The World War that Started in Pennsylvania

By Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo

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Known by various names—in Europe, "The Seven Years' War," in India, "The Third Carnatic War," in North America, "The French and Indian War"—it was the first war fought simultaneously in four continents around the globe. Its spark was struck in Pennsylvania. To understand this world war, it is not enough to talk of the French, the Indians, the English, and the colonists; you have to grasp the role played by Pennsylvania as a place, its geography of rivers, mountains, and forests.

Early in the 18th century, North America's rivers were flowing with gold—not the kind of precious metals the Spaniards found, but the North American financial substitute: fur. The European need for winter fur garments continued to grow, but Europe's forests had been cleared and pelts were scarce. North America had an abundance of high quality fur, but to get to the woods to hunt and then ship the pelts to market, it took rivers. Pennsylvania is the only one of the original colonies with three major river systems, the Delaware and Susquehanna flowing north to south and the Ohio River flowing westward. It was prime territory for the fur trade.

Keep in mind, though, that Pennsylvania was a proprietary colony. All the land belonged to the Penn family, who intended to profit from sale of land to settlers. The King of England enjoyed jurisdiction, of course, but had no responsibility to pay for the roads or the defense of Pennsylvania. As in a gated community today, owners, not government, financed roads and protection. Even after William Penn drew up a charter of self-governance in 1701, the colonial Pennsylvania legislature was much like a tenants' association, and colonial policy would eventually suffer from the profit motive.

Recall also that Pennsylvania was also a state of mind: a Quaker mind. Quakers believe that every human being, no matter their station in life, possesses an Inner Light of God's presence. If that spiritual force is allowed to manifest itself freely, without coercion, Quakers expect that peace and justice will prevail in the world. Everyone is a "Friend"; no one is boss or bishop. But just as the Friends would not impose themselves on others, they would not let others do any imposing. Quakers were "Antinomians," opponents of institutional authority and inherited noble status. In the 17th century, the Quakers constituted a radical movement that had unleashed powerful political forces leading towards racial and religious tolerance, and this tolerance provided a favorable climate for rapid socio-economic development.

Pennsylvania was open to immigrants like the wave of European settlers from the German Free Churches, so called because they had little clerical hierarchy. Pennsylvania's first "Germantown" was on the outskirts of Philadelphia, but settlements by other Germans with similar religious leanings, like the Amish and Mennonites, multiplied in the colonial countryside, along with the Moravians, a group that followed the teachings of John Hus. Jews, Catholics and Blacks from Caribbean plantations also found homes in Pennsylvania, attracted by Quaker tolerance.

Although it had been one of the last of the thirteen colonies to be founded, by 1756 Pennsylvania was the most diverse, the most prosperous, and the most enlightened colony in North America. Philadelphia was the sixth largest city in the British Empire, with such notable libraries and scientific and philosophical academies that it

was considered "the Athens of North America." Economic expansion sounded a discordant note, however, to the Antinomian Quaker ideal, which was suspicious of institutional authority, hierarchy, and anything that smacked of coercion or exploitation.

William Penn had died in 1718 and his ex-private secretary, John Logan, was running the show for Thomas and John, Penn's less fervent heirs. Logan found a clause in Penn's original pact with the Natives that allowed Europeans to take as much additional territory west of the Delaware as "a man could walk in a day." Before the day of measurement, in 1737, however, Governor Logan ordered a path cleared northward from Wrightstown, near Philadelphia, up to the banks of the Lehigh River. He hired trained athletes not to walk, but to run. Edward Marshall was the fastest and he completed the journey of some 60 miles from Bucks County to today's Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania. When a diagonal rather than a straight line was surveyed eastward to Port Jarvis, a friendly agreement for a "Walking Purchase" was converted into a swindle of 1.2 million acres, about the size of the state of Rhode Island. The Indian chief, Lapowinsa, went to Pennsylvania court, where he lost the protest against cheating; "Fast Eddie" Marshall was rewarded with land near a creek along the Delaware that still carries his name.

Although they lacked writing, the First Peoples of America were not "savages." They had elaborate governance by ritual, religion and kinship, which produced complex alliances among them. The most famous of these was the Iroquois Confederacy, which antedated the arrival of Europeans and is often considered the forerunner of the United Nations in that it unified peoples of different nations in a pledge to "keep the peace." It should not surprise us, then, that the Lenni Lenape of Pennsylvania had a sophisticated understanding of the alliance offered by William Penn. In fact, they had turned it to their advantage. In exchange for turning pelts over to trappers for shipment downriver to Philadelphia, the Natives obtained prestige items like brass and glass jewelry; cloth, especially blankets; tools like axes, shovels, saws, and knives; then eventually, guns.

These trading items from the colonists gave the Lenni Lenape power over native rivals and benefited them without any risk to their quality of life, since the fur trade did not displace the forests. While Native Americans who lived along the sea coasts of New England or the Carolinas or on the shores of Chesapeake Bay had rich protein sources in mollusks and fish, the woodland dwellers of Pennsylvania had to rely on the hunt for animal protein to augment their meager crops of corn, squash and berries. The game that supplied necessary nutrition prospered only with forested land, which was why these First Peoples lived in small, semi-nomadic settlements, always ready for the hunt.

The "Walking Purchase" of 1737 crucially shifted the relationship between the Pennsylvania colonists and the First Peoples of the region. Lacking an ecological conscience, the Europeans thought the woods were "uninhabited," and that the Lenni Lenape were wasting good farmland. The eventual attack on the forests for economic profit by farmers that followed the Walking Purchase constituted an attack on the First Peoples themselves. Killing the forests, culling the game, and robbing Native hunters of their quarry eventually resulted in the people's starvation.

The Iroquois Confederacy was bound to the English cause by what Francis Jennings calls the "Covenant Chain," and they were unwilling to risk their influence to help their rivals. Thus abandoned by both native and Quaker allies, the Lenni Lenape were forced westward in Pennsylvania, where they came in contact with the French, who were eager to stop English expansion. The conflict became more violent. Homes were burned, colonists were massacred, and—in the ultimate degradation—enemies' scalps were taken so that they would not be recognizable in the after-life. Such drastic measures of self-defense tell us the Lenni Lenape felt their survival as a people was at risk. And the French, for reasons of their own, were willing to assist.

It is easy to forget that in 1740 "New France" was rival to "New England." The initial French colonization in North America followed the course of the St. Lawrence River. International legal traditions in the 17th century held that explorers who traversed the full length of a river had claim to all the land irrigated by the waterway, and the land irrigated by the St. Lawrence included much of what is now northern New England. The French explorer, Samuel Champlain had come in 1609 to the southern bank of the St. Lawrence, the lake that bears his name, and the province named "La Maine." French settlers settled the southeastern bank of the St. Lawrence in a place known for its Green Mountains, "Verdes monts," on the border of English New Hampshire.

French expeditions avoided English resistance by moving westward over the Great Lakes, with army officers like Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac founding forts such as the one at the strait, or the *detroit,* between Lake Huron and Lake Erie. Finally, in 1682, the year before Penn founded his colony, René Robert de La Salle and Jesuit Jacques Marquette traveled the length of the Mississippi, naming all the land on either bank "Louisiana" after their king. Remember that one of the tributaries of the Mississippi is the Ohio River. The French, as they had with other waterways, later set about sailing its length. That brought them to the

source of the Ohio at the confluence of the Allegheny and the Monongahela in Pennsylvania, and brings us to the war.

Both Virginia and Pennsylvania challenged each other's claim to the Ohio River valley. The French set up a "strong house" south of Lake Ontario on a tributary to the Allegheny River to defend their claim. This incursion threatened the trade in furs for the English colonies. In 1753, Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia sent a 21-year-old surveyor, George Washington, to protect English interests. That December, a lost and freezing Washington stumbled on the French strong house where the soldiers treated him to a warm meal and the enjoinder not to return.

After Washington told the Virginia Governor how the French were already established, plans were made to counter the French presence with a competing fort for Virginia on the river. But the French, under the new Governor, Marquís de Duquesne, had the same idea. Dinwiddie ordered Washington in 1754 to return to the Ohio at the head of a force of militia, with some Indian guides. On May 28, 1754, the Virginia expedition came across a French patrol and fired on them. The French were apparently on a peaceful mission to convince English settlers to leave the area. Nonetheless, Tanaghusson, the Mingo chief in Washington's party, tomahawked the surrendering Frenchmen, taking their scalps. The chief may have resented the French for favoring rival Mingo leaders, but whatever his motives, his was an act of war since the rules of engagement made each commander liable for the actions of Natives in his company. Washington hastily built a stockade out of necessity, but when surrounded by a superior French and Indian force, he beat an ignominious retreat on July 3rd back to Virginia.

The defeat in Pennsylvania actually caused the fall of the government in the English Parliament. In 1755, new leaders in London, bent on retaliation, dispatched British marines to the mouth of the St. Lawrence, where they invaded the French settlement called "Acadia." To attract English settlers, the place was renamed "New Scotland"—in Latin, "Nova Scotia."

That same year of 1755, General Edward Braddock was sent to show the impudent French in Pennsylvania the power of "real" Englishmen, supposedly better fighters than the Virginians. To Braddock's dismay, the colonies did not want to pay for his expedition to the Ohio. The Virginians refused to spend money if Pennsylvania would control the claim. New England, New York and New Jersey were not interested in spending money to resolve the other colonies' problems.

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Eventually, Braddock raised a force of two thousand men by including Virginia militiamen and George Washington, who knew the trails to Fort Duquesne. But the English forces met a brutal defeat in the wilderness on July 9, 1755. During the onslaught, Washington begged Braddock to allow the Virginians to take cover in the forest, but the English general insisted on fighting "like gentlemen." He marched his men in shoulder-to-shoulder formation to their deaths, taking a fatal musket ball himself. Virtually the entire force had been wiped out; Washington, fleeing with a handful of survivors, did not even have time to bury the dead.

The massacre left the western front undefended. The people on the Pennsylvania frontier demanded that the legislature in Philadelphia protect them, but Pennsylvania's Quakers, who opposed armed defense because it violated their religious principles, had long objected to building any military fortifications. In fact, the Quaker colony had not a single cannon until 1748, and then only because one had been stolen from the Spanish.

That did not deter the most prominent non-Quaker Philadelphian, Benjamin Franklin. Rallying the German Pennsylvanians who faced the greatest hostilities, he formed the first ever state-funded militia for Pennsylvania. He ordered that reliable stone buildings along the frontier with Indian land should be designated as strong houses where residents in a five-to-ten mile radius could flee for defense against attacks. This was the origin of Fort Hamilton and Fort Penn on today's Main Street of Stroudsburg.

These measures were not enough. On December 10, 1755, bands of First Peoples killed the eldest of the Hoeth family in today's West End near Gilbert, Pennsylvania and kidnapped the children. The next day, the Indians destroyed the Moravian Mission on the western side of the creek and set fire to Daniel Brodhead's homestead on a hill on the eastern bank of the Pocono waterway. It would be imprecise to say that this attack on the settlers at Brodhead Creek started the world war between England and France that was declared in May of 1756, but it is nonetheless true that what happened in Pennsylvania did not stay in Pennsylvania.

The disastrous defeats in the English colonies were political hot news in London, enabling the rise to power in 1757 of William Pitt, Sr., leader of the Whig Party, which professed sympathy to colonial needs. The fruits of Pitt's new approach were several: 1) funding

for the war from Parliament; 2) professional British troops in the field; 3) cultivation of American networks of commerce; and 4) enlistment of colonials in English armed forces against France. Six thousand British regular troops under the command of General John Forbes were sent to attack the French at Fort Duquesne, which sat on the slip of land where the Allegheny and Monongahela form the Ohio River. The French were forced to abandon their position to Forbes in November of 1758. Fort Duquesne then became "Fort Pitt" and later "Pittsburg."

William Pitt's strategies turned the tide of war. Although the settings of the war's armed battles moved to other theatres, Pennsylvania continued to be under the war's shadow. On the positive side, the city's merchant class grew rich with wartime commerce. On the negative side, refugees of all kinds poured into Philadelphia, straining resources while also draining the countryside of its industrious farmers. Prices of food rose, and disease was rampant. Wounded soldiers and deserters swelled the population with little economic positive effect. Philadelphia's Quakers gave refuge to the converted Moravian Indians who had suffered greatly for their faith. The city also received 450 of the 1,000 French Acadians forcibly deported from Canada, an event celebrated by Longfellow in his epic poem *Evangeline*, about an Acadian heroine who became a Catholic Sister of Mercy in Philadelphia. While the most famous "Cadjians" resettled in the bayous of French Louisiana, many came to Pennsylvania because it was the only colony where they could legally practice their Catholic religion.

Meanwhile, military action moved north, first to the forts that guarded Lakes Champlain and George from invasion from Canada, and then finally to Quebec and Montreal. The American phase of the war ended in 1760 when the English captured Detroit. Sadly, the dark dogs of war in Pennsylvania allowed militiamen to degenerate into brigands. In reprisal during Pontiac's Rebellion in December of 1763, the Western Pennsylvania Scotch-Irish known as the "Paxton Boys" from a town east of Harrisburg (Paxtang) wiped out the settlement of the Conestoga Indians, who had converted to Christianity. With warrants issued for their arrest, the Paxton Boys defiantly marched on Philadelphia. In February of 1764, they were met at the city limits by Colonel Benjamin Franklin and the Pennsylvania militia; Franklin reaped credit for turning the Scotch-Irish raiders away, but there were rumors that numerous kegs of whiskey had played a role. On such a whimper, the war ended in Pennsylvania.

There are a few reasons why we should consider this first real world war historically important.

It was the "War that Made America". The colonies discovered that they had to fight together or all would perish together. Pennsylvania held the colonies together, thus inaugurating the metaphor of Pennsylvania as the keystone that sets the strength of an arch.

The conflict showed that you didn't have to speak English to be an American patriot. The German-speakers were a vital and contributing population in Pennsylvania. Moreover, the Quaker ideal of non-interference with others allowed the Commonwealth to be a de facto bilingual English-German society for hundreds of years up to the beginning of the 20th century.

The Native Americans, however, suffered the destruction of their habitat, and without the protection of Quaker political dominance, their communities would virtually vanish from Pennsylvania.

The colonial militiamen acquired skills in military tactics and a taste for victory. George Washington learned that the British would always attempt to fight in formation and that a numerically inferior force could defeat them if it used guerilla tactics.

Benjamin Franklin's leadership during the war earned him a mission to London to negotiate, in the name of all the colonies, for American representation in Parliament. Pitt and the Whigs were willing to listen, but King George III, priggish and prone to fits of madness, fought both Whigs and colonials, insisting on taxation without representation. Thus, in 1776, only eleven years after the French and Indian War had ended, the War of American Independence began.

In conclusion, whether you consider this war glorious or horrendous: know that it was Pennsylvania's.

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