

SITUATION OF AFFAIRS BETWEEN THE FRENCH AND ENGLISH –
OVERTURES OF BOTH TO THE INDIANS – JONCAIRE – FRAZER,
THE FIRST WHITE MAN LOCATED IN THE ALLEGHENY VALLEY

The situation of the issue between the French and English plainly indicated that no compromise was possible. An appeal to arms was imminent – both sought rather to fortify their interests and conciliate and secure the aid of the Indians. The French resolved to erect a line for fortifications, or forts, extending from Lake Erie to the lower Ohio.

In the fall of 1750, the Ohio Company employed Christopher Gist, a surveyor and experienced woodsman, to proceed to the Ohio, for the purpose of examining their lands, to select suitable locations for settlements and fortifications, and to conciliate the friendship of the Indians.

He visited Logstown, where he was received by the Indians with jealousy, and passed over to the Muskingum, where he found a village of the *Ottawas* friendly to the French, and a village of the *Wyandots* divided in settlement.

There he met Croghan, who had been sent out by Pennsylvania, and the two held a council with the chiefs. They then visited the *Shawnese*, on the Scioto river, and went as far as the Miami Valley. Crossing the Great Miami on a raft of logs, they visited *Piqua*, the chief town of the *Pickawilliamies*, where they made a treaty with the last named tribe.

From this place Croghan returned, but Gist followed the Miami to its mouth, and went down the Ohio to within fifteen miles of the great falls at Louisville, returning by way of the Kentucky river, and thence over the Cumberland Mountains to Virginia, in May, 1751; having, during his journeyings, visited the *Iroquois*, *Wyandots*, *Shawnese*, and *Miamis*, and appointed a general council, to be held at *Logstown*, for the purpose of forming an alliance between the Indians and the Colony of Virginia.

In the mean time some traders from Pennsylvania had opened a trading-house as some point, not certainly known, but within the limits of the State of Ohio, and certainly within the region claimed by the French.

The latter, accompanied by a band of *Ottawa* and *Chippewa* Indians, demanded the traders of the *Miamis* who refused to surrender them; whereupon a battle ensued in which fourteen of the *Miamis* were slain, and the traders taken to Canada, where some accounts say they were burned.

The English now determined to purchase the disputed territory from the Indians, and accordingly Messrs. Fry, Lomax, and Patton, were dispatched by Virginia to meet them in council, which was held at Logstown on the 9th of June, 1752.

Gist attended this council as agent of the Ohio Company. The Lancaster treaty of 1744 was produced, but the Indians insisted that “they had not heard of any sale of lands west of the “Warrior’s Road,” which ran at the foot of the mountains (Allegheny Ridge).

The commissioner endeavored to get the assent of the Indians to the treaty of Lancaster by offer of goods, and mentioned the proposed settlement by the Ohio Company as the forks. The Indians recognized the treaty, and the authority of the *Six Nations* for making it, but insisted that no western lands were conveyed by it, and declined having anything to do with it. They were willing, however, to have the company construct a fort at the forks of the Ohio.

This did not satisfy the commissioners, and they persuaded the Indians, through Montour, the interpreter, to recognize the Lancaster treaty in its broadest sense, which they finally did, and the tribes united in signing a deed confirming it, on the 13th of June.

At the date of these negotiations, the country adjacent to the forks of the Ohio was occupied by various tribes, or nations. The *Shawnese*, who may scarcely be said to have a permanent abiding place, were settled along the Allegheny and Ohio rivers. The *Delawares* were intermingled with the *Shawnese*, having removed westward from their former homes on the Delaware and Susquehanna rivers. Their king, *Shingiss*, was found by Washington, in 1753, located at the mouth of Chartier’s creek, about two miles below the forks of the *Youghiogeny*. The *Delawares* also had a town called *Shanopin’s Town*, on the left bank of the Allegheny, two miles above the forks.

The *Senecas* of the *Six Nations* were also dwelling on both the Allegheny and Ohio; and these distinct nations then appear to have been living peaceably together, at the same time preserving their manners, customs, and dress.

The English flattered themselves that by their polite conduct they had outwitted the Indians and secured their friendship. But the French proved that they knew best how to manage the natives; and, though they had to contend with the former enmity that existed against them by the *Six Nations*, and

committed some acts against the remonstrances of those tribes, they finally succeeded, to a greater degree than the English ever did, in attaching the Indians to their cause.

The determination with which the French prepared to make good their claims is shown by the following letter from Joncaire to Governor Hamilton, of Pennsylvania:

“DE CHINIQUE, June 6th, 1751.

“SIR: – Monsieur the Marquis de la Gallissoniere, Governor of the whole of New France, having honored me with orders to watch that the English should make no treaty in the country of the Ohio, I have directed the traders of your government to withdraw.

“You cannot be ignorant, sir, that all the lands of this region have always belonged to the king of France, and that the English have no right to come there to trade. My superior has commanded me to appraise you of what I have done, in order that you may not affect ignorance of the reasons of it; and he has given me this order with so much the greater reason, because it is now two years since Monsieur Celoron, by order of Monsieur de la Gallissoniere, then Commandant-General, warned the English, who were trading with the Indians along the Ohio, against so doing, and they promised him not to return to trade on the lands, as Monsieur Celoron wrote you.

“I have the honor to be, with great respect,

“Sir, your very humble and obedient servant,

“JONCAIRE,

“Lieutenant of the detachment of the Navy.”

As Captain Joncaire was quite a noted personage, a short sketch of him will no doubt be interesting. In Smith's "History of New York" is the following notice of his father: "Canada was very much indebted to the incessant intrigues of this man. He had been adopted by the *Senecas*, and was well esteemed by the *Onondagas*. He spoke the Indian language, as Charlevoix affirms, '*avec la plus sublime eloquence Iroquois*,' and had lived amongst them, after their manner, from the beginning of Queen Anne's reign. All these advantages he improved for the benefit of his country. He facilitated the missionaries in their progress through the cantons, and more than any other man contributed to render their dependence upon the English weak and precarious. Convinced of this, Colonel Schuyler urged the Indians, at this treaty with them in 1719, to drive Joncaire out of the country, but his endeavors were fruitless." His son, the author of the letter to Governor Hamilton, seems, from all accounts, to have followed the course his father pursued, and to have given the English a great amount of trouble. He is the Jean Coeur from whom the leaden plate was stolen by the *Seneca* Indians and sent to the Governor of New York. Joncaire is a contraction from Jean Coeur, that may have occurred from the Indian pronunciation, or by the peculiar French accent in speaking to nouns together, and resembling one word in English dialect. At any rate the contracted form seems to have been adopted by both father and son. Joncaire, the younger, was stationed at the fort at Venango, and was met here by George Washington, during his journey to the French posts, in 1753. That his influence with the Indians, and especially the *Senecas*, enabled him to render great service to the French, is clearly shown in the account of Celoron's expedition, given in the preceding chapter, in which he took a conspicuous and important part. He evidently possessed shrewdness and ability. At a council with the Indians at Logstown, in May, 1751, he made the following speech:

“Children, I now desire you may give me an answer from your hearts to the speech Monsieur Celoron made to you. His speech was that your Father, the Governor of Canada, desired his children on the Ohio to drive away the English traders from amongst them, and discharge them from ever coming to trade amongst them again, or on any of the branches, on pain of incurring his displeasure, and to enforce that speech he gave them a very large belt of wampum.”

One of the methods he adopted to win the confidence of the Indians, and get their consent to build the fort at Venango, was that it would be a trading post for their convenience.

The first white man who located within the limits of Venango county, was undoubtedly a Scotchman named John Frazer. We extract the following from the History of Western Pennsylvania, in relation to him and other early adventurers to these wilds:

“Western Pennsylvania was untrodden by the foot of the white man before the year 1700. As early as 1715 and 1720, occasionally a trader would venture west of the Allegheny Mountain; and of these the first was James Le Tort, who resided, in 1700, east of the Susquehanna, but took up his residence west of it, Le Tort Spring, Carlisle, in 1720; Peter Cheever, John Evans, Henry Devoy, Owen Nicholson, Alex Magenty, Patrick Burns, George Hutchison, all of Cumberland county; Barnaby Currin, John McQuire, a Mr. Frazer,

the latter of whom had, at an early day, a trading house as Venango; but afterwards, at the Monongajela, at the mouth of Turtle creek – were all traders among the Indians.

Frazer was a gunsmith, and this facilitated his success in trading with the Indians.

In the year 1753, Edward Shippen, of Lancaster, in writing to Governor James Hamilton, says of him and this place: “Weningo it eh name of an Indian town on the Ohio, where Mr. Frazer has had a gunsmith shop for many years. It is situated about eighty miles up the said river beyond Logstown.”

At the time Joncaire came to commence the erection of the French fort at this point, he drove Frazer away from his house and took possession. Washington speaks of him as having been driven from Venango by the French, and that he went from here to the mouth of Turtle creek, where he is subsequently mentioned in history. It was in his house at Venango that Washington met Joncaire and had the famous interview with the wily Frenchman, and over which floated the French flag. The location of this house can now only be approximated. From the best information upon the subject we have been enabled to obtain, we are led to infer that it stood somewhere within the two blocks embraced between Liberty, Eighth and Ninth streets and the river. But authenticated tradition is silent upon the subject, the site has never been ascertained by antiquarians, and must remain forever a mystery.

While on his mission to the French posts, Washington met Frazer at the mouth of Turtle Creek. He appears frequently on the scene in the string of events about the forks of the Ohio, up to the time of Braddock’s defeat, when, no doubt, he was broken up in his trading business, and changed his location. Nothing seems to be known of his subsequent career.

Letter from Edward Shippen, Prothonotary of Lancaster county, to Governor Hamilton, of Pennsylvania, with another enclosed in it to one Young, and Indian Trader, from John Frazer, his partner, who had lived at “Wenango” (Venango), but then living at the forks of the “Mohongialo,” about fourteen miles from where it enters the Ohio, where he had a store and carried on a trade with the Indians. Frazer’s letter contains an account of the French proceedings, and Mr. Shippen’s letter explains several matters in it.