

Sandscrest: A Sense of Place, A Sense of Past

by Nora Edinger

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The Frontier Era: AD 1600-1800

Part 2 in a Series

Change wasn't anything new to the Ohio Valley in general or Sandscrest in particular when the era of American colonization and frontier began. Going back far enough -- and digging deeply enough -- the rock layers are so old the age of the dinosaurs was still a blip in the future when they formed.

Much, much later, early indigenous groups such as the Adena people (the mound builders) came and were gone by about AD 100. They or other early groups living in nearby Avella, Pa. -- the Meadowcroft people -- could have been the ones who left petroglyphs on a rock feature near Sandscrest Conference & Retreat Center, pictured right. Still later, more recent Native American tribes emerged. These peoples developed agriculture and were able to establish regional villages given this nutritional enhancement to their hunting and gathering.



In the late 1600s, however, a new level of change arrived, according to Alan Fitzpatrick, a Wheeling historian and author who specializes in the viewpoints and historic lifeways of Ohio Valley indigenous tribes. A naturalized American, Fitzpatrick is native to Canada's Saskatchewan province and became interested in this cultural era while attending elementary school with First Nation students in that location.

From Trickle to Sea Change

At first, Fitzpatrick said, this colonization-driven change was a relative trickle. For example, the Delaware (Lenape) people who, historically, had made their home in what is now New York and New Jersey began to arrive in the Ohio Valley. They were domestic refugees, displaced by a new wave of immigrants coming, this time, from across the Atlantic Ocean rather than from Asia.

The Delaware/Lenape ultimately settled among the Wyandot, Seneca, Mingo and Shawnee peoples already living around the Ohio Valley, Fitzpatrick said. In this era, he noted, these groups were generally peaceful and matrilineal in governance.

“They were primarily farmers,” Fitzpatrick said. “They no longer exclusively hunted and gathered foodstuffs to survive. Now, they supplemented hunting by growing corn, squash, beans, sunflowers. That’s why they could support bigger towns.” The tribes even shared a hunting camp located in what is now downtown Wheeling, south of the Wheeling Suspension Bridge on the site where Wesbanco Arena is now located, he noted.

More change followed, however, Fitzpatrick said. By the 1740s, French and English explorers interested in various trade agreements with indigenous tribes began to travel to and throughout the Ohio Valley. They brought new opportunities. But, they also carried biological peril in the form of diseases to which the Native Americans had no immunity, causing many to perish.

“They’re bringing pots and pans and metal needs and wool blankets,” Fitzpatrick explained of how even the opportunity side was dual-edged. “In one generation, Native people became dependent upon European goods, especially muskets. Every warrior wanted to put down his bow and arrow and get a musket for hunting.”

Trade and interactions continued to increase, he noted. Accord did not. The French – who were the first Europeans to arrive in what is now Ohio County – began to claim the Ohio Valley as their own. They were interested in trading European goods for trapped furs. The English also wanted the land -- to farm.

By 1754, these competing European interests sparked the French and Indian War. It seemed everyone coveted the Ohio Valley, including those Native Americans who were already living here. The tribes largely opted to side against the English as their farming intent involved settling on the land rather than travelling across it as the French were inclined to do.

“When the French and English started battling for Native-occupied land, everything destabilized (including for Native Americans living near Sandscreech),” Fitzpatrick said. “There was no good thing that could come out of it for Native Americans.”

Sea change had arrived.

Tomahawk Rights

By 1763, the French and Indian War was over – with about 13,000 lives lost to battle injuries and disease since its inception in 1754. Great Britain beat the French, but a new intensity of conflict and patterns of guerilla warfare were now established between

Native Americans and the British, who began dividing up the Ohio Valley as they viewed it as their spoil of war.

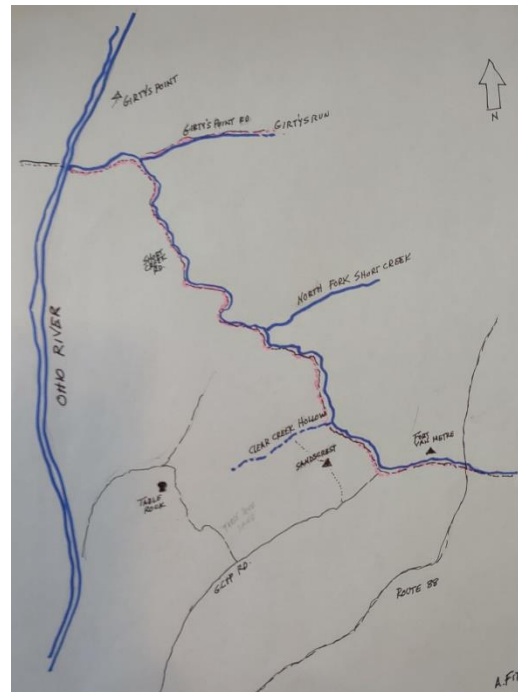
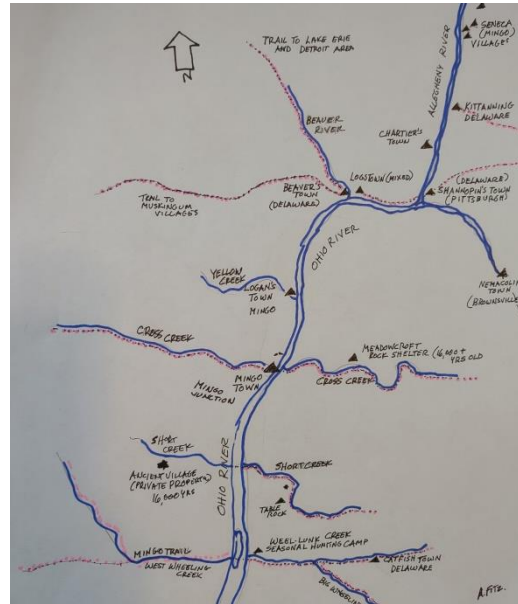
By the late 1700s, future American President George Washington traveled through what is now the Wheeling area doing land surveys. His records noted a Native American village at Mingo Town (now Mingo Junction). The sizeable location included multiple lodges and corn fields. Records from other sources document Native American villages in the Washington, Pa. area and elsewhere and a seasonal, multi-tribal hunting camp in what is now downtown Wheeling.

Maps drawn by historian Fitzpatrick – shown at right -- indicate the Native American presence and the comparative locations from this time of the European American's Fort Van Metre and what is now Sandscrest.

By about 1770 – when what is now Ohio County was still considered colonial territory by the British – Gov. Patrick Henry of Virginia granted massive acreage to two families of farmers who left what is now the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia in search of peace and plenty. Flood walls built later in their South Potomac Valley location – near present Moorefield, W.Va. -- suggest they may have also been fleeing frequent flooding.

The Zanes were first of the two families to arrive locally, in 1769. They claimed all the land around the mouth of Wheeling Creek (including the area of the multi-tribal hunting camp) and established Fort Fincastle (later renamed Fort Henry) in what is now downtown Wheeling. The McCollochs – colonists since 1720 and the Zane's neighbors and in-laws through the marriage of Ebenezer Zane and Elizabeth McColloch -- came in 1770.

The latter clan – whose four young-adult sons included Major Samuel McColloch of McColloch's leap fame -- is the one that specifically concerns Sandscrest.





McColloch family members struck out on horseback to notch trees bordering a tract of thousands of acres to the Zane's north. The McColloch's "tomahawk rights" claim stretched from what is now North Wheeling in the south to what is now West Liberty in the north and through the core of today's Northern Panhandle from west to east.

Its place of safety was Fort Van Metre – built in 1773 and located along what is now Boone and Hedges Road. This site is west of the intersection of state Route 88/Bethany Pike and GC&P Road -- according to Joe Roxby, Ohio County magistrate and a Wheeling historian. It is freshly marked, as seen in the accompanying photo.

Today's Sandscrest – and nearby Table Rock, a geological feature Fitzpatrick believes was a spiritual site for Native American tribes given petroglyphs left on its surface -- was smack in the middle of the McColloch claim.

The Native Americans, who had already found their version of peace and plenty and were living it out in villages located throughout the Ohio Valley were not pleased by what they viewed as a land grab. A new type of war would emerge.

A Landscape of Fear

From the 1774 start of Lord Dunmore's War (a pre-cursor to the Revolutionary War) to about 1800, no one living in Ohio County was experiencing peace. Plenty was a relative concept, according to historian and author Fitzpatrick. Residents were not starving. The McCollochs and other early settlers of European descent were, indeed, beginning to accumulate land-based wealth. But, the rich Ohio Valley was reduced to a landscape of fear.

Colonists intent on seizing and settling the land for farming attacked whole indigenous villages at times in an attempt to push tribes ever westward. In the most brutal of these events – on March 8, 1782 – more than 160 colonists from Pennsylvania and what is now the Northern Panhandle of West Virginia crossed the Ohio River into indigenous territory. One account claims there were nearly 300 colonists involved although there is

no known complete roster. Whatever their number, these men killed 96 Delaware/Lenape and Mohican men, women and children living in what is now Gnadenhutten, Ohio.

This village was Christianized to the point the Native peoples refused to resist the attack. They were systematically executed while they prayed and sang hymns. Their bodies were left in a pile and the village was looted and burned to the ground. This atrocity – known as the Moravian Massacre or Gnadenhutten Massacre – sent an undeniable signal to indigenous tribes throughout the Ohio Valley, Fitzpatrick said.

“There’s not going to be any living together side by side,” Fitzpatrick explained, noting the details of the attack especially gave evidence that the conflict was about land rather than faith or race. “One side is going to exterminate the other.”

Native Americans, already angered by European American encroachment on their own long-held land rights, had been engaging in guerilla-style raids for some time, he noted. Warriors were regularly trying to push back the newcomers, attacking the colonial frontier east of the Ohio River, where they killed or took captive settlers and burned their cabins.

As this frontier war progressed – particularly after the Moravian Massacre – these Native American raids became increasingly brutal, Fitzpatrick said. European American settlers, including women, were scalped. Native warriors often otherwise mutilated the bodies of the dead. Based on interviews with historians from the Delaware/Lenape and Wyandot tribes, Fitzpatrick explained this was about seeking a double death. Native Americans of this time and place believed an intact body was needed to move into the afterlife.

Layers of Complication

On one level, there were two parties seeking land and that ever-elusive peace and plenty. In reality, there was a mix of British loyalists and an emerging group of patriot Americans and a second mix consisting of various indigenous tribes. Beyond that surface, it was even more complicated, Fitzpatrick said.

For example, Wheeling history includes an iconic story from this era that is generally told from only the patriot point of view, he said. In it, patriot Betty Zane is described as having made a daring and desperate run from Fort Henry to the Zane family cabin in order to get the gun powder needed to fend off a 1782 attack by British loyalists and Native warriors. What is less frequently discussed or even known, he noted, is that Betty Zane’s brother, Isaac Zane, chose to live out his life as a Native American after being captured by the Wyandot at age 9 -- in 1763, during Pontiac’s War.

Isaac Zane was not alone, Fitzpatrick said. One of Fitzpatrick's own Irish ancestors -- who came to what is now New York as an indentured servant -- opted to fight as a loyalist ranger and spy alongside the Seneca and Iroquois against American patriots. He was forced to flee to Canada when the patriots prevailed. While this ancestor did not live as a Native American thereafter, Fitzpatrick, who participates in re-enactments on occasion, always portrays one of these "white Indians" to help literally flesh out the story of this era.

Pat Jeffers, a vestry member at nearby St. Matthew's Episcopal Church of Wheeling and a frequent Sandscree guest, has a similar family story. One of her direct ancestors, David Boyd, and his young brother and two teen sisters were captured during the French and Indian War from a Pennsylvania homestead. Native warriors killed and scalped their mother and a toddler-aged brother. The father survived as he was en route from a nearby neighbor's homestead that was also attacked and its residents killed.

A young teen, Boyd was brought on foot to the Ohio Valley and was eventually adopted by a tribal elder whose own son had been killed in warfare. In fireside chats with his young granddaughters -- who recorded the history for the family -- Boyd explained both his trauma and his love for the tribal elder, who was so good to him that he considered him a second father. The elder taught Boyd to be a warrior. Boyd taught the elder to read English, using a Bible that had somehow made its way into the camp.

While the teen passed as Native American given his naturally straight, black hair and a deep tan, Boyd said the elder realized, as the Revolutionary War progressed, that Boyd could be doomed because of his actual ancestry. Boyd and his biological sisters, who were adopted into other tribal groups, were ultimately returned to their birth father in Pennsylvania. Boyd and one of the sisters attempted to return to their Native American families but eventually resumed European American lifeways. The younger Boyd brother was never seen nor heard from again.

"I'm so grateful they came here to make me an American," Jeffers said of her immigrant ancestors and a circuitous survival that led back to the Ohio Valley. "But I'm so grateful I didn't live then."

She has pondered genetic testing to see if she has any matches to indigenous peoples that might be descendants of the missing Boyd brother.

Tangled History

If the contrast between Betty and Isaac Zane and their circumstantial kindred is complicated, the story of the Sandscree area's first white inhabitants is a tangle of knots.

The McColloch family -- who were related by marriage to the Zanes, Wheeling's founders -- came to the mouth of Short Creek (land that includes Sandscrest) in 1770 from what is now the Moorefield, WV area.

They, like the Zanes, had been farmers -- having immigrated to what is now the U.S. from Scotland and Ireland in 1720. They, like the Zanes, wanted a bigger, better life and believed they could get it in the Ohio Valley. It was the land -- big land -- that could do this for them and their descendants. The fact that there were Native Americans already living throughout the area was an obstacle, but not a wall.

Having collectively secured nearly 3,000 acre of land grants from Gov. Patrick Henry of Virginia and marked their perimeter with tomahawk slashes to trees, the McCollochs began clearing sections of untouched forest for cabins and agriculture. Sons Samuel and John have a specific tie to the earliest days of the nearly 300 acres that are now Sandscrest.

Farming was necessary for survival but, given the dangers of the time, the extended family group and other incoming colonists also built a fort to which to retreat as needed. Fort Van Metre was located west of the intersection of GC&P Road and state Route 88/Bethany Pike, according to Joe Roxby, an Ohio County magistrate and regional historian. (This location is less than two miles away from Sandscrest by road.)

Samuel -- a 20-something who rose to the title of major but whose military career has proven difficult to document -- was appointed fort commander.

The possibility of violence was so ever present that area residents farmed with weapons at hand, sometimes with individuals dedicated to standing guard while others worked, according to various first-person accounts. In their roles as frontier scouts during the Revolutionary War, Samuel and his brother John did daily forays to monitor for potential Native American raids. They often travelled to and from the Zane-commanded Fort Henry in what is now downtown Wheeling.



In 1777 -- during the heart of the Revolutionary War -- Fort Henry came under heavy attack by Native Americans and a call for aid reached Fort Van Metre. Samuel and others traveled to Fort Henry -- a historically accurate drawing of which by Wheeling artist Anne Foreman is pictured below. While the rest of the Fort Van Metre men were able to enter Fort Henry and join the fight, Samuel was cut off from the group and fled up Wheeling Hill in an attempt to escape capture.

In the American patriot version of the story, Samuel preferred death to capture to the point he ran his horse off the cliff-like side of Wheeling Hill. That

he and the horse survived the dramatic combination of leap and scramble to the peninsula below became the stuff of heroic legend. The Scotch-Irish Samuel is pictured in farming gear above and left as imagined in a painting by historian Fitzpatrick. The work was gifted to McColloch descendants still living in the Wheeling area.

Interestingly, Fitzpatrick was able to get the Native American perspective on the same event by interviewing a Wyandot historian and archivist. The Wyandot record is that the warriors were about an arm's length away from capturing McColloch when he made the leap.



McColloch lived on. The clan's progenitor did not. In 1778, the McColloch father died of natural causes. Eldest son Samuel ultimately claimed inheritance of the vast McColloch acreage (including today's Sandscree), according to historian Roxby. But, time -- if nothing else -- was on the Native American's side.

Five years after the famous leap – in the summer of 1782 -- area patriots were on edge because of multiple Native American raids that appeared to be in retaliation for the Moravian Massacre. In the Fort Van Metre area alone, the West Liberty home of Zachariah Sprigg was invaded. Militiaman John Stevenson and a Black enslaved man were captured. The slave escaped. Stevenson was killed.

It was in this tense atmosphere that Samuel and John were again scouting on the morning of July 30, 1782. It had been reported Fort Van Metre would be attacked.

In their official capacity as frontier scouts, they would likely have been wearing buckskin breeches, fringed hunting shirts, moccasins and raccoon caps. Each would have worn a red silk scarf on his upper arms so as to be identifiable at a distance as scouts rather than Native Americans. Each would have carried a tomahawk, knife and a gun with its accompanying powder and bullets.

The brothers were ambushed by either a couple of Native American scouts or a party of warriors as they returned to Fort Van Metre. Samuel was shot in the neck with a bullet like one of these from Fitzpatrick's collection, pictured to the right. Samuel fell, already dead, from his horse and was scalped. John was able to safely return to the fort with both men's horses and a dog that may have been named Blue. This return happened possibly after John killed his brother's assailant with a single shot, according to some patriot accounts.



A son of John McColloch later stated that John re-entered the fort with half of his face blackened by dirt and leading Samuel's riderless horse, gestures ironically symbolic of death in Native American culture.

There might, in reality, have not been time for such symbolism or retaliatory shooting. John – who, by various accounts, was wounded or had his outerwear pierced by bullets -- was under fire to the point he was unable to retrieve Samuel's body until the next day. While there is no known written history attributed directly to John, other records from the time suggest John discovered on his return to the site the next day that Samuel's heart had been removed from the scene and his other internal organs hung from the maple tree against which his body was propped in a seated position.

This grisly sight – and a later, alleged admission of such activity by a Native American with first-person knowledge of the killing -- sparked persistent legend that the victorious warriors had engaged in cannibalism in a show of hero worship of Samuel's strength. Fitzpatrick believes such an admission would have been so dangerous for any indigenous person of the overall era that it is unlikely to be true. Also, he said it does not match the lifeways and warfare tactics of local Native Americans of the time.

The Wyandot historian told Fitzpatrick that the Native American raiding party was specifically stalking Samuel and John and worried a lack of bird song would reveal their location.

Some accounts written from first-person American patriot sources claim the attack may have been revenge associated with the Moravian Massacre, which had occurred in March of the same year. John McColloch is included on the partially documented list of participants, according to histories collected by the Rev. Joseph Doddridge and his daughter Narcissa Doddridge.

(An interesting side note: Joseph Doddridge and John McColloch were married to sisters from settler John Van Metre's second family. Van Metre's first wife and two daughters were killed by the Wyandot, while his young son was captured and became a Native American chief.)

Given the Doddridges' well-documented inseparability of John and Samuel McColloch, Fitzpatrick wonders if Samuel was in Gnadenhutten, as well. It is worth considering, however, that Samuel had only been married a few weeks at the time of the massacre.

Wyandot people were not among those killed during the Moravian Massacre. But, all the regional tribes were enraged, Fitzpatrick said. Then Gen. George Washington warned troops not to allow themselves to be captured because of the high threat of retaliation. He was not amiss in his concern. The Moravian Massacre sparked a new level of

brutality. Warriors specifically began mutilating the bodies of slain patriots in attempt to prevent them from entering an afterlife.

Twice dead was the Native American goal, Fitzpatrick explained. But, even once dead, Samuel's blood reached a very different goal for the patriots. It and that of others who died in raids or warfare effectively purchased the land that includes Sandscrest in a way a gubernatorial deed could not.

The McCollochs and other settlers had paid the ultimate price for land and opportunity and there was no going back to Europe. The case was the same for other American patriots who continued to arrive from the east. The Native Americans, increasingly outnumbered, would be the ones to surrender the land. Treaties forged in the late 1780s at least technically ended regional frontier conflict. And, by 1800, Native American raids on local patriot settlements were over, Fitzpatrick said.

What is now Sandscrest would no longer be part of a multi-tribal hunting ground. Table Rock would no longer be a place of indigenous spiritual activity. Between 1830 and 1843, all local tribes – including the Wyandot -- were forced out of the Ohio Valley by order of President Andrew Jackson. Their westward journey is known as the Trail of Tears.

Samuel -- a 30-year-old newlywed who left his watch and a note behind for his young wife on the morning of his death – had already amassed enough wealth he was occasionally bolstering the local government with cash. (His approximate gravesite is marked, as pictured above.) But, he would not live long enough to see the true peace and plenty that had lured his family to the Ohio Valley. The extended McColloch clan would. What is now Sandscrest would become a farm.



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Maps and a painting of Samuel McColloch are used by permission of Wheeling historian and artist Alan Fitzpatrick.

A drawing of Fort Henry is used by permission of Wheeling artist Anne Foreman.

A photo of a marker at the approximate gravesite of Major Samuel McColloch is used by permission of Wheeling historian Margaret Brennan.

Photo of historic bullets and the Fort Van Metre marker were taken by author Nora Edinger and are the property of Sandscrest Foundation, Inc.

Sources:

West Virginia Geological and Economic Survey website

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2024 interview with and fact checking by Margaret Brennan, Wheeling historian

2024 interview with Pat Jeffers, Wheeling resident and descendant of an American patriot captured by Native warriors during the French and Indian War

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A biography of Samuel McColloch by Richard S. Klein and Alan H. Cooper; originally published in 1977 in the Wheeling Intelligencer; Ohio County Public Library Archives

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Accounts of the Moravian/Gnadenhutten Massacre from Wikipedia and freepages.rootsweb.com

“The Scout,” a fictionalized account of Samuel McColloch’s death, by Bruce D. Bonar (faculty at Eastern Kentucky University) for the fall 2006 issue of Combat: the Literary Expressions of Battlefield Touchstones

An 1845 interview with David McColloch (John McColloch’s son) recorded by historian Lyman Draper

“McColloch Family of Ohio County, W.Va.,” 1999, a book-length record compiled by Sam McColloch, a then-living descendant of the extended family