notions concerning the proper relationship between labor, property and power in a post-Revolutionary world. Agrarian yeomen valued the pursuit of material self-interest and physical security above all else; they committed acts of violence against wealthy Pennsylvania land speculators and provincial officials partly in response to deeply-held fears of losing their land, livelihood and independence to a political entity that was both hostile to yeomen interests and dedicated to forcing them into a state-sanctioned form of political and economic subordination. Class conflict played out through frontier violence typified the Wyoming Crisis in its later years, as New England settlers began to displace thoroughly the Pennamites inhabiting Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley, bringing with them ideals of agrarian independence wholly incompatible with the interests of Pennsylvania's political elites. The engine of Yankee immigration into Pennsylvania, the Susquehanna Company, was itself rife with these sorts of class divisions; fault lines between speculators and settlers were cunningly and successfully exploited by the Pennsylvania Assembly and its agents during the final decades of the controversy.

To date, the majority of the literature on the Wyoming Controversy (and closely related subjects) that has been written and produced has been essentially confined to the following areas of interest: the basic narrative of the Susquehanna Company and of the Yankee-Pennamite Wars; the goals, motivations, and ideological underpinnings of the settlers to the region themselves, the relationship between the Wyoming Controversy and episodes of violent Indian-European altercations that were themselves products of the American Revolutionary War (the infamous

Paxton Boys of Lancaster County and Wyoming Massacre are particularly well covered examples); the origins and nature of the jurisdictional dispute between Connecticut and Pennsylvania; and, the broad themes of frontier unrest and agrarian insurgency and their relationship to the concept of agrarian independence.¹⁶ With respect to that particular area of interest I am deeply indebted to Paul Moyer's research on the relationship between the Wyoming dispute and backcountry revolution, as well as the ideal of agrarian independence; his work on the subject, entitled Wild Yankees: The Struggle for Independence along Pennsylvania's Revolutionary Frontier, is an excellent introduction to the themes, concepts and terms used in the study of the American backcountry, as well as one of the leading contemporary narratives of the Wyoming Controversy. For the most part, however, the full depth and import of the Wyoming Controversy has been obscured; this is largely the result of the fact that few historians in the past have chosen the subject for their research. A thorough monograph examining the ways in which the actions taken by Pennsylvania's political elites determined the course and outcome of the Wyoming Controversy is certainly lacking – this thesis exists in an attempt to fill that void.

¹⁶ See Boyd, Julian P. "Attempts to Form New States in New York and Pennsylvania, 1786-96." *New York State Historical Association Quarterly Journal* 12 (July 1931): 264-66; Boyd, Julian P. "Connecticut's Experiment in Expansion: The Susquehanna Company, 1753-1803." *Journal of Economic and Business History* 27 (1931): 38-69; Cornell, Saul. "Aristocracy Assailed: The Ideology of Backcountry Anti-Federalism." *Journal of American History* 76 (March 1990): 1148-72; Knouff, Gregory T. "'An Arduous Service': The Pennsylvania Backcountry Soldiers' Revolution." *Pennsylvania History* 61 (January 1994): 45-74; Miner, Charles. History of Wyoming. Philadelphia, 1845; Moyer, Paul B. Wild Yankees: The Struggle for Independence along Pennsylvania's Revolutionary Frontier. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2007; Nobles, Gregory H. "Breaking into the Backcountry: New Approaches to the Early American Frontier, 1750-1800." *William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (October 1989): 641-70; Onuf, Peter S. The Origins of the Federal Republic: Jurisdictional Controversies in the United States, 1775-1787. Philadelphia, 1983; and Ousterhout, Ann M. "Frontier Vengeance: Connecticut Yankees vs. Pennamites in the Wyoming Valley." *Pennsylvania History* 62 (summer 1995): 330-63.

The Wyoming dispute is an interesting and provocative historical event worthy of serious analytical consideration for the following reasons (apart from the fact that it has been seldom written about): (1) the conflict took place over a long span of time during a period of enormous political upheaval (three forms of government – the Pennsylvania Colonial Assembly, the Pennsylvania General Assembly as it existed under the Articles of Confederation, and the Assembly as it existed under the United States Constitution – addressed the crisis); (2) the conflict was only the most bloody and longest-lived in a wave of provincial and jurisdictional conflicts centered on property and power that swept the American Northeast during the second half of the eighteenth century; and (3) the conflict encompassed all of the major forms of backcountry frontier violence (settler-on-settler, Indian-on-white, yeoman-on-gentry, and agrarian-on-government official) characteristic of early United States jurisdictional controversies and land disputes. The following pages will be an attempt to explain the story of the Wyoming Controversy, from the point-of-view of the political elites responsible for the administration of the Quaker Colony as well as the pacification of its tumultuous Northeast frontier. Though initially impotent in the face of what started as a determined wave of Yankee migration and eventually transformed into a stubborn and intransigent backcountry insurgency, the government of Pennsylvania more often than not by its actions determined the basic contours of the Wyoming dispute; through the efficient and pragmatic combination of military force and conciliatory diplomacy, Pennsylvania's political actors were ultimately able to effect a collapse in settler resistance in the Wyoming Valley.

Chapter 1

“such a Dangerous Enterprise as this”: The Origins of the Wyoming Controversy

On July 18, 1753, a group of land-hungry speculators and would-be settlers met in Windham, Connecticut, in order to discuss a design to “Enlarge his Majesties English Settlements In North America”, to “further To Spread Christianity”, and to “promote [their] own Temporal Interest”.¹⁷ At this meeting Eliphalet Dyer, Jedidiah Elderkin, John Fitch and over three hundred others purchased, at the rate of “Two Spanish Mill’d dollars” apiece, shares of backcountry land the company had claimed along Pennsylvania’s northeast frontier. Their purchase was soon

¹⁷ Minutes of a Meeting of the Susquehannah Company, July 18th, 1753, SCP 1:28-29.

recorded as the first official act of the newly minted Susquehannah Company.¹⁸

This was not the first time citizens of Connecticut had taken steps toward settlement outside the official boundary of their home colony, which in the eighteenth century was, by the British Colonial Office, demarcated in the west by the Hudson River and New York, and in the east by the Rhode Island colony. On May 10, 1750, John Humphrey, Samuel Griswold, Haynes Woodbridge and several unnamed others delivered a petition to the Connecticut General Assembly requesting a grant of land located within a “Large Tract of Land Lying within the bounds of [Connecticut] as described in the Royal Charter Lying west of Hudsons River”, with the stated goal of enjoying the “pleasure & Sattisfaction of Seing a Howling Wilderness turned into fruitfull fields”.¹⁹ On May 20, 1752, Joseph Blackleach and others petitioned the assembly for a grant of a piece of the “Considerable tract of Land Lying to [the] westward of Hudsons River...Near [the] place Called Delaware River”.²⁰ This time Connecticut speculators referred specifically to regions falling into the explicit jurisdiction of the Pennsylvania colony.

The Connecticut Assembly, at the beginning of the Wyoming Controversy, was steadfast in its refusal to endorse any settlement scheme directed beyond the official British-mandated boundaries of their colony. This was due to a perceived lack of jurisdiction rooted in pragmatic deference to the Board of Trade, which refused to consider any claims made by Connecticut speculators to lands lying outside of the New York-Rhode Island corridor for fear that unregulated settlement would provoke war with the Indians (the Colonial Office and Ministry of Indian Affairs shared this view).²¹ In December 1750, Roger Wolcott, the colony’s governor, firmly articulated

¹⁸ All of the investors, save one, were men at the first meeting of the Susquehannah Company. The lone exception was the widow Sarah Huntington, who purchased one share in the company, paid to Captain John Fitch, who was an early leader of the organization, along with Eliphalet Dyer and Jedidiah Elderkin. Minutes of a Meeting of the Susquehannah Company, July 18th, 1753, SCP 1:28-38.

¹⁹ Petition of John Humphrey and Others to the Connecticut General Assembly, May 10th, 1750, SCP1:1-2.

²⁰ Memorial of Joseph Blackleach and Others to the Connecticut General Assembly, May 20th, 1752, SCP 1:9-10.

²¹ SCP 1:lxiii-lix.

this position in an official statement to the Board of Trade pledging Connecticut's commitment to the extant western boundary demarcated by the colony of New York. In May 1751, James Brown, a land speculator from Norwalk, offered 760 Spanish dollars for a "tract of land extending from the Hudson River to five degrees of longitude west of the Delaware River and throughout the 42nd parallel".²² His petition was referred to a seven-person joint committee, one of whose members was Jedidiah Elderkin, who (along with fellow committee-member Stephen Lee) went on to become an avid early supporter of the Susquehannah Company. The committee ruled, five votes to two, to reject Brown's petition, in the process reaffirming a 1725 agreement made between New York and Connecticut that delineated Connecticut's western border as a fixed line twenty miles to the east of New York's easternmost settlement (Elderkin and Lee, understandably, were in the minority holding on this opinion).²³

Nevertheless, economic and demographic pressures led Connecticut land companies to pursue settlement opportunities located outside of their home colony, despite the absence of an official sanction by the Connecticut Assembly (the traditional and principle agent of land acquisition in colonial Connecticut). Thus the Susquehannah Company was born, poised to embark upon a program of settlement guaranteed to provoke the ire of both Connecticut and royal officials, not to mention the proprietors and land speculators of the Pennsylvania colony, whose pristine backwoods New England settlers soon would come to unabashedly penetrate. On November 27, 1753, Richard Peters, Pennsylvania's provincial secretary, wrote to the colony's proprietors to inform them that he had "heard a further Piece of disagreeable News, that some People from Connecticut whose Western Parts swarm with Inhabitants have been to view the Lands of Wyomint & have made great disturbance among the People of Northampton County,"; Peters'

²² SCP 1:lx.

²³ SCP 1: lx.

report concludes ominously with the prediction that “they will come in the Spring with a Thousand Men and settle those Lands”.²⁴

The impetus for the vast migration from Connecticut that Peters both observed and predicted came from a pronounced and widespread dissatisfaction with the living conditions in the colony; this dissatisfaction, in turn, was engendered by a wealth of social, economic, demographic and religious pressures that came to a head in the middle of the eighteenth century. Paramount among these pressures was the enormous increase Connecticut saw in its population in the decades immediately preceding the advent of the Wyoming Crisis: between 1730 and 1756 Connecticut’s population grew by 244%, from 38,000 to 130,611; at the eve of the American Revolution in 1774 there were 197,856 inhabitants living in the colony.²⁵ In the later decades of the eighteenth century, Connecticut’s growth began to lag behind the average rate of growth for the United States as a whole; compared to the U.S. average of 35.75% for the period 1790-1810, Connecticut saw only a 5.4% increase in its population between 1790 and 1800, and between 1800 and 1810 its population increased by a scant 4.3%.²⁶ While part of this trend is explained by the fact that other colonies, especially Pennsylvania (where the first state law permitting alien migrants to own land was enacted), proved themselves more capable of enticing migrant workers from Europe than Connecticut, the fact that vast numbers of Connecticut’s population were deserting the state at an astounding rate is equally instrumental in explaining why Connecticut’s growth lagged so far behind the national average during the later years of the Wyoming Controversy.²⁷

When the Connecticut River basin was first settled (as an offshoot of the Massachusetts

²⁴ Richard Peters to the Pennsylvania Proprietaries, November 27th, 1753, SCP 1:42.

²⁵ SCP 1: xlix.

²⁶ SCP 1: xlix.

²⁷ SCP 1: xlix. See also James T. Lemon, The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins P, 1972 for a discussion of why Pennsylvania was seen as one of the more enticing places to settle in the minds of European migrants during the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

Bay Colony) in 1634-1635, its lush, open meadows and abundance of navigable streams were a godsend to colonists struggling to develop towns, farms and fields in the heavily forested New World.²⁸ Towns such as Wethersfield, Windsor and Hartford (the three original Connecticut towns, founded in 1634-1635) thrived during the early Colonial period. However, by the middle of the eighteenth century, Connecticut's economy had faltered and was less than satisfactory relative to other colonial entrepôts. In the words of the historian Robert J. Taylor,

For most of the colonial period only those farmers who lived sufficiently near navigable rivers to make carting feasible were readily able to send surpluses to towns and ports. The consequence of widespread subsistence farming was low per capita income and limited demand for manufactured goods. The narrow market, in turn, discouraged domestic industry from reaching the point at which economies of scale could be achieved...These conditions were only intensified by high labor costs and lack of adequate development capital.²⁹

In other words, subsistence farming was the norm and surpluses rare in the economically depressed eighteenth-century Connecticut colony. Competition for the best tracts of land was widespread and fierce, and exacerbated by the mid-eighteenth century population explosion. Furthermore, Connecticut was still an almost wholly agrarian economy at this point in its history; over 90% of its citizens were connected with agriculture, and few alternative means of living were available, as Connecticut contained no large towns to rival Boston, Philadelphia or New York.³⁰ All of these factors in turn encouraged migration from the Connecticut River Valley into regions lying outside the official boundaries of the colony.

Some of the older literature on the subject has asserted that Connecticut, by 1750, had effectively run out of unsettled land, leaving a surplus population of land-hungry yeoman farmers desirous of independent holdings of their own.³¹ However, this was not strictly true, as land was

²⁸ Robert J. Taylor, Colonial Connecticut: A History. Millwood, NY, 1979 (4).

²⁹ Taylor, Colonial Connecticut: A History. Millwood, NY, 1979 (90).

³⁰ Taylor, Colonial Connecticut: A History. Millwood, NY, 1979 (90).

³¹ SCP 1: 1.

available in Connecticut during that time, particularly in the western counties, where the increase in population between 1756 and 1774 was 88.7%, compared with an average increase of 43.3% for the middle and eastern counties during the period.³² Richard Peters' observation of a Connecticut "whose Western Parts swarm with Inhabitants" alludes to this fact.³³ As Julian Boyd has noted, lack of available land was not the primary problem; "What the growing population needed was not more land but land better adapted to agriculture and giving promise of larger yield in crops and more profit in speculation".³⁴ Due to what in the eighteenth century was perceived as an endless frontier of unclaimed land, agriculture tended to be conducted "as if it were an extractive industry rather than a science" during the period.³⁵ The consequence of this practice, which was marked by a lack of crop rotation, antiquated wooden tools, the neglect of proper fertilization techniques and an emphasis on surface scratching over deep plowing, was a gradual exhaustion in the fertility of Connecticut's soil.³⁶ While this trend was for the most part applicable to all colonies in British North America during the period, Connecticut lacked advantageous mitigating circumstances such as Pennsylvania's vast, fertile countryside and dense system of waterways or Massachusetts Bay's thriving port-city of Boston. The small geographic size of Connecticut compared to other New World colonies must be remembered as well, as demographic and economic pressures were no doubt exacerbated by Connecticut's relative lack of room within which to expand.

The effect of extractive agriculture on the eighteenth-century Connecticut economy was noticed and roundly criticized by Jared Eliot in his *Essays on Field Husbandry*, published in 1747. In this work the New Englander asserts that

When our forefathers settled here, they entered a Land which probably never had

³² SCP 1: 1.

³³ Richard Peters to the Pennsylvania Proprietaries, November 27th, 1753, SCP 1:42.

³⁴ SCP 1: 1.

³⁵ SCP 1: xlvi.

³⁶ SCP 1: xlvi.

been Ploughed since the Creation; the Land being new they depended upon the natural Fertility of the Ground, which served their purpose very well, and when they had worn out one piece they cleared another, without any concern to amend their Land, except a little helped by the Fold and Cart-dung. . . Our lands being thus worn out, I suppose to be one Reason why so many are inclined to Remove to new Places that they may raise Wheat: as also that they may have more Room, thinking that we live too thick.³⁷

Eliot's words reflect both the poor quality of Connecticut's soil, due to careless agricultural techniques predicated on the widespread belief of an endless supply of free, arable land, as well as the demographic pressure and corresponding sense of confinement and competition wrought by a rapidly expanding population. We may add to this as well the lack of an adequate transportation network in colonial Connecticut, leaving all regions save for a narrow strip of coastline and along the Connecticut River largely isolated from the other economies of the British New World.³⁸

Pronounced levels of emigration from Connecticut in the mid-eighteenth century were in part products of demographic change, poor soil fertility, a small and slow economy relative to other colonial endeavors, and the absence of adequate transportation networks crucial in the movement of surplus goods to market. However, demographic and economic factors provide only one lens with which to view the underlying origins of that vast swarm of Yankee migrants that flooded the northeast Pennsylvania backcountry during the latter half of the eighteenth century; to complete the picture, it is necessary to examine the socio-cultural, political and religious motives underlying Connecticut's experiment in expansion.³⁹

There existed in colonial Connecticut, and across the British New World at large, a distinct "atmosphere of speculation" which reached its peak somewhere between the late 1730s and the onset of the American Revolution.⁴⁰ Julian Boyd argues that, "because of its emotional and

³⁷ Quotation found in SCP 1: xlvi.

³⁸ Taylor, *Colonial Connecticut: A History*. Millwood, NY, 1979 (90-93) and SCP 1: lv-lvii.

³⁹ Julian P. Boyd, "Connecticut's Experiment in Expansion: The Susquehanna Company, 1753-1803." *Journal of Economic and Business History* 27 (1931) (38-69)

⁴⁰ SCP 1: xlii-xlv.

psychological effect, this factor probably had more than any other to do with the genesis of the idea of a western claim; for it created just that state of mind in a credulous public as to make the most impracticable of schemes seem wise and prudent”.⁴¹ The widespread mania for new land came from three distinct sources. First, there was the need to establish new colonies west of the seaboard settlements in order to create a zone of buffer establishments able to check the advances of the French, as well as their Indian allies. The Albany Congress of 1754, which saw representatives of the Susquehanna Company purchase land in Pennsylvania’s Wyoming Valley from the Iroquois for the first time, was convened for precisely this purpose. In most cases the patriotic impulse to settle new lands in the west in order to buttress British rule in the New World against French and Indian incursions was combined, in rhetoric and in publication, with promises and expectations that the colonial endeavors would be immensely profitable.⁴²

Second, there was the desire on the part of wealthy gentlemen speculators, always cognizant of the preeminent importance of the pursuit of profit, to possess large tracts of land in western backcountry wilderness in order to accelerate the creation of a hierarchical, capitalist social order centered on the collection of property and power.⁴³ As Alan Taylor’s research has demonstrated, gentlemen speculators

insisted that America’s commercial development required the emergence of a more efficient, complex, and hierarchical social order where property would become concentrated in the hands of capitalists who best understood how to employ it to create more property...[these speculators] believed that putting a price on unsettled land would accelerate the restructuring of American society by forcing out inefficient farmers”.⁴⁴

Speculators, elsewhere referred to as “gentlemen” or “Great Proprietors”, often had no intention of

⁴¹ SCP 1: xlii.

⁴² SCP 1: xlii-xliii.

⁴³ See the introduction to Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina P, 1990.

⁴⁴ Taylor, Alan (8).

settling the backcountry themselves; instead, they would demand (from their city homes in Philadelphia, New York and Boston) purchase payments and annual quit-rents from those who sought to settle. Groups of speculators often formed land companies in an attempt to more rapidly settler frontier regions; the Susquehanna Company was one such corporation (though it was in many ways far more democratic and small-holder friendly than was the norm for eighteenth century British colonial land companies). While speculators existed in both Pennsylvania and Connecticut, Pennsylvania's distinct system of land tenure and distribution spawned the development of a speculator class that was markedly more elitist, aristocratic and opposed to the interests of independence-driven agrarians than was the average Connecticut land speculator.⁴⁵

The third source of the "atmosphere of speculation" driving scores of new settlement attempts across the American backcountry came from those who physically occupied, settled and developed the frontier. Settlers were for the most part culled from the hardscrabble lower classes of colonial American society. Their interests were diametrically opposed to those of the wealthy gentlemen speculators, yet constitute an essential ingredient of the Revolutionary War-era zeitgeist, as it existed in the colonial American backcountry. Settlers who claimed land in and then occupied the eighteenth-century American frontier were motivated by a zealous desire for agrarian independence, which Moyer defines as signifying "material security, masculine autonomy, and political empowerment".⁴⁶ Agrarian independence was made possible by the ownership of a farm, which provided subsistence and eliminated the need for persons of low economic standing to sell their labor to wealthy capitalists. Eighteenth-century agrarians explicitly rejected the idea that one could possess land without physically occupying and developing it themselves; while the absentee landlords of the lands upon which they settled often referred to them with the pejorative term

⁴⁵ See SCP 1: ix-xl for an introductory comparison of Connecticut and Pennsylvania in the mid-eighteenth century.

⁴⁶ Moyer (8).

“squatter”, yeomen struggling to settle the colonial American frontier would have perceived what they were doing as just, honorable and right. They too sought to hasten the development of a new American social order, but one that differed markedly from that envisioned by wealthy speculators. Agrarians “wanted to live in a society where many small producers engaged in exchange as equals, where no white man had any dominion over another...Agrarians hoped to sustain American capitalism at a simple stage of development where households bought and sold the fruits of their labor without having to sell their labor itself”.⁴⁷ The ideal of agrarian independence constitutes an essential element of the Wyoming Controversy and is crucial to its understanding. Agrarians’ fears of losing their independence - whether it be to rival settlers, hostile Indians, or the authority of the state – engendered many of the violent episodes that give the Wyoming Crisis its color, depth and meaning.

All three sources of the “atmosphere of speculation” that fueled, along with economic and demographic pressures, the vast migration from Connecticut to the Pennsylvania backcountry were relevant factors in the growth and development of the Wyoming Controversy. Wealthy land speculators living in Philadelphia were alarmed at what they perceived as a vast immigration of unlawful squatters into their legally recognized property; the settlers themselves, in contrast, frequently employed a combination of patriotic zeal (they were the ones developing the frontier, after all, and conferred to wealthy city folk the benefits of protection and economic development) and populist agrarian fervor in order to protect their independent holdings in the American backcountry. The ideology of agrarian independence was utilized frequently among rival groups of Pennamite and Yankee settlers, who terrorized and in some cases murdered those who conformed to Pennsylvania’s attempt to force backcountry inhabitants into economic subordination (through the payment of quitrents and taxes) to political elites. During the later years of the Crisis,

⁴⁷ Taylor, Alan (8).

Pennsylvania officials representing the Assembly and the governor's office successfully exploited the ideological division between Yankee speculators, who often held high-level positions in the Susquehanna Company, and less-wealthy settlers who bore the brunt of the backbreaking work necessary to develop frontier regions.

In addition to the speculative, land-hungry climate, there was a religious dimension as well to the causal process that underlied Yankee migration out of the Connecticut River Valley region. Evangelization of the indigenous Americans was an explicit goal of many of the early leaders of the Susquehanna Company in particular, and of Connecticut émigrés in general. When the first Connecticut purchase was made from the Iroquois at Albany in 1754, the deed contained a provision articulating the desire of Europeans to impart on Native Americans “a more full & clear knowledge of the True God and the Christian religion and thereby fix and Establish a more firm solid and Lasting friendship with his Majesties English Subjects”.⁴⁸ The Puritan Congregationalists who settled Connecticut were deeply pious and adhered to a rigid system of morality that was disseminated into virtually every aspect of their society; a similar situation existed in much of New England during the period. Although religion entered a period of relative decline beginning in the late seventeenth century and continuing into the first decades of the eighteenth century, the arrival of the Great Awakening in Connecticut in 1740 ushered in a new era of religiosity within Yankee communities.⁴⁹ Settlers to the Pennsylvania frontier framed their experience not only in terms of agrarian independence and populist fervor but also in religious terms as well; the “Puritan colonists believed literally that natural catastrophes, sickness, Indian raids, were all means employed by God to punish a people for their wicked ways”.⁵⁰ In the early days of the Susquehanna Company's experiment in westward expansion, evangelization of indigenous Americans proved beneficial in

⁴⁸ Deed from Indians of the Six Nations to the Susquehanna Company, July 11, 1754, SCP 1:100.

⁴⁹ See Taylor, *Colonial Connecticut: A History*. Millwood, NY, 1979 (108-140).

⁵⁰ Taylor, *Colonial Connecticut: A History*. Millwood, NY, 1979 (108).

securing much-needed contacts among Indian tribes (necessary for land purchases); Rev. Timothy Woodbridge's Indian school at Stockbridge proved instrumental in this respect.⁵¹ Couching their argument for expansion in religious terms also aided the Company early on in its attempts to secure financial backing for their endeavor. However, all available evidence leads to the probable conclusion that settlers prioritized property, profit and independence over all else, including missionary zeal. For example, it was not until 1768 that the Company itself granted a tract of land for the purposes of establishing an Indian school in the area; however, due to the opposition of British Superintendent of Indian Affairs Sir William Johnson, the school was never built and was eventually relocated to New Hampshire where it became Dartmouth College.⁵²

One question not yet addressed is why, taking into account all of the factors that fueled emigration out of the Connecticut colony into parts west, Yankees began to look toward the Northeast Pennsylvania backcountry in order to quench their desire for land and independence. In other words, what specific factors were at play that resulted in the Wyoming Valley region in particular coming, in the nineteenth century, to signify "field of blood" rather than "the large plains"? The answer begins with the conflicting charters of Connecticut and Pennsylvania, which gave the Susquehannah Company a legal argument upon which to ground their migratory desires.

When King Charles II granted the citizens of Connecticut a revised charter in 1662, he bestowed upon them a grant of land (as well as a degree of political autonomy) that was uncommonly generous for the period.⁵³ The charter, which predated that of Pennsylvania's by nineteen years, provided Connecticut with a tract of land extending from the border with Rhode Island in the east to the "South Sea" in the west, understood at the time to be the Pacific Ocean (the

⁵¹ SCP 1: lxx-lxxi.

⁵² SCP 1: liii-liv.

⁵³ Although the Connecticut region was first settled in 1634, the colony did not have a proper legal foundation; "The Fundamental Orders, however useful to the people of Connecticut, had no legal standing in the eyes of English authorities". Taylor, *Colonial Connecticut: A History*. Millwood, NY, 1979 (27).

distance was reckoned then in the hundreds, rather than the thousands of miles). This new charter gave Connecticut speculators a legal basis for a claim to lands west of the Hudson River. Although Yankees did petition the Connecticut Assembly for grants of land in New York, pursuant to the 1662 charter privileges, in the early 1750s (there were twelve petitions in total between 1750 and 1753), New York's large population, economic and political clout relative to other smaller colonies, as well as its history of conflict with Connecticut over the exact delineation of jurisdictional lines, prevented the near west claim from being seriously acted upon.⁵⁴ Although those Connecticut citizens hungry for land, livelihood and agrarian independence (all three of which, beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, were becoming scarce commodities in the densely populated North Atlantic coast) were free to leapfrog the colony of New York and settle theoretically as far west as New France, the backcountry of Northeast Pennsylvania was much closer and had the added advantage of being both uninhabited by Europeans and reliably arable.⁵⁵ In addition, the overlapping nature of the Connecticut and Pennsylvania charters added an additional incentive for Connecticut speculators and would-be settlers to look towards Pennsylvania.

When Charles II granted William Penn a charter for his "Holy Experiment" in 1681 – an experiment that eventually realized itself as the Quaker colony of Pennsylvania – he overlooked the fact that a portion of land granted to Pennsylvania falling between the forty-first and forty-second degrees of latitude fell squarely within Connecticut's original 1662 charter boundaries.⁵⁶

The problem, as Paul Moyer has pointed out, was that British officials surveying the New World

⁵⁴ Moyer (17).

⁵⁵ By 1750 no one in Connecticut was prepared to stake a claim all the way to the Pacific; the extent of the western grant was generally perceived to end at the Mississippi River, due to France's colonial enterprise in North America. Moyer (16).

⁵⁶ Moyer (16), and see Edwin B. Bronner, William Penn's "Holy Experiment": The Founding of Pennsylvania 1681-1701. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Publications, 1962.

“often possessed little knowledge of the American landscape they parceled out, [and] issued vague or inaccurate patents that frequently interfered with earlier grants or encroached on competing claims”.⁵⁷ One interesting consideration is that Royal officials representing both the Duke of York and the Lord Baltimore (proprietary of the New York and Maryland colonies respectively) voiced their objections to Penn’s charter before the Lords of Trade, as they feared their land rights would be infringed by Penn’s grant.⁵⁸ Officials representing Connecticut, it appears, were absent from these negotiations, and Pennsylvania was granted formal sovereignty over the region lying between the forty-first and forty-second parallels, a status it has held to this day (apart from an eight-year period surrounding the American Revolution).⁵⁹ Connecticut’s apparent lack of interest in disputing Penn’s land grant is not as surprising as it seems, however, because in 1681 Connecticut settlers would have found plenty of available land within the New York-Rhode Island corridor on which to settle. It was not until the mid-eighteenth century that citizens of Connecticut began to make moves toward realizing their western claim.

The legal ambiguity created by the conflicting charters of Pennsylvania and Connecticut, coupled with the Susquehanna Company’s legal-historical justification for its existence (predicated on the 1662 charter and Charles II’s generous “sea-to-sea” grant), demonstrates how the British system of land distribution employed in the New World during the seventeenth century helped set the stage for the Wyoming Crisis. However, this is only one half of the legal dimension to the origins of the Wyoming Controversy: the other half has to do with Native American concepts of soil rights and land tenure, to which speculators and settlers of Pennsylvania’s Wyoming Valley were forced to accommodate themselves.

⁵⁷ Moyer (14).

⁵⁸ Charles II referred Penn’s request for a land grant to the Privy Council, who in turn referred the decision to the Lords of Trade.

⁵⁹ Philip S. Klein and Ari Hoogenboom. A History of Pennsylvania. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1973.

Northeast Pennsylvania in the eighteenth century was only “uninhabited” in the sense that there were few (if any) Europeans living in the area. The first Europeans to explore the Delaware River Valley encountered Indian tribes who spoke Algonquian tongues and called themselves *Lenni-Lenape* (“the original people”); the English called these people “Delawares”.⁶⁰ In the eighteenth century, the preeminent Indian power in the American Northeast was the Iroquois confederation known as the Six Nations, comprised of *sachems* (Native American tribal chiefs) representing the Mohawk, Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca and (beginning in the early 1700s) Tuscarora tribes. The Six Nations occupied land ranging from the Mohawk Valley in the east to Lake Erie in the west; they held their league Council at Onondaga (Syracuse), New York. Other less prominent indigenous actors in Pennsylvania included the Nanticoke and Susquehannocks, who inhabited the upper and lower reaches of the Susquehanna respectively, as well as the Shawnee, who were scattered throughout the state.

Pennsylvania was distinct among seventeenth century English colonies with respect to its Indian policy. In his *Concessions* of 1681, William Penn affirmed that “the Indians shall have liberty to do all things...that any of the planters shall enjoy”; the colonial Assembly sought to realize Penn’s vision of just treatment for Native Americans through legislation barring nonresidents from the trading with Indians, requiring all traders to be licensed, and forbidding the trafficking of rum among Indian villages.⁶¹ Penn also insisted on purchasing all of Pennsylvania’s lands directly from the Indian tribes who inhabited them, a policy that was often breached and even when implemented faithfully engendered unexpected problems.

European and Native American conceptions of property rights and land tenure differed

⁶⁰ Klein/Hoogenboom (5).

⁶¹ These laws were unenforceable; private traders were consistently able to use alcohol to their advantage, robbing Indians of valuable furs and land. However, the Pennsylvania sachems were aware of Pennsylvania’s official conciliatory efforts, providing groundwork for future good relations when both parties became embroiled in the land dispute with Connecticut. Penn quotation found in Klein/Hoogenboom (22-23, 53).

markedly; the contrast between the two societies' legal systems (with respect to soil ownership) contributed a great deal to the origins of the Wyoming Crisis. Europeans who migrated to the New World brought with them ideas about land transactions that were simple and direct: in their society, purchased land was the sole property of the owner, and one could dispose of the land as he or she pleased. To quote Eric Hinderaker and Peter Mancall,

If a landowner decided...to force tenants off his or her land there was little a tenant could do to object. If a landowner decided to grow wheat instead of barley, or turn land over to sheep pasturing instead of crop agriculture, the decision could not be challenged by tenants. Similarly, the decision to sell or rent land belonged to the landowner alone. To the English, land was a commodity to be bought and sold like any other good.⁶²

Indigenous Americans, by contrast, maintained a wholly different conception of land ownership and soil rights. While the idea that the Indians had no concept of property ownership is often alluded to in popular culture and literature, this was not strictly true. Individuals did not own land; rather, land belonged to indigenous communities as a group asset. Furthermore, what was owned was not in fact the land itself, but rather the produce of the land: "the corn they grew, the game they hunted, the fish and clams they harvest, the fruit and nuts they gathered: these were the things Natives owned".⁶³ Indigenous Americans owned land in *usufruct*, meaning they had possession over its use and operation but did not believe a single individual, or a community, could obtain perpetual dominion and control over land itself.⁶⁴ Furthermore, Native Americans were perfectly happy to sell the same tract of land to multiple purchasers, believing that they were only selling rights to the produce of the land and not the land specifically itself. This practice allowed Pennamites and Yankees to purchase land in the same geographic space while at the same time each believing that their tenancy was lawful and just; attempts to settle these purchases often

⁶² Eric Hinderaker and Peter C. Mancall, At the Edge of Empire: The Backcountry in British North America. Baltimore, 2003 (27-28).

⁶³ Hinderaker/Mancall (28).

⁶⁴ Hinderaker/Mancall (28).

resulted in incidents of settler-on-settler violence between Pennamites and Yankees. Discrepancies between European and Native American ideas of land tenure and property exacerbated the preexisting confusion that stemmed from the jurisdictionally vague British-chartered land grants; this confusion formed an essential ingredient of the origins of the Wyoming affair.

The dissonance between Indian and European cultural conceptions of land tenure engendered enormous consequences for the Wyoming Valley region of Pennsylvania. Hostilities stemming from competition for land (Indians would sell land to Europeans, only to be confused and enraged when these same Europeans attempted to force them off of land they believed they held together in usufruct) fueled the Wyoming Crisis in its early years, when violence occurred not only between different groups of European settlers but also (and far more frequently) between indigenous Americans and yeoman farmers. In these cases both parties made use of deadly force in order to protect their property and political autonomy in Pennsylvania's tumultuous backcountry. Outside events, such as the Seven Years' War, Pontiac's Rebellion and the American Revolutionary War often led to an increase in the frequency and intensity of violent altercations in the Wyoming Valley. The preeminent example of this was the Wyoming Massacre of July 3rd, 1788; this seminal event of the Revolutionary War saw a fearsome regiment of over seven hundred Indians and Loyalists confront, and then massacre a group of around three hundred American militiamen led by Colonel Zebulon Butler.⁶⁵ However, due in many ways to the course of action pursued by Pennsylvania's political elites in the face of unrest in Wyoming, Native Americans were for the most part displaced completely from Northeast Pennsylvania by the late eighteenth century, around the same time the Wyoming dispute was beginning to enter its most climactic and violent phase.

⁶⁵ The Loyalist faction was comprised largely of disenchanting Pennamites. Zebulon Butler and the American militia hailed predominately from Connecticut and other New England regions. Moyer (1-2).

Thus by 1754 the stage for the Wyoming Crisis had been set. A trickle of Yankee émigrés had already begun to traverse Southeast New York and cross into the rolling hill and valley backcountry of Northeast Pennsylvania; a flood would soon follow. Their reasons for leaving were multifaceted and complex: economic hardship, infertile soil, a sense of claustrophobia wrought by a rapidly expanding population, a near-maniacal atmosphere of speculation, religious fervor, lack of roads with which to take what surplus they could manage to produce to market, and a profound desire for agrarian independence all contributed their relative weights. The geographically vague and jurisdictionally confusing crown-granted charters of Connecticut and Pennsylvania gave Yankees a convenient legal justification for expanding settlement into Northeast Pennsylvania and laying a claim to lands there; Native American land purchases added to the nascent turmoil as well by putting Pennamites and Yankees into close proximity while allowing both groups to believe they were the sole rightful occupants. This of course brought indigenous Americans into the controversy, as they quickly learned the full importance of what it meant to sell land to Europeans, and took steps to repudiate their sales and retake possession of their territorial lands. When Richard Peters first reported to the Pennsylvania Assembly his concerns about incursive Yankees from Connecticut, Pennsylvania's political elites could hardly have known what was in store for them in the decades to come. As such the Assembly can reasonably be excused for its initial assumption that Connecticut settlers would quickly abandon "such a Dangerous Enterprise as this". Yet it would not be long before the government of Pennsylvania would come to take an active role in the Wyoming Controversy, although for the greater part of the dispute their actions more often than not only succeeded in exacerbating and prolonging the crisis. Pennsylvania's political elites' political, military and legislative attempts to resolve the Wyoming Crisis essentially determined the contours within which this complex jurisdictional-frontier conflict was played out, and while at

first counter-productive eventually proved instrumental in realizing its dénouement.

Chapter 2

“an Asylum to all the Villains & Robbers” : Backcountry Revolution in Pennsylvania’s Wyoming Valley, from the Albany Congress to the Trenton Decree, c. 1754-1782

In the spring of 1753, shortly before the inaugural meeting of the Susquehannah Company

was to take place elsewhere in New England, the Mohawk sachem Tiyanoga – or Hendrick, as he was known to the Europeans – marched into the New York governor’s office on Manhattan Island and promptly informed the colonial administration there that the Six Nations would no longer be assisting the British in checking French incursions against crown interests in the Ohio Valley and Great Lakes region. “You are not to expect to hear of me any more, and, brother, we desire to hear no more of you!” Tiyanoga allegedly exclaimed just before he stormed out, along with the rest of the Iroquois delegation that had accompanied him.⁶⁶ This act effectively brought to a close almost a century of good relations between England’s colonies and the Iroquois League (New York’s first alliance treaty with the Mohawks was signed in 1675 by governor Edmund Andros). When the disastrous news reached London, the Board of Trade promptly wrote Lt. Gov. James DeLancy of New York, instructing him to convene an assembly consisting of representatives from all of the British colonies in order to repair the crucial alliance with the Six Nations and improve Anglo-Indian relations from thereon after.

The Albany Congress of 1754, while perhaps best known for its role in the inaugural events of the French and Indian War, also provides a convenient way with which to demarcate the early terminus of the Wyoming Crisis. The jurisdictional dimension of the controversy was born at Albany, the result of two semi-covert purchases of land conducted between European land companies and Six Nations’ representatives. The Albany Congress contains a broader significance as well, as it represented a paradigmatic shift in Anglo-Indian relations that was to engender enormous consequences for Pennsylvania’s northeast frontier. Up until Albany, Anglo-Indian diplomacy could be broadly characterized by the dual characteristics of cooperation and accommodation. However, a variety of pressures contributed to the gradual breakdown of relations during the Age of Colonization, ultimately resulting in the elimination of Indian soil rights in the

⁶⁶ Quotation found in Ketchum, Richard M. Ketchum, "The Spirit of '54." *American Heritage* 53 (2002) (57).

Pennsylvania Northeast. As we shall see, the Wyoming Controversy proved to be an effective agent in this process.

Not all Iroquois employed a policy of cooperation and accommodation with respect to Britain's colonial American empire during the period of the Anglo-Iroquois alliance. From the upper reaches of Iroquoia to the lower Carolina piedmont ran the so-called "warrior's path", along which indigenous warriors, including some Iroquois, traveled, leaving a path of death and destruction affecting those settlers unfortunate enough to provoke their ire.⁶⁷ During Carolina's Tuscarora Wars of 1711-1715, for example, a band of two hundred Iroquois warriors attacked a group of Virginia merchants, enraging that colony's governor, Alexander Spotswood, as the colony was formally allied with the Iroquois League. Two years later, following another violent incident involving Iroquois raiders and European settlers, he sent a representative to Albany in order to extract a promise from the Six Nations' sachems that the raids on settler communities would cease. This diplomatic endeavor proved decidedly ineffective, however, as the raids continued.⁶⁸

The problem lay in the distinction between Iroquois diplomats, who were in many cases willing to work with the British colonists in order to secure profit and protection (from French raiders), and Iroquois warriors, who bore the brunt of the European displacement of indigenous land and reacted in kind. Geographic distinctions were at play as well, as the Iroquois League sachems resided in regions generally avoided by British settlers; those Iroquois who utilized the "warrior's path" to take part in raids on settler communities more often than not resided in those backcountry regions that colonial American settlers were beginning to move into at the close of the seventeenth century. However, the formal alliance with the Six Nations did confer protection

⁶⁷ Hinderaker/Mancall (81).

⁶⁸ Hinderaker/Mancall (81-83).

benefits, particularly in the middle Atlantic colonies; Pennsylvania in particular received several assurances from the sachems that their southeastern lands were secure and safe from invasion.

A notable episode that worked toward cementing the alliance between Iroquois diplomats and British colonists occurred in 1710, when leaders of the New York colony arranged for a party of four Iroquois braves to travel to London as “kings” of the Iroquois Confederacy (that title was used to portray the Indians in terms more familiar to Europeans at the time). While there they met with Queen Anne and an arrangement was made to provide mutual aid in the ongoing conflict with New France. In 1722, the governors of Pennsylvania, New York and Virginia met with the Six Nations’ leaders in Albany and signed an agreement expanding the degree of partnership between the Iroquois League and the British colonies.⁶⁹ In the words of Hinderaker and Mancall,

Pennsylvania, especially, capitalized on Iroquois power to impose order on its Indian relations. Proprietary officials met regularly with representatives of the Iroquois Confederacy to brighten the chain of friendship by offering gifts to Iroquois leaders, exchange information, and consider remedies for the problems that arose between Indians and colonists.⁷⁰

However, due to subsequent European actions in the following several decades, the policy of mutual respect and cooperation practiced between Iroquois leaders and Britain’s colonial administrators came virtually to an end.

The impetus for Tiyanoga’s abandonment of the alliance with Britain had its roots in the fur trade; specifically, commerce in beaver pelts in which the Iroquois acted as middlemen between Western tribes (Ottawas, Nipissings, Hurons and Petuns, to name a few) and European merchants. The trade was centered in Albany, New York, and was one of the preeminent factors enticing European migration to the New World throughout the Age of Colonization. Demand for beaver pelts – the underhairs of which are flush with microscopic barbs capable of being molded

⁶⁹ Hinderaker/Mancall (84).

⁷⁰ Hinderaker/Mancall (84).

into an extremely dense, rich felt, perfectly suitable for hats – was so acute that by the late seventeenth century the rodent had become relatively scarce in Iroquoia.⁷¹ This forced the fur trade to migrate westward, into French-occupied Canada; with it came hundreds of European traders and land speculators from Pennsylvania, Virginia and New York. France responded to this development by constructing a series of forts in the Ohio Valley, and on the Niagara River and Lake Champlain, engendering an increase in French attacks on Iroquois villages. New France had begun to push eastward into Six Nations' territory in order to protect their New World assets.

The failure of the British colonies to effectively support the Iroquois against French incursions into their domains was one of the most important causes underlying the dissolution of the Anglo-Indian alliance.⁷² Another equally important factor was European migration into Iroquoia, which in many cases involved the forcible displacement of indigenous Americans from the lands they controlled and gained subsistence from. Pennsylvania governor James Hamilton, writing to Roger Wolcott, the governor of Connecticut, in the early spring of 1754, predicted the event that would soon come to pass. Pleading with his New England counterpart to put an end to Yankee migration into the Wyoming Valley, he beseeched Wolcott to

further to consider, that the Six Nations will be highly offended if these Lands on Sasquehannah be overrun with White People, for they are their favourite Lands and reserved for their Hunting, and many of them live there, and they have the Faith of this Government solemnly and repeatedly plighted that no White People shall settle there...I will not answer for the Consequences, they may not only turn their Arms against the Setlers, but withdraw themselves from our Alliance which might at this Time prove the Ruin of our Affairs, and involve the Colonies in endless Bloodshed and Expence.⁷³

It was not only the Iroquois who balked at European immigration into the American backcountry.

Early in 1754, a party of around seventy Delawares led by the sachem Teedyuscung left the

⁷¹ Hinderaker/Mancall (12), Ketchum (57).

⁷² Ketchum (57).

⁷³ James Hamilton to Roger Wolcott, March 4th, 1754, SCP 1: 56.

Moravian settlement of Gnadenhütten and occupied the Wyoming Valley, which they viewed as part of their ancestral homeland (the larger and more powerful Iroquois claimed the region as well).⁷⁴ Violence stemming from land competition and jurisdictional disputes involved Indians as well as Europeans in the early years of the Wyoming Controversy; Richard Peters, writing to Sir William Johnson in the spring of 1761, was decidedly aware of this fact when he wrote that “the Controversy is not between Subject & Subject but between Indian & Englishman”.⁷⁵

Indeed, in the early years of the Wyoming Crisis, episodes of violence did occur more frequently between Native Americans and European settlers than between rival groups of Pennamites and Yankees. The reasons for this are fairly intuitive: the region was vast compared to the thinness of coastal settlements, and Yankee migrants could easily avoid those scant few Pennamite settlers who occupied the region in the early decades of the crisis. Pennsylvanians also looked westward, in addition to northward, in this period, in order to satisfy their need for land; the lush, fertile fields of the Philadelphia Countryside and of Lancaster County were more often than not preferred to the rough wilds of the Northeast Pennsylvania backcountry. Furthermore, the Pennsylvania proprietors (the Penn family and their agents) discouraged migration into the Wyoming Valley at an official level (at least in the initial years of the dispute), as evidenced in Governor Hamilton’s letter referenced above; this was due to the close relationship the Penn family had with Sir William Johnson, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, who wanted to appease indigenous American actors in order to avoid destabilizing the colonial frontier in the face of coming war with France.⁷⁶

Thus the Albany Congress was convened, in the heat of summer, 1754, to address the concerns of Britain’s most important Indian ally in the New World to see if the alliance between

⁷⁴ Moyer (18-19).

⁷⁵ Richard Peters to Sir William Johnson, May 18th, 1761, SCP 2:98.

⁷⁶ SCP 2: i-v.

the two powers could not be repaired, in order to promote the establishment of a viable system of frontier defense able to check the expanding interests of New France. Representatives from Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Maryland, New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island met from June 19th through July 11th in order to discuss plans for a common colonial defense. It was an endeavor made all the more urgent due to the fact that the French and Indian War had begun the previous May, following George Washington's disastrous expedition at Jumonville Glen in Western Pennsylvania, necessitating concerted action on the part of the British colonies. While arguably its most lasting legacy was Benjamin Franklin's introduction of his Albany Plan, an early attempt to construct a union of the British colonies in North America (part of which was used in the drafting of the Articles of Confederation some years later), the Albany Congress also had significant ramifications with respect to the growth and development of the Wyoming Controversy. This was because of two semi-covert land purchases made during the Congress between European settlers and Indians representing the Six Nations; these purchases together constituted the first round of the Wyoming dispute as it played out in the jurisdictional arena. One purchase, made by Yankee representatives of the Susquehanna Company, formed half of the legal basis of Connecticut's claim to land in Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley (the other half being the generous charter of 1662); the other, conducted between the Iroquois and a Pennsylvania land company operating under the instructions of the Pennsylvania government, proved (along with several mitigating aspects of Connecticut purchase) integral in the seminal 1782 decision made at Trenton by a U.S. court that determined Connecticut's claim on Northeast Pennsylvania to be illegitimate. This act, conducted pursuant to Article IX of the Articles of Confederation (the first and only time the provision was invoked), effectively brought to a close the jurisdictional dimension of the Wyoming Controversy.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Robert J. Taylor, "Trial at Trenton." The William and Mary Quarterly 3rd ser. 26 (1969) (521-547).

On July 11, 1754, John Henry Lydius, a representative of the Susquehannah Company and attendant at the Congress, contracted with a group of Iroquois who were “doubtless under the influence of liquor” (in the judgment of one historian) for a tract of land located in Northeast Pennsylvania.⁷⁸ The Connecticut purchase was problematic for three reasons (in addition to the insidious plying of alcohol, a common practice in Indian-European land transactions during the period). First, the sale was not conducted in the presence of the full League Council, meaning it did not carry with it the necessary approval of several relevant sachems. Furthermore, the last signature was not affixed to the document until March 4, 1755. Second, the particular group of Iroquois who conducted the purchase did not in fact have as much authority to make the sale as Lydius imagined, and did not physically occupy the region the Susquehannah Company intended to purchase. In any case a contingent of Delawares, led by their sachem Teedyuscung, who inhabited the region as well (beginning in 1753) were never consulted. Third, representatives from the Pennsylvania delegation at Albany purchased land in the same area in an attempt to preempt the Susquehannah Company; their purchase was made on July 6th, predating that of the Yankees by almost a week. Thus added to the two colonies’ overlapping colonial charters were rival purchases of indigenous land made by Pennamites and Yankees in what would soon become the most hotly contested frontier region in the early history of the United States.⁷⁹ All of these factors combined led the Six Nations to repudiate the Connecticut purchase in 1761.

The Pennsylvania purchase, by contrast, was considered to be a far more legally sound document than the Connecticut purchase in the eyes of the court at Trenton. For one, many of the sachems who signed Lydius’s deed also granted their signatures to the Pennsylvania deed; Kahiktoton, chief of the Senecas, was one such sachem.⁸⁰ It should be remembered that while

⁷⁸ SCP 1: lxxxiv.

⁷⁹ Moyer (1-12), SCP 1: lxxxiv-lxxxv.

⁸⁰ Deed from Indians of the Six Nations to the Susquehannah Company, July 11, 1754, SCP 1:100.

Iroquois law saw no problem with the sale of the same tract of land to multiple purchasers, the court at Trenton would have considered the fact that Pennsylvania's purchase predated that of the Yankees to be very important indeed. In addition, the Pennsylvania purchase was also conducted less surreptitiously, in the presence of the full League council, and there is no evidence whatsoever of the coercive use of alcohol (though by no means should we discount the possibility).⁸¹ Sir William Johnson also lent his approval to the Pennsylvania purchase, as he had a longstanding friendship with the Penn family proprietors; a secondary motivation on his part was a desire to check the coming flood of Yankee migrants he feared would destabilize Anglo-Indian relations in the region.

The import and significance of Albany is multifaceted. It marked a turning point in Pennsylvania's policy concerning migration into its northeast backcountry: beginning just a handful of years after the Congress, emigration into the Wyoming Valley region was encouraged at an official level rather than prohibited, the result of the desire on the part of the Assembly and governor's office to check the Susquehanna Company's movements towards populating the region with hardscrabble New England settlers presumably hostile to Pennsylvania's interests and authority. In addition, the Albany Congress marked the occasion where the foremost indigenous power in the region, the Iroquois League, ceded formal control over Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley to Europeans. This in turn caused those Indians not aligned with the Six Nations – including, most prominently, Teedyuscung and his band of Delawares, who initiated settlement in the Wyoming Valley in 1754 – to move into and defend the region in greater numbers and with more determination than before, leading to the first instances of episodic Indian-settler violence that would soon come to sanguify the rolling, fertile hills of the Pennsylvania backcountry. However, by 1782, Native American soil rights in the region had been largely eliminated, in a

⁸¹ SCP 1: lxxxiv-lxxxv.

process that was inextricably intertwined with the early stages of the Wyoming Crisis.

During the French and Indian War (1754-1763), emigration from New England to the Pennsylvania backcountry slowed almost to a standstill, as evident by the complete gap in the minutes of the Susquehanna Company between the years 1755 and 1761.⁸² Nonetheless, this same period also saw some of the earliest and most horrific episodes of violence characteristic of the Wyoming dispute. Following (British general) Edward Braddock's defeat at Fort Duquesne in July 1755, the Pennsylvania frontier lay largely defenseless. This, coupled with a pacifist Quaker Assembly that refused to appropriate funds for military purposes even in matters of self-defense, inspired those Delawares inhabiting Northeast Pennsylvania to take advantage of the moment and, in the words of proprietor Thomas Penn, "take up the Hatchet" against Yankees and Pennamites alike.⁸³ Hundreds of colonists were killed, and thousands more driven from their homes during this phase of the conflict.⁸⁴ However, with the coming of British troops to Pennsylvania in 1758, the situation began to stabilize. The Treaty of Easton of the same year marked the cessation of hostilities between the Delawares and the Pennsylvania colony. Two years later, provincial secretary Richard Peters would once again report to the Pennsylvania Assembly with an ominous prediction, as well as an urgent recommendation.

On September 15, 1760, Richard Peters took note of a "number of persons having presumed to make Settlements at or near a place called Cashietan [Cushietunk] within this Province on Lands not purchased from the Indians".⁸⁵ The Susquehanna Company had resumed its efforts at colonizing the Pennsylvania frontier. Acting under orders from Governor Hamilton's office, Peters wrote to Lewis Gordon and conveyed to him the following instructions:

⁸² SCP 2: i-ii.

⁸³ Thomas Penn to William Logan, SCP 2: 11.

⁸⁴ For a more detailed account of the negotiations and diplomacy conducted between the Delawares and Pennsylvania, see SCP 2: i-xvi.

⁸⁵ Richard Peters to Lewis Gordon, Sept. 15, 1760, SCP 2: 24.

[you are to take] two of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace to accompany you to the place where these Settlements are said to be made and there inform yourself of what is doing, and take down the names of all persons that you shall find there, together with everything done by them that you may upon Oath or otherwise give just and full Information in order to have the Laws put in the most speedy execution against them, and that all proper steps may be taken to prevent the renewal of an Indian War, as well as an Invasion of the Proprietary Lands.⁸⁶

Lewis Gordon managed to complete one half of his task. Clad in farmers' attire and pretending to be prospective New England settlers, he and three Northampton County officials observed "eighty and odd Lotts, Two Hundred Acres in each Lot...three logg Houses one sawmill, one Gristmill almost finished, and about thirty Cabbins for working people".⁸⁷ Gordon reported that while only twenty or so families occupied the settlement, they were "in full expectation to be joined by one Hundred Families at least in the Spring".⁸⁸ However, Gordon and his entourage failed in their principle objective, which was to eject the Connecticut émigrés from Pennsylvania soil. After informing the Yankees that the land they claimed was the "undoubted right and Property of the Honourable the Proprietaries of Pennsylvania", Gordon was told that the land was "claimed under the Connecticut Government and the Indian Purchase and that they would hold their Lands untill it was decided by the Highest Authority in whom the true Title was Vested".⁸⁹ Richard Peters' fears of an "Invasion of the Proprietary Lands" was thus well grounded indeed.⁹⁰

Peters' correspondence on behalf of the government of Pennsylvania reveals an interesting policy paradox that confronted Pennsylvania's political elites during the early years of the Wyoming Controversy. At an official level, the government of Pennsylvania (i.e. the Governor's office, the Proprietors, and the Assembly) discouraged and attempted to prohibit immigration into backcountry areas not formally purchased from their indigenous inhabitants. Their concern was

⁸⁶ Richard Peters to Lewis Gordon, Sept. 15, 1760, SCP 2: 24.

⁸⁷ Report of Lewis Gordon and Others to James Hamilton, Oct. 15, 1760, SCP 2: 29-32.

⁸⁸ Report of Lewis Gordon and Others to James Hamilton, Oct. 15, 1760, SCP 2: 29-32.

⁸⁹ Report of Lewis Gordon and Others to James Hamilton, Oct. 15, 1760, SCP 2: 29-32.

⁹⁰ Richard Peters to Lewis Gordon, Sept. 15, 1760, SCP 2: 24.

purely pragmatic – war with the Indians was undesirable and costly, but was nearly inevitable unless some checks were put in place on emigration from Philadelphia and its countryside to the Pennsylvania Northeast. However, by the waning days of the French and Indian War it had become clear to political elites in Pennsylvania that Yankee emigration from New England represented a significant threat to their colony’s sovereignty over its northeast frontier. Employing an ideology rooted in agrarian populism, Connecticut Yankees could make a strong argument that as the ones breaking their backs and risking their lives to develop the Pennsylvania frontier, they were more deserving of legitimate rights to its soil than absentee landlords advancing gentrified property claims. The government of Pennsylvania recognized this situation, and through the 1760s and 1770s intensified its efforts at recruiting European settlers to occupy its claim in the Wyoming Valley.⁹¹ Both policy goals – avoiding war with the Indians, and physically occupying the northeast backcountry in order to check New England incursions – were mutually exclusive, and Pennsylvania’s attempts to reconcile them more often than not came at the direct expense of the colony’s indigenous actors.

The elimination of Native American soil rights in Northeast Pennsylvania was not a top-down affair orchestrated by the political elites of Pennsylvania and Connecticut; rather, it was a gradual, piecemeal process originating from the bottom-up with the settlers themselves. The Connecticut settlement at Cushietunk was one of the earliest instigative factors in this trend, though many additional settlements would soon develop and contribute to the process. Following the cessation of formal hostilities between the Delawares and Pennsylvania at Easton in 1758, Teedyuscung redirected his efforts at securing Native American independence and autonomy away from the battlefield and into the political arena. Late in 1760 the sachem beseeched Governor Hamilton to eject the incursive Yankees from their settlement on the Delaware, because “the

⁹¹ Moyer (20).

Indians were very uneasy and would certainly turn them away if he would not".⁹² However, it was not until the following February that Hamilton was inclined to write to his Connecticut counterpart, Thomas Fitch, asking him to

use [his] utmost Influence with [the Connecticut settlers] to desist from prosecuting their unjust Scheme any further, and to remove immediately with their Families, without running the Risque of being cut off by the Indians, and involving us in a new War with them, which is an Event very much to be dreaded, or putting me to the disagreeable Necessity of using legal Measures to remove them.⁹³

It is likely that Hamilton was motivated to write to Fitch primarily because a renewed and revitalized Susquehannah Company had begun to launch a fresh wave of settlement expeditions early in 1761.⁹⁴ In any case, his words reveal three interesting aspects of Pennsylvania policymaking during the period that warrant consideration.

First, Hamilton evokes the uncompromising position held by the majority of Pennsylvania's political elites with respect to Yankee immigration into the Wyoming Valley: in no cases was it to be tolerated, and every conceivable effort ought to be made in order to eject the incursive New Englanders from Pennsylvania soil. This position stands in marked contrast to that held by political elites active during the later years of the Controversy, who more often than not preferred policies of compromise and conciliation over stubborn and aggressive attempts at eviction. Second, Hamilton's letter again serves to reinforce the preeminent importance that fear of war with the Indians had in the minds of Pennsylvania policymakers during the initial decades of the Wyoming Crisis. Finally, the governor's words hint at the immensely difficult position he and the proprietors of the Pennsylvania colony were put in, due to the machinations of the Susquehannah Company. It was at best extremely difficult and at worst next to impossible for the

⁹² Minutes of the Pennsylvania Council, At a Conference with Teedyuscung on the 13th day of November, 1760, SCP 2: 33-34.

⁹³ James Hamilton to Thomas Fitch, Feb. 10th, 1761 SCP 2: 54-56.

⁹⁴ SCP 2: xvii-xxxii.

colonial administration of either Connecticut or Pennsylvania to halt the tide of illegal settlement and unlawful squatting that was slowly turning the Pennsylvania backcountry into a powder keg seething with the potential for agrarian unrest and violent insurgency. Wary of the “disagreeable Necessity of using legal Measures to remove them”, Hamilton is quite clearly conscious of the adamant determination of the New England settlers, their willingness to use deadly force to protect their holdings, and the difficulties that would be involved in convincing a pacifist Quaker assembly to appropriate funds to eject, through force, Wyoming’s Yankees invaders.⁹⁵

Governor Fitch was not inclined to accommodate Governor Hamilton’s request. He had readily given his approval to the Susquehannah Company’s purchase at Albany some seven years previously – though the Connecticut Assembly had withheld theirs – and his inaction with respect to the Wyoming dispute reflected a growing trend in Connecticut policymaking concerning settlement and the frontier: slowly but surely, Connecticut’s political elites were beginning to accept, justify, argue for and defend their colony’s 1662 charter grant of a tract of land extending from “sea-to-sea” - or at least well into Pennsylvania’s northern limits. The Susquehannah Company continued to operate at their discretion, uninhibited by the government of Connecticut and possessive of their tacit approval. On May 19, 1762, the company’s shareholders voted “for the promotion and encouragement of the speedy beginning a Settlement of our Susquehannah purchase” along a tract of land “Ten Miles Square, easterly of and adjoining to the Susquehannah River”.⁹⁶ Purchasers, of whom there could be no less than fifty and no more than a hundred, were obligated to initiate settlement “within Four Months” and “continue thereon, holding and improving the same [tract of land] for, and during the whole Time [of a] Term of Five Years”, lest their “Interest in the [aforesaid] Ten Miles Square of Lands shall be to all Intents and Purposes

⁹⁵ James Hamilton to Thomas Fitch, Feb. 10th, 1761 SCP 2: 54-56.

⁹⁶ Minutes of a Meeting of the Susquehannah Company, May 19, 1762, SCP 2: 130.

forfeited and shall revert to the said Company”.⁹⁷ In this way the Susquehannah Company reflected the town-founding traditions of the Puritan New England society from which it was born.

The system of land tenure and distribution employed in colonial Connecticut was one that could, in the judgment of one historian, “best accomplish the settlement, the cultivation, and the possession of the frontier by the greatest number of people acting together as a coherent body”.⁹⁸ New England towns based themselves around a concept of cooperate ownership, in which each landholder held absolute ownership of his individual property as well as an equal share in “public goods” – i.e., schools, roads, churches, markets, etc. The Susquehannah Company evoked this tradition in its form and organizational development: shareholders participated in a highly democratic political structure in which they were given a vote on all major policy issues, and held an equal right to all unsettled lands the Company held.⁹⁹ Purchasers could expect to possess exclusive dominion over their tracts of land, provided they could afford the asking price and were willing and able to settle it themselves. This system of land tenure is referred to as “allodial”, and it stands in marked contrast to the structure of proprietary ownership and compulsory quit-rents characteristic of Pennsylvania’s system of land tenure and distribution.¹⁰⁰

Up until the tumultuous events of the American Revolution, Pennsylvania was for all intents and purposes a feudal domain under the exclusive dominion of the proprietary interest, the Penn family. Although the colony’s charter technically gave William Penn and his successors power equivalent to that of an absolute monarch over the “Holy Experiment”, in practice the proprietary government rapidly and willingly ceded formal political control over the colony to the

⁹⁷ Minutes of a Meeting of the Susquehannah Company, May 19, 1762, SCP 2: 131.

⁹⁸ SCP 1: xxiv.

⁹⁹ A “standing committee”, analogous to groups of town selectmen, tempered this oft-labeled “shareholders’ democracy”. SCP 1: xxiv-xxix and Moyer (17).

¹⁰⁰ See SCP 1: xxiv-xxx for more on the contrast between Connecticut and Pennsylvania’s systems of land tenure.

Assembly.¹⁰¹ Despite the relatively high democratic nature of Pennsylvania's political apparatus compared to other mid-eighteenth century British settlements, the Quaker colony's system of land tenure and distribution remained decidedly feudal. Landholders did not possess absolute control over the land they purchased; rather, all land remained in the exclusive formal and legal possession of the proprietor, who demanded from his subject-citizens annual quit-rents, an ancient and customary type of land tax. Furthermore, in contrast with the New England system of allocating and dividing a large parcel of land equally among a great number of small-holders, who would then go on to possess their land in absolute terms, free from quit-rents, Pennsylvania employed a system of land distribution that more often than not favored a small minority of wealthy gentlemen speculators at the expense of poorer agrarians. As Julian Boyd has argued,

The proprietors were believed by many people in the province to have reserved large tracts of land on the frontier for the inevitable increase in value...the large speculators in land in Pennsylvania, despite efforts at regulation, made large surveys in regions most suited for immediate settlement. Such methods on the part of the proprietors and the large land-jobbers meant a retardation of settlement...¹⁰²

This was due to the fact that speculators as a rule did not settle the land they purchased; rather, they owned land for the sole purpose of renting or selling it to other, less wealthy men. This made legal settlement costly and cumbersome, and did not facilitate the growth of township-settlements (a necessity for the successful settlement of the backcountry, due to the constant and pervasive threat of Indian attacks) the way New England's allodial system of land tenure did. This was because of the absence of an effective and efficient system of land distribution capable of organizing large groups of people into defensible (and affordable) frontier settlements; the quit-rent and speculator-friendly arrangement in employ in Pennsylvania made large-scale settlement

¹⁰¹ For more on the political relationship between William Penn, the proprietary government, and the Assembly, see Isaac Sharpless, Political Leaders of Provincial Pennsylvania. 2nd ed. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries P, 1971 (21-54).

¹⁰² SCP 1: xxvii.

expensive, unenticing, and a bureaucratic nightmare – consequentially, illegal settlement, or squatting, was both encouraged and exacerbated, at the expense of Pennsylvania’s indigenous actors and a corresponding hastening of the elimination of their soil rights.

The Wyoming Crisis simply could not have existed were it not for the stark differences between Pennsylvania and Connecticut with respect to the structure and organization of their land tenure and distribution systems. Yankees emigrating from Connecticut sought to realize frontier communities arranged along lines similar to those they were familiar with in Puritan New England – most importantly, communal ownership of public goods and unsettled land coupled with absolute ownership of their farmsteads, free from feudal obligations of any kind. This was the ideal of agrarian independence zealously held and guarded by yeomen all over the American backcountry; it was an economic and political ideology wholly incompatible with Pennsylvania legal practice and tradition. Upon arriving in the Wyoming Valley, Connecticut Yankees were loath to pay quit-rents, and balked at claims of ownership and demands of back rent made by wealthy gentlemen speculators who had in most cases never set foot in the Pennsylvania frontier, and for the most part had no intention of ever doing so. They were in many cases joined by disaffected Pennamites frustrated with the difficulties and expense involved in securing agrarian independence under the aegis of Pennsylvania law, and enchanted with the unfamiliar yet thoroughly democratic and deeply populist arrangements being enacted by strangers from New England along their northeast frontier. Lazarus Stewart and his infamous Paxton Boys from Lancaster County are a preeminent example of this trend.¹⁰³ Had Pennsylvania maintained an allodial system of land tenure rather than a quit-rent, it is likely that émigrés from New England would have seen little reason to resist so thoroughly Pennsylvania’s attempts to assimilate them. By the same token, the financial and political demands made by political elites in Pennsylvania on immigrant Yankees were intertwined

¹⁰³ See below (45-46).

completely with their colony's method of land distribution; were it not for the attempt made by relevant Pennsylvania actors to force migrants from New England to conform to a social, political and economic arrangement wholly alien to them, the Wyoming Crisis could not have occurred.

By 1763, neither the government of Pennsylvania nor the Wyoming Valley's indigenous actors had made any significant progress in halting the movement of the Susquehannah Company and its increasingly vast hordes of land-hungry settlers. Teedyuscung and his Delawares had won several small victories, to be sure: late in 1762, he reported to Governor Hamilton that he had observed in Wyoming

150 of these people furnished with all sorts of Tools as well for Building as Husbandry & declared that they had bought those Lands from the Six Nations and would settle them...I threatned [sic] them hard and declared I would carry them to the Governor at Philadelphia, and when they heard me threaten them in this manner, they said they would go away...and they said further that since the Indians were uneasy at this Purchase, if they would give them back the Money it had cost them which was one or two Bushels of Dollars, they would give them their Land again.¹⁰⁴

Despite winning for his people a temporary victory, as well as an ephemeral break from the waxing pressure of European colonization, Teedyuscung's attempts to evict the Yankee migrants from Northeast Pennsylvania ultimately resulted in failure. In April 1763, Teedyuscung's house was set ablaze, and he burned to death while he slept. In the words of Paul Moyer,

There is little doubt that the Susquehannah Company was behind the conflagration. More than any other event, his death symbolizes how the Wyoming dispute promoted the dispossession of Northeast Pennsylvania's Indian inhabitants. His demise was no accident but the product of a larger act of arson that resulted in the fiery destruction of the Indian settlement at Wyoming. Less than two weeks after the destruction of the Delaware village, a dozen Connecticut families took possession of the site; a month later more than 150 New Englanders were planting crops and building cabins there.¹⁰⁵

Teedyuscung's assassination revitalized fears of an Indian war in the minds of Pennsylvania's

¹⁰⁴ Conference with Teedyuscung, Nov. 19, 1762 SCP 2: 180.

¹⁰⁵ Moyer (22).

colonial administrators. On June 15, 1763, the British Privy Council demanded of Connecticut's governor Thomas Fitch that an "effectual Stop should be put to the Settlement which the said People of Connecticut have thus unwarrantably attempted to make".¹⁰⁶ The directive also instructed those migrants who had settled in Northeast Pennsylvania to return to Connecticut. However, the instructions from the Privy Council were for all intents and purposes ignored, and bloodshed between Native Americans and Europeans continued unabated. In the fall of 1763, Teedyuscung's son Captain Bull led a raid in the Wyoming Valley that resulted in the brutal death of the Connecticut settlers who had occupied the site of his murdered father's house.¹⁰⁷

Captain Bull and his raiders preempted an attempt made by the government of Pennsylvania to realize a similar, albeit less violent, result. In the fall of 1763, the Assembly ordered militia captain Asher Clayton and a company of one hundred men to occupy the Wyoming Valley and remove the incursive Yankee settlement there. Lazarus Stewart, an infamous backcountry outlaw and unapologetic Indian-killer who was born in Hanover, Pennsylvania in 1734, participated in the expedition and commanded a company of rangers there. It was an exercise in futility, however, as the Pennsylvanians arrived to find the settlement destroyed and all of its inhabitants murdered. One member of the party saw his observations published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. On October 23, 1763, the periodical reported that the Pennsylvania military expedition

is returned from Wyoming, where they met with no Indians but found the New Englanders, who had been killed and scalped a Day or two before they got there; they buried the Dead, nine men and a woman, who had been most cruelly butchered, the woman was roasted...and several of the men had Awls thrust into their Eyes, and Spears, arrows, Pitch-forks, [etc.] sticking in their bodies.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Instructions from the Privy Council to Thomas Fitch, June 15, 1763, SCP 2: 256.

¹⁰⁷ Moyer (22), also see Hinderaker/Mancall (117-124) for more on the connection between Captain Bull's raid and Pontiac's War.

¹⁰⁸ Extract from the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Oct. 23, 1763, SCP 2: 277.

This sort of savage brutality characterized episodes of Indian-European violence during the first phase of the Wyoming Controversy, and it was eagerly reciprocated by white settlers frustrated with and fatigued by the constant threat of Indian attack. One notable example of this was a December 1763 massacre of six Conestoga Indians at their village along the Susquehanna River, followed a week later by the murder of fourteen more who had sought refuge at the county jail in Lancaster. One eyewitness described his nausea upon seeing the victims “spread about the prison yard; shot, scalped, hacked, and cut to pieces”.¹⁰⁹ The massacre was conducted by none other than Lazarus Stewart and a group of men hailing from the Paxton District of Lancaster County; they justified their actions by arguing that their victims had acted likewise upon white settlements in the Wyoming Valley. However, putting aside the obvious racial motivations that went along with the attacks, it is likely that Lazarus Stewart and his Paxton Boys were motivated more than anything by a fear of losing their agrarian independence, as well as the rights and privileges engendered by landownership, to Indian raiders.¹¹⁰ These same fears led Stewart to abandon his allegiance to Pennsylvania and join the Susquehannah Company early in 1770; from that point on, the Wyoming dispute was one largely between Europeans and not one characterized by episodes of indigenous-settler warfare.¹¹¹ This was because the Wyoming Controversy as it played out during the pre-revolutionary decades of the 1760s had the effect of largely eliminating the Native American claim to land on Pennsylvania’s northeast frontier.

Though the Pennsylvania Northeast was subjected to nearly constant Indian raids during the initial years of the Wyoming Crisis, Native Americans never succeeded in their goal of repossessing Pennsylvania’s Wyoming Valley. By the late 1760s, the government of Pennsylvania had decided that Indians were no longer capable of stemming the tide of Yankee migration into the

¹⁰⁹ Quote found in Moyer (25).

¹¹⁰ See Moyer (24-30) and Klein/Hoogenboom (74-77) for more on the Paxton Boys’ massacres and motivations.

¹¹¹ John Penn to Thomas Penn, March 10, 1770, SCP 4: 42-43.

Pennsylvania backcountry; they resolved to repossess the region themselves, using other means. In 1768, Pennsylvania signed a treaty with Indians representing the Six Nations at Fort Stanwix (Rome, NY) for a huge tract of land known as the “New Purchase”; through this Pennsylvania gained a large strip of land extending from Wayne County in the northeast to Green and Washington Counties in the southwest, legitimizing at last its charter-granted claim over the Pennsylvania Northeast.¹¹² Attendance at the treaty conference was astoundingly high: two hundred thousand Indians were recorded as having attended the conference; the Iroquois, Shawnee and Delaware tribes contributed the largest delegations.¹¹³ Renowned Pennsylvania politicians Richard Peters and James Tilghman represented the Quaker colony during the affair. As Paul Moyer has cogently argued,

The Fort Stanwix Treaty of 1768, which established a “line of property” between Indians and whites, became an instrument through which Pennsylvania and Connecticut land companies vied for possession of Northeast Pennsylvania and extinguished Indian authority and soil rights in the region. Pennsylvania used the treaty council as an opportunity to expand and consolidate its control over the upper Susquehanna and Delaware valleys.¹¹⁴

The government of Pennsylvania was able to achieve this by leasing one-hundred acre land grants in the Wyoming Valley to three proprietary agents – Amos Ogden, John Jennings, and Charles Stewart – who were then expected to parcel their tracts and lease them to groups of small freeholders who pledged to support Pennsylvania and work to prevent and reverse the settlement of Connecticut claimants. The Fort Stanwix Treaty aided the efforts of the Susquehannah Company as well, for with it they were able to argue that the 1763 Privy Council proclamation banning settlement in northeast Pennsylvania had been effectively reversed. Thus by 1768 the process that had been put in motion at Albany – that is, the gradual realization on the behalf of Pennsylvania’s

¹¹² See Klein/Hoogenboom (165-167) for more on the New Purchase specifics.

¹¹³ Hinderaker/Mancall (147).

¹¹⁴ Moyer (23).

political elites that physical occupation of the northeast frontier was essential to prevent a loss of sovereignty over the region to Connecticut, even at the expense of Indian autonomy and soil rights there – was largely complete. Native Americans found themselves marginalized both economically and politically by both Pennsylvania and Connecticut, and by the early 1770s had for the most part migrated to parts west. The gradual disappearance of Native Americans as major players in the Wyoming dispute coincided with a marked increase in hostilities amongst the settlers themselves, as the fertile soil of the Wyoming Valley began to gradually be claimed and developed, forcing newer migrants – Yankee and Pennamite alike – into more hardscrabble backcountry regions further north. From this point on, the Wyoming Controversy, which had previously been a multi-ethnic and multi-dimensional conflict involving Indians, settlers, and proprietary officials, became for all intents and purposes a European struggle over land, property and power played out in the American backcountry.

By the convening of the court at Trenton in 1782, the landscape of the northeast Pennsylvania frontier had undergone events that had the effect of transforming the social and political backdrop of the Wyoming Crisis irrevocably. The 1763 Treaty of Paris, which concluded the Seven Years' War in North America, radically altered the map of the British New World. France was thoroughly defeated in the conflict, and consequentially was forced to relinquish all of its North American territorial possessions. Britain acquired Canada, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Cape Breton, and what was then called Florida – in all, close to half a billion acres of new territory, all of which need to be explored, settled, administered and defended.¹¹⁵ By this time the Susquehanna Company was settling the fertile Wyoming Valley at full speed, in spite of the intense bureaucratic and legal opposition presented by the combined interests of Pennsylvania

¹¹⁵ The territory called “Florida” in 1763 also included regions in present-day Alabama and Mississippi. Hinderaker/Mancall (125).

proprietary actors and political elites, the institutional apparatus that was the British Privy Council, and Superintendent of Indian Affairs Sir William Johnson. Because of the repudiation of the Connecticut purchase by the Six Nations in 1761, coupled with the brutal savagery New Englanders often met hostile or obstructionist Indians with, Yankee émigrés to the Wyoming Valley quickly aroused the ire and opposition of the region's indigenous inhabitants. Most prominent among these was Teedyuscung, sachem of the Delawares. Though he and many other Native American military leaders in the region managed to assemble a respectable opposition, first through the use of military force, than through the use of political maneuvering and diplomacy, their efforts were ultimately in vain. The government of Pennsylvania was impotent in the face of Yankee emigration, and the government of Connecticut was beginning to actively support it. New Englanders and Pennamites alike responded to Native American raids with astonishing brutality, often massacring entire villages in response to indigenous attacks.¹¹⁶ Teedyuscung's assassination by a group of Susquehanna Company settlers in the spring of 1763 is by far the most notable example of this trend; the event was to mark the beginning of the end of the autonomy and independent existence of Northeast Pennsylvania's Native Americans.

During the late 1760s, the form of agrarian unrest that defined the Wyoming Controversy at its most basic level began to change. Angered at land distribution policies that favored wealthy speculators at the expense of small freeholders, unable to afford the increasingly usurious annual quit-rents demanded by the proprietors, and enticed by a populist agrarian ideology rooted in backcountry independence and masculine yeomanry, many disenchanting Pennamites decided to cast aside their loyalties to their home colony and became Yankees. John Penn, nephew of Pennsylvania proprietor Thomas Penn, wrote to his uncle in March 1770, warning him that

¹¹⁶ For more detail on instances of European-Indian frontier violence, see Moyer (13-36) and Hinderaker/Mancall (123-124, 135-137)

the Paxton Boys have joined themselves to the New Englanders, and are now in possession of your reserved lands in Wioming. About a fortnight ago fifty or Sixty of these lawless villains well armed marched from the County of Lancaster towards the northeast Branch of the Susquehanna and I have Since had intelligence that they have plundered & destroyed several houses belonging to the persons who were settled at Wioming under you. I think there is no doubt but these Robbers will gain strength every day especially as we are in no situation to give them any opposition...I am at a loss what can be done to any purpose. It is almost certain, should they keep their possession, it will become an Asylum to all the Villains & Robbers, as well of this as the neighbouring Provinces.¹¹⁷

Penn's naked expression of fear, worry and hopelessness was a telling indication of events that would soon come to pass. While episodes of violence characteristic of the Wyoming dispute as it existed in the 1760s were largely between Indians and European settlers, by the 1770s the Wyoming Crisis was for the most part a conflict between rival groups of white settlers, and also between zealous agrarians (Wild Yankees) and officials representing the government and proprietary interests of Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania's political elites, in response to the growing threat posed by the Susquehannah Company and its Connecticut claimants, initially employed tactics of bureaucratic wrangling and legal maneuvering in an attempt to force invasive Yankees out of the Wyoming Valley. Though these strategies – which included the preemptive purchase made at Albany, the successful courting of the Privy Council as well as the Ministry of Indian Affairs, and the Fort Stanwix Treaty and New Purchase of 1760 – achieved some degree of success at the official level (they proved decisive in convincing the court at Trenton to award Northeast Pennsylvania to its namesake state), they were unable to prevent the rapid colonization of the Wyoming Valley region by hordes of fiercely independent men and women from New England.¹¹⁸

By 1782, Pennsylvania's policy towards Indian affairs and settlement of the backcountry

¹¹⁷ John Penn to Thomas Penn, March 10, 1770, SCP 4: 42-43.

¹¹⁸ For more on the arguments presented at Trenton, see Robert J. Taylor, "Trial at Trenton." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser. 26 (1969) (521-47).

frontier had also changed drastically, at the direct expense of the Wyoming Valley's indigenous inhabitants. Whereas before the proprietary administration, governor's office, and Assembly had all opposed the settlement and colonization of Pennsylvania's northeast frontier, increasingly after Albany Pennsylvania's political elites began to endorse and implement a settlement program of the Wyoming Valley in order to check the seemingly-unstoppable threat posed by Yankee migration. By the time of the 1768 Fort Stanwix Treaty this transformational process was largely complete, and had been as such consummated by an official partnership between the Assembly and Pennsylvania's most powerful land speculators. The impetus for this policy shift was brought about due to changing calculations concerning the strategic importance of Pennsylvania's indigenous actors. With the defeat of France's North American empire, the alliance between the British and the Six Nations became less relevant, and consequentially Indian settlements in northeast Pennsylvania lost their value as buffer zones against a French invasion of the economically dominant Pennsylvania southeast. In addition, by the late 1760s, the inability of Wyoming's Indians to retake the region was obvious to all but the most willfully ignorant amongst Pennsylvania's political apparatus.¹¹⁹ The net result of this was a conscious abandonment of a policy of accommodation and conciliation with Pennsylvania's northeast backcountry Native Americans. Whereas before Pennsylvania had resisted settlement in the Wyoming Valley for fear of provoking an Indian war, by the time of the Fort Stanwix negotiations this sort of war was for the most part considered inevitable, as it had become clear to the government of Pennsylvania that nothing short of violent force, coupled with the physical occupation of the Proprietor's crown-granted domains, could effect a cessation in Connecticut's experiment in expansion. With this development, "bloodshed and murder", as Paul Moyer eloquently put it, "replaced legal

¹¹⁹ For more on how Colonial British policy towards the American backcountry changed following the French and Indian War, see Hinderaker/Mancall (125-160).

maneuvering as the coin of conflict in the Wyoming Valley”.¹²⁰

The colony of Connecticut had likewise thoroughly transfigured its outlook toward settlement outside of its official boundaries by the time of Trenton. Initially, the colony’s governor and Assembly refused to endorse or fund any settlement scheme predicated on the 1662 charter grant, as the official policy of the Privy Council (and therefore theoretically of all British colonial administrations) aimed to prevent over-hasty settlement of the American backcountry in order to avoid costly and destabilizing war with Indian tribes, whose allegiance was crucial in order to protect British interests from French incursions. However, as unlawful settlement proved an impossible force to control, and as British military victories in the Seven Years’ War negated the cruciality of the Anglo-Iroquois alliance, Connecticut’s policy towards settlement in Pennsylvania began to change. Adding to this development as well were the myriad social, economic and demographic factors extant in Connecticut by the mid-eighteenth century – factors that ultimately pressured political elites in Connecticut to act with urgency, lest they deal with the consequences of a tremendous surplus population of angry, hardscrabble, armed yeomen hungry for land. Unsurprisingly, the Susquehannah Company played a role in engendering this transformation in Connecticut’s settlement policy: a company representative attended almost every legislative session of the Assembly between the years 1769 and 1774, continuously petitioning the body to boldly assert Connecticut’s claim west of the Delaware.¹²¹ More nefariously, the company managed to successfully purchase influence among Connecticut’s political elites, using shares in the Wyoming claim as currency.¹²² This tactic worked to great effect, and even succeeded in securing the allegiance of the colony’s governor, Jonathan Trumbull (1769-1784). Following a

¹²⁰ Moyer (28).

¹²¹ Moyer (40).

¹²² For more on the role played by the Susquehannah Company in Connecticut’s decision to assert its western claim, see Julian P. Boyd, “Connecticut’s Experiment in Expansion: The Susquehanna Company, 1753-1803.” *Journal of Economic and Business History* 27 (1931) (38-69).

decisive defeat of Pennamite settlers in the summer of 1771, Yankees gradually began to become the majority demographic in Northeast Pennsylvania.¹²³ Though only numbering around a hundred or so in 1771, by 1774 the Yankee population in Wyoming had reached two thousand, and it would reach three thousand two years later.¹²⁴ All of these factors combined caused the Connecticut Assembly to at last recognize the Susquehanna Company's purchases in the Pennsylvania backcountry, and in May 1771 the legislature voted to incorporate the claim as the town of Westmoreland, which was then attached to Litchfield County; two years later, this became Westmoreland County.¹²⁵ The Continental Congress, occupied with the Revolutionary War and anxious to avoid an open break between two important colonies, voted to award the disputed territory to Connecticut for the time being, until a more permanent arrangement could be made.¹²⁶

A permanent arrangement, at least at the jurisdictional level, was made, in 1782 by a United States Court convened under Article IX of the Articles of Confederation at Trenton, New Jersey. Despite the fact that by that time the overwhelming majority of settlers in the northeast Pennsylvania backcountry hailed from New England and identified politically with Connecticut, the five-judge tribunal determined that the more salient factor pertinent to a reasonable adjudication of the controversy was the fact that Pennsylvania had conducted its purchases of backcountry lands from Indian tribes in a more legal and legitimate manner. After more than a month of testimony, the panel ruled on December 30, 1782 that the "State of Connecticut has no right to the lands in Controversy", and that the "Jurisdiction and Pre-emption of all the Territory lying within the Charter boundary of Pennsylvania, and now claimed by the State of Connecticut,

¹²³ See John Thompson to Charles Stewart, July 5, 1771, and Minutes of the Pennsylvania Council, July 16, 1771, SCP 4: 219, 223.

¹²⁴ Julian P. Boyd, "Connecticut's Experiment in Expansion: The Susquehanna Company, 1753-1803." *Journal of Economic and Business History* 27 (1931) (52, 55-62).

¹²⁵ Resolution of the Connecticut Legislature Concerning the Western Claim, May 1771, SCP 4:215; Act of the Connecticut General Assembly Erecting the Town of Westmoreland, Jan. 1774, SCP 5: 268-269; An Act Making Westmoreland a County, Oct. 1776, SCP 7: 23-24.

¹²⁶ SCP 5: xlviii-lii.

do of right belong to the State of Pennsylvania".¹²⁷ Connecticut official lost its western exclave with this decision, which brought to an official close the jurisdictional dimension of the Wyoming dispute. From 1754 to 1782 Connecticut supported, first tacitly and then openly, its citizens' attempts to settle the Pennsylvania Northeast under a Connecticut claim. However, following the Trenton decision, Connecticut's political elites abandoned their attempt to realize their western claim.¹²⁸ The Susquehannah Company, however, would continue to live on, though the Yankees who settled the Wyoming Valley under its claim were no longer considered citizens of Connecticut by any of the relevant political actors in the dispute. The Wyoming Controversy was far from over; rather, it was on the verge of becoming truly a crisis, and was about to enter its deadliest and most destructive phase.

By 1782 the land dispute disseminating turmoil along Pennsylvania's northeast frontier was nearly three decades old. The American Revolution had come and gone, and the colonies of Pennsylvania and Connecticut were now states. The American Revolution as it played out in the Pennsylvania backcountry was largely an Indian war, although the Wyoming Valley's indigenous inhabitants had long since migrated to parts west. Many Pennamites, dissatisfied with Pennsylvania's inadequate attempt at stemming the flood of Connecticut émigrés into their backyards, joined forces with pro-British Indian tribes and became Tories; the infamous 1778 Wyoming Massacre – which claimed, among many other victims, none other than Lazarus Stewart – is only the most well-known example of this pervasive trend. Following the tumultuous events of the Revolution and Pennsylvania's formal reassertion of its sovereignty over its northeast frontier, the Wyoming dispute took on a markedly different form. Violence that had formerly been trained

¹²⁷ Judgment of the Court Convened at Trenton, Dec. 30, 1782, SCP 7:245-246; also see Proclamation Announcing the Trenton Decree, Jan. 6, 1783, SCP 7: 247-249.

¹²⁸ For an overview of the Trenton trial, see SCP 7: xxii-xxxiii, 144-249 and Robert J. Taylor, "Trial at Trenton." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser. 26 (1969) (521-47).

upon Indians by white settlers and vice versa was now occurring between the settlers themselves, and also between men driven to execute the law and force Yankees to conform to Pennsylvania's system of land tenure and distribution and those zealous agrarians determined to resist any attempt to deny them their independence. The apex of the Wyoming Crisis was about to begin, and it would go on to embroil the region in another two decades of violent conflict before a profound shift in Pennsylvania's policy towards the settlement and administration of the Susquehannah Valley caused the "bloody fields" of the Pennsylvania Northeast to at last become tranquil.

Chapter 3

"Those Godforsaken Men and Enemies of all Good": The Apex of the Wyoming Crisis, c. 1782-1800

On October 11, 1784, a prominent shareholder and leader in the Susquehannah Company named John Franklin wrote to a group of Wyoming's leading Yankees in an attempt to rally them into action in the face of what were, in his words, the "Arbitrary Unconstitutional and Unlawful Proceedings had against us and the Cruel Barbarous and worse than Savage treatment that we have receiv'd and are Receiving from the Authority of this State and the Pennsylvanean Land jobbers

and their Lawless Banditti”.¹²⁹ Franklin continued, expressing himself in a way only a person who had experienced the bloody conflagration embroiling Pennsylvania’s Wyoming Valley for themselves would be capable of, with the lamentation that it was “beyond [his] Power to express, (or even point out)...one half of the Injustice Rapine Plunder and Murder and (every) Species of Cruelty and Barbarity which have been committed against us”.¹³⁰ Prompting this spirited correspondence between Susquehannah Company representatives was, in part, the appointment of four Pennsylvania Justices of the Peace – Alexander Patterson, John Seely, Henry Shoemaker and David Mead – to the Wyoming Valley in 1783. All four men claimed land in the region under Pennsylvania and were notoriously both hostile to Yankee interests and friendly with the Pennamite cause. They facilitated, in an attempt to mitigate the Wyoming Controversy, the forcible dispossession of hundreds of Yankee settlers unwilling to conform to Pennsylvania’s system of land tenure and distribution. One Connecticut claimant described the justices as “Ignorant and void of Humanity” and complained that by their actions a “whole herd of Pennsylvania landjobbers were set loose upon the Inhabitants to Exercise their wonted avaritious and hellish Practices”.¹³¹ The depth and color of the language used to describe the Wyoming Crisis at this stage in its history is well-deserved, for the northeast Pennsylvania backcountry in the final two decades of the eighteenth-century witnessed some of the most bloody and destructive episodes of frontier agrarian violence in the post-Revolutionary United States. Franklin encapsulates the righteous fury common to many Yankees involved in this phase of the dispute with Pennsylvania better than most: reacting to the Pennsylvania-ordered kidnapping and imprisonment of Col. Zebulon Butler and eleven others in the spring of 1784, Franklin viciously impugns those “Godforsaken Men and Enemies of all Good, Patterson, and More and their Infernal Associations,” who, in his opinion, “began the

¹²⁹ John Franklin to William Samuel Johnson, Eliphalet Dyer, and Jesse Root, Oct. 11, 1784, SCP 8: 104.

¹³⁰ John Franklin to William Samuel Johnson, Eliphalet Dyer, and Jesse Root, Oct. 11, 1784, SCP 8: 104.

¹³¹ Obadiah Gore to William Judd, Nov. 21, 1783, SCP 7: 331.

greatest piece of cruelty, and Barbarity that ever was Committed by any of Gods Creation".¹³²

Though the jurisdictional dispute between Connecticut and Pennsylvania over contested lands in the later state's northeast backcountry had ended successfully for the Quaker colony with the judgment made at Trenton in 1782, the Wyoming Controversy lingered on. Before the conflict had simultaneously been a jurisdictional power struggle as well as a multi-party land and property struggle involving groups of rival settlers and indigenous Americans clinging to the last vestiges of their ancestral lands. Now, at this late stage in its development, the Wyoming Controversy had become a three-way conflict characterized by two parallel forms of violent unrest. Frontier violence occurred between Pennamites and Yankees, much the same as it did during the early decades of the dispute though thoroughly more frequent and destructive in nature. Examples of this sort of agrarian unrest include an incident in mid-July, 1784, when John Franklin was shot through the wrist by a group of Pennamites, who managed to mortally wound his Yankee companion Nathan Stevens.¹³³ That same month the Pennamite garrison at Wilkes-Barre was subjected to a nine-day siege by an armed party of Connecticut claimants focusing their unrest upon a prominent agent and symbol of Pennsylvania's authority.¹³⁴ Following the Trenton Decree, Alexander Patterson became, in the words of Moyer, the "undisputed leader of Pennamite settlers"; John Franklin was in many ways his Yankee counterpart.¹³⁵ However, increasingly after 1771 Yankees began to displace Pennamites as the dominant majority in the Wyoming Valley; by 1784, the cause of Wyoming's Pennamite settlers was, for all intents and purposes, lost.

The second form of agrarian violence that defined the Wyoming dispute in its apex years was that which took place between independence-driven yeomen farmers, Yankee and Pennamite

¹³² John Franklin to William Samuel Johnson, Eliphalet Dyer, and Jesse Root, Oct. 11, 1784, SCP 8: 106.

¹³³ John Franklin's Diary, July 3 to December 7, 1784, SCP 8: 131, 155-156.

¹³⁴ Moyer (33).

¹³⁵ Moyer (46).

alike, and officials representing the state of Pennsylvania who were for the most part hostile to the backcountry ideal of agrarian independence and eternally committed to the forceful cooptation of Wyoming's New England migrants into Pennsylvania's traditional system of political and economic authority. During the final decade of the Wyoming dispute, Wild Yankees hostile to Pennsylvania's rule of law waged a protracted insurgency against both Pennsylvania officials as well as any settlers who attempted to settle the Susquehannah Valley under grants of land procured from Pennsylvania land companies. The best example of this form of violence was the kidnapping of Luzerne county clerk Timothy Pickering by a group of Yankee insurgents, many of whom had fathers that were prominent shareholders in the Susquehannah Company.¹³⁶ Pickering's kidnapping, in addition to being an effort at securing the release of one of the most prominent players in the Susquehannah Company, was also a violent reaction to an attempt made by Pennsylvania to politically weaken, through a divide-and-conquer strategy, Northeast Pennsylvania's Yankee insurgents.¹³⁷

Settler-on-settler violence occurred in Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley largely because of agrarians' fears of losing their agricultural independence – i.e., their small backcountry farmsteads, which provided them material self-sufficiency as well as the ability to retain possession of their own labor. Between the Albany Congress and the Trenton Decree, these fears were for the most part engendered by the constant threat of Indian invasion, which came to a head during the tumultuous years of the American Revolutionary War. Native American attacks were often unspeakably savage and destructive; they generally provoked instances of settler retaliation that were equally so. Lazarus Stewart and his Paxton Boys are the preeminent example of this form of agrarian unrest; however, they constituted merely a part of a terrifyingly large whole. Some weeks

¹³⁶ Deposition of Andrew Ellicott, July 7, 1788, SCP 9:394-396

¹³⁷ See below (71-76). Also See Moyer (65-75) and SCP 9: xli-xlv, 394-496 for more on the kidnapping of Timothy Pickering.

after Stewart's infamous Lancaster massacre of twenty-one Conestoga Indians, hundreds of Pennamite settlers marched on Philadelphia with the goal of murdering a group of Christian Indians who were seeking refuge in the city. Though they were turned away, the incident nonetheless illuminates a degree of racial enmity pervasive amongst those settling the Pennsylvania frontier. It was a prejudice that, while inexcusable, is nevertheless understandable given the frequency and intensity of Indian attacks, as well as the inability (and in some cases entrenched unwillingness) of the Pennsylvania government to adequately defend the backcountry frontier.¹³⁸

Following the resolution of the French & Indian War, indigenous settlements were for the most part a relic of the past in the Wyoming Valley (though Iroquois raids originating from regions west remained a common occurrence). However, the legacy of racialized violence that was endemic to those areas of the Pennsylvania frontier embroiled in the Wyoming Controversy left a lasting mark on the dispute. Moyer puts it best:

From the start, contention between Indians and colonists and among Euroamerican land claimants was intertwined. Specifically, the bloody, interracial confrontations that occurred during the Seven Years' War, Pontiac's Rebellion, and later, the Revolutionary War, schooled settlers in the types of violence and terror tactics they would later bring to bear against land speculators, government officials, and each other. In other words, struggle over land and independence in Northeast Pennsylvania was prefigured by decades of racialized frontier violence.¹³⁹

Agrarians often dressed and yelled like Indians as they committed attacks aimed against rival settlers' homes, crops and livestock. In April 1770, Connecticut claimant John McDonner, along with twenty-eight companions, "abused & Robbed [Amos] Ogden's party painted like Indians" (Ogden was a prominent land speculator appointed by the Pennsylvania Assembly to administer and lease tracts of land in the Wyoming Valley to loyal Pennamites following the 1768

¹³⁸ Moyer (26).

¹³⁹ Moyer (24).

Fort Stanwix Treaty).¹⁴⁰ Likewise, Timothy Pickering's kidnappers were also reported to have been robed in Indian vestments, which usually included a blackened face as well as a handkerchief wrapped around the head and a blanket draped over the figure.

Moyer's point speaks to a larger truth: in many ways, Pennsylvania's long and turbulent history of Indian-settler warfare is what sets the Wyoming Crisis apart from other mid- to late-eighteenth century jurisdictional disputes over land, property and power.¹⁴¹ What distinguished the Wyoming Controversy from other contemporaneous conflicts involving struggles over land and property rights was the frequent and pernicious use of violence in the attempt to secure, on the part of the frontier yeomanry, a manifestation of agrarian independence defined essentially by security, self-sufficiency, and masculine autonomy. Other regions, ones which experienced outbreaks of backcountry insurgency during the second half of the eighteenth century but did not necessarily share Pennsylvania's history of Indian-settler conflict, incurred far fewer casualties and witnessed markedly fewer episodes of mortal violence than Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley during the Pennamite-Yankee Wars.¹⁴² For example, the murder of proprietary agent Paul Chadwick in Maine by a group of agrarian insurgents was considered to be so appallingly unacceptable, indefensible, and just plain out of the ordinary that it contributed significantly to the collapse of agrarian unrest in the region.¹⁴³

Settler-on-settler violence, which was, incidentally, the particular form of agrarian unrest

¹⁴⁰ Eliphalet Dyer and Others to Jonathan Trumbull, March 27, 1771, SCP 4: 194-195, n. 36.

¹⁴¹ For more on Pennsylvania's history of Indian-settler conflict, see Hinderaker/Mancall (105-112, 117-124, 133-140, 177-183) and Ann M. Ousterhout, "Frontier Vengeance: Connecticut Yankees vs. Pennamites in the Wyoming Valley." *Pennsylvania History* 62 (summer 1995) (330-63). For an excellent introduction to the origins of early U.S. jurisdictional controversies, as well as a broad overview and comparative analysis of the regional scope of these controversies, see Peter S. Onuf, The Origins of the Federal Republic: Jurisdictional Controversies in the United States, 1775-1787. Philadelphia, 1983.

¹⁴² Moyer (1-12, 24-25).

¹⁴³ See Taylor, Alan. *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina P, 1990 (202-205).

responsible for this period of the Wyoming dispute's moniker "Pennamite-Yankee Wars", occurred in a number of ways. Prospective settlers trained violence upon one another while surveying claims they had both purchased, albeit from different grantors. A July 1784 incident, in which a "party of men who lay in Ambush" (Connecticut claimants Elisha Garret and Chester Paine) surprised and wounded Pennsylvania claimants Henry Brink and Wilhelmus Van Gordon (they proceeded to kill their attackers), is an excellent example of this type of Yankee-Pennamite altercation.¹⁴⁴ Yankees also trained violence upon Pennamites who actively supported the efforts of the Pennsylvania government to force them into political subordination: in October 1784, a pitched battle near Abraham's Creek between Yankee claimants and a combined force of Pennamite settlers and Pennsylvania militiamen took the lives of a half-dozen Pennsylvanians.¹⁴⁵ Finally, Yankees trained violence upon other Yankees who decided to conform – often through the re-purchase of their land grant under a Pennsylvania title, in addition to increased taxes and decreased local autonomy – to Pennsylvania's attempts to force them into compliance with its land tenure system. Examples include an occasion in June 1788 when a group of armed Yankees from Tunkhannock Creek "assembled in a riotous manner about the House of a Mr. [Zebulon] Marcey" and proceeded to tear down his house and drive him from the valley.¹⁴⁶ Marcey was a New Englander who claimed land under a Susquehannah Company title; however, he angered his backcountry brethren through his cooperation with Pennsylvania officials as well as agreeing to purchase a Pennsylvania deed for his land.¹⁴⁷

Violence between yeomen and political elites was similar to settler-on-settler violence in that it too was motivated out of agrarians' fear of losing their property and independence, though

¹⁴⁴ Deposition of William Brink, July 27, 1784, SCP 8: 7-9.

¹⁴⁵ John Franklin to Frederick Antes, Daniel Montgomery, and William Bonam, Oct. 23, 1784 and John Armstrong, Jr., to John Dickinson, Oct. 25, 1784, SCP 8: 130-131, 135.

¹⁴⁶ Deposition of Andrew Ellicott, June 8, 1788, SCP 9: 394-395.

¹⁴⁷ Moyer (91).

as a product of forcible, elite-driven state cooptation rather than that of the more level playing field of the bloody Pennsylvania backcountry. Wild Yankees trained violence on those Pennsylvania officials charged with the task of pacifying, incorporating, and ultimately profiting from the Pennsylvania backcountry. The kidnapping of Timothy Pickering is a preeminent example of this sort of violence; another includes a summer 1785 incident wherein Northumberland County magistrate and Pennsylvania Justice of the Peace David Mead's home was put under siege by a large group of Wild Yankees. Mead preserved his harrowing experience in a letter he drafted while the events were taking place. He gives the following narration of his ordeal:

this day while I am writing, about twenty armed men are now before my Door mowing my meadow, removing my fences [etc.], keeping up the Indian yell; my hands beat and abused with many stripes before they could escape. A General meeting of the Inhabitants was held on Saturday last, when it was Resolved by them without one dissenting voice, that the Laws of Pennsylvania could not be submitted to, that myself and the other few inhabitants who are any way attached to the state to be expelled.¹⁴⁸

Mead's story incorporates two vital elements of eighteenth-century backcountry unrest: the destruction of property (in this case crops and agricultural equipment) and therefore of independence, and the legacy of Pennsylvania's long history of Indian-settler conflict in the form of the Wild Yankee's utilization of an "Indian yell" as a terror tactic. His words also hint at the causal factor underlying the phenomenon of the Wild Yankee insurgency – the laws of Pennsylvania themselves, specifically those laws pertaining to land tenure and property rights that were wholly different from what Yankees were used to in New England, were in many ways the primary impetus of Northeast Pennsylvania's agrarian revolt.

Pennsylvania's political elites also became embroiled in violent encounters with settlers who had previously bought land under Pennsylvania titles but became enamored with the Yankee's ideology of agrarian independence, as well as enticed by the prospect of independently owning

¹⁴⁸ David Mead to John Dickinson, July 6 1785, SCP 8: 245-246.

their land free from semi-feudal obligations, and consequentially joined the cause of the Susquehanna Company. Lazarus Stewart's seminal migration to Wyoming from Lancaster County in 1770, and his subsequent violent entanglements with Pennsylvania militiamen and proprietary officials from thereon after, is the preeminent example of this trend. John Armstrong Jr., a prominent state official charged with restoring order to northeast Pennsylvania in the late eighteenth century, highlighted the particular problem Pennsylvania's political elites were faced with as a result of the class-rooted conflict between hardscrabble yeomen and gentrified elites when he complained to Governor Dickinson in the fall of 1784 that every time he tried to enforce the law in the Wyoming Valley, he was "not only attacked by one, but in a great degree deserted by the other".¹⁴⁹ At times the aversion many Pennamite settlers developed to Pennsylvania authority manifested itself in violent confrontation between disenchanted yet independence-driven Pennsylvanians and state officials (many of which owned land in the region and thus counted as gentlemen speculators also) or militiamen; however, Pennamite subversion of Pennsylvania's rule of law negatively impacted the ability of the Quaker Colony's political elites to manage the Wyoming affair in more indirect and less overtly hostile ways as well.

Obstructionism was the primary means by which Pennamites impeded the ability of the Pennsylvania government to adequately pacify the Wyoming Valley. Many who served in the Pennsylvania militia at times resisted the efforts of the Assembly to use them in the forcible pacification of the war-torn Pennsylvania backcountry. In 1771, an embarrassingly low figure (at least for the provincial administration) of twenty-five Northampton County militiamen responded to the Assembly's order to relieve a besieged Pennamite garrison in Wyoming.¹⁵⁰ Thirteen years later, Northampton's militia displayed a similar sense of apathy in response to the events

¹⁴⁹ John Armstrong, Jr., to John Dickinson, Oct. 25, 1784, SCP 8: 135.

¹⁵⁰ Lewis Gordon to James Tilghman, Aug. 11, 1771, and James Hamilton and Others to Thomas Penn and John Penn, Aug. 20, 1771, SCP 4: 238-239.

embroiling Wyoming: in 1784, only a third of the troops requested by the Assembly to restore order in the region obeyed the province's directive. Pennsylvania officials John Boyd and John Armstrong, Jr. recalled this version of events in a correspondence with Governor Dickinson following their arrival at Easton, which was currently consumed in Yankee-Pennamite violence:

Upon our Arrival...we found neither the temper nor preparation of the Militia such as we had expected to find them...We everywhere met the following Objections "that it was Quarell of a Sett of Landjobbers that the whole Country was not worth the life of a single Man, or the labor of the many who were now called out to quiet it and that they were drawn forth not meerly to support the laws but to exturbate the whole race of Connecticut Claimants...not more than one third of the Number warned appeared at the place of Rendezvous, and among these, but very few declared themselves to be perfectly willing to go farther...Out of 70 Men who came from the Northampton Battalion, their were but 40 who had brought their Arms."¹⁵¹

Boyd and Armstrong's account, in addition to conveying the depressingly shabby condition of Pennsylvania's military response to agrarian unrest and backcountry revolution, also alludes to an important causal factor underlying Pennamite obstruction of Pennsylvania policy with respect to the pacification of the province's northeast backcountry. There was a marked feeling on the part of many settlers not located in those areas directly affected by the dispute that what was going on in Wyoming was none of their concern. There is also an indication that by this point Wyoming was gradually beginning to attain its alternate meaning, "field of blood": despite its relatively fertile and accessible nature, the entire Wyoming Valley region was, in the eyes of one Pennamite militiaman, "not worth the life of a single Man".¹⁵² It is also probable that some of the Northampton militiamen, who were for the most part culled from the same sort of folk zealously

¹⁵¹ John Boyd and John Armstrong, Jr., to John Dickinson, August 7, 1784, SCP 8: 20-21.

¹⁵² John Boyd and John Armstrong, Jr., to John Dickinson, August 7, 1784, SCP 8: 20-21.

guarding their agrarian independence in parts further east, saw eye-to-eye ideologically with Wyoming's agrarian insurgents and were hesitant to apply deadly force to them in the service of the Pennsylvania government. Most backcountry settlers called into militia service shared the same priorities as Yankee émigrés from New England: a nearly single-minded concern for property, power and independence defined above all by the pursuit of both self-sufficiency and self-interest. More than anything, however, this telling anecdote reveals the general impotency of Pennsylvania's political elites when it came to the use of military force in the pacification of the province's frontier territories. Pennsylvania not only had to deal with a stubborn and violent agrarian revolt, whose participants were more than willing to use deadly force, in its northeast backcountry, but also had to wrestle with the problem of securing adequate and effectual military service from men whose interests more often than not aligned with the invaders from New England rather than the administrators and officials representing their home state. It was a problem that would soon come to hasten the displacement of Pennamites from the Wyoming Valley; it also ultimately engendered a profound shift in Pennsylvania's strategy of engagement with the Wyoming dispute, one that would, through the effectual and concerted use of force as well as the dual diplomatic strategies of compromise and conciliation, eventually lead to the end of controversy along Pennsylvania's northeast frontier.

During the early years of the Wyoming Controversy, Pennsylvania employed a no-settlement policy in its territories lying along the northeast frontier, in the region straddling the Susquehanna and Delaware Rivers. This was in line with a colonial policy dating back to the time of William Penn, which necessitated prior purchase, from their indigenous owners, of all lands not included within the original 1683 purchase from the Delawares.¹⁵³ In 1754 war with the Indians was extremely undesirable, leading Pennsylvania politicians (with the support of the Crown

¹⁵³ Klein/Hoogenboom (34-36, 53-57).

Colonial Office) to support a policy of buttressing Indian settlements in the colony's northeast backcountry while prohibiting its citizens from colonizing there. This policy was first breached at Albany, when Pennsylvania speculators preempted a Susquehanna Company purchase of Six Nations' lands in the Wyoming Valley. Unable to stem the tide of unlawful emigration to Northeast Pennsylvania from Connecticut through diplomacy and negotiation (in any case, there was little the government of Connecticut could do in the face of a determined and nomadic settlement movement even had they opposed the endeavor instead of giving it their tacit approval), Pennsylvania gradually began to endorse and facilitate settlement in the Wyoming Valley in order to populate the region with loyal Pennamites able to check a hostile Yankee incursion. These actions came at the direct expense of Wyoming's indigenous peoples' soil rights and autonomy; beginning in 1763 and for all intents and purposes complete by 1768, Native Americans were displaced from Northeast Pennsylvania. This process was a direct result of the Wyoming Controversy.

Pennsylvania accompanied this course of action with a concerted legal effort aimed at convincing its federal administrative superiors - first the Privy Council and then the United States government in its various revolutionary-era forms - of the province's sole and inalienable right to the Wyoming Valley and all other Pennsylvania territories laying between the forty-first and forty-second parallels. Despite an eight-year period during which Connecticut maintained formal sovereignty over the Wyoming Valley region, this strategy was decidedly effective, culminating in 1782 with the Trenton Decree. However, it failed utterly to stem both the tide of Yankee migration as well as that of agrarian unrest that was rapidly sanguifying the rolling hills of the Pennsylvania Northeast. Permitting and sponsoring expeditions of Pennamite settlers to the Susquehanna Valley only exacerbated the conflict, as instances of racialized frontier violence multiplied between

Indians and Europeans, only to be followed after their displacement by equally savage attacks occurring between rival groups of Yankee and Pennamite settlers. Furthermore, many Pennamite settlers were abandoning their allegiance to Penn's colony and asserting land claims under Susquehannah Company deeds; scores more were apathetic and ineffectual in the face of Pennsylvania's attempts to restore order to the valley, the result of their prioritization of self-interest over obedience and loyalty to the state. Up until now, politicians and political elites attempting to control the rapidly-degenerating situation in the northeast Pennsylvania backcountry had failed to adequately stem the tide of frontier violence. However, all of that was about to change – counter-intuitively, perhaps, as it was the Wyoming Valley's Pennamite resistance that was to become the first casualty of Pennsylvania's final, at-long-last effectual attempt to regain, retain and pacify its northeast frontier. The hard-line approach to Yankee settlement favored by previous administrations, which included the ejection of all Yankee settlements as a non-negotiable condition, was about to come to an end. In its place would appear a new strategy that accepted the inevitable reality that some degree of compromise with the New Englanders was a precondition for peace, while at the same time effectively made use of coercive pressure as well as a class-based divide-and-conquer political strategy. The consequences for Pennsylvania's northeast frontier from all of this were to be enormous.

The significance of the fact that the Wyoming Crisis in its apex phase was a three-way struggle between Yankees, Pennamites, and government of Pennsylvania cannot be overstated. Though initially set loose in Wyoming in order to achieve the policy goal of the Pennsylvania administration – i.e., the pacification of the turbulent Wyoming Valley region and a cessation of Connecticut settlement there – many officials and justices appointed by the Assembly and governor's office to restore order to the region and quell agrarian unrest in fact achieved the exact

opposite result. This was because many Pennamites, including both backcountry smallholders and wealthier land speculators, held interests that were not in line with those charged with the administration of William Penn's proprietary lands. The story of Alexander Patterson provides an excellent example of the ways in which Pennamites worked to undermine the efforts of the Pennsylvania government to return stability to Northeast Pennsylvania.

It should be remembered that Patterson, a veteran of the Pennamite-Yankee Wars by this point in his career, was appointed to the Wyoming Valley as a justice of the peace in 1783, as part of the initial attempt made by the government of Pennsylvania to reoccupy and quell its turbulent, formerly-annexed Northeast Frontier. Patterson was for all intents and purposes an agent of the powerful hand holders and gentlemen speculators of Pennsylvania; in this role he wasted no time in demonstrating his thoroughly unprincipled and self-interested nature by essentially organizing a campaign of violence, incorporating both legal and extra-legal means, aimed at ejecting Yankees and all other Connecticut claimants from the land. Using his power as a county judge, he coerced some of the more timid Yankees in the region to turn in their Connecticut deeds and repurchase their land under a Pennsylvania title, using the threat of prosecution and dispossession if they resisted. It was not uncommon for Connecticut claimants – such as Benjamin Harvey, a New Englander with a farmstead near Wilkes-Barre – to be imprisoned under false pretences and then return home, only to find a Pennamite family had appropriated their land and property. Furthermore, Patterson was complicit in a scheme amongst Pennamite elites aimed at securing the cooperation and allegiance of Wyoming's military garrisons. By the fall of 1783, Patterson had issued sizable grants of land in the Wyoming Valley to Pennsylvania militia commanders James Moore, James Christy, Philip Shrawder, Blackall William Ball, Andrew Henderson, Samuel Reed and John Armstrong; in return, they provided him with armed militiamen Patterson then used to

violently intimidate non-complicit Yankees.¹⁵⁴ All of this had a retarding effect on the ability of Pennsylvania's political elites to negotiate successfully with insurgent Yankees. In September 1784, the Pennsylvania Assembly resolved to send a four-man committee to the Wyoming Valley in order to "make a proper distinction between those persons whose cases are recommended by any considerations of equity or humanity, and others in different circumstances and thereon to take such measures as become the dignity of the commonwealth".¹⁵⁵ Their intent was to identify those Yankees that had both settled the region before the Trenton Decree and defended it from Indian and Loyalist invasion during the Revolutionary War, and negotiate a settlement with them. However, the Pennsylvania delegation failed because two of the commissioners – John Boyd and Col. John Armstrong – aroused immediate suspicion within the Yankee communities they visited, due to their ties to Patterson and history of friendly associate with Pennamites. On the night of September 26, 1784, the houses in which the committee members were lodging caught fire and the delegation scampered back to Philadelphia.¹⁵⁶

Patterson's tenure as one of the highest-level judges responsible for adjudicating the Wyoming Controversy only succeeded in fanning the flames of the crisis. However, all of his machinations came to an end beginning in May 1784, when a group of Northumberland County officials wrote a letter to Governor Dickinson complaining about the "outrageous conduct" of the Wilkes-Barre garrison, and accused Patterson, Wyoming's judges and militiamen, and the Pennamite settlers themselves of, "instead of aiding the Civil Authority", having "set it at defiance, and place[d] themselves above the Laws".¹⁵⁷ Dickinson responded by closing the garrison and

¹⁵⁴ See Moyer (46-49).

¹⁵⁵ Resolution of the Pennsylvania General Assembly Concerning the Connecticut Claimants, Sept. 7, 1784, SCP 8: 47-48.

¹⁵⁶ The Commissioners to John Dickinson, Oct. 5, 1784, SCP 8: 87.

¹⁵⁷ John Buyers and Others to John Dickinson, May 17, 1784, SCP 7: 410-411.

ordering all of its servicemen to exit the Wyoming Valley by the first of June.¹⁵⁸ Alexander Patterson was soon after charged with robbery, kidnapping, riot and assault by Northumberland County, who had gathered evidence against and indicted forty-five Pennamites on similar charges over the spring and summer of 1784. All were convicted. Henry Shoemaker, another justice of the peace appointed alongside Patterson in 1783, was among the Pennamites ensnared in this judicial endeavor; so too were many of the captains of the Wilkes-Barre militia.¹⁵⁹ All of these prominent Pennamites were disgraced and forced to resign their positions of power; from thereon after, owing to this substantial loss in leadership and military capability, Wyoming's Pennamite resistance began to enter into the period of its final collapse. Patterson, in giving deposition during his trial, admitted that his actions were "not strictly consonant with the Letter of the Law"; he remained unapologetic, however, justifying his decisions by claiming they had been made "solely by the principles of self-preservation".¹⁶⁰ Nothing illustrates better than this how the pursuit of power, property, and self interest, effectuated through any means necessary and sacred to all backcountry agrarians, Yankee and Pennamite alike, defined the Wyoming Controversy, determined the fates of its many actors, and perpetually frustrated the efforts of Pennsylvania's proprietors and politicians to reoccupy and pacify their troubled frontier.

By 1785, Wild Yankees had for the most part displaced completely the Wyoming Valley's Pennamite settlers. In addition to actions taken by the government of Pennsylvania in response to activity considered to be counterproductive to a successful and peaceful resolution of the dispute, the bargain rates at which the Susquehannah Company sold shares in the Wyoming Claim to purchasers in an effort to increase migration into the region played a significant role as well. One

¹⁵⁸ John Dickinson to James Moore, April 20, 1784, SCP 7: 393.

¹⁵⁹ Thomas McKean, William Atlee, and Jacob Rush to John Dickinson, June 7, 1784, SCP 7: 431-432; Minutes of the Court at Sunbury, Nov. 8, 1784, SCP 8: 145-146.

¹⁶⁰ Alexander Patterson to Thomas McKean and Other Judges of the Supreme Court, May 30, 1784, SCP 7:427-428.

Pennamite settler testified that by his recollection, Yankees had driven upwards of six hundred Pennsylvanian men, women and children from the region by January 1785.¹⁶¹ The Yankee-Pennamite Wars were drawing to a close; the final stage of the Wyoming Controversy, marked by a protracted struggle for land and power waged between zealous yeoman – or Wild Yankees – and Pennsylvania officials determined to enforce the rule of law, was set to begin.

In March 1787, the Pennsylvania Assembly formalized the process that had been set in motion three years previously, when John Boyd, John Armstrong and two other state officials journeyed to Wyoming in an attempt to negotiate with those groups of Yankees whose settlements had existed prior to the Trenton Decree. The Confirming Act of 1787 was a piece of legislation designed for “ascertaining and confirming to certain Persons called Connecticut claimants, the Lands by them claimed within” Pennsylvania’s Wyoming Valley.¹⁶² What the Confirming Act essentially did was to reach a peaceable accommodation with a large portion of Connecticut claimants who had obtained and settled their tracts prior to the Trenton Decree. However, the act contained no provisions for settlers who had colonized land in the Pennsylvania Northeast under Susquehannah Company deeds post-1782; likewise, the law made no mention of non-resident Connecticut land speculators who held deeds to land in Pennsylvania. As Moyer puts it, “The Confirming Act, not accidentally, served to divide Connecticut claimants into two parties: more established settlers who could take advantage of the state’s offer versus those holding newly issued deeds that were excluded from the legislation’s provisions”.¹⁶³ Pennsylvania’s strategy of compromise and conciliation coupled with a divide-and-conquer type political strategy aimed at provoking the internal collapse of Yankee resistance would eventually prove to be the best (and only) effective program capable of restoring order to Pennsylvania’s northeast frontier.

¹⁶¹ Deposition of Preserved Cooley, Jan. 14, 1785, SCP 8: 198.

¹⁶² The Confirming Act, March 28, 1787, SCP 9:82-86.

¹⁶³ Moyer (68).

The Confirming Act also called for the creation of Luzerne County from Northumberland County, effectively setting off the upper Susquehanna Valley, which was for the most part populated and controlled by Wild Yankees viciously hostile to Pennsylvania authority, from the rest of the northeast Pennsylvania backcountry. The area north of the Tunkhannock Creek, in what was now Luzerne County, became the new stronghold of Yankee resistance to Pennsylvania's rule of law; the Wyoming Valley, once the locus of backcountry agrarian unrest in the Pennsylvania Northeast, quickly became the headquarters of more moderate Connecticut claimants willing to negotiate with the Pennsylvania authorities. The Tunkhannock Creek Line, as it came to be called, provides a remarkably reliable way in which to demarcate the regional extent of agrarian resistance to Pennsylvania's rule of law during the apex period of the Wyoming Controversy: settlers living south of the line overwhelmingly took loyalty oaths to the state and supported county elections, which the more intractable Yankee hardliners opposed, for fear that it would bring the government of Pennsylvania directly into their backyard. Settlers living north of Tunkhannock Creek, on the other hand, seldom agreed to say an oath of allegiance to the Quaker Colony, and overwhelmingly opposed county elections.¹⁶⁴ Unsurprisingly, each one of the men who partook in the kidnapping of Timothy Pickering hailed from the region between Tioga Point in the north and Tunkhannock Creek in the south – a region Moyer called the “crucible of Wild Yankee resistance”, and one which would stubbornly resist Pennsylvania's attempts to pacify it completely for close to a decade and a half.¹⁶⁵

The final decade of the eighteenth century witnessed an explosive revitalization of the Wild Yankee insurgency that was determined to wrest control of the Wyoming Valley from

¹⁶⁴ Oaths of Allegiance before Timothy Pickering and Others, Jan.-Feb. 1787; Declarations in Support of the Laws of Pennsylvania, April 21, 1787; Oaths of Allegiance of Timothy Pickering and Others, April 26, 1787, SCP 9: 13-17, 106-110, 111-115.

¹⁶⁵ Moyer (68-69).

Pennsylvania's political control. Following the Trenton Decree and Connecticut's official abandonment of its western claim, Connecticut claimants occupying the Pennsylvania frontier could no longer cling to the hope of having their Susquehannah Company-granted land tracts endorsed and protected by the government of Connecticut; this caused some of the more zealous and sensational of Pennsylvania's Wild Yankees to contemplate the idea of secession. On January 11, 1787, a prominent Susquehannah Company shareholder and notorious Wild Yankee named William Judd remarked in a letter to Col. Zebulon Butler his opinion that the "federal Government [was] upon its last Leggs"; Judd predicted that Wyoming's Connecticut settlers would "stand an Equal Chance with the rest of mankind" if they were "firm Steady and United" in an effort to establish themselves as an independent nation.¹⁶⁶ In 1787 the United States government was in dire straits indeed, the result of both the ravages of revolutionary war and the cumbersome and inefficient Articles of Confederation; thus, it is unsurprising that settlers occupying the least secure regions of the fledging republic – those backcountry frontier areas perennially embroiled in conflict over land and property – would predict the imminent downfall of the nation. However, Judd's words contain a universal quality to them as well, in that they echo the spirit of backcountry independence that defined in nearly every way the contours of violence along Pennsylvania's revolutionary frontier.

Pennsylvania officials were likewise concerned about the potential for national dis-union; these concerns manifested themselves in the form of apprehension directed towards Connecticut claimants suspected of harboring treasonous designs to form an independent state out of land culled from Pennsylvania and New York.¹⁶⁷ In May 1786 William Montgomery, a member of the

¹⁶⁶ William Judd to Zebulon Butler, Jan. 11, 1787, SCP 9: 6.

¹⁶⁷ William Hooker Smith, Samuel Hover, and Abraham Westbrook to William Montgomery, May 14th 1786, SCP 8:326-327; Julian P. Boyd "Attempts to Form New States in New York and Pennsylvania, 1786-96." *New York State Historical Association Quarterly Journal* 12 (July 1931) (264-66); Moyer (70-72).

Pennsylvania Council of Censors, wrote to Pennsylvania Supreme Court Chief Justice Thomas McKean urgently informing him of the existence of the “greatest & most imminent danger of a dismemberment of the State” by Connecticut claimants participating in the Wild Yankee insurgency.¹⁶⁸ Eventually Yankee leader John Franklin was arrested and imprisoned on charges relating to this conspiracy, which precipitated the kidnapping of Timothy Pickering on June 26, 1788. However, following that plot’s notable failure – which had the effect of disgracing several prominent Yankee leaders, thereby weakening the Connecticut claimant’s cause - there was very little correspondence concerning the creation of an independent country in Pennsylvania’s backcountry.¹⁶⁹ However, events as they played out on the ground contributed to a revitalization of Yankee resistance beginning in the early 1790s.

Between 1790 and 1820 a great wave of migrants and pioneers participated in a process of settlement and colonization that had the effect of improving and occupying more frontier land in three decades than in the previous two centuries of the Age of Colonization.¹⁷⁰ Pennsylvania was not left out of this trend; starting in the 1790s, thousands upon thousands of New England settlers began to arrive in the Wyoming Valley region in search of land, property and material self-sufficiency. Members of this new wave of settlement benefited from a partnership with Connecticut’s great land speculators that was mutually beneficial in nature: enterprising entrepreneurs, aware of the potential fortune to be made in the great land boom sweeping the American Northeast, began to intensify their efforts at purchasing and clearing frontier land in Pennsylvania’s Wyoming Valley, to the benefit of land-hungry New England yeomen whose desires for independent farmsteads were facilitated by the existence of a wealth of land available at

¹⁶⁸ William Hooker Smith, Samuel Hover, and Abraham Westbrook to William Montgomery, May 14, 1786, SCP 8:326-327.

¹⁶⁹ Moyer (92-93).

¹⁷⁰ Moyer (95).

bargain rates. The settler-speculator alliance characteristic of the Wyoming dispute in its final decade had the effect of intensifying Yankee resistance while simultaneously significantly enlarging the geographic extent of agrarian insurgency in the Pennsylvania backcountry, much to the dismay of Pennsylvania's geopolitically-aware political elites. However, two developments took place towards the turn of the century that had the effect of undermining the settler-speculator alliance and inaugurating the downfall of Wyoming Valley's Wild Yankee insurgency.

The first was that the land speculation boom that had torn across northeast Pennsylvania during the 1790s, ushering in an era of pervasive, feverish mania for unsettled frontier land, had virtually collapsed by 1800. This caused the wealthy Connecticut land speculators who had funded and fueled settlement in the early years of the craze to fall back from their commitment (i.e. the provision of economic and physical security) to the Connecticut claim. The second, and (for the scope of this thesis) most crucial development was the successful implementation of a legislative strategy that was simultaneously conciliatory and punitive. This had the effect of undermining support for the Connecticut claim among Yankee settlers, who at last became convinced that it was in their self-interest to accommodate themselves to Pennsylvania and its system of economic, legal and political authority, rather than stubbornly persist in waging a doomed insurgency, one in which the costs were at long last beginning to outweigh the benefits. This engendered a total collapse in the leadership structure of the Susquehanna Company apparatus as well as that of local Wild Yankee insurgencies; in the resulting power vacuum, men whose pursuit of self-interest caused them to move towards accommodation with Pennsylvania rather than utilize deadly force in the advancement of the Connecticut claim began to assume the reigns of power in the Wyoming Valley. This in turn led to the gradual disappearance of the Wyoming Controversy and the incorporation of Pennsylvania's northeast frontier – which consequentially by the turn of the

century was no longer a frontier in any real sense of the term – into the dense and vibrant economy of the northeast American seaboard.¹⁷¹

The Compromise Act of 1799 was essentially a repeat of its predecessor the Confirming Act of 1787; a new legislative attempt to divide-and-conquer Wyoming's Connecticut claimants was made necessary because of the Assembly's repealment of the Confirming Act in the spring of 1790. This occurred largely due to pressure put on the Assembly by Pennamite factions angry at Pennsylvania's efforts at reaching accommodation with what they saw as unlawful and frequently violent invaders. In this way Pennamites acting out of concerned self-interest once again hampered efforts made by the Pennsylvania administration to restore order to the Wyoming Valley, causing Pennsylvania to indirectly aid and abet the Wild Yankee insurgency that now essentially defined the Wyoming dispute.¹⁷² Like its predecessor the Confirming Act, the Compromise Act sought to divide Connecticut claimants by issuing secure, Pennsylvania-backed deeds to their lands at bargain-rate prices. Fifteen Susquehanna Company towns established before the Trenton Decree accepted this arrangement with Pennsylvania as a direct result of the legislation; with that development, the Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley was at long last politically and economically incorporated within the state of Pennsylvania and for all intents and purposes pacified.¹⁷³

Epilogue

¹⁷¹ See Moyer (120-121).

¹⁷² Repeal of the Confirming Act, April 1, 1790, SCP 10: 112-113; SCP 10: xiv-xx.

¹⁷³ The Compromise Act of 1799, April 4, 1799, SCP 10: 468-474.

“Some wild and desperate Yankees” : The End of the Wyoming Controversy, c. 1800-1810

In the spring of 1801, a group of more than forty Connecticut claimants settled in Pennsylvania’s Wyoming Valley agreed to abandon their Connecticut claims and purchase new ones in comport with Pennsylvania’s rule of law.¹⁷⁴ In doing so, they impressed one Pennsylvania official through their conveyance of the “utmost respect” for Pennsylvania’s authority, in addition to their demonstration of a “readiness to comply and submit to the Laws of [the] State”.¹⁷⁵ This was just an isolated incident of a trend that was slowly becoming endemic to Pennsylvania’s northeast frontier: from 1800 on, the majority of Yankees who had previously favored agrarian insurgency over conciliation with the Pennsylvania government began to pursue a course of negotiation with Pennsylvania’s political elites. Save for “Some wild and desperate Yankees” who would rather “lose either their lives, then to submit”, Pennsylvania’s Wyoming Valley was by 1810 essentially free from controversy.¹⁷⁶

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¹⁷⁴ List of Connecticut Relinquishments, June-Aug. 1801, SCP 11: 193.

¹⁷⁵ Joseph Van Sick to Tench Coxe, May 19, 1801, SCP 11: 61.

¹⁷⁶ Joseph Van Sick to Tench Coxe, May 19, 1801, SCP 11: 61.

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