

Fiske Hall Graduate Seminar Paper Award*

**Sympathy for the Devil:
Simon Girty, the Frontier Captive Experience, Loyalty and American
Memory**

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He was fifteen. In those fifteen years he had witnessed and experienced things which only those growing up on the fringes of a frontier society could. He had been raised at a place known as Chambers's Mill in what is now south central Pennsylvania, a settlement rough even by frontier standards. Nineteenth-century historian Consul Willshire Butterfield tells us, "Indeed, it had few, if any, rivals, for its wickedness, in the province."¹

As a child he had been evicted from his home. The rude cabin burned, not by Indians, but by an under-sheriff of Cumberland County.² His father had died violently. Traditional histories suggest that he was killed in a drunken brawl with an Indian named The Fish. His future stepfather then killed The Fish and married the widow.³ The modern historian Colin Calloway, however, has uncovered Pennsylvania Supreme Court records that show his father died in a duel with a man named Samuel Saunders.⁴ Nothing in his experience, however, could have prepared him for the events of these past few days.

War had once again returned to the frontier. After Braddock's defeat in July 1755 the English settlers of western Pennsylvania erected small forts, including Fort Granville in Cumberland County. The boy's family removed there in July 1756 for protection. On 30 July a force of 23 Frenchmen and about 100 Delaware, Shawnee and Seneca Indians under Neyon de Villiers attacked the small fort. After withstanding the assault in the daylight the defenders surrendered that night when Villiers offered quarter.⁵

The prisoners from Granville were force marched to the Delaware village of Kittanning on the east bank of the Alleghany River. There the boy watched as his stepfather was stripped and tied to a black pole. A fire was built under him and heated gun barrels were thrust into his naked body. After three hours of torture the suffering was finally terminated with a scalping and a tomahawk stroke.⁶ This was not to be the last such death the boy would witness.

The events of that summer of 1756 would go a long way toward shaping the man the boy would become. He now entered into contact with the Indian peoples who would forever be linked with his name and reputation. Though he would move back and forth between their world

* Each year, the Fiske Hall Graduate Seminar Paper is given to the best graduate paper written in the previous semester's seminar.

¹ Consul Willshire Butterfield, *History of the Girtys* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1890; reprint, Columbus, OH: Long's College Book Co., 1950), 1-2 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

² *Ibid.*, 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴ Colin G. Calloway, "Simon Girty: Interpreter and Intermediary," in James A. Clifton, ed., *Being and Becoming Indian* (Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1989), 39.

⁵ Butterfield, 6-9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

and the white world of his birth he would come to be labeled a “white savage.”⁷ The boy’s name was Simon Girty.

The white boy who had already lost two white fathers would grow to adulthood with an Indian father. As an adult Simon Girty moved freely between the white world of those loyal to the British crown and the Indian world in which he had reached maturity. He would struggle to decide on his own loyalty and in the end allowed others and events beyond his control to determine his allegiance for him. His enemies blamed him for depredations he didn’t commit and credited him with leadership he never possessed. This led to a reputation so great that while private citizens did indeed offer rewards in the neighborhood of \$100 for Indian scalps, rumor held that Girty’s scalp was worth \$1,000.⁸

Tens of thousands of American colonists remained loyal to the British Empire during the Revolution. Their exact numbers are unknown, but the best estimates range from 75,000 to 100,000. Thousands bore arms against their Patriot neighbors. Many served in the twenty-one loyalist regiments which complimented the British Army in America. Thousands fled to British Canada after the Revolution and continued in their loyalty to the British crown.⁹ Yet Simon Girty’s infamy would prove unique. While all Tories are viewed negatively in American memory, Girty’s legacy is darker not only because of his service alongside Indians, but primarily because he practiced and was exceedingly successful in their way of war. More than a hundred years after his death, a 1920s Hollywood serial painted the picture of the white demon renegade, Simon Girty, leading “war-painted, tomahawk-wielding Indian savages upon innocent white settlers.”¹⁰

Girty owes his place in history to that Indian way of war. It was the Indian way of war that first led to his presence in Indian society. The taking of captives was an integral aspect of Indian warfare. European armies rarely seized noncombatants and combatants were usually paroled after agreeing to abandon the fight.¹¹

But according to Indian rules, captives of all ages and of either sex could—indeed must—be taken, either to be adopted into the families of the victorious nation or, if less fortunate, to be tortured, killed, and (occasionally) eaten. These practices, which American colonists too readily dismissed as evidence of the Indian’s savage nature, were embedded in complex cultural ideas about warfare and the possibility of ‘requickening’ (physically and spiritually replacing) deceased relatives.¹²

Upon capture, the captive’s fate depended on a number of factors. Between 1675 and 1763 French, Indian, or combined parties of French and Indians captured 771 males and 270 females from the New England settlements.¹³ The Abenaki and other Canadian mission Indians

⁷ Daniel P. Barr, “A Monster So Brutal:,” *Essays in History* 40 (1998): 1.

⁸ Alan D. Gaff, *Bayonets in the Wilderness: Anthony Wayne’s Legion in the Old Northwest*, Campaigns and Commanders Series (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 228-229.

⁹ Thomas Fleming, *Liberty. The American Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1997), 348.

¹⁰ Wilbur Edel, *Kekionga: The Worst Defeat in the History of the U.S. Army* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 29.

¹¹ Alden T. Vaughan and Daniel K. Richter, “Crossing the Cultural Divide: Indians and New Englanders, 1605-1763,” *The Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 90 part 1 (April 1980): 73.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ June Namias, *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 50.

were usually disposed to give their captives over for French bounties or English ransom. Only a few were kept for adoption into the tribes.¹⁴

The situation in Pennsylvania by the time of Simon Girty's capture was very different from that in New England. As historian James Axtell points out, "... the Indians of Pennsylvania, southern New York, and the Ohio country had no Quebec or Montreal in which to sell their human chattels to compassionate French families or anxious English relatives. For this and other reasons they captured English settlers largely to replace members of their own families who had died, often from English musketballs or imported diseases."¹⁵

Whether adoption or ransom was the motive for capture the captive had first to survive the journey back to the Indians' villages. Captivity narratives scandalized white audiences with the tales of those who did not survive these arduous treks. On the retreat back to Canada after the 1704 Deerfield raid, the Reverend John Williams became separated from his wife Eunice (Mather) Williams who was weak from recent childbirth. Frantically he asked fellow captives if they had seen her and learned the worst. After falling while crossing a freezing river she was killed by one stroke of a tomahawk by one of the Indian raiders. He consoled himself and the couple's five children with the hope that she had died instantly and her suffering was past.¹⁶

Mrs. Williams' death and the similar deaths of others; infants, the old, the weak and the sick, appears heartless and savage to the modern reader, but it must be remembered that raids such as these are examples of extreme guerilla warfare. The weak and infirm posed a great risk to the successful escape of the raiders. While modern lawyers would decry such acts, some modern military commandos would describe such acts as military necessity.¹⁷ Brutality was a common feature of frontier warfare. The English colonists themselves were not above killing prisoners. During a scouting expedition against Fort Ticonderoga in January 1757 English colonial rangers under Robert Rogers killed seven prisoners to prevent their escape during a firefight.¹⁸ In the Revolutionary War George Rogers Clark ordered the scalping of Indian prisoners in sight of an enemy force at Vincennes to hasten their surrender.¹⁹

If a prisoner had been selected for adoption he or she could expect protection on the trail. John Tanner was nine years old when he was captured at his home on the Kentucky River by the Shawnees. On the journey back to Shawnee country Tanner struggled against his captors and one warrior raised his tomahawk to strike the boy. Another warrior by the name of Kish-kau-ko prevented the act and warned the offender to leave his "little brother" alone. Kish-kau-ko and an older warrior stayed by Tanner's side for the remainder of the journey.²⁰

Arrival at the Indians' villages did not guarantee survival. Adult captives faced a gauntlet run where they were struck with, "ax handles, tomahawks, hoop poles, clubs and switches."²¹ Some captives received serious injury by the gauntlet and were taken from village to village to repeat the run. Such was the case with the renowned frontiersman Simon Kenton. Kenton was

¹⁴ Vaughan and Richter, 84.

¹⁵ James Axtell, "The White Indians of Colonial America." *The William and Mary Quarterly: Magazine of Early American History* 3d ser., 32, no. 1 (January 1975): 59.

¹⁶ John Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 28-29.

¹⁷ Armstrong Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare: 1675-1815* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 26-27.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁰ John Tanner, *The Falcon*, with an introduction by Louise Erdrich, Penguin Nature Classics, ed. Edward Hoagland. (USA: G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1830. Reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 5.

²¹ Axtell, 70.

captured on the Ohio and forced to run the gauntlet at the villages of Chillicothe, Piqua, and Wapatomica.²² He would eventually be saved from further torment by an old acquaintance among his captors.

Even worse treatment awaited a few, such as Simon Girty's stepfather, John Turner. Often a fate such as Turner's was an act of revenge or mourning. Families who had lost kin to the enemy could demand such a death as revenge or to assuage their grief.²³ At least one historian suggested that Turner had bragged of killing The Fish, the Indian who had supposedly killed his wife's first husband, and his own death was in revenge for that death.²⁴ If that entire incident was indeed fiction, as Calloway contends, then Turner's repetition of the fiction may have cost him his own life.

After Turner's horrendous torture, Simon, his mother, his brothers, Thomas, James and George, and two-year-old half-brother John Turner, Jr. were spared. The family was quickly divided however. The mother and baby were claimed by the Delawares and departed for the French post at Fort Duquesne where the baby was given Catholic baptism.²⁵

The brothers Girty were soon separated also. A provincial force under Lieutenant Colonel John Armstrong attacked Kittanning early on the morning of August 8, 1756. Thomas Girty was one of eleven white captives rescued during the assault. Simon, George and James along with several other prisoners were herded out of the village by their captors until Armstrong withdrew.

One unfortunate woman who had attempted to flee during the attack was recaptured and suffered an even more terrible death by fire and torture than had John Turner. There is no reason to believe that the remaining prisoners including the Girty brothers were not forced to witness this spectacle, especially since Thomas had made good his escape. The Indians abandoned Kittanning shortly after Armstrong's assault and Simon, George and James were themselves separated. James was claimed by the Shawnees, George by the Delawares and Simon by the Senecas, or Mingoes as the colonists referred to the Ohio Iroquois.²⁶ Each was adopted into families of their respective tribes.²⁷

James Axtell has identified three "initiation rites" by which many captives were adopted into their new Indian families. As the motive for adopting captives was often to replace family members who had been lost, the first rite was purgative in nature. Here the Indians could relieve their desire for revenge and also cover their grief. This was accomplished by the gauntlet or other initial rough treatment. The second ceremony was a ritual washing, usually in a river. This was a way of cleansing the captives of their very whiteness. The final rite was a formal welcome given at the village council fire by one of the chiefs.²⁸

The words of one such speech have been preserved for us. The speech leaves no doubt as to a captive's new status as a member of the tribe:

My son, you are now flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone. By the ceremony that was performed this day, every drop of white blood was washed from your veins. ... After what has passed this day you are now one of us by an old strong law and custom. My son,

²² Butterfield, 76-77.

²³ Vaughan and Richter, 75-76.

²⁴ Butterfield, 11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁶ Barbara Alice Mann, *George Washington's War on Native America* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 41-42. Mingo was a slur term taken from the Lenape word *mengwe* meaning "the sneaky people."

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 12-15.

²⁸ Axtell, 69-72.

you have now nothing to fear. We are now under the same obligation to love, support and defend you that we are to love and defend one another. Therefore you are to consider yourself as one of our people.²⁹

The captives were then introduced to their new family members, given new clothes and showered with gifts. In a very real sense, the captive was reborn into a new family and a new society. Axtell states that, "Treatment such as this—and it was almost universal—left an indelible mark on every captive, whether or not they eventually returned to English society."³⁰

The transformation from Euro-American to American Indian was still not complete. The Indians would attempt to complete that transformation through example and teaching. But complete transformation required a reciprocal commitment on the part of the former captive. Those who exhibited that level of commitment found that every possibility in the Indians' world was open to them.³¹

Years after his own capture Simon Girty himself would tell ten-year-old O.M. Spencer, a captive of the Shawnee, that he would never see home again, but that if he became a good warrior he could one day become a chief. Such a future was indeed possible for a captive.³² Captives John Tarbell and Timothy Rice became clan chiefs of the Caughnawagas. A Pennsylvania boy, whose white name has never been learned, who was captured at the age of four became Old White Chief of the Iroquois. His sons also became chiefs.³³ At Odanak, in Quebec, Joseph Louis Gill, the son of adopted white New England captives became "the White Chief of the Saint Francis Abenakis."³⁴

The Ohio tribes signed a treaty in Easton, Pennsylvania in 1758 after their French allies had abandoned Fort Duquesne. The English demanded the return of all captives as a condition of the peace. The demand ignored the emotional bonds that had developed between the Indians and their new relations, and the fact that there was no existing framework by which the chiefs could force their people to comply with such a demand. The Delaware chief Tamaqua, in an attempt to lead by example, returned two captives he referred to as "my Mother" and "my Sister." By 1759 the Indians returned most of their living captives to Pittsburgh.³⁵ After three years with the Indians, Simon, as well as his mother and brothers, were back in the white man's world.

By 1767 Simon, George and James Girty were among the thirteen traders employed at Fort Pitt by the firm of Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan. Although he had lived with the Mingo Senecas, Simon was apparently fluent in the Delaware tongue as this was the tribe he now traded with for the firm. His fluency in different Indian tongues would not have been surprising. White encroachment had pushed numerous Indian peoples, including the Senecas and Delawares into multi-ethnic villages in the Ohio country.³⁶ The British Indian Department also employed Simon as an interpreter at a private conference with the Six Nations in 1769.³⁷

²⁹ Howard Peckham, ed., *Narratives of Colonial America, 1704-1765* (Chicago, 1971), 91-92; quoted in Axtell, 72.

³⁰ Axtell, 74.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

³² *Ibid.*, 80.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 72.

³⁵ Michael N. McConnell, *A Country Between* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 143-144.

³⁶ Calloway, 8.

³⁷ Calloway, "Simon Girty: Interpreter and Intermediary," 42. The practice of name adoption has led to some confusion. In Mann, *George Washington's War on Native America* Mann refers to the Wyandot War Chief Katepakomen ("Simon Girty") on page 120. She never states whether she is referring to the white Simon Girty or

Girty appears to have earned a good deal of respect among the Delaware, as a Delaware warrior by the name of Katepakomin adopted the name Simon Girty as a result of his wish to acquire some of Simon's prestige and power.³⁸

In the early 1770s a dispute over jurisdiction over the forks of the Ohio River between Pennsylvania and Virginia divided the residents of the Fort Pitt area. Simon took the side of Virginia in the dispute and allied himself with Governor Dunmore of Virginia and his agent at Fort Pitt, Dr. John Connolly, both of whom would side with the Loyalists in the Revolution.³⁹

Tensions and skirmishes along the Ohio, including the murder of Mingo chief Logan's family,⁴⁰ in the fall of 1773 threatened renewed hostilities. Simon Girty and Alexander McKee, deputy Indian agent for Sir William Johnson, made numerous journeys to the Indian villages to forestall full-scale war. Their efforts were successful in persuading most of the tribes to refrain from pursuing retaliation for their injuries.⁴¹

The Shawnees and Mingoes, however, could not be placated and the resulting conflict erupted into "Lord Dunmore's War" in 1774. Girty served as a scout and interpreter in the conflict. Girty's comrades in this conflict included future American Revolution Patriots George Rogers Clark and the aforementioned Simon Kenton. The Indians were finally defeated in the Battle of Point Pleasant on October 10, 1774. In serving the whites Girty helped to defeat the very people who had adopted him just a few years earlier.⁴²

On February 22, 1775, Girty took the oath of allegiance to King George III and was appointed a lieutenant of militia for the Pittsburgh region.⁴³ The Indians subdued for the moment, the frontier turned its attention in another direction. Revolution was in the air, and Simon Girty was about to change allegiance once again.

On May 1, 1776, just over a year after pledging allegiance to the English monarch, Girty aligned himself with the Patriot cause and was appointed interpreter to the Six Nations for the Americans. But Girty did not get along with Congress's Indian agent, George Morgan, and was discharged after only three months. He subsequently enlisted in the Patriot army as a second lieutenant.⁴⁴

Although his skills as an interpreter were well known, Girty was also acquiring a reputation for drunkenness and combativeness. His personal battles with Morgan and others, coupled with his erratic behavior led those in positions of authority to lose confidence in his ability to serve the Patriot cause. He was now an angry young man with scores to settle.⁴⁵ He resigned his lieutenant's commission in August 1777.⁴⁶

Rumors of a Tory conspiracy led to the arrest of Girty, Morgan, McKee and Colonel John Campbell in December 1777. The men were acquitted but remained under suspicion. In February

the Delaware warrior who adopted his name. It is only by comparing Girty's activities with her references to Katepakomen that the informed reader is able to determine that her Katepakomen is indeed the white Simon Girty.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 42-43.

⁴⁰ Butterfield, 25.

⁴¹ Calloway, 43.

⁴² Butterfield, 25-28.

⁴³ Calloway, 44.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁵ Larry L. Nelson, *A Man of Distinction Among Them: Alexander McKee and the Ohio Country Frontier, 1754-1799* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1999), 107.

⁴⁶ Calloway, 45.

1778 Girty served as a scout in American General Edward Hand's inglorious "Squaw Campaign."⁴⁷ The expedition was Girty's last service in the Patriot cause.

On the night of March 28, 1778, Girty changed loyalties for the last time. Girty, Alexander McKee, McKee's cousin Robert Surphit and a man by the name of Higgins, and two of McKee's black servants left from McKee's home outside Pittsburgh for the English fortress at Detroit. McKee had long been under suspicion as the former English deputy Indian agent and had been ordered to appear before the American Congress at York to answer questions about his loyalty.⁴⁸ Matthew Elliott was a trader from the Pittsburgh area who had lost an entire year's worth of trade goods to a party of Mingoes the previous fall. The Indians had told Elliott they were acting under orders of the English at Detroit.⁴⁹

While we can not state with absolute certainty, the motives of McKee and Elliott appear fairly easy to ascertain. McKee was probably a Tory from the start and Elliott's only chance of recovering his financial loss was through the English at Detroit. Girty's motives are harder to determine. The future of the Patriot cause was far from certain and the Ohio Indians appeared to be on the brink of joining the war on the English side. That Girty was disgruntled with his prospects in Pittsburgh is certain. His future service under both McKee and Elliott would also suggest that they held a great deal of influence over him.

Given Girty's lack of education and contact with the white world outside the Pennsylvania and Ohio frontier it is doubtful that he looked upon the Revolution in the same terms as Emerson's, "the shot heard 'round the world." To Simon Girty this was just another in the long series of bloody conflicts that had served as a constant backdrop to his young life. An educated man like Alexander McKee would not have faced much of a challenge in convincing his young friend, already embittered towards Patriot officials, that his talents would be greatly valued by the British at Detroit. In his biography of Alexander McKee, historian Larry Nelson stated:

McKee coupled his sense of place within the lower Great Lakes Region with a wider appreciation of the frontier's place within the British realm. Neither Simon Girty nor Matthew Elliott, ... took much interest in the world beyond the Ohio Country, and both conducted their dealings ... with indifference to events that transpired beyond their immediate experience.⁵⁰

Whatever their true motives, the news that these particular three men had fled to the English sent shock waves through the American frontier settlements. All three were vigorously denounced as traitors to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.⁵¹

Girty and his friends did not travel directly to Detroit. They went first to the Delaware village at Goschochking and counseled the Indians to war against the Americans as the Americans were intent on destroying all the Ohio Indians. McKee wrote to the English Lieutenant Governor at Detroit, Henry Hamilton, sharing the situation at Fort Pitt and offering

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Reginald Horsman, *Matthew Elliott, British Indian Agent* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1964), 19-20. Elliott had already made one trip to Detroit to attempt compensation and had been arrested there as a suspected American spy. He had been sent to Quebec where he was paroled back to Pittsburgh due to lack of evidence.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 15-16.

⁵⁰ Nelson, 22-23.

⁵¹ Calloway, 45-46.

his and his companions' service to the Crown. The group traveled next to visit the Shawnees along the Scioto.⁵²

Hamilton was delighted with McKee's offer and sent a man to guide the party on to Detroit. McKee and Girty were promptly given positions in the British Indian Department, McKee as a captain and Girty as an interpreter to the Mingoes.⁵³ Elliott would need to prove his loyalty before gaining a position, but by 1782 he too would hold a captain's grade in the department.⁵⁴ Even though his reputation would surpass both McKee's and Elliott's, Simon Girty would never hold any position in the department above that of interpreter, and would thus never obtain the respectability that McKee and Elliott garnered with their commissions.

Historian Colin Calloway depicts the British Indian Department as "a multicultural institution. Prominent members were of Scots and Irish ancestry; agents wore a mixture of Indian and European clothing and frequently developed extensive kinship ties by marrying Indian women; and business was conducted at frontier posts where Redcoats, French Canadian traders, Indian, and Metis families, together with delegates from tribes far and near, rubbed elbows in fluid and heterogenous communities."⁵⁵ With Girty's knowledge of various Indian languages and his ties to the Mingoes he was indeed a very valuable asset for the department.

In June 1778 Girty acted as an interpreter in a council held at Detroit between Hamilton and representatives of the Ottawas, Chippewas, Hurons, Wyandots, Potawatomis, Shawnees, Delawares, Miamis, Mingoes, Mohawks, and Senecas. Girty's services were deemed so valuable that while most interpreters were paid eight shillings a day, Simon was paid ten.⁵⁶

Simon's brothers James and George followed him to Detroit, but Thomas and John Turner stayed in Pennsylvania.⁵⁷ Simon and James joined the Shawnees on a foray to Kentucky. On their return they visited the Shawnee town of Wapatomica. Here Simon encountered his comrade from "Dunmore's War," Simon Kenton. As previously related Wapatomica was the third town in which Kenton had been forced to run the gauntlet after his capture. Kenton's face had been painted black, a sure sign that he was condemned to be burned to death. Girty addressed the Shawnee and persuaded them to spare Kenton's life.⁵⁸

That Girty spoke with his old friend from his days at Pittsburgh is certain. There are at least two different versions of their conversation, and though these versions differ somewhat, they both speak to Girty's struggle with his own loyalties. Modern historian Calloway relates that Girty asked Kenton how he reconciled his current Patriot allegiance given that he too had sworn loyalty to King George.⁵⁹ Nineteenth-century historian Consul Willshire Butterfield recounts that Girty told Kenton that he regretted having allied himself with the English and that he had acted too hastily.⁶⁰

Whatever his level of regret, Girty now served the British cause unfailingly. In January 1779 he was involved in the ambush of an American supply column on the trail to Fort Laurens.⁶¹ On October 4 of that same year, Simon, his brother George, and Elliott accompanied by a

⁵² Horsman, 23.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵⁵ Calloway, 46.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

⁵⁷ Calloway, 46.

⁵⁸ Butterfield, 74-79.

⁵⁹ Calloway, 46.

⁶⁰ Butterfield, 80.

⁶¹ Calloway, 47.

force of Mingoes, Delawares, Shawnees and Wyandots clashed with an American force under Captain David Rogers at the mouth of the Licking River in Kentucky. In the ensuing battle forty-two Americans were killed and five taken prisoner.⁶² When not engaged in actual combat, Girty was busy scouting American movements and relaying information between the British and their Indian allies.

In 1780 the Girtys, McKee and Elliott with their Indian charges joined British Captain Henry Bird's expedition against George Rogers Clark at the falls of the Ohio. The Indians convinced Bird to alter his plans and the contingent turned instead against the Kentucky settlements. As Girty's reputation grew the Americans posted an \$800 bounty for his scalp.⁶³

Lieutenant Governor Hamilton had been captured by George Rogers Clark at Vincennes on March 5, 1779.⁶⁴ He had been replaced at Detroit by Major Arent Shuyler De Peyster. De Peyster transferred Simon from the Mingoes to the Wyandots at Upper Sandusky early in 1781 and by March Girty had completed his first raid as Wyandot interpreter.⁶⁵

In the spring of 1781 ten prisoners were brought into Upper Sandusky. Nine were from Kentucky and after running the gauntlet were burned at the stake. The tenth prisoner was an eighteen-year-old boy from present West Virginia by the name of Henry Baker. He too endured the gauntlet and was the last slated for death. Girty had been absent at the time of the Kentuckians' deaths and returned just as Baker was being tied to the stake. Girty queried the young man and then interceded on his behalf. The boy's life was spared and he was sent on to Detroit.⁶⁶

In May 1781 Mohawks under Thayendanagea, more commonly known as Joseph Brant, arrived at Upper Sandusky to join forces with the Ohio Indians against the Americans. Many years of intertribal warfare between the Mohawks and Ohio Indians had left bitter memories. Many of the Ohio Indians also detested the Mohawks as arrogant braggarts. For now, old grievances would be veiled but relations would remain tense as they prepared to strike a common foe.⁶⁷

On August 24, 1781, the combined Mohawk and Ohio Indian force surprised Colonel Archibald Lochry's flotilla on a creek just below the Great Miami River. Lochry was among the thirty-seven Americans killed. All the surviving Americans were taken prisoner while the Indians suffered not a single casualty.⁶⁸

That night the Indians celebrated their victory. An intoxicated Brant bragged to the assembled warriors as if he had single-handedly won the victory. Exactly what happened next is unclear, but what is certain is that Girty vociferously challenged Brant's braggadocio. An enraged Brant drew his sword and struck Girty across the forehead.⁶⁹ The presence of the corresponding scar is historical fact.

We can only guess at Girty's motives for challenging Brant. Perhaps he felt a slight against himself or his brother George who was said to have exhibited personal bravery during the battle.⁷⁰ An equally valid supposition would be that he was standing up for the prestige of his

⁶² Butterfield, 110.

⁶³ Calloway, 47.

⁶⁴ Mann, 115.

⁶⁵ Calloway, 47-48.

⁶⁶ Butterfield, 127.

⁶⁷ Isabel Thompson Kelsay, *Joseph Brant* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 310-311.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 313.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 314.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Wyandot warriors in the face of Mohawk arrogance. Such an act would have earned him great respect among his new comrades. As soon as Girty had recovered enough to travel De Peyster sent him and his Wyandots on yet another mission.

The Moravian missionary at Salem, John Heckewelder, proclaimed pacifism and therefore neutrality, but had long been relaying intelligence of Indian movements to the Americans. Heckewelder had already been to Detroit once on espionage charges but had been released back to Salem at the behest of the Delaware chief Hopocan ("Captain Pipe"). On his return Heckewelder had immediately resumed his activities. De Peyster, tired of the duplicity dispatched Girty and his Wyandots to bring all the Moravian Indians at Salem to Upper Sandusky and their white missionaries to Detroit.⁷¹

The remaining Moravian mission villages were in an impossible situation. Just days after Girty's Wyandots had closed the Salem mission Colonel David Williamson and the Pennsylvania Third Militia regiment slaughtered 126 Delaware and Mahican Moravian converts at the missions at Gnadenhutten and Killbuck's Island.⁷² Word of these massacres infuriated all the Ohio Indians but above all the Delawares.

On May 25, 1782, another American force under Colonel William Crawford of Virginia, a respected veteran of the Indian wars and personal friend of George Washington, left Fort Pitt for the Ohio country.⁷³ Delaware chief Captain Pipe, the same man who had vouched for Heckewelder's behavior to De Peyster, led a force of Delawares, Shawnees, Mingoos and Wyandots with Girty present to meet the new American threat.⁷⁴

On 5 June the Indians smashed into the American force which disintegrated into small groups in an attempt to facilitate escape. The next morning Crawford's small band was captured and presented to Captain Pipe.⁷⁵ Captain Pipe and another Delaware chief, Wingenund, decided that Crawford should die as revenge for the massacre of the Moravian Delawares. This in spite of the fact that Crawford had himself condemned the massacre. Crawford and his men were taken to the Delaware town of Tymochetee.⁷⁶ Dr. John Knight and John Slover two of Crawford's fellow captives managed to escape but not before witnessing Crawford's cruel fate. These two fortunate men related their version of this tragic story to a Pittsburgh lawyer named Hugh Brackenridge who published their account in 1783.⁷⁷

Crawford was stripped, shackled and tied to a tree before the council fire. The helpless colonel was beaten with fists and tree limbs. But this was only a preliminary to torture. His ears were cut off and presented to the assembled Indians and at least two white onlookers, Matthew Elliott and Simon Girty. Muskets loaded with powder but no ball were repeatedly pressed to his body and discharged. Next flaming brands from the fire were thrust to every area of his body. When the tormented captive finally lost consciousness his scalp was cut and torn from his battered head. His mutilated body was then thrown into the bonfire.⁷⁸

According to Knight and Slover, Crawford had pleaded with Girty to shoot him to put an end to his suffering. Girty replied that he had no gun and turning to the Indian onlookers

⁷¹ Mann, 150-151.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 151.

⁷³ Dr. John Knight, "That Is Your Great Captain," in *Scalps and Tomahawks*, ed., with an introduction by Frederick Drimmer (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1961), 119-121.

⁷⁴ Calloway, 49.

⁷⁵ Knight, 124-125.

⁷⁶ Horsman, 39.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁷⁸ Barr, 1.

“laughed heartily.”⁷⁹ With the publication of Knight and Slover’s account, both the heroic reputation of Crawford and the infamous reputation of Girty were sealed for generations to come. Girty would later claim that he had done everything he could to save Crawford but that he had no influence with the Delawares who were not to be denied their revenge. He even stated that he would have shared in Crawford’s fate if he had interfered. If Girty did indeed make an attempt on Crawford’s behalf, no record of such appears in the records of the British Indian Department.⁸⁰

Girty would continue to fight alongside his Wyandots until the end of the war. After the war he made his home in British Canada at Malden Township beside Matthew Elliott, Alexander McKee, other veterans of the Indian Department and many of the Indians they had long associated with. In 1784 he married Catherine Malott, a white woman who had herself been a captive of the Indians during the Revolution.⁸¹

He continued to serve as an interpreter for the British Indian Department after the war and his prestige among the Indians continued to grow. When hostilities again erupted, he fought beside the Wyandots at the defeat of St. Clair’s army in November 1791, and the Indians rewarded his bravery with three captured cannon.⁸² When representatives of numerous Indian nations as disparate as the Ottawas and Creeks met at the Glaiize in 1792 to discuss a pan-Indian confederacy to combat the continuing encroachment of the Americans⁸³ only one white man was allowed to attend, Simon Girty.⁸⁴

British military presence and Indian sovereignty were both doomed in the Old Northwest. Simon Girty would fight for both to the very end. A story persists of one last act of defiance in the flamboyant style of a living legend. American troops arrived by boat to garrison the abandoned British fortress of Detroit in 1796. In full view of the Americans, the aging warrior Simon Girty plunged his horse into the Detroit River shouting obscenities at his old enemies until he reached the Ontario shore and the safety of Canada.⁸⁵

The rest of Girty’s life was spent on his farm. He suffered from rheumatism and turned increasingly to drink. His wife left him and he went totally blind. Shortly before his death he quit drinking and begged forgiveness from his wife. He died at his farm on February 18, 1818. British soldiers from Malden attended his funeral wherein he was provided full military honors by the nation of his final loyalty.⁸⁶

To most of his white contemporaries, be they American Patriots or Loyalists, or King George’s military or civil servants, Simon Girty appeared to be a man of questionable character. But the Indian warriors he served alongside honored him with a seat at their councils. He did not disdain either their bravery or their ferocity in the practice of war as did so many of his fellow whites of British or American loyalty. His rank of interpreter bore no pretense of superiority over his Indian comrades.

Where Simon Girty’s true loyalties lie is impossible for us to state at this late date. He served the British cause by serving alongside Indian warriors. Was it the British cause or the

⁷⁹ Knight, 127.

⁸⁰ Calloway, 49.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 52.

⁸³ Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance*. The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 103.

⁸⁴ Calloway, 52.

⁸⁵ Butterfield, 300.

⁸⁶ Calloway, 55.

Indian warriors who held his heart's allegiance? An early childhood spent in Chambers's Mill was not likely to instill a strong sense of patriotism to any nation or nationality. The horrors that the fifteen-year-old Simon experienced that July and August of 1756 could not but scar him for the remainder of his days.

In what has come to be called the "Stockholm Syndrome," the captive is the victim of a shocking capture. He or she believes that their death is imminent. The captive is at the total mercy of the captors. Every movement; talking, eating, sleeping, even urinating is dictated by the captors. Any act of kindness on the part of the captors is magnified. The captive reverts to a childlike state wherein he becomes grateful to his captors for life itself. If the captor shows affection for the captive, feelings of genuine attachment develop beyond conscious control.⁸⁷ If the "Stockholm Syndrome" exists today, surely it existed in 1756, and surely Simon, George and James Girty experienced it.

Simon Kenton, Simon Girty's old comrade from Lord Dunmore's war who was himself a captive for a short time before securing his release with the help of Girty, acknowledged the psychological effects of such captivity. "They say when a man comes among a parcel of people that are harsh to him, and they moderate towards him, he will be more attached to them, and I believe it."⁸⁸ Kenton was aware that Girty had been captured not as a man, but as a boy, and while Girty was universally despised on the frontier, Kenton always spoke well of his old friend.⁸⁹

Who were Simon Girty's people? In his fifteenth year he acquired his third father, his second mother, his second family, and his second cultural loyalty. Regrettably the nineteenth-century American historians who supplied us with the basics of Girty's biography tell us nothing of his Seneca Mingo family. Their interest was directed towards vilifying both Girty and his Indian friends and family. Without this knowledge we have no way to determine how strong his feelings were for his Indian parents and siblings. It is worth noting that Thomas Girty, who escaped from Kittanning, and Simon's half-brother John, who was only a baby when captured in 1756 and not separated from his mother, remained loyal to the Patriot cause throughout the Revolution.⁹⁰

Simon Girty's people had once been the English colonists among whom he was born. Then in the critical years in which he reached adulthood, his people, his family, were the Mingoes. After living as a member of a Mingo family for three years he was once again torn from his family. He was now an English colonist again. Then after pledging his allegiance to this society, that society went to war with itself.

Is it surprising that his loyalties were confused? Would it be surprising that he would be swayed by others, or that he could regret a hasty decision? Once reunited with the Mingoes in the service of the Crown he was now once again among people who acknowledged and respected him as a warrior and a man. It was these people who had instructed him in the ways of both as he grew to maturity. He had reached adulthood as a Seneca Mingo and as a member of that society there was no greater role to aspire to than that of warrior.

Girty immersed himself once again into the Indian world. Historian Isabel Thompson Kelsay gives us this vivid picture of his outward appearance. "Girty with his shaggy hair, dark

⁸⁷ *Gift From Within- "Q & A with Dr. Ochberg" Gift From Within*, <http://www.giftfromwithin.org/html/qna.html>, accessed 2 Dec. 2005 .

⁸⁸ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, Cambridge Studies in North American Indian History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 393.

⁸⁹ Butterfield, 80.

⁹⁰ Butterfield, 330-333.

visage, and short, flat nose, the great scar on his forehead only partially hidden by the handkerchief he wore as a hat, and indulging, as he often did, in the more grotesque forms of Indian ornamentation, cut a shocking figure."⁹¹

He could not recant his allegiance once again. Girty would live among white people again, but always with white people who had also lived and fought beside the Indian. His legacy was now that of a "white Indian," or worse, a "white savage."

There was no going back. His place in America's memory would lie alongside that of his Indian comrades. Generations of Americans would grow up hearing lurid tales of Indian atrocities on the frontier and of the white devil Simon Girty who led and fought alongside the stereotypical painted savage fiends.

Late twentieth and early twenty-first century Americans have come to define "Indians" as Native Americans and to acknowledge their resistance as a valiant and desperate exercise in patriotism. Perhaps it is also time to recognize Simon Girty not as a "savage" or "devil," but rather as a man who once he chose his final loyalty, or had it chosen for him, committed his best talents to that same valiant and desperate exercise in patriotism.

⁹¹ Kelsay, 501.