

THE COLUMBIA DEMOCRAT.

"I have sworn upon the Altar of God, eternal hostility to every form of Tyranny over the Mind of Man."—Thomas Jefferson.

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Wyoming Claim.

From the Wyoming Republican & Herald.
MEMORIAL TO CONGRESS.

To the Honourable the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, in Congress assembled.

By order of a public meeting, held at Wilkes-Barre, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, the subscribers present you the following Memorial in behalf of the Wyoming Sufferers during the Revolutionary War, their Heirs, Widows, and legal Representatives.

The circumstances of the invasion of the Wyoming Settlement by the British and Indians; the battle and massacre; the entire expulsion of the inhabitants; the conflagration of their dwellings, and the devastation of their fields—are presumed to be familiar to all of you. In the annals of that fearful but glorious conflict, not a page recounts a livelier devotion to the cause of liberty, or depicts a bloodier field, deeper sufferings, or more extensive losses of property. Every historian who has written an account of the Revolutionary War, has told the story of her sufferings. All America and Europe were filled, at the time, with the melancholy details. It is not our purpose to awaken your sympathies; but so much we thought proper to say by way of introduction. Our appeal shall be made to your judgments. We would address facts to your reason, and arguments to your understanding; looking to your deliberate judgments for a favorable response to our Petition.

The Wyoming Settlements were made under the authority of Connecticut. A town called Westmoreland was erected here, attached to the county of Litchfield, near three hundred miles distant; the laws of Connecticut prevailed. Civil and military officers derived their commissions from that State. Representatives were sent from here to her Legislature; and the troops raised in Westmoreland were part of the Connecticut Line on the Continental establishment. Several towns of Connecticut were burnt by the enemy:—New London, Danbury, Westmoreland, Fairfield, Groton, and others, were among the number. Connecticut has made all those towns, except one, full and ample remuneration for their losses. Westmoreland, or Wyoming, alone, received nothing. Five hundred thousand acres of land, in the Western Reserve, were granted in 1792 to those towns, valued at 6s. 8d., a French crown per acre—amounting to between five and six hundred thousand dollars. This was a beneficial act on the part of Connecticut, and will rebound in all future time to her honor. Was not the grant also just, as well as beneficial? Did not the recipients deserve—were they not entitled to this grant? Was not their claim founded in the principles of eternal Equity and everlasting justice? Who ever heard a doubt expressed of the righteousness of their claim? If, then, it was just and equitable that New-London, Danbury, Fairfield, and those other towns should be indemnified, is it not clear as demonstration, that Westmoreland or Wyoming—where a heavier sacrifice of life, far deeper personal sufferings, and more extensive losses, were sustained, was also entitled to remuneration?

We anticipate here, that honorable members may say—"Your claim is doubtless just.—Standing on its own merits of services, sufferings, and losses, it is a strong claim; and when it is considered relatively to those other towns of Connecticut, provided for, it appears of unquestionable validity: But when your parent State was making so ample provision for others similarly situated, why did you not then apply to her for aid? While we admit the claim just, we cannot see as yet, how the General Government can be held liable to make you compensation." To this we would reply with all truth and simplicity:

The reason why no provision was made for Westmoreland is simple, and easily told. About the conclusion of the War, by the decree of Trenton, which settled the long existing controversy in respect to these lands, the jurisdiction over Westmoreland ceased in Connecticut, and was transferred to Pennsylvania. It was not until about ten years after this event, that Connecticut so far recovered her resources as to be able to make remuneration to those suffering towns which she indemnified. Being no longer a portion of the State, no provision was made for us, as there doubtless would have been, had Westmoreland continued a component part of Connecticut.

Pennsylvania, with a liberality and public spirit most honorable to her patriotism and justice, has granted ample rewards to officers and soldiers of her line, and to others, whose merits and sufferings in the cause, commended them to her consideration. Not having been harmoniously a part of Pennsylvania, but maintaining an

attitude of opposition, if not of hostility, during, and indeed for sometime after the war, it could not be asked or expected that she would make good the losses, or grant rewards for the sufferings of the Wyoming people. So that, to use a common but expressive phrase, "between two stools we came to the ground." Moreover, the disasters of the war, utterly prostrated the people of Wyoming. Most of our natural guardians and protectors were slain, amongst them many of our chief men; widows and orphans, aged or very young men, destitute and poor, constituted our chief population. The unhappy dispute (since so satisfactorily adjusted by our present parent and protector, noble and liberal Pennsylvania) still continued, as you doubtless know, to perplex and impoverish us. To obtain "this day our daily bread" occupied the thoughts and exertions of us all, and no application was made to Connecticut to share in the bounty she was so liberally dispensing. But we ask your patience while we show, as we are sure we can, that to the General Government we have a right fairly to look for aid. The services performed, the sufferings endured, and the losses sustained, were all in the public service, for the general cause. They all tended to the great end of accomplishing National Independence, which has brought prosperity so unbounded to our beloved country. All the debts founded on contract having been paid, Congress have recently, with just and liberal hand been meting out to claimants, not by contract, but in equity, liberal rewards for services performed, sufferings endured, or losses sustained. In those three particulars, no claim can be stronger than that of Wyoming.

Moreover, there is a strong point which we mean to indicate, but not now to argue at length, which statesmen, familiar with the springs of events, well know to have truth for its foundation. About the close of the war, when the issue was certain, and a great empire of independent and powerful sovereignties was taking rank among the nations, it was deemed of the utmost importance that all disputes about territory and jurisdiction should be put to rest. Powerful States were to be conciliated by the favorable adjustment of their claims. Indemnifications were to be allowed to others. Little would those statesmen and patriots have deserved the award we all yield their wisdom and sagacity, if they had not adopted proper measures to harmonize conflicting interests, and to consolidate the union. How far the national policy we speak of influenced the various measures and final decision which confirmed to Pennsylvania the whole extent of her chartered limits, and granted to Connecticut an indemnification in Ohio, we need not here demonstrate. Certainly that policy was, in a national point of view, wise—a benefit to Connecticut—a blessing to Pennsylvania: and if, for the common good, it excluded Westmoreland from a participation with other towns indemnified, is it not right that the common purse should afford her such remuneration as may be just?

Again—The old Continental Congress passed a Resolution, Oct. 10, 1780; in which it was declared, in reference to the unappropriated Lands which may be ceded to the United States, "That the necessary and reasonable expenses which any particular State shall have incurred, since the commencement of the present war, in subduing any British Posts, or in maintaining Forts and Garrisons within and for the defence, or in acquiring any part of the territory that may be ceded or relinquished to the United States, shall be reimbursed." Although the words of the Resolution do not reach us, we do respectfully suggest, that its spirit makes strongly in favor of the Wyoming claim.

During the Revolutionary war, Wyoming stood an extreme frontier—an outpost on the borders of the settlement of the Savage enemy. To Sunbury, the nearest inhabited place down the Susquehanna, it was sixty miles; through the Great Swamp it was sixty miles, a pathless wilderness, to Bethlehem or Easton. The warlike and bloody Mohawks, Senecas, and others, of the Six nations, occupied all the upper branches of the Susquehanna, and were within a few hours sail of our settlements, which were exposed to constant attacks. Our pathways were ambushed, and midnight glared with the constant conflagration of our dwellings. Thus exposed, we stood as a shield to all the settlements below us. In this situation, every man might justly be considered as on duty continually. Every man might well be considered as enlisted for and during the whole war. There was no peace, no security at Wyoming. The husbandman took his hoe in one hand, and his rifle in the other, to his cornfield. Several forts were built, and garrisons steadily maintained. Such

was the case with Wintermoet's fort, Forty fort, and the fort at Wilkes-Barre. This was done by the people, by the militia, by common consent and common exertion. [See note A.] Three hundred miles from Connecticut, it was vain to ask assistance from her, exerting every nerve as she was for the common defence, and the protection of her extensive and exposed sea-board. If States which ceded lands were entitled to be reimbursed for keeping up forts, we submit whether a people situated like those of Wyoming, may not properly ask for reimbursement—since not only themselves, but a wide extent of country below, slept in comparative security through their position and exertions.

But Congress early saw, and felt for the extremely exposed situation of Wyoming. On the 23d August, 1776, Resolutions were entered into, of which one is in these words: "That two companies on the Continental Establishment be raised in the town of Westmoreland, and stationed in proper places, for the defence of the inhabitants of said town, and parts adjacent, till further orders of Congress." The Monday following, Aug. 26, "Congress proceeded to the election of sundry Officers, when Robert Durkee and Samuel Ransom were chosen Captains of the two Companies ordered to be raised in the town of Westmoreland; James Wells and Perrin Ross first Lieutenants; Heman Swift and Mathias Hollenback Ensigns of said Companies."

Thus the General Government—the Continental Congress, took the special defence of Wyoming into their hands. They were satisfied, it seems, that the militia, however well organized, were not sufficient for its defence. A regular force was deemed necessary, and orders were issued for raising that force, for the special defence of that town and parts adjacent. By another clause it was provided that the men should be liable to serve in any other part of the United States. This provision, notwithstanding they were raised expressly "for the defence of the inhabitants," &c. was perfectly proper; for if the Savages on the upper waters of the Susquehanna should be driven off by a force from Albany, or elsewhere, so that the source of impending danger should be removed, there was nothing more proper than that these companies, being no longer needed for the defence of the inhabitants, should be marched elsewhere, at the discretion of Congress. Imperious necessity, however, almost immediately induced Congress, without the implied contingency of the proximate enemy being removed, to call for their services in another quarter. On the 25th October, 1776, the battle of White Plains was fought, and Washington retreated. Nov. 16, Fort Mifflin surrendered to the enemy, who immediately pushed his victorious troops in pursuit of the American army, and on the 2d December His Excellency retired through Princeton to Trenton, Lord Cornwallis pushing upon his rear. "The Army," says Marshal, "at no time during the retreat, exceeded four thousand men, and on reaching the Delaware was reduced to less than three thousand, of whom not quite one-third were militia of New Jersey." "The commander-in-chief found himself at the head of this small band of soldiers, dispirited by their losses and fatigues, retreating, almost naked and bare-footed, in the cold of November and December, before a numerous, well appointed and victorious army."

On the 12th December, Congress passed a Resolution, setting forth, that "whereas, the movements of the enemy have now rendered this city (Philadelphia) the seat of war," &c., they resolved to adjourn to meet at Baltimore. The same day they adopted the following Resolution:—"Resolved, That the two companies raised in the town of Westmoreland, be ordered to join Gen. Washington, with all possible expedition."

Thus, within less than four months from the first order to raise these companies, and

NOTE A.—Extract from Westmoreland Records.

"At a Town meeting legally warned and held in Westmoreland, in Wilkes-Barre district, August ye 24th, 1776.

"Col. Butler was chosen Moderator for ye work of ye day.

"Voted—It is the opinion of this meeting that it now becomes necessary for ye Inhabitants of this Town to erect suitable Fort or Forts, as a defence against our common enemy.

"August 28th, 1776, this meeting is opened and held by an adjournment.

"Voted—That ye three Field Officers of ye Regiment in this Town be appointed as a committee to view the most convenient places in said town for building Forts for ye defence of said town and determine on some particular spot or place or places in each district for that purpose, and make out the same.

"Voted—That the above said Committee do recommend it to the people in each part as shall be set off by them to belong to any Fort to proceed forthwith in building said Forts &c. without either fee or reward from ye said Town."

probably within less than ninety days from their enlistment and organization, the extreme and pressing exigence of the general cause required that they should be withdrawn from the country they were raised to defend, to aid Washington in resisting the alarming advances of the enemy.

The consequence which followed it required but little sagacity to foresee. Stimulated to revenge, by the aid sent from Wyoming to Washington; incited by the consequent weakness of the settlements, to attack them; and urged by policy to compel the withdrawal from the Commander in Chief of part of his men, by forcing them home to defend their own fire-sides—the enemy were not long in planning their attack.

The British having obtained possession of Philadelphia, inevitable necessity did not allow His Excellency to dispense with the services of the Westmoreland companies; but the reiterated rumors of preparation to attack Wyoming, again engaged the attention of the Congress. They saw, felt and acknowledged their distressed situation; but while the heart was assailed, and the whole force of the country was concentrated for its protection; little aid, but encouraging words, could be afforded to the threatened extremities. In March, 1778, about ninety days before the invasion, Congress resolved. "That one full company of foot be raised in the Town of Westmoreland on the east bank of the Susquehanna, for the defence of the said town and the settlements on the frontier, and in the neighborhood thereof, against the Indians and other enemies of the States: the said company to be enlisted for one year from the time of their enlisting, unless sooner discharged by Congress. That the companies find their own arms, accoutrements and blankets." And provision was made that these should be paid for.

Thus a third company was raised in that infant and small settlement, having to clothe and arm themselves if they could, and an exhausted Treasury promised to repay the charge. This company was in the battle, and almost literally annihilated.

The number of men which comprised the first two companies when raised in 1776, we are not able to state; but in June, 1778, by a Resolution of Congress, it appears that there were then 86 non-commissioned officers and privates. A number it is known, were slain in battle, in the Jerseys, and some died in the service.—At the time mentioned the two companies were consolidated into one; Simon Splading appointed Captain, Timothy Pierce and Phineas Pierce, Lieutenants; and they were detached for the defence of the frontiers, but did not arrive until the settlement was cut off. Capt. Ransom and Capt. Durkee, Lieut. Ross and Wells, of the original companies, at home on furlough, were in the battle, and were all slain.

On the first of July, 1778, Col. John Butler, of the British army, with 400 men, regulars and Tories, and with 500 Indian warriors, entered the Valley of Wyoming. Rumors of the meditated irruption had preceded them, and pressing solicitations for relief had been sent to head quarters. A number of the officers of the two companies had returned on furlough. The Militia were mustered. Old men and boys took their muskets. Retirement or flight was impossible. There seemed no security but in the victory. Unequal as was the conflict, and hopeless in the eye of prudence; the young athletic men fit to bear arms and roused for their special defence, being absent with the main army; yet the inhabitants, looking to their dependent wives and little ones, took counsel of their courage, and resolved to give the enemy battle. On the 3d of July, about 400 men under the command of Col. Zebulon Butler, marched out to meet the British and their savage allies, being more than double their numbers. On the right wing the conflict was sharply contested for some time, and the enemy gave way. On the left, out flanked by the savages, the men fought and fell rapidly, till an order was given to fall back and persist a longer front to the enemy; a manoeuvre which could not be executed under the destructive fire of the Indian rifles. Confusion ensued—a disastrous retreat followed, and a most bloody massacre consummated the bloody tragedy. We cannot dwell on the battle and the subsequent horrors. It would be useless if we could. Brother fell by the side of brother; fathers and sons perished in the same field. More than half our little army were slain; many of the rest were wounded; and the whole settlement—very aged men and helpless children, widows and orphans, were now exposed, without protection, to the tomahawk and scalping knife. In utter confusion and distress they all fled,—some in boats down the river, but most on foot through the wilderness. Your imagination must conceive,

for words cannot point the unequalled misery of their situation. In the simplicity of truth we will state two instances, those of the Chairman and Secretary of this meeting.

Perrin and Jeremiah Ross, brothers of the Chairman, were in the battle, and both fell. Mr. Ross, then a lad, his father being dead, was the only male of the family remaining. His mother, six sisters, the widow of his brother Perrin and her five orphan children, fled,—such was the terror and confusion, not together, but in three separate parties; two down the river to Harrisburg, and thence to Orange Co., New York—two to Nescopeck, and thence to Fort Allen—the rest by a more eastern route.

The father of Mr. Dana had then recently returned from Hartford, where he had been a member of the Assembly of Connecticut, from the town of Westmoreland. He was in the battle; and Mr. Whiting, a young man who had a few months before married his daughter, was also in the battle. Both were slain. Anderson Dana, our Secretary, then a lad of 13, widowed mother and widowed sister, (the latter in delicate health) with thirteen others, of whom he was the eldest male—having one pack horse to carry the few things they could hastily gather, set out through the wilderness on foot to join their friends three hundred miles distant, in Ashford, Connecticut, from whence they originally came.—Death and desolation were behind them; before them, hunger and despair. They were twenty days on their journey, living chiefly on charity. Several women of different parties of fugitives, gave birth to children on the way, who were indeed,

"Children of misery baptized in tears."

In the Valley, the demon of destruction completed his work: Scarcely an inhabitant remained. Every house was rifled and burnt. The sweep was universal—every thing was destroyed. The cattle driven away and the harvests laid waste. War and woe never looked upon a scene of such utter sorrow and desolation.

GENTLEMEN—Is it not plain, that these disasters and sufferings, befel the inhabitants from their exertions in the cause of their country? Is it not manifest, that the withdrawing the two companies raised for the defence of the people, occasioned the attack, massacre, and ruin that followed?—And is it not right, just now when the public Treasury is full, and all the other equitable Revolutionary claims have been recognized by Congress, that something should be granted to the old Wyoming sufferers, and their heirs? Why should all receive bounty or justice, and we, ten fold sufferers, obtain nothing? In honor of the dead, as well as justice to the living, we ask it at your hands. Noble Virginia granted Col. George Rogers Clarke and his regiment, who marched with him to Kaskaskia, and St. Vincent, one hundred and fifty thousand acres of land on the Ohio. Should not Wyoming receive as much?—The portion of New London must have exceeded one hundred and fifty thousand: Ought not Wyoming receive as much?—

Having no other resting place, the survivors were obliged to return, desolate and melancholy as were their homes,—the battle ground was still strewn with the unburied slain; and their remains, as soon as they could be approached in that sultry season, were gathered and interred with affectionate and pious care.

After their return, the savages kept war parties around the settlements, and many were murdered. Jonathan Slocum and his wife's father, Isaac Tripp, Esq. who had been a representative to the Connecticut Assembly from Westmoreland, were butchered and scalped together, near the Wilkesbarre fort; and shortly before, another party of savages murdered two children near the door of Mrs. Slocum, and took captive, Frances, her daughter, aged then about five years. After the war diligent search through all the Indian country to Detroit, was made by her brothers, for their lost sister, but in vain. After all hope was extinguished, recently within the present year, the sister, now nearly seventy years of age, has been found. Not able to speak a word of our language, a long life of habit has identified her with the Indians; and though there is a melancholy pleasure in the recognition, and certainty of

NOTE B. What a noble contrast do the proceedings of Wyoming present—we copy from the record.

"At a town meeting legally warned and held at Westmoreland December ye 9th 1777.

"John Jenkins, Esq. was chosen Moderator for ye work of ye day, Ezekiel Pierce was chosen Town clerk for the year ensuing, December 30th, 1777. This meeting is opened and held by adjournment.

"Voted—By this Town that ye committee of Inspectors be empowered to supply the Savages widows, and their families with the necessaries of life."