## $A\ Corridor\ of\ Fear:$ Stories along the Susquehanna River, 1754- 1768

The many landscapes of pre-revolutionary America can be explored through the stories of the men, women, and families that made their homes in these places. Leading up to the American Revolutionary War, the American colonies and frontier borders were characterized not only by the opportunities associated with unfamiliar territory but also by disease, famine, death, and conflicts with Native Americans. This research project, resulting in a historical-storytelling-map, explores some of these aspects of mid-18th century colonial experience along the main branch of the Susquehanna River in order to provide insight into the experience and mindset of some of the human actors in historical events remembered and debated today.

## Penn's "Holy Experiment"

Arriving in his new colony for the first time in 1682, Quaker proprietor William Penn set into motion his idealistic dream for a place in which European Christians and Native Americans could live and thrive peacefully. He believed that fair negotiations with the Delaware Indians in the area were essential to the governance of this utopian kingdom. In 1682 and again in 1701, Penn signed land and peace treaties with the Delaware Indians and received wampum belts in order to symbolize the working relationship of trust and protection between them. These early interactions between Penn and Native Americans seemed to promise a harmonious landscape in which both groups could live but their peace was a fragile one.

## Peaceable Kingdom Forgotten

Throughout the early 18th century, large groups of English, German, and Scots-Irish immigrants began to dot the landscape of colonial Pennsylvania, and land conflicts with groups of Indians intensified. By the 1750s, immigrants settled, although not purchased, the land along the main stem of the Susquehanna River (modern-day Sunbury to Harrisburg.)<sup>1</sup> In 1754, the French Indian War in Pennsylvania shattered the deceased Penn's dream for a utopian society. With French encouragement, parties of hostile Delaware Indians ravaged settlements along this part of the river. In October 1755, Delaware Indians killed or captured 25 inhabitants of the Penn's Creek area in what is remembered today as the Penn's Creek Massacre and continued to traverse the landscape attacking European settlers (panel 1). These attacks ushered in a period of terror for colonists and friendly Native Americans alike. The Moravian missionary town of Shamokin (modern-day Sunbury) was abandoned. The Scots-Irish inhabitants of Paxton (modern-day Harrisburg) remained; however, fear became a dominating aspect of daily life. This anxiety intensified when Paxton resident John Harris and a group of men traveled up the river to bury the murdered at Penn's Creek and suffered a terrifying mid-night Indian attack, resulting in the deaths of five men (panel 2).

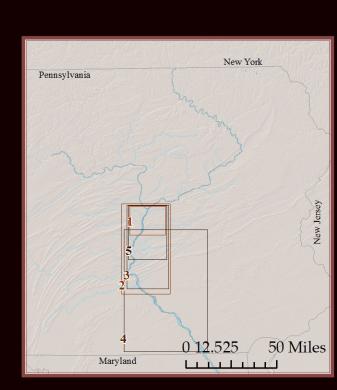
In order to defend this part of the frontier from French and French Indian aggression, Pennsylvania Governor Robert Morris appointed Lieutenant Colonel William Clapham to lead an expedition up the Susquehanna from Paxton to Shamokin and build Fort Augusta at the abandoned town (panel 3). Although the fort was not attacked during the war, its hasty construction and poorly-supplied maintenance illustrates the colonists' vulnerabilities and desires for protection for which the government did not adequately provide. Men along the river believed government intervention could not quell fears and bring peace to the landscape. Fort Augusta was

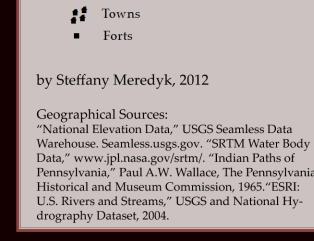
## "Christian White Savages"<sup>2</sup>

Just as this part of the river had been used as a corridor for Indian travel and aggression and government expedition, it would be soon used as a corridor for colonial aggression and gruesome murder. In December 1763, a group of men from Paxton followed the river down to the Indiantown at Conestoga Manor and slaughtered six friendly Conestoga Indians. The remaining 14 Conestoga Indians were removed to Lancaster for protection; however, a week after their first attack, the Paxton boys returned to Lancaster and murdered the 14 defenseless Indians (panel 4.) Responses to the massacres in the forms of letters, poems, and artwork ranged from condemnation of the murders of friendly Indians to statements of support and understanding that fear and necessity had driven these good citizens to the unthinkable.

Even after the widespread hostilities of the French Indian War and Pontiac's Rebellion, anxiety and barbarity still characterized the landscape. In January 1768, Middle Creek inhabitant Frederick Stump killed six Indians that arrived at his house and stuffed the bodies into holes in the ice of the Susquehanna. The next day he traveled 14 miles up Middle Creek in order to murder the families of the slain as well (panel 5). Barbarous actions such as these question how lifelong experiences of terror and Indian-colonial aggression affect the mindsets and mentalities of people living along the river in the 18th century. In order to explore these mentalities that manifested into controversial historical events, one must take a deeper look into their stories and personal experiences and memories.

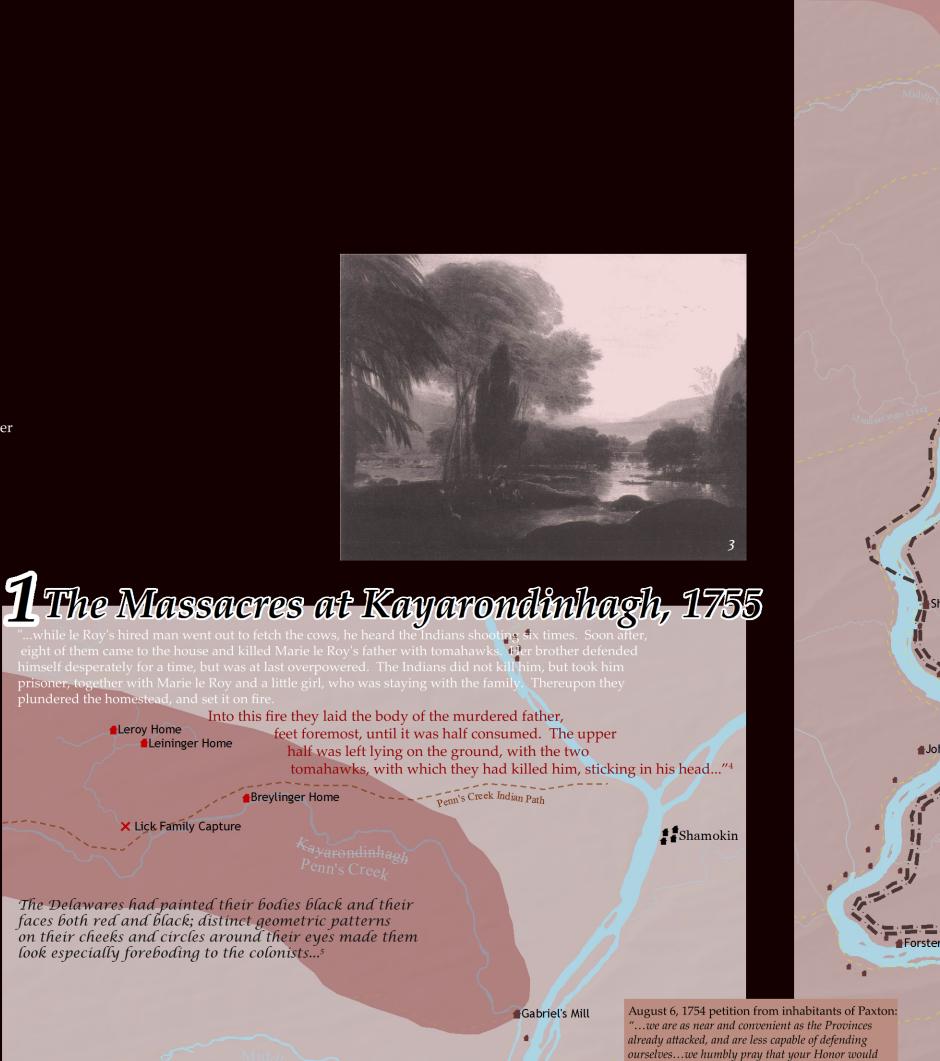
In order to read this map, explore each panel (1-5) in chronological order. Each panel provides geographical information about events that occurred and where people lived and moved on the landscape from 1754 to 1768. They also contain stories of the people who lived through and even played an integral role in some of the historical events remembered during this era that can be found in letters, memoirs, family papers, and diaries. The inclusion of artwork and poetry should be examined as well as the map panels in order to fully delve into the mid-18th century Susquehanna landscape of lust, fear, and barbarity.

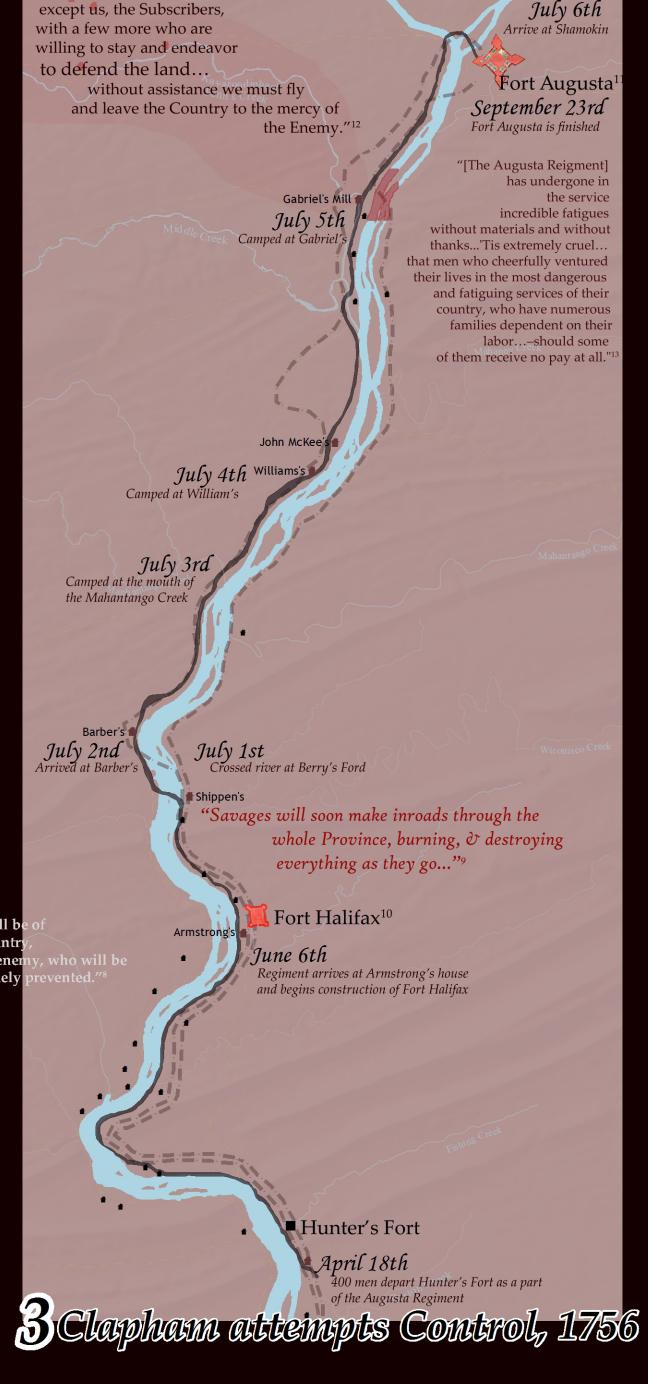




---- Indian Trails

Houses

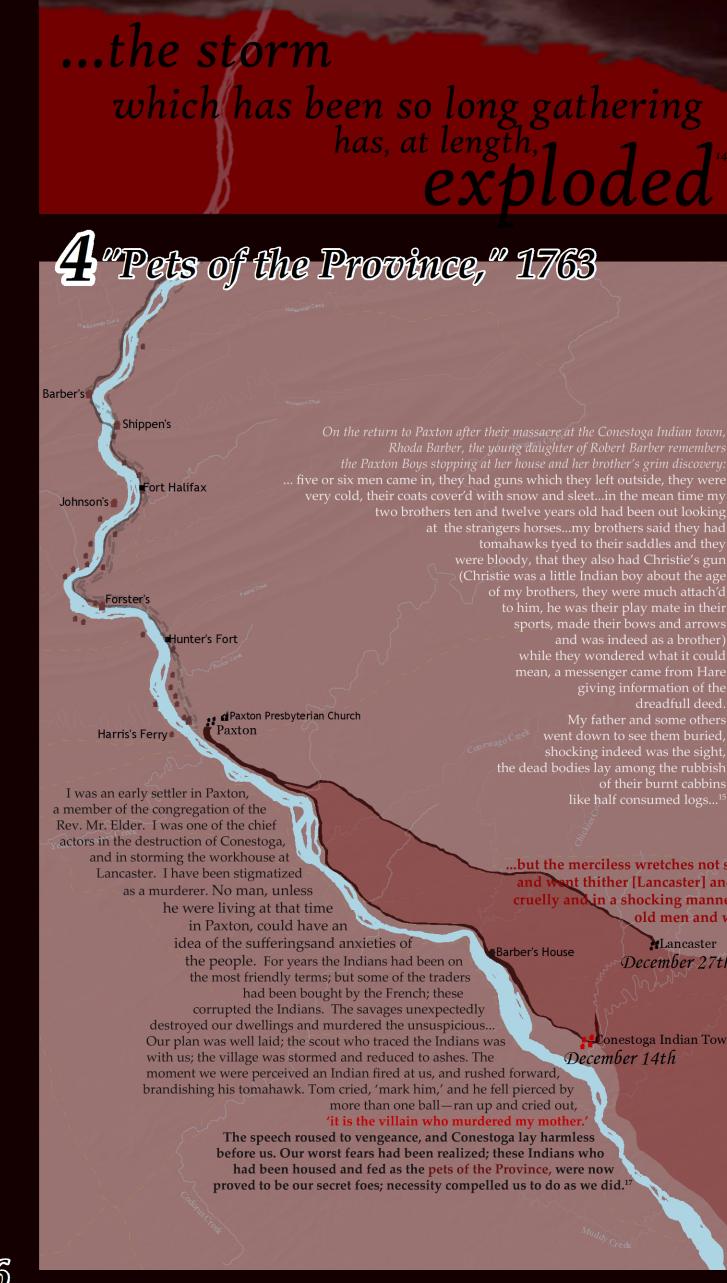


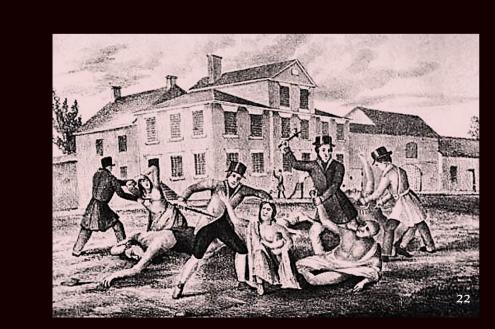


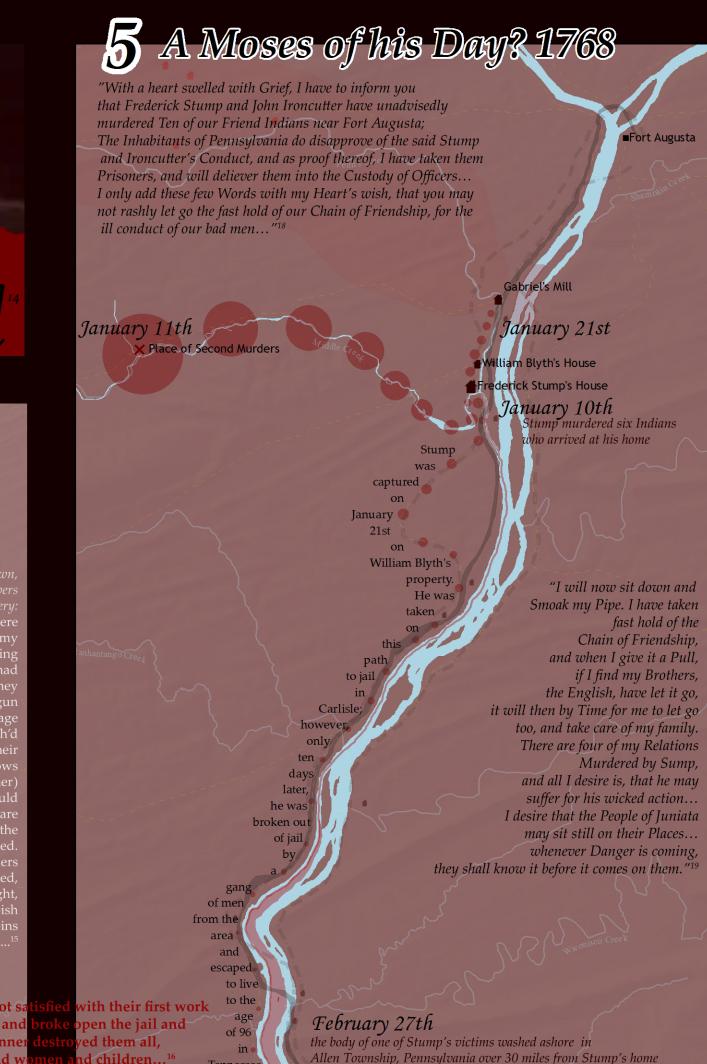
"The terror of which has drove away

almost all these back Inhabitants

except us, the Subscribers,







A new SONG, in high Vogue in Northampton County, [To the Tune of Bold Sawyer.]

"Then those infernal ravens in the dead of the night, Surprised our cooling turtles and put them all to flight, To pillage went the savage band, And plunder'd what came next to hand, But yet they could not steal the land, From true Paxton boys.

Be not impatient, brothers, we'll make it soon appear, Our hearts are quite undaunted, and strangers unto fear, Depend upon it—before next May, We'll drive these locusts all away, You may once more except fair play, From true Paxton boys.20

Now, Sirs, I ween it is but right, That we upon these Cananites, Without delay should Vengeance take, Both for our own, and the K - k's sake [sic]: Destroy them quite frae out the Land; – And for it we have God's Command.21

—The Paxtoniade, Christopher Gymnast 1764

Joseph Shippen's "Map of Colonel Clapham's March to Fort Augusta," 1756. Phrase From "A Narrative of the Late Massacres in Lancaster County..." by Benjamin Franklin, 1764. Sedited from Benjamin West's A View on the Susquehanna, 1767. Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware. Panel One: 4"The Narrative of Marie Le Roy and Barbara Leininger." In the Pennsylvania Archives. Series II. Volume VII, 1890. Page 427. 5David L. Preston, "Pennsylvanians at War..." Historical Society of Pennsylvania. 6From George Morgan's Annals of Harrisburg, 1906. Page 29.

take our distressed condition into consideration, and make such provision for us as may prevent ourselves and families from being destroyed and ruined by

Signed Thomas Forster, John Harris,

Iilliam Armstrong, Samuel Hunter, John Johnson

such a cruel enemy...'

October 16th

Penn's Massacre occurs

November

were attacked by

20 or 30 Indians

Moravian Mission at Shamokin

is abandoned in fear

drowned

drowned

drowned

drowned

Reverend John Elder of the Paxton Presbyterian Church

carried a gun into the pulpit every Sunday

in fear of Indian attack. About it he said,

"What may be the end of these things

which may, 'tis true, be recovered

out the hands of the enemy,

but at the expence of much

blood & treasure."7

God only knows, but I really fear that unless

a sacrifice & this part of the Province be lost,

vigorous methods are speedily used to prevent it,

we in these back Settlements will unavoidably fall

Paxton men embark on journey to bury the dead

Paxton Presbyterian Church

Panel Two: <sup>7</sup>From a letter from John Elder to the Secretary of the General Assembly dated November 9, 1755. In the Pennsylvania Archives, Series II, Volume VI, 1851. Page 704. <sup>8</sup>From a letter from John Harris to Governor Robert Morris dated October 28, 1755. Annals of Harrisburg, 1906. Panel Three: 9A letter from Edward Shippen to his Son. In The Paxton Papers, edited by John Dunbar, 1957. Page 18. 19Image of Fort Augusta. From "The Report of the Commission to Locate the Sites of the Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania," 1896. 12From "A Petition to Governor Morris from the Inhabitants living on the West side of Sasquehannah." In the Pennsylvania Archives. Series II, Volume VI, 1851. Page 647. 13From a Letter from Colonel Clapham to Governor Morris. In History of Northumberland County, Pennsylvania by Herbert C. Bell, 1891. <sup>14</sup>From a letter from Reverend John Elder to Governor John Penn, December 16, 1763. In The History and Topography of Dauphin, Cumberland, Franklin, Bedford, Adams, and Perry Counties, 1846. Page 164.

**Panel Four:** 15 From Rhoda Barber's "Recollections written in 1830 of life in Lancaster County 1726-1782 and a History of settlement at Wright's Ferry, on Susquehanna River." 16 From Rhoda Barber's "Recollections written in 1830 of life in Lancaster County 1726-1782 and a History of settlement at Wright's Ferry, on Susquehanna River." 16 From Rhoda Barber's "Recollections written in 1830 of life in Lancaster County 1726-1782 and a History of settlement at Wright's Ferry, on Susquehanna River." 17 A narration of the massacre by Mr. Smith, one of the Paxton Boys. From George Morgan's Annals of Harrisburg, 1906. Page 54. Panel Five: 18 From a Letter from Captain William Patterson to the Indians at the Great Island. In the Pennsylvania Archives. Series II. Volume IX, 1852. Page 454. 19 A Response from Shawana Ben to Captain William Patterson. In the Pennsylvania Archives. Series II. Volume IX, 1852. Page 480 <sup>20</sup>Two verses from Anne Domini's popular song published in 1771. <sup>21</sup>A verse from Christopher Gymnast's popular poem "The Paxtoniade" published in 1764. <sup>22</sup>Edited from Thomas Sinclair's "Massacre of the Indians of Lancaster by the Paxton boys in 1763," 1841.