

# MASSACRE OF THE CONES- TOGA INDIANS, 1763. INCIDENTS AND DETAILS.

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The events which preceded the massacre of the Conestoga Indians, the French and Indian war, followed by Pontiac's war, and the plundering and murdering of defenseless families of the frontier settlements, tended to accentuate the feeling of fear and distrust which the white inhabitants held against the uncivilized and treacherous Redskins.

The building of the frontier forts and blockhouses by the Government, which also maintained a number of provincial troops, and the forming of ranging companies in the most thickly populated districts, did not stop the Indian depredations. Many of the Indians living among the white settlers in the eastern section of Pennsylvania had become civilized, or partly so, and by 1763 the Conestoga Indians, or the small part left of that once hostile tribe, were considered friendly and harmless. In fact, the Conestogas are quoted as friendly much earlier than this date. Rev. M. H. Stine in his book, "Baron Stiegel," tells how the Baron and his friend took with them from Lancaster, when on a tour of exploration of this county, an extra guide, a trusty Indian "belonging to the Conestogas," and

reference is made later of a warning given by a friendly Indian, a "member of the Conestoga tribe"

It was, however, the marauding bands of hostile Indians from the West pressing into the more thickly-settled and better-cultivated sections of the East that caused such terror among the white inhabitants, and naturally made them feel that their near neighbors, the friendly Indians, might turn once more to the side of their hostile brethren. Report, whether true or false, had set on foot many tales to this effect.

In the month of October, 1763, in Northampton county, occurred a forerunner of the trouble to follow later in our own county. The Indians in the East were living under the protection of the Government, yet it was the Government's own soldiers, commanded by Captain Jacob Wetterhold, who murdered a number of harmless Indians at the end of a drunken debauch. This, of course, roused the other Indians to vengeance, and one affair followed another, until, in November, the Indians from that section were taken to Philadelphia and placed on Province Island, in the Delaware river, for safety. The above, with many details, will be found in the "Life and Times of David Zeisberger," by Edmund De Schweinitz.

In Cumberland county people were fleeing to Carlisle and the banks of the Susquehanna river. In our own county, more especially the sections which are no longer included within its borders—Dauphin and Lebanon counties—murders were numerous, and, while many facts concerning them are given in the histories of the county, much occurred that was never known. The picture presented

to us of the desperation and stress in which the people of 1763, ancestors of some of us, were living has possibly not been drawn with sufficient darkness.

John Penn, the new Governor, had been in the province only a month when the Conestoga Indians sent a letter to him, dated November 30, 1763 (see Colonial Records, Volume IX) which contained a welcome, also a request. Being without forest lands in which to hunt, they asked for provisions and clothing, and complained that their neighbors were using land allotted them for their use to cultivate crops for themselves. This letter reached Governor Penn December 19, 1763, five days after six of their number had been killed and the spot which had been the setting for many a picturesque gathering was marked with only a heap of ashes.

To the Indian town in the Manor of Conestoga came at various times Governors to meet Indian chiefs, hold councils and make treaties. The Governors—Gookin, Keith and Gordon—were always accompanied by a number of men—once thirty, another time seventy, and usually several men of prominence in Indian affairs from Philadelphia or our own vicinity. The Indian chiefs, also, had their followers in attendance, so that the provincial representatives on one side and the Indian contingent on the other side formed a group of men unusual as well as important.

And to this spot on the 14th of December, 1763, came the men from Paxton. The dreadful conditions throughout the province had caused them to consider all Indians alike, and with them on their journey to Conestoga they carried but one thought, that of extermination.

Thwarted in that, owing to the absence of a number of the Indians, but deviating in no way from their purpose, their mission of destruction was doomed to have a second chapter. Governor Penn was notified as soon as possible, a matter of two or three days, for overhead wires, surface rails, or even good roads, were not seen in Lancaster county in 1763, of the unfortunate affair at Conestoga, and immediately issued the following proclamation:

“By the Honorable John Penn, Esquire; Lieutenant Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Province of Pennsylvania and counties of New-Castle, Kent and Sussex on Delaware.

#### A PROCLAMATION.

“Whereas, I have received Information, That, on Wednesday, the 14th Day of this Month, a Number of People armed and mounted on horseback, unlawfully assembled together, and went to the Indian Town, in the Conestoga Mannor, in Lancaster county, and without the least Reason or Provocation, in cool blood, barbarously killed Six of the Indians settled there, and burnt and destroyed all their Houses and Effects; And, Whereas so cruel and inhuman an Act, committed in the heart of this Province on the said Indians, who have lived peacefully and inoffensively among us, during our late Troubles, and for many years before, and were justly considered as under the protection of this Government and its Laws, calls loudly for the vigorous exertion of the Civil Authority, to detect the Offenders, and bring them to condign Punishment; I Have Therefore, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Council, thought fit to issue this Proclamation, and do here-

by strictly charge and enjoin all Judges, Justices, Sheriffs, Constables, Officers Civil and Military, and all other his Majesty's Liege Subjects within this Province, to make diligent Search and Enquiry after the Authors and Perpetrators of the said crime, their Abettors and Accomplices, and to use all possible means to apprehend and secure them in some of the public Goals of this Province, that they may be brought to their Trials, and be proceeded against according to law. And, whereas, a number of other Indians, who lately lived on or near the Frontiers of this Province, being willing and desirous to preserve and continue the ancient Friendship, which, therefore, subsisted between them and the good People of the Province, have, at their own earnest Request, been removed from their Habitations, and brought into the county of Philadelphia, and seated for the Present for their better security on the Province Island, and, in other Places in the Neighborhood of the City of Philadelphia, where Provision is made for them at the public expense. I do, therefore, hereby strictly forbid all Persons whatsoever, to molest or injure any of the said Indians, as they will answer the contrary at their Peril.

“Given under my Hand, and the Great Seal of the said Province, at Philadelphia, the Twenty-second Day of December, Anno Domini One Thousand Seven Hundred and Sixty-three, and in the Fourth Year of His Majesty's Reign.

“JOHN PENN.

“By His Honor's Command, Joseph Shippen, jun., Secretary—God Save the King.”

This proclamation, as just noted, was issued December 22d, but did

not appear in print until Thursday, December 29th, in the two Philadelphia papers of that day, The Pennsylvania Journal and The Pennsylvania Gazette—owing to the fact that they were issued but once a week. Copies of these papers can be seen at the library of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, at Philadelphia. This same proclamation appears in Colonial Records, Volume IX.

Before this proclamation was handed to the public on December 29th the second chapter of the tragedy had occurred. On the day the Indian town was destroyed and the six Indians murdered, four of those absent at the time either came or were brought to Lancaster. They were taken to the work-house, which stood at the corner of West King and Prince streets, adjoining the jail to the north, by Robert Thompson and Adam Simon Kuhn, and, as the jailor has written it, were "given into my care."

The other ten did not seek safety in the work-house until December 17th, when placed there by John Hay, the Sheriff of the county, with instructions for care and ample provisions. This was but a temporary procedure, some authorities say preparatory to taking them to Philadelphia and putting them on Province Island, where those from Northampton county had been for some time. Before the civil authorities of the county had time to take action as to the future of their charges the "Paxton Boys" came down and completed what they had begun at Conestoga. They started for Lancaster on December 26th; did they know of the proclamation issued on December 22d? Nothing, evidently, had turned them from their purpose for when they entered the town on December 27, 1763, it was with the

precision and directness of a set purpose, went quickly to the place that housed their victims, used violence to gain entrance, and then "shot, scalped, hacked and cut to pieces," as William Henry described it, the last collective body of the original inhabitants of the county of Lancaster when a wilderness. They took away the Indians, but left us the name Conestoga. The description of the massacre can best be told as William Henry, a resident of Lancaster and an eye-witness, detailed it in a letter to a friend. See Heckewelder's Narrative, pages 78, 79, 80: "There are few, if any, murders to be compared with the cruel murder committed on the Conestoga Indians in the gaol of Lancaster in 1763, by the Paxton Boys (as they were then called). From fifteen to twenty Indians, as report stated, were placed there for protection. A regiment of Highlanders were at the time quartered at the barracks in the town, and yet these murderers were permitted to break open the doors of the city gaol and commit the horrid deed. The first notice I had of this affair was that while at my father's store, near the court house, I saw a number of people running down street toward the gaol, which enticed me and other lads to follow them. At about sixty or eighty yards from the gaol we met from twenty-five to thirty men, well mounted on horses, and with rifles, tomahawks, and scalping knives, equipped for murder. I ran into the prison yard, and there, O what a horrid sight presented itself to my view! Near the back door of the prison, lay an old Indian and his squaw (wife), practically well known and esteemed by the people of the town, on account of his placid and friendly conduct.

His name was Will Sock; across him and his squaw lay two children, of about the age of three years, whose heads were split with the tomahawk, and their scalps all taken off. Toward the middle of the gaol yard, along the west side of the wall, lay a stout Indian, whom I particularly noticed to have been shot in the breast, his legs were chopped with the tomahawk, his hands cut off, and finally a rifle ball discharged in his mouth; so that his head was blown to atoms, and the brains were splashed against, and yet hanging to the wall, for three or four feet around. This man's hands and feet had also been chopped off with a tomahawk. In this manner lay the whole of them, men, women and children, spread about the prison yard: shot, scalped, hacked and cut to pieces."

After receiving the news of the massacre and recognizing, undoubtedly, the disregard with which his first proclamation had been received the Governor issued a second one. This one was dated January 2, 1764, but came to the public by way of the newspapers on January 5th, also appearing in the issues of the following week, January 12th.

The second proclamation reads:

By the Honorable John Penn, Esquire; Lieutenant Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Province of Pennsylvania, and Counties of New-Castle, Kent and Sussex on Delaware.

#### A PROCLAMATION.

Whereas, on the Twenty-second Day of December last I issued a Proclamation, for the apprehending and bringing to Justice a Number of Persons, who, in violation of the public



Faith, and in Defiance of all Law, had inhumanly killed Six of the Indians, who had lived on Conestogue Manor, for the course of many years, peaceably and inoffensively, under the Protection of this Government, on Lands assigned to them for their Habitation; Notwithstanding which, I have received Information, that on the Twenty-seventh of the same month, a large Party of armed Men again assembled and met together, in a riotous and tumultuous Manner, in the County of Lancaster, and proceeded to the Town of Lancaster, where they violently broke open the Work-house, and butchered and put to Death Fourteen of the said Conestogue Indians, Men, Women and Children, who had been taken under the immediate Care and Protection of the Magistrates of said County, and lodged, for their better Security, in the said Work-house, till they should be more effectually provided for, by Order of the Government: And Whereas common Justice loudly demands, and the Laws of the Land (upon the Preservation of which not only the Liberty and Security of every Individual. but the Being of the Government itself depend) require, that the above Offenders should be brought to condign Punishment; I Have Therefore, by and with the advice of the Council, published this Proclamation, and do hereby strictly charge and command all Judges, Justices, Sheriffs, Constables, Officers Civil and Military, and all other His Majesty's faithful and liege Subjects within this Province, to make diligent search and inquiry after the Authors and Perpetrators of the said last mentioned Offense, their Abettors and Accomplices; and that they use all possible Means to appre-

hundred and secure them, in some of the public Goals of this Province, to be dealt with according to law. . And I do hereby further promise and engage, That any Person or Persons, who shall apprehend and secure, or cause to be apprehended and secured, any Three of the Ringleaders of the said Party and prosecute them to conviction, shall have and receive for each the public Reward of Two Hundred Pounds; and any accomplice, not concerned in the immediate shedding the Blood of the said Indians, who shall make Discovery of any or either of the said Ringleaders, and apprehend and prosecute them to Conviction, shall, over and above the said Reward, have all the weight and influence of the Government, for obtaining his Majesty's Pardon for his Offence.

Given under my Hand and the Great Seal of the said Province at Philadelphia, the Second Day of January, Anno Domino One Thousand Seven Hundred and Sixty-four, and in the Fourth Year of his Majesty's Reign

JOHN PENN.

By his Honor's Command, Joseph Shippen, Jun., Secretary

"GOD SAVE THE KING."

This second proclamation had as little weight with the inhabitants of Lancaster county as the first one had. Even the generous reward offered was no temptation to assist in bringing to justice the men who dared defy the commands of the Government. Public opinion held sway and out-did the law in this one case, at least, for the "Paxton Boys" went about the country as usual, unapprehended. A weak attempt was made

to put Lazarus Stewart in the hands of the law, but nothing materialized from the effort.

In the meanwhile, Felix Donnally, the jailer, in whose care the murdered Indians had been, presents a bill to the county for their keep during the time they had been in the work-house. The original paper is the property of the Ridgeway Branch of the Library Company, of Philadelphia and part of the John A. McAlister collection of manuscripts. On the outside of the paper is "Felix Donnally: Acco:—for maintaining the Indians at Lancaster." On the other side, the bill itself reads as follows:

"John Hay Esquire high Sheriff of Lancaster County to Felix Donnally Dr.

"For the Diet and Maintenance of 14 Indians which belong to the Conestogue Town in the said county and committed to the care of the said Felix Donnally, Viz:

"For the Diet and Maintenance of four of them from the 14th of December to ye 27th of December 1763 inclusive.....14 days at 1s6 each..... £4,,4,,0.....these four were brought to me and given into my care by Robert Thompson & Adam Simon Kuhn Esqr.

"For the Diet and Maintenance of 10 of said Indians from the 17th to the 27th of Decr. 1763, in clusive is 11 days at 1s6 each p Day.....8,,5,,0.....These ten were directed to my care by yourself and on my receiving them you ordered me to take care of & provide for them plentifully with the others.

For Fire Wood provided for & used by the said Indians 4 cords..at 10s p cord.....2,,0,,0—(total

£14,,9,,0

To the Trouble & Expense of having the said Fourteen Indians carried to the grave and interred....

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Errors Excepted  
p FELIX DONNALLY.

This paper is well preserved considering its age, as will be seen from the fac-simile obtained for this society through the courtesy of the library mentioned.

After the massacre much was said and nothing done, as often happens in other cases. You have seen the references to numerous pamphlets printed, some sustaining the action of the "Paxton Boys," others arguing against such lawlessness. Most of these pamphlets can be seen at the Ridgeway Branch of the Library Company of Philadelphia. An extract from "Plain Truth," a pamphlet printed in Philadelphia by Andrew Stewart—1764—is a good example of what appeared for the defense:

"First, then, Let us consider the Paxton Voluntiers, and others, against whom some make such an Outcry;— Shall we attempt to vindicate their Killing Indians under the Protection of the Government? By no means. The Fact is to be condemned as unlawful; but though we would not vindicate their conduct in every Respect, is it not the Duty of every good Man impartially to consider what have been the circumstances of those people, and what they suffered to provoke them to this desperate and unlawful Act? Would not this course discover more of that meek and Christian Spirit, which some People so much profess, but so little exercise? . . . . .(Referring to the Quakers.)

These Incendiaries are not only enraged themselves, at their dear friends, the Indians, being slain, but would have all the Rest of the World of their Temper;—To obtain which End, they have wrote and published several inflammatory Pamphlets, asserting many falsehoods, with a Design to enrage the Populace against these poor, distressed, though rash People.—Go but into the House of a Quaker, and before you have Time to discover what you came for, he will ask you, with an effected Meekness, “Hast thee seen the Massacre of the Indians at Lancaster’” A Pamphlet well known to be wrote by one of their zealous Friends, in Order to swell the Current of Prejudices against the aforesaid People. I should be glad to see the Massacre of the Back Inhabitants drawn by the same able Hand, provided he would do it with the same Zeal in their Favour and against the Savage Indian Butchers, as I’m confident he could have a much more affecting Subject to handle, and fill every Imagination with Horror.—None of those killed at Lancaster were by Design kept one Moment in Torment; whereas many of our Frontier Inhabitants have been wantonly kept whole Days and Nights in exquisite Tortures, prolonged and heightened with all the contrivances infernal Malice could suggest before those Savages (whose Cause and Interest Quakers so warmly espouse) would vouchsafe to give the merciful finishing Blow.

In another pamphlet entitled “The Conduct of The Paxton-Men, Impartially represented:—In a Letter From a Gentleman in one of the Back-Counties, to a Friend in Philadelphia. Philadelphia: Printed by A. Stew-

art, and Sold by John Creaig, Shop-keeper in Lancaster 1764, our former townsman, the Reverend Thomas Barton, who was the author of the letter, seemed to regard the killing of the Indians as a danger removed rather than an unpardonable offense against the Government and a crime against humanity. In his letter he says: "A mighty Noise and Hubbub has been made about killing a few indians in Lancaster-County and even Philosophers and Legislators have employed to raise the Holloo upon those that killed them; and to ransack Tomes and Systems, Writers ancient and modern, for Proofs of their Guilt and Condemnation! And what have they proved at last? Why, that the White Savages of Paxton and Donnegall have violated the Laws of hospitality!.....Now I have been frequently informed, for many years, by sundry of their nearest neighbors in the Conestogoe Mannor, that they were a drunken, debauched, insolent, quarrelsome crew; and that ever since the Commencement of the War, they have been a Trouble and Terror to all around them—as for Will Soc and his Brother, I am told there are undoubted Proofs of the Guilt and Treachery—That they have threatened and drawn their Knives upon People who have refused to comply with their demands, is a Fact well known to hundreds. The Public are also informed that "The Magistrates of Lancaster sent to collect the remaining Indians,—brought them into Town, comforted and promised them Protection."—If they did this, they must be very silly, indeed. For how was it possible for Men destitute of a Militia, without Men. Arms or Ammunition to protect them? But

I am credibly informed that the Truth of the Matter was That these Magistrates, being apprehensive of the Danger of the Indians, were very desirous to have them removed immediately to Philadelphia as a place of greater Security;—through which neglect to remove thither they must have lost their Lives, and not through any Misconduct of the Magistrates—For it seems the Affair was accomplished so unexpectedly and suddenly that not one half of the Magistrates knew any Thing of the Matter till they were all kill'd; and those that did, could do nothing, unless it was to go at the Peril of their Lives, among an enraged and armed multitude, and attack them with Stones and Brickbats I have indeed heard it alleged against those Magistrates, that there were some soldiers in the Place, which they might have called to their Assistance—But I have heard it positively declared, by many of the inhabitants of that Town, who were Eye-witnesses of the whole Transaction, that if there were Ten Thousand Soldiers dispers'd and strolling about in the Manner that these were at the Time, it would have been impossible to have got them to their Arms, and properly drawn up, before the Indians were killed; so dextrous and expeditious were the Paxtonians in executing their Purpose\* that the Bodies of the murdered were brought out and exposed in the Street.”—This appears likewise to have been misrepresented—I have been informed by some of the most reputable Inhabitants of Lancaster, that they were

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\* It is confidently said that the Paxtonians were not above twelve minutes altogether in the town, and not above two minutes in dispatching the Indians.

never removed out of the Work-house and Work-house-yard where they were shot, till they were brought out to be carried to their Graves.....

“When a Waggon-Load of the scalped and mangled Bodies of their countrymen were brought to Philadelphia and laid at the State-House door, and another Waggon-Load brought into the Town of Lancaster, did they rouse to Arms to avenge the cause of their murder'd Friends? Did we hear any of those lamentations that are now so plentifully poured forth for the Conestogoe Indians.”

What the “Paxton Boys” had to say for themselves concerning this matter can be found in the “Declaration and Remonstrance” issued by them and other inhabitants of the frontier counties to the Governor and Assembly in February, 1764. In the Pennsylvania Journal of March 15, 1764, the “Declaration and Remonstrance” is printed in full, the opening of which is:

“A Declaration and Remonstrance of the distressed and bleeding Frontier Inhabitants of the Province of Pennsylvania; presented by them to the honourable the Governor and Assembly of the Province, shewing the causes of their late Discontent and Uneasiness and the Grievances under which they have laboured, and which they humbly pray to have redressed.....”

“Inasmuch as the killing those Indians at Conestoga Mannor and Lancaster, has been, and may be the subject of much conversation; and by invidious Representations of it, which some, we doubt not, will industriously spread, many, unacquainted with the true State of Affairs, may be led to pass a severe Censure on the Authors of these Facts, and any other



of those like Nature, which may here after happen, than we are persuaded they would if matters were duly understood and deliberated: We think it therefore proper thus openly to declare ourselves and render some brief Hints of the Reasons of our Conduct, which we must, and frankly do confess nothing but necessity itself could induce us to, or justify us in; as it bears an Appearance of flying in the Face of Authority, and is attended with much Labour, Fatigue and Expense.....”

Undoubtedly the affair was the “subject of much conversation,” but, owing to the shadows which began to cast themselves over the Province of a bigger event to follow, the conversation was to no purpose. The oppression of England in the colonies commenced as early as 1765, and minor troubles were then swallowed up in the greater ones. The “Paxton Boys” put a blot on the history of Lancaster county which no one can ever remove.

This Society is indebted to Mr. William Vincent Byars, of St. Louis, for finding the original paper—the bill for maintaining the Indians in the workhouse—and thanks is due him relative to this paper, as well as Mr. F. R. Diffenderffer, Dr. John W. Jordan, Philadelphia; Mr. A. R. Beck, Lititz, and Rev. H. A. Gerdson, for suggestions.

Author: Bausman, Lottie M.

Title: Massacre of the Conestoga Indians, 1763 : incidents and details / by Miss Lottie M. Bausman.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Paxton Boys.  
Conestoga Indians--History.  
Conestoga Massacre, Pa., 1763.  
Pennsylvania--History--Colonial period, ca. 1600-1775.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1914

Description: 169-185 p. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 18,  
no. 7

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.18

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

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