

A LITTLE KNOWN HERO

James Bayne

There are many who can answer to that appellation but today I wish to tell you the story of William Crawford of Virginia.

William Crawford was born in Orange County, Virginia in 1732 of parents who were of Scots-Irish ancestry. While still a young man he became a friend of George Washington and from him learned the practice of surveying. In 1755 he enlisted in the forces of General Braddock and was given the rank of ensign and served alongside Washington in the defeat at the Battle of Monongahela. He later served in Washington's Virginia Regiment during the French and Indian Wars. In 1758 he served with General Forbe's army in the capture of Fort Duquesne and later fought in Pontiac's Rebellion in 1763.

The middle 1760's were spent farming and trading along the Youghiogheny River in Pennsylvania where he lived with his wife and children. After the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768 between the British and the Iroquois where land was ceded to the British he was employed to survey lands to be awarded to soldiers who had fought for the British against the French and Indians. That land was in the area where the Ohio and Kanawha Rivers join. By the early 1770's the populace was growing weary of the taxes and other restraints being imposed by King George and calls for resistance were being heard. In 1774 the royal governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore commissioned Crawford as a major and assigned him the task of building a Fort, which was named Fort Finckley, some 50 miles southwest of Fort Pitt. From this location Major Crawford led a raid which destroyed several Mingo villages some 36 miles to the northwest. In 1776 he returned to civilian life and became a surveyor and justice for Yohogania County in Virginia.

When we declared our independence from British rule in 1776, Crawford recruited a regiment for the Virginia Continental Line forces and he was appointed a Colonel of the 7th Virginia Regiment by the Continental

Congress. His Regiment fought at the Battle of Long Island and they retreated with the rest of Washington's Army in the retreat into New Jersey. He was among those who crossed the Delaware with Washington and served in the battles of Trenton, Princeton, Brandywine and Germantown. In 1777 the British were raising a ruckus with their Indian allies on the western frontier and Crawford was detached and assigned to the Western Department of the Continental Army. While in this assignment he built Forts Laurens and McIntosh but was never given adequate supplies to be effective in that theatre. He retired in 1781. The British essentially conceded defeat to our forces at Yorktown in October 1781 but renegade units and the Indian allies of the British continued to cause problems particularly in the far reaches of the land lying along the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes.

In 1782 General William Irvine persuaded Colonel Crawford to come out of retirement and lead an expedition against the Indians in the area of the Sandusky River. Colonel Crawford answered the call and left leading a force of some 500 men. His plans became known to the British garrison at Detroit and they together with their Indian allies ambushed Crawford and his men. The first encounter occurred June 4 and 5 at Sandusky and it was there that Colonel Crawford was captured by the Indians. The following day the remainder of his troops were surrounded at Olentangy and defeated. This ended the expedition. His Indian captors tortured Colonel Crawford for several hours and then burned him at the stake. They blamed Crawford for the atrocities committed at Gnadenhutten against their fellow tribesmen. Crawford had no part in that engagement but paid for it with his life.

Author's Note:

Colonel Crawford's home in Pennsylvania has been restored and is open to the public. It is located in Connellsville, PA. By today's standards it is quite small, measuring some 14 feet by 16 feet. His place of birth (Orange County, VA at that time) is now a part of Berkeley County, WVA