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“Savage and Bloody Footsteps Through the Valley”
The Wyoming Massacre in the American Imagination

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at
Virginia Commonwealth University

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14 May 2021

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Abstract

Along the banks of the Susquehanna River in early July 1778, a force of about 600 Loyalist and Native American raiders won a lopsided victory against 400 overwhelmed Patriot militiamen and regulars in the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania. While not well-known today, this battle—the Battle of Wyoming—had profound effects on the Revolutionary War and American culture and politics. Quite familiar to early Americans, this battle’s remembrance influenced the formation of national identity and informed Americans’ perceptions of their past and present over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

From the beginning, however, Americans’ understanding of what occurred in the Wyoming Valley in July 1778 was strongly influenced by reports from partisans not present at the battle, reports which wildly differed from eyewitness accounts. In the aftermath of the battle, a fabricated myth about Loyalists and Native Americans massacring women, children, and wounded soldiers quickly took root in the public imagination and influenced the Patriot war effort. Despite having no evidence backing it up, the myth eventually outlasted its Revolutionary context, coming back to shape political dialogue and popular culture in the early nineteenth century. Indeed, this Revolutionary fabrication was only the beginning of the historical distortion related to the Battle of Wyoming. By mid-century, a whole new myth about the battle arose, featuring a Native American woman known as Queen Esther who murdered prisoners around a rock. Made possible by the cultural atmosphere of the period, this myth proved equally sensational.

This thesis explores how these myths about the battle formed, spread, and influenced American society on national and local levels from 1778 to around 1878. Tracing and analyzing how Americans have remembered and misremembered the Battle of Wyoming, more popularly known as the Wyoming Massacre, its primary focus is to look at the meaning behind the narratives that formed around this event and what those meanings say about the individuals and cultures that created them. It also scrutinizes some of the ways Americans have tailored their remembrances of Wyoming to speak to their present. Ultimately, this thesis points to how historical distortions can easily enmesh themselves into popular memory and how they can influence national and local identities.

Acknowledgements

After almost a year working on this project, I am glad to finally be able to thank all the people who have helped me along the way.

First thanks must go to my wonderful thesis director Dr. Carolyn Eastman. Her helpful guidance, encouragement, and patience has not only made this work possible but improved it immeasurably. I also thank Dr. Robert Parkinson and Dr. Gregory Smithers for devoting their time to serve on my thesis committee and providing valuable feedback on my work. My friend and colleague, Ben Smith, also deserves my gratitude for his careful reading of early drafts and his constructive criticism.

I also want to thank the staff at the Luzerne County Historical Society for their friendly assistance in helping me navigate their wonderful collection. I give special thanks to the director of library and archives, Amanda Fontenova. Throughout the uncertainties of COVID-19 restrictions, winter weather, and even a furnace malfunction, she provided timely answers to my many queries and helped me ultimately plan a successful archives trip to northeastern Pennsylvania in the middle of winter.

I also extend my thanks to Bill Lewis of the Wyoming Commemorative Association for pointing me to several fruitful avenues of research and sharing his expertise (and his wonderful paper on the Battle of Wyoming's memory) with me.

The support I have received from Virginia Commonwealth University's history department cannot be overlooked. I am grateful for all the encouragement from my classmates and professors during my two years in the program. I am also thankful for the department's Schilling Fund Award, which graciously funded my visit to the archives in Wilkes-Barre.

Last but certainly not least, I must thank my family and friends. They have listened to me talk about the Battle of Wyoming and its many aspects ad nauseum for these past months, and I am grateful for their attention and insights. I would not have been able to complete this project or graduate school without them. I would like to express my love and thanks to my mother, Trish Sherron, my father, Geoff Tharp, my siblings, Katy Sherron and Matthew Whitehurst, and my grandmother, Linda Tharp. Of course, I cannot forget the loving support of my fiancée Leah and her family as well. Leah has always provided needed encouragement and expressed confidence in me and my work. I am very grateful for her and for all those who I have failed to mention that have contributed to this work in ways both big and small.

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Introduction

On July 20, 1778, a New York newspaper editor named John Holt published a gruesome and shocking report about the war on the frontier. “Collected” from “many of the distressed Refugees...who escaped the general massacre” and “have passed this way,” this report told of a violent battle and massacre in the backcountry of northeastern Pennsylvania. According to Holt, 1600 Loyalist and Native American raiders descended on the Wyoming Valley in late June and early July, destroying several small forts and demanding that all Patriot forces in the region surrender.¹ Though significantly outnumbered, the obstinate Patriots refused and left the safety of their main fort, Forty Fort, to face the enemy on the evening of July 3, 1778. The Patriots, unfortunately, marched right into an ambush. After 45 minutes of fighting, they retreated in disarray, and “a total rout ensued” in which many perished. The next day, the Loyalists and Native Americans returned to Forty Fort and demanded that the remaining defenders surrender, threatening the indiscriminate killing and scalping of all the fort’s inhabitants. Eventually forcing entry, the attackers proceeded to slaughter women, children, and wounded soldiers by burning them alive within their own homes. In the coming days, the raiders’ reign of terror extended even farther across the region. Holt reported that they burned numerous crops while killing or maiming nearly everything that moved—from cattle to their own families.²

¹ While situated in modern northeastern Pennsylvania, the Wyoming Valley was also claimed by Connecticut at the time. The two states and their settlers quarreled and intermittently fought over possession starting in the 1760s and continuing into the first decades of the 1800s. See Anne M. Ousterhout, “Frontier Vengeance: Connecticut Yankees vs. Pennamites in the Wyoming Valley,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 62, no. 3 (1995): 330–63. The Wyoming Valley should not be confused with the state of Wyoming, established later in the nineteenth century. Interestingly, the Wyoming Valley did provide inspiration for the state’s name. See, Jim Brown, “The First Wyoming: What’s in a Name?” *WyoHistory.org*, Wyoming State Historical Society, 2014, <https://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/wyoming-name>.

² “Poughkeepsie, July 20,” *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), July 30, 1778, 1, 4. All the details about the battle within this paragraph come from Holt’s account. As a result, they are not all accurate. For instance, closer to 500 or

Horribly gruesome, John Holt's account of this event reached thousands across the American colonies during the Revolutionary War, achieving wide circulation in Patriot newspapers and helping inflame public opinion against Great Britain. There was only one problem—much of his account simply had no basis in evidence coming from eyewitnesses. Most glaringly, no massacre occurred at Forty Fort on July 4. While British-backed raiders did win a lopsided victory against Patriot militiamen and regulars on July 3, Forty Fort, in fact, surrendered peacefully and without bloodshed the next day. In war and politics, however, accuracy does not always matter, and the tale of a massacre at Wyoming spread rapidly as Patriot publicists capitalized on the propaganda value of this sensational story. Even after the Revolutionary War, the narratives advanced by Holt and other Patriots lived on, becoming the basis for many flawed accounts about what happened in the Wyoming Valley on July 3 and 4, 1778. Holt's report proved to be only the beginning in a long cycle of historical distortion, resulting in narratives of enduring power that shaped Americans' understandings of the Revolution, and cultivated lasting notions of the war's villains and their allegedly innocent Patriot victims.

While the Battle of Wyoming amounted to a small-scale conflict that only had minor effects on the military situation during the Revolutionary War, this brief encounter along the Susquehanna River took on massive proportions in the American imagination that reached far beyond its limited military significance.³ Ignited by sensational rumors in the aftermath of the

600 Loyalists and Native Americans attacked Wyoming—not 1600. Chapter 1 provides a reconstruction of the battle that corrects these smaller details while also tackling the larger historical distortions found in Holt's report.

³ I use the term the Battle of Wyoming over the Wyoming Massacre because of the tendency to label any act of violence by Native Americans against whites as a "massacre." Thus, within this thesis, the Battle of Wyoming refers to the actual battle fought on July 3, while the Wyoming Massacre refers to the sensational legend about the events of July 4 that emerged a few days and weeks after the battle. Whether or not the aftermath of the battle constituted a massacre may be debated, especially considering the slaughter of retreating Patriot soldiers by Loyalists and Native Americans alike. Though I personally use "battle" to avoid the common tendency to disparage Native Americans

battle, an incendiary myth took root just days later that paved the way for the fabricated story of John Holt and others to influence the Patriot war effort. This myth, which this thesis terms the legend of the Wyoming Massacre, played an integral role in the struggle for independence, the formation of national identity, and the outcome of the war on the frontier. Perhaps Wesley Johnson, writing close to a hundred years after the event, said it best: “The battle of Wyoming was not a great battle directly in its results, as affecting” the struggle for independence or in terms of the number of men who fought, but “it was great in this: the exaggerated story of the atrocities committed by the British troops and their allies...fired the heart and nerved the arm of every American patriot.”⁴ Through continued use, the Wyoming Massacre became a central part of Patriots’ partisan arguments and assisted in the formation of a shared narrative of American victimhood that helped shape national identity.

The exaggerated myth of the Wyoming Massacre did not just influence the Revolution, however. Rather, the fabrications of the 1770s outlasted their original partisan context and came to influence political discourse over thirty years later in the era of the War of 1812. Fearing Indian war in the backcountry and suspicious of British meddling on the frontier, Americans during the War of 1812 turned to the vivid example of British and Indian savagery at Wyoming to draw parallels between their current situation and the Revolution. In a very real sense, Americans’ understanding of the battle based on this legend influenced both their conceptions of the Revolution and their interpretation of their present conflict.

The legend of the Wyoming Massacre reached its apogee in these tense years during the 1810s, but it gradually diminished in the later 1800s under the assault of mid-nineteenth-century

and as a more succinct shorthand, perhaps the organizers of the 1878 commemorative observance were more accurate in calling it both.

⁴ Wesley Johnson, *Wyoming: A Record of the One Hundredth Year Commemorative Observance of the Battle and Massacre, July 3, 1778-July 3, 1878* (Wilkes-Barre, Pa: Beardslee & Co., printers, 1882), 25-26.

historians. A new myth, however, quickly rose to take its place. Starting in the late 1820s and fully blossoming by the late 1840s, this new myth centered around a murderous Native American woman popularly known as Queen Esther. While not as featured in political discourse as the original legend, this myth still resonated with many Americans and found its way onto the pages of numerous histories, works of fiction, and travel narratives. As in 1778 or 1812, a powerful legend about the Battle of Wyoming—one now more capable of meeting the needs of antebellum and postbellum Americans—continued to color the public’s understanding of the Revolution and by extension contemporary society, just in a new guise.

Though largely forgotten today, the memory of the Battle of Wyoming had profound effects on the Revolution and nineteenth-century American culture and politics. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, the battle remained a well-known event and an integral part of the nation’s Revolutionary mythology, often included along with other more well-known events, such as the reading of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia or the Battle of Lexington.⁵ Americans were indeed quite familiar with the battle, having read about it in newspapers, popular histories, poems, short stories, and travel accounts throughout the century. Reflecting their familiarity with the battle, Americans utilized its memory for a variety of purposes in the years between 1778 and 1878. From using it to justify independence in the 1770s to relying on it to explain Native American removal in the mid-nineteenth century, Americans connected the battle to numerous national and regional narratives in attempts to explain current

⁵ This can be seen visually on the bronze doors for the House chamber in the United States Capitol. Drawn up in the 1850s, molded in the 1860s, but not installed until 1905, this door features the Battle of Wyoming alongside a public reading of the Declaration of Independence, the Battle of Lexington, and the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783—among others. That Wyoming was included among these events points to its importance in nineteenth century Americans view of the Revolution. Thomas Crawford and William Rinehart, *House Bronze Doors*, bronze, 1905, U.S. Capitol East House Portico, <https://www.aoc.gov/art/doors/house-bronze-doors>.

reality. Narratives about the extreme atrocities of the Battle of Wyoming indelibly shaped earlier generations' understanding of the Revolution and American history.

Despite its significance during the Revolution and in the nineteenth century, very few scholars have examined the memory of the Battle of Wyoming in a detailed way. This thesis aims to add to this scholarship, providing new insights into the evolution of this specific historical memory. As one of the few others to examine the battle's lasting effects, Lisa Ann Francavilla explored the Battle of Wyoming's importance to regional identity and briefly discussed how different historical actors portrayed the battle from the 1770s to the 1920s in her 2002 master's thesis. Building upon her work, this thesis also investigates how the memory of Wyoming reflected societal perceptions, but it differs in several important ways. For one, this thesis concentrates more on why different people used Wyoming, and it more thoroughly places this memory into a wider national context. This work also pursues a divergent chronological scope, focusing most of its attention on the Revolution and the early nineteenth century. In her work, Francavilla fleetingly mentions these decades before examining the large celebrations that commemorated the battle in 1878 and 1928. While these celebrations proved vital to shaping Wyoming's memory, the development of this memory in the earlier parts of the nineteenth century was equally, if not more, important. Filling this gap, this thesis analyzes the years between 1778 and 1878, specifically detailing the development and effects of the myth of the Wyoming Massacre and that of Queen Esther.⁶

This thesis additionally draws on scholarship that has explored the ways that fear and rhetoric emanating from the frontier played an integral role in the Patriot war effort and in the

⁶ While this thesis briefly discusses the large celebrations in 1878 and 1928, these celebrations do not constitute the main object of inquiry as they did in Francavilla's work. See, Lisa A. Francavilla, "The Wyoming Valley Battle and 'Massacre': Images of a Constructed American History" (M.A. thesis, United States -- Virginia, College of William and Mary, 2002), iv, 21-25, 59- 63.

formation of American identity in the Revolution and beyond. Reports of savagery committed by the British, Loyalists, and Indians abounded in Patriot discourse, and these reports shaped American attitudes. Peter Silver, in *Our Savage Neighbors*, details how rhetoric helped solidify hate in Patriot minds. According to him, anti-Indian rhetoric united fractious groups of white settlers and townspeople together and helped shaped ideas about racial difference. The Revolution saw the summation of this process as Patriots associated Great Britain with its “savage” allies and perceived their struggle as a defense of home against monstrous enemies.⁷ As scholar Robert Parkinson has similarly argued, stark representations of both the British and natives aided Patriot attempts to create a unified national identity separate from Britain and harness support for the war.⁸ Misinformation played a large role as well. In the larger battle to control public opinion, Gregory Dowd demonstrates, both prominent statesmen and average citizens advanced unsubstantiated rumors about atrocities and misdeeds to advance the Patriot cause.⁹ Negative representations of the British or Native Americans, far from being passive or neutral, possessed serious political value.

These representations also had long-lasting effects on American identity and conceptions of the past. As Parkinson argues, negative and often racialized depictions of Native Americans became integral to the nation’s founding narrative and forcefully reemerged during the War of 1812. Dowd similarly maintains that rumors, even if groundless, could endure for generations and become incredibly influential in shaping public attitudes.¹⁰ Indeed, the exaggerations and myths formed from the Revolution and from conflict in the backcountry proved especially

⁷ Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), xx, 227-260.

⁸ Robert G. Parkinson, *The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 9-10, 17-19.

⁹ Gregory Dowd, *Groundless: Rumors, Legends, and Hoaxes on the Early American Frontier* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 1-2, 175-201.

¹⁰ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 655; Dowd, *Groundless*, 1-5, 177.

powerful in the American imagination—often not for the better. In his seminal *Regeneration Through Violence*, Richard Slotkin explores the development and power of frontier myths in early America. According to him, these myths gave birth to the idea that the frontier could provide regeneration for American society. This restoration, however, came at the cost of incredible violence against Native Americans, which these myths had to find a way to justify.¹¹ The myths that formed around Wyoming illustrate some of the ways this justification occurred and how Americans used them to reframe the violence of the past in an understandable way. From Silver to Slotkin, these scholars' works offer insight into how false narratives, like those that formed about Wyoming, could have massive effects on American mindsets.

Works on Revolutionary memory similarly inform this analysis, providing needed context on how political and cultural shifts influenced Americans' perceptions of the Revolution. For instance, Sarah Purcell's *Sealed with Blood* provides a compelling examination of the half-century after independence that details how the Revolution changed meaning in response to growing partisan divides and increasing democratization. Her work also describes how Americans used public events, histories, plays, and even material culture to craft an interpretation of the Revolutionary past.¹² Michael Hattem's recent book sheds further light on the dissemination of historical memory. Exploring how memory interacts with politics and culture, Hattem chronicles how Americans created a shared and usable past out of the historical experiences of the Revolution. On a methodological level, this thesis also utilizes what Hattem calls "history culture," an approach that examines historical memory not just through written

¹¹ Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (1973; repr., University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 3-5.

¹² Sarah J. Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 1-10. Emphasizing the importance of journalist portrayals and popular history to both the remembering and forgetting of different aspects of the Revolution, Janice Hume likewise highlights the importance of media to the Revolutionary narrative. See, Janice Hume, *Popular Media and the American Revolution: Shaping Collective Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1.

histories but through a variety of media found within a culture.¹³ James Paxton's analysis of Revolutionary memory in the Mohawk Valley of New York during the nineteenth century similarly influenced this thesis's approach. With its attention to the role of local context in creating historical memory, Paxton's essay demonstrates the complex interplay between regional and national narratives at work in historical memory and the need to understand both to fully grasp a memory's meaning.¹⁴

Building upon these works, it is this thesis's purpose to show the significance of this small frontier defeat to Revolutionary history and memory over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Though Loyalists and Native Americans also remembered the event, this thesis focuses on the dominant memory of Wyoming among white Americans who supported independence. Paying particular attention to the historical actors who shaped this memory and the political and cultural climate they inhabited, this thesis will trace how and why this historical memory ebbed and flowed in the American imagination over these decades. While Americans repeatedly drew on similar themes of patriotism, sacrifice, and savagery when discussing Wyoming from 1778 to 1878, their deployments of this memory were always historically contingent and thus require attention to chronology and context. Placing this memory into that context, this thesis examines how Americans drew deeper meaning from this defeat along the Susquehanna and how the memory of the battle changed over time as a result of both local and national developments.

¹³ Michael D. Hattem, *Past and Prologue: Politics and Memory in the American Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 1-7. Like Hattem, I primarily utilize a cultural history approach.

¹⁴ James Paxton, "Remembering and Forgetting: War, Memory, and Identity in the Post-Revolutionary Mohawk Valley in Michael McDonnell, et. al., eds., *Remembering the Revolution: Memory, History, and Nation Making from Independence to the Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 179-195.

Tracing how earlier Americans have recalled the Battle of Wyoming requires a diverse array of primary sources from multiple eras. Just as Americans used Wyoming for numerous purposes, they similarly wrote about or referenced the battle in many different media, often with very distinct objectives in mind. Any reconstruction of the battle and the development of its subsequent myths must recognize that these objectives and the worldview of each observer informed each account; it would be impossible to recapture “what really happened” because each observer and commentator brought their own biases to their reports, even when they were eyewitnesses. The first references to the battle occurred in military correspondence, diaries, and a few depositions from 1778. Written or given by firsthand witnesses just a few days after July 3 and 4, these accounts provide useful information about the battle. As with all sources, one must contend with inherent bias, reporting error, and the desire for some military men, especially commanders, to exaggerate their successes and minimize their failures. Ultimately though, such accounts allow for a composite account of what participants on both sides of the battle claimed to have witnessed. Further away from the battlefield, letters and depositions from those who did not witness the event also offer tantalizing evidence of the rumors about Wyoming that quickly spread throughout the colonies during the summer of 1778. These sources show how Americans, working off limited information, often circulated wild rumors for a range of reasons, a trend that Revolutionary newspapers only compounded when they saw advantage in doing so.

As a primary means for communicating news and partisan information across the colonies, Revolutionary and eventually early national newspapers serve as some of the most important accounts for tracing Wyoming’s memory. Exaggerating the carnage and reporting inaccurate information, Patriot newspapers provided sensational accounts of Wyoming, which magnified earlier rumors and significantly contributed to the creation of the legend of the

Wyoming Massacre. From one paper to the next, fantastic fabrications about the battle and its aftermath spread across the colonies, cementing the Massacre in Patriot arguments for independence as well as in the popular imagination. Three decades later, newspapers printed political speeches and editorials that referenced the Massacre and used it in ways almost indistinguishable from their Revolutionary counterparts. Like in the Revolution, American newspapers in the era of the War of 1812 underscored the untrustworthiness of the British, Loyalists (or at least those accused of Loyalism), and Native Americans while encouraging Americans to stay vigilant against them. These newspaper sources highlight the importance of the battle to political discourse in the Revolution and beyond, demonstrating how the legend of the Wyoming Massacre endured and adapted in new contexts.

Published histories similarly inform this analysis. Of these, this thesis relies on two distinct sets of histories: early accounts of the Revolutionary War and local or regional histories in the antebellum period. Revealing changing attitudes about the Revolution and showing how different authors conceptualized Wyoming as part of larger regional or national narratives, both sets of histories provide a window into the mindsets of their makers. In this case, these histories expose differing interpretations of the Revolution, especially as it relates to British and Native American savagery. These histories also allow one to trace the development and spread of ideas about the battle and the legend of the Massacre. By following early Revolutionary histories from the late 1780s to around the turn of the century, a clearer picture emerges about how the exaggerated narratives first found in Revolutionary newspapers became an authenticated part of the historical record. Early historians of the Revolution, uncritically accepting sensational Revolutionary accounts, helped the myth of the Wyoming Massacre to persist into the era of the War of 1812. Antebellum histories tell a similar story that elucidate the process through which

the legend of Queen Esther emerged. While local historians replaced the legend of the Wyoming Massacre with what they believed was a more accurate description of the battle's aftermath, many of these authors reproduced that equally hyperbolic myth in their attempted correctives. As with earlier historians, these later authors' acceptance of historical falsehoods paved the way for artists, writers, and politicians to spread these fabrications to a wider audience.

Along with histories, works of popular literature and commemorative events are essential to telling the story of the Battle of Wyoming's place in American myth and memory. As in the twenty-first century (and much to the chagrin of historians then and now), many Americans in the nineteenth century learned their history from sources of popular reading and entertainment. For one, travel narratives—increasingly popular in the antebellum period—often featured accounts of the Battle of Wyoming. Tapping into the tragic and romantic aspects of the region's history, these narratives used the history of the battle to attract visitors or to tell compelling stories for the reading public. Fiction played an even larger role in the transmission of this memory. From poetry to short stories, Wyoming remained a popular literary topic throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Literature, like history and newspaper reports, provides insight into how Americans conceptualized Wyoming and the Revolution. As literature allows for creative fabrication to a greater extent than history, it also indicates how different individuals derived meaning from this historical event. In the antebellum period, local commemorative events also became an essential aspect of the battle's memory. Knitting together the local community and occasionally reaching others around the country through newspaper and periodical reports, commemorative events shaped the battle's memory and the lessons that Americans took from it.

¹⁵ See, for example, Thomas Campbell, *Gertrude of Wyoming; or, The Pennsylvanian Cottage* (New York: D. Appleton & Co, 1858). While not well-known today, Campbell's 1809 poem, which featured the Battle of Wyoming as its climax, remained immensely popular in America throughout the nineteenth century. The poem reproduced several misconceptions to readers over the century and became a touchstone to the battle for average Americans.

Organized chronologically based on key moments in time when the Massacre reappeared in popular consciousness, this thesis will begin by discussing what firsthand witnesses said about the battle and the development of the myth of the Wyoming Massacre in Chapter 1. This chapter starts with a thorough reconstruction of the battle and its aftermath, creating a basic outline of what witnesses said happened on the days of July 3 and 4, 1778. It then shifts to how the myth emerged and how Patriots utilized it to their advantage. Starting in the backcountry, the myth grew out of exaggerated and misinformed stories of survivors and backcountry settlers who fled east in fear. These lurid stories then found a wide audience in newspaper reports, where some editors embellished these already sensational rumors for partisan effect. Tapping into a budding American narrative of atrocity and victimization, the rumors and newspaper accounts that produced the legend of the Wyoming Massacre drew from the conventions of anti-Indian rhetoric and stressed the savagery of their enemies—whether British, Loyalist, or Native American. As a result, the Wyoming Massacre became a potent political weapon. In the arsenals of the Patriot publicists and partisans, Wyoming helped provoke the public's ire against Great Britain and justify frontier attacks against Britain's Native American allies.

Chapter 2 focuses on how the Wyoming Massacre became an integral part of Revolutionary history and memory for the next generation, especially during the War of 1812. The chapter first draws attention to the role of early historians in legitimizing and then spreading the myth. Though forged amid the uncertainty and vagaries of war, massacre narratives of the Revolution indeed proved remarkably resilient, and the legend of the Wyoming Massacre did not die with the Revolution. Instead, as this part of the chapter argues, the real and fabricated atrocities of the battle endured and gained further legitimacy through early histories, which too readily accepted Patriot reports at face value. These histories' endorsement of these narratives

had lasting consequences as other writers and artists drew from these accounts in creating their own works, further spreading the legend. Early nineteenth century Americans' familiarity with the event enabled a new generation to return to the legend of the Wyoming Massacre when they found themselves once again at odds with Great Britain and their native allies on the frontier.

The second part of the chapter picks up in the early nineteenth century as tensions with Great Britain worsened and eventually erupted in the War of 1812. During this fraught time—a second Revolutionary War to some—the relevancy of Wyoming to the republic's political discourse increased. Political commentators, like in the Revolution, turned to memories of the battle and Massacre to again disparage the British or encourage frontier violence. In this era of provocative and inflammatory rhetoric, political writers did not merely use Wyoming's example to denounce the British and Native Americans, however. Some of the most vociferous rhetoric was instead reserved for members of the other political party, who many tried to depict as secret Loyalists bent on destroying America. Even after the threat from Great Britain dissipated, Wyoming remained ideologically valuable, either to criticize foreign interventions on the frontier or to reinforce the nation's founding mythology. In showcasing Patriot suffering at the hands of the British and Indians, Wyoming helped sanctify the American cause.

Shifting to the period after the War of 1812, Chapter 3 details the creation of the myth of Queen Esther and the Bloody Rock, examining the role mid-nineteenth century historians and culture played in its growth and acceptance. The first half of the chapter traces how local historians from the late 1820s to around 1860 worked to discredit many of the Revolutionary fabrications that informed the myth of the Wyoming Massacre. It also details how certain cultural ideas influenced their interpretations. Dedicated to authenticity, these historians took pains in their search for truth and partially succeeded in dismantling the Wyoming Massacre, but

they simultaneously allowed Queen Esther's legend to arise. After showing how historians attacked the myth of the Wyoming Massacre, the chapter outlines the nebulous origins of Queen Esther's myth before showing how these new historians—much like their earlier counterparts—advanced a myth about the battle in their own work.

Historians were not the only means through which the myth of Esther grew, however, and the second half of Chapter 3 explores how several cultural currents converged to increase Esther's relevancy in this period. Americans' desire for regional romance and the continued literary use of Wyoming's history, for instance, created an atmosphere where the fantastical story of Queen Esther could flourish. Local commemoration, which increased considerably in the 1830s and 1840s, also contributed to Esther's acceptance and later dissemination by encouraging locals to look for and possibly even fabricate interesting stories about their region's history. An interest in stories about Native Americans within popular literature contributed to Esther's emergence on a national level as well. For purposes of entertainment or making meaning out of the past, Esther's myth fit antebellum needs quite nicely.

The significance of the Battle of Wyoming in history and memory ultimately reaches far beyond the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania. Relevant to the political and cultural life of early Americans, Wyoming had an outsized influence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Understanding its effects remains important as the story of Wyoming's place in the culture and politics of this period illuminates some of the ways Americans have tailored their history to speak to the present and how they forged national and local identities in the process. As scholars of historical memory have long realized, memory "is an active, constructive process" that entails

reshaping recollections of the past to serve current conceptions.¹⁶ Wyoming's memory proved no different, adapting to the purposes of several generations living in markedly different contexts. A reminder of the malleability of historical memory, this exploration of Wyoming accentuates how the present continually exerts an influence on the retelling of the past.

Such present-minded manipulation of the past had consequences for identity formation in this era. Then as now, the memory of the Revolutionary War remained important to the articulation of a shared past and a common national mythology. "Military memory, especially memory of the Revolutionary War," wrote Sarah Purcell, stands "at the heart of American national identity."¹⁷ An example of Patriot suffering and sacrifice, the Battle of Wyoming fit nicely into this mythology, helping Americans make sense of the suffering of war and imparting patriotic lessons to future generations. On a regional level, local interpretation of the battle helped reaffirm community identities while simultaneously reinforcing national narratives about the Revolutionary past. Often hopelessly intertwined, local and national identities gained strength through reference to each other.¹⁸ More nefariously, such stories of suffering at the hands of savage enemies, especially the exaggerated myths of the Massacre and Queen Esther, could also work for exclusionary purposes. As historians like Parkinson have related, negative founding narratives about native people became the basis for their political exclusion and physical removal.¹⁹ Put bluntly, in defining what it meant to be an American or who was or was not an American, Revolutionary memories of events like the Battle of Wyoming mattered.

¹⁶ Barry Schwartz, "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory," *Social Forces* 61, no. 2 (December 1982): 374. See also, David Thelen, "Memory and American History," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 4 (1989): 1120.

¹⁷ Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 1. See also, Hume, *Popular Media and the American Revolution*, ix-1.

¹⁸ Paxton, "Remembering and Forgetting," 179-195.

¹⁹ See, for example, Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 650- 655.

Indeed, they still matter in that they can illustrate how past Americans perceived the Revolution, themselves, and others.

Along with accentuating the influence of the present on conceptions of the past and the significance of Wyoming to identity formation in early America, the story of the Wyoming Massacre's staying power in the American imagination points to how the exaggerated rhetoric of wartime and the fabrications of a few can enmesh itself into history and popular memory. Even if fabricated, the myths about the Battle of Wyoming wielded tremendous influence over many decades. Born from exaggerated rumors, partisan reports, and local folklore, these narratives became lasting aspects of the battle's historical remembrance that informed the public's understanding of the Revolutionary past. These exaggerations, often legitimized by historians and spread by popular media, wielded tremendous influence over many decades. In the end, the pervasive effects of these sensational myths offer a warning about the danger of uncritically accepting and reproducing information, especially information formed in the uncertainties of war or intended for partisan effect.

In an era of fake news, acrimonious political partisanship, and countless cases of misinformation, modern readers would do well to remember the example of Wyoming.

Chapter 1

“These monsters in human shape”

Transforming a Battle into a Massacre

When Patriots collided with Loyalist and Native American raiders in the Wyoming Valley in July 1778, bloodshed ensued. Outnumbered and outmatched, Patriot troops suffered horrendous casualties in the subsequent battle and lost control of frontier forts across the region. In the aftermath of this inglorious defeat, distressed frontier families and those soldiers who managed to escape the slaughter fled the area, spreading fear and distorting the details of the failed defense of Wyoming and the fate of the valley’s inhabitants. The histrionic stories and rumors from these survivors served as the basis for even more embellished newspaper coverage of the event. Sensationalizing the narrative about the Battle of Wyoming, newspapers cemented a lasting, if hyperbolic, view of the event into the public mind. In effect, as this chapter demonstrates, they created the legend of the “Wyoming Massacre,” an exaggerated tale of murder, arson, and parricide. This portrayal of the battle, especially in the largely unsubstantiated depiction of its aftermath, had real uses and consequences for Revolutionary Americans.

From humble frontier petitioners to the highest civilian and military leaders, supporters of the Patriot cause quickly subsumed the Wyoming Massacre into pre-existing and interconnected arguments about independence and British savagery. At the same time, a similarly diverse cast of characters evoked the example of Wyoming to justify retaliatory strikes on the frontier against Native Americans and those Loyalist and British militants who allegedly instigated the attacks. In its many iterations within Patriot discourse, the story of the Massacre often encouraged additional violence by perpetuating a lasting American narrative of atrocity, suffering, and victimization. Depicting their enemies as monstrous villains and savages harming innocent

backcountry families, Patriots utilized the real and imagined details of the Wyoming Massacre to support a simplified narrative of frontier war that vindicated their own political positions on both national and more local levels. As they used the example of Wyoming to advance their own aims, Patriot revolutionaries and backcountry settlers alike fabricated a frontier horror story that possessed an enduring mythic appeal for generations of future Americans.

In tracing the evolution of the story of Wyoming from a battle to a full-fledged massacre, this chapter offers a thorough reconstruction of the reports as they initially appeared in military accounts and their eventual transformation in anecdotal and newspaper reports. Focused on the growing popularity of narratives demonizing Loyalists and Indians as barbaric enemies, this composite account draws on the insights about anti-Indian rhetoric made by Robert Parkinson and Peter Silver, as well as a vast scholarship on Native Americans, frontier warfare, and the Wyoming Valley during the Revolution. Though others have briefly touched on the transformation of Wyoming into legend, this chapter more extensively details the process, seeking to explain how different narratives emerged and how they influenced contemporary attitudes.

The Battle

To understand the Battle of Wyoming's place within local and national memory, it first becomes necessary to understand what participants in the battle said they witnessed in early July 1778. What they recorded and what later backcountry residents and newspapers reported often proved to be at odds.

As the Revolutionary War entered its third year in 1778, violence had engulfed the backcountry of the mid-Atlantic. In a brutal war that pitted neighbors, families, and tribes against each other, Patriot and British forces battled for control over the valuable borderlands of New

York and Pennsylvania. The preceding year had seen two large British expeditions traverse the New York countryside, attempting but ultimately failing to bifurcate the colonies along the Hudson River. After the disappointment of the botched expedition against Fort Stanwix in central New York and Burgoyne's disastrous defeat at Saratoga in 1777, the conduct of the frontier war changed. While Burgoyne had brought a large army into the frontier, his costly failure forced British military commanders to reevaluate their strategy. Their revised approach, characterized by irregular warfare and raiding, aimed to minimize expenses while maximizing destruction to vulnerable frontier settlements.¹

Thinly manned yet vitally important, the settlement in the Wyoming Valley was an ideal target within this new strategic conception. Situated along the banks of the Susquehanna River in northeast Pennsylvania, Wyoming defended a crucial waterway and produced a significant amount of grain that helped feed the Continental Army. While the Patriot government recognized the importance of defending the valley, the settlement still lay exposed to attack. From 1776 to 1778, the Continental Congress had passed several acts related to this frontier region's protection, setting aside funds for the raising of companies as well as the construction and arming of forts.² The companies organized for Wyoming's benefit, however, instead served with General Washington, providing fresh manpower to the depleted Continental Army. The defense

¹ For strategic context of the frontier war in 1778-1779, see Joseph R. Fischer, *A Well-Executed Failure: The Sullivan Campaign against the Iroquois, July-September 1779* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 9-33, esp. 27-28. See also Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1972). In particular, the British wished to divert Continental soldiers from Washington's army to defend this territory while also hoping to severely cripple the colonists' agricultural heartland.

² Edwin Horace Hayden, *The Massacre of Wyoming. The Acts of Congress for the Defense of the Wyoming Valley, Pennsylvania, 1776-1778: With the Petitions of the Sufferers by the Massacre of July 3, 1778, for Congressional Aid* (Wilkes-Barre, PA: Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, 1895), 1-6, 64, 70. The Wyoming Valley contained five principal forts that were constructed in 1777 to defend this valuable region: Forty, Jenkins, Pittston, Plymouth, and Wintermont. See also H. Melchior Muhlenberg Richards, et al., *Report of the Commission to Locate the Site of the Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, PA: Cm. Busch, 1896), 423-465.

of Wyoming thus fell mostly to the local militia, a much less disciplined and battle-tested adversary than their Continental counterparts.

Coupled with the valley's lackluster manpower, the inhabitants of the region were also internally divided. This was not new. Starting in 1769 and as recent as December 1775, different groups of settlers from Connecticut and Pennsylvania had briefly come to blows over conflicting claims to the land. Tensions remained high in the community throughout the Revolutionary War, with the added political divide over whether to support independence or the crown "superimposed" onto "the existing division" between Connecticut "Yankees" and "Pennamite" Pennsylvanians over claims to land in the valley. As historian Anne Ousterhout has argued, the Revolution exacerbated this societal partition within Wyoming and gave both sides opportunities to seek revenge against their neighbors.³ By employing several Loyalists from the region within his army as well as utilizing disaffected locals to garner military intelligence, Major John Butler's military expedition to Wyoming in late June and early July of 1778 readily exploited these old animosities.⁴

Traveling along the Susquehanna River, Major John Butler and his combined force of Loyalist rangers and Native American auxiliaries reported arriving in Wyoming on the last day of June 1778. His small army, whose Indian component was commanded by the Seneca chief

³ See, Ousterhout, "Frontier Vengeance: Connecticut Yankees vs. Pennamites in the Wyoming Valley," 330–63, esp. 337-347. Ousterhout maintains that with the coming of war in 1776 Yankee settlers increasingly associated Pennamites with Great Britain to justify taking actions against them. In turn, Yankee threats and damages eventually forced many Pennamites to join with the British. In the expedition against Wyoming in 1778, many Tory Pennamites were given the chance to enact revenge against their former neighbors. See also Paul B. Moyer, *Wild Yankees: The Struggle for Independence along Pennsylvania's Revolutionary Frontier* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 34-35, 51-52.

⁴ See Colonel Guy Johnson to Lord George Germain (No.9), New York, September 10, 1778, in K.G. Davies, ed., *Documents of the American Revolution, 1770-1783*, Colonial Office Series, XV, *Transcripts, 1778* (Dublin, 1876), 199. Guy Johnson specifically mentions how Butler "augmented" his forces with Loyalists from the countryside in his letter. See also, Richard McGinnis, "Journal of Occurrences Respecting Our Suffering in the Late Rebellion," Carol Lind., ed., *NY Genealogical & Biographical Record*, vol. 105, no. 4 (Oct 1974), 14-18. In his diary, the Loyalist soldier McGinnis mentions how several locals provided cattle for the soldiers upon their arrival.

Sayenqueragtha, consisted of roughly “500 rangers and Indians” ready to make war upon the valley.⁵ As they camped on a nearby cliff overlooking the frontier settlement, Butler sent out scouting parties to report on the strength of the nearby Patriot defenses. His scouts, along with two local Loyalists, provided him with valuable information as well as a small number of prisoners and scalps. According to their reports, about 800 Patriot defenders were spread out among several forts in the nearby vicinity. Armed with this intelligence, Butler and his men set out the next day to accomplish their objective: destroy these frontier posts and prevent Wyoming’s inhabitants from harvesting their crops.⁶

On July 1, the British expedition quickly and bloodlessly captured the two poorly manned forts of Wintermoot and Jenkins. At Fort Wintermoot, Lieutenant Turney of Butler’s command demanded the Patriots’ immediate surrender, and the beleaguered defenders quickly complied. Turning over all public and private stores and promising to not “bear Arms” for the duration of “the present contest,” the surrendering Patriots obtained Butler’s promise of protection for themselves and their families. The aged defenders of Jenkins Fort, numbering just about

⁵ Major John Butler to Lieut.-Colonel Mason Bolton, Lackawanna, July 8, 1778, in K.G. Davies, ed., *Documents of the American Revolution, 1770-1783*, Colonial Office Series, XV, *Transcripts, 1778* (Dublin, 1876), 165. Butler provided no exact numbers, but the most reliable accounts usually place the number of British and Indian troops engaged in this expedition close to 500 or 600. In his journal, Loyalist Richard Cartwright maintained that 110 Rangers came with Butler, while 464 Indians accompanied the expedition. See Richard Sir Cartwright and C. E. Cartwright, *Life and Letters of the Late Hon. Richard Cartwright, Member of Legislative Council in the First Parliament of Upper Canada, Born 1759, Died 1815* (Toronto: Belford Bros., 1876), 29-32. One deposition from about a week after the battle noted that the number of Tories “did not exceed two hundred,” which lends partial support to Cartwright’s assertion. See George Washington Papers, series 4, *General Correspondence: Jacob Wise, July 10, 1778, Deposition on the Wyoming, Pennsylvania Massacre*, manuscript/mixed material, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mgw451152/>.

⁶ Butler to Bolton, July 8, 1778, 165-166. It seems likely that most of the “eight prisoners and scalps” reportedly brought in by Butler’s scouts on June 30 were from the nearby Fort Jenkins. In her recollections, Mrs. Jenkins, an eyewitness at the fort, mentioned that seven men garrisoned there had been killed two days before its surrender on July 1. While this would put their deaths on June 29, it is more likely that her recollection was just slightly off since she recalled this event more than 60 years after its occurrence. For her testimony, see Hayden, *The Massacre of Wyoming*, 47.

seventeen, likewise accepted Butler's terms. They refused, however, to swear that they would never rejoin the Patriot military.⁷

After the British successes at these locations, John Butler then demanded the surrender of the remaining 400 or so Patriot troops stationed in Forty Fort, the largest and best defended of the region. The commanding American officer Colonel Zebulon Butler (no relation to the British commander) and his men refused and remained within their fortifications. Despite the initial objections of Colonel Butler and his second in command, Colonel Nathan Denison, however, the Patriots did not stay put for long. Understandably, most of the militiamen and many of the subordinate officers wished to attack the British in order to prevent further damage to their homes and preclude a lengthy siege. Colonel Butler, against his better judgment, eventually acquiesced to this plan.⁸ Moving out for an attack at 5 P.M. on July 3, about 400 Patriots left the safety of Forty Fort to engage the enemy, or to use the more dramatic phrase of one historian, "having refused terms," Zebulon Butler's men "sallied out of the fort and into history and legend."⁹

Once committed to the battle, Zebulon Butler hoped to catch his adversary unprepared. Several British scouting parties, however, foiled this design and gave John Butler's men ample

⁷ Butler to Bolton, July 8, 1778, 165; Articles of Capitulation, Q15, p. 225, Public Archives of Canada, as quoted in Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 168. On the age of the defenders of Jenkins Fort, see the petition of Mrs. Jenkins in Hayden, *The Massacre of Wyoming*, 47. For an account that largely corroborates Butler's letter, see Cartwright, *Life and Letters*, 29-32.

⁸ Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 169. As an officer in the Continental Army who was on furlough in Wyoming when this expedition occurred, Colonel Zebulon Butler had been chosen by the valley's inhabitants to lead them in this emergency. One suspects that his temporary position, based as it was on his popularity among the settlers, along with the democratic tendencies of many militia units likely made him more willing to acquiesce to his troops' desire to meet the invaders outside the fort.

⁹ Gregory Dowd, *Groundless: Rumors, Legends, and Hoaxes on the Early American Frontier* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2015), 176. Most primary sources agree that around 400 or 500 Patriots left the fort that morning. See Butler to Bolton, July 8, 1778, 165-166; George Washington Papers, series 4, *General Correspondence: Solomon Avery, July 8, 1778, Deposition on the Wyoming, Pennsylvania, Massacre*, manuscript/mixed material, https://www.loc.gov/resource/mgw4.050_0795_0795/; Cartwright, *Life and Letters*, 29-32; McGinnis, "Journal of Occurrences...", 14-18.

warning. Unfazed by Forty Fort's obstinacy or the news that 400 American troops were on the march, Major John Butler cunningly burnt the captured fort in his possession to give the impression that his men had withdrawal from the valley. He and his native allies then chose an ideal battleground "in a fine open wood" that would allow for concealment and cover. Lying down for the greatest protection, John Butler's Loyalist rangers and Sayenqueragtha's warriors waited to spring a deadly trap on the unsuspecting Patriots.¹⁰

Thus, lured onto the battlefield with hopes of driving off the retreating invaders, Zebulon Butler's troop moved quickly to attack. Focusing on the Loyalists who had been specifically positioned to draw the Patriots' attention, Zebulon Butler's men berated their enemies with insults and called out: "Come out ye villainous Tories! Come out if ye dare and show your heads...to the brave Continental Sons of Liberty."¹¹ They then fired three ineffectual volleys at the Loyalist rangers' position from about two hundred yards away, which did little damage to the prone British forces. Unaware that each movement forward drew them deeper into the ambush, the Patriots advanced towards the rangers who remained behind their cover instead of returning fire. When the American army had advanced to just 100 yards away, the Loyalists and Native Americans finally struck back. With a brutal close-range volley, the Loyalist and Indian army exacted a heavy toll, and the ambush's success quickly became apparent. The Native American wing soon flanked, or in some reports surrounded, part of the American army and engaged in close-quarter combat with the Patriots.¹² When a Patriot officer ordered his men to fall back to

¹⁰ Butler to Bolton, July 8, 1778, 165. See also, McGinnis, "Journal of Occurrences..." 14-18.

¹¹ McGinnis, "Journal of Occurrences..." 14-18.

¹² Butler to Bolton, July 8, 1778, 165-166; *Solomon Avery Deposition*, July 8, 1778; Governor Blacksnake, *Chainbreaker: The Revolutionary War Memoirs of Governor Blacksnake as Told to Benjamin Williams*, ed. Thomas S. Abler (Lincoln: Bison Books, 2005), 135. One of the only Native American accounts of this engagement, Blacksnake's memoir offers some unique perspectives on the frontier during the Revolutionary War. While it is not certain if Blacksnake is talking about Wyoming, the editor of this volume believes that his description of a battle, which has Loyalists attacking first and drawing the attention away from the natives who came "behind the enemy

escape from the Native American flanking maneuver, many confused and undisciplined militiamen misinterpreted this as a sign of retreat, and they quickly broke ranks.¹³

What started as retreat swiftly transformed into a rout. Many Patriots fled and attempted to cross the Susquehanna back to Forty Fort, but Native American soldiers cut off their escape. In the brutal type of warfare that characterized the frontier conflict by both sides, the Native Americans killed as many of the retreating soldiers they could.¹⁴ A few desperate militiamen attempted to avoid this fate by jumping into the river, and several saved themselves from death and dismemberment by swimming to safety. Others, either drowned or got shot while in the river. Many never made it to shore.¹⁵ Still more, according to some improbable testimony, were ritually tortured by an Indian queen.¹⁶ In the end, the entire battle, the retreat of the Patriot forces, and the decimation of their numbers had lasted only about thirty minutes.¹⁷

Predictably, the casualty numbers at the Battle of Wyoming matched the lopsided nature of the fighting. John Butler and his Indian allies lost almost no soldiers; in his letter to his superior, Butler maintained that he suffered only about three killed and eight wounded.¹⁸

hills, and put our tomehawk on back side of their [the Patriots'] heads," could perhaps describe the flanking trap at Wyoming.

¹³ Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 169.

¹⁴ Fischer, *A Well-Executed Failure*, 27-28. See again, Butler to Bolton, July 8, 1778, 166. According to Butler, "the Indians gave no quarter" to those inhabitants who had taken up arms against them.

¹⁵ *Solomon Avery Deposition*, July 8, 1778; Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 169-171.

¹⁶ See the testimony of Colonel Ransom in Hayden, *The Massacre of Wyoming*, 51. See also, Captain John Franklin in William Zierdt, *Narrative History of the 109th Field Artillery Pennsylvania National Guard 1775-1930* (Wilkes-Barre: Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, 1932), 33-34. The probably apocryphal story of Queen Esther will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

¹⁷ Butler to Bolton, July 8, 1778, 165-166. This reported length comes directly from Butler's own estimation. Another Loyalist at the battle claimed that the fighting "lasted about fifteen minutes" before the Patriots retreated. See Cartwright, *Life and Letters*, 29-32. This recollection does not directly contradict Butler. The Loyalist recollections are probably more accurate than Solomon Avery's deposition from July 8, 1778 or his later account given to Patriot newspapers on July 17. Avery maintained that the battle lasted quite long, saying that the Patriots fought for about one or two hours before the retreat occurred. With such a lopsided result, it seems more likely that the encounter did not last nearly as long as Avery described. See *Solomon Avery Deposition*, July 8, 1778 and "New London, July 17," *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), July 30, 1778, 2.

¹⁸ Butler to Bolton, July 8, 1778, 165-166. His language is somewhat ambiguous. He writes that "on our side were killed one Indian, two rangers and eight Indians wounded." It is unclear whether the rangers were wounded or killed.

Recalling the battle many years later, Blacksnake, an Indian veteran of the conflict, put the Indian losses at close to eight, while Loyalist Richard Cartwright reported that “Major Butler’s loss was only seven wounded, two of who died of their wounds.”¹⁹ The Patriots suffered much greater losses. Two different Patriot officers claimed that the American dead numbered close to 200, while Loyalist accounts place the loss at well over 200. According to the testimony of one witness, “the number of those who escaped did not exceed thirty men.”²⁰ Indeed, other reports corroborate this ghastly toll. Writing to his superior, John Butler reported that his men had “taken 227 scalps and only five prisoners” during the action. Considering that many Patriot militiamen drowned or were killed in the river and thus did not suffer the ignominy of scalping, this conservatively puts the number to at least 250.²¹ Ultimately, historians will probably never uncover the exact number of those who died, but they can comment on the battle’s effect by discussing the ranges of casualties typically ascribed to it. In the words of military historian Joseph Fischer, “Regardless of whose figures one accepts, put in perspective, this means the engagement [at Wyoming] ranks as one of the most costly frontier battles in the nation’s history.”²² In fact, one could consider Wyoming to be one of the American military’s most lopsided frontier defeats.

¹⁹ Blacksnake, *Chainbreaker: The Revolutionary War Memoirs of Governor Blacksnake*, 97; Cartwright, *Life and Letters*, 29-32. Some Patriots put Loyalist casualties at 80, but this seems much too high. See, for instance, Colonel Nathan Denison to Jonathan Trumbell, Governor of Connecticut, Lower Smithfield Township, Pennsylvania, July 28, 1778, in Winsor et. al., *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, vol. 3 (2), October 1887, 342-344.

²⁰ *Solomon Avery Deposition*, July 8, 1778. He also repeated this number in a deposition which many Patriot papers would later print. Though supposedly an eyewitness to the battle, he was not present for the events of July 4. See, for instance, “New London, July 17,” *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), July 30, 1778, 2.

²¹ For Patriot accounts, see Denison to Trumbell, July 28, 1778, 342-344 and the account of Captain John Franklin in Zierdt, *Narrative History of the 109th Field Artillery*, 33-34. For a sample of Loyalist accounts see Butler to Bolton, July 8, 1778, 165-166 and Cartwright, *Life and Letters*, 29-32. See also *Jacob Wise Deposition*, July 10, 1778. In his testimony, Wise says that the Indians “complained because they could not get the scalps of the drowned.” Thus, if one accepts Butler’s report on the number of scalps in addition with Wise’s deposition, the casualties clearly exceeded 232. On the number of scalps collected, Cartwright’s account closely aligns with Butler: 226 scalps and 3 prisoners.

²² For a detailed look at casualty numbers along with this quote, see Fischer, *Well-Executed Failure*, 205 note 52.

In the wake of this military disaster, Forty Fort capitulated the next day: July 4. Filling the place of Zebulon Butler, who had escaped the carnage the day before and fled to safety away from the valley, Colonel Denison now negotiated for the badly beaten Patriots. In no real position to offer resistance, Denison readily signed Butler's terms.²³ The articles of surrender ordered Denison's men to lay down their arms, destroy their garrison, give up their prisoners, and commit to not serving in the Patriot military for the duration of "the present contest." In a nod towards Pennamite Loyalists in the valley, John Butler also made Denison promise to give back "the properties taken from the people called Torris" and allow them "to remain in peaceable possession of their Farms and unmolested in a free Trade." For surrendering peacefully, the British victors agreed to do their best to protect the private property of the valley's inhabitants and promised to allow the occupants to live peacefully on their farms.²⁴

Although some later reports propagated vastly different notions of what occurred during the surrender, most evidence suggests that John Butler's men did not harm any of Forty Fort's inhabitants during its capitulation. Bragging to his superior about his men's conduct, John Butler wrote "what gives me the sincerest satisfaction is that I can with great truth assure you that in the destruction of this settlement not a single person has been hurt of the inhabitants but such as were in arms."²⁵ While Butler potentially stretched the truth in writing to his superior, his statement still stands out as more substantiated than later reports, which describe lurid scenes of destruction and bloodlust levied against civilians. Reporting that their Native American allies did not engage in wanton massacre of civilians, other accounts, such as those from Loyalist soldiers

²³ Denison to Trumbell, July 28, 1778, 342-344.

²⁴ Articles of Capitulation, Q15, p. 225-27, Public Archives of Canada, as quoted in Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 171. Butler's use of language here is interesting. He does not say that Tories should get their land back, rather he says that people called Tories should. This suggests that some false labeling was likely occurring. For quotes throughout this thesis, I have retained the source's original spelling.

²⁵ Butler to Bolton, July 8, 1778, 166.

Richard Cartwright and Richard McGinnis, support Butler's recollection that there was no civilian massacre at the fort.²⁶ According to the questionable testimony of one former inhabitant, however, Butler did briefly lose control of his Indian allies while negotiating the initial surrender. They stole minor effects from the fort's inhabitants.²⁷ Regardless, this indicates that only a negligible amount of plundering and destruction occurred within the fort.

While Butler's men did not likely harm the fort's occupants, they did break their promises regarding protecting private property and allowing the region's occupants to remain peacefully in the surrounding countryside. After the surrender, Butler's forces ravaged the Wyoming Valley, driving off droves of frontier families and setting much of the region's infrastructure alight. Having eliminated Patriot resistance by July 7, the expedition's raids continued, crippling the ability of the region to produce needed foodstuffs for the Patriot army.²⁸ Not only did Butler's men target farms and homes, but they also stole or killed large numbers of livestock. Commenting on the success of his expedition in a letter, Butler estimated that "we have taken and destroyed eight palisaded forts and burned about 1000 dwelling houses, all their mills, etc. We have also killed and drove off about 1000 head of horned cattle, and sheep and swine in great numbers."²⁹ Native American soldiers additionally plundered houses, and some returned home with their canoes laden with stolen goods.³⁰ Some Loyalist and Indian soldiers took the devastation yet one step further when they killed fleeing frontiersmen on the roads out of the region.³¹

²⁶ See Cartwright, *Life and Letters*, 29-32 and McGinnis, "Journal of Occurrences...", 14-18.

²⁷ Hayden, *The Massacre of Wyoming*, 49.

²⁸ According to Cartwright, the other Patriot forts in the region "were either abandoned or surrendered...before the 7th Instant." See Cartwright, *Life and Letters*, 29-32.

²⁹ Butler to Bolton, July 8, 1778, 165-166.

³⁰ *Jacob Wise Deposition*, July 10, 1778.

³¹ Denison to Trumbell, July 28, 1778, 342-344. In a letter written less than a month after the event, Denison wrote that he saw the bodies of five dead frontiersmen on the road the day after the surrender as he left the valley.

To the Patriot inhabitants of Wyoming, the disastrous battle brought immense loss, dislocation, and terror. Reflected in tax records from the valley, the extent of the physical destruction reached far and wide. Before the raid in 1777, the valley had £20,322 worth of taxable property. Afterwards in 1780, it had only £2,353, or about one tenth of the prewar total.³² In just a few short days, Butler's men had destroyed much of the frontier community's farms, crops, and equipment. Even more damaging to the prosperity of the region, however, was the mass exodus and psychological terror engendered by Butler's victory.

From Wyoming, Butler traveled down the Delaware River, destroying a settlement along his way before returning via the Susquehanna to the British stronghold of Fort Niagara by mid-July 1778.³³ While this ended Butler's Wyoming expedition, the story of the Wyoming Massacre was only just beginning.

Distressing News

Understanding the full influence of reports and news about the Battle of Wyoming on the wider Patriot public requires seeing it within a larger cultural context that focuses not on the details of "what really happened" but on why certain narratives about Loyalists and their native allies easily proliferated at this point in time. Notably, the battle occurred during a period that saw a dramatic increase in anti-Indian rhetoric. Focusing on victimization at the hands of "savages" and fueled by fear of Indian war, colonists had long cultivated what scholar Peter Silver calls the "anti-Indian sublime," the propensity to use atrocity-filled stories to argue for a variety of social and political goals. In the Revolutionary War, Patriots applied this rhetoric to

³² Moyer, *Wild Yankees*, 58.

³³ Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 172. For another description of the Battle of Wyoming see, Francavilla, "The Wyoming Valley Battle and 'Massacre,'" 1-6.

Great Britain, connecting the British with their “savage” allies and presenting themselves as the victims of numerous “barbarities.”³⁴ The language used in such frontier accounts had immense power. To communicate the inhumanity of Indians and those perceived as engaging in “savage” behavior, atrocity stories and news from the northern frontier consistently utilized words such as “slaughter,” “defenseless,” “butchered,” and “scalped.” These and similar words worked on multiple levels. Not only did they suggest the cruelty and monstrous nature of Patriot opponents on the frontier, but they also presented settlers as innocent residents undeservedly suffering from violence and inhumane mutilation.³⁵ In the aftermath of the Battle of Wyoming, the anti-Indian sublime and its histrionic language often colored Patriot reports with an eye towards provoking governmental action or encouraging continued opposition to Great Britain.

Before the news of Wyoming reached the papers, it underwent an initial transformation in the backcountry. As settlers and survivors fled in the aftermath of the battle, they disseminated accounts that played up the extent of destruction and death that occurred in the valley. Suffering from emotional trauma and the discomfort of forced migration, historian Barbara Graymont notes, grieving settlers “easily...embellished their own very real misfortunes with tales of even greater horror.” These embellished accounts informed Patriot reports on the battle, presenting the aftermath in such a way that did not bear much resemblance to the course of events reported by eyewitnesses. Moreover, when “others who had not been there” got hold of such information, they “readily fill[ed] in the details [that] they lacked to the greatest extent that their imaginations permitted.”³⁶ Indeed, James Fenimore Cooper’s description of the response to a military defeat in

³⁴ Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), xx, 227-260. Both Wise’s testimony about Indian misbehavior after the battle and Avery’s emphasis on victimization readily illustrate that this trend affected views on Wyoming.

³⁵ Gregory T. Knouff, *The Soldiers’ Revolution: Pennsylvanians in Arms and the Forging of Early American Identity* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2004), 161-163. Frontier accounts implicitly presented Native-Americans and their allies as aggressors.

³⁶ Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 174.

The Last of the Mohicans mirrors the reaction of many on the Revolutionary frontier to Wyoming:

A wide frontier had been laid naked by this unexpected disaster, and more substantial evils were preceded by a thousand fanciful and imaginary dangers. The alarmed colonists believed that the yells of the savages mingled with every fitful gust of wind that issued from the interminable forests of the west. The terrific character of their merciless enemies increased immeasurably the natural horrors of warfare. Numberless recent massacres were still vivid in their recollections; nor was there any ear...so deaf as not to have drunk in with avidity the narrative of some fearful tale of midnight murder...the blood of the timid curdled with terror, and mothers cast anxious glances even at those children which slumbered within the security of the largest towns.³⁷

As Cooper's passage relates, frontier disasters like Wyoming produced distress and set off the anxieties of much of the populace at the same time that they confirmed a longstanding pattern of portraying Native Americans as barbaric. By seemingly confirming previous tales of massacres and "midnight murder" as well as stereotypes about their adversaries, such news could shake the confidence of entire towns and set Patriot imaginations on fire. Already awash in tales of frontier violence, many unquestioningly believed the worst.

When the news of the disastrous defeat at Wyoming reached the inhabitants of the region, dozens of settler families fled eastward, away from the invading army. While the July 4 treaty at Forty Fort offered relatively conciliatory terms to the settlers, most Wyoming inhabitants either did not put much stock in John Butler's promises or had simply fled before his men descended on the fort the day after the battle. Fearing for their lives, some settlers quickly formed an impromptu convoy of "boats, canoes, hogtroughs, [and] rafts hastily made of dry sticks" to escape. Guarded on both sides of the river by "the men of the settlement," this panicked convoy

³⁷ James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (New York: Signet Classics, 2005), 10. Though set in the French and Indian War, Cooper's description accurately reflects attitudes on the Revolutionary frontier as well.

illustrates the fear that gripped the countryside after the battle.³⁸ In the numerous recollections of former inhabitants, eyewitnesses uniformly made mention of the general confusion and fear that accompanied their flight from the valley. Like many other loaded frontier accounts, the plight of women and children featured prevalently in these narratives as did rumors of grisly death and dismemberment at the hands of savage enemies. As they emphasized “the suffering of the day” brought about by the defeat and subsequent panic, the valley’s survivors repeated similar sets of stories about destruction and suffering. Capturing the displacement that many felt, former valley resident Ishmael Bennet recalled that “the loss and ruin seemed universal; the distress no tongue can tell.”³⁹

As fearful settlers left the valley and spread their often groundless stories of loss and dislocation, the panic engendered by the Patriot reversal at Wyoming quickly spread across the northern frontier. Though the first newspapers only reported on the battle starting on July 16, several earlier documents indicate that news of a costly defeat began to disseminate almost immediately across the backcountry, sowing panic wherever it went. Just two days after the battle on July 5, citizens of the frontier town of Goshen, New York invoked “the disagreeable news of Wyoming” to petition Governor George Clinton for guns and ammunition to protect their vulnerable town. Reporting that the settlement of Wyoming had totally surrendered after an ill-fated battle, the authors of the petition attested to the effect this intelligence had on the condition of the backcountry. In their own words, this news “gives the people...so much uneasiness that many families are moving off and we have the greatest reason to believe that

³⁸ Robert Covenhoven’s Account of the Great Runaway, n.d., Journals of Fort Augusta, vol. 21, as quoted in Fischer, *A Well-Executed Failure*, 28.

³⁹ See Hayden, *The Massacre at Wyoming*, 42-75, esp. 53-54. In general, these stories revolved around a woman giving birth while fleeing, the vast destruction of farms and livestock, and the murder of many frontier men at the hands of Native Americans.

unless something be done...our frontiers will soon be reduced to the greatest distress.” This petition’s bleak picture of the frontier effectively demonstrates how news of Wyoming’s surrender influenced settlers and contributed to an atmosphere of fear that caused many in nearby regions to flee to the coast like their Wyoming counterparts.⁴⁰

For several days, news continued to trickle out about Wyoming, first to other frontier towns and then quickly to Philadelphia. By July 8 and 9, several prominent Patriots reported information about the battle.⁴¹ On July 10, the Loyalist deserter Jacob Wise related his experiences with Butler’s expedition to the Patriot judge John Cleeve Symmes in Minisink, New York. Roughly fifty miles east of Wyoming, Minisink lay directly on the path of many panicked frontier settlers trying to leave the backcountry. Presenting Butler and his allies in a negative light and commenting on the slain Patriots, Wise’s account likely exaggerated the immoral actions of Butler’s Native American soldiers during and after the battle. In particular, he focused on how the Indians “complained because they could not get the scalps of the drowned” from the battlefield and how many left the region loaded with stolen goods.⁴² As it accentuated Indian and British misconduct, Wise’s account foreshadowed later retellings of the Wyoming Massacre, which would ascribe even greater horrors to the Patriots’ opponents.

⁴⁰ Citizens of Goshen to Governor George Clinton, Goshen, 5 July 1778, in George Clinton, *Public Papers of George Clinton, First Governor of New York, 1777-1795, 1801-1804*, vol. 3 (Albany: James B. Lyon, 1900), 522-523.

⁴¹ See “To Alexander Hamilton from Elias Boudinot, 8 July 1778,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-01-02-0502>, *Solomon Avery Deposition*, July 8, 1778, and “James Lovell to Abigail Adams, 9 July 1778,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-03-02-0049>. As fleeing settlers spread the news, Patriot political elites quickly caught on.

⁴² *Jacob Wise Deposition*, July 10, 1778. Though not as focused on atrocities, Wise’s account still utilized the anti-Indian sublime. Aside from Wise’s deposition, Symmes recorded testimony from the militiaman Solomon Avery on July 8, and he quickly forwarded it to General Washington. At least by July 10, Washington knew about the battle. See “From George Washington to John Cleves Symmes, 10 July 1778,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-16-02-0053>.

Along with Wise, other travelers, many of them former residents of Wyoming, also spread news of the Patriot defeat, amplifying the attendant horrors. On the same day that Symmes recorded Wise's testimony, several Patriot officers also located in the town of Minisink referred to Wyoming in a letter to Governor Clinton. Upon their arrival a few days earlier, the officers reported that they had "found things in the greatest confusion" as a result of the upheaval on the frontier. According to their account, "some few men with women and children by [the] hundreds [were] flocking from Wyoming where by the concurrent testimony of numbers the most horrid scenes of savage barbarity ha[ve] been exhibited." After considering this information as well as other distressing news, these officers, like the townspeople of Goshen, recommended that the governor take offensive action as soon as possible.⁴³ As terrified settlers fled and disseminated the grisly news about Wyoming, they thus not only helped create a general panic across the northern frontier but also encouraged other Patriots to begin thinking about retaliation as a way to defend themselves.

Informed by fear and rumor, frontier men and women told stories of destruction and bloodshed about Wyoming that were both gripping and wildly exaggerated. As Graymont writes, "almost as soon as the [British] invaders left, the rumors began to fly, magnifying the horrors of the battle and fabricating atrocities."⁴⁴ For example, along with showcasing the frontier panic, the Goshen petition from July 5 illustrates how quickly new details could suddenly emerge in narratives about Wyoming. Within their appeal, the townspeople maintained that both John Butler and Joseph Brant, a prominent Mohawk leader who despite his role in much of the frontier war was almost certainly not present at Wyoming, had attacked the valley. This

⁴³ Benjamin Tusten, Jacob Newkirk, and Henry Wisner to General George Clinton, Minisink, 10 July 1778, in George Clinton, *Public Papers of George Clinton, First Governor of New York, 1777-1795, 1801-1804*, vol. 3 (Albany: James B. Lyon, 1900), 539-541.

⁴⁴ Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 172.

groundless detail about the battle would have a major impact as it was eventually repeated in popular histories and fiction well into the next century.⁴⁵ Even more egregious cases of this hyperbole plagued early depositions as well as Patriot newspapers. In particular, one Patriot militiaman's testimony, first recorded by a judge and later disseminated through a widely circulated account published in a Connecticut newspaper, illustrates the wide-reaching effects that such reports had on popular understanding of the battle.

No stranger to exaggeration, the Patriot militiaman Solomon Avery contributed significantly to the atmosphere of misrepresentation surrounding the Battle of Wyoming. Avery first told his story to Judge Symmes on July 8 in northern New Jersey, nine days before a somewhat similar printed account by him emerged in a Connecticut newspaper.⁴⁶ Presenting a rosier picture of American conduct on the battlefield than Loyalist accounts, Avery's deposition recalled the Battle of Wyoming and the rout of Patriot forces through a decidedly partisan lens. The Patriots in Avery's account, for instance, did not retreat like cowards after only thirty minutes like they did in John Butler's report to the British high command. Instead, they fought for "some time" until "all prospect of success was over." Small embellishments aside, Avery's description of the battle and retreat remained consistent with other non-Patriot sources. His comments about the aftermath, however, wildly exaggerated the death and destruction suffered by the valley's residents. As he quickly fled "the night after the action of the third," Avery claimed to have seen the settlement at Wyoming "all on fire" from his overlook to the east.

⁴⁵ See, for instance, Campbell, *Gertrude of Wyoming*. See also, Letter to the Mohawk Chief, Ahyonwoeghs, commonly called John Brant, Esq. of the Grand River, Upper Canada, from Thomas Campbell, London, January 20, 1822 in William W. Campbell, *Annals of Tryon County: Or, The Border Warfare of New York, During the Revolution*, 4th ed. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1924), 210-218. Much to the chagrin of his family, Brant became a major villain of the battle for generations.

⁴⁶ *Solomon Avery Deposition*, July 8, 1778. See also, Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 413-414. Parkinson provides a detailed discussion of the Wyoming Massacre in Patriot newspapers and popular memory up to the 1820s. In her thesis, Francavilla also mentions Avery, noting that he might have had a relative named Christopher who died in the battle. Francavilla, "The Wyoming Valley Battle and 'Massacre,'" 7.

Moreover, he liberally estimated that 2000 inhabitants had “perished in the carnage.”⁴⁷ His guesses proved wrong on both counts, yet his comments would have long lasting effects.

In a widely reprinted newspaper account printed a few days later, Avery repeated many of the same details from his deposition about the Battle of Wyoming but added yet more embellishments to his portrayal of the aftermath. Within the newspaper retelling, Avery first accentuated the plight of the inhabitants of the valley who left everything behind as they made “their escape naked through the wilderness.” Following the language conventions of frontier accounts, he particularly drew attention to the “most forlorn condition” of the women and children, and he used certain keywords, such as “distressed,” “naked,” and “escape,” to present Patriots as pitiable victims. Though he doubtlessly exaggerated the nakedness of the emigrants, this aspect of his expanded testimony speaks to the fear that gripped the northern frontier after the battle and the deplorable state that many frontier refugees found themselves in as they moved away *en masse*. Avery followed with his most shocking information, which significantly diverged from his earlier deposition that had circulated to a much smaller number of readers. Not mentioning any fire this time, he estimated that about 2500 people, or one half of the settlement and 500 more than in his original approximation, were “killed” or “taken by the enemy [as] prisoners.” The other half, he maintained, attempted to escape the region by any means necessary.⁴⁸ Once again, Avery’s claims about the days after the battle deviated significantly from what other participants claimed to have seen.

⁴⁷ *Solomon Avery Deposition*, July 8, 1778.

⁴⁸ “New London, July 17,” *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), July 30, 1778, 2. Avery’s account appeared in many Patriot newspapers. For example, see the *Connecticut Courant* (New London), July 21, 1778, 3, the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* (Philadelphia), July 30, 1778, 3, and the *New Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), August 5, 1778, 1.

While Avery had witnessed the Battle of Wyoming firsthand, his knowledge of the aftermath was at best confused and at worse fabricated for political effect. Since he left by his own admission relatively soon after the battle, it is tempting to disregard the information in Avery's testimony and his newspaper account about this stage of events as completely flawed and pass him over for other accounts. His suppositions about the aftermath of the battle, however, speak to Patriot attitudes about the frontier war and the politicization of information. Of course, his claims that a large fire engulfed the settlement, that 2000 or more died, and that the inhabitants fled naked through the wilderness should not be taken at face value; none of these things likely occurred, especially considering that no eyewitnesses from July 4 reported any similar events. Nonetheless, through Avery's comments, one can better understand the attitudes and responses of many Americans in reference to Wyoming and similar instances of frontier violence.

As he worked without much concrete information about the events of July 4 and after, Avery may have reported what he believed had happened, thus demonstrating his ignorance of the actual occurrences in the days after July 3. Probing deeper into his account from July 8, one must first wonder what flames or smoke he mistook for fire, since John Butler's Loyalist and Indian army did not set Forty Fort or any major settlements alight on the night of July 3.⁴⁹ With only a brief description of a fire in the valley from Avery, a definite answer does not present itself. Most likely, however, as the frightened and exhausted soldier viewed the valley from a distant mountain, he mistook the smoke leftover from the battle or perhaps the blaze of Fort Wintermont for the general settlement. As for the casualties of this alleged fire, Avery's estimate clearly had no basis in fact. Nowhere in the document does Avery explain how he reached this

⁴⁹ See Butler to Bolton, July 8, 1778, 165-166.

number, and since he left town on the night of July 3, he likely could not have received any reliable intelligence from anyone in the settlement.⁵⁰ Rather, his contention that a fire occurred and that thousands died could come from his misreading of events. Similarly, the belief espoused in the newspaper account that John Butler's forces killed or captured 2500 civilians and that many fled completely naked likely emerged from his own misinterpretations or from information he heard from other settlers as he traveled away from Wyoming. Politics and the exigencies of war could have also played a role in Avery's depictions. Possibly hoping to encourage Patriot retaliation against the victorious Loyalist and Indian force or to convince the government of the need to better protect the frontier, Avery might have possessed political motivations to exaggerate the damage inflicted upon the valley.

The leaps made in Avery's account speak volumes to his mindset and those of many Patriots. If he had simply misread the evidence, then Avery not only believed that his enemies *could* commit such horrible atrocities on civilians, but he naturally assumed they would carry them out. Recognizing the intense violence of the frontier war and that Avery had just witnessed the deaths of hundreds of his fellow soldiers, suggests that such a hyperbolic response would make sense within this context. He may well have been one of the many who conceived of their Loyalist and Indian adversaries as villainous murderers. In turn, this type of thinking colored his interpretation in the face of limited concrete information, leading him to make sensational inferences about the destruction wrought by Butler. Amplified by the hyperbolic accounts of settler emigrants, whom Avery almost certainly encountered in his trek east, this proclivity for extrapolation could have led him to report high casualty numbers without verification. Even if solely political motivations drove Avery to sensationalize his account of the aftermath, his

⁵⁰ *Solomon Avery Deposition*, July 8, 1778.

portrayal would still demonstrate that he thought others would believe Loyalists and Indians capable of enacting such violence. These documents from Solomon Avery thus showcase how fear, rumor, and shock worked on the Patriot mindset, creating an environment conducive to imaginative and political fabrication and detrimental to the truth.

Demonstrating the power of fear in feeding rumor and exaggeration, Avery's account and other early reports about Wyoming show how the process of transforming the Battle of Wyoming into the Wyoming Massacre began: it started with settlers and survivors before moving out to others who similarly distorted Wyoming to fit their own preconceived notions about frontier violence, Native Americans, and the morality of the combatants on both sides. Though most informants remained anonymous, their accounts still influenced Patriot reporting. Since these news bearers were fueled by grief, anger, and despair over the humiliating defeat and sudden upheaval as well as political animus against the British and their allies, it is easy to see why they may have reported and responded in these ways. Nonetheless, such exaggerated stories from fearful settlers contributed to a general sense of panic and misinformation not only in the backcountry but also further east. In an emotionally charged atmosphere, rumors of real and exaggerated horrors from survivors "grew [even more] monstrously in rumor" as an information hungry public got hold of them.⁵¹ As newspapers transmitted the news of Wyoming to the broader Patriot public, the hyperbole of frontier settlers soon found its way into such accounts, often in even more embellished forms.

Once newspapers took up the story of Wyoming, the dynamics of the Patriot press began to play a significant role in seeking to sway the opinions of Americans about the event. Central

⁵¹ Dowd, *Groundless*, 176-178. Dowd also argues that the Wyoming Massacre mixed with legendary aspects of Indian martial prowess and heartless violence, amplifying these colonial fears.

to the Patriot war effort and the fashioning of a new American identity, Patriot newspapers served as crucial sources of information and important ideological weapons during this period. As historian Robert Parkinson relates, Patriot publicists, particularly newspaper printers, worked to convince the wider public to support independence or what they considered to be the common cause. In creating that cause, they often relied on negative depictions of the British assisting or encouraging Native Americans to commit depredations on the frontier.⁵² As Parkinson has demonstrated, the political necessity of creating a common enemy dovetailed nicely with anti-Indian rhetoric already in widespread use. Appealing to deep-seated cultural fears, newspapermen commonly used Native Americans as negative reference points for articulating a nascent American identity.⁵³ Tellingly, Patriots also dissociated themselves from Loyalists and the British by accusing them of engaging in “savage” behavior and thus connecting them to the negative cultural stereotypes associated with Native Americans. The hyperbolic coverage of Wyoming fits within these trends as Patriots used widely-circulated published tales of massacre to convince others of the need for continued dedication to the war effort, argue for political and cultural separation from Great Britain, and distance themselves from Loyalists and the British.

As the first two newspaper mentions of the action at Wyoming appeared on July 16 within New York and Pennsylvania papers, both authors used their stories in service of the Patriot cause by utilizing atrocity-filled depictions to describe the battle and its aftermath.⁵⁴ Likely drawing on intermittent pieces of news from the settlers who had arrived in Fishkill after escaping the frontier, the July 16 account from the New York paper only provided its readers with a few lines about the event. While the paper gave only a basic outline of the course of the

⁵² Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 9-10, 17-19. Parkinson also discusses how African Americans were similarly demonized in the press.

⁵³ Knouff, *The Soldiers' Revolution*, 158-183, 216-219. See also Parkinson, *The Common Cause*.

⁵⁴ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 412.

battle, it made effective use of this small amount of space to craft a thoroughly effective partisan narrative. Most notably, when detailing the Revolutionary soldiers' retreat and loss at the hands of John Butler's Native American forces, the author noted that the defenders of the settlement "being overpowered with numbers" had been "scalped and butchered by these inhuman allies of Britain."⁵⁵ Turning to powerful atrocity language to demonize Loyalist and Indian conduct, this paper presented a clear example of British barbarity that would have encouraged Patriots and even those on the fence to distance themselves from Britain.

The July 16 account from the *Pennsylvania Packet* even more explicitly argued that the news from Wyoming showcased British inhumanity and illustrated the necessity of supporting the Patriot cause. As it broadcasted the anxiety that many Pennsylvania felt about a joint Loyalist, Indian, and British "incursion" into the interior of the state, the paper painted a vivid and distressing picture of the Pennsylvania backcountry. Within its report, the British-backed invaders emerge as clear villains, "committing the most horrid murders on defenceless farmers, women and children, and also laying waste and destroying the plantations of the inhabitants." The message the paper drew from these actions was unequivocally clear. Using the deplorable state of the frontier and the misconduct of the British at Wyoming and beyond as evidence of insidious British designs, this article harshly criticized Great Britain's overtures for peace in 1778. In aiming to convince others of this, the author caustically wrote "thus, while our defenceless wives and children are cut off by merciless savages...is the *humane* King of Britain offering his idle and delusive propositions of peace!—Let this fresh act of his cruelty and wickedness stimulate every good man to support, with redoubled vigor, that Independence which

⁵⁵ "Fish-Kill, July 16," *New Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), July 22, 1778, 3. I base the assumption that the editor heard about Wyoming from settlers heading east from his own writing, since he directly mentions that "several of the distressed families passed through here this week."

Nature, Necessity, and Reason have dictated to us.”⁵⁶ The onslaught of overwrought terms characterizing the Patriot residents as “defenceless” and the Loyalists, Britons, and Native Americans as “merciless savages who la[id] waste and destroy[ed]” the Patriots’ property drew a sharp moral line between the two sides. For this paper, British depredations on the frontier like Wyoming simply confirmed their belief that complete separation through independence was the best course of action for the young nation.

Over the next few days, Solomon Avery’s exaggerated newspaper account started to circulate. As it encouraged Patriots to believe that massive numbers of civilians had been slaughtered, it set the stage for a second and even more influential (and sensational) account to emerge on July 20. This account, a narrative written by *New York Journal* editor John Holt, “became the standard tale of the Wyoming Massacre” despite its woeful exaggerations. Printed by “nearly every active American paper...in full,” as Robert Parkinson has explained, Holt’s telling of the Wyoming Massacre deserves an in-depth analysis.⁵⁷

Like Solomon Avery’s account, John Holt’s description embellished the course of events at the Battle of Wyoming and even more significantly exaggerated in its depiction of the aftermath. Beginning with a brief description of the natural abundance of the Wyoming Valley, Holt moved into a partisan retelling of the battle. In his version, Zebulon Butler and his men fought valiantly against 1600 Loyalist and Indian troops—more than double the actual number. As the Patriots almost forced their numerically superior enemy to fall back, a cowardly or traitorous soldier spread confusion in the Patriot ranks by yelling for a retreat. This act doomed

⁵⁶ “Extract of a letter from Charlestown (South Carolina) dated May 13, 1778,” *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), July 16, 1778, 2. The more contemporary news from the Pennsylvania frontier was included with this more dated letter from the South. The peace overtures alluded to in this paper was the Carlisle Commission sent by Great Britain in 1778 to attempt to negotiate a peace settlement that would keep the colonies within the empire.

⁵⁷ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 412-415. According to Parkinson, about ten Patriot papers printed both Avery’s and Holt’s account.

the Patriot army and started the rout. Portraying the battle as a heroic and almost successful attempt that was brought to ruin through treachery, Holt reframed this embarrassing loss to explain away Patriot blundering and exonerate Zebulon Butler and his men from blame.⁵⁸

While Holt used facts creatively in his depiction of the battle, his story of what happened on July 4, the day after the battle, presented a largely invented narrative of death and destruction that in turn became a potent American legend.⁵⁹ According to Holt's account, upon gaining entry to the fort, the Loyalists and Indians proceeded to burn down most of its buildings, gathering up women, children, and wounded soldiers to burn alive within their homes. They then went across the river to another fort and repeated their atrocities.⁶⁰ Not content with merely destroying these forts, Holt reported, "they proceeded to the destruction of every building and improvement...that came within their reach." Nothing, not even crops and livestock, remained safe from the invaders. The Loyalists and Indians even went so far as to cut out the tongues of cattle, leaving them to die a pitiable death from thirst. The enemy's depravity did not stop there though, as several Patriot officers endured horrific torture at their hands.⁶¹ Most infamously, however, Holt reported that John Butler offered only one term of surrender to the beleaguered Forty Fort: "the Hatchet."⁶² This threatening phrase, a creation of Holt's imagination or perhaps gleaned from settlers' rumors, implied that Butler had encouraged atrocities against Patriots in the valley and had done nothing to contain his savage auxiliaries.

⁵⁸ "Poughkeepsie, July 20," *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), July 30, 1778, 1 and 4. This account achieved wide circulation. For example, see the *Connecticut Courant* (Hartford), July 28, 1778, 2 or the *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, Massachusetts), July 30, 1778, 3. See Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 412-415 for a more exhaustive discussion of its circulation.

⁵⁹ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 414.

⁶⁰ It seems possible that Holt's depiction of Wyoming being set on fire might have been influenced by Solomon Avery's earlier account.

⁶¹ First filled with painful splinters, several men were burned alive in a fire while "held...down with pitch forks."

⁶² "Poughkeepsie, July 20," *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), July 30, 1778, 4.

As Holt tapped into anti-Indian rhetoric and the language of frontier atrocity in crafting his narrative, he mostly used these rhetorical weapons to attack the conduct of fellow “whites.”⁶³ While perhaps surprising to modern readers, the British and Loyalists—not Native Americans—received the most vitriolic criticism for engaging in frontier violence in these years. As Peter Silver notes, “At least through 1778, the revolutionary press’s fascination with Loyalists who tried to cross over to the Indians and conspire with them...still easily exceeded its interest in Indians.”⁶⁴ Holt’s account reflects these attitudes, and his descriptions often blurred the line between Loyalist and Native American. For instance, he reports that the Tories present at the battle overwhelmingly dressed like Native Americans and even decorated themselves with Indian war paint. The Loyalists additionally engaged in many of the same behaviors as the Indians, such as torture and the mutilation of fallen combatants.⁶⁵

Sometimes, according to Holt, Loyalists even surpassed native cruelty. As Holt wrote in a later article about Wyoming, “the behavior of the Tories to our people was abundantly worse in every respect than that of the Indians.”⁶⁶ This emerges most egregiously in his description of the murderous “Partial Terry,” the Loyalist son of a respectable Wyoming family. After sending horrific threats to his father about bathing in his blood, “the monster [Partial]...murdered his father, mother, brothers, and sisters, stripped off their scalps, and cut off his father’s head.”⁶⁷ Alongside Holt, other Patriots indulged in spreading similar tales of Loyalists killing and mutilating family members. The story of Henry Pensell, a Patriot soldier shot in cold blood and

⁶³ Knouff, *The Soldiers’ Revolution*, 158-183, 216-219. As Knouff argues, the frontier war helped to solidify ideas about race, especially the idea of a racial binary of white versus non-white.

⁶⁴ Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 240.

⁶⁵ “Poughkeepsie, July 20,” *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), July 30, 1778, 1. Holt was not alone in conflating Loyalists, the British, and Indians. This was a common practice in Patriot reports about the frontier. For example, one Patriot criticized the “worse than savage Tories” in a letter. See “Poughkeepsie, December 14. Extract of a Letter from Tyron County, dated November 24, 1778,” *New Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), January 13, 1779, 2-3.

⁶⁶ “Poughkeepsie, August 10,” *Pennsylvania Evening Post* (Philadelphia), August 18, 1778, 2.

⁶⁷ “Poughkeepsie, July 20,” *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), July 30, 1778, 4.

then scalped by his Tory brother in the aftermath of the battle, lived on in the American imagination for decades. According to one 1779 account, Henry begged his brother to spare him, yet his brother John simply loaded his gun and called him “a damned rebel.” After one final plea from Henry, John shot his brother and collected his scalp.⁶⁸ However fantastic, such gruesome reports about Loyalists killing their own families held immense political power.

Though these stories about Loyalist and Native American brutality at Wyoming had power, many of the tales were simply invented with little or no evidence to support them. Holt’s narrative again illustrates this larger trend as his story peddled unverified claims about many aspects of the event. For instance, Holt claimed that John Butler only offered “the Hatchet” and that Butler’s forces burnt Patriot civilians alive within the fort. Most participants in the surrender, however, said that the troops at Forty Fort surrendered peacefully, accepted Butler’s lenient terms, and suffered no civilian casualties during the capitulation. That John Holt accepted groundless claims about Loyalist and Indian depravity at Wyoming should come as no surprise. Twice in the first three years of war, British actions compelled him to relocate his newspaper business after they captured the two places he worked: New York City and then Kingston, New York. Both times, British and Loyalist troops destroyed his equipment and printing press, forcing him to rebuild and eventually settle in the frontier town of Poughkeepsie. In debt and doubtlessly angry at the British for his misfortunes, Holt had plenty of reason to propagate wild stories about a cruel massacre committed by Loyalists and their Indian allies—and perhaps to believe those stories as well.

⁶⁸ Zebulon Butler told this version of the tale to Reverend William Rogers, which he then reproduced in his journal. See William Rogers, *The Journal of a Brigade Chaplain in the Campaign of 1779 against the Six Nations under Command of Major-General John Sullivan* (Providence, Rhode Island: Sidney Rider, 1879), 55-56. A version of the story also exists within the account of Captain John Franklin in Zierdt, *Narrative History of the 109th Field Artillery*, 33-34.

As other information came in though, even the bitter John Holt recognized some of the ways his earlier report had erred. Three weeks after his initial article, he printed a correction, noting “that the account...published in our paper of the 20th July, tho’ right in general, was in sundry particulars erroneous.” In this retraction, Holt slightly modified his account, informing his readers that the fort surrendered and that the British army did not indiscriminately kill women and children. Even the story about Partial Terry, the supposedly murderous Loyalist, proved wrong. While Terry had cursed and stolen from his family, “he did not actually murder...any of the family,” as Holt admitted in his retraction.⁶⁹

Despite walking back his initial information, the damage Holt had unleashed regarding the wider public’s understanding of Butler’s attack on Wyoming had already been done. The idea of a barbaric Wyoming Massacre quickly embedded itself into American consciousness, and John Holt’s correctional letter did little to alter this trend. In fact, the notice only achieved circulation in a third as many newspapers as the initial report.⁷⁰ Across the colonies, Patriots believed the most sensational accounts of Wyoming, and these became the baseline for a sensational legend. One New York doctor’s August 5 letter illustrates how widespread this tale became. Certain that his wife had access to similar information from “the Boston papers,” Dr. Samuel Adams wrote “the unparalleled barbarity and worse than diabolical behavior of the Tories and Savages at Wyoming on Susquehanna, you will no doubt have account of.”⁷¹ The Wyoming Massacre had become a national story.

⁶⁹ “Poughkeepsie, August 10,” *Pennsylvania Evening Post* (Philadelphia), August 18, 1778, 2.

⁷⁰ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 416, fn. 9.

⁷¹ Dr. Samuel Adams to Sally Preston Adams, August 5, 1778, item 29 in Sol Feinstone Collection of the American Revolution, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia as quoted in Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 415-416. Parkinson mentions several examples of journals and private letters discussing the reports of Wyoming from places as far away as Virginia and New England. In one Virginia diary, he notes how the diarist believed that civilians had been burned alive in their homes—a clear indication that the diarist had drawn from Holt’s widely published newspaper report.

As the event quickly became embedded into the national imagination, Patriots harnessed the rhetorical power of the Wyoming Massacre for a variety of political purposes in the coming months and years. For one, these accounts of Wyoming helped Patriots morally distance themselves from the Loyalists and the British. For many Patriots, Loyalist and British involvement with Native Americans and frontier violence signaled their former countrymen's descent into barbarism. Indeed, many accounts disparaged Loyalist and British conduct on the frontier and used it to equate their white enemies with murderous Indians. As one Pennsylvanian wrote in reference to the destruction of the settlements in the Wyoming Valley, "the devastations and murders of the British and Indian savages, are not to be paralleled."⁷² Other accounts about Wyoming further denigrated the character of the British and Loyalists by describing them as "merciless villains" or "monsters in human shape."⁷³

In accusing the British and their allies of succumbing to savagery, Patriots attempted to articulate a distinct identity by differentiating themselves from their former neighbors and compatriots. Moreover, within a culture increasingly anxious about the cultural degeneration of whites as a result of living on the uncivilized frontier, Patriots worked to address these cultural worries by casting their new white enemies into the role of "new-made Indians," who "contract the vices of both" white and Indian society.⁷⁴ Especially in the focus on the gruesome family murders of those like Partial Terry or in the erroneous rumors that John Butler and Zebulon Butler were cousins, frontier accounts tried to show how their opponent's tendency towards betrayal and brutality matched that of Native Americans. According to Silver, such accounts

⁷² "Extract of a letter from an officer of distinction at Sunbury, dated September 1, 1778," *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), September 5, 1778, 3.

⁷³ "From the Rebel Paper, Chatham, June 29," *The New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury* (New York City), July 5, 1779, 3; "Poughkeepsie, July 20," *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), July 30, 1778, 4.

⁷⁴ J. Hector St John De Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, ed. Susan Manning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). 52-53.

gave “pro-revolutionary readers a satisfying feeling of moral distance...it was a relief to see that the real parricides were on the other side.” Far from a model of enlightenment, Great Britain and their similarly polluted Loyalist allies had become base and depraved in Patriot eyes.⁷⁵ As part of a wider Patriot discourse about the frontiers, the attention given to Loyalists and the British in hyperbolic renditions of Wyoming ultimately helped Patriots articulate a separate identity and justify their support for independence.

The themes of British misconduct and American tragedy at Wyoming readily fit within the larger revolutionary narrative that Patriot publicists and newspapermen had constructed to convince others to support independence. As a now well-known example of the British encouraging Indian depravities and supposedly engaging in the atrocities themselves, the Wyoming Massacre reinforced the chief arguments of those advocating for political independence, who painted the British as diabolical and unfit to rule. The last line of Holt’s lengthy account encapsulates this idea. Arguing unabashedly for independence, John Holt wrote “this [the Wyoming Massacre] it is hoped will be the concluding scene of the tragedy acted by the British tyrant and his murderous diabolical emissaries, in a part of his late kingdom, which he has justly forfeited, and which is now forever departed from him.”⁷⁶ For Holt, the atrocities at Wyoming discredited the British and illustrated why Americans should control their own fate.

A shameless promoter of the American cause abroad, Benjamin Franklin also recognized how incendiary tales about British cruelty, like the Wyoming Massacre, advanced the cause of independence. Around May 1779, Franklin planned to weave such portrayals into a partisan depiction of the war for foreign and domestic audiences, drafting a list of twenty-six potential illustrations to include in a book for children. Though never produced, the images he proposed

⁷⁵ Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 239-241, 252-253.

⁷⁶ “Poughkeepsie, July 20,” *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), July 30, 1778, 4.

utilized the common atrocity tropes of the period to support separation from Great Britain and the Patriot cause. Intended to accentuate the depravity of the British, Franklin's illustrations would have drawn attention to their wrongdoings including the burning of cities, the abuse of prisoners, and the use of formerly enslaved men as soldiers. Alongside these perceived injustices, the frontier loomed large within Franklin's negative portrayal of "British Cruelties." While critical of Indians, Franklin's frontier images mostly focused on British collusion with Native Americans and how such actions perpetuated injustices on the frontier. Harnessing the anti-Indian sublime to harshly condemn his former country, Franklin envisioned several provocative illustrations that would have shown British officials and even the king endorsing brutal violence, scalping, and cannibalism. Within his draft, Franklin painted a grisly picture of "Savages killing and scalping the Frontier Farmers and... Women and Children, [while] English Officers mix'd with the Savages...giving them Orders & encouraging them."

The Wyoming Massacre, especially in its most exaggerated forms, naturally fit within this histrionic narrative of British backcountry atrocity. Indicative of the Wyoming Massacre's national clout among Patriots, Franklin mentioned the settlement by name in his draft, stating his intention to commission an illustration of the British commander at Niagara paying for "the Scalps of the Wioming Families."⁷⁷ Franklin's description implicitly accepted exaggerated accounts of civilian death at the settlement further entrenching popular misperceptions of the event. Moreover, his words illustrate how Patriots quickly integrated this sensationalized view of the massacre into their arguments for independence and in their overarching critique of Great Britain. A visceral example of British savagery and American suffering, the Wyoming Massacre became an integral part of the pro-independence argument.

⁷⁷ "Franklin and Lafayette's List of Prints to Illustrate British Cruelties, [c. May 1779]," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-29-02-0477>.

Patriot accounts of Wyoming additionally encouraged retaliation in the backcountry. In the wake of the Battle of Wyoming, many appealed to the government and army to defend the frontiers, invoking the language of frontier victimization and stressing the inhumanity of Loyalist, British, and Indian troops to galvanize governmental action. Discussing rumored pockets of Loyalist and Indian raiders, Holt commented, “it is hoped speedy and effectual measures will be taken to punish and extirpate these monsters in human shape from the face of the earth.”⁷⁸ Connecticut governor Jonathan Trumbull echoed these sentiments in an appeal to General Washington. Stressing “the distressed situation of the Inhabitants...who survived the more than barbarian cruelty of Indians and Tories,” Trumbull hoped to convince Washington to act on behalf of the Connecticut settlers still in the valley and send roughly 2000 men to “pursue that detestable Banditti [the Loyalists and Indians] into their own Country.” He further admonished Washington to “chastise them for their insolence and cruelty towards the innocent Inhabitants...and effectually prevent their making any further Depredations on that, or any other of our back settlements.”⁷⁹ Presenting Wyoming as a tale of settlers suffered at the hands of monstrous invaders, Trumbull ultimately argued that the Loyalists and Indians deserved punishment for their crimes and that the defense of the frontier required a retributive strike.

Starting in late September 1778, Colonel Thomas Hartley took up the task of punishing Loyalist and Indians for the massacre at Wyoming with his own expedition into the interior of Pennsylvania. Hartley, clearly influenced by the news coverage of the battle, began his account by reminding his readers about the dangerous state of the frontiers after the destruction of the settlement in the Wyoming Valley. Utilizing the common frontier tropes of fleeing settlers, the

⁷⁸ “Poughkeepsie, July 20,” *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), July 30, 1778, 4.

⁷⁹ “To George Washington from Jonathan Trumbull, Sr., 27 August 1778,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-16-02-0430>.

murder of women and children, and “villainous Indians and Tories,” Hartley presented his offensive action as a defensive measure aimed to prevent another Wyoming Massacre. Like Trumbull, he believed retaliation was necessary to punish former atrocities and safeguard the backcountry from future attack. As he envisioned his men’s movement as “an aid and assistance....to the distressed people” on the frontier, Hartley detailed his men’s destruction of Native American settlements without any sense of contradiction. In his encounters with Native Americans, Hartley revealingly saw “no alternative but conquest or death.”⁸⁰ Stories of violence at Wyoming allowed Hartley to endorse a morally unambiguous view of the frontier war that justified his punitive expedition.

For national military leaders, exaggerated reports from Wyoming played a crucial role in convincing them to approve an even larger expedition in 1779. Indeed, from the time the news about Wyoming broke, national politicians had called for a concentrated attack on the frontier. As the Patriot James Lovell wrote just five days after the battle, “The Indians and Tories have cut off Wyoming; and They must be eradicated Root and Branch as soon as ever we get a little Relaxation from War on the Sea Coasts.”⁸¹ Other Patriots concurred, arguing that a frontier sortie might provide “a breathing spell for the People” and that a successful attack against Indian country might prevent the Indians “from acting hostilely against us” for the rest of the conflict.⁸² George Washington, the architect of the large expedition that set off in the summer of 1779, endorsed these arguments in his justification for a raid. Ordering General John Sullivan, commander of the Patriot troops in the raid, to demolish Indian villages and take as many

⁸⁰ “May it please the CONGRESS,” *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), October 17, 1778, 1.

⁸¹ “James Lovell to Abigail Adams, 9 July 1778,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-03-02-0049>.

⁸² “To George Washington from Major General Nathanael Greene, 5 January 1779,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-18-02-0642>; “To George Washington from Major General Philip Schuyler, 4 February 1779,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-19-02-0126>.

prisoners as possible, Washington asserted that “our future security” rested on driving the Indians away and in leaving them “in the terror with which the severity of the chastisement they receive will inspire them. Peace without this would be fallacious and temporary.”⁸³ In other words, Washington presented invasion and the destruction of Indian towns, farms, and communities as a necessary precursor to peace on the frontier. Influenced by reports of destruction and chaos engendered by Wyoming and other similar frontier disasters late in 1778, Patriots advocated for offensive invasions and total war on the frontier, rationalizing them as justifiable retaliatory maneuvers meant to prevent future atrocities. Ironically, such actions, far from securing the frontiers as Washington and other Patriots had hoped, only deepened the cycle of violence and encouraged ravaged Native American populations to seek revenge.⁸⁴

While Patriots used the example of Wyoming to reinforce the national cause of independence or endorse violence, their arguments and depictions had local import as well. From the beginning, local and national currents intertwined within the struggle over the Wyoming Valley. Of course, the battle was part of the larger Revolutionary contest, but it was also an intensely local affair in which older conflicts between Pennamite and Yankee settlers reemerged with new window dressing. As Patriots conflated Tories and Indians for a more national

⁸³ “From George Washington to Major General John Sullivan, 31 May 1779,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-20-02-0661>.

⁸⁴ See Fischer, *A Well-Executed Failure*, 194, and Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 272. Even after a year had passed, the shadow of the Battle of Wyoming hung over the Sullivan-Clinton expedition in summer 1779. As the hundreds of Continental soldiers who participated marched off in order to secure the frontier against future attack, they carried with them attitudes about frontier warfare and their enemies that had been formed by popular depictions of Wyoming. One field officer stationed near the former settlement during the campaign recalled the fateful day “about 302 of our countrymen were butchered by the savages and tories, and near 200 helpless widows with a large number of orphan children left naked and forlorn, all their houses and furniture being burnt by those merciless villains.” See, “From the Rebel Paper, Chatham, June 29,” *The New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury* (New York City), July 5, 1779, 3. Similarly, a letter written by a soldier on the year anniversary of the battle describes the event in detail, commenting that “to this day [it] remains a melancholy spectacle of savage cruelty.” See Letter from William Pierce to Dwight Foster, Wyoming, Pa., July 4, 1779, in American Revolutionary War Manuscripts Collection, Boston Public Library, <https://archive.org/details/lettertodwightfo00pier/mode>.

audience, settlers on the ground in the Wyoming Valley saw their neighbors, whom they mislabeled as Tories, in the same light. Imbibing and spreading stories of Loyalist depravity, so Paul Moyer writes, Yankee settlers and Patriot publicists alike “portrayed Tories [and consequently Pennamites] as people who possessed the same savagery, mercilessness, and brutality that supposedly characterized Indians.” Such “white savagery,” as historian Gregory Knouff terms it, was seen as even worse than traditional Indian savagery, since by acting like Indians white Loyalists betrayed their communities and race.⁸⁵ In the Wyoming Valley, these depictions allowed Yankee settlers to justify brutal treatment of their Pennamite neighbors.

Though Patriots and settlers primarily drew on exaggerated accounts of the Wyoming Massacre to advance their own political goals, such reports also influenced Native American and British perspectives on the battle and its aftermath. Most dramatically, as some Iroquois heard about the cruelties Patriots accused them of committing, they “smoldered with...resentment” and reacted most violently.⁸⁶ Their resentment came to a head at Cherry Valley, New York in November 1778, when a large Loyalist and Native American raiding party attacked the small town and massacred most of its inhabitants. Unlike the Battle of Wyoming, Cherry Valley needed no exaggeration after the fact as Native Americans and Loyalists brutally killed any Patriots outside of the defending fort. A far cry from the relatively peaceful surrender of Fort Fort less than six months before, these murders signaled a shift in the frontier conflict, leading both sides to commit violence against combatant and civilian alike.

In part, Patriot propaganda about Wyoming contributed to this shift. Though Indian raiders expressed anger at the sight of Patriot soldiers violating their paroles during the attack, Native Americans primarily reacted to popular misperceptions of their conduct at Wyoming. As

⁸⁵ Moyer, *Wild Yankees*, 34-35; Knouff, *The Soldier's Revolution*, 217-218.

⁸⁶ Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 174.

British officer Walter Butler revealingly argued in a letter to his superior, the violence at Cherry Valley resulted from Patriot reports that “falsely accused the Indians of cruelty at Wyoming.”⁸⁷ Incensed by Americans’ accusations about the Wyoming Massacre, some Indians embraced the violence that Patriots had earlier accused them of committing. Casting long shadows over frontier relationships both during and after the Revolutionary War, exaggerated and unsubstantiated accounts of the Battle of Wyoming contributed to the backcountry’s descent into distrust and retaliation.

Conclusion

From rumors of frightened backcountry settlers to national newspapers to prominent statesmen, the legend of the Wyoming Massacre spread rapidly across the thirteen colonies during the Revolutionary War, accruing meaning and potency with each successive use. This sensational story, which had been suspect to exaggeration from its very beginning, served a variety of purposes to Patriots and more local settlers in the aftermath of the battle. On a national level, Patriot propagandists used the Wyoming Massacre to bolster their arguments for political and cultural separation from Great Britain, while national policymakers called on the recent memory of Wyoming to either provoke action or rationalize punitive raids into the backcountry. Seemingly confirming Patriots’ fears about Native American savagery and Britain’s part in perpetuating it, Wyoming played an indispensable role in the larger propaganda war that raged during the Revolution. As the emerging memory of the battle resonated with national audiences, it struck a chord with locals and others on the frontier as well. While some, like the townspeople

⁸⁷ Captain Walter Butler to Lt. Col. Mason Bolton, Unadilla, Nov. 17, 1778, in K.G. Davies, ed., *Documents of the American Revolution*, vol. XV, 261-263. Native Americans, according to Butler, also expressed anger that Patriot soldiers that had surrendered in earlier conflicts had broken their paroles and returned to service.

of Goshen, used the events in the valley to petition the state or national government for much needed defense, others turned the rhetoric of savagery and the anti-Indian sublime against their former neighbors and countrymen. As they denigrated their opponents as diabolical and evil, Patriots and settlers commonly justified retributive frontier violence by referring to Wyoming.

Though firmly situated in the context of the Revolutionary War, the legend of the Wyoming Massacre outlived the conflict. As the Revolution slowly receded into memory, Americans still evoked this increasingly mythic event for their own political or rhetorical purposes. Wartime narratives and arguments utilizing the characterization of Wyoming as a massacre rather than a mere battle indelibly effected these later depictions. Indeed, the exaggerations of the moment cast a long shadow over the remembrance of the Battle of Wyoming as future historians, politicians, writers, and artists would uncritically affirm and pass down the exaggerations of their forebears to succeeding generations.⁸⁸ Due to its importance in national and regional narratives, Wyoming remained entrenched within the country's Revolutionary mythology and the valley's local politics. As one British paper perceptively noted in 1781, the events in the valley "have only served to fix a bitter and lasting resentment in the minds of the colonists."⁸⁹ Lasting indeed.

⁸⁸ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 641-670. As Parkinson has noted, the exclusionary arguments that Patriot newspapers and partisans made during the war commonly outlasted their initial purpose and left an enduring mark on national remembrance.

⁸⁹ "The following Relation of the Horrid Cruelties Committed at Wyoming in 1778 by Britons and Their Savage Allies," *Salem Gazette* (Massachusetts), October 18, 1781, 4. The *Salem Gazette* reprinted this extract from a British paper.

Chapter 2

“Let Britain and Wyoming butchers tell!”

Authentic History, British Barbarity, and Frontier War in the Early Republic

The Revolutionary War officially ended in 1783, but the legend of the Wyoming Massacre lived on in the Early Republic. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the battle did not receive much attention in contemporary political discourse, but it remained a well-known event for most Americans—in part due to the influence of the first historians of the Revolutionary conflict.¹ Working to provide truthful and authentic accounts, these historians helped ensure that Americans would not forget Wyoming and its role in the Revolution. What these historians wrote and what Americans remembered about July 1778, however, often relied on the embellishments of wartime Patriot propaganda. The ephemeral, often groundless reports from the Revolution thus became verified parts of the historical record, bolstering the credibility of the legendary massacre narrative and allowing it to spread in new ways.

As historians reaffirmed unsubstantiated narratives from 1778 and assisted their ongoing dissemination, they made it possible for the Massacre to return to national political attention.

¹ National newspapers primarily focused on concerns that more directly spoke to the present, such as the struggle of forming a new federal government. If government officials or national newspapers did talk about Wyoming, they most often focused on the violence of the Wyoming land dispute and worried about its deleterious effects on the young nation. Nevertheless, some national figures occasionally commented or exchanged material on the battle as did Thomas Jefferson and the author St. John de Crèvecoeur. See, “From Thomas Jefferson to St. John de Crèvecoeur, [ca. February 1787],” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-11-02-0201>. In fact, Crèvecoeur wrote a brief account of the battle in a manuscript copy of his literary work *Letters from an American Farmer*, but that letter never made it to publication and was only rediscovered in the twentieth century. See, St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Sketches of Eighteenth Century America: More “Letters from an American Farmer,”* ed. Henri Bourdin et al (New York: Benjamin Bloom, INC., 1972), 10-25. Crèvecoeur’s depiction of the battle mostly aligns with many eyewitness accounts, though he does claim that Joseph Brant participated in the attack. One wonders how the publication of this account might have affected early European and American perspectives on the event and whether it could have counteracted the negative influences of Holt’s hyperbole. Of course, Loyalist papers had more restrainedly reported on the event during the war, and their reports did little to alter public perception. Perhaps, Crèvecoeur’s account would have had little effect.

With relations with Britain deteriorating, especially after 1807, older accounts of British misconduct regained much of their political import, and they served as a way for Americans to tie past British barbarity to new circumstances. Once again assisting Americans in calling for unity against the British and their “savage” Native American allies, the legend of the Wyoming Massacre returned in full force for the War of 1812. Like Patriots before them, however, Americans during the new conflict did not simply utilize Wyoming’s example to attack the British or even Native Americans. Rather, they also turned its rhetorical force against each other, using it for partisan advantage in one of the most divided moments in American history.

Throughout the war with Britain and even later as Americans continued to fight against native tribes in the West and South, the familiar language of atrocity consistently accompanied depictions of Wyoming. The legend of the Wyoming Massacre readily spoke to white fears of an Indian war on the frontier, a fear shared with many Patriots during the Revolutionary War. Repeatedly invoking the Massacre in ways indistinguishable from their Patriot counterparts, Americans used it to justify retaliation and blame the British for inciting the violence. In 1812 as in 1778, Wyoming’s tale of British and Indian savagery packed a powerful punch.

This chapter seeks to explain how and why Americans elected to remember the myth of the Wyoming Massacre during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. After examining how historians legitimized groundless accounts from the Revolution, this chapter then explores how these reified narratives reemerged to influence national discourse. Informed by works on Revolutionary memory and the War of 1812 by such scholars as Alan Taylor, Sarah Purcell, and Robert Parkinson, this chapter aims to show how the legend of the Wyoming Massacre not only survived into the early Republic but how it shaped a national conversation.

“Authentic” Falsehoods

Exaggerated and unverified wartime narratives continued to foster misunderstandings among the American populace about Wyoming long after the end of the Revolutionary War. While newspapers of the early Republic rarely mentioned the battle before the nineteenth century, the stories of the Wyoming Massacre were given new life in early histories of the war. In the writing of these histories, especially in the period before 1815, American historians made ample use of Revolutionary newspaper accounts.² As media historian Janice Hume recounts, these historians commonly relied on and even reproduced press stories from the Revolution in their works, helping “ensure that the iconic narratives [of the Revolution] endured in American collective memory.”³ Despite these historians’ professed aims to present truthful history, they duplicated many of the uncorroborated claims presented in these wartime accounts, showing how Patriot propaganda outlasted the fighting and continued to shape the public’s understanding. According to Robert Parkinson in *The Common Cause*, the first histories of the Revolution allowed “war stories, which Patriot publicists often crafted in frantic, anxious settings” to transform into durable narratives by reaffirming them in supposedly “detached [historical] volumes.” Like Hume, Parkinson maintains that history helped temporary, partisan news accounts from the Revolution become a “permanent fixture” of the American Revolutionary story.⁴ Forged in fear, nationally known, and having no basis in evidence, the Wyoming Massacre—especially as related in Holt’s account—was exactly the type of war story passed down in these early histories. Taking newspaper accounts at their word, these historians further solidified the Wyoming Massacre’s place in the American imagination.

² While I usually call the authors of these histories “historians,” they might more properly be called amateur historians or amateur historical writers.

³ Hume, *Popular Media and the American Revolution*, xvi, 3-12.

⁴ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 598-612, esp. 604 and 612.

One of the first influential histories set the stage by reproducing and reifying many of the elements of Holt's unsubstantiated narrative. First published in London in 1788, William Gordon's four-volume *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment, of the Independence of the United States* claimed in the preface to uphold a "sacred regard to truth," yet its retelling of Wyoming appeared to treat Holt's 1778 newspaper report as a trustworthy source.⁵ Gordon provided several details that he likely picked up from Holt. For instance, he maintained that John Butler led 1600 Loyalist and Native American raiders, a wildly exaggerated number that came directly from Holt's account. Gordon's description of the battle also resembled typical Patriot narratives that stressed that Patriot troops had fought bravely, almost won, and suffered defeat only because of the cowardice or betrayal of a soldier who called for a retreat. Most importantly, Gordon reproduced the most infamous of Holt's fabrications, the myth that John Butler refused to allow Fort Mifflin's surrender and then let a massacre occur. According to Gordon, the commanding Patriot officer asked Butler for the terms of surrender for the fort, but Butler, "with more than savage phlegm," only "answered...[with] two short words—*the hatchet*." Gordon's account then insists that the outmatched Patriot defenders fought unsuccessfully against a besieging force of Loyalists and Indians, who after taking the fort massacred the inhabitants and burned the remaining buildings. Gordon also illustrated the brutality of the British and their Indian allies by focusing on how they cut out the tongues of cattle, cruelly torturing the animals. Charges of parricide and the torture of Patriots at the hands of Loyalists reemerged in Gordon's account as well. In effect, he rehashed Holt's overwrought

⁵ William Gordon, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment of the Independence of the United States of America* (New York: John Wood, 1801), I: 3-6. This is the third American edition of Gordon's work. The first appeared in London in 1788.

narrative, giving it an enhanced status as part of a supposedly authenticated history that further fueled a “bitter and lasting resentment...in the minds of the Americans.”⁶

Even without succumbing to Holt’s level of exaggeration, South Carolina historian David Ramsey’s discussion of Wyoming largely legitimized American retaliation and highlighted the depravity of Loyalists just as Patriot rhetoric had during the Revolution. Writing at the same time as Gordon, Ramsey published his history of the American Revolution just a year later in 1789. Unlike Gordon, however, he did not reproduce the hyperbole of Patriot news sources about the battle, and his account of the course of events at the Battle of Wyoming and in its aftermath aligned with most eyewitness reports.⁷ Indeed, Ramsey did not need Holt’s or Gordon’s fabrications to explicate the lessons that Americans should take away from Wyoming and other similar instances of frontier violence during the war. Just by showing how the Patriots had “fought gallantly” and by mentioning the suffering of those fleeing Wyoming in fear, Ramsey could expound upon how “the savage part of the war was carried out in America.” Emphasizing its cruelty, horror, and waste, Ramsey placed the blame for frontier violence firmly on “the savages, encouraged by British presents and agents, and led on by American refugees [Loyalists].”⁸ Like they did a little more than a decade before, Americans like Ramsey still referenced the events at Wyoming to justify their actions on the frontier and their conduct during the war.

Ramsey’s account demonstrates that not all historians or writers of this period uncritically accepted the Patriot press’s original reporting on the battle, but most authors writing about

⁶ Gordon, *The History of the Rise*, II: 385-390. Also see Holt’s account, “Poughkeepsie, July 20,” *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), July 30, 1778, 1 and 4.

⁷ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 600-603.

⁸ David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution* (Trenton: James J. Wilson, 1811), II: 184-189. This is a reprint of Ramsey’s work, showing its popularity over the next two decades. He originally published his history in 1789.

Wyoming before 1830 more closely followed Gordon's account than Ramsey's. Writing in the 1790s, John Lendrum's history illustrates this larger trend as he took aspects of Ramsey's writing but mostly relied on Gordon's history to craft his account of the battle. Lendrum's recounting of the Loyalists and Native Americans who had mustered under John Butler's command, for instance, more closely followed the numbers offered by Ramsey.⁹ In most other ways, however, Lendrum clearly drew most of his material from Gordon and by extension John Holt's 1778 report.

This influence emerges clearly in Lendrum's thinly veiled paraphrasing of Gordon's words. When he writes that "Butler, with all the phlegm of a real savage, answered [the query about surrender terms], in two short words, 'The hatchet,'" Lendrum just slightly altered the earlier historian's line about Butler's "more than savage phlegm."¹⁰ His subsequent description of "barbarous conquerors" and "merciless ravagers" immolating defenseless women and children before directing "their animosity against every part of animated nature" also clearly hewed to Gordon's and Holt's narratives. Moreover, Lendrum's account similarly painted an idealized picture of life in the valley before the battle.¹¹ In an era when authors commonly copied each other without acknowledgment, this somewhat blatant plagiarism should not come as a surprise.¹² Nonetheless, Lendrum's paraphrasing shows that he relied on Gordon and other

⁹ John Lendrum, *A Concise and Impartial History of the American Revolution* (Boston: I. Thomas and E.T. Andrews, 1795), II: 230-234. See also, Ramsey, *The History of the American Revolution*, II: 185. Ramsey estimated that Butler commanded 1100 men, 900 of them Native American. Lendrum perfectly reproduced Ramsey's number, writing that Butler's force was "estimated at 1100 men, 900 of which were Indians," (230). Gordon, however, suggested that 1600 men had been arrayed against the Wyoming defenders.

¹⁰ Lendrum, *A Concise and Impartial History*, II: 232. Gordon, *The History of the Rise*, II: 234.

¹¹ Lendrum, *A Concise and Impartial History*, II: 229-234. Lendrum maintained that "this settlement exhibited such a picture of primeval happiness, as can scarcely be supposed to be exceeded...in the present state of humanity." Bizarrely, this line about the "primeval happiness" of the valley comes in the same paragraph that discusses the conflict between Pennamite and Yankee settlers. This conflict does not seem to affect the author's idea of Wyoming as a peaceful, bucolic settlement before the war. Interesting, this line about the settlement's pre-war status may come from another historian. See notes 52 and 66.

¹² George William Pilcher, "William Gordon and the History of the American Revolution," *The Historian* 34, no. 3 (1972): 461.

flawed historical accounts for his own work. Utilizing extremely similar terms and phrases to discuss the state of the settlement and the supposed massacre on the day after the battle, Lendrum partially reproduced Gordon's account, further reifying the story of the Wyoming Massacre from the Revolution itself.

In legitimizing this story, Lendrum added other material that subsequent historians would replicate in their own work, and with each successive use they rendered more support for the legend of the Wyoming Massacre. For instance, Lendrum used the massacre to transition from his discussion of the "reprehensible" behavior of the British and Hessians to the far worse conduct of Native Americans and Loyalists. He especially expounded upon the evils of John Butler and Joseph Brant, accusing the latter of participating in the attack on Wyoming.¹³ Writing in the next decade, noted female historian Mercy Otis Warren employed the same transition in her discussion of the Massacre. The beginning of her account closely followed Lendrum's, including this transition and a similar pastoral image of the Wyoming settlement as a fertile "happy spot."¹⁴ Her account of the battle likewise relied on hugely exaggerated numbers and reproduced "the hatchet" myth, going so far as to claim that John Butler "had nothing human about him, except a rough, external figure of a man." In offering such portrayals, Warren clearly based her interpretation on her reading of other amateur historians and the original reports. Though she did not mention any other historians by name, her narrative choices and the use of certain phrasing points to connections to Gordon and Lendrum, while the influence of Holt and other similar Patriot accounts are explicitly referenced within the text. In a revealing footnote,

¹³ Lendrum, *A Concise and Impartial History*, II: 229-231.

¹⁴ Mercy Otis Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution...* (Boston: Manning and Loring, 1805), II: 111-112. While this suggests that Lendrum's work likely influenced Warren, Warren's history added other emphases to which Lendrum did not draw attention, such as her discussion of the family divisions and atrocities committed by neighbors against one another during the Revolution.

Warren admits that “the transactions at Wyoming are recorded above, agreeably to the most authentic accounts at the time.”¹⁵ By “authentic accounts,” she must have meant Holt and his ilk.

Warren’s “authentic” depiction of Wyoming advanced a partisan interpretation of frontier violence during the Revolution. Noting, among other alleged atrocities, the enemy’s “internal pleasure of seeing” women and children inside Forty Fort “perish promiscuously, in the flames lighted by their bloody hands,” Warren drew a vivid picture of British and Indian savagery during the Massacre. She then used this to partially justify American frontier reprisals. While admitting that George Rogers Clark’s attack on Native Americans in Illinois country during the war “awakes compassion,” Warren largely dismissed this act of violence perpetrated by Patriots. Citing Wyoming, she commented that “perhaps the law of retaliation may, in some measure, justify the depredations of Clark.”¹⁶ Like many Patriots before her, Warren called upon the political power of the sensationalized tale of Wyoming to denigrate British and Indian conduct while simultaneously defending the rectitude of Patriot frontier attacks. Justifications like these, premised on fabricated evidence, had powerful ideological effects on an American readership.

As information from Holt’s and Gordon’s accounts got repeated, they gained the veneer of truth and became adopted by other historians in the early nineteenth century. In 1803, John Marshall’s multi-volume biography of George Washington again replicated earlier historians like Gordon in describing Butler’s “more than cannibal ferocity” and repeating his hatchet story to even more readers. Marshall also commented on the atrocities committed during the battle in a list that mirrored Holt’s original recounting. Recalling instances of familicide and other “peculiar instances of barbarity...at which human nature recoils,” Marshall lamented how political

¹⁵ Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution*, II:111-114.

¹⁶ Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution*, II:114-116.

division could lead to such violence.¹⁷ Even across the Atlantic, similarly histrionic retellings of the Wyoming Massacre took hold. For instance, a history of North America published in Dublin in 1820 referred to the Massacre by parroting John Holt's account of 1600 Loyalists and Indians killing inhabitants, burning residents alive, and ruthlessly maiming cattle.¹⁸ This development would have major consequences for the public's remembrance of the event.

While groundless accounts of the battle gained increasing acceptance by the amateur historians of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it did not go unchallenged. In 1806, Charles Miner, a congressman and later a local historian from the Wyoming Valley, wrote to John Marshall to complain about his inaccurate depiction of the battle. Twenty-five years later in 1831, John Marshall finally responded to Miner and revealingly acknowledged his reliance on both Ramsay's and Gordon's early histories. Primarily blaming these historians for any inaccuracies in his own work on Wyoming, Marshall directly spoke to how the wartime Patriot press operated and how this later influenced the writing of history. "It is surprising that they [Ramsay and Gordon] should have so readily given themselves up to the newspapers of the day," Marshall wrote. "It was certainly our [Patriot] policy during the war to excite the utmost possible irritation against our enemy, and it is not surprising that we should not always have been very mindful of our publications."¹⁹ Acknowledging the partisan function of newspapers during the

¹⁷ John Marshall, *Life of Washington, Commander in Chief of the American Forces, During the War Which Established the Independence of His Country, and First President of the United States...* (Philadelphia: C.P. Wayne, 1804), III: 559-560. Marshall seemed to follow Gordon's account much more than Ramsey's, especially considering that he reproduced the hatchet myth. Marshall's account of Wyoming, moreover, cites Gordon's history within the text.

¹⁸ James Gordon, *The Historical and Geographic Memoir of the North American Colonies and Its Nations and Tribes* (Dublin, Ireland: John Jones, 1820), 245, quoted in William Lewis, "The Changing Story and Historical Importance of the Battle of Wyoming" (unpublished manuscript, 2020), provided and cited with permission of the author.

¹⁹ Charles Miner, *History of Wyoming: In a Series of Letters, from Charles Miner, to His Son William Penn Miner, Esq.* (Philadelphia: J. Crissy, 1845), 257. Miner reproduced Marshall's letter in his 1845 history. Bizarrely, Marshall claims that Ramsey led him astray along with Gordon, but as discussed Ramsey did not give much credence to the alleged massacre on July 4.

war, Marshall recognized the inherent issue with using these accounts to obtain the true course of events, and his comments illustrate how such newspaper reports found their way into one history after another. History's supposed authenticity indeed gave the partisan stories of the Patriot press credibility and even authority.

The acceptance of these unsubstantiated accounts by self-described truthful historians opened the way for those less concerned with verifiable facts to further spread these stories. With the increasing popularity of Indian atrocity literature after the Revolution, some disseminated these narratives as part of larger works on Indian-settler relations. An 1800 publication, for example, included the tale of the Wyoming Massacre with six other stories of encounters between whites and Native Americans, most of which resulted in violence. To present these stories, such books often simply reproduced Gordon's account, considering it "authenticated in the most satisfactory manner."²⁰ Presenting Native Americans in a negative light, this 1800 work and another book that reproduced Gordon's account of the massacre—appropriately subtitled the *Outrages Committed by the Indians in Their Wars with the White People*—reflect a growing hostility to Native Americans in the period.²¹ According to historians Philip Deloria and Colin Calloway, white Americans increasingly saw Native Americans as enemies to the nation, ignoring the sacrifices of loyal tribes during the Revolution and instead focusing on atrocities committed by natives during the conflict. These books fit within this trend, and they used historians' accounts to advance a certain view of Native Americans as savage, less than human, and unfit to become citizens in the new American nation.²² As they took historians' accounts of Wyoming at face

²⁰ Chapman Whitcomb, *Affecting History of the Dreadful Distresses of Frederick Manheim's Family* (Leominster, MA: Chapman Whitcomb, 1800), 1-4, 34-39.

²¹ Archibald Loudon, *A Selection of Some of the Most Interesting Narratives, or the Outrages Committed by the Indians in Their Wars with White People* (Whitehall, PA: A. Loudon, 1808), I: 122-132.

²² Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 43-45. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 291-295. According to Calloway, "after the war, lurid accounts [about Native Americans] tended to increase rather than diminish" (294).

value, the authors of these works of atrocity literature used this largely unfounded history to shape the public's understanding of Indian-settler relations, assisting white Americans in justifying the exclusion of native people from the body politic.

Poets also spread the sensationalized tale of the Massacre to the reading public, further solidifying the legend of Wyoming as they used Revolutionary history for inspiration. In 1810, a poem printed in The District of Columbia's *National Intelligencer* spoke to the direct influence that Revolutionary historians had on depictions of the battle in popular print culture. Detailing the horrors of the Massacre in verse, this poem painted a disturbing picture of merciless "savage bands" burning buildings and slaughtering innocents at Wyoming—an image that fit with most historians' accounts. Revealingly, the poet's vivid description presented the event as a hellish nightmare inspired by a nighttime reading of a Revolutionary history. "Thus far I read, and clos'd the blood-stain'd page," the poem began, "And sought in sleep my horrors to assuage." This nightmare-inducing page came directly from William Gordon's history, which the poet referenced in a footnote to the piece. Even more fittingly, another paper paired a reprinting of this same poem with an excerpt from Mercy Otis Warren's history about Wyoming.²³ This explicit reference to Gordon and the pairing of Warren with this poem shows the influence that historians wielded in shaping Americans' understanding of the battle. As historians uncritically duplicated the baseless stories of Patriot publicists, poets and other artists likewise reproduced these narratives, now authenticated by historical works, within their own creations. These popular poems ensured that the legend of the Wyoming Massacre would live on.

²³ "Wyoming: --a Vision," *National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), November 29, 1810, 3. For the reprinting of the poem with Warren's history see, "Poetry: From the National Intelligencer," *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), December 10, 1810, 1.

Scottish poet Thomas Campbell's 1809 epic poem, *Gertrude of Wyoming*, exemplifies how the legend of Wyoming passed first from newspapers to histories and then to works of popular culture and literature. Based on the events of 1778 and reaching its climax with the battle, this Romantic tale followed a young heroine, a noble patriarch, and a dashing hero as they witnessed Wyoming's settlement transform from a pastoral refuge to a place of horrors.²⁴ Drawing from popular history and adding dramatic flair, the poem embellished some events and invented a few characters. Overall, though, Campbell based the poem on historical facts he gleaned from popular histories and contemporary reports.²⁵ The accounts he relied on, however, led him astray, especially with who he chose to portray as the main perpetrator of the massacre: Mohawk leader Joseph Brant, who had not been there according to the testimony of participants. No matter, "the Monster Brandt," as Campbell called him, became the chief villain of the work.²⁶

Brant's incensed family eventually wrote to Campbell about this major oversight in 1822, eliciting revealing admissions from the poet that illuminate some of the ways that history and partisan reporting from the Revolution negatively informed his and the public's understanding of Wyoming. Campbell responded by expressing regret that he had misrepresented Brant's character. He claimed that he had taken it "as I found in in popular history" and had "adopted accusations against him [Brant] which had stood...uncontradicted, for thirty years." Campbell then directly spoke to how historians and other author's repetition of these Revolutionary narratives influenced his inclusion of those same accusations within his narrative. According to

²⁴ "Art. I. Gertrude of Wyoming, a Pennsylvanian Tale, and other Poems, by Thomas Campbell, Author of the Pleasures of Hope, &c. 4to. Pp. 130. London, Longman. 1809," *Quarterly Review*, London (May 1809): 242-258. This British review gives a useful overview of the poem's basic structure and plot. Of course, also see, Campbell, *Gertrude of Wyoming*.

²⁵ See, Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*, 1st Vintage Books ed edition (New York: Vintage, 1979), 79-80. One of the things that Campbell added, according to Berkhofer, was a friendly "Noble Savage" character. For information on what sources Campbell relied on, see Letter to John Grant from Thomas Campbell, January 20, 1822, 210-218.

²⁶ Campbell, *Gertrude of Wyoming*, 62.

him, “A number of authors have repeated them [the accusations against Brant] with a confidence which beguiled at last my suspicion, and I believe that of the public at large.” Campbell’s frank admission reveals the massive extent to which historians reified these sensationalized narratives. Repeated enough times by historians, these stories became disassociated from their original partisan intent and emerged as indisputable historical fact for many in the American and even British public. The sheer number of contemporary sources and historians who duplicated the same falsehoods from Patriot accounts gave those hyperbolic details a plausibility that proved difficult to question.

Even after admitting he mistakenly made Brant the villain of his poem, Campbell still refused to accept the suggestion that the legendary version of the Massacre might rest on baseless rumors. He argued, “an error about him [Brant] by no means proves the whole account of the business [at Wyoming] to be a fiction...who would not wish its atrocities to be disproved? But who can think it disproved by a single defender, who writes anonymously, and without definable weight or authority?” In ascertaining the truth as to what occurred at Wyoming in July 1778, Campbell still trusted the collective judgment of historians over that of Brant’s family despite the revelation that these same sources had led him to error. In the end, the authority afforded to history by Campbell and “the public at large” gave the legendary narrative of Wyoming an almost unassailable legitimacy.²⁷

Gertrude of Wyoming increased the staying power of the sensationalized image of the battle as it became popular in nineteenth century America. Despite meeting mixed reviews from American critics at first, the poem found great popularity in the United States.²⁸ Partially, this

²⁷ Letter to John Grant from Thomas Campbell, January 20, 1822, 210-218.

²⁸ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 646. Parkinson ties the popularity of Campbell’s poem to rising tension on the frontier, especially around 1811. For a commonly reprinted criticism of the poem from 1809, see “For the American: The Latitudinarian—No. X,” *American* (Providence, RI), August 25, 1809, 1. The *Republican Watch-Tower* in New

came from growing tensions with the British and Native Americans, especially on the frontier. As Americans again worried about Anglo-Indian connections around the advent of the War of 1812, the poem's story of British and savage barbarity in the backcountry fit many Americans' preconceived notions and their growing suspicions of native people.²⁹ Of course, this view of native people and the historical and artistic works that supported it were not based in historical fact but partisan fiction. That fiction, however, had gained legitimacy in its repetition, and Campbell's work simply cemented it further into American memory. As a result, Campbell's work became part of the very same cycle that led Campbell himself to portray Brant inaccurately. One of the many authors to duplicate baseless narratives about the Wyoming Massacre, Campbell passed on these stories to generations of readers. Supported by histories and literature, the legend of Wyoming—and the lessons it imparted about both the British and Native Americans—became firmly entrenched in the American imagination.

As more historians, writers, and even poets duplicated details from partisan accounts of Wyoming in the years between the end of the Revolution and the beginning of the War of 1812, the story became a fixture in early American's historical remembrance. While national

York City reprinted this article on September 15, 1809, stating "Never were we so disappointed in a new publication." Some Americans enjoyed the poem, however. A writer for the *Orange County Patriot* called it an "exquisite performance." See, "Gertrude of Wyoming. An Extract," *Orange County Patriot* (Newburgh, NY), January 21, 1812, 4. See also, Francavilla, "The Wyoming Valley Battle and 'Massacre,'" 19-21. Francavilla mentions several negative reactions to the poem's subject matter from British critics like Sir Walter Scott. While they criticized the topic, British critics did not dispute the story, showing how the legend had truly taken hold on both sides of the Atlantic.

²⁹ In Parkinson's words, *Gertrude of Wyoming* "kept with what many Americans believed happened along the Susquehanna, including who was to blame." See, Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 646. The poem's depiction of Native Americans, however, was not simply negative as evidenced by the "Noble Savage" character that Berkhofer mentions. See, Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 79-87. Though practically unknown today, *Gertrude of Wyoming* was a widely read piece of literature for Americans throughout the nineteenth century. Indeed, a few American students emulated Campbell and produced lines on the Wyoming Massacre for commencement ceremonies throughout the antebellum period. See for instance, E. Emelius Leclerc, "The Massacre of Wyoming. A Poem, Delivered at the Commencement of Dickinson College, July 19th, 1838," *Lady's Book* 18, Philadelphia (June 1839): 247-248; R. Weiser, "Lines on the Massacre of Wyoming. Composed at Wilkes-Barre, Oct, 1846," *Literary Record & Journal of the Linnaean Association of Pennsylvania College* 3, no. 3 (January 1847): 70. Moreover, Campbell's poem, according to Gregory Dowd, was commonly read by children in antebellum America. See, Dowd, *Groundless*, 177-178.

newspapers did not say much about the massacre before 1807, Wyoming, in the words of Parkinson, “never really left the American vernacular.”³⁰ In part, the legend of Wyoming remained known and its sensationalized aspects more ingrained because of these historians and those influenced by their work. Of course, as historian Sarah Purcell rightly points out, history was not equivalent with popular or collective memory of the Revolution.³¹ These histories did, however, influence that memory by replicating some of the hyperbolic narratives of that period, allowing Revolutionary stories such as Wyoming to reemerge in different media. The perpetuation of the legendary version of the battle through history and then fiction set the stage for Wyoming’s narrative to return to political relevancy as Anglo-British relations soured in the first decade of the 1800s. As the political winds shifted, even more Americans returned to the example of Wyoming to speak to the present, nurturing misconceptions that these histories had further entrenched.

New War, Same Enemies

If American newspapers rarely discussed the Battle of Wyoming in the first few decades after the Revolutionary War, they changed their tune during the eight years between 1807 and 1815. This considerable upswing in national attention to the memory of Wyoming resulted from rising tensions with Great Britain and the growing fissure between American political parties in the first decades of the nineteenth century. As the British continued to impress American sailors into their navy and supply hostile Native American tribes on the frontier with arms, Anglo-American relations noticeably declined in these years, and memories of British savagery during

³⁰ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 648.

³¹ Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 6. See also, Len Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press), 58-59. According to Travers, historians shaped Americans’ historical consciousness.

the Revolution became increasingly relevant once again. As Purcell has noted, politicians, especially Democratic-Republicans (also known as Republicans), cultivated a “bloody patriotism” based on memories of British misconduct to turn the public against Great Britain and maintain the people’s resolve first for anti-British policies and later for war starting in 1812. Even years after the Revolution, she contends, “carefully deployed memories of the Revolutionary War had the power to make resistance to the British seem like a national imperative.”³² Along with anti-British sentiment, the fervently partisan political climate of the day also affected the usage of highly charged Revolutionary memories like that of Wyoming. In a nation divided on party issues, especially as they related to foreign policy and conflict with Great Britain, past stories of British savagery like the legend of the Wyoming Massacre could have quite the political force.

Diplomatic relations between the United States and Great Britain remained strained in the post-Revolutionary period. They only worsened starting in the 1790s as Britain’s continued presence in the northwestern frontier and disagreements over shipping rights and impressment pushed the countries closer to war.³³ Locked in a virtual cold war starting in 1783, both nations attempted to gain the upper hand in the strategic Great Lakes region throughout this period.³⁴ As the British hindered American expansion into the region by continuing to man frontier forts and supplying weapons to resistant native tribes, many Americans grew increasingly resentful and often blamed the British for inciting Indian attacks on the frontier. Tensions over shipping, neutrality, and impressment also heightened in the early 1790s as the French revolutionary wars

³² Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 143-154. See also, Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 648.

³³ George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 67-75.

³⁴ Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, & Indian Allies*, illustrated edition (New York: Vintage, 2011), 15. For context on foreign relations between Britain and the United States in this period, see Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 67-121.

began. Attempting to defeat France, Britain further angered Americans by infringing upon their shipping neutrality and turning to the impressment of United States' merchant sailors to supplement the Royal Navy's numbers. In 1794, the two countries narrowly averted war through diplomatic talks that resulted in Jay's Treaty, which bettered relations for a brief period and accomplished some American goals, such as the removal of British troops from some forts in the northwestern frontier.³⁵ While Jay's Treaty produced a brief thaw in Anglo-American interactions, the same issues revolving around rights on the high seas and the British role on the frontier reemerged in the next decade and only became more volatile as partisan politics remade the American political scene.

With a growing suspicion of the British and each other, Americans turned to memories of Revolutionary violence to advance their own political aims in the years leading up to war. The United States' first two-party system reshaped the political landscape of the nation, and it opened the way for a more divisive rhetoric to emerge—a rhetoric where Wyoming gained increasing resonance.³⁶ As Americans divided into separate parties, the conservative and pro-British Federalists and the more populist and anti-British Democratic-Republicans (also known as the Republicans), newspapers became a key weapon in the fight to sway public opinion and gain partisan support. Within this newspaper coverage, Revolutionary stories such as Wyoming often featured, either to challenge British aggression, denigrate political enemies, or accomplish a combination of these aims.³⁷

³⁵ Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 75. Part of the conflict over impressment stemmed from differing interpretations of citizenship between Britain and the United States. While Americans believed that immigrants could naturalize and choose to become citizens, Britain subscribed to the common belief that subjects remained subjects even when they moved to other lands. Thus, most British captains considered British-born sailors as fair game for impressment even though those sailors may have immigrated to the United States and claimed citizenship.

³⁶ Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 7. According to Herring, the two parties began to form because of foreign policy debates over Jay's Treaty in 1795.

³⁷ Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 149-154.

Republicans needed only to mention the legendary Wyoming Massacre to sully Britain's reputation and by association that of the Federalist Party in the minds of many Americans. A 1798 editorial speaks to this dynamic and Wyoming's place within the partisan divide of the period. Criticizing "those...known by the name of *Federalists*" for refusing to condemn "the perfidious conduct of the British," this writer attempted to highlight the hypocritical and treacherous nature of the Federalists by accusing them of collaborating with Great Britain. This invective particularly utilized negative memories of the British during the Revolution to discredit the Federalists. As it recalled "the horrors of a Jersey prison-ship, the massacres at Wyoming...and such other *trifles* as we experienced a few years since," the editorial used examples of past British atrocities to paint Federalists as "homebred lordlings[s]" beholden to Britain.³⁸ The memory of the battle invoked by this editorial clearly had potent political uses, helping turn public opinion against the British and by extension the Federalists. An early example of what was to come in force just a decade later, this 1798 inclusion of Wyoming demonstrates how the battle's remembrance regained political relevancy because of political division and the deterioration of relations with Britain.

While the Massacre reentered national political rhetoric briefly in the 1790s, it truly reemerged as a potent political weapon around 1807, a year marked by an inflammatory incident off the coast of Virginia that almost led to war. With war in Europe raging again starting in 1803, the Royal Navy turned once more to impressment to man their ships in the fight against Napoleon. Britain's navy worked to acquire the necessary men as the conflict renewed, yet they lost many able sailors to American vessels which offered consistently better pay. In late June 1807, this cycle of competition, desertion, and impressment reached its culmination in the

³⁸ "For the Bee: Mr. Holt," *The Bee* (New London, Connecticut), August 8, 1798, 2.

Chesapeake-Leopard Affair. When the British warship HMS Leopard stopped the USS Chesapeake, demanded to search it for deserters, and then fired on the merchant vessel, it incensed Americans across the country even in typically Federalist locales.³⁹ Americans seemed unified in anger—even if only temporarily.

Just as when Britain threatened the nation more than thirty years prior, Americans invoked the memory of Wyoming in the aftermath of the Chesapeake Affair to demonstrate the insidious nature of the British and encourage a unified resistance. In the Federalist stronghold of Luzerne County, which included the site of the Battle of Wyoming, locals reacted with outrage. Responding angrily to the news, the editor of the regional paper drew on the local memory of the battle to influence national dialogue. In an editorial first printed on the anniversary of the battle and later reprinted in other cities, the Luzerne editor argued for a decisive response against the British. Railing against them for dishonoring the nation and shedding “the blood of American citizens,” he called his countrymen to arms by connecting the present injustice of the Chesapeake with the past actions of the British in 1778. The editor used familiar, revolutionary-era language to do so. He claimed that while “many a brave man fell beneath the knife of the Savage and the British” during the battle, “the savage has [since] become humane, while the British, with greater professions of civilization, retain all their ferocity.” Reminiscent of the anti-British and “white savagery” rhetoric that Gregory Knouff identified in Revolutionary accounts, these remarks reveal a remarkable rhetorical continuity.⁴⁰

³⁹ Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 100-106. For anger across the country, see also Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth*, 178-179.

⁴⁰ Editorial from the Luzerne Federalist, *Spectator* (New York City), July 11, 1807, 2. Another New York City paper and a Connecticut-based newspaper reprinted this account as well. See the *Commercial Advertiser* (New York City), July 9, 1807, 3, and the *Middlesex Gazette* (Middletown, Connecticut), July 17, 1807, 2. For a discussion on “white savagery” during the Revolution, see Knouff, *The Soldier’s Revolution*, 217-218.

Like the response of the Luzerne editor in 1807, Republican arguments and the prominent place of Wyoming within their rhetoric resembled Patriot discourse during the war, especially in how it emphasized American victimhood and argued for unity. One 1810 article, for instance, drew a link between British wrongdoing during the Revolution and the post-Revolutionary period. Including Wyoming within a lengthy list of British transgressions, this article incorporated the Massacre into a larger narrative about America victimization, mimicking Revolutionary rhetoric as it defended the Republicans' anti-British stance.⁴¹ Indeed, one of the most colorful Republican diatribes against Great Britain could have just as easily been written in 1778 as 1808. "The conduct of the *British*, or as they have been aptly termed the *Brutish*," wrote one Republican, "were totally unworthy of a civilized people. Remember the massacre at Wyoming."⁴² Venomously attacking the British like his Revolutionary forefathers, this Republican articulated why the United States must resist British aggression. This critique noticeably employed the Massacre to illustrate British savagery and promote a unified response in the same way that John Holt's narrative used his account of the Massacre to urge Americans to support independence. The story of Wyoming still shaped public attitudes as it had in the Revolution.

This moment of agreement between Federalists and Republicans would not last long. Despite the bellicose statements and calls for unity in 1807, Great Britain and the United States did not go to war, and the Federalists and Republicans returned to their bickering, reviving the partisan usage of Wyoming in the process. "Unwilling to compromise and unable to fight," in the words of George Herring, President Thomas Jefferson "fell back on an embargo of American commerce" after the Chesapeake Affair. Jefferson had hoped to force France and Britain to

⁴¹ "Great Britain; Ireland; America; Germany," *New York Journal* (New York City), April 24, 1810, 4.

⁴² "Paragraph Second," *The Public Advertiser* (New York City), August 13, 1808, 2.

respect American neutrality with the embargo. Instead, he severely damaged the American economy and did not secure any major concessions from the two foreign powers.⁴³ This lack of concessions from the British further damaged relations, while Native American activity on the frontier added to the list of American grievances.⁴⁴ The embargo and differing responses to frontier concerns created internal division as well. Reflected in the disparate rhetorical uses of Revolutionary memory, these political occurrences drove the Federalists and Republicans further apart. Although both parties employed this memory to call for unity in response to foreign indignities, as Sarah Purcell has argued, they fundamentally disagreed on what adherence to that memory should look like.⁴⁵ As a result, Americans, especially Republicans, just as commonly used highly charged Revolutionary memories—like that of Wyoming—to defame their fellow countrymen as to attack British aggression.

Always more likely to deploy emotional memories of the Revolution, Republican denunciations of Britain, while genuine, pointedly targeted Federalists and sought to expose their “treasonable devotion” to Great Britain.⁴⁶ The same Republican who spoke of “the *Brutish*,” for instance, presented “the atrocities of the” British to counteract Federalist critiques about Republican foreign policy. Arguing that Federalist concerns about Napoleon were simply “a chimera,” this writer insisted that Federalists worked “to advance the British interest...[and] destroy the American administration.”⁴⁷ Other Republicans even more directly utilized the memory of Wyoming to condemn the Federalists. One “old Whig of 76,” as he styled himself, recalled when some Federalists or their fathers “were arrayed in arms against us, when they were

⁴³ Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 119-121. See also, Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 117-118.

⁴⁴ Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 125-126.

⁴⁵ Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 154.

⁴⁶ Marcus Morton, *An Oration, on American Independence* (New Bedford, MA: Elijah Billings, 1806), 16.

⁴⁷ “Paragraph Second,” *The Public Advertiser* (New York City), August 13, 1808, 2.

united with the English, Hessians, and Indians in the work of murder, conflagration and ruin.” The old Whig then cited the legend of the Wyoming Massacre to express his doubt in current Federalists. “How can I forget the capture of Wyoming in 1778, when man, woman, and child were indiscriminately burnt together,” he wrote. “And how can I command my patience when I see many of this infernal gang now claiming confidence as patriots and power as legislators and statesmen?”⁴⁸ Casting modern Federalists as the new Tories by utilizing the Massacre, this Republican attempted to delegitimize the opposition. Amazingly, some Republicans even more bluntly connected Federalists to Tories through the example of Wyoming. Attacking Federalists in Luzerne County, one Republican paper wrote, “The farmers of Luzerne...should remember the Wyoming Massacre, the TORIES of that day—and then MARK the conduct of the TORIES of the present day.”⁴⁹ Using the memory of Wyoming as a weapon to paint their political enemies as in league with the villains of the Revolution, Republicans simultaneously vilified Britain and their Federalist rivals.

Republicans in this period clearly evoked Wyoming with an eye towards their own political agendas. During the lead-up to the 1810 midterm elections, for example, a Republican paper courted Irish immigrant votes by creating a narrative of shared oppression between Ireland and the United States that utilized the example of Wyoming. Claiming that “We were born the subjects of one king” and “have been the fellow victims of a common oppressor,” this Republican contended that “the assassins at Wyoming...were instruments of the same ferocious tyrant who has spread havook, death and desolation in Hibernian fields.” The editorial then

⁴⁸ “For the Bee: The Old Whig of 76,” *The Bee* (Hudson, New York), September 19, 1809, 5.

⁴⁹ “Citizens!” *Gleaner* (Wilkes-Barre, PA), August 7, 1812, 3. The quote is originally from a Baltimore paper but was reprinted by the editors of the *Gleaner* in Wilkes-Barre to respond to the accusations.

stressed that good Irish and American patriots should support the Republicans over the Anglophile Federalists.⁵⁰

Memories of Wyoming could likewise assist Republicans in justifying their anti-British policies. In the face of flagging support for the embargo, some utilized historical accounts of the battle to tilt public opinion in their favor. Directly reproducing an excerpt from an English historian's work, which replicated most of the groundless stories from Holt's account, a few Republicans used this excerpt to show how the embargo remained viable and to cast their Federalist opponents as modern-day Tories.⁵¹ The reprinting of this historical account—based on unsubstantiated narratives from the Revolution—as a piece of political commentary highlights the role history played in perpetuating and authenticating Patriot propaganda. Finding their way into political discourse, the exaggerations of Holt and the historians who reproduced his account influenced the way that Americans conceptualized current events. By this time, the legendary story of the Massacre was so ingrained in the American imagination that most Republicans only needed to reference Wyoming to accomplish their aims.⁵²

Wyoming also found a ready place within Republican commentary about the nation's frontier. The frontier and Native Americans featured heavily within Republican rhetoric, especially as the party drew considerable support from western states and as the charismatic

⁵⁰ "The Election," *New York Journal* (New York City), April 4, 1810, 1.

⁵¹ "A Picture of War: For the consideration of those who condemn the Embargo," *The Bee* (New London, CT), April 5, 1808, 2. "Toryism," *Carthage Gazette* (Carthage, TN), May 31, 1809, 2. The Bee article directly addresses those who do not support the embargo, while the Carthage article indirectly connects Revolutionary Tories with modern Federalists. The history these papers reprinted was purportedly Joseph Gerrald, a British political dissident. His account reproduced myths from Holt about the hatchet and murders committed by Loyalists. See, Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 159 and Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 648 for brief discussions on how Republicans used Revolutionary memory to paint Federalists as crypto-Loyalists.

⁵² Indeed, Federalists sometimes criticized Republicans for using Wyoming as the only evidence of current British machinations. An 1809 article, for instance, mocked a Republican whose only evidence that Britain was responsible for recent fires at American manufactories was because they had sanctioned the Glencoe Massacre in the Scottish Highlands in the late 1600s and the Wyoming Massacre in 1778. See, "Editor's Closet," *Northern Whig* (Hudson, New York), September 5, 1809, 3.

Indian leader Tecumseh threatened the country's expansion in the west.⁵³ As both the British and Indians remained enemies with American settlers in the backcountry, Americans in this period lived in a context comparable with their Revolutionary forebearers. Instances of frontier violence from the Revolution thus remained relevant and capable of speaking to early nineteenth century concerns.⁵⁴ One Republican in 1808, for instance, referenced the Battle of Wyoming to encourage compliance with the embargo on the frontier. Urging his countrymen to not engage in smuggling with the British, this man recalled the horrors of the Revolution to highlight the "hostile designs of the *English*, [as] manifested in their stirring up the Indians against us." Mentioning his memory of Wyoming, he argued that Americans must remain true to Republican policy to prevent the British and their savage allies from perpetrating another frontier massacre.⁵⁵ Upon hearing of fresh instances of Indian attacks, an 1812 editorial similarly lamented that "the murdered innocents at Wyoming bleed afresh" and insisted that only a strong American response could "prevent a repetition of slaughter and death."⁵⁶ Another article from the *Lexington Reporter* also utilized Wyoming to highlight Britain's perfidious designs in the backcountry.⁵⁷ Though decades distant, the legend of Wyoming still spoke to deep-seated backcountry fears about Britain's savage allies.

These Republican examples of frontier rhetoric show that a younger generation of partisans used Wyoming in ways that Revolutionary Patriots would have recognized and likely approved. Like in the Revolution, these Republican accounts tapped into the legend of the

⁵³ See Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 123-124 and Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 126-130.

⁵⁴ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 645. In the words of Parkinson, "Many people, places, and events from the Revolution had disappeared... but memories involving Britain and their 'savage allies' had not" in the years before the War of 1812 (645).

⁵⁵ "From the Albany Register: Patriotic Association," *City Gazette* (Charleston, SC), August 16, 1808, 2.

⁵⁶ "From Niles' Weekly Registers: Foreign Relations," *New Hampshire Patriot* (Concord), January 7, 1812, 1.

⁵⁷ "From the Lexington Reporter: For Congress and the Administration," *Columbian* (New York City), December 12, 1811, 1. The *Reporter* turned to "the savage British tortures at Wyoming and Wilkes-Barre, and to all the horrors of the revolutionary war" as evidence of hostile British intentions in the present.

Wyoming Massacre and the accompanying language of atrocity to enhance their arguments. Republicans used this language and the example of Wyoming to provoke action on the frontier or to argue for resistance against the British, just as Patriots like John Holt had in the late 1770s. Republicans also ignored Native American agency, often claiming, as the *Lexington Reporter* did, that “the Indians are instigated to war by the British.”⁵⁸ Blaming the British for the massacre and other instances where Native Americans attacked settlers, Patriots and Republicans alike presented themselves as innocent victims of outrageous aggression and ignored their own culpability in provoking such responses. As one Republican claimed without any sense of irony, “all our difficulties with the Indians have originated with the British.”⁵⁹

While Americans consistently evoked the example of Wyoming before the War of 1812, the outbreak of war provided new opportunities to use the battle’s memory as a political tool. With violence escalating in the backcountry, especially after the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811, and without concessions from the British on shipping rights, President James Madison finally asked Congress to declare war in early summer 1812. In the closest vote on a declaration of war in United States history, Congress passed the motion on strictly partisan lines. While Federalists opposed the war, Republicans supported it and hoped that it would unify the country behind their party.⁶⁰ Political unity ultimately eluded the nation, however, and partisan divides grew more evident during the conflict; indeed, some Federalists even considered secession from the Union. With the onset of war, the first party system and relations with Great Britain thus met their

⁵⁸ “From the Lexington Reporter: For Congress and the Administration,” *Columbian* (New York City), December 12, 1811, 1. As Alan Taylor wrote, Americans saw natives “as pawns in an insidious British plot to ravage the frontier.” Americans did not consider that natives could work to advance their own interests. See, Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 126.

⁵⁹ “From Niles’ Weekly Register: Desultory Remarks,” *Saratoga Patriot* (New York), August 19, 1812, 2.

⁶⁰ Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 123-124. See also, Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 133-137.

breaking points. Similarly, the trends affecting political rhetoric and Revolutionary memory during the previous half-decade reached their culmination in this same period, affecting the use of Wyoming within national discourse. As in the five years leading up to the War of 1812, Wyoming still served as a rhetorical weapon that could accomplish many of the same political aims, but American usage of the battle's remembrance took on an added urgency with the higher stakes of war.

For many Republicans, richly embroidered memories of the Revolution assisted them in waging a propaganda war to garner support for the fight against Great Britain. According to Alan Taylor, the War of 1812, like the Revolution, was a "highly political war, waged in newspapers as well as on the battlefield."⁶¹ Republicans thus used news coverage to attack the enemy and bolster American resolve, like Patriots had done in the struggle for independence. In fact, Republicans relied on many of the same foundationless war stories from the Revolution to discredit the British.⁶² Republican editorials claimed that the British had traded in scalps or encouraged the wanton murder of women and children in both the Revolution and the current conflict. Unsurprisingly, they also evoked the legend of the Wyoming Massacre.⁶³ Blending old and new examples of British barbarity, Republican rhetoric during the war portrayed the British as savage to demonstrate American's own superiority and show why the American people must support the war. This rhetorical continuity with the Patriot's propaganda efforts demonstrates the

⁶¹ Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 259. For the propaganda war during the Revolution, see Carl Berger, *Broadsides and Bayonets: The Propaganda War of the American Revolution* (San Francisco: Papamoa Press, 1961), 10.

⁶² Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 655-658. As Robert Parkinson maintains, Americans resurrected pro-independence arguments and depictions from the Revolutionary War for the War of 1812, especially if they involved the frontier and Native Americans.

⁶³ "From Niles' Weekly Register: Desultory Remarks," *Saratoga Patriot* (New York), August 19, 1812, 2. The editorial certainly used Wyoming in its picture of British barbarity. According to the author, "the British government has always been deliberately cruel and base...the massacres at Paoli and Wyoming, with their notorious avowed premium for scalps...are sufficient proofs of that assertion."

durability of Wyoming's memory and its ability, along with other revolutionary memories, to bridge the past and present for early nineteenth-century Americans.

The legend of the Wyoming Massacre featured in Republican denunciations of Britain and helped connect memories of the Revolution with current events. About a month after the beginning of the war, for instance, two papers printed an excerpt about the supposed history of the Massacre. Far from simply printing this history for its own sake, these papers intended the excerpt to speak to the present conflict. As one editor wrote in an introduction to the piece, "The following dreadful picture is one of the most horrid exploits of our present enemy" and "is more peculiarly interesting at this time and in this state... [as] the same course of cruelties [has] been recommenced." Republicans readily drew on such resonate memories and easily connected them to the nation's current situation. They based their comparisons, however, on uncorroborated rumors solidified by historians in the years after the Revolution. Reproducing most of the Holt account's and in language that Lendrum copied into his own work, this reprinted excerpt indicates how historic accounts shaped political conversations and disseminated unverified and explosive narratives to the public.⁶⁴

With a faulty understanding of what occurred at Wyoming in July 1778, Republicans continued to associate the sensationalized account of the battle with recent examples of British misdeeds to argue that the British were no different now than during the war for independence. As the *Baltimore Patriot* caustically wrote in October 1813 after tying "the shocking massacres of Cherry-Valley and Wyoming" to the latest British atrocities in Maryland, "let him [the reader]

⁶⁴ For original article that reprinted excerpt see, "Destruction of Wyoming," *Baltimore Patriot*, July 9, 1813, 2. For editorial quote see comments attached to reprinting of the *Baltimore Patriot* article in "Destruction of Wyoming," *New Hampshire Patriot* (Concord), July 27, 1813, 3. Based on the line "this settlement exhibited such a picture of primeval happiness..." Lendrum seems to have copied parts of this history, identified as the work of Joseph Gerrald, into his own history. See Lendrum, *A Concise and Impartial History*, II: 230.

determine for himself how far these *noble English* are consistent with their former character.”⁶⁵

While this Maryland article linked Wyoming with violence between whites, Republicans more commonly partnered the battle with instances of racial warfare in the backcountry. These accounts again accused America’s white opponents of succumbing to Indian barbarism and pushed for governmental action. A July 1812 article from the *Lexington Reporter*, for instance, explicitly referenced Wyoming with other instances of frontier bloodshed to argue that the British stirred up the Indians to frontier murder “as in 1777” and 1778. According to the *Reporter*, “the old revolutionary soldier...can well recollect the massacre of Wyoming. He has not forgotten that a horde of Tories and Indians...inflicted a barbarity of torture, unequalled in the annals of human history” there. Nor could he forget “who hired and paid those savages and tories...The BRITISH.” Calling for a defense of the west, this article claimed that Britain had instigated another Indian war.⁶⁶ For Republicans, the example of Wyoming thus provided ample evidence of Britain’s continued brutality and supported their arguments about the necessity of defending the frontier. To the question of “who gave the Indians tomahawk and knife? Who started first the daring savage yell?” many Americans would have agreed with one poet’s reply—*“Let Britain and Wyoming butchers tell!”*⁶⁷

The Battle of Frenchtown in January 1813 provided the readiest parallel for Republicans to link the massacre with the current day. Also known as the River Raisin Massacre, this battle in the Michigan Territory saw 500 Kentucky militiamen overwhelmed by a combined force of British and native troops. Hundreds of Kentuckians died in the attack, and many more were taken prisoner and forcibly marched to Fort Malden in Canada. Those too wounded to move

⁶⁵ “Character of the War within the State of Maryland,” *Baltimore Patriot* (Maryland), October 1, 1813, 2.

⁶⁶ “From the Lexington Reporter: The British,” *American Mercury* (Hartford, Connecticut), July 8, 1812, 1.

⁶⁷ “British Barbarity. And Dartmoor Prison,” *Patrol* (Utica, NY), July 24, 1815, 4. Though this poem emerged after the war, it was published just a few months removed and still reflects the general attitude of many during the period.

remained behind in two houses, which Native Americans burned the next day with the inhabitants still inside. Caught in the flames or escaping the conflagration just to be scalped, the wounded Americans perished.⁶⁸ As a frontier massacre perpetuated by the British and their Indian allies that included the burning of helpless individuals inside buildings, the River Raisin Massacre fit the script of Holt's Wyoming account, and Americans took notice. One Republican orator lamented that "The bloody tragedy of Wyoming has been repeated on the banks of [the] Raisin, and throughout our western frontier."⁶⁹ The similarities between the well-known account of the Wyoming Massacre and the recent occurrence upon the Raisin certainly helped Americans link the two events.

Just like Wyoming in the Revolution, events at the River Raisin justified revenge in the backcountry and continued resistance to the British. "Remember the Raisin" became a popular rallying cry and a type of rhetorical "trump card" for Americans in the coming months of the conflict.⁷⁰ Republicans proved particularly eager to use the memory of the Raisin to justify retaliatory measures. This memory was also powerful in the backcountry and led Kentuckians to commit their own atrocities on natives during the Battle of the Thames in October 1813.⁷¹ One *Enquirer* correspondent in April 1813 predicted the Kentuckians' angry response as well as the propagandic usage of the Raisin. He wrote, "the massacre of the Raisin will be inscribed on the same imperishable page of history with...the destruction of Wyoming. But the only effect, which it will have upon the war, will be to rouse" the people to action "and call forth the Kentuckians to revenge the assassination of their Kinsmen."⁷² Each time they likened the Raisin massacre to

⁶⁸ See Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 210-215.

⁶⁹ "Fourth of July," *The Columbian* (New York City), July 3, 1813, 2.

⁷⁰ Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 214-215.

⁷¹ Walter R. Borneman, *1812: The War That Forged a Nation* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 160-162.

⁷² "Enquirer Office," *Enquirer* (Richmond, VA), April 2, 1813, 1.

Wyoming, Republicans used these backcountry atrocities to perpetuate a familiar narrative of victimhood that allowed Americans to see themselves not as aggressors but as innocent victims who retaliated against the fiendish British and Indians only in righteous self-defense.

As during the leadup to war, Republican denunciations of Great Britain and their rhetorical deployment of the memory of Wyoming served partisan purposes intended to not only help in the struggle against Britain but also meant to further the interests of the current administration. In a highly divided political climate, Republicans worked to defend their handling of the war, win reelection, and discredit their opponents. Facing mounting criticism as the war progressed, Republicans tapped into incendiary frontier language and a well-spring of hatred for the British and Indians to divert attention from military failures and retain control. Expounding upon frontier atrocities both past and present or “waving the bloody scalp,” as Taylor puts it, “Republicans shifted the focus away from their mistakes [and] onto the misdeeds of the British and their Indian allies.”⁷³ Again following in the footsteps of Revolutionary Patriots, Republicans used the example of Wyoming to distract from the sagging war effort and unite the nation behind their cause, as one 1812 editorial shows. Referencing the battle to prove that “the British government has always been deliberately cruel and base,” this Republican called for every American to unite in the face of British barbarity. This editorial writer used Wyoming to rally the public behind the war effort and subtly asserted that good Americans must assist the Republican administration waging it.⁷⁴

⁷³ Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 212.

⁷⁴ “From Niles’ Weekly Register: Desultory Remarks,” *Saratoga Patriot* (New York), August 19, 1812, 2. Over the course of the war, many wisely manipulated inflammatory frontier rhetoric for effect at the ballot box. For instance, the same Republican who connected “the massacre of the Raisin” with “the destruction of Wyoming” urged voters to support the war by voting for his party. See “Enquirer Office,” *Enquirer* (Richmond, VA), April 2, 1813, 1.

Republicans also utilized Wyoming and the language of atrocity to malign their political opponents in newspapers and speeches, sometimes portraying the opposition as “wretches calling themselves Americans.”⁷⁵ Many Republicans tried to quash attempts to criticize their leadership, and they commonly accused critics of supporting the British or worse—their savage allies.⁷⁶ One, for instance, directly evoked Wyoming—and the horrors of Indian war attached to it—to personally attack a political enemy. Condemning a Federalist orator for forgetting “the victims of stimulated Anglo-Indian ferocity” at Wyoming and supporting “the abettors...[of] the bloody deed,” this Republican portrayed Federalists as hypocrites at best and Loyalists at worse.⁷⁷ Another utilized Wyoming and other instances of “savage cruelty” in defense of a proclamation that threatened Canadians “should they employ the Savages.” Painting a nightmarish scenario of frontier atrocity replete with Native American “prowlers” butchering women and children in the night, this writer emphasized the necessity of the proclamation. Most important, however, he shamed the opposition for ignoring the suffering that frontier inhabitants would experience in the ensuing frontier violence.⁷⁸ An example of combined British, Native American, Loyalist, and now Federalist savagery, Wyoming remained malleable for Republican political ends.

Republicans more typically utilized Wyoming in their rhetoric, but they faced opposition from Federalists who occasionally referenced the battle’s memory in their defense. Generally hailing from the region where the battle occurred, those few Federalists who utilized Wyoming evoked its memory during Independence Day celebrations, right after the battle’s anniversary. While Federalists and Republicans had long competed for attention during Fourth of July

⁷⁵ For quote see, “Fourth of July,” *The Columbian* (New York City), July 3, 1813, 2. See also, “Mr. Overton’s ORATION,” *Carthage Gazette* (Tennessee), July 23, 1813, 1-2.

⁷⁶ Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 171-180.

⁷⁷ “Base Degeneracy,” *Public Advertiser* (New York City), August 20, 1812, 2.

⁷⁸ “To the Edit. of the Pub. Adv.,” *Public Advertiser* (New York City), August 11, 1812, 2.

festivities, according to Len Travers, this party conflict reached its climax during the War of 1812, and it shows in each parties' respective usage of Wyoming in their holiday orations.⁷⁹ Referenced in a few Republican orations after the Chesapeake Affair, Wyoming typically emerged as an example of British savagery intended to inflame both partisan and anti-British passions.⁸⁰

Federalists in the Wyoming region, however, recalled the battle on the Fourth of July to resist attempts to squash their free speech and paint them as Loyalists. Local politician Charles Miner's oration, for instance, employed the battle to show how locals had suffered in the Revolution and insisted that Federalists had remained true Americans. Miner, however, still asserted his opposition to the war and maintained that the constitution protected dissent.⁸¹ A July 4 editorial letter in Luzerne similarly opposed the war and advocated a "change of rulers." The author of this editorial tied Wyoming to current events yet drew different conclusions than Republican writers. Aware of "the horrid massacre [that] took place at Wyoming" and the current "*bloody news*...of the inhabitants on our frontiers" who have suffered "in a similar manner to those who fell at Wyoming in July 1778," this author advocated not for continued war but for unity to "bring about an honorable peace." For him, the failures of American arms in Canada and across the Great Lakes merely prolonged the suffering on the frontier and brought dishonor to the nation.⁸² Instead of galvanizing support for the war as it did for Republicans, Federalists invoked the memory of Wyoming to hasten peace.

⁷⁹ Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth*, 90, 190-198. As Republicans used the holiday to support the war, Federalists called for a day of mourning in opposition to the conflict.

⁸⁰ See for example, Morton, *An Oration*, 7 or "Fourth of July," *The Columbian* (New York City), July 3, 1813, 2 or "Mr. Overton's ORATION," *Carthage Gazette* (TN), July 23, 1813, 1-2.

⁸¹ "Address, delivered on the 4th of July: By C. Miner," *Gleaner* (Wilkes-Barre, PA), July 17, 1812, 1. Miner claimed that the war with Britain was partially justified, yet he also believed it was equally so with France.

⁸² "Extract of a Letter to the Editor, From an Old and Valued Friend," *Gleaner* (Wilkes-Barre, PA), July 16, 1813, 3.

When war ended and the peace treaty was signed in early 1815, the Wyoming Massacre retained some of its political immediacy in a new era of territorial expansion, especially as Americans continued to fight Native Americans on the frontier. While ostensibly a draw, the United States largely won the peace in the aftermath of the War of 1812, securing its spot on the continent and ensuring future westward expansion. As the war allowed the Americans to cut off natives from most foreign allies on the continent, the real losers of that war in Taylor's estimation were Native Americans.⁸³ With the conflict against Britain over, Republicans largely pardoned former Federalists for their opposition. The nation entered an era of "good feelings" in the aftermath of the conflict, characterized by an awakened nationalism and a brief lessening of partisan divides—partially a result of the Federalist Party's effective collapse after the poorly timed Hartford Convention.⁸⁴ Many Americans, however, never forgave Indians for their perceived role in the conflict of 1812 and even 1776. Indeed, the continuing usage of these stories, first employed for independence and later revived for the renewed conflict against Britain, had tragic consequences for native people. Convincing many Americans that Indians were enemies of the nation and unworthy of citizenship, these durable narratives, as Parkinson rightly points out, portrayed Indians as "founding traitors."⁸⁵ The legend of Wyoming continued to play into this idea, painting a lasting image of natives as bloodthirsty and easily manipulated monsters that would last far into the nineteenth century.

⁸³ Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 420-437, esp. 437.

⁸⁴ David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 294-296. While nationalism rose in this period, Waldstreicher notes that "mixed feelings," embodied in sectional and partisan differences, remained.

⁸⁵ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 658. Native Americans, of course, were not "founding traitors." Many tribes had assisted the Patriot war effort but were conveniently forgotten by the white political nation. It is all the more important to understand the process of creating narratives about the American past that sought to establish Indians as enemies *per se*.

Conclusion

The War of 1812 had ended, but the ideological value of invoking the Wyoming Massacre did not, particularly on the frontier. Wyoming continued to reappear in writings seeking to criticize vicious actions by the British and “savage” Indians, particularly against “helpless females” and “tender infants.” One of the most striking examples of this appeared during the Seminole War at the end of the 1810s, when Gen. Andrew Jackson executed two British captives accused of assisting the Seminoles in their battle against the United States. When he justified the deaths of Alexander Arbuthnot and Richard Armbrister as just retaliation for horrors enacted against whites, his supporters hastened to remind newspaper readers of the long pattern of British and Indian atrocities. One of these was a congressman and newspaper correspondent using the pseudonym Wyoming who called for the extermination of native people because of their propensity for extreme violence. Because Arbuthnot and Armbrister had “made themselves savages,” they were “more deeply stained with guilt than any painted Seminole,” and thus deserved execution.⁸⁶ Clearly, the constructed memory of British and Indian collusion at Wyoming still had the power to galvanize Americans to retaliate and see themselves as the true victims on the frontier.

⁸⁶ For quote on “tender infants,” see “Counter Report,” *Baltimore Patriot* (Maryland), January 14, 1819, 2. This newspaper report reprinted comments from a Kentucky congressman. See also, “From the N.Y. Columbian: Arbuthnot and Ambrister,” *Hampden Patriot* (Springfield, MA), January 7, 1819, 3. With the pseudonym “Wyoming,” this author wrote, “Of all the hordes of savages on earth, the Indian tribes of North America are least of all entitled to compassion or lenity in time of war.” Waging wars of cruelty and extermination, this author argued, Native Americans deserved like treatment. “What they do to others must be done to them in return,” he rationalized, “and Retaliation in its severest form, is but common justice.” The massacre’s legend helped Americans support further Native American removal and exclusion in the immediate postwar era. White Americans, however, did not forget the roles that people of European descent supposedly played in instigating frontier attacks as evidenced by Armbrister and Arbuthnot. Americans like “Wyoming” were quick to blame foreign influences for frontier violence. In accusing Armbrister and Arbuthnot for starting the violence and being worse than savage Indians, “Wyoming” certainly lived up to his pseudonym.

Entrenched in American culture through histories, popular culture, literature, and politics, the legend of the Wyoming Massacre remained relevant in the early Republic. Used to attack the British and Indians, bolster American resolve, discredit political opponents, or argue for action on the frontier, the battle's memory spoke to a variety of Americans' concerns in the era around the War of 1812. As Americans faced similar enemies and situations first in the War of 1812, they turned to the same arguments and examples from the Revolution to support their aims and defend their positions. These powerful narratives, passed down and legitimized by early historians and literary works, stayed influential and were ripe for use by the politically savvy. In the new propaganda war of 1812, the legendary version of the Massacre remained a powerful rhetorical weapon against the British, Native Americans, Federalists, and Republicans. Through Wyoming, Americans connected the Revolutionary past with their present, a trend that continued even when the hostilities with Britain and the Seminoles ceased.

The Wyoming Massacre became a key part of the Revolutionary story in the nineteenth century. Even as the threat from Britain passed and Wyoming's political relevancy declined, the Massacre remained a part of American's historical consciousness, thanks in no small part to the popularity of Campbell's *Gertrude of Wyoming* and the continued influence of early historians.⁸⁷ Coupled with growing nationalism and a desire to preserve the experiences of the Revolutionary generation as it began to pass away, Americans remembered the sacrifices at Wyoming and considered it a part of their Revolutionary heritage.⁸⁸ These trends in history, popular culture, and Revolutionary memory converged in the remembrance of Wyoming, illustrating the wide-

⁸⁷ As one historian aptly summarized in 1838, "So long as English poetry exists, will the imaginary tale of *Gertrude of Wyoming* be read, admired, and wept; and thousands, in every generation to come, will receive the beautiful fiction for truth, while the details of fact by the faithful historian, rejecting the exaggerations of Ramsay and Gordon, and their associate writers of the revolutionary era, together with compilers more modern, who have taken no pains to inquire for the truth, may be regarded as too common-place and unimportant for attention." See, William Leete Stone, *Life of Joseph Brant—Thayendanegea* (New York: A. V. Blake, 1838), I: 318-319.

⁸⁸ Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 193-195.

reaching influence of histories and literature in helping Wyoming become part of the Revolutionary mythos. One 1823 article from Vermont, for instance, began with a line from Campbell's poem and provided a historical excerpt that duplicated the legend of the Massacre before reminding its readers of the sacrifices made during the Revolution.⁸⁹ Similarly citing Campbell and then giving an excerpt "in the language of America's great historian," whom the editor considered to be John Marshall, an 1827 article from Philadelphia also encouraged its readers to remember the sacrifices of Wyoming and the "almost sacred charge" its survivors had left behind.⁹⁰ Immortalized in history and fiction, the Massacre had become a part of Americans' Revolutionary mythology. The memory of Wyoming reminded a new generation of the sacrifice and vigilance needed to protect the nation's freedom.⁹¹

As a new generation of Americans worked to commemorate the triumphs and sacrifices of their Revolutionary forebears, the focus of the Massacre's remembrance gradually turned more inward towards the local community near Wilkes-Barre and Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. Desiring to memorialize those slaughtered in July 1778 and record the recollections of those who had experienced it, locals worked to preserve and shape the memory of the battle in new ways in the coming decades of the nineteenth century. Some in the community even began to question the popular version of the battle, attempting to discredit the

⁸⁹ "Battle of Wyoming," *Vermont Gazette* (Bennington), September 30, 1823, 3.

⁹⁰ "From the Philadelphia Ariel: Old Wyoming," *Torch Light* (Hagerstown, Maryland), May 17, 1827, 1. While the article did not name Marshall, the reprinted excerpt was from Marshall's biography of George Washington. See Marshall, *Life of Washington*, 556-560.

⁹¹ See, "Spark for the Altar of 76'," *Norwich Courier* (Connecticut), August 27, 1828, 4. An elderly orator in 1828 considered Wyoming as part of the Revolutionary "inheritance." He directly referenced Wyoming in what he clearly believed would be one of the "the last time[s]" his generation "will ever tell you...the story of our sufferings." He urged the upcoming generation to "defend your inheritance" with virtue. For Wyoming's continued place in Revolutionary mythology, see, for example, Thomas Crawford and William Rinehart, *House Bronze Doors*, bronze, 1905, U.S. Capitol East House Portico, <https://www.aoc.gov/art/doors/house-bronze-doors>. These doors, crafted in the 1850s and 1860s but installed in the early 1900s, included Wyoming with other important Revolutionary events, such as the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Its inclusion points to the battle's continued importance in nineteenth century America.

narratives that Patriot publicists, authentic histories, and political commentaries had all reproduced down the decades. Their efforts, as we shall see, only gave rise to a new narrative of an equally unverified nature.⁹² Of course, the legend of the Wyoming Massacre would not easily be discredited, and by no means did Wyoming fade from national discourse even as locals exerted more control over its memory.⁹³ Rather, as it had during the years surrounding the War of 1812, Wyoming's memory remained malleable in new circumstances.

The legend of the Wyoming Massacre had aged quite well.

⁹² See, for example, Francavilla, "The Wyoming Valley Battle and 'Massacre,'" 21-25.

⁹³ As late as 1878, a local historian criticized school textbooks for handing down "monstrous falsehoods" about the battle and massacre. The historian wrote, "That such an account should be published as late as 1871 for instruction in schools and the edification of families, is an unmitigated, unpardonable outrage." Clearly, the legend of the Wyoming Massacre lived on far into the nineteenth century. See Harry Hakes, *Wyoming: Synopsis of the Battle and Massacre for the Information of the People*, 1878, from the collections of the Luzerne County Historical Society. This source can also be accessed via the Library of Congress at <https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.16001200/>.

Chapter 3

“A fury in the form of a woman”

A New Legend Takes Hold

A new legend about the Battle of Wyoming emerged in the mid-1800s, equally as sensational as the first. This myth eventually replaced the long-lived narratives of John Holt and his Revolutionary counterparts. As regional historians finally discredited those Revolutionary accounts starting in the 1820s, they enabled this other legend to materialize, continuing the cycle of historical distortion for a new generation. They had help, of course. Influenced by national attitudes about Native Americans, patriotism, and regionalism, locals eagerly and uncritically adopted wild tales, which then allowed this new legend to spread through other media. Much as early Revolutionary historians and *Gertrude of Wyoming* disseminated the legend of the Wyoming Massacre in the era of the War of 1812, historians in the antebellum period and the popular literature of the nineteenth century made it possible for a new legend to take hold.

This legend centered around a woman of probable French and Native American ancestry named Esther or Catherine Montour, who became popularly known as Queen Esther. This native leader, given the title “Queen” by colonists due to her position of authority, was likely a largely fictional composite of three historic Native American women.¹ According to some accounts and later historians, Esther brutally massacred between seven and twenty-five Patriot prisoners after the Battle of Wyoming as an act of revenge for the murder of her son on July 2. She allegedly

¹ Warren Hunting Smith, “Queen Esther,” *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 29, no. 3 (Summer 1953): 400-404. In the nineteenth century, authors usually considered Esther responsible, but they sometimes claimed that her sister Catherine Montour carried out the killings. Some even argued that Catherine Montour went by the name “Queen Esther.” For different names, see Campbell, *Annals of Tyron County*, 64 [appendix], and William Leete Stone, *The Poetry and History of Wyoming: Containing Campbell’s Gertrude, and the History of Wyoming, from Its Discovery to the Beginning of the Present Century*, 4th ed. (Wilkes-Barre: C.E. Butler, 1869), 207-208.

slaughtered the prisoners about a mile away from the field of battle around a slightly raised rock, which these new accounts came to call “Bloody Rock” or “Queen Esther’s Rock.” With a maul in one hand and a hatchet in the other, Esther purportedly chanted an otherworldly dirge as she killed the terrified Patriots, who were held captive by native warriors in “the fatal ring” around the rock.²

Just like Holt’s earlier account, the story of Queen Esther found life in histories and popular culture. Morphing from an obscure rumor referenced in a few contemporary accounts and advanced by some elderly veterans, this myth started making its way into local histories beginning in the 1820s, gaining gradual acceptance as historians repeated it. From there, the myth disseminated to the community and then the nation. Capable of tapping into the currents of regional romance and commemoration, fascination with Native Americans, and cultural discourses on American identity, Esther’s legend perfectly fit mid-nineteenth-century tastes as well as the public’s understanding of the Battle of Wyoming. As a result, Esther featured in popular fiction, travel literature, and commemorative events that introduced her to even more Americans. Able to connect Wyoming and Esther to larger regional and national narratives, Americans turned to this legend for a variety of reasons.

This chapter examines the development of this legend in the antebellum period and its continued influence later in the nineteenth century. Detailing where it originated, how and why it became accepted, and how it spread, the chapter relies on a variety of primary and secondary sources to explore the influences of history, literature, and local commemoration on the legend. This chapter will use the terms “myth,” “legend,” and “story” interchangeably to describe the various narratives that surround Esther or Catherine Montour’s supposed involvement in the

² Miner, *History of Wyoming*, 226-233, 53-55 [appendix]. See also, George Peck, *Wyoming; Its History, Stirring Incidents, and Romantic Adventures* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1858), 48, 284-290.

Battle of Wyoming. As Barbara Graymont and Amber Laubach have argued, Queen Esther's legend is likely "completely fictional" and should be treated as such.³ The author concurs with this assertion and finds little evidence to suggest that executions occurred around the Bloody Rock or that any Native American woman, especially Esther Montour, killed Patriot prisoners. Of course, there is no way to definitively prove that this event never occurred, and some passionately claimed it did; as a result, the author welcomes historical revision if new evidence or interpretations come to light. Ultimately, however, this chapter contends that Esther's legend has little basis in fact and that it should be considered local folklore that locals, historians, and authors legitimized for their own purposes during the mid-nineteenth-century. The accuracy or inaccuracy of narratives about Queen Esther, nonetheless, does not constitute the primary focus of this chapter. Instead, it principally seeks to highlight the complex interaction between local and national ideas that affected the remembrance of the Battle of Wyoming as well as the acceptance and diffusion of Esther's myth. It explores why this myth suddenly appeared so compelling and relevant more than half a century after the battle itself.

Historians at It Again

Just as earlier historians of the Revolution reinforced and perpetuated groundless narratives of the Wyoming Massacre in the first three decades after 1778, many local historians working in the mid-1800s disseminated equally unsubstantiated tales. While some claimed to

³ Indeed, in Laubach's words, Esther "would not be the first Native person to be [falsely] accused of atrocities at Wyoming." For quote in text, see Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 174. See also, Amber Laubach, "Queen Esther Montour of the Munsee Delaware: An Ethnohistoric and Archaeological History of Esther Montour and Queen Esther's Town Preserve" (M.A., State University of New York at Binghamton, 2018), 50, 81-82. I agree with Laubach's assertion that Esther's story seems about as accurate as Thomas Campbell's poem. I would disagree, however, that the story of Esther was used as a propaganda tool against native people in the late 1770s. While it could have motivated some of Sullivan's men, the fact that no newspapers, the chief vehicle for propaganda in the period, ever picked it up suggests that it was not well-known and thus likely not used as propaganda in the 1770s.

correct the falsehoods in earlier accounts, many of these efforts merely gave credence to similarly baseless narratives.⁴ Most local mid-century historians, unlike the earlier generation of authors, did not reproduce the hyperbolic narratives of the Patriot wartime press. In fact, these historians worked hard to discredit what one called the “downright falsehoods” of John Holt’s 1770s report, which included the story of the hatchet and the burning of women and children inside of Forty Fort.⁵ As they discredited the more lurid details of popular narratives, however, many local historians helped a new myth about the battle gain traction by uncritically accepting another long-lived rumor that reemerged around the 1820s and 1830s. This rumor, backed by the testimony of a few aged veterans, scant documentation, and local folklore, would become the basis for a whole new legend about the Battle of Wyoming.

Before a new legend could take hold, local historians first worked to discredit many of the older Revolutionary accounts that lacked evidential backing. Though a few historians had challenged these accounts from the beginning, many had simply reproduced the hyperbole, ensuring that it persisted in popular narratives long into the nineteenth century. The prevalence of these misconceptions encouraged many local historians, such as Isaac Chapman, William Stone, Charles Miner, and George Peck, to “correct” these stories and try to uncover the true course of events. As they presented their findings to dislodge these views, historians related what they believed happened in the past, yet their narratives shed light on more than just that. Their works inadvertently reveal larger cultural currents in the antebellum period that underpinned both the history and memory of Wyoming, currents that influenced the telling of the story and the use of evidence.

⁴ Francavilla, “The Wyoming Valley Battle and ‘Massacre,’” 21.

⁵ Peck, *Wyoming*, 58. Like their counterparts in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, these local “historians” were also amateurs with little historical training. The term amateur historians or amateur historical writers equally applies to these authors.

Beginning in the late 1820s and early 1830s, local historians followed a similar pattern in their coverage of the battle, first laid out by Isaac Chapman in his 1830 history of Wyoming. Though Chapman still (erroneously) claimed Joseph Brant had been present, he provided a retelling of the battle that did not reproduce the narratives that had become central to the popular legend. Chapman began by describing of the beauty of the valley before detailing how Native Americans and Loyalists triumphed through sheer numbers. An account of the retreat and the suffering of defeated Patriots followed, concluding with the plight of distressed frontier families fleeing from the carnage.⁶ Other historians from northern Pennsylvania and upstate New York quickly followed Chapman's lead, citing him within their own histories or even copying parts of his work to challenge the misconceptions that had become so popular.⁷ Chapman's successors regularly included denunciations of John Holt's 1778 report in their works, and they helped finally dislodge this Revolutionary holdover from many histories of the region.

Chapman's local situation and national ideas about commercialization, progress, and Native Americans influenced his depiction of the battle and its place within Wyoming's larger history. At the end of his book, Chapman reminded his readers of the prosperity the valley now enjoyed. Extolling the growth of towns, internal improvements, technology, and especially the discovery of coal, Chapman painted a rosy picture of the valley's present and future, highlighting the region's economic potential. His vision spoke to growing commercial prosperity, and his

⁶ Isaac A. Chapman, *A Sketch of the History of Wyoming* (Wilkes-Barre: S. D. Lewis, 1830), 3, 121-128. While Chapman's work saw publication in 1830, he had worked on it much earlier. The preface is dated 1818, and both Miner and Stone write that Chapman's work was published posthumously and in an incomplete form. Chapman became the first to write a history of Wyoming, but politician and later historian Charles Miner wrote John Marshall about the inaccuracies of his depiction back in 1806. Miner did not publish until 1845, however.

⁷ See, for example, William W. Campbell, *Annals of Tryon County: Or, The Border Warfare of New York, During the Revolution*, 4th ed. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1924), 64 of appendix, and Stone, *Life of Joseph Brant*, I: 319. Campbell's work, which first appeared in 1831, reprinted Chapman's account before adding a few editorial comments. Stone's work, on the other hand, cited Chapman's history in his footnotes.

work implied that the trials of Wyoming's history had made modern improvements possible.⁸

Like other historians writing from the nearby Mohawk Valley of New York, Chapman endorsed the idea of progress and "viewed history as a linear progression that drew together past, present, and future." This narrative of progress served an important cultural function. Helping make sense of the violence of war and suggesting that those who perished did not die in vain, the linear progression of local history made it seem, in Paxton's words, like "the Revolutionary generation's sacrifices ushered in a new and better world for their children and grandchildren."⁹

Indeed, within Chapman's narrative, even the defeat at the Battle of Wyoming eventually worked towards the good of the region. As it encouraged the devastation of the Iroquois thus removing "the danger of Indian wars," the author suggested, the battle indirectly created an advantageous environment for the valley's residents to quickly rebuild.¹⁰ This perspective was not unusual. White Americans often linked progress and the removal of Native Americans. Viewing natives as part of the past or as representing a previous stage of societal development, many white Americans saw their removal as a sign of progress, and Chapman's history followed suit.¹¹ His work ultimately shows how the exclusion and removal of Native Americans undergirded the comforting narrative of progress. It also highlights how local histories endorsed these larger cultural ideas and applied them to their own reading of the region's past.

In the coming decades, other local historians would build off Chapman's example, dislodging the baseless narratives of the Revolution and advancing similar views of the relation of history to both progress and Native Americans. One such author, Colonel William Leete

⁸ Chapman, *A Sketch of the History of Wyoming*, 198-209. Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 173. According to Sarah Purcell, as Americans looked to a future of progress in an era of increasing commercialization and democratization, they still "kept...[their] eyes on the past for inspiration."

⁹ Paxton, "Remembering and Forgetting," 183. Both quotes are from Paxton.

¹⁰ Chapman, *A Sketch of the History of Wyoming*, 133-134.

¹¹ See, Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 45-55. See also, Paxton, "Remembering and Forgetting," 188-189, and Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 58-63.

Stone, built on Chapman's history in 1838 but went much further to discredit the "gross exaggerations" about the battle in his two-volume biography of Joseph Brant. Fully conscious of the fiction of *Gertrude of Wyoming* and the "exaggerations of Ramsay and Gordon...together with [those from] compilers more modern who have taken no pains to inquire for the truth," Stone set out to rectify the historical record. He first attacked the idea of a July 4th massacre. He concluded, "it does not appear that anything like a massacre followed the capitulation," and he rejected the idea that there were "any specific acts of cruelty other than such as are usual in the general rout of a battlefield." Next, Stone rebuffed the long-standing notion that Brant led the raid on Wyoming with John Butler, using sources that he believed proved Brant could not have been present.¹²

Stone also took issue with another tendency common among white historians of this period—the propensity to depict Indians "with the characteristics of demons." Taking pains to stress the prominent role of Loyalists in committing atrocities after the battle, Stone questioned this idea by reminding his readers of the savagery exhibited by white men at Wyoming. "In a domestic war marked by such atrocity, even among those claiming to be civilized," he wrote, "it becomes us to pause before we brand the untutored savage, who fights according to the usages of his own people, with *all* that is revolting and cruel." Returning to ideas about white savagery and Loyalist depredations, Stone challenged the depiction of Native Americans as bloodthirsty monsters that many of his contemporaries advanced. In fact, Stone even defended some Indian actions like scalping, arguing that these acts were considered honorable in native culture.¹³ His

¹² Stone, *Life of Joseph Brant*, I: 319, 336-339. In a footnote, Stone remarked, "Rarely, indeed, does it happen that history is more at fault in regard to facts than in the case of Wyoming. The remark may be applied to nearly every writer who has attempted to narrate the events connected with the invasion of Colonel John Butler, Ramsay, and Gordon, and Marshall—nay, the British historians themselves—have written gross exaggerations" (339).

¹³ Stone, *Life of Joseph Brant*, I: xiii-xv, 336-339.

desire to present natives sympathetically led Stone to believe native testimony more readily than other historians, and his admiration of Brant emerges in his work.

Despite his more evenhanded interpretation, Stone ultimately remained a product of his time in that he subscribed to the prevailing, if toxic, idea that natives would soon disappear. Like many Americans on the east coast, most notably James Fenimore Cooper in his 1826 *Last of the Mohicans*, Stone believed in the myth of “the vanishing Indian.” This myth held that Native Americans, in Stone’s word, were quickly “melting away before the Anglo-Saxons like the snow beneath a vertical sun,” destined to be replaced by white settlers bringing progress further west.¹⁴ Seeing the extinction of native people as inevitable in the face of progress, which equated to the advance of white society, Stone and other proponents of this myth mourned the loss of natives and found it easier to admire certain native attributes. Ironically, this occurred only after government policies and war had effectively removed most Native Americans from the eastern United States. More nefariously, this sentimentalization of dying Indians had “profound political implications,” providing “whites with an influential narrative of [inevitable] Indian decline” they could use to advocate for native removal throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁵ This myth subtly helped conceal white complicity in this process. An example of what one scholar terms “imperialist nostalgia,” the mourning or nostalgia expressed for disappearing Indians in the antebellum period helped hide white involvement by presenting them as innocent or passive bystanders to native extinction.¹⁶ Thus, while Stone did not present natives as heartless monsters,

¹⁴ Stone, *Life of Joseph Brant*, I: xiii. See also, Paxton, “Remembering and Forgetting,” 188-189.

¹⁵ Carolyn Eastman, “The Indian Censures the White Man: ‘Indian Eloquence’ and American Reading Audiences in the Early Republic,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (July 2008): 538-539.

¹⁶ Renato Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia,” *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 108. See also, Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (1973; repr., University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 354-355.

his adherence to this myth and the idea of progress ultimately supported the very expansion that led to Native Americans' disappearance.

Not all local historians agreed with Stone's interpretation about Wyoming or Native Americans. Stone's friend Charles Miner, for instance, challenged Stone's argument about Brant's participation in the battle in his own 1845 history of Wyoming. In a detailed footnote, Miner claimed that Stone lacked convincing evidence to support his assertion about Brant. Doubting the veracity of any testimony from Brant's "Indian friends" as to his whereabouts at the time of the battle, Miner argued that Brant's infamy and his role in the rest of the war suggests that he did, in fact, command the Indian contingent in July 1778. His suspicions of Native Americans clearly colored his reading of certain evidence as well as his overall depiction of natives.¹⁷ Despite his disagreements with Stone, Miner similarly recognized the problems with the public's understanding of the battle and built off Chapman's example by seeking to present a truthful account that discredited the sensationalized details built up around the battle. His own interpretation of the battle followed closely with Chapman's account, and it shared many features with other contemporary works on the topic.¹⁸ Miner did not repeat Holt's unfounded stories about a July 4th massacre. Calling out William Gordon, David Ramsey, John Marshall, and other historians for disseminating myths about the surrender of Fort Fort, Miner declared that "it is time the truth of history should be vindicated." He then asserted that these earlier accounts were inaccurate and that no one died at the fort. Of course, this correction did not influence his opinion of Butler, Great Britain, or any natives. For him, these actors remained tainted by their

¹⁷ Miner, *History of Wyoming*, 227, 233. Miner did not have a kind view of most Native Americans, comparing them to demons. Referring to the torture of prisoners after the battle by Indians, Miner wrote "the vast depths of hell, boiling with demoniac passions, never could have devised or executed such horrid tortures (227)."

¹⁸ Miner, *History of Wyoming*, iii-iv, 216-237. Miner perceived the origins of the misinformation that had colored most Americans' view of the event, and traced the legend's development from wild rumors to newspapers to histories in the preface to his work. The extent of the historical distortion deeply troubled Miner and inspired him to write.

involvement in the battle and the murder of retreating Patriot soldiers.¹⁹ Correcting some of the narratives of previous writers and historians, Miner's account helped further discredit the old legend of the Wyoming Massacre in the eyes of many locals.

Thirteen years after Charles Miner published his book, local minister George Peck added his own contribution to Wyoming's history that sought to dislodge popular misconceptions. Peck's 1858 book, titled *Wyoming; Its History, Stirring Incidents, and Romantic Adventures*, aimed to not only conform to "historic truth" but also inspire future generations. In his coverage of the battle, Peck stressed the contrast between Patriot bravery and the barbarity that Indians and Loyalists exhibited against retreating men and prisoners. Peck also attacked Holt's ideas about the hatchet and the burning of women and children in Forty Fort. Though he understood how many Americans could easily believe such lies about the Tories and Indians who "were with no injustice regarded as a sort of demons incarnate," he emphasized that "these [details] are not mere exaggerations, but downright falsehoods." After rejecting the central fiction of the legendary version of the massacre, Peck turned to an even more disputed detail—the role that Joseph Brant played in the battle. Weighing the evidence presented by "popular tradition" as well as from Chapman, Miner, and Stone, Peck eventually sided with Stone, arguing that Brant did not accompany John Butler. Not that this correction altered his estimation of Brant or Native Americans. Even without Wyoming on his record, according to Peck, Brant remained a monster because of his actions in the Mohawk Valley during the Revolution. In this regard, his disdain for Native Americans more generally resembled Miner's.²⁰

¹⁹ Miner, *History of Wyoming*, iv, 235-237. Miner well-understood the process by which the legend of Wyoming took hold in the American imagination. According to him, the basis for the legend started with rumors repeated by those escaping from the valley. Newspapers then quickly amplified their stories "to arouse the most powerful emotions of the human soul...to strengthen our [the Patriot] cause." The legend's prevalence and importance, however, ensured that few would challenge it after the war. Instead, historians reinforced myths about the massacre by relying on Revolutionary newspaper accounts, such as John Holt's fabrication.

²⁰ Peck, *Wyoming*, vi-vii, 38-58, 87-92.

Peck may have showcased his devotion to uncovering the truth, but his history also reveals his harsh attitude towards natives and Loyalists, an attitude that many Revolutionary Americans would have shared. Just like earlier Patriots, Peck equated Loyalists and Native Americans with savagery, and his coverage of Wyoming often focused just as much on “the diabolical spirit of the *Tories*” as Indian depredations.²¹ Criticizing Loyalists for voluntarily choosing “savagery over civilization” and emphasizing that Indians and Loyalists had committed heinous acts, Peck helped justify the removal of Native Americans and their allies from the region.²² By playing up the savagery of the enemy in contrast to Patriot bravery, Peck presented the triumph of the United States and the expulsion of these enemies as a victory of good over evil. He placed the Battle of Wyoming at the center of a narrative of the region’s history and anchored it to an overarching narrative of progress. Like Chapman before him, Peck presented Wyoming’s history as a linear progression and argued that the sacrifices of the past, especially from the battle in 1778, ultimately paved the way for a more promising future. Referring to the Wyoming Massacre Monument, Peck wrote, “while it points back to a stern, bloody period in our history, it should indicate the fact of progress, and prophesy a glorious future.”²³ Once again, Peck’s work accentuates how locals actively shaped ideas from wider American culture to give meaning to their own regional circumstances and history, combining a renewed concern for historical accuracy with an adherence to a particular narrative of progress.

While these authors repudiated the legend of the Wyoming Massacre and criticized the cycle of historical distortion that had spread it across the country, many of these same writers

²¹ Peck, *Wyoming*, 45-48.

²² Paxton, “Remembering and Forgetting,” 191-193.

²³ Peck, *Wyoming*, 387.

ironically contributed to a new form of distortion in their histories. Their writings fueled the rise of a new legend: the legend of Queen Esther and the Bloody Rock.

Before analyzing how local historians perpetuated Queen Esther's myth, it is necessary to first trace, as much as possible, the legend's origins. As one scholar attests, "the facts surrounding Esther's involvement in the events of the Battle of Wyoming are sketchy," and no firsthand accounts place her at the site.²⁴ Nonetheless, some contemporary references to Queen Esther and a murderous ritual after the battle do exist. The earliest mention of Esther after the battle emerges from Colonel Thomas Hartley's account of his late September 1778 punitive expedition into the New York and Pennsylvania backcountry. Angered by the purported massacre at Wyoming, Hartley set out to avenge Patriot losses, and he burned several Native American towns during his expedition, including "Queen Hester's [a corruption of Esther's] palace or town." Hartley, however, never mentioned Esther's involvement with Wyoming, which would be unusual if she had in fact committed atrocities at that battle. Indeed, one would expect Hartley to more fully emphasize the destruction of this Indian town to gain favor with his superiors, even if there were only unsubstantiated rumors about her.²⁵ No such rumors yet existed, however. In fact, the presses that readily disseminated Holt's sensational account during the Revolution never printed a word about Queen Esther, the Bloody Rock, or prisoners massacred in a ring.²⁶

While the legend of Queen Esther received no newspaper coverage at the time, a few contemporary journals from 1779 referenced rumors about Queen Esther and the killing of prisoners around the fatal ring at Wyoming. In a journal from Sullivan's expedition against the

²⁴ Laubach, "Queen Esther Montour of the Munsee Delaware," 50, 81-82.

²⁵ "May it please the CONGRESS," *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), October 17, 1778, 1.

²⁶ I have found no newspaper accounts that mention Queen Esther's story before 1823.

Iroquois in summer 1779, Reverend William Rogers wrote of visiting the Wyoming battlefield a little more than a year after the battle. He recalled visiting “a spot where fourteen wretched creatures [Patriot prisoners] ...were...made immediately to sit down in a ring” before a group of Native Americans “tomahawk[ed] the poor fellows one after another.” Amazingly, one prisoner escaped this heavily guarded execution and reported the occurrence to Colonel Zebulon Butler, who later “went to the spot and found the bones of the fourteen lying...in an exact circle.” Butler allegedly then related this information to Rogers. Rogers also reported rumors about Esther, though he did not explicitly connect her with the incidents at the ring. “It is said Queen Esther, of the Six Nations, who was with the enemy, scalped and tomahawked with her own hands in cool blood eight or ten persons,” he wrote.²⁷ Another veteran of Sullivan’s expedition, Sergeant Nathaniel Webb, provided another written mention of Esther’s purported role from before the nineteenth century. On August 30, 1779, Webb claimed to have found “the body of Queen Esther, who murdered many of the inhabitants of Wyoming last summer” while destroying nearby cornfields in an Indian village.²⁸ While far from conclusive, these journal accounts suggest that rumors about Esther existed among some men in Sullivan’s army and that some in the valley claimed to have witnessed Esther’s actions. Nonetheless, the veracity of these rumors remains questionable at best, since no firsthand written sources place Esther at Wyoming or mention the Bloody Rock in July 1778. In the end, the silence of most contemporary

²⁷ Rogers, *The Journal of a Brigade Chaplain in the Campaign of 1779 against the Six Nations under Command of Major-General John Sullivan*, 37, 52-53. This journal was published incompletely in 1797 but received full treatment in an 1823 newspaper.

²⁸ Frederick Cook, *Journals of the Military Expedition of Major General John Sullivan Against the Six Nations of Indians in 1779: With Records of Centennial Celebrations; Prepared Pursuant to Chapter 361, Laws of the State of New York, of 1885* (Auburn, NY: Knapp, Peck & Thomson Printers, 1887), 285-287. This journal was not published until the 1850s. According to scholar Amber Laubach, there are no reliable records to date when Esther died. See, Laubach, “Queen Esther Montour of the Munsee Delaware,” 56. Two other journals from Sullivan’s expedition briefly mention Esther. See Smith, “Queen Esther,” 398.

eyewitnesses and the Patriot press about these occurrences speak more loudly than the passing references mentioned in these journals.

After these 1779 mentions, the story of Esther and the fatal ring did not again enter the historical record until 1797 when a Philadelphia magazine printed excerpts from William Rogers's journal. Few evidently took notice. The next reference to Queen Esther appeared some twenty-six years later when a few Eastern newspapers again reproduced Roger's journal, helping this rumor reach a slightly wider audience.²⁹ Nevertheless, the story remained relatively unknown for much of the 1820s until locals from the Wyoming Valley gave it new life.

The real emergence of Queen Esther in histories occurred because of developments on the local level. In 1829, Israel Skinner, a resident of the Wyoming Valley, became one of the first historians to include the legend of Esther in his history. Dedicating a few pages to the battle, his verse account of the Revolutionary War provided a description of Esther and the fatal ring:

A squaw, the Indians did queen Esther call,
Was set apart to tomahawk them all...
Fourteen lay dead and scalped upon the ground,
With feet towards each other, circled round.

Skinner revealed that he learned about these events from aged residents of the valley, who claimed to have escaped and saved themselves "from savage vengeance" back on July 3, 1778. Specifically, Skinner cited the testimony of Joseph Elliot and Lebeus Hammon (or Hammond), two figures to whom later mid-century historians would commonly return in their own accounts and who had evidently told others in the community about their experience.³⁰ Skinner accepted

²⁹ "From the Philadelphia Gazette: Extract from a Journal of a brigade Chaplain, written in the campaign of 1779, under Ge. Sullivan," *Salem Gazette* (Massachusetts), October 17, 1823, 1. On previous printings of the Chaplain's journal, see Rogers, *Journal of a Brigade Chaplain*, 5-6. The publisher gives a few brief lines on previous printings, noting that the original manuscript remains lost.

³⁰ Israel Skinner, *A History of the Revolutionary War between Great Britain and the United States, in Verse*. (Binghamton, NY: Collier and Canoll, 1829), 153- 155. Hammond and Elliot's testimony reached at least a few locals, such as James May, who gave a speech at the site of the monument. See, "From the Wyoming Herald: Wyoming Massacre," *Hazard's Register of Pennsylvania* 10 (July-December 7, 1832): 39-42.

their testimony as truth and merely repeated the tale, inaugurating a pattern that many other locals would follow. As with “Brant’s imagined participation in the Battle of Wyoming,” according to one scholar, Queen Esther’s story grew as “word of mouth became fact, leaving little room for doubt in the minds of locals.”³¹

Esther’s legend expanded after 1829, often morphing with successive use and quickly jettisoning any evidential mooring. William Campbell’s 1831 history of Tyron County, New York, for example, added a new spin on the legend in a brief appendix. Mistaking Esther for her sister, Catherine Montour, and offering no sources for his commentary on her, Campbell provided a fantastical account of this woman, who “might well be termed a fury.” Instead of killing prisoners around a stone, Campbell’s Catherine supposedly slaughtered wounded Patriots across the battlefield, “barbarously murdering the wounded who in vain supplicated for their lives.”³² William Leete Stone’s 1838 biography of Brant presented a similar story of Catherine ranging the battlefield “like a chafed tigress, stimulating the warriors of her adopted race to the onslaught.” As with Campbell’s appendix, this mention of Catherine lacked any reference to the tale’s origin and failed to mention the Bloody Rock. Unlike Campbell, however, Stone recognized that “the story can hardly be credited,” and he labored to disprove it by describing Catherine as a woman of dignity and solid upbringing. Coupled with Stone’s effort to dislodge this view, the inconsistencies of Esther’s (or in this case Catherine’s) story and the absence of sources on her involvement within these two histories suggest that Esther had fully entered the

³¹ Chad Leslie Anderson, “The Storied Landscape of Iroquoia: History and Memory on the New York Frontier, 1750–1840” (Ph.D., University of California, Davis, 2012), 107.

³² Campbell, *Annals of Tyron County*, 64 [appendix].

realm of popular folklore and romance during the 1830s. By 1838, Stone described her as part of the “the unwritten history of this battle,” suggesting that her legend had grown considerably.³³

Over the next few years, however, new testimony seemingly emerged as locals began to record the remembrances of aged residents and veterans in the Wyoming Valley. In 1839, a local committee published and sent Congress summaries of twenty interviews they had conducted about Wyoming during the Revolution. Hoping to induce Congress to grant them land in the West, the committee sent interviews meant to highlight the suffering and patriotism of the valley’s older citizens. The committee’s strategy failed to sway Congress, but the interviews recorded valuable firsthand accounts from the period. Three interviews from veterans repeated stories about Queen Esther’s legend and the story of the Bloody Rock from Lebeus Hammond and Joseph Elliot that Israel Skinner had first referenced in 1829. All three related the escape of Patriot soldier Lebeus Hammond from the execution around the ring. Often citing Hammond as their chief source of information, these recollections indicate that the initial rumors about the fatal ring and Esther probably originated with Hammond sometime after the battle; his recollections likely preceded Joseph Elliot’s, which fewer sources mentioned.³⁴

From Hammond, the rumor likely spread to other veterans, who in turn introduced it into the historical record through their testimony more than sixty years after the event.³⁵ As more

³³ Stone, *Life of Joseph Brant*, I:339-340. Isaac Chapman’s 1830 history did not mention Queen Esther, perhaps because he wrote much of it before the 1820s. Still, it is possible that the local legend existed before the 1820s.

³⁴ My interpretation differs from Chad Anderson’s, which argues that Elliot primarily spread the myth. While Elliot certainly did spread it, I believe the more common mentions of Hammond suggest that he originated it. In several recollections, Hammond was the only one to escape, and only one of the three testimonies recorded in 1839 mentioned Joseph Elliot. Skinner does reference Elliot a few lines before Hammond, but that should not be taken as evidence that Elliot started the idea. See Anderson, “The Storied Landscape of Iroquoia,” 104-106.

³⁵ For interviews and committee’s records, see Hayden, *The Massacre of Wyoming*, 50-51, 61-63, 75. Of the three veterans interviewed, none claimed to have seen the event or Esther firsthand. In their late seventies by the time of their interviews, however, two veterans remembered finding “mangled bodies...placed in a circle” as they buried fallen Patriot soldiers several months after the battle. Only one, however, mentioned that “a squaw” butchered the prisoners.

mentioned this story, some veterans, such as Colonel Nathan Denison—second in command at the battle—and possibly also Joseph Elliot, even seemed to re-remember (or perhaps more accurately misremember) the events of July 3 and 4, 1778. Adding Queen Esther to his story, Denison “claimed that Esther led the Indians at Wyoming,” despite never mentioning her in his official report from late July 1778.³⁶ Giving credence to the idea that local rumor eventually morphed into fact, locals accepted much of this testimony for the truth. In spite of the 1839 committee’s admission “that, in answer to their inquiries of the aged people for information, as was inevitable from the great lapse of time, much that was learned from friends...was mixed up with what was personally known,” few questioned the validity of these veterans’ recollections.³⁷

Perhaps since the myth conformed to many residents’ understandings of the battle and the Revolution, they chose to accept it. The story’s emphasis on Patriot sacrifice and the horrors of Indian savagery would have certainly aligned with many people’s preconceptions, and the myth would not have seemed incongruous with other more fictionalized portrayals of the region’s past. A desire to honor and record the sacrifices of the Revolutionary generation may have also played a role in its widespread acceptance, especially for historians. More interested in transmitting the stories and values of the passing Revolutionaries than possibly confronting possible inaccuracies in their accounts, many historians failed to challenge the veracity of these recollections and thus helped the local rumors of Esther gain staying power in the local community as well as in the national imagination.³⁸

³⁶ Anderson, “The Storied Landscape of Iroquoia,” 107-108. Anderson also points out that Blacksnake, a native leader, rejected the tales related to Wyoming in an “equally plausible denial” of Denison’s and other’s testimony. For Denison’s original report, see Colonel Nathan Denison to Jonathan Trumbull, Governor of Connecticut, Lower Smithfield Township, Pennsylvania, July 28, 1778, in Winsor et. al., *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 3, no. 2 (October 1887): 342-344. Notably, he does not mention any Native American women.

³⁷ Hayden, *The Massacre of Wyoming*, 42.

³⁸ Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 190-195. Paxton, “Remembering and Forgetting, 183. Paxton writes that local historians sought not to rigorously test the sources but to “transmit for posterity the Revolutionary generation’s achievements” (183).

Armed with newly recorded testimony, local historians began producing a more consistent story about Queen Esther and the fatal ring starting in the 1840s. For instance, William Leete Stone, now writing a history on Wyoming in 1840, discarded the story of Esther's battlefield antics. In its place, he wrote of Hammond's escape, the fatal ring, and Esther around a stone—all aspects of an emerging common narrative, which drew from the interviews collected by the valley's 1839 committee. Provided to Stone by Charles Miner, a fellow historian and a member of the committee, these interviews began to reshape the historical record just a year after their publication. As historians accepted the rumors or simply placed them in their histories, they advanced the legend of Esther. To Stone's credit, even with this testimony, he never wavered in rejecting the story, a far cry from other historians of this period. He, nonetheless, still clung to the idea that Native Americans tortured Patriots around the bloody rock after the battle and that another Indian woman could have been responsible.³⁹ Though far from wholeheartedly endorsing the Esther myth, this interpretation gave credence to its general idea, namely that an Indian woman massacred several prisoners around a stone after the battle.

Charles Miner also included the story of Queen Esther when he finally published his own work on Wyoming's history in 1845. In his coverage of the battle, he presented the now standard narrative of Hammond's escape and Esther's executions, describing her as "a fury in the form of a woman, [who] assumed the office of executioner with death maul, or tomahawk." Unlike Stone, Miner believed in this story's validity and disputed Stone's evidence, again allowing his negative view of Native Americans to influence his interpretation. Playing a conspicuous role in the battle, according to Miner, Esther conducted herself "like a demon." Interestingly, his view of women and his reading of history also contributed to his rejection of Stone's argument.

³⁹ Stone, *The Poetry and History of Wyoming*, iv-viii, 207-208. The preface of the work dates from 1840.

“Remember the kindred atrocities perpetrated by women during the French Revolution,” Miner wrote in reference to Esther, “it required the purity of angels corrupted to make perfect devils.”⁴⁰ Presumably considering proper females as pure and above violence, he interpreted Esther’s corruption as a transgression of the normal gender order and further evidence of her demonic nature.

Along with these racial and gendered attitudes, Miner’s extensive use of oral testimony and interviews also furthered his acceptance of Queen Esther’s legend. Conducting dozens of private interviews, Miner provided a total of forty-five interview summaries in one of his appendixes, including one from Joseph Elliot—supposed survivor of the fatal ring. He relied on much of this testimony in shaping his interpretation and seems to have taken it largely at face value.⁴¹ As he cited Hammond and Elliot’s testimony based on his reading of the evidence, Miner further legitimized this local legend, and his extensively sourced account increased the likelihood that others in the future would take it for the truth. As a result, despite having decried falsehoods about Wyoming in his work, Miner unwittingly became just like the Revolutionary historians he so vehemently denounced as he forwarded this evocative but almost certainly fantastic tale.

Just like Charles Miner, George Peck accepted dubious historical evidence and allowed his biases to shape his 1858 history. Referring to Esther as “the priestess of the hellish orgies of ‘Bloody Rock,’” Peck repeated the popular account of her deeds as told by Hammond and Elliot. As he did for Brant, Peck again weighed the evidence for this claim about the Battle of

⁴⁰ Miner, *History of Wyoming*, 226-232.

⁴¹ Miner, *History of Wyoming*, iii-xiv. Miner was neither the first nor the last to make use of testimony from different survivors of the massacre; Chapman had relied on “the recollection of various individuals” a full fifteen years before (3), and Peck cited similar recollections in 1858. See, Chapman, *A Sketch of the History of Wyoming*, 3, and Peck, *Wyoming*, v-vii.

Wyoming, eventually arguing that Esther participated. Several factors influenced his decision. For one, he believed the testimony of Elliot and Hammond, whom he considered estimable community members. Moreover, Peck allowed his view of Native Americans to inform his portrayal. While acknowledging Stone's point that Esther "had amiable qualities, and a certain polish in her manners," Peck maintained that Esther could not escape the tendencies of her native ancestry. For "this 'half-breed' woman," according to Peck, "the sound of the battle and the sight of human gore aroused the demon within her," and "according to the most approved Indian forms," she took "sweet vengeance upon the prisoners which had fallen into her hands."⁴²

As with their commentary on Brant, Peck and Miner's take on Esther sheds light on the cultural atmosphere of the mid-nineteenth century, specifically as it relates to Native Americans and race. The story of Esther, representing how "Indians could be savages poisoned with rage" and resistant towards "inevitable white settlement," served as an image of the "bad Indian" for both these historians and many in the valley—and a woman who had abandoned feminine characteristics to boot.⁴³ This image easily helped whites justify their triumph over native people as a manifestation of progress over savagery. In addition, the appellation of "half-breed" attached to Esther fits within the increasingly racist thinking of the antebellum period. As many white Americans believed so-called "half-breeds" acquired the worse traits of both races, Esther's story attested to white arguments for racial separation.⁴⁴ For Peck, Esther's atrocities were no surprise

⁴² Peck, *Wyoming*, 48, 284-288. See also, Darlene Miller-Lanning, "Dark Legend and Sad Reality: Peck's Wyoming and Civil War," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 65, no. 4 (1998): 441. Miller-Lanning defends aspects of Peck's history and argues for a nuanced understanding of the work. In her view, Peck's vision of local history stressed that the country could re-unify and avoid civil war. She further contends that Peck knew the limits of his interpretation and should not be too harshly condemned for advancing racism (especially against Indians) and failing to scrutinize some of his sources. While one should recognize Peck's complexities as laid out by Miller-Lanning, his narrative did give some historical fabrications legitimacy and thus more power. Surely, historians can rightly criticize him for that.

⁴³ Anderson, "The Storied Landscape of Iroquoia," 128-131. For discussion of the "bad Indian," see Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 71-80, 119.

⁴⁴ Anderson, "The Storied Landscape of Iroquoia," 107.

considering her Indian ancestry, while her white ancestry allowed her to display some semblance of manners when necessary—a portrayal where the message is hard to miss.

These depictions of Esther again point to the interaction between local histories and national narratives. Influenced by but also informing national ideas, local stories, in the words of Paxton, “did not remain local. They rejoined and influenced national conversations about the related subjects of modernity, national unity, and Indian removal.”⁴⁵ In the hands of Peck and Miner, Esther’s story spoke to the need for progress and Indian removal in the valley and elsewhere. Using national ideas to shape their community’s understanding of the Revolution, these historians framed the story of Esther and the history of the Battle of Wyoming at large to meet local purposes. At the same time, read by people across the nation, these histories seemed to confirm national narratives about progress and the disappearance of Native Americans by showing them at work on this well-known local scene.⁴⁶

While regional historians crafted their narratives to fit local needs and replace baseless stories from the Revolutionary era, many of them ultimately gave life to their own unsubstantiated legend by writing about Queen Esther. Convinced by their own preconceived notions about Native Americans, the pervasive influence of local folklore, and collective misremembering by many in the valley community, historians fostered a new legend even as they discredited Holt’s exaggerations. Uncritical of their source material, historians at mid-century fell into practically the same trap as earlier Revolutionary historians. As in the early nineteenth century, the misconceptions furthered by history found their way into different media,

⁴⁵ Paxton, “Remembering and Forgetting,” 181.

⁴⁶ While local histories, these books informed much of the literature about Wyoming, and they truly interested national audiences. National publications, such as *Harper’s Weekly*, published reviews on Peck’s history, which seems to have received more national attention than Miner’s work. See, for example, “Wyoming: Its History, Stirring Incidents, and Romantic Adventures. By George Peck, D.D. With Illustrations; 12mo, Muslin; \$1.25,” *Harper’s Weekly: A Journal of Civilization*, May 22, 1858, 335. See also, Miller-Lanning, “Dark Legend and Sad Reality,” 408-409.

such as in literature and on the local commemorative scene. Born from local hearsay and boosted by historians, the myth of Queen Esther cast quite the shadow on the Battle of Wyoming's historical remembrance.

Regional Romance, Popular Literature, and Local Commemoration

While historians kickstarted Queen Esther's myth, her legend benefitted from other cultural forces at work, especially considering the timing of the myth's development starting in the late 1820s and fully blossoming by the 1840s. Several cultural currents contributed to Esther's rise. In a period marked by a rise in regional story-telling and mythmaking across the country, Wyoming remained a household name and featured in popular history, literature, and travel accounts. The Wyoming Valley particularly attracted those looking for this intersection of fantasy and romance, especially since many Americans highly regarded the region for its natural beauty, history, and the fictional accounts written about it. On the local scene, more residents expressed interest in the Battle of Wyoming's remembrance, eventually constructing a monument and holding commemorative events to honor the sacrifices of the region's Patriots. Highly popular, these events attracted residents and visitors alike. The valley's history with Native Americans additionally brought attention as writers turned to natives for compelling characters and to explore issues related to American identity and expansion during this time. Easily manipulated for romantic effect, in line with most Americans' view of their past, and capable of speaking to contemporary issues, the Battle of Wyoming was also uniquely well-suited for mythmaking in the antebellum period, and, as a result, many included it in regional folklore, local speeches, and popular fiction. Esther's myth grew in this fertile environment, benefiting from the coalescing of these trends on regional and national levels.

Queen Esther's myth began in local rumor and history but quickly expanded into the realm of popular culture. Akin to how early historians of the Revolution spread the first legend of the Wyoming Massacre, regional historians and locals' uncritical acceptance of Esther led other kinds of authors to fall prey to these oft-repeated narratives and further the cycle of historical distortion. A note at the end of the 1840 short story "Meantonimo," for instance, reveals how the embellishments of local rumor and regional history gained the veneer of credibility and spread through popular fiction. Reassuring his readers of the historical accuracy of the "hair breath escapes" described in his story about the Battle of Wyoming, this author asserted his credibility by claiming that he received all his information "from the lips of an actor in the scene who is still living."⁴⁷ While the testimony of an aged veteran ostensibly gave the story's depiction credibility, such testimony could err in significant ways as seen above in the case of Colonel Dennison's 1830s testimony or even in Solomon Avery's deposition just a few days after the battle. Nonetheless, this author readily accepted this testimony as true and then disseminated it to his readers. While not specifically about Esther, this example shows how many authors contributed to the spread of misinformation by uncritically reproducing local legend and hearsay.

While Esther's myth seems to have its origins in local rumor and regional history, literature and the wider cultural atmosphere played an outsized role in the acceptance of Queen Esther on a local and national level. In fact, the literary environment of the antebellum period, especially with its emphasis on regional storytelling and American themes, partially explains

⁴⁷ "Meantonimo: A Tale of Wyoming," *Easton Gazette* (Maryland), October 10, 1840, 1. A similar process also occurred with Esther's rumor as evidenced by one author who decided to write about Queen Esther after learning about it "from the lips of men and women whose parents had escaped with their lives at that terrible time." See, Ann S. Stephens, *Mary Derwent, A Tale of Wyoming and Mohawk Valleys in 1778*, (Wilkes-Barre: Fowler, Dick & Walker, 1908). The book was first published in 1858.

why Esther's legend flourished at this specific time. For instance, emerging during a period "ripe for regional romance," in the words of one scholar, Esther's myth took form around the same time that many American writers were crafting fictional or pseudo-historical accounts about regions across the United States—including Wyoming itself. Most famously, Washington Irving wrote several localized tales for New York, authoring "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." In both short stories, published around 1820, Irving presented a regional culture and infused its history with mythical elements. While Irving largely created fictional legends for these places, it seems possible that locals in the Wyoming Valley could have adapted rumors about Esther to enhance the romance of their own history.⁴⁸ This is not to say that locals necessarily endorsed falsehoods on purpose, but it does suggest a reason why residents may have been more eager to accept (or at least not challenge) the stories about her.

Starting in 1809, as discussed in Chapter 2, Scottish poet Thomas Campbell set a precedent for dramatic fabrication that encouraged other writers to embellish different aspects of Wyoming's history for literary effect. *Gertrude of Wyoming*, Campbell's popular poem, took several creative liberties, such as the creation of a "noble savage" character, and it provided a basic narrative framework that many emulated.⁴⁹ Over the course of the antebellum period, many American authors drew inspiration from Campbell's poem and Wyoming's history, and, as a result, the valley became a popular setting for poems, novels, and short stories. As one literary reviewer remarked in 1830, "as a subject to writers in every department of composition—the massacre of Wyoming; and that of the cruel Brandt; and remorseless Butler...are conspicuous characters," worthy of fiction and romance.⁵⁰ Another reviewer agreed, "the tale of

⁴⁸ Smith, "Queen Esther," 400.

⁴⁹ See, Campbell, *Gertrude of Wyoming*. In a way, Campbell's poem contributed to the entrenchment of both legends of the Wyoming Massacre. See also, Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 79-80.

⁵⁰ "The Betrothed of Wyoming," *Saturday Evening Post* 9, no. 483, October 30, 1830, 2.

Wyoming...is well-adapted to call forth poetical effects.”⁵¹ By 1840, several authors, such as Joseph McCoy and James McHenry, had created romantic poems or novels about Wyoming, infusing romantic and melodramatic bits of fiction into the region’s history.⁵² This outflowing of literature—from both locals and non-locals alike—only increased with the discovery of Frances Slocum, a local woman who had been taken captive by Native American during the Revolutionary War and who became known as the “Lost Sister.” Like the Battle of Wyoming, Frances’ rediscovery inspired writers to produce emotional works of historical fiction centering around the valley’s past.⁵³ As these examples attest, antebellum Americans clearly saw Wyoming’s history as especially fruitful for fiction and romance. In fact, perhaps too many American authors saw it that way. In 1858, an American literary periodical complained that “two or three weeks only have passed, since we [last] had to deal with the Valley of Wyoming.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ “For the Register of Pennsylvania,” *Hazard’s Register of Pennsylvania* 6 (July 1830- January 1831): 202.

⁵² See, Joseph McCoy, *The Frontier Maid, or, A Tale of Wyoming: A Poem, in Five Cantos* (Wilkesbarre: Steuben Butler & Samuel Maffet, 1819), and James McHenry, *The Betrothed of Wyoming: An Historical Tale* (Philadelphia: Principal Booksellers, 1830). For a short story example, see “Meantonimo: A Tale of Wyoming,” *Easton Gazette* (Maryland), October 10, 1840, 1.

⁵³ “Valley of Wyoming—The Lost Sister,” *Ladies’ Garland: Devoted to Literature, Amusement, & Instruction*, December 1, 1839, 150-152. Native American raiders took Frances from her family in the Wyoming Valley in 1778, and she was never recovered, despite the desperate searches of her mother and other family members. Frances grew up with the Delaware tribe before becoming part of the Miami. In 1837, family members finally reconnected with Frances, now an elderly woman who spoke no English. With the help of an identifying childhood scar on her finger, the family confirmed Frances’s identity. The family reconnection produced an outpouring of writing immediately after the event. Frances’s story appeared in histories of the region as well as contemporary newspapers and magazines. See, for example, “A Surviving Captive of the Massacre of Wyoming,” *Boston Weekly Magazine*, November 9, 1839, 78, and Miner, *History of Wyoming*, 247-251. Referring to Slocum’s discovery, Miner remarked that “the sensation produced by this...throughout Wyoming can scarcely be imagined” (251).

⁵⁴ “New Books,” *The Albion: A Journal of News, Politics, and Literature* 36, no. 27 (July 3, 1858): 321. The article continued, “here is much of the same ground to be gone over again.” This sentiment was far from new. Twenty-eight years earlier, another reviewer had similarly argued that an overabundance of authors turned to Wyoming’s past in their fiction. According to the reviewer, “the subject...and the location [of Wyoming] have so frequently been dwelt upon.” These comments further illustrate how Wyoming’s history was commonly featured in the romantic literature of the antebellum period. See “The Betrothed of Wyoming,” *The Philadelphia Album and Ladies’ Literary Portfolio* 4, no. 44 (October 1830): 349.

Accustomed to seeing the region through a semi-fictionalized lens, many Americans viewed Esther's myth as just another instance of romance in this storied vale. One 1850 article vividly illustrates this idea. According to the author,

The imaginary Wyoming differs little from that which has a geographical position on the banks of [the] Susquehanna. When the cursory narrator of strange events has erred, he has seldom erred by exaggeration. When the poet has indulged in fiction, his fiction has been strangely like the truth. They, indeed must have a tolerably correct, however imperfect an idea, of Wyoming and its history, who have read the romantic story of the Lost Sister, the Legends of Queen Esther, and the Bloody Rock, and the sweet lay of the Caledonian bard [Campbell].⁵⁵

Arguing that one could glean the proper history of Wyoming from popular fiction and local fable, this author shows how the numerous stories based on Wyoming's Revolutionary history prepared the average American to uncritically accept exaggerated narratives. In this atmosphere, misinformation could clearly flourish, likely first effecting local and then national audiences.

Regardless of their role in beginning the legend, locals spread and benefitted from it. As Warren Smith has argued, "local writers can hardly be blamed for making the most of Queen Esther. The annals of American villages are usually dull enough, and a picturesque villain is a godsend." Esther's story surely added a new element of interest to the area's history. As "the priestess of mid-night massacre," Queen Esther essentially became the region's equivalent to Sleepy Hollow's Headless Horseman, helping residents make their history more exciting and attract more visitors.⁵⁶

Romantic literature and local boosterism about the region's history continued unabated after the development of this myth, both easily incorporating Esther's story with the mythos surrounding the valley. "Romance, or reality, or both, has made Wyoming the spot where Catharine Montour or Queen Esther played the Hecate of the night," wrote one 1841 traveler,

⁵⁵ "Wyoming," *The Yale Literary Magazine* 15, no. 7 (June 1850): 255.

⁵⁶ Smith, "Queen Esther," 400.

giving voice to the how easily Esther fit into preconceived notions of the valley's regularly



Figure 1: Esther's Rock in the Mid-Nineteenth Century. From George Peck, *Wyoming: Its History, Stirring Incidents, and Romantic Adventures* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1858), 284.

fictionalized history. Taking locals and regional historians at face value, such articles disseminated Esther's legend across the nation and allured tourists to come visit the region by accentuating these fantastic tales. In fact, as the century wore on the "Bloody Rock" became quite the tourist attraction. As promotional material from the 1878 centennial celebration of the battle declared, "all who are interested in the history of the valley have a desire to view the scene of savage slaughter" at the Bloody

Rock.⁵⁷ The rock also became the focal point of local superstition. According to some, the blood of Esther's victims gave the rock its reddish hue.⁵⁸

Again, this was part of a larger trend occurring in Wyoming—tourists came not just for Esther but because of the other history and legends associated with Wyoming as well. This becomes apparent from the variety of travel articles published about the region, which praised Wyoming and described it as a beautiful and historic place to visit. As one author wrote, "The bards of the Revolution embalmed it in song, and Campbell's *Gertrude* made it classic ground. The fame of it has 'gone out into all the world,' and no American tourist can be regarded as

⁵⁷ "Queen Esther's Rock Decorated: Historic Site of Executions of Battle of Wyoming Survivors Attracts Many," *The Wilkes-Barre Record*, June 29, 1928, 23, from the collection of the Luzerne County Historical Society. This 1928 article reprinted material first "printed during the centennial celebration of the Battle of Wyoming" in 1878.

⁵⁸ For quote see, Erastus Brooks, "Wyoming Valley: The Susquehannah—Incidents of Travel—The Lost Traveller—The Captive Maid," *Southern Literary Messenger* 7, no. 7-8 (July/August 1841): 553. For rumors on the rock's color, see "Travels in the Dog Days," *New York Spectator* (New York City), November 11, 1839, 4.

having completed his task until he shall have visited Wyoming.”⁵⁹ Making sure to mention the exciting historical events of the region, which almost always included the Battle of Wyoming, the Lost Sister, and now Queen Esther, travel accounts illustrate how Americans readily bought into this local myth and historical fantasy. They also point to the important role literature and travel accounts played in spreading regional myths to a national audience.⁶⁰ One must not forget, however, that local promotion and the anecdotes which filled travel narratives originated from the region and ultimately served local purposes. To fully understand the legend of Queen Esther then, a more detailed look at the regional remembrance of the Battle of Wyoming is warranted.

Developments on the local commemorative scene contributed to this legend’s rise by similarly predisposing locals to accept Esther’s story before diffusing it far beyond the region. For one, valley residents increasing interest in the battle’s remembrance in the 1830s and 1840s partially explains their endorsement of the legend, since this interest almost directly coincided with the growth of the myth. A community drive to construct a monument to the battle’s fallen best indicates this amplified interest in the battle. While some locals had called for a monument in the first decade of the 1800s, momentum for commemorating the battle on the landscape grew considerably in the 1830s after a long period of neglect.⁶¹ In 1832, locals rediscovered the

⁵⁹ Z. Paddock, “Wyoming,” *Methodist Quarterly Review*, October 1858, 587, quoted in Miller-Lanning, “Dark Legend and Sad Reality,” 409.

⁶⁰ For another example of a travel narrative along with Brooks’ narrative and the *New York Spectator*, see “Wyoming,” *The Yale Literary Magazine* 15, no. 7 (June 1850): 255. See also, “The Wyoming Valley: Its Landmarks and Traditions,” *The Knickerbocker Monthly: A National Magazine* 61, no. 2 (Feb 1863): 118.

⁶¹ “From the Luzerne Federalist: The Wyoming Massacre,” *Portland Gazette* (Maine), November 20, 1809, 2. Charles Miner led the way in this endeavor. In 1809, he recalled the battle in a highly charged editorial that emphasized the slaughter of gallant Patriots at the hands of John Butler, Brant, and his “savage myrmidons.” Lamenting that “no testimonial of respect has been paid to the memory of the slain,” Miner expressed his interest in raising a monument to remember the sacrifices of the Revolutionary generation who gave their life at the battle. Three years later, Miner returned to similar themes in a July 4 oration. As he attempted to galvanize more support for his idea, he accentuated the heroism and patriotism of Wyoming’s Revolutionary veterans. Despite their service, Miner bemoaned, “their bones were gathered and *shame to ourselves, not a single stone is raised to mark the place of their deposit.*” See, “Address, delivered on the 4th of July: By C. Miner,” *Gleaner* (Wilkes-Barre, PA), July 17,

common grave of many Patriot soldiers, and in 1833 they laid a cornerstone for a monument in their honor.⁶² The project stalled for close to ten years, but the all-female Luzerne Monumental Association eventually came to the rescue. Raising funds through dinners, fairs, and other forms of fundraising, they succeeded where earlier backers had failed. By October of 1843, contractors put the finishing touches on the 62-and-a-half-foot tall marble obelisk, completing the Wyoming Monument.⁶³ Overlapping with the desire for regional stories, this uptick in community involvement with the battle's remembrance likely made residents more enthusiastic for stories about the event, especially the exciting recollections of Hammond and Elliot. Local interest could only benefit Queen Esther's legend.

The commemorative events associated with the monument contributed to the diffusion of Esther's myth to the community and then the nation. Commemorative events at the monument attracted large crowds, bringing the community together and even receiving national attention. The 1833 grave uncovering and cornerstone laying, for example, brought two to three thousand

1812, 1. According to Miner, residents would periodically hold meetings and adopt resolutions "favorable to the object" of building a monument in the first decades of the 1800s, but "the people, poor, and indebted for their land, were not able to meet the expense." Miner, *History of Wyoming*, 71-72 [appendix].

⁶² By 1832, an additional problem arose in the effort to build a monument. As George Peck related, "Strange as it may seem, the grave of the patriots who fell...was for years wholly lost." Since farmers had consistently cultivated the area, they no longer knew where the grave lay. In 1832, two Democratic clubs sponsored a competition to ascertain the location of the bones, and on May 22 of that year Philip Jackson discovered the grave, which held eighty-three skeletons. Galvanized by the discovery of these bones, Wyoming residents met at the site of the grave the next spring and proceeded to fully uncover the Patriot remains, periodically passing around skulls that showed visible signs of scalping or bones which had bullets lodged in them. During this macabre community event, locals rededicated themselves to constructing a monument and raised 1200 dollars to that effect. See, Peck, *Wyoming*, 377; "Wyoming Massacre," *Niles' Weekly Register*, July 6, 1833, 312; William Lewis, "The Changing Story and Historical Importance of the Battle of Wyoming" (unpublished manuscript, 2020), provided and cited with permission of the author; Payne Pettebone, *Account of Monument Association and Memoranda of Various Proceedings*, manuscript, July 3, 1879, from the collection of the Luzerne County Historical Society.

⁶³ Later in the 1830s, a local monument committee, desperate for funding, even unsuccessfully appealed to the Connecticut legislature to support the monument. On the monument association, see Johnson, *Wyoming: A Record of the One Hundredth Year Commemorative Observance of the Battle and Massacre, July 3, 1778-July 3, 1878*, 330-342. See also, Pettebone, *Account of Monument Association*; Peck, *Wyoming*, 380-384; Miner, *History of Wyoming*, 72 [appendix].

to the grounds and featured in the *Niles Weekly Register*, an early national magazine.⁶⁴

Especially upon the completion of the monument, commemorative events brought in attendees from the surrounding area and beyond. The most noteworthy celebration occurred with the centennial in 1878 when several prominent Wilkes-Barre citizens planned a massive two-day event that featured processions, pageants, restored forts, artifact displays, fireworks, and even a presidential appearance by Rutherford B. Hayes. As one of the largest events in the valley's history up to that point, it attracted over 60,000 people according to some estimates, and it featured in newspaper articles from Washington to Philadelphia to Chicago to New Orleans.⁶⁵

These types of commemorative events, along with histories, fiction, and local folklore, helped solidify Esther's myth into the public mind. At an 1832 event, for instance, one of the speakers mentioned Queen Esther—perhaps for the first time at a public event. Heard by the thousands of locals in attendance and reprinted for newspapers, his speech and subsequently his discussion of Esther reached valley residents and national citizens alike.⁶⁶ This process of diffusion most conspicuously occurred during the 1878 event where Esther's myth featured prevalently. In fact, the first day processional ended at the Bloody Rock, and the keynote speaker used “the account of the horrible orgies at what has since been known as Queen Esther's Bloody Rock...[to] close out” his description of the battle.⁶⁷ Promotional material further capitalized on

⁶⁴ “Wyoming Massacre,” *Niles' Weekly Register*, July 6, 1833, 312, and “The Wyoming Massacre Monument,” *Hazard's Register of Pennsylvania* 12 (July-December 1833): 33-36.

⁶⁵ “Massacred Martyrs: Dark Deeds of the British and Savages of Wyoming,” *Washington Post*, July 4, 1878, 1. “The Massacre Memorial: Centenary of the Wyoming Butchery—Programme of the Celebration, and Sketch of the Tragedy,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 3, 1878, 6. “Wyoming, Second Day's Proceeding Commemorating the Battle and Massacre,” *Daily Inter Ocean* (Chicago), July 5, 1878, 3. “The Fourth,” *New Orleans Times*, July 5, 1878, 1.

⁶⁶ “Wyoming Massacre,” *Niles' Weekly Register*, July 6, 1833, 312, and “From the Wyoming Herald: Wyoming Massacre,” *Hazard's Register of Pennsylvania* 10 (July-December 7, 1832): 39-42. This speech was given by James May to a large group gathered to pay respect to the memory of the fallen at the Battle of Wyoming.

⁶⁷ Steuben Jenkins, *Historical Address at the Wyoming Monument, 3d of July, 1878, on the 100th Anniversary of the Battle and Massacre of Wyoming*, (Wilkes-Barre: Robert Baur, 1878), 50. Steuben Jenkins, a leading citizen in Wilkes-Barre, was one of the chief planners for the hundredth anniversary celebration.

the public's interest and often directed visitors to the Bloody Rock.⁶⁸ Assisting the spread of Queen Esther's myth to locals and visitors in attendance, these commemorative events ensured the legend's diffusion to a wider audience.

These events did not simply utilize the interesting history and romance of Esther's myth or the Battle of Wyoming to attract visitors, however. Instead, as with regional history, certain memories of the battle—and eventually Queen Esther—allowed locals to make sense of their present and connect it with national narratives. Serving as the focal point for commemorating the battle, the monument and the events centered around it illustrate how the local community looked to the battle to define their identity as valley residents and Americans. Many supporters of the Wyoming Monument, for example, envisioned it as a sacred space for the expression of what Edward Linenthal calls “patriotic orthodoxy.” “Designed to ensure continued allegiance” to the values of a “heroic past,” patriotic orthodoxy, according to Linenthal, warns against “falling away from the ideals of cultural heroes who died in battle.” Throughout many wars, Americans have employed battlefield monuments to convey this idea and influence the values of the present.⁶⁹ Several Wyoming residents seem to have understood that with both their permanence and prominence on the landscape battlefield monuments can uniquely shape historical remembrance and perpetuate a version of patriotic orthodoxy.

Beginning with Charles Miner, many residents looked to the Wyoming Monument to properly enshrine the region's past and pass down the Revolutionary generation's values to succeeding generations. With an eye toward the future, Miner argued in 1809 that the monument would please not just “our old men” but instill pride in the past for “our young men” who “shall

⁶⁸ D. Davidsburg, *Pittston Gazette Centennial Hand-Book, 1778-1878: One Hundredth Anniversary of the Battle and Massacre of Wyoming, July 3 and 4, 1878* (Pittston, PA: Gazette Print, 1878), 33-34.

⁶⁹ Edward Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields*, 2nd edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 1-5.

gather round the tomb—reflect on the virtues of their fathers...[and] as at the altar—shall swear a new devotion to liberty, and new fealty to their country.”⁷⁰ Chester Butler, grandson of Zebulon Butler, echoed Miner’s sentiment at the monument in 1833. He declared, “this [the monument] shall be the shrine to which children yet unborn will be led, while they learn from maternal lips the first lesson of patriotism.”⁷¹ Supporters of the monument clearly grasped that a proper memorial to the Wyoming dead could provide inspiration to shape the region’s future and ensure that no one would forget the ideals of the Revolution.



Figure 2: Photograph of the Wyoming Monument. Created by C.F. Cook, from Wesley Johnson, *Wyoming: A Record of the One Hundredth Year Commemorative Observance of the Battle and Massacre, July 3, 1778-July 3, 1878* (Wilkes-Barre, Pa.: Beardslee & Co., Printers, 1882), frontispiece.

⁷⁰ “From the Luzerne Federalist: The Wyoming Massacre,” *Portland Gazette* (Maine), November 20, 1809, 2.

⁷¹ “The Wyoming Massacre Monument,” *Hazard’s Register of Pennsylvania* 12 (July-December 1833): 33-36.

Connecting local events with national mythology about the Revolution, locals understood that the monument could help maintain patriotic orthodoxy in a uniquely material way. This connection becomes most apparent through the monument's full inscription:

Near this spot was fought
 On the afternoon of Friday, the third day of July 1778,
 THE BATTLE OF WYOMING
 In which a small band of patriotic Americans
 Chiefly the undisciplined, the youthful, and the aged,
 Spared, by inefficiency, from the distant ranks of the republic,
 Led by Col. Zebulon Butler, and Col. Nathan Denison,
 With a courage that deserved success,
 Fearlessly met and bravely fought,
 A combined British, Tory, and Indian force
 Of thrice their number.
 Numerical superiority alone gave success to the invader,
 And wide-spread havoc, desolation and ruin
 Marked his savage and bloody footsteps through the valley.

THIS MONUMENT
 Commemorative of these events,
 And in memory of the actors in them,
 Has been erected
 OVER THE BONES OF THE SLAIN
 By their descendants and others who gratefully appreciated
 The services and sacrifices of their patriot ancestors.

Giving a succinct history lesson that stressed Patriot virtue and bravery, highlighted the “savage” ways of the enemy, and demonstrated the gratitude of modern residents, this epitaph quite literally set in stone this patriotic interpretation of the battle. A visual testament to Revolutionary sacrifice and bravery, this monument to Wyoming’s memory would remind succeeding generations of the costs of liberty and independence both in the past and in the present. As one speaker declared at the 1878 celebration, “never did lofty column rest upon the bones of braver or more patriotic men whose names are carved upon its tablets. It is the monument of *our* Bunker Hill... The hundred thousand people who today are residents of the Wyoming Valley claim this monument, and the glories which cluster around it, as their common property, and their joint

inheritance.”⁷² Showcasing local contributions to the Revolution, this monument allowed locals to look to their regional (and national) past with pride.

Along with connecting regional history with the nation’s Revolutionary mythology, locals used the commemorative space provided by the monument to reaffirm the community’s values and connect their history with other national narratives. For example, in an 1833 speech, Chester Butler used the Battle of Wyoming to articulate a vision of American identity and defend his ancestor’s actions. Extolling the region’s sturdy pioneer ancestors for escaping the “vices or...follies of the old world” and representing the virtues of the New World, he presented the settlers of the Wyoming Valley as the best of American civilization—conveniently forgetting the violent clashes between Pennamite and Yankee settlers that had plagued the valley for decades. With this positive depiction cemented in his mind, Chester could easily justify white conquest of the valley. “Unlike many who first invaded the secluded retreats of the natives of the forest,” Chester remarked, “it was by honorable purchase, and not by force or fraud that our ancestors sought to possess themselves of the country. Unwilling to endure oppression themselves, they could not practice it against others.” While largely inaccurate, Chester’s reasoning provided a comforting narrative that minimized white complicity in one of the community’s darker moments.⁷³ Just one example of how locals could take meaning from the battle and apply it to present realities, Chester Butler’s speech reveals how commemoration, much like regional history, used the memory of the Battle of Wyoming for local purposes—and how those purposes were often undergirded via connections to larger national ideas.

⁷² Johnson, *Wyoming: A Record of the One Hundredth Year Commemorative Observance of the Battle and Massacre, July 3, 1778-July 3, 1878*, 117-118. This quote comes from Colonel Wright’s speech at the 1878 centennial.

⁷³ “The Wyoming Massacre Monument,” *Hazard’s Register of Pennsylvania* 12 (July-December 1833): 33-36. Drawing a direct line between the sacrifice of the Patriots of 1778 and the “happy husbandry and avocations of civilized industry” that now marked the valley, Chester also praised the current civilized state of the valley.

Queen Esther's myth helped locals further cultivate a regional identity from the Battle of Wyoming. Adding the Bloody Rock and Esther's executions to the typical narrative of the battle, residents could use her to accentuate different aspects of the story depending on what message they hoped to get across. For example, one orator in 1878 used Queen Esther to highlight the "barbaric deeds" of Loyalists and Native Americans and to show how Patriots suffered. Presenting the modern day as an achievement made possible by the sacrifices of these suffering Patriots, the orator also utilized Esther to present a contrast between the past and present that ultimately supported his vision of progress.⁷⁴ The legend additionally reinforced the common portrayal of the battle—practically identical to the one inscribed on the monument—that brave Patriot soldiers fought against a wicked enemy. Merely confirming what locals already claimed to know, the addition of Queen Esther proved that the Loyalist and Native American forces who attacked their region in 1778 were savage, merciless invaders. Such depictions of the enemy ultimately allowed locals to paint their ancestors as both victims and heroes. The Patriots of 1778, in their eyes, valiantly suffered the full wrath of savage raiders, capable of all the horrors of the Bloody Rock, and died so "that we might be free," prosperous, and in control of the valley.⁷⁵ In this sense, local commemorative events so frequently employed Queen Esther's legend because it aligned so well with the regional and national narratives of progress, Indian removal, and patriotism to which they already subscribed. Able to speak to local concerns, Esther's myth proved equally applicable to national ones.

⁷⁴ Johnson, *Wyoming: A Record of the One Hundredth Year Commemorative Observance of the Battle and Massacre, July 3, 1778-July 3, 1878*, 210. This quote comes from Reverend W.M.P. Abbott's speech on July 3, 1878.

⁷⁵ Jenkins, *Historical Address at the Wyoming Monument*, 76. This line originated in the poem "Battle of Wyoming" by Steuben Jenkins.

Nineteenth-century Americans' penchant for stories about native people also fed into the outpouring of popular stories about Wyoming and the eventual emergence of Esther on the national scene. In the first half of the century, the reading public eagerly consumed numerous stories related to Native Americans, such as James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*. For Romantic fiction and regional folklore alike, Native Americans were indeed the perfect characters. Lurking in the wild and dark forests of the frontier, the strange and violent customs of Indians added to the evocative power of these stories, and natives' perceived "vanishing" at the end of many of these tales enhanced the emotional effects that authors wished to elicit.⁷⁶ Possessing a dark history with natives and a picturesque and wild environment, Wyoming thus offered Romantic authors and local boosters with a readymade formula for compelling fiction and interesting anecdotes. Queen Esther merely enhanced Wyoming's allure to authors, and it provided local promoters with another shocking Indian character capable of appealing to the public's voracious appetite for stories featuring Native Americans.

The fantastical and romantic elements of native characters, however, do not totally explain the obsession that antebellum Americans displayed for literature featuring Native Americans, Wyoming, and later Esther. Rather, like locals who used the Battle of Wyoming to craft a regional identity, more literary minded authors hoped to use natives to forge a distinct national literary style. As part of this, many writers turned to native people to highlight what they saw as uniquely American themes, commonly presenting Indians "as metaphors in the struggle between savagery and civilization." Through this literary exploration, according to Robert Berkhofer, authors grappled with one of the chief paradoxes of nineteenth century American identity: the struggle to find a balance between European civilization and the regenerative yet

⁷⁶ Berkhofer, *White Man's Indian*, 87-89.

potentially savage nature of the American wilderness.⁷⁷ These authors also wrestled with conflicting ideas about American Indians as they sought to explain and defend the triumph of white civilization in their present. In the view of scholar Roy Harvey Pearce, Americans eventually justified their conquest of native people by altering or contesting the idea of the “noble savage,” a stock literary character that stood outside of and uncorrupted by the vices of civilization. American literary works slowly transformed this idea “replacing it with the conception of a savage in whom nobility was one with ignobility” or by simply discarding the idea of Indian nobility all together. Still others made the noble savage “a prehistorical culture hero” in order “to save history, or at least modern history, for his own civilization.” Presenting Native American history as equivalent to North America’s childhood, authors sentimentalized the Indian of the past while also arguing that their disappearance ultimately benefitted the whole, since it brought on the United States’ adulthood—understood as white civilization.⁷⁸

As a familiar and dramatic frontier battle with conspicuous (if not actually present) Indian villains, the Battle of Wyoming provided authors with the elements to craft a narrative that could articulate a new national style and grapple with these issues. For example, one literary critic lauded Jacob McCoy’s 1819 epic poem, *The Frontier Maid, or, A Tale of Wyoming*, for contributing to the nation’s incipient literary scene. The 1820 reviewer wrote, “at a time when the citizens of the United States are actively endeavoring to absolve themselves from a dependence on foreign artists..., it is truly gratifying to behold the *literati* of the country joining in the march, and conducting the rising muses, clad in ‘American Scenes and incidents,’ to the

⁷⁷ Berkhofer, *White Man’s Indian*, 86-87, 91-96. See also, Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 73-90. According to Deloria, some white authors hoped to tap into Native Americans as muses for American identity.

⁷⁸ Roy Harvey Pearce, “The Virtues of Nature: The Image in Drama and Poetry,” in *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988): 169-195, quoted in *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*, ed. Michael L. LaBlanc, vol. 79 (Detroit, MI: Gale, 2002), *Gale Literature Resource Center* (accessed February 12, 2021).

grateful land of independence.”⁷⁹ Self-conscious in his use of American history, McCoy, like other American authors, turned to the Battle of Wyoming to show that the new nation’s history could provide proper material for high literary forms. A local poet from the Wyoming Valley, McCoy also used the poem to speak to both the region’s and nation’s Revolutionary experience. His poem revealingly, according to Pearce, “center[ed] on the attack of British-maddened Indians on idyllic frontier farmers.” Playing up the contrast between the peaceful white settlers and savage Indians, the poem spoke to the related themes of progress, civilization, and savagery, ultimately helping to justify the displacement of Native Americans in favor of supposedly peaceable whites.⁸⁰ In coming decades, other literature about the Battle of Wyoming also helped Americans reaffirm the nation’s independence and its expansion.⁸¹ Both aesthetically and thematically, the battle represented an authentically American story that some believed could help explore the nation’s character and defend its conduct.

Like other elements of the Battle of the Wyoming, Esther’s story met the needs of American authors during this period. Used to exploring larger themes through Wyoming’s history, many authors subsumed Queen Esther into the wider mythos surrounding the battle and started including her in their fiction, spreading the legend even further. In an 1854 short story,

⁷⁹ “For the Record: Remarks on the ‘Frontier Maid,’” *Village Record* (West Chester, PA), February 23, 1820, 4.

⁸⁰ Pearce, “The Virtues of Nature.”

⁸¹ For example, “Meantonimo,” a short story written in 1840, focused more on native actors but still justified American conduct and eventual victory over the Indians. For one, the story accentuated native cruelty by portraying Brant as a malicious monster who even kills a woman of his own race—albeit unintentionally. This depiction of a “bad Indian” implied that Indians were more viscous and less deserving of the land than the white narrator, a Patriot veteran of the battle. The fate of the “good Indian” in the story, a beautiful woman named Meantonimo who shared a romantic bond with the narrator, furthers this message. Sacrificing herself to Brant’s knife to protect the narrator, the “noble hearted Meantonimo” gave her life because this white soldier had shown her kindness. Her death not only provides the story’s dramatic climax, but it helps exonerate the Patriot soldier and by extension his cause for the eventual conquest and removal of natives. The reasoning goes that if Meantonimo willingly gave her life for this man, he and his nation must have been worthy of her sacrifice. Moreover, the narrator’s kindness to Meantonimo effectively hides his complicity in her people’s eventual demise and suggests that he was not personally responsible. Like the “vanishing” Indian trope, Meantonimo’s death endorsed the triumph of white civilization while mourning the loss of some natives. See, “Meantonimo: A Tale of Wyoming,” *Easton Gazette* (Maryland), October 10, 1840, 1.

for instance, the executions of Esther provided the author with a thrilling scene and an evil villain—a “weird and horrible-looking squaw.” The suspenseful scene, replete with descriptions of Esther as “the female monster” or “the crimson queen,” ultimately ended when the protagonist escaped by killing Esther and evading “the savage actors” who had assisted in her bloody work. An 1858 novel, *Mary Derwent*, similarly included scenes of Esther as a savage Indian intent on brutally killing whites, taking no prisoners, and urging her followers to commit atrocities.⁸² While these authors likely included Esther for dramatic reasons, their depictions, nonetheless, give voice to certain cultural attitudes and narratives prevalent at the time. Indeed, both these stories did the same cultural work as the *Frontier Maid* and regional histories in that they touched on themes of savagery, progress, and settlement. Most noticeably, these works dehumanized Esther and other Native Americans as savage, bloodthirsty monsters, which made it easier to justify their expulsion and defend past actions against them. By defending retribution in the past, these authors justified the present reality of white settler control while also legitimizing violence against natives in the present. The legend of Queen Esther, just like other accounts of Wyoming’s history, helped justify backcountry violence and reinforce the legitimacy of the United States’ claims to native land.

These stories shaped ideas about American identity as well. This becomes most apparent when comparing the depictions of whites and most Native American characters in such stories. Overwhelmingly, whites appear much more favorably, and they are practically always the protagonists. *Mary Derwent’s* title character serves as a prime example. Described as a “lovely and unselfish character” by one reviewer, Derwent purposefully stands out from the bloodthirsty

⁸² J.H Robinson, “The Royal Greens:--Or, The—Scout of the Susquehanna: A Tale of Wyoming,” *Flag of Our Union* 9 (June 3, 1854): 22. Stephens, *Mary Derwent*, 209-215, 385.

Esther.⁸³ Such depictions of virtuous white characters seem to suggest that white settlers had successfully struck a balance between the good qualities of European and American life. Unsullied by the extreme vices of civilization or the savagery of natives, these characters represented an American ideal. Native American villains, such as Queen Esther, served to highlight this ideal through noticeable contrast, vividly displaying the one extreme of unrestrained savagery in the process. Clearly, Esther's story attracted authors not just for its romance but for its ability to speak to American themes and identity.

As the antebellum period progressed and eventually gave way to the Gilded Age, the eccentric Queen Esther easily took place alongside more established villains of Wyoming's history and legend, and her fantastically bloody execution scene attracted attention across the nation. Originating from within the region, Esther's legend became accepted on the local level in part because of Wyoming's long history of fabrication and fantasy, the antebellum push for literature about American locales, and the local commemorative furor of the mid-nineteenth century. The legend then spread through media that accepted local's testimony or took regional historians at their word. Fiction and tourist promotion alike capitalized on Esther's story, adding her to attract readers or visitors and occasionally using her to connect to national arguments about Native Americans or American identity. Just like regional historians, those that utilized the Battle of Wyoming and Queen Esther in their fiction, their travel narratives, or their celebrations show how antebellum culture influenced the memory of the Battle of Wyoming and the telling of Queen Esther's story.

Conclusion

⁸³ "New Books," *The Albion: A Journal of News, Politics, and Literature* 36, no. 27 (July 3, 1858): 321.

From its humble origins in Revolutionary rumor and the testimony of two aged veterans, Queen Esther's legend grew tremendously over the course of the antebellum period. By the late 1850s and especially by 1878, Esther's myth had become an integral part of the Battle of Wyoming's public memory, even more so than the original legend of the Wyoming Massacre. Indeed, as regional historians began to banish this first legend of the Wyoming Massacre—born from the unverified claims of Holt and Avery—to the dustbin of history, they paved the way for the equally sensational story of Queen Esther to take its place. This new story replaced the old but still provided a way for Americans to take meaning from the battle. For local historians and speakers, Esther's myth could help them extoll progress, justify the removal of Native Americans, or highlight the patriotic devotion of valley residents. Just as importantly, Esther's fantastical story attracted visitors by contributing to the region's romantic allure. On the national scene, authors and travel writers turned to Wyoming and Esther for similar reasons. Looking for interesting events, exotic Indian characters, and a way to discuss American issues, these writers utilized Esther for their own purposes, introducing her to readers far and wide.

Diffusing via regional history, travel literature, popular fiction, and local promotion, Esther's myth originated within the community before reaching Americans across the country. The process by which the legend emerged, however, is no simple narrative of transmission from a locality to the nation. Instead, the process of diffusion—as seen above—reveals how local and national trends often overlapped and interacted. For one, the process that led to this myth's wide acceptance in the community complicates the narrative. Local developments, of course, influenced the acceptance of Queen Esther's story, especially the increasing interest in commemoration and the desire to record the sacrifices of the valley's Revolutionary veterans. National trends, however, played an equally important role. In this, the national desire for

regional romance and the propensity to fictionalize aspects of Wyoming's history for literary effect created an environment where locals were more likely to accept Esther's legend. Since the atmosphere of romance and fantasy surrounding the valley contributed to the myth's acceptance, national trends and writings clearly disposed locals first to believe Esther's myth and then spread it. The multiple meanings that residents and other Americans took from Esther similarly attests to this overlap between regional and national narratives. On the one hand, valley residents worked hard to connect the local history of Wyoming to national values and narratives, yet, on the other, American writers tried fashion a more national identity by referencing these regional events. No simple narrative of transmission seems to apply in these cases, and neither local nor national trends necessarily influenced the memory of the Battle of Wyoming more than the other. Rather, the development of Queen Esther's legend suggests that one cannot fully understand the remembrance of this battle without reference to both.

The confluence of both regional and national ideas that helped birth Esther's myth, eventually led to her ascendancy in the public

memory of the battle. By 1878, one promotional handbook could write that "none of the tragic events connected with the struggle of July 3, 1778 retains a stronger hold on the popular mind

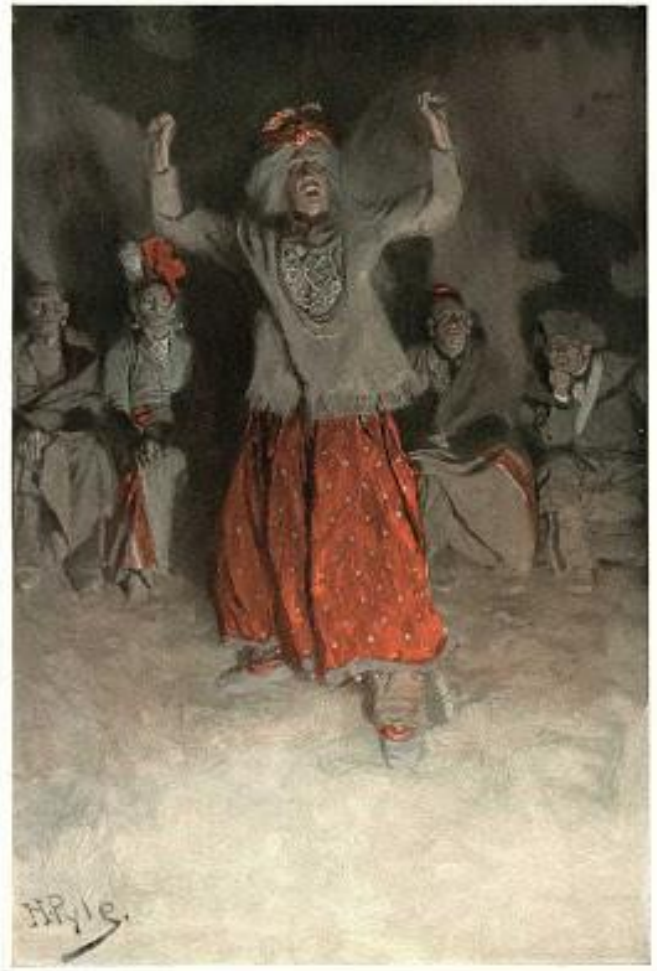


Figure 3: Howard Pyle's Painting of Queen Esther. From *Scribner's Magazine* 31 (April 1902): 413.

than the treacherous and brutal murder[s]” of Queen Esther.⁸⁴ Indeed, as the nineteenth century progressed, Esther increasingly became *the* story of the Battle of Wyoming as one well-meaning historian’s comments reveal. Rejecting the “monstrous falsehoods...published concerning the battle and the massacre” in its immediate aftermath, this 1878 historian went on to mistakenly argue that Esther’s “unlawful, wicked, cruel, and brutal murder of prisoners captured after the battle...has given to history and posterity the name, ‘Wyoming Massacre.’”⁸⁵ While mistaken, his remarks certainly illustrate how Esther’s legend would effectively replace the earlier myth and continue to wreak havoc on the public’s understanding of the event.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Esther’s myth undoubtedly reigned. Painted by the popular illustrator Howard Pyle at the turn of the century, Queen Esther’s hideous image became chiefly associated with the battle, so much so that the official souvenir booklet for the 1928 sesquicentennial celebration included it on its cover. Esther’s story was everywhere in 1928, especially inside the booklet where an article told the history of Esther, “the wickedest woman in American history,” and included a short story about her. Tapping into an early twentieth century fascination with Indians and the tropes commonly associated with dime novels, this short story presented “in the form of stirring fiction the perils and privations of the hardy pioneers of the Wyoming Valley and the sinister character of wicked Queen Esther.”⁸⁶ Though decades removed, Esther’s myth remained potent, appealing to early twentieth century

⁸⁴ Davidsburg, *Pittston Gazette Centennial Hand-Book, 1778-1878*, 33-34.

⁸⁵ Hakes, *Wyoming: Synopsis of the Battle and Massacre for the Information of the People*.

⁸⁶ Catherine McNelis and Hugh Weir, *Official Souvenir: Sesqui-Centennial of the Battle of Wyoming 1778-1928* (Wilkes-Barre: McNelis and Weir, 1928), from the collections of the Luzerne County Historical Society, box 4, shelf 15. Locals even printed 100,000 copies of Pyle’s painting to distribute during the event. See, “Famous Painting to Be Exhibited,” *Wilkes-Barre Record*, June 24-28, 1928, from the collections of Luzerne County Historical Society, box 4, shelf 15. Article found within the *Notebook Containing Clippings on Celebrations*, pp. 99.

Americans in much the same way it had originally enthralled their antebellum predecessors. Like Holt's 1778 fabrication, this legend aged well.⁸⁷

Perhaps too well. In 1962, locals "partially absolved Queen Esther of killings at Wyoming in 1778," changing the wording on a historic sign at the site of the Bloody Rock to reflect their uncertainty as to the identity of the Indian woman responsible⁸⁸ This changed wording, though a step in the right direction, ultimately still affirmed the myth's essence. Late twentieth-century locals may have challenged certain details of the legend, but they still believed that an Indian woman had massacred Patriots around the Bloody Rock.

This much maligned woman—alternatively called a Hecate, a fury, a monster, and a demon incarnate for more than a century—lived on in popular remembrance of the Battle of Wyoming, whether as Queen Esther or as a more anonymous Native American woman.

Her legend endures even today.

⁸⁷ Even in 1959, textbook companies sent letters to the Wilkes-Barre and Luzerne community to ascertain the truthfulness of Queen Esther's legend. See, Muriel Bisbee to Luzerne County Chamber of Commerce, February 2, 1959, from the collections of the Luzerne County Historical Society, Queen Esther Vertical File.

⁸⁸ "Wording is Changed: Queen Esther Partially Absolved of Killings at Wyoming in 1778," *Times-Leader* (Wilkes-Barre, PA), September 23, 1962, from the collections of the Luzerne County Historical Society, Queen Esther Vertical File.

Epilogue

While the remembrance of the Battle of Wyoming eventually faded on the national level, it remained robust in the late nineteenth century. Remembered through a large celebration in 1878 and remaining a popular historical and literary topic, Wyoming was not in danger of being forgotten. Rather, many Americans still referenced the battle to explain or make sense of their present until at least the 1930s. Although Americans in the period between 1878 and the first decades of the twentieth century often relied on similar references to progress, Indian removal, or patriotism when discussing Wyoming, they still modified their interpretations to reflect the concerns of the Gilded Age or the early twentieth century. Once again, the changing perceptions of the battle reflected larger societal trends. The battle's remembrance, however, gradually faded from the national scene and lost its place within the nation's Revolutionary mythology. By the mid-twentieth century, Wyoming had become increasingly obscure.

The 1878 centennial celebration marked a high point in the battle's memory. Attracting tens of thousands of visitors to the valley and garnering national publicity, the event proved wildly successful, and the attention it garnered indicates its familiarity to many.¹ While some came to the celebrations for costumed pageants, fireworks, parades, and musical performances, others earnestly sought to commemorate this well-known Revolutionary battle.² Bringing people together to celebrate and remember the sacrifices of those who had died during the battle, this massive event further enshrined a patriotic vision of American history that placed Wyoming at its center. "This is no empty and unmeaning pageant," asserted one 1878 speaker, "it is an

¹ Francavilla, "The Wyoming Valley Battle and 'Massacre,'" 30-46.

² Francavilla, "The Wyoming Valley Battle and 'Massacre,'" 35-45. Regardless of their own personal motives, Americans who attended these commemorations would still have come away with a certain view of the past as the activities at these events often featured patriotic history lessons as part of their appeal.

electric cord that binds the living to the dead.”³ Ultimately, such pageantry helped the battle retain importance in the nation’s cultural and political atmosphere.

To connect Wyoming with larger Revolutionary and cultural narratives, later nineteenth-century Americans relied on much of the same rhetoric in use earlier in the century. Like previous generations, these later Americans presented the brave Patriot defenders of Wyoming as models to emulate or commemorated their sacrifice in creating a better nation. For instance, local leader Steuben Jenkins’s keynote address in 1878 connected Revolutionary sacrifices with modern freedoms and the country’s current greatness. According to him, “the nation they [the Wyoming veterans] fought and sacrificed and died to establish, is great and mighty, the home of freemen, the abode of liberty.”⁴ Far from a new sentiment, this patriotic interpretation of sacrifice and devotion could have easily aligned with those of Revolutionary Patriots, early nineteenth century Democratic-Republicans, or local speakers at the Wyoming Monument in the 1830s or 1840s. Mentions of Native Americans and the settling of America also proved long-lasting. Many Gilded Age Americans, including President Rutherford B. Hayes in his brief remarks at the 1878 event, referenced Wyoming to articulate ideas about ongoing Native American policy and progress, much like earlier antebellum writers and speakers.⁵ Whatever their purpose, references to Wyoming in the late nineteenth century followed patterns akin to the ones first laid out in the century between the battle and the 1878 commemoration.

³ Johnson, *Wyoming: A Record of the One Hundredth Year Commemorative Observance of the Battle and Massacre*, 113. The speaker was Colonel Wright.

⁴ Jenkins, *Historical Address at the Wyoming Monument*, 65-67, 75. In a poem he also performed during the festivities, he similarly explicated the lesson the battle “taught posterity: ‘Tis sweet and glorious to die/ For country, home, and liberty” (75). Another prominent attendee agreed, revealing comparing “the name of ‘Wyoming’” with Thermopylae, arguing that it acted as “a synonym for desperate valor and a patriotic devotion to the cause of country with us as Spartan valor was regarded as the highest type among the Greeks of old.” See, Johnson, *Wyoming: A Record of the One Hundredth Year Commemorative Observance of the Battle and Massacre*, 25-26.

⁵ For summary of Haye’s remarks, see “Wyoming’s Martyrs: Second Day’s Celebration of the Massacre,” *Washington Post*, July 5, 1878, 1.

Of course, those who used Wyoming's memory in the years between 1878 and the early 1900s did so with an eye towards influencing their present, and they were likewise affected by societal trends at work in this period. Hayes's speech in 1878, for instance, reflected some of his era's chief concerns, such as westward expansion and Native American policy, and was influenced by prevailing ideas about race and civilization. Comparing the settlement of the Wyoming Valley with current expansion into Idaho, Arizona, and Colorado, Hayes argued "that the settlers of Western frontier were undergoing the same trials to-day that beset those pioneers of Wyoming a century ago." In Hayes's speech, these settlers—supposedly bringing civilization out of the savage wilderness—signified progress and spoke to white America's superior moral character. The settlers' example also furnished Hayes with lessons about current policies related to Native Americans. In his interpretation of Wyoming's history, Hayes asserted that the pioneers of Wyoming, while ready to go to war if necessary, had engaged with Native Americans "in good faith" and that the modern nation should follow their example. Connecting the national narrative of westward expansion to Wyoming's history, Hayes's speech mirrored the work of antebellum historians and speakers in that he drew on this regional history to discuss national occurrences. Nonetheless, his utilization of the battle's memory reinterpreted the event in light of current circumstances.⁶ Despite a changing cultural and political atmosphere, Hayes's speech shows how Wyoming's memory remained adaptable enough to stay culturally relevant in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

For more than one hundred years, Wyoming's memory stayed powerful in the American imagination. As we have seen, narratives about the Wyoming Massacre fueled pro-Patriot

⁶ "Wyoming's Martyrs: Second Day's Celebration of the Massacre," *Washington Post*, July 5, 1878, 1. See also, Johnson, *Wyoming: A Record of the One Hundredth Year Commemorative Observance of the Battle and Massacre*, 110-112.

sentiment during the Revolution, anti-Indian rhetoric after the war, and reinvigorated American nationalism during the War of 1812. The addition of the Queen Esther story provided new ways for later nineteenth century Americans to adapt the battle's remembrance to their changing circumstances. Utilized in a myriad of ways, narratives about the battle and Queen Esther supported diverse objectives—from justifying Indian removal to enhancing the romantic appeal of popular literature in the mid-nineteenth century. Americans took so many meanings from the Battle of Wyoming because its stories were capable of speaking to a variety of anxieties and contradictions within American culture and politics in the century between 1778 and 1878. Most notably, Americans readily connected with narratives about Wyoming because many still used the British, Loyalists (or those accused of aiding America's enemies), and Native Americans as reference points in the search for American identity. Whether working to distinguish themselves from the British during the Revolution or seeking to justify white possession of the valley in the antebellum period, Americans relied on narratives about the Battle of Wyoming to understand themselves and their place in the world.

The world that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Americans inhabited, however, changed rapidly during the twentieth century. New concerns and political struggles increasingly overshadowed the battle's memory, leading to a slow decline in the battle's importance to national audiences. Though it received some attention in literature during the first half of the 1900s, remembering the Battle of Wyoming became an almost exclusively regional affair in the large Wilkes-Barre area starting in the twentieth century.⁷ The battle became replaced by more

⁷ Even after the closing of the frontier around the turn of the century, Americans still occasionally recalled the memory of this frontier battle even as it began to fade from national consciousness. Much like their antebellum counterparts, some writers returned to Wyoming because it could interest American readers, who continued to devour stories about the frontier and Anglo-Indian conflict. Reflecting the staying power of ideas about westward expansion that became popular in the 1890s and early 1900s, some even reinterpreted this complex Revolutionary conflict as a simple battle between pioneers and Native Americans—an image that fit within the prevailing notion of westward expansion at the time. The stock image of savage Indians attacking upright frontier families became

recent events, and it lost its political and cultural relevancy as the concerns of Americans shifted. In part, the passage of time doomed Wyoming's memory on the national level. As William Lewis has written, Wyoming's importance diminished because more contemporary events like the Civil War, Spanish American War, and World War I understandably took attention away from smaller Revolutionary conflicts like the Battle of Wyoming.⁸ The battle's memory also declined because of the nation's markedly different political atmosphere. With frontier war no longer a threat and independence secure beyond a doubt, the Battle of Wyoming lost much of the political potency it had enjoyed during the Revolution, the War of 1812, and the antebellum period. In 1900, a Philadelphia newspaper asked, "is it well to keep alive the memory of the massacre of Wyoming...?" Questioning the relevance of Wyoming's memory to the present, the newspaper continued, "the orator of the occasion last Tuesday could draw from it no lesson but revenge. Revenge on whom? Not on the Indians—they were exterminated long ago. Not on the Tories—they are dead and no grudge is felt against their descendants." Indeed, the newspaper could identify no one deserving revenge.⁹ In the twentieth century, Americans no longer had any need to retaliate against any British, Loyalists, or Native Americans. As a result, the Battle of Wyoming simply did not seem to matter as much.

As the battle slowly retreated from national memory, its remembrance shifted almost exclusively to local commemorations, publications, and the occasional newspaper reference. After the success of the 1878 celebration, locals began to hold an event at the Wyoming

applied to Wyoming, leaving out Loyalists and much of the Revolutionary War context of the battle. While Wyoming's memory still spoke to British savagery, its remembrance increasingly centered more on the interaction between natives and whites. See, Ellis, *Red Jacket*, 213-216, 240-242; Alfred Matthews, "A Story of Three States," *Scribner's Magazine* 31 (April 1902): 407-419; "Prisoners of Esther" by J. M. Hoffman in McNelis and Weir, *Official Souvenir: Sesqui-Centennial of the Battle of Wyoming 1778-1928*.

⁸ Lewis, "The Changing Story and Historical Importance of the Battle of Wyoming" (unpublished manuscript, 2020), 17-18, provided and cited with permission of the author.

⁹ "The Massacre of Wyoming: From the Philadelphia Ledger," *The New York Times*, July 8, 1900, 4.

Monument every year, and this eventually became the chief means of remembering the battle. Not only did this yearly event manage to bring locals together but it also received modest national news coverage and created a forum for scholars to discuss the battle's importance.¹⁰ In 1928, the Sesquicentennial celebration of the battle even helped bring about a brief popular resurgence in the battle's memory. Bringing 250,000 visitors to the valley, the celebration replicated many of the activities of the hugely successful 1878 commemoration. Its success proved short lived, however. By the early 1930s, William Lewis reports, "even the annual ceremonies...became less focused on the Battle," and no celebration ever matched 1928's success again.¹¹ For the rest of the twentieth century, the memory of Wyoming became overwhelmingly local with many in the Wilkes-Barre region continuing to participate in yearly anniversaries to honor their Patriot ancestors or their region's part in the Revolution. Interrupted only twice since 1878, memorial services continue at the Wyoming Monument today.¹²

The Wyoming Massacre's staying power in American history and memory ultimately demonstrates both the importance and fallibility of historical narratives in shaping conceptions of the present. Throughout the century covered in this thesis, the groundless legends that emerged from the Wyoming Valley exerted remarkable influence in determining how Americans conceived of the nation. That such baseless, often partisan rumors intimately informed this process offers a warning to modern readers in an age awash with misinformation and rancorous

¹⁰ Lewis, "The Changing Story and Historical Importance of the Battle of Wyoming" (unpublished manuscript, 2020), 17, provided and cited with permission of the author.

¹¹ For quote, see Lewis, "The Changing Story and Historical Importance of the Battle of Wyoming" (unpublished manuscript, 2020), 19-20, provided and cited with permission of the author. See also, Francavilla, "The Wyoming Valley Battle and 'Massacre,'" 38-46.

¹² See, Francavilla, "The Wyoming Valley Battle and 'Massacre,'" 61-63. Only the great flood brought on by Hurricane Agnes in 1972 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 have led to a cancellation of the festivities since the 1880s. As of this writing, a socially distanced celebration is planned for July 3, 2021.

partisanship. As this thesis shows, stories matter and can have long-lasting effects. In the case of Wyoming, narratives that demonized or exaggerated the misdeeds of the “villains” of the battle assisted Americans in articulating a nascent national identity. This came at a frightful cost, however, especially for Native Americans. In the modern era, Americans must again contend with partisan narratives that threaten to negatively shape public discourse by demonizing others and propagating unsubstantiated claims. Learning from Wyoming’s example, citizens of the modern United States must be wary of such stories and sensitive to the contexts in which information emerges.

Above all else, the legends related to the Battle of Wyoming underscore that Americans, historians or not, should be critical of what they accept as accurate information—it just might be the beginning of a new, unfounded American legend.

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