



"CUMBERLAND COUNTY WILL BE A FRONTIER"

The FRONTIER in 1777 officially lay somewhere west of the Laurel Ridge which stretches in a southwest to northeast line about fifty miles to the west of the town of Bedford. The ridge's diagonal course brought its northern end within thirty-some miles west of the small settlement of Frankstown. Lying west of the formidable Allegheny Ridge, which served as a natural defense boundary for the eastern half of Bedford County, the Laurel Ridge formed the next natural boundary. When Westmoreland County was erected out of Bedford in 1773, the Laurel Ridge became the dividing line between them. West of that natural boundary, the Laurel Ridge, lay the frontier in 1777. This essay is not about the frontier that was Westmoreland County in its first decade of existence; it is about the desperate fear that gripped Bedford County - that it might, once again, become *that frontier*.

The western part of Pennsylvania, when it was still called a Province, had been troubled by Indian incursions since the 1760s and the end of the French and Indian War. Rather than putting an end to the hostilities of the native Indians, the cessation of that recent war had merely settled the French and English quarrel. The Indians were pushed further westward by the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768, and many of the tribes were not agreeable with that situation. The Iroquois Indians had given up the territory claimed by them south of the Ohio River, and which stretched westward to the mouth of the Tennessee River. The Shawnee Indians, on the other hand, had not been included in the negotiations of this treaty, and were upset that their hunting grounds in the Kentucky countryside would now be cut off from them. The Shawnee lived primarily north of the Ohio, but those lands south of the river were their source of food. In 1772 the Earl of Dunmore was appointed as governor of the colony of Virginia, and he proceeded to try to wrest a part of Pennsylvania from the western edge of that Proprietary Province. In what would become known as Lord Dunmore's War of 1774, the Virginians attempted to take the Pennsylvania frontier by force. They took possession of Fort Pitt, which the British garrison had abandoned in 1772, and renamed it Fort Dunmore, and called upon the inhabitants of the settlement of Pittsburgh to assemble as a body of Militia to fight the Pennsylvania Militia if necessary. I do not plan to go further into this episode known as the Lord Dunmore's War at this time; my sole purpose in mentioning it is to note that it was because the Virginians moved into Pennsylvania that quite a number of the Indian incursions into the province were precipitated. It had been the Virginian and Maryland settlers and hunters who craved the lands south of the Ohio River and who had been pushing the Indians into relinquishing those lands. The Shawnee began to make war raids into the territories held by the Virginians, and that included the lands west of the Monongahela River in the Province of Pennsylvania.

The events that were leading the American colonies into rebellion against the mother country began to divert the attention of the Virginians from their western Pennsylvania aims, although it was of little concern to the Indians. The uniting efforts of the Continental Congress helped to set the differences of opinion over the Virginia/Pennsylvania boundary dispute aside, while the more urgent demands of the Revolutionary War were dealt with. In July of 1775 the Continental Congress organized three Indian departments to try to persuade the tribes to remain neutral in the war between the colonies and England. The Treaty of Pittsburgh in 1775 was successful in gaining the word of the important tribes of the region (Shawnee, Delawares, Mingo, Seneca, Wyandot and the Ottawa) that they would avoid entering into the conflict on either side.

The peace lasted less than a year. In 1776 a group of the Mingo tribe, under the inducement of the British, had begun sporadic attacks on settlers in the Kentucky region. A second peace treaty was negotiated at Pittsburgh in October of 1776, but this, also, was destined to be short-lived.

In March of 1777 orders were dispatched from London to Governor Henry Hamilton at Detroit to enlist the Indians of the region under the British flag and create diversions on the western Virginia and Pennsylvania borders. The aim was to weaken the American army by forcing a western theatre of operations on it. In June of that year Hamilton summoned the Indians to a council to urge them to take up the hatchet against the Americans. The Chippewa, Ottawa, Wyandot and the Mingo were very enthusiastic about carrying out the request of the British. The Shawnee and Iroquois, on the other hand, expressed no interest in participating in actions that would incur the wrath of the frontier settlers - they too were settlers of that same frontier region and they feared the reprisals that would no doubt come from the Americans. Their apathy toward warring with the Americans did not last long. A Shawnee chief, Cornstalk, who had been detained at Fort Randolph on the Ohio River was murdered by militiamen (in response to one of their own men being killed by Indians), and the Shawnee and Iroquois became ruthless in their vengeance against the Americans. (Only the Delaware tribe would remain friendly to the colonists.)

Throughout the summer and fall of 1777 and over the following two years the Indians waged war raids upon the western portion of the state, independent of any British enticements. On the 27th of November, 1777 George Woods and Thomas Smith sent a letter to Thomas Wharton, Jr (who had been elected to the position of President of the Supreme Executive Council of the State of Pennsylvania). In that letter they explained the situation that Bedford County found itself in at that time: "Gentlemen: The present situation of this County is so truly deplorable that we should be inexcusable if we delayed a moment in acquainting you with it, an Indian War is now raging around us in its utmost fury. Before you went down they had killed one man at Stony Creek, since that time they have killed five on the Mountain, over against the heads of Dunning's Creek, Killed or taken three at the three springs, wounded one and kill'd some Children by Frankstown... A small party went out into Morrison's Cove scouting and unfortunately divided, the Indians discovered one division and out of eight killed seven & wounded the other. In short, a day hardly passes without our hearing of some new murder and if the People continue only a week longer to fly as they have done for a week past, Cumberland County will be a frontier. From Morrison's, Croyle's and Friend's Coves, Dunnings Creek, & one--half of the Glades they are fled or fortified..."

The Bedford County Militia performed the vital role of attempting to ward off the attacks and to keep the Indians in check. As history reveals, Bedford County remained stable on the edge of the frontier despite the horrors the Indian incursions brought upon her; Cumberland County also experienced her share of Indian raids, but she was spared having the edge of the frontier coming back to her borders.

CONSTITUTION DAY DINNER

The 1991 Constitution Day Dinner will be hosted by the Blair County Chapter, SAR on Saturday, September 14, 1991 at the Ramada Hotel in Altoona. The luncheon (of Chicken Breast with filling, whipped potatoes, fruit cup, tossed salad and sherbet) will begin at 12:00 noon. The luncheon will be followed by some words on the subject of the "Bill of Rights", to be given by Ernest Dejaiffe (retired Professor of Engineering, Penn State). The cost of the dinner will be \$12.00 per person. Those wishing to attend should respond with their reservations by Wednesday, September 11, 1991 to Larry D. Smith, Treasurer.

QUARTERLY MEETING

Don't forget to attend the 3rd 1991 Quarterly Meeting of the Blair County Chapter, SAR (to be held at King's Family Restaurant on Saturday, August 10, 1991 at 12:00 noon). Compatriot Joseph Ramsey will present a video of "Desert Storm Navy and Marine Teams".