



2010

## Gettysburg Historical Journal 2010

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/ghj>

 Part of the [History Commons](#)

**Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.**

---

(2010) "Gettysburg Historical Journal 2010," *The Gettysburg Historical Journal*: Vol. 9, Article 8.  
Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/ghj/vol9/iss1/8>

This open access complete issue is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact [cupola@gettysburg.edu](mailto:cupola@gettysburg.edu).

---

# Gettysburg Historical Journal 2010

# **The Gettysburg Historical Journal**

Volume IX

Fall 2010

**Evan C. Rothera, General Editor**  
**Elizabeth Ungemach, Assistant Editor**  
**Katie Chandler, Managing Editor**  
**Elizabeth Johns, Submissions Editor**  
**Rachel A. Santose, Publicity Editor**

## **Department of History**

Michael J. Birkner, Professor  
William D. Bowman, Professor  
Frank M. Chiteji, Professor  
Thomas S. Dombrowsky, Adjunct Instructor  
Kwame Essien, Visiting Instructor  
Allen C. Guelzo, Professor  
Scott Hancock, Associate Professor  
Robert W. Lewis, Visiting Assistant Professor  
Dina Lowy, Associate Professor  
Virgil Dixon Morris, Adjunct Professor  
Matthew David Norman, Assistant Professor  
Karen Carol Pinto, Assistant Professor  
Magdalena Sanchez, Associate Professor  
Timothy J. Shannon, Department Chair  
Barbara A. Sommer, Associate Professor  
Michael Weber, Adjunct Assistant Professor

# Contents

<b>Letter From the Editor</b> .....	3
<b>“There Was Nothing in Sight but Nature, Nothing...”: Nineteenth-Century Gendered Perceptions of the Overland Trail</b> Andrea J. Savadelis, '10 .....	4
<b>The Ottoman Gunpowder Empire and the Composite Bow</b> Nathan Lanan, '12.....	32
<b>Credibility and Incredulity: A Critique of Bartolomé de Las Casa's <i>A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies</i></b> Alexander Allen, '11.....	44
<b>“Bloody Outrages of a Most Barbarous Enemy:” The Cultural Implications of the Massacre at Fort William Henry</b> Colin Walfield, '10.....	49
<b>The Struggle to Create Soviet Opera</b> Miriam Grinberg, '11.....	61
<b>Contributor Biographies</b> .....	70

### From The Editor

Before I introduce the articles in the Fall 2010 edition of the Gettysburg Historical Journal, I would like to relate a personal anecdote. When I toured Gettysburg College in the summer of 2005, as a rising high school senior, I stopped by Weidensall Hall. Among the multifarious sheets of information and statistics, I received a copy of Fall 2004 edition of the Gettysburg Historical Journal. At the time, I remember thinking how gratifying it would be to have one of my own papers published in the journal. Now, five years later, I have completed my senior year at Gettysburg and have had the opportunity not only to see my own work published, but also to act in the capacity of editor of this journal and provide other students with the similar thrill of seeing their work published. It has been both an honor and a privilege to be the editor of this journal and a job that I will miss. That being said, it gives me great pleasure to introduce the five articles in this year's journal.

Andrea Savadelis, in "*There Was Nothing in Sight but Nature, Nothing...*": *Nineteenth-Century Gendered Perceptions of the Overland Trail*, offers a well-reasoned consideration of the Overland Trail and focuses on the experience of women. Through a careful analysis of many different sources, Savadelis presents readers with a complete perspective of the struggles of women and they traveled on the Overland Trail in search of new lives. Nathan Lanam, in *The Ottoman Gunpowder Empire and the Composite Bow* engages the seeming paradox of a group of Sipahi cavalry who preferred the seemingly primitive compact bow to the more modern guns. With an eye for detail, Lanam constructs a lucid exploration of the similarities and differences between the compact bow and guns in the sixteenth century and explains exactly why the Sipahi preferred compact bows. In a completely different vein, Alexander Allen focuses on the New World and the interactions between the Spanish and the indigenous populations. Allen, in *Credibility and Incredulity: A Critique of Bartolomé de Las Casas's A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, considers the exaggerations of Las Casas, attempts to understand how they can inform the context, and buttresses his case with accounts by Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and Jean de Léry. Colin Walfield, in "*Bloody Outrages of a Most Barbarous Enemy:*" *The Cultural Implications of the Massacre at Fort William Henry* considers two central themes. The first is the massacre at Fort William Henry, where a joint force of French soldiers and their indigenous allies killed the British defenders. Walfield also interprets the wider cultural implications and analyzes how the French and Indians, although allies, displayed radically different concepts of warfare. Finally, the journal concludes with an article by Miriam Grinberg, entitled *The Struggle to Create Soviet Opera*. Grinberg provides the reader with an excellent overview of the quest to create a unique form of Soviet opera and delineates the setbacks, problems, trials, and tribulations involved in this quest.

It is my hope that readers will find these articles enlightening and enriching.

Evan Rothera  
Gettysburg, Spring 2010

“There Was Nothing in Sight but Nature, Nothing...”: Nineteenth-Century Gendered Perceptions of the Overland Trail

Andrea Savadelis

One hundred and seventeen years ago, between 1841 and 1867, the Overland Trail saw approximately 350,000 Oregon and California bound North Americans traverse its landscape.<sup>1</sup> This westward migration painted the American frontier with a white sea of wagon covers, spotted the grassy plains with brown patches of oxen herds, and lighted the night sky with open cooking fires. Men and women Overlanders experienced this life-changing event in different ways, which are crucial to understanding the dynamics and interaction between these people and their frontier context. Gender-specific roles and social standards of masculinity and femininity carried from emigrants' previous lives influenced their perception of the Overland Trail, interaction with the environment, and their future on the western frontier. These influences affected the settlers throughout the entire journey, beginning with their decision for such a move.

Historically, scholars addressed this westward movement in various ways and have produced great Overland Trail literature. Frontier scholarship began with Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 thesis, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." Turner argued the frontier provided for the development of unique American cultural characteristics and was responsible for the way in which Americans at large defined themselves.<sup>2</sup> Turner influenced women's initial absence from western history by emphasizing the physical harshness frontier inhabitants consistently struggled through.<sup>3</sup> Despite receiving criticism, Turner significantly influenced the historical approach to westward Overland Trail migration and propelled frontier literature into romantic, environmental, and gender-specific directions.

---

<sup>1</sup> John Mack Faragher and Christine Stansell, "Women and Their Families on the Overland Trail to California and Oregon, 1842-1867," in *A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women*, ed. Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1979), 246.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Where Cultures Meet: Frontiers in Latin American History*, ed. David J. Weber and Jane M. Rausch (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1994), 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Armitage, "Women and Men in Western History: A Stereoptical Vision," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (October 1985): 383. <http://www.jstor.org/>.

Early twentieth-century historians acknowledged the frontiersmen's vulnerability and subordination to the plains' commanding natural forces, but also strengthened the notion of Americans as hardworking and self-sacrificing through romanticized visions of western heroes such as the cowboy.<sup>4</sup> Some historians were unsatisfied with such invincible and domineering white male figures. Stemming from liberal social movements of the 1970s, New Western historians rejected romanticism, re-examined previous western literature, and acknowledged previous literature's inadequacy in representing the west in a non-skewed light.<sup>5</sup> To improve upon such faults, New Western historians emphasized the analysis of race, class, and gender<sup>6</sup> and portrayed a much more personal, accurate, and all-inclusive western image. They accomplished this fresh approach by studying letters, diaries, newspapers, travelogues, and biographies.<sup>7</sup> These factors created an ample environment for women's western history to make its debut.

Historians of the West set out to determine if women felt liberated or further confined to gender roles through their Overland Trail journey. Initially, they proclaimed that despite various personal experiences, the migration neither liberated nor abused women.<sup>8</sup> Most historians however, contradicted this conclusion and asserted that the westward movement separated women from female companions, strengthened their subordination to male authority, and extended their domestic duties.<sup>9</sup> Although these scholarly findings focused on women, male influence remained entwined with female Overland Trail perception and experience. New Western historians who focused on female experiences viewed primary sources through new lenses that altered reflections and definitions of Overland Trail women. These lenses, fueled by feelings of female empowerment from various feminist movements of the 1970s and 1980s,

---

<sup>4</sup> For significant historical works regarding frontier environmentalism and romanticized visions of western heroes, see Andy Adams, *The Log of a Cowboy: A Narrative of the Old Trail Days* (Boston, 1903); Rodman W. Paul and Michael P. Malone, "Tradition and Challenge in Western Historiography," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (January 1985). <http://www.jstor.org/>.

<sup>5</sup> Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin, eds., *Trails: Toward a New Western History* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1991), xi.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, for historical works analyzing these categories, see Paul and Malone, "Tradition and Challenge in Western Historiography."

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Walsh, *The American West: Visions and Revisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 56.

<sup>8</sup> Paul and Malone, "Tradition and Challenge in Western Historiography," 46.

<sup>9</sup> Limerick, Milner II, and Rankin, *Trails*, 40. For historical works that came to these conclusions, see John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979); Faragher and Stansell, "Women and Their Families," 246-67.

influenced the rejection of stereotypical female passivity and presented an assertive female Overland character that perceived the westward journey as a positive experience, and was no more physically or mentally taxed than the male emigrant was.<sup>10</sup> Through contexts such as trade and the task of cooking, historians exposed these characteristics and analyzed women's importance to Overland Trail migration.<sup>11</sup>

These historical Overland Trail approaches relied on positive social dynamics within family structure and primarily focused on female Overlanders without discussion of their male companions.<sup>12</sup> However, most recent scholarship reverts to analysis of both genders and does not conveniently ignore contradicting evidence to accepted Overland Trail views. Discussion of divorce on the frontier and during the westward journey exposed how marriage and complete family structure was neither always present nor necessary for successful completion of the journey.<sup>13</sup> Acknowledgment of this negative familial aspect punched holes through previous literature, which heavily relied and focused on marriage as the pivotal driving force of nineteenth-century migrants' Overland Trail completion. Furthermore, historians analyzed the perspectives of both genders by comparing cross-generational Overland travelers.<sup>14</sup> While Overland Trail literature varies throughout its trajectory, there is consistent examination of female and male interactions, gender role application to trail life, and the importance and consequences of male and female presence during the westward migration. Regarding gender perspectives, historians have traditionally focused on women and men's apparent reactions to their surroundings. Women found the Overland Trail to be a volatile place with little comfort or resemblance of their eastern lives, and where the ability to keep their family intact was

---

<sup>10</sup> For historical works presenting this type of female Overland character, see Beverly Beeton, review of *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915*, by Sandra L. Myres, *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 33, no. 4 (Autumn 1983). <http://www.jstor.org/>; Lucy Jane Bledsoe, "Adventuresome Women on the Oregon Trail: 1840-1867," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 7, no. 3 (1984). <http://www.jstor.org/>.

<sup>11</sup> For historical works presenting the female Overland character through these specific contexts, see Bledsoe, "Adventuresome Women"; Joseph R. Conlin, "Eating on the Rush: Organizing Meals on the Overland Trail," *California History* 64, no. 3 (Summer 1985). <http://www.jstor.org/>.

<sup>12</sup> For a historical work with this primary female focus, see Lillian Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982).

<sup>13</sup> For accounts of Overland Trail divorce, see Armitage, "A Stereoptical Vision."

<sup>14</sup> For this type of analysis, see Cynthia Culver Prescott, *Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier* (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2007).

constantly threatened.<sup>15</sup> Men, however, perceived the trail as an adventurous process to new beginnings where trials and tribulations were times for personal growth.<sup>16</sup> One cannot accept these claims without further investigation of how gender-specific influences were the foundation for these Overland Trail perspectives.

To constructively evaluate why such views were held and by whom, this study examines how Overland Trail participants' lives were previously defined. Primary sources are essential to the originality of this study. Diaries, whether factually descriptive or dry, provide firsthand accountable evidence of how gender roles and social standards defined the individual's frontier perspective. Historians must interpret a diary, reflective of personal experience, with an understanding of biases and situational circumstances within which it was written. Primarily nineteenth-century women wrote diaries to pass on family histories. In contrast, Overland diaries were practical, meant as a guide for eastern relatives who followed westward. Others expressed emotions and reactions to daily Overland trials and tribulations.<sup>17</sup> Within these personal narratives resides bias and conscious awareness for a lack of privacy. Women and men disliked portrayal in a disgraceful light, which influenced their diary's content. While there are exceptions, such as women who traveled independently, the majority of men and women reflected daily accounts in congruence with social standards and behavioral expectations. Diary entries written during the few minutes spared before sleeping recalled the day's events and were susceptible to deviating from accuracy. Despite limitations and skewed accounts, Overland diaries are essential; without such keys to the past, much secondary Overland Trail history and literature would not exist.

With careful evaluation, evidence from diaries, letters, biographies, and autobiographies challenges Frederick Jackson Turner's belief that the frontier defined larger things, such as United States' culture and its people,<sup>18</sup> proving instead that gender roles and ideas of masculinity and femininity defined the frontier. Turner argued that American development reflects "a return

---

<sup>15</sup> Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Faragher and Stansell, "Women and Their Families," 251.

<sup>17</sup> Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 11.

<sup>18</sup> David J. Weber and Jane M. Rausch, *Where Cultures Meet: Frontiers in Latin American History* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1994), 4.

to primitive conditions” which was central to westering peoples starting anew.<sup>19</sup> To support this claim, Turner relied on census reports to define the frontier as a place of free land occupied by less than two people per square mile.<sup>20</sup> For Turner, the frontier was a place where the sparse population of inhabitants recreated their lives and gradually became distinct from their eastern roots.<sup>21</sup> Examination of Overlanders’ conduct and attitude suggests otherwise. Women never intended to recreate their lives; they strove to emulate their eastern practices as accurately as possible. For Overland travelers, the frontier was not a specific place, rather an experience that challenged their previous lives and forced them to interact with their surroundings in self-conflicting ways.

Furthermore, this analysis demonstrates that male and female expectations of western territory differed due to their unique relations to the land. A key aspect to David J. Weber and Jane M. Rausch’s definition of a frontier is that it is a place where members of a culture challenge their physical surroundings and create a dynamic unique to time and place.<sup>22</sup> The Overland Trail was a place and process, which exhibited different frontiers among its male and female travelers. While a man’s interactions often tested his manhood and position as leader and provider of the family unit, male Overlanders were successful in upholding and strengthening their roles and masculinity. To women, the Overland Trail was a menacing place where their struggle to defend their femininity seemed a lost cause. Therefore, distinctive male and female relations to the western landscape, influenced by self-images reflective of gender standards, formed their perception of the Overland Trail. This supports David J. Weber’s and Jane M. Rausch’s argument that values placed on land depended upon the people who came to it.

Between 1841 and 1867, numerous Americans throughout regions east of the Mississippi moved westward, primarily to Oregon or California. The government offered incentives to carry out an expedition to a supposed western paradise. Congress passed the Donation Land Act of 1850 that offered single male Oregon settlers over the age of eighteen, 320 acres of land and 640

---

3. <sup>19</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” in *Where Cultures Meet*,

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>22</sup> Weber and Rausch, *Where Cultures Meet*, xiv.

acres to those married, if they arrived prior to December 1850.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, established Oregon residents who wanted more property were encouraged to stay and newcomers were enticed by the opportunity to acquire large amounts of land. The bill offered the same deal to single white males over twenty-one who settled the territory between 1850 and 1853. Those who did not own 320 acres had the opportunity to purchase up to 160 acres of land in Oregon and Washington at one dollar and sixty cents per acre through the Preemption Act of 1841.<sup>24</sup> Despite specifications to acquiring official ownership of land such as completion of a four-year residency and cultivation period, governmental descriptions of land and opportunity made these offers irresistible:

This land is among the richest lands in the world, that it is nowhere surpassed in productiveness, and in all kinds of grain nowhere has its equal... Besides this, we have mines of coal, of iron, or marble, or granite, or salt, and probably mines of gold... you will find ready employment at from five to fifteen dollars per day, according to your trade, corresponding wages by month or year... here you will see things are ready and waiting for the coming emigrant... five years in this country, with the inducements offered, are worth as much in point of property as twenty years east of the Rocky Mountains.<sup>25</sup>

Publicized descriptions of western territory were hard to disregard since people in various business sectors experienced financial difficulty by the mid-nineteenth century and looked to improve their economic situation.<sup>26</sup> At only eighteen years of age, Mollie Dorsey Sanford understood that “we cannot go through life ‘on flowery beds of ease,’” and was sympathetic toward her family’s situation.<sup>27</sup> Her “father and mother have eight children... My father... is obliged to make a change. It is very hard in a city for one pair of hands to support so large a

---

<sup>23</sup> Samuel R. Thurston to The People of the United States, 19 December 1850, in *African American Newspapers* (Washington, D.C.: The National Era, 1850).  
<http://www.accessible.com/accessible/print?AADocList=1&AADocStyle=STYLED&AAStyleFile=&AABeanName=to1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=1.6.1.0.1>.

<sup>24</sup> Weldon Willis Rau, *Surviving The Oregon Trail, 1852: As Told by Mary Ann and Willis Boatman and Augmented with Accounts by other Overland Travelers* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel R. Thurston to The People of the United States.

<sup>26</sup> Rau, *Surviving The Oregon Trail*, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Mollie Dorsey, *Mollie: The Journal of Mollie Dorsey Sanford in Nebraska and Colorado Territories: 1857-1866*, ed. Donald F. Danker (N.p.: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 3.

family.”<sup>28</sup> As breadwinners, husbands and fathers proposed the idea and made the final decision to emigrate westward.<sup>29</sup> While men and women shared monetary concerns,<sup>30</sup> they perceived the decision to improve such factors via westward movement in contrasting light.

Men carried out their gender-specific roles as provider and protector in the family’s interest but did not depend on its constant structure. Some men, such as Winfield Scott Ebey, initially favored traveling ahead to claim land and later send for the remaining family when the western situation was appropriate for their presence. Within the family, women were traditionally subordinate to men’s authority and conceded to make the westward journey whether they wanted to or not. Entwined with family structure, women’s roles relied upon its continuity. Women’s familial dependence resulted in apprehensive female Overland Trail perceptions. Women feared the journey’s potential to end family members’ lives, which for many women became a reality.<sup>31</sup> Throughout the journey, it was common to observe wagons returning east with “not a man left in the entire train; -all died...and the women were returning alone.”<sup>32</sup> Contrary to Ezra Meeker’s eastbound wagon sightings, many widowed women felt compelled to continue westward to fulfill their husband’s wishes and claim their land at the journey’s completion.<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth Smith Geer was “left in a strange land, without money or friends, and the care of seven children,”<sup>34</sup> but eventually established and maintained a life in Oregon. When left without a husband’s support, many women struggled to accomplish their duties from the pressures of filling both parent roles. Disease, accident, and physical disaster could cause the

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Faragher and Stansell, “Women and Their Families,” 250.

<sup>30</sup> Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 13.

<sup>31</sup> For additional accounts of women who became widowed during their journey, see Francis Sawyer, “Kentucky to California by Carriage and a Feather Bed,” Polly Coon, “Journal of a Journey Over the Rocky Mountains,” Anna Maria Goodell, “Vermillion Wagon Train Diaries, 1854,” and Mary Ringo, “The 1864 Journal,” in *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails, 1840-1865*, ed. Kenneth L. Holmes (1983-1989; repr., Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995-1999), 4:97, 5:87, 7:105, 8:200; Lucinda Cox Brown and Caroline Findley, quoted in Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 54, 57.

<sup>32</sup> Ezra Meeker, quoted in Rau, *Surviving The Oregon Trail*, 57.

<sup>33</sup> Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 15. For additional accounts of widows who continued their journey, see Lucia Loraine Williams, “Letter to Mother,” and Abigail Jane Scott, “Journal of a Trip to Oregon,” in *Covered Wagon Women*, 3:133, 5:67; Ellen Smith, Nancy Hunt, Elizabeth Dixon Smith, and Mary Perry Frost, quoted in Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 47, 122, 122, 123; Jane Gould Tourtillott, “Touring From Mitchell, Iowa, to California, 1862,” in *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 226-227.

<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Smith Geer, quoted in Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 55.

family to fall apart, a possibility many women strove to avoid. Therefore, breadwinners who attempted to make the journey without their wife threatened family unity from the beginning and spurred female challenge to male dominance.<sup>35</sup> Mary Jane Hayden blatantly told her husband that “We were married to live together...under these circumstances you have no right to go where I cannot, and if you do you need never return for I shall look upon you as dead.”<sup>36</sup> Threatened by the dismemberment of her support structure, she perceived the Overland Trail journey as the source of such problems and attempted to dissuade her husband’s decision.

Even though women had little influence over the final westward movement decision, they used such threatening tactics to influence the time at which the journey embarked to ensure the family unit travelled together. However, this did not always simply include the immediate family; as Jacob Hammer recalled, “A letter from my father and mother-in-law gave an account that our relations were very much opposed to our moving so far away from them.”<sup>37</sup> It was common for many generations of kin to settle in a particular area, which provided women social contacts.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, many Overland Trail parties consisted of large, multi-generational families. Charlotte Stearns Pengra felt “...lonely and almost disheartened...our folks not having come.”<sup>39</sup> The immediate and larger family unit provided more than simply social relations for women; it acted as the outlet for implementation of their roles. Women were accustomed to living their life and implementing these roles within the “sphere of domesticity,” which shaped appropriate methods to perform domestic duties in a respectable manner. Daily Overland Trail turmoil threatened this “sphere of domesticity,” thereby affecting women’s ability to keep house and influencing their perception of the Overland Trail as “not very homelike.”<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Faragher and Stansell, “Women and Their Families,” 250.

<sup>36</sup> Mary Jane Hayden, quoted in Faragher and Stansell, “Women and Their Families,” 251.

<sup>37</sup> Jacob Hammer, *This Emigrating Company: The 1844 Oregon Trail Journal of Jacob Hammer*, ed. Thomas A. Rumer (Spokane, WA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1989), 44. Although Jacob Hammer received the letter, it was written from his wife’s family. This suggests that females were crucial to extended family unity because other family members were unhappy about her moving away.

<sup>38</sup> Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 121.

<sup>39</sup> Charlotte Stearns Pengra, quoted in Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 98.

<sup>40</sup> Helen Carpenter, “A Journal Across the Plains in An Ox Cart, 1857,” in *Ho for California!: Women’s Overland Diaries from the Huntington Library*, ed. Sandra L. Myres (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1980), 97.

Men's roles, centered upon their ability to provide for family members, influenced their Overland Trail outlook as a transition period to becoming a more adequate provider. Women, however, could not so easily suspend their roles. There was a constant need for female contribution, and traversing the Overland Trail was no excuse not to fulfill daily expectations of cooking, cleaning, and childcare among many others. However, almost every aspect of the Overland Trail hindered preservation of women's domestic sphere. Lansford W. Hasting's popular westering emigrant guide suggested that

Very few cooking utensils, should be taken, as they very much increase the load...A baking-kettle, frying-pan, tea-kettle, tea-pot, and coffee-pot are all! The furniture of this kind, that is essential, which, together with tin plates, tin cups, ordinary knives, forks, spoons, and a coffee-mill, should constitute the entire kitchen apparatus. Bedding should consist of nothing more than blankets, sheets, coverlets and pillows, which, being spread upon a buffalo rode, an oiled cloth, or some other impervious substance, should constitute the beds...because of their being much less bulky, and weighty.<sup>41</sup>

Catherine Haun proves that women perceived the Overland Trail as a barren place by referring to "rocking chairs, mirrors, washstands, and corner-whatnots" as "luxuries."<sup>42</sup> Prior to embarking on the journey, women took these items for granted and saw them as standard household items. The trail's lack of accommodation for such items in turn made women see their previous life as plentiful, in contrast to trail life. Due to the physical limitations that the trail imposed upon women's ability to make their surroundings resemble a home, they consistently struggled to accept load reduction to the bare essentials.<sup>43</sup> Far along the journey, Lavinia Porter observed a "stove which some emigrant had hauled all those weary miles of mountain and desert, only to discard it at last."<sup>44</sup> Finding an abandoned stove beyond the mountainous region of the trail proves women's attachment to such items and resistance to cutting ties with their previous lives.

---

<sup>41</sup> Lansford W. Hastings, *The Emigrants' Guide, to Oregon and California, Containing Scenes and Incidents of a Party of Oregon Emigrants; A Description of Oregon; Scenes and Incidents of a Party of California Emigrants; And A Description of California; With A Description of the Different Routes to Those Countries; And All Necessary Information Relative to the Equipment, Supplies, and the Method of Traveling* (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 1845), 144.

<sup>42</sup> Catherine Haun, "A Woman's Trip Across the Plains in 1849," in *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 170.

<sup>43</sup> Rau, *Surviving The Oregon Trail*, 102.

<sup>44</sup> Lavinia Porter, quoted in Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 170.

Many discarded items were family heirlooms, such as pieces of furniture and china that served as a physical connection to the previous life many women so desperately continued to cling on to.<sup>45</sup> While “no useless trumpery should be taken,”<sup>46</sup> many women refused to part with sentimental items until required by a dire situation. Helen Carpenter recalled, “The keeper of the bridge... wanted mother’s baby wagon and as it had been of little use and was always in the way when anything in the wagon was wanted, she let it go for toll.”<sup>47</sup> Initially a difficult task for Helen Carpenter’s mother, she eventually came to terms with letting such valuable pieces go for the journey and her family’s sake. However, other adjustments to the “sphere of domesticity” were consistently more difficult throughout the Overland Trail journey.

Constant hardships while traveling threatened the clean, healthy, and safe environment women created and maintained for their family.<sup>48</sup> Helen Carpenter observed, “The dust and wind has given everybody sore lips. The worse cases ache, swell, crack open, and bleed.”<sup>49</sup> As caretakers of the family, women were concerned with nature’s affect on health rather than on efficient traveling. Women constantly struggled to keep ill family members alive because the trail was “a far off place where a Doctor can only be obtained by accident.”<sup>50</sup> Lodisa Frizzell was “tortured with anxiety and often as I passed the fresh made graves, I have glanced at the side boards of the wagon, not knowing how soon it might serve as a coffin for one of us.”<sup>51</sup> The scarcity of effective remedies for even the most basic ailments, and the ease with which people contracted them, influenced women’s view of the Overland Trail as a dangerous and inevitable death trap for many who made the journey.

Unfortunately, simple ailments like chapped lips were the least of women’s worries. Many families consisted of young children in direct care of their mother, who were constantly threatened throughout the journey. Children got lost during breaks wandering among the sea of

---

<sup>45</sup> Thomas A. Rumer, “This Emigrating Company,” in *This Emigrating Company*, 69.

<sup>46</sup> Joel Palmer, quoted in Hammer, *This Emigrating Company*, 69.

<sup>47</sup> Carpenter, “A Journal Across the Plains in An Ox Cart, 1857,” 128.

<sup>48</sup> Sandra L. Myres, ed., *Ho for California!: Women’s Overland Diaries from the Huntington Library* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1980), 43.

<sup>49</sup> Carpenter, “A Journal Across the Plains in An Ox Cart, 1857,” 112.

<sup>50</sup> Winfield Scott Ebey, *The 1854 Oregon Trail Diary of Winfield Scott Ebey*, ed. Susan Badger Doyle and Fred W. Dykes (Independence, MI: Oregon-California Trails Association, 1997), 72.

<sup>51</sup> Lodisa Frizzell, quoted in Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 72.

families and livestock or parents left them behind due to the confusing disorder of every day trail life.<sup>52</sup> Amelia Stewart Knight had a frightful experience concerning her daughter when

We unknowingly left our Lucy behind...She was terribly frightened and so were some more of us when we found out what a narrow escape she had run. She said she was sitting under the bank of the river, when we started, busy watching some wagons cross, and did not know we were ready...It was a lesson to all of us.<sup>53</sup>

She was disappointed that such carelessness occurred and her reaction proves how fear provoking the trail was to women. Margaret S. Frink had a more traumatic experience because of her awareness to her child's absence. "I suffered the agony almost of death...But just at dark, Aaron came in sight having the lost boy with him. My joy turned to tears."<sup>54</sup> While episodes like this caused women to perceive the Overland Trail as a busy, overwhelming, and difficult place to keep track of children, cases of lost children were less disheartening than the physical pains inflicted on youth. Most commonly, children incurred injury or death from falling out of wagons. Amelia Stewart Knight had several children and like most women, was consistently unable to be physically by their side watching for danger. "Chat had a very narrow escape from being run over...he kept from under the wheels and escaped with only a good or I should say, a bad scare. I never was so much frightened in my life."<sup>55</sup> Witnessing the near death experience of her son further supported her perception of the Overland Trail as a wild and unpredictable place that could destroy the family she worked so hard to nurture. Lucy Henderson Deady lost her sister when trail life distracted her mother's attention away from child supervision. "Mother had brought some medicine [laudanum] along...my little sister, Salita Jane...drank it all...when

---

<sup>52</sup> Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 13.

<sup>53</sup> Amelia Stewart Knight, "Diary of Mrs. Amelia Stewart Knight," in *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 212.

<sup>54</sup> Margaret S. Frink, quoted in Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 49.

<sup>55</sup> Knight, "Diary of Mrs. Amelia Stewart Knight," 210. For additional accounts of the death, injury, or survival of children who fell out of wagons, see Keturah Belknap, "The Commentaries of Keturah Belknap," Lucena Parsons, "An Overland Honeymoon," Lucia Loraine Williams, "Letter to Mother," Jean Rio Baker, "By Windjammer and Prairie Schooner: London to Salt Lake City," Elizabeth Myrick, "Northern Route to California," Sarah Maria Mousley, "Delaware to Utah, 1857," Mary Elizabeth Lightner, "Journal of a Mormon Woman, 1863," and Mary Ringo, "The 1864 Journal," in *Covered Wagon Women*, 1:223, 2:247-48, 3:131, 3:264, 6:273, 7:168, 8:104, 8:206; Katherine Dunlap, quoted in Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 135; Tortillott, "Touring From Mitchell, Iowa, to California, 1862," 222.

mother tried to awake her later she couldn't arouse her."<sup>56</sup> Many mothers could only watch their children's fate unfold while hoping for the best. Although trail life prohibited women from constantly watching over children, women dedicated much of their attention to them, often times at the detriment to themselves.

In their previous life, the "sphere of domesticity" not only provided a structure of safety in which women raised their children but also some form of sociability with their female companions. Thus, women perceived the Overland Trail as a lonely venture where lasting female companions and friendships were hard to come by. Women took advantage of opportunities to be in the presence of fellow female westward travelers regardless of the way in which enjoying their companionship took place. Catherine Haun attempted to continue her social life whenever the situation permitted her to do so. "During the day we womenfolk visited from wagon to wagon or congenial friends spent an hour walking, ever westward...voicing our hopes for the future in the far west and even whispering a little friendly gossip of emigrant life."<sup>57</sup> Women enjoyed "comfortable conversations," but the sharing of chores with female kin and trail friends allowed them to reconnect to their previous life. During permissible times of her journey, Catherine Haun enjoyed "...tating, knitting, crocheting, exchanging recipes for cooking beans or dried apples or swapping food for the sake of variety" because it "kept us in practice of female occupation and diversions."<sup>58</sup> While such talk about female activities and diversions was a comforting past time women enjoyed between each other, their reflection upon the life they left behind reinforced their negative Overland Trail views. Together, women shared the difficulty the trail posed in carrying out important roles, especially cooking, which consequently influenced women to identify the Overland Trail as a volatile and capricious setting not conducive to carrying out even the most basic of domestic duties.

Within the "sphere of domesticity," cooking was a central task that allowed women to display their home-making skills. While cooking was a necessary skill essential to survival, women compared conveniences eastern life provided for such work to their current situation, which furthered their perception of the frontier as an inconvenient and difficult place to fulfill

---

<sup>56</sup> Lucy Henderson Deady, quoted in Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 49.

<sup>57</sup> Haun, "A Woman's Trip Across the Plains in 1849," 180.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

such essential tasks. Contrary to this common perception, some westering women possessed a very different view due to luxuries afforded in regards to the way they traveled. Hired hands, particularly a cook, were a pleasurable addition to the travel company.<sup>59</sup> Hired cooks however, represented wealth, which few Overlanders possessed. As a southern woman, Catherine Haun did not know how to cook and “had never made even my first cup of coffee.”<sup>60</sup> Although having a hired cook was a rare luxury during westward travel, if available, travelers took advantage of it. Catherine Haun depended upon a hired cook and would have perceived the Overland Trail as more difficult had she been forced to cook as the majority of westering women. Women who had no other option other than to cook for their family experienced many hardships that conveniences of eastern life had eliminated. Lansford W. Hastings’ emigrant guide recommended a light travel load, therefore, many women abandoned their stoves and cooked by an open fire and used a tin reflector for baking.<sup>61</sup> While this alternative cooking style was not reflective of the methods in the “sphere of domesticity”, there was a general female consensus that “what we are to have to eat is going to be of much more importance than how it is cooked or served.”<sup>62</sup> Although preparing food over an open fire was necessary for completion of this domestic duty, the process in doing so posed various problems. Cecilia Adams failed to produce a meal because she “could not raise enough fire to cook breakfast.”<sup>63</sup> Unlike their previous life, which provided the comfort of a permanent shelter, the Overland Trail exposed travelers to nature’s elements.

---

<sup>59</sup> For another account of a family with hired hands, see Rebecca Nutting Woodson, quoted in Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 67.

<sup>60</sup> Haun, “A Woman’s Trip Across the Plains in 1849,” 169. Catherine Haun makes mention of her southern origin and stated that “having been reared in a slave state my culinary education had been neglected....” It was common during this time period for southerners to live a plantation lifestyle and have slaves, considered hired hands after their legal freedom had been enacted. Therefore, the amount of hired hands that traveled with the Haun family suggests that they continued their plantation-type lifestyle, which allowed for Catherine Haun to neither learn nor need to cook during her journey.

<sup>61</sup> Rau, *Surviving The Oregon Trail*, 13. For additional accounts of women cooking by an open fire, see Margaret A. Frink, “Adventures of a Party of Gold-seekers,” Lucena Parsons, “An Overland Honeymoon,” Eugenia Zieber, “Journal of Our Journey to Oregon,” Lucy Rutledge Cooke, “Letters on the Way to California,” Louisa Cook, “Letters from the Oregon Trail, 1862-1863,” and Harriet Hitchcock, “Thoughts by the Way, 1864-1865,” in *Covered Wagon Women*, 2:97, 2:286, 3:185, 4:258, 8:36, 8:261; Lodisa Frizzell and Catherine Bell, quoted in Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 80, 128; Tourtillott, “Touring From Mitchell, Iowa, to California, 1862,” 219.

<sup>62</sup> Carpenter, “A Journal Across the Plains in An Ox Cart, 1857,” 95.

<sup>63</sup> Cecilia Adams, quoted in Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 76.

Inconvenient surroundings forced women to become creative in fulfilling their culinary tasks. James Clyman observed a woman within his party who “having kneaded her dough, she watched and nursed the fire and held an umbrella over the fire and her skillet with the greatest composure for near 2 hours and baked enough bread to give us a plentiful supper!”<sup>64</sup> While men were impressed with women’s determination and dedication to their duties, women were less enthusiastic about doing so. Esther Hanna’s patience was tried when cooking and baking “on a little green wood fire with the smoke blowing in your eyes so as to blind you, and shivering with cold so as to make the teeth chatter.”<sup>65</sup> Her emphasis on the negative affects from this particular duty and her surroundings shows that her focus was on the troubles she endured rather than anything positive such as learning a new method for an old task. The cumbersome elements women overcame simply to prepare a meal were taxing and carried over into the final product and its presentation.

Women accepted the fact they were not able to serve their meals from platters or onto fine dinnerware, but remained particular about its taste, which although at times most unfavorable, was essentially unavoidable. “Got breakfast over after a fashion. Sand all around ankle deep; wind blowing; no matter, hurry it over. Them that eat the most breakfast eat the most sand....”<sup>66</sup> By stating this so matter-of-factly, Amelia Stewart Knight proves that she could not control her surroundings and grudgingly accepted the outcome of the meal. While all of these factors within cooking were troublesome, the entire process was a never-ending aggravation. Helen Carpenter stated with discontent and frustration that

Although there is not much to cook, the difficulty and inconvenience in doing it amounts to a great deal. So by the time one has squatted around the fire and cooked bread and bacon, made several trips to and from the wagon, washed the dishes (with no place to dry them), and gotten things ready for an early breakfast, some of the others already have their night caps on.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> James Clyman, quoted in Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 80.

<sup>65</sup> Esther Hanna, quoted in Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 80.

<sup>66</sup> Knight, “Diary of Mrs. Amelia Stewart Knight,” 205.

<sup>67</sup> Carpenter, “A Journal Across the Plains in An Ox Cart, 1857,” 114.

She perceives, like most westering women, the frontier as an inconvenient and difficult place to fulfill the basic yet essential task of cooking compared to the conveniences eastern life provided for such work. However, with the exception of hindrances presented by natural elements, such as rain, wind, dirt, and sand, most difficulties women experienced within their cooking duties stemmed from the most daunting of Overland Trail inconveniences: the lack of resources to replenish dwindling provisions.

Women depended on various resources to carry out domestic duties, which had been readily available or easily acquired through markets relatively close to their eastern home. Therefore, westering women perceived the Overland Trail as a barren landscape non-conducive to providing the necessary resources for daily frontier survival. Contrary to information provided by emigrant guides that "...many wild fruits are also found, in the greatest abundance,"<sup>68</sup> women did not find plentiful resources of any kind:

...my husband stopped the team and said,  
 'Mary, did you ever see anything so beautiful?'  
 There was nothing in sight but nature. Nothing....<sup>69</sup>

Mary A. Jones clearly did not find anything appealing about their frontier surroundings as her husband did. Lydia Allen Rudd thought, "we had been in the most desolate looking region," and Mary Stuart Bailey "did not see anything but bones and dead animals."<sup>70</sup> As women, Mary Jones's, Lydia Rudd's, and Mary Bailey's primary concern was acquiring the proper materials to replenish provisions that westward travel demanded. Without nearby markets or means to process foods, the natural surroundings made it extremely difficult for women to be optimistic about their western future. Francis Parkman however, perceived the trail similar to his female westward counterparts:

---

<sup>68</sup> Hastings, *The Emigrants' Guide*, 45.

<sup>69</sup> Mary A. Jones, quoted in Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 53.

<sup>70</sup> Lydia Allen Rudd, "Notes By the Wayside En Route to Oregon, 1852," in *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 193; Mary Stuart Bailey, "Wife of Dr. Fred Bailey from Ohio to California, April-October 1852," in *Ho for California!*, 84. For additional accounts of women who expressed their view of the western landscape as barren, see Betsey Bayley, "Across the Plains in 1854," Elizabeth Dixon Smith, "The Diary of Elizabeth Dixon Smith," and Martha S. Read, "A History of our Journey," in *Covered Wagon Women*, 1:36, 1:124, 5:227.

I can assure him that he need not think to enter at once upon the paradise of his imagination. A dreary preliminary, a protracted crossing of the threshold awaits him before he finds himself fairly upon the verge of the “Great American Desert” – those barren wastes, the haunts of the buffalo and the Indian, where the very shadow of civilization lies a hundred leagues behind him. The intervening country, the wide fertile belt that extends for several hundred miles beyond the extreme frontier, will probably answer tolerably well to his preconceived ideas of the prairie; for this it is from which picturesque tourists, painters, poets and novelists, who have seldom penetrated further, have derived their conceptions of the whole region...As for food, he must content himself with biscuit and salt provisions, for, strange as it may seem, this tract of country produces very little game.<sup>71</sup>

Most men however were not so pessimistic because of various opportunities the trail provided them to improve their luck. Herds of various game or lone animals occasionally came into view and reaffirmed the possibility of acquiring fresh meat:

...up jumped an animal with very long ears...  
 ‘Joe, shoot it, or it will get away from us yet.’  
 ‘No,’ ... ‘I will catch it for it is lame and cannot run far.’ ...the animal made a few leaps and was out of sight... ‘I never was so deceived in an animal in all my life.’<sup>72</sup>

The lighthearted attempt to kill the Jackrabbit and Joe’s passive reaction to its flight exemplifies their optimism that larger, more important game would not so easily escape. Although such hopes infrequently became realized, the thought of opportunities for improvement kept men Overlanders’ enthusiasm for the journey higher than most women’s. Resources needed to fulfill male duties were quite different from those required for female duties.

Primary male roles before, during, and after the westward journey, consisted of being the family’s protector and provider. Men were responsible for providing money that women used to obtain resources. En route to their western destination however, men were not able to earn money nor were there substantial opportunities to purchase goods at outfitting stores. Consequently, hunting was men’s primary means of obtaining game that women used to provide

---

<sup>71</sup> Francis Parkman, “The Plains Described – Francis Parkman on the ‘Oregon Trail.’” *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, CA) May 23, 1872; Issue 40; col C.

<sup>72</sup> Charles Howard Crawford, *Scenes of Earlier Days: In Crossing the Plains to Oregon and Experiences of Western Life* (1898; repr., Chicago: Quadrangle Books, Inc., 1962), 14.

the family with protein enriched meals.<sup>73</sup> Having such meals was rare because “one of the greatest difficulties is about getting enough to eat.”<sup>74</sup> From her experience, Margaret A. Frink concluded that “there are hundreds and thousands of them on these plains; but the emigration has frightened them...away...so that they are seldom seen.”<sup>75</sup> Men who attempted to hunt buffalo that crossed their path quickly realized they acquired more frustration than meat. “It would be impossible to kill them in sufficient numbers, to sustain a large party, unless many persons should devote their entire attention to the business of hunting.”<sup>76</sup> It was difficult for men to take such substantial amounts of time and energy away from their family or driving the wagon. To counter this inhibiting circumstance, a particular man acted as a game scout. Even with this strategy and a successful hunt, the meat obtained was rarely enough to sustain a decent sized party. Helen Carpenter thought, “Uncle Sam...is an excellent shot and...has had opportunities of getting rabbits, prairie chickens, and antelope. They are always very generous in dividing it if the supply will admit of it, but with a family of eight this occurs only occasionally.”<sup>77</sup> Most traveling parties were not so lucky to have an experienced shot, but even Helen Carpenter’s uncle was only successful at providing the family with smaller more vulnerable game. Despite buffalo being fiercely resistant to shots, men attempted to provide their families with whatever they could, even though the amount of usable food acquired by large gaming attempts was minimal.<sup>78</sup> Men regularly concluded “...as a beautiful herd [of buffalo] came in sight, that they would give chase and secure some fresh meat if possible...Neither were successful in their hunt and we had to abide our time for fresh meat.”<sup>79</sup> Sarah Davis, who was lucky to have fresh meat from a kill, recalled, “the rest of the men killed nothing of consequence.” Compared to the various uses and

---

<sup>73</sup> Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 50.

<sup>74</sup> Asa Bowen Smith to Parents, 15 May 1838, in Clifford Merrill Drury, *The Mountains We Have Crossed: Diaries and Letters of the Oregon Mission, 1838* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 145.

<sup>75</sup> Margaret A. Frink, “Adventures of a Party of Gold-seekers,” in *Covered Wagon Women*, 2:88.

<sup>76</sup> Hastings, *The Emigrants’ Guide*, 144.

<sup>77</sup> Carpenter, “A Journal Across the Plains in An Ox Cart, 1857,” 120.

<sup>78</sup> Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 85.

<sup>79</sup> Crawford, *Scenes of Earlier Days*, 15. For additional accounts of men who were unsuccessful while hunting, see Patty Sessions, “A Pioneer Mormon Diary,” Sallie Hester, “The Diary of a Pioneer Girl,” Rachel Taylor, “Overland Trip Across the Plains,” Ellen Hundley, “From Utah to Texas in 1856,” Julia Ann Archibald, “To Pike’s Peak and New Mexico, 1858,” Louisa Cook, “Letters from the Oregon Trail, 1862-1863,” and Harriet A. Loughary, “Travels and Incidents, 1864,” in *Covered Wagon Women*, 1:169, 1:237, 6:168, 7:150, 7:197, 8:33, 8:127.

ample supply of provisions back east, women did not want to be bothered with little game that reminded them of the trail's lack of resources. Stemming from men's difficulty to provide game, women relied on supplies brought from the journey's beginning. The limited supply of necessities caused women's overly cautious attitude toward measuring daily rations; consistent small meals throughout the westward journey were preferred to starving toward the end because of initial overindulgence.<sup>80</sup> While provisions such as flour, meal, sugar, and salt were conducive to preparing basic staples such as bread and biscuits, sometimes women were able to find items to supplement their food. Women scrounged the earth for items readily available in an eastern market. Jane Gould Tourtillott "went in a path through the hazel bushes, saw some hazelnuts laying on the ground...finding them good, gathered two quarts, which were quite a luxury this time of year."<sup>81</sup> The view of hazelnuts as a luxury proves that women believed the trail lacked the abundant ingredients that eastern life offered.

Regardless of the amount of packed culinary resources women had available, wood and water, gathered from the natural surroundings, were scarce and further limited their use of provisions and daily activities. Helen Carpenter experienced, "Noon on the prairie where there was neither wood nor water...precludes the idea of making tea at noon as some of the party wished to do."<sup>82</sup> Contaminated water sources outnumbered pure ones, which caused a lack of drinking water as well as a lack of nutrient rich sources such as healthy fish:

At the edge of the water every now and then would be a dead ox or cow that had gone down the steep bank to quench its thirst and, being too weak to make the return up the steep bank, would fall in the river and drown. About those dead carcasses would be dozens of large fish dead. They had been eating on the putrid flesh of the dead cattle. So that ended the feast of fish.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 70.

<sup>81</sup> Tourtillott, "Touring From Mitchell, Iowa, to California, 1862," 219.

<sup>82</sup> Carpenter, "A Journal Across the Plains in An Ox Cart, 1857," 97.

<sup>83</sup> Rau, *Surviving The Oregon Trail*, 151. For additional accounts of water contamination and scarcity, see Betsey Bayley, "Across the Plains in 1854," Patty Sessions, "A Pioneer Mormon Diary," Sallie Hester, "The Diary of a Pioneer Girl," Louisiana Strentzel, "A Letter from California, 1849," Lucena Parsons, "An Overland Honeymoon," Susan Amelia Cranston, "An Ohio Lady Crosses the Plains," Mariett Foster Cummings, "A Trip Across the Continent," Lucy Rutledge Cooke, "Letters on the Way to California," Abigail Jane Scott, "Journal of a Trip to Oregon," Polly Coon, "Journal of a Journey Over the Rocky Mountains," Martha S. Read, "A History of our Journey," Amelia Stewart Knight, "Iowa to the Columbia River," Mary Burrell, "Council Bluffs to California, 1854," Elizabeth Austin, "Vermillion Wagon Train Diaries, 1854," Ellen Hundley, "From Utah to Texas in 1856,"

Many women felt they could never escape the constant struggles to provide meals for their family or limitations the frontier landscape posed on fulfillment of such duties. There were exceptions to this scarcity situation, particularly during the later years of Overland travel when wealthy families attempted to increase their social status through western opportunities. Harriet T. Clark and her husband had “seven or eight wagons and two or three hundred head of cattle, about 100 head of horses” and chickens “to furnish us with eggs all the way.”<sup>84</sup> Harriet T. Clark’s wealth and ability to purchase quality items provided an abundance of resources, which made her journey favorable. Due to her lack of struggle compared to the common westering females, her perception of the Overland Trail was one of a “pleasure trip and a perfect delight.”<sup>85</sup> However, when not so adequately outfitted, the negative effects of resource scarcity affected female perception of native encounters on the Overland Trail.

At the beginning of their westward migration, women like Harriet Noble “had the greatest terror of Indians.”<sup>86</sup> Having no prior experience with natives and provided only with knowledge from exaggerated stories, Catherine Haun “had a nervous attack was really so timid that I saw that the canvas of our wagon was snugly together; all strings and fastenings securely tied...for I just couldn’t go to sleep knowing that some bold, prying savage eye might look in at me during the night.”<sup>87</sup> Catherine Haun’s reacted to native presence with fear and apprehension, similar to that of Amelia Stuart Knight. “I was very much frightened...and lied awake all night – I expected every minite we would all be killed, however we all found our scalps on in the morning.”<sup>88</sup> Both women expected the worst from native presence and felt completely

---

and Harriet A. Loughary, “‘Travels and Incidents,’ 1864,” in *Covered Wagon Women*, 1:35, 1:168, 1:240, 1:255, 2:266, 3:101, 4:135, 4:246, 5:59, 5:188, 198, 5:227, 6:59, 61, 6:248, 7:117, 7:140, 8:150.

<sup>84</sup> Harriet T. Clark, quoted in Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 104.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Harriet Noble, “Emigration from New York to Michigan,” in *Root of Bitterness: Documents of the Social History of American Women*, ed. Nancy F. Cott (1972; repr., Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 226.

<sup>87</sup> Haun, “A Woman’s Trip Across the Plains in 1849,” 176.

<sup>88</sup> Amelia Stewart Knight, “Iowa to the Columbia River,” in *Covered Wagon Women*, 6:58. For additional accounts of women who feared Indians, see Tabitha Brown, “A Brimfield Heroine,” Margaret A. Frink, “Adventures of a Party of Gold-seekers,” Lucena Parsons, “An Overland Honeymoon,” Harriet Talcott Buckingham, “Crossing the Plains in 1851,” Amelia Hadley, “Journal of Travails to Oregon,” Elizabeth Wood, “Journal of a Trip to Oregon,” Abigail Jane Scott, “Journal of a Trip to Oregon,” Cecelia Adams, “Twin Sisters on the Oregon Trail,” Amelia Stewart Knight, “Iowa to the Columbia River,” Ellen Hundley, “From Utah to Texas in

overwhelmed due to the minimal precautionary measures they were able to take. However, women's reliance on the availability of resources was so great that when the western landscape failed to provide such elements, they developed a different view of native presence from their original outlook and that of men.<sup>89</sup> Helen Carpenter's family encountered a group of peaceful Indians but "Uncle Sam kept charging us to keep on our guard as 'nobody knows what they may be up to'...they came with moccasins to trade for something to eat."<sup>90</sup> Although women were reluctant to sacrifice food provisions, clothing materials were essential for protection against harsh trail elements. Helen Carpenter understood the value of food but also knew time to mend or make clothing was rare. From Helen's perspective, they could acquire necessary resources from natives at minimal effort to balance the supply of provisions along the journey. Therefore, while Uncle Sam's advice of caution is considered, Helen's focus is on trade. Men, as protectors of the family, stock, and train unity, focused on their family's safety particularly from native attack.<sup>91</sup> Uncle Sam was persistent about being wary of natives and was disinterested in what any unfamiliar outsider had to offer. Uncle Sam's attitude toward the native encounter was nearly universal; men viewed the Overland Trail journey as a constant threat and an exhausting one to constantly defend against.

Charles Howard Crawford believed the "Sohones or Snake Indians" were "one of the worst tribes that ever lived on the American continent for low cunning, meanness, and treachery...."<sup>92</sup> Although Charles Howard Crawford did not personally experience the ruthlessness of the Sohones, stories circulated throughout wagon trains that reaffirmed negative generalizations:

---

1856," Harriet Booth Griswold, "From Ashtabula to Petaluma in 1859," Harriet A. Loughary, "'Travels and Incidents,' 1864," and Mary Ringo, "The 1864 Journal," in *Covered Wagon Women*, 1:52, 2:77, 79-81, 84, 2:277, 3:45, 3:89, 3:175, 5:55, 88, 5:274, 6:40, 58, 60, 7:145, 7:233, 8:150, 8:215.

<sup>89</sup> Glenda Riley, "Frontierswomen's Changing Views of Indians in the Trans-Mississippi West," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 34, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 20. <http://www.jstor.org/>.

<sup>90</sup> Carpenter, "A Journal Across the Plains in An Ox Cart, 1857," 116. For additional accounts of women who traded with Indians for resources, see Susan Amelia Cranston, "An Ohio Lady Crosses the Plains," Elizabeth Wood, "Journal of a Trip to Oregon," Abigail Jane Scott, "Journal of a Trip to Oregon," Polly Coon, "Journal of a Journey Over the Rocky Mountains," and Elizabeth Austin, "Vermillion Wagon Train Diaries, 1854," in *Covered Wagon Women*, 3:124, 3:174, 170, 5:124, 5:187, 195, 7:124; Rebecca Ketcham, quoted in Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 102-3; Lydia Allen Rudd, "'Notes By the Wayside En Route to Oregon, 1852,'" and Knight, "Diary of Mrs. Amelia Stewart Knight," in *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 192, 213.

<sup>91</sup> Myres, *Ho for California!*, 43.

<sup>92</sup> Crawford, *Scenes of Earlier Days*, 30.

...The savage yell was heard, striking terror to every heart...for out of the entire company only two boys were left as survivors of the scene that day...To fully accomplish their brutal work they burned the wagons, and then used iron rods to burn their victims into insensibility.<sup>93</sup>

These extreme accounts of men who failed to protect their families intensified the threat Indians posed to male Overlanders. Additionally, horse thievery was an exhausting daily challenge to ward against:

The men at the fort warned us to look out for thieving Indians...they came we supposed about midnight when the guards were being changed and took three horses and made their escape with them while no one knew they were gone until the next morning.<sup>94</sup>

Frequent failure to fulfill the protectorate role increased the disparity between male and female perception of Indian encounters. Women, while cautious in most respects, saw the Overland Trail as a barren landscape where risks were necessary for daily survival. While the availability of resources varied, their use and application influenced women's adherence to social behavioral standards established in their previous lives.

Social standards in congruence with traditional gender-specific behavior guided an individual's actions and opinions of the frontier throughout the westward journey. Women performed the tasks necessary to carry out their roles but were fiercely committed to doing so with accepted behavior. Helen Carpenter noted "...various chip gatherers can be seen...It would be amusing if it were not dire necessity which drives them to it. Hale made gather this evening and reported to mother...."<sup>95</sup> Helen did not forwardly express disgust for the gather and use of buffalo chips, dried pieces of buffalo dung, but clearly cannot imagine doing so within voluntary circumstances. Mention of Hale's employment by Helen's mother is evidence of her mother's attempt to retain her dignity while completing necessary tasks. Such tasks influenced women's view of the Overland Trail as a degrading and embarrassing place because such behavior back

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>95</sup> Carpenter, "A Journal Across the Plains in An Ox Cart, 1857," 119. Hale is Helen's younger brother for whom it was acceptable to take part in such activities.

east would have been unacceptable. Similar dignity emphasizing social standards guided male behavior. Both genders avoided the need for buffalo chips as fuel altogether when the situation provided for such opportunity. “In order to get any fire wood we take our horses, and ride across the Stream...and go a mile to the river and cut some dead Willow bushes and bring to Camp. This is getting fire under difficulties; but better than none.”<sup>96</sup> Winfield Scott Ebey did not consider starting a fire with buffalo chips and would have done without a fire if the wood had been unattainable. More often however, men’s actions did not so closely resemble female social influences. Men often found women’s reactions and the way in which they carried out tasks amusing:

...we had to use buffalo chips...It was amusing to see the different expressions of countenance when this announcement was made. Ladies who had been reared in luxury and were generally noted for their good nature and mild manners, fairly stamped the earth and almost gritted their teeth together, declaring they never could and never would cook with it.<sup>97</sup>

Men’s amusement toward the application of buffalo chips stemmed from their freedom from female social standards and acceptable behavior restrictions. The Overland Trail was consequently favorable toward men applying their role as masculine protector to the westward journey with considerable ease. Men saw the adaptations people made to their Overland Trail surroundings in a different light than women. “It is an excellent thing we are so formed that we can adapt ourselves to the surrounding circumstances.”<sup>98</sup> From the ease of Charles Howard Crawford’s tone, he clearly found adaptation a fluid process everyone was easily capable of, however, female Overland Trail experience and attitude strongly suggests otherwise. Crawford observed an exceptional outburst contrary to most women’s public display of emotions. Lavinia Honeyman Porter

...would make a brave effort to be cheerful and patient until the camp work was done. Then starting out ahead of the team and my men folks, when I thought I had gone beyond

---

<sup>96</sup> Ebey, *The 1854 Oregon Trail Diary of Winfield Scott Ebey*, 69.

<sup>97</sup> Crawford, *Scenes of Earlier Days*, 9.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

hearing distance, I would throw myself down on the unfriendly desert and give way like a child sobs and tears, wishing myself back home with my friends and chiding myself for consenting to this wild goose chase.<sup>99</sup>

She clearly disapproves of transporting her life westward, but regardless of her personal opinion on the situation, nineteenth-century female social standards influenced Lavinia to be publically positive regardless of the circumstances.

Women's concern for public appearance included physical traits as well. Back east, women felt their appearance was a direct reflection of their family. If people saw a woman as presentable, clean, and beautiful, then they thought the same about her family. Thus, women were adamant about maintaining a beautiful physical appearance. Miriam Davis stated she "...cooked so much out in the sun and smoke that I hardly know who I am when I look into the little looking glass."<sup>100</sup> Social standards for beauty and femininity influenced women to perceive the trail as a harmful place to their fair complexion and a challenging force to their appearance. Determined to counter the Overland Trail's complexion destroying forces and maintain a proper feminine appearance, many mothers insisted for themselves and daughters to take reasonable cautions:

While traveling, mother was particular about Louvina and me wearing sunbonnets and long mitts in order to protect our complexions, hair and hands. Much of the time I should like to have gone without that long bonnet poking out over my face, but mother pointed out to me some girls who did not wear bonnets and as I did not want to look as they did, I stuck to my bonnet finally growing used to it.<sup>101</sup>

Protecting one's skin was a constant reminder to women as to how detrimental the Overland Trail was to their being. Although women took protective measures such as wearing bonnets, they viewed the Overland Trail as a damaging place to their appearance as socially acceptable women.

To uphold her appearance as a domestic woman working within the traditional sphere, Catherine Haun was "never without an apron and a three-cornered kerchief...I presented a

---

<sup>99</sup> Lavinia Honeyman Porter, quoted in Faragher and Stansell, "Women and Their Families," 251.

<sup>100</sup> Miriam Davis, quoted in Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 83.

<sup>101</sup> Adrietta Hixon, quoted in Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 84.

comfortable, neat appearance.”<sup>102</sup> Prolonging this favorable facade was difficult. As the westward journey progressed, women’s muddy, torn, and infrequently washed clothing reflected their strenuous and physically demanding tasks. The traditional clothing style of floor length dresses, high tight collars, and heavy amounts of fabric became a nuisance in trail life but continued for as long as possible due to its connection to gender-specific standards.<sup>103</sup> Women felt that any clothing, which made them seem more fitting to the trail, threatened the image of it being a temporary place and lifestyle. Even though Rebecca Ketcham’s dress was “dirty and...torn nearly if not quite twenty times,”<sup>104</sup> she refused to change into a more practical garb, such as bloomers, and was determined to appear as easterly domestic as possible. “Bloomers were made with short skirts and pants reaching to the shoe tops.”<sup>105</sup> While they enabled Jane Kellogg “to walk through the sagebrush,”<sup>106</sup> the majority of female Overlanders could not afford such special occasion fashion. More importantly, many women disapproved of such liberating fashions. Public reactions to bloomers further exemplify nineteenth-century social standards’ rejection of such inappropriate fashion, no matter how temporary. Helen H. Clark recalled a clerk’s persistent stare at her bloomers as if he had never known women had feet.<sup>107</sup> It was socially unacceptable for a woman to show her legs; therefore, women consistently wore long skirts throughout the westward journey. If nothing else, these long skirts aided in maintenance of modesty, a crucial social factor more so than the cleanliness of clothing. Long skirts were a privacy barrier in times when women needed to relieve themselves. Two women faced away from a third with skirts surrounding her for visibility protection.<sup>108</sup> Social expectations for modest women influenced female perception of the Overland Trail as a disgraceful place inauspicious to upholding the privacy upon which many females depended to carry out specific tasks. Furthermore, the Overland Trail was rarely conducive to upholding the Sabbath, hindering public display of women’s piety.

---

<sup>102</sup> Haun, “A Woman’s Trip Across the Plains in 1849,” 168.

<sup>103</sup> Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 106.

<sup>104</sup> Rebecca Ketcham, quoted in Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 101.

<sup>105</sup> Jane Kellogg, quoted in Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 105.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 128.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

Sunday had become a day for women to practice their religious devotion and confirm their nature as moral and devout beings by suspending all earthly work to concentrate on scripture and prayer. However, this practice was not conducive to trail Sundays where religious practice came second to drying out cargo. Consequently, women perceived trail duties on Sunday as irritating and blasphemous.<sup>109</sup> Mary Stuart Bailey was determined to remain true to Sabbath observance, “I have not washed yet nor do I intend to on the Sabbath.”<sup>110</sup> Initially women insisted on performing traditional Sabbath practices. Yet as the westward journey progressed, many women such as Catherine Haun had to accept reality of, if not abandonment, modification to traditional Sabbath observation. “If we had a devotional service the minister stood in the center of the corral while we all kept on with our work. There was no disrespect intended but there was little time for leisure or that the weary pilgrim could call his own.”<sup>111</sup> As the reality of trail life became apparent, many women along with Catherine Haun did not completely discard Sabbath observance but made a reasonable excuse to justify the practice’s alteration. However, women still felt uneasy and reverted back to proper Sabbath observance whenever able. Sabbath practices relied upon halting westward travel. Therefore, women could only observe the Sabbath if their husbands decided to allow for such activity in the journey’s schedule. This aspect of trail Sabbath further proved male dominance within family structure, the organization of which was the ultimate structure that guided gender-specific roles and Overland Trail perception.

Traditional family structure, centered on male authority, greatly influenced female Overland Trail perception and the manner in which people accomplished their gender-specific

---

<sup>109</sup> Faragher and Stansell, “Women and Their Families,” 257.

<sup>110</sup> Bailey, “Wife of Dr. Fred Bailey from Ohio to California,” 56.

<sup>111</sup> Haun, “A Woman’s Trip Across the Plains in 1849,” 173. For additional accounts of women who had to accept altered Sabbath practices, see Keturah Belknap, “The Commentaries of Keturah Belknap,” Margaret A. Frink, “Adventures of a Party of Gold-seekers,” Amelia Hadley, “Journal of Travails to Oregon,” Lucia Loraine Williams, “Letter to Mother,” Eugenia Zieber, “Journal of Our Journey to Oregon,” Sarah Pratt, “The Diary Notes of Sarah Pratt,” Lucy Rutledge Cooke, “Letters on the Way to California,” Abigail Jane Scott, “Journal of a Trip to Oregon,” Rachel Taylor, “Overland Trip Across the Plains,” Mary Burrell, “Council Bluffs to California, 1854,” Sarah Sutton, “The Travel Diary in 1854,” Ellen Hundley, “From Utah to Texas in 1856,” Harriet Booth Griswold, “From Ashtabula to Petaluma in 1859,” Martha Missouri Moore, “The Trip to California, 1860,” Louisa Cook, “Letters from the Oregon Trail, 1862-1863,” Harriet A. Loughary, “Travels and Incidents, 1864,” and Mary Ringo, “The 1864 Journal,” in *Covered Wagon Women*, 1:221, 2:89, 97, 3:62, 3:156, 3:191-92, 4:186, 4:218, 236, 5:40, 61, 6:155, 6:230, 7:32, 7:150, 7:223, 7:266, 8:31, 8:124, 150, 155, 8:223.

roles. Despite situational circumstances, women were subservient to and respectful of male requests. Jules Ami Sandoz was a frontiersman who violently opposed non-traditional women and felt that “women who won’t obey their husbands are worthless.”<sup>112</sup> Whatever male expectations existed of women, there was a constant female concern for how fulfillment of certain duties affected their image. Women’s femininity was fragile and dependent on distinct division of gender roles. To protect their femininity, women merely “helped” their husbands when required to perform male oriented tasks.<sup>113</sup> Overland train structure was particularly important to upholding male dominance and female assistance. Overlanders viewed the wagon as a temporary household in which men remained the primary authoritative figure. Within a wagon train, heads of households were delegated positions of “general, colonel, captain, lieutenant, and sergeant.”<sup>114</sup> Throughout the journey, women constantly adjusted their opinions and actions according to freedoms allowed by male leaders. The result of A.O. and Helen Carpenter’s “attempt to drive ahead of the two baggage wagons as no one rides in them,”<sup>115</sup> proves Helen’s dependency, as a woman, on family structure to exert daily roles. Without this supportive structure, women felt vulnerable in a threatening place. Hence, when “given to understand that we can travel behind the baggage wagon or leave the party,”<sup>116</sup> the small inconvenience of their position becomes trivial and Helen remains with her family train. Female subordination to male authority is most obvious through the driving of individual wagons.

Driving a wagon was as a task through which an individual took charge and decided the journey’s course. Therefore, men were the primary drivers of Overland wagons while women either rode beside their husbands or walked alongside the wagon. Women rarely drove the wagon unless their husband became ill calling for their “help” to continue the journey. Charlotte Stearns Pengra’s husband, Bynon, became extremely ill during their journey. Consequently, Charlotte “took my turn and drove until I was quite outdone.”<sup>117</sup> She made particular mention of taking her turn at this task, implying she did not take on the task as her own and was only

---

<sup>112</sup> Mari Sandoz, *Old Jules* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1935), 95.

<sup>113</sup> Cynthia Culver Prescott, *Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier* (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2007), 18.

<sup>114</sup> Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 26.

<sup>115</sup> Carpenter, “A Journal Across the Plains in An Ox Cart, 1857,” 112.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Charlotte Stearns Pengra, quoted in Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 98.

temporarily assisting her husband. However, some women were exceptions to this subservient female position. A few women made the journey without a husband. Widow Margaret Caldwell wanted to better her children's future by having land they could call their own and cultivate.<sup>118</sup> Even though it was more difficult without a male figure, she did not let the unfortunate death of her husband prevent her from obtaining her goal. Some tenacious women were independent leaders of Overland trains. However, these female leaders contradicted female femininity and caused other women anxiety due to potential association with such a disgraceful female character.<sup>119</sup> Few women traveled outside a traditional family structure due to strong influences social standards had placed on women to always be dependant and supportive of socially higher male beings. Therefore, from the very beginning, social standards that defined the previous lives of westward migrants influenced males and females to perceive the Overland Trail as reinforcing or threatening to gender definitions.

Thousands of men, women, and children journeyed through the Overland Trail to establish a new life in western territory. This adventure to a new life meant new beginnings and opportunities for many families who were struggling back east. Their previous lives continued to impact their journey and experiences within the process of starting life anew. In contrast to Frederick Jackson Turner's argument, this process retained as many aspects of Overlanders' previous lives as the circumstances allowed. Roles and social standards of masculinity and femininity, which they carried with them from their eastern lives, influenced and defined gender-specific perceptions of the Overland Trail. Therefore, men and women held very different perceptions of the Overland Trail and interacted with their surroundings differently. Women's view of the Overland Trail as a volatile, capricious, barren, and morally demeaning place stemmed from their life's work done within the sphere of domesticity, their dependency on resources to carry out such work, and the way in which social standards allowed them to express themselves and appear in public. As protector and provider of the family, men perceived the westward journey as a threat to its members but an unavoidable challenge to a new life. These

---

<sup>118</sup> Bledsoe, "Adventuresome Women," 25. For additional accounts of single women traveling, see Rebecca Ketcham and Elizabeth Wood, quoted in Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 99; Bledsoe, "Adventuresome Women," 25-26.

<sup>119</sup> Bledsoe, "Adventuresome Women," 26.

different gender views of the Overland Trail derived from unique male and female socialization. Society taught women to care about the home and family while it taught men to be concerned with their control over outside influences.<sup>120</sup> As the personal accounts of Overland Trail travelers demonstrate, gender-specific roles defined the frontier and the values placed on the land depended upon the influence from the individual's previous life.

---

<sup>120</sup> Armitage, "A Stereoptical Vision," 382.

## The Ottoman Gunpowder Empire and the Composite Bow

Nathan Lanan

The Ottoman Empire is known today as a major Gunpowder Empire, famous for its prevalent use of this staple of modern warfare as early as the sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup> However, when Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq visited Constantinople from 1554 to 1562, gunpowder was not used by the Sipahi cavalry who stubbornly, it seems, insisted on continuing to use the composite bow that the Turks had been using for centuries. This continued, despite their fear of European cavalry who used “small muskets” against them on raids. Was this a good idea? Was the composite bow a match for contemporary handheld firearms? Were Turkish tactics incompatible with firearms to the point that the Ottomans would have lost their effectiveness on the battlefield? Could the Ottoman Empire even be considered a Gunpowder Empire with such a refusal?

Busbecq says of the Turks that “no nation has shown less reluctance to adopt the useful inventions of others.”<sup>2</sup> This was proven by their use of gunpowder; Mehmed II Fatih famously used massive cannons to batter down the walls of Constantinople in 1453, when gunpowder weapons were just beginning to gain their potency.<sup>3</sup> Mehmed even equipped some of his Janissary infantry with primitive handguns, including early muskets and mortars<sup>4</sup> By Busbecq’s trips to Constantinople in the middle of the sixteenth century, the Ottoman military was equipped with the most firearms in Europe, their disciplined infantry and often foreign, mercenary artillerymen being best suited to gunpowder weapons. Indeed, until the turn of the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Empire was at the forefront of military technology.<sup>5</sup>

This makes it all the more shocking when Busbecq tells of a group Sipahis, landowning cavalymen, refusing firearms in his third letter home to his friend. He was in Constantinople at

---

<sup>1</sup> Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture Of Islam Volume 3: The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 99.

<sup>2</sup> Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, *The Turkish Letters*, trans. Edward Seymour Forster (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 135.

<sup>3</sup> William H. McNeill, *The Age of Gunpowder Empires: 1450-1850* (Washington D.C.: American Historical Association: 1989), 33.

<sup>4</sup> Godfrey Goodwin, *The Janissaries* (London: Saqi Essentials, 2006), 69.

<sup>5</sup> McNeill, 33.

the time, performing his duty as the Austrian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. As Busbecq observed, after a small band of Christians decimated a larger force of Turks by using muskets, Roostem Pasha ordered that 200 Sipahis should learn to use small muskets from horseback. This idea was quickly abandoned when, according to Busbecq, the muskets became unreliable and the soldiers were embarrassed by how dirty they became while using them. They went back to using more primitive composite bows instead. This is despite the fact that Busbecq quotes a Turkish messenger as wholly understanding the ability of the muskets to “harness fire” and rout the Muslim forces. One would think that, if the Ottomans understood the power of the musket, they would have forced the 200 Sipahis to take care of their weaponry and continue learning to use the muskets regardless of their own thoughts and worries. Busbecq’s story suggests that there was more to the matter.<sup>6</sup>

The basic requirement for the use of each weapon was creating them; if either weapon was too expensive or time-consuming to make, or not durable enough to withstand multiple conflicts, it could be a detriment to the cavalry. The process of making a bow was incredibly time-consuming and required the best materials available. For the highest quality bows, glue that was made either from tendons or a combination of the ears or hide of cattle and skin from the roof of the mouth of a Danube sturgeon, had to be cooked. The most common wood used as the base of the bow was maple because of its ability to accept the glue. Excellent bowyers knew exactly where and when to find the best trees to use to obtain this wood. Horn that is appropriate for the bow must be smooth and free of imperfections and the pieces for the top and bottom limbs of the bow must be identical. The bow is covered on the opposite side by sinew. Assembling the bow is a rigorous multi-step process in which the bow is repeatedly heated and cooled while the bowyer applies glue in many different layers, adding in the horn and sinew at various points in the years-long procedure. The final steps include reflexing the bow to the point that it resembles a pretzel and applying sinew so that the bow will tend to return to that shape, and then stringing the bow and going through a final shaping process to increase its efficiency. All told, making a high-quality bow that would be powerful, efficient and durable could take anywhere from five to ten years including several periods during which the bowyer leaves the

---

<sup>6</sup> De Busbecq, 122-125.

bow to dry.<sup>7</sup>

Compared to such a lengthy and complicated process, firearms of the time might seem simple. Two different firing mechanisms existed during the mid-sixteenth century: the matchlock and the wheellock. The matchlock which had been around for over a hundred years by the time of Busbecq was still the most reliable method of firing a gun. It consisted of relatively fewer pieces than the composite bow, and featured a simpler construction. The firing mechanism consisted of two simple lever mechanisms. The first was a trigger made of a long metal bar that was on the outside of the gun. When squeezed toward the gun, the trigger forced the other end of the lever, which was inside of the gun, down. When the lever was lowered, it twisted an arm on the outside of the gun, which held a smouldering string, into a pan of gunpowder. The powder burned through a hole in the barrel and ignited the powder behind the projectile, forcing it out of the front of the barrel. There were very few main parts: a trigger that screwed into a lever that was braced against a spring and forced down on a pin attached to the arm holding the string. All of these were, all of which were attached to a metal assembly on the outside of the gun that also held the priming pan for the gunpowder and a cap to cover the priming pan before it was ready to fire. All of these parts could be fashioned more easily than the natural components of the composite bow.<sup>8</sup>

The other, significantly more complicated firing mechanism was the wheellock, which was inspired by German clockworks. This worked by winding a spring tightly (using a separate key) that was attached to a wheel<sup>9</sup>. The spring had to be wound just the right amount or it would either snap or not work properly. The wheel was serrated and a piece of pyrite rested on top of it, near the priming pan. When the trigger was pulled it released the spring and caused the wheel to spin rapidly and grind against the pyrite, sending sparks into the priming pan, which was opened by the pull of the trigger. This mechanism required far more moving parts than the matchlock, and needed a trained specialist to make, making it more expensive than the matchlock. Both matchlock and wheellock guns consisted of metal barrels attached to wooden stocks. The barrel consisted of just a metal tube, capped at one end, with a hole on the right side

---

<sup>7</sup> Paul E. Klopsteg, *Turkish Archery and the Composite Bow* (Evanston: self-published, 1947), 36-53.

<sup>8</sup> William Reid, *Arms Through the Ages* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 59-61.

<sup>9</sup> Robert L. O'Connell, *Soul of the Sword* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), 121.

which lined up with the priming pan on the firing mechanism. The wooden stock held all of the pieces together and required little work but to shape it, carving out areas for the inner workings of the firing mechanism, and affix it to the barrel and mechanism.<sup>10</sup>

Considering only the ease of construction and the value of the work in composite bows, matchlock guns and wheellock guns, it would seem that the best weapon with which to equip the Ottoman cavalry would be the matchlock gun. The composite bow is time consuming to create and very expensive due to the amount of specialization required in its construction; furthermore its design disallowed any repairs, should the bow be damaged. The wheellock gun was also very complicated and required a great deal of specialization and little margin of error in its design, which made it too expensive to construct and repair. The matchlock was the least complex in its construction and had the simplest parts, thus making it both the cheapest to produce and the easiest to repair.

The next important factor was the training and equipment required to fire each weapon. Busbecq described the Turks' training in the use of the composite bow. He said that they began training as early as seven or eight years old and continued for up to twelve years in order to build up accuracy. The power in the bow required its user to build strength in his arms in order to pull the string back far enough to fire, something which took years of experience to control. Also, in order to fire, the archer needed a thumb ring for his right thumb as the thumb held the string while the other fingers braced it and the tremendous power of the bow would injure the thumb if it was not protected.<sup>11</sup> This ring was normally made of horn but could also be made out of bone or ivory. A Turkish archer might have also used a *siper*, a device that was strapped to the left hand in order to guide the arrow. Unlike in Western archery, the arrow was held on the right side of the bow and Turkish bows, though smaller, typically had a longer draw length than Western bows. The *siper* guided the arrow so that a shorter arrow could be used with a bow of longer draw length without the bow interfering with the path of the arrow. The *siper* allowed the arrow to come up to three inches inside of the bow and yet still be guided along the outside of the bow, putting more power into the shot<sup>12</sup>. Ammunition for a bow was simple. While the arrows

---

<sup>10</sup> Reid, 90-96.

<sup>11</sup> De Busbecq, 133-135.

<sup>12</sup> Klopsteg, 59-68.

used by Turkish archers were highly specialized, they had major advantages over the shot used by firearms: arrows could be reused and required only the power of the bow to take flight.<sup>13</sup>

Guns in the middle of the sixteenth century, whether matchlock or wheellock, were single shot. They required the shot (usually made of iron which was strong enough to pierce armor) and the powder (in a very specific amount) to be loaded into the gun separately and then rammed in with a ramrod. While on foot, with larger guns, this task was much simpler than while on the back of a moving horse with only one available hand and constant movement. A matchlock lit the powder via a smouldering string that could not be openly burning because it would deteriorate too quickly, but could also not go out. If the gun needed to be ready to fire, the string was always lit. Once the gun was loaded, the soldier had to first move the cap protecting the priming pan by hand and then pull the trigger to fire the gun. There were many variables. The string could go out, or the powder could spill from the priming pan. The matchlock, additionally, was not one hundred percent reliable. The burning string also prevented it from being holstered for fear of burning one's clothes, and made it more difficult to use from horseback; the air moving at high speeds around it could blow it out. The wheellock solved these problems, though it had problems of its own. There was no open flame to extinguish, so the soldiers could use it in the rain or on horseback. The lack of flame also allowed it to be holstered, so gun makers shortened the barrels for ease of holstering, which also made them easier to use on horseback. The wheellock, however, required a key to be wound, meaning that if a soldier lost his key, he could not fire the gun, and there was still a chance that the sparks would not ignite the powder, causing a misfire.

While both guns and composite bows were difficult to use, bows required more training, but required less materials to use. While an upstart might not be able to pull the bow or aim perfectly, he would only require a thumb ring and a *siper* to fire arrows that he could re-use later. While it would take some time to learn to load a gun, the amount of materials required would be greater as the powder and shot can only be used once. Bows, at the time, were more reliable than guns; one shot was fired for every arrow that was put on the string until the string broke, while a gun might misfire if it was in good repair.

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 74.

The next important aspect of the weapons was their respective effectiveness as weapons. The first of these qualities was range. While at a closed shooting range, famous Turkish archers could reach distances in excess of 900 yards, with some lesser archers reaching 625 yards.<sup>14</sup> Although not every shot reached these remarkable distances, this shows the impressive distance these bows could fire. Matchlocks, in stark contrast, were effective to a hundred yards at best; smaller wheellocks were at even more of a disadvantage.<sup>15</sup> This low range was due to the poor aerodynamics of the shot, a simple iron ball, and the inefficient early design of the gun which allowed much of the energy from the powder to escape without affecting the ball. The composite bow, with maximum ranges at least six times those of the musket, was a long-range weapon.

Another important quality was rate of fire. In order to fire a matchlock, the following steps had to be taken: pour powder into muzzle (made easier by the use of bandoliers of pre-measured powder flasks), place ball into muzzle, remove ramrod, use ramrod to pack ball and powder tightly, replace ramrod, level gun, pour additional powder into priming pan (being sure to keep the burning string away from the powder; a wheellock had the additional step of winding the wheel with a key to just the right tension) and pull the trigger.<sup>16</sup> Firing a single-shot gun is a time-consuming process. A composite bow, on the other hand, required only the following steps: retrieve an arrow, place it against the right side of the bow simultaneously with pushing the nock against the bow string, hold the arrow in place with the left hand and the tension of the bow string, grip the string (utilizing the thumb grip that requires the thumb ring), pull and release.<sup>17</sup> Either process, with practice, can be accelerated, though there are only six steps to firing a bow versus eight or nine steps to firing a gun. The steps to firing a bow could also be performed more as many of the steps to firing a gun involved precise placement of exact amounts of powder and safe conduct with said powder. The steps to firing a bow involve less minute placement and the bow is less of a threat until the last two steps. A composite bow was capable of a much higher rate of fire than a gun.

The next weapon quality was accuracy. On a closed shooting range, at a much shorter

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 25-32.

<sup>15</sup> R.G. Grant, *Weapon: A Visual History of Arms and Armor* (London: DK, 2006), 150-151.

<sup>16</sup> O'Connell, 120-121; R.G. Grant, *Warrior: A Visual History of the Fighting Man* (London: DK, 2007), 132.

<sup>17</sup> Klopsteg, 91-105.

distance than their maximum range (10 yards), Turkish archers were deadly accurate. According to Busbecq, they could surround a target the size of a Thaler (large German coin) with five or six arrows so that all of them were touching the outside of the target but none broke the border. Busbecq also said that an archer could “pierce a man’s eye or any other part that is vulnerable” in the stress of battle.<sup>18</sup> Busbecq later described the Turks practicing the “Parthian shot,” in which they galloped by a target and, once past it, quickly turned in their saddle and fired an arrow into the target.<sup>19</sup> So, even on the back of a moving horse, facing backwards, the composite bow can be very accurate in practiced hands. Guns of the time were not as accurate. As the ball had to be smaller than the bore of the barrel, it could bounce around inside of the barrel, causing it to fly off course upon exiting the barrel. The very shape of the ball increased drag so that its path could very easily be disrupted by air resistance during its flight. Factors such as these meant that it was very difficult to duplicate a shot; even an experienced soldier was likely to make an errant shot. Because of this, composite bows were more accurate than firearms.

Perhaps the most crucial quality of a weapon in battle was power. The draw weight of a composite bow tended to be around 65 pounds, though the bows that Busbecq handled were apparently heavier.<sup>20</sup> This meant that, when an arrow was launched from the bow, 65 pounds of force or more were focused directly on the tip of the arrow. While this is powerful, a gun could cause more damage. Gunpowder gave more force to the projectile which, rather than being a clean point or sharp blade like an arrow, was a blunt ball. So while an arrow would cut into a soldier, causing him to bleed and making him lose some of his battle lust, a gunshot would tear a gaping wound that caused incredible pain and was very difficult to heal. A gun shot was normally immediately crippling and nearly always fatal.<sup>21</sup> Guns had the potential to be more lethal than composite bows.

One final weapon quality was solely a gun’s advantage over a bow: psychology. Guns of the mid-sixteenth century were incredibly loud and sprayed smoke and fire with each shot. Compared to a silent bow that soldiers had seen for thousands of years, a gun was absolutely terrifying. While the gunner could miss due to the gun’s low accuracy and range, he would still

---

<sup>18</sup> De Busbecq, 133.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>20</sup> De Busbecq, 133; Klopsteg, 40.

<sup>21</sup> O’Connell 120.

succeed in defeating his opponent by taking away his heart for battle. “If battle constituted hell on earth, then why not fire and brimstone?”<sup>22</sup>

More important than the qualities of an individual weapon was the way it was used on the battlefield. Turkish tactics were exemplified at the battle of Mohacz in 1526. Suleyman had 70,000 to 200,000 lightly armored troops (accounts differ) against 30,000 elite, noble, Hungarian cavalry.<sup>23</sup> The Hungarian cavalry was heavily armored so that they could slam like a wrecking ball into Suleyman’s troops and carve their way to the Sultan himself. They were so strong and invulnerable that none of Suleyman’s lightly armored men could stop them. So, Suleyman did not try to stop them. He arrayed his army into three groups with himself at the rear where he could survey the entire battle. When the Hungarians charged, the Turks’ front ranks parted and let them through, an age-old steppe fighting technique. When the Hungarians barreled into the middle of Suleyman’s army, the front Ottoman ranks turned and fired into their rear. The Hungarians pushed to the point that they almost killed Suleyman, but the Janissaries rescued him. Surrounded and pelted by arrows, the Hungarians broke and retreated. Using their superior range and speed, the Turks pursued and destroyed many Hungarian soldiers. Turkish tactics relied on avoiding direct hand to hand combat and releasing arrow after arrow into the enemy. This was why the Parthian shot was ingrained into a young archer’s training; the shot was designed to shoot while avoiding the enemy. In this way, the enemy would be weakened enough that, should a charge be necessary, the enemy would suffer far greater losses than the Turks.<sup>24</sup>

The tactics of Western cavalry armed with guns were similar, though different in purpose. Some of the earliest maneuvers included waiting for a charge, then firing a volley into the attacking forces and countercharging. A variation included retreating in order to reload and returning to fire another volley. Another maneuver was guarding the flanks of the army with pistol-armed cavalry who would advance to within a hundred paces of the enemy and fire volleys, retreating to reload as they went until they were safely within their own forces. When two forces, both of which were armed with pistols, met, they would skirmish each other.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 120-121.

<sup>23</sup> Colonel G.T. Denison, *A History of Cavalry* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1913), 202; R.G. Grant, *Battle: A Visual Journey Through 5,000 Years of Combat* (London: DK, 2005), 132.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 199-200.

Another maneuver was called the caracole and it involved harassing enemy infantry with pistols while the cavalry attempted to reload on a moving horse.<sup>26</sup> Unlike Turkish tactics, which were designed to tire and weaken the enemy, Western tactics centered around delaying the enemy until the cavalry could mount a more effective charge. The idea of chivalry was still strong and glorious charges were still popular. Pistols were adopted to make the slaughter of a charge easier; if the enemy was already in disorder from the fear of the guns and broken up due to gaps in the line, friendly cavalry could mount a charge more easily.

If the Turks in Busbecq's story had adopted the pistol immediately, their tactics would have needed to change rapidly. Turkish cavalry tactics centered around the bow. Its greater rate of fire and range allowed the cavalry to stay well out of harm's way while they slowly tired and destroyed the enemy. Pistols were more suited to Western tactics. Their higher power and lower range and accuracy meant that they needed to be used in a volley to be truly effective. They were more cumbersome to reload on a moving horse, meaning that the rider would have to stop to reload the gun. Had the Turks adopted the gun, they would have had one shot from a very short range while they were luring their enemy into chasing them. While that one shot would certainly kill an enemy if it struck him, that one shot might not reach the enemy due to the gun's unreliability in firing and accuracy. Being at 100 yards rather than the previous 600 yards, the Turks would either struggle to reload while their fast horses galloped away causing them to spill more gunpowder than they used, or they would have to stop, while the enemy caught up, in order to reload their pistols. The Turks could carry multiple pistols, but in order to carry as many pistols as they could arrows, it would cost the Empire an atrocious amount of money. So, in order to adopt the more powerful guns as their main weapons, the Turkish cavalry would have needed to change their battlefield tactics entirely to western tactics. After having trained with the bow since they were seven, most, if not all, Turkish cavalymen would find this very difficult, and discipline would be lacking. So, for these 200 men, it seems that keeping their bows and arrows was the better choice for the moment.

This brings up the question of social acceptance of the gun. Gunpowder weapons were very dirty; the powder could spill, smoke billowed out of the gun every time it was fired, and the

---

<sup>26</sup> O'Connell, 121.

gunner required so many different components in order to fire the gun that it could be difficult to keep them in order. According to Busbecq, this contributed greatly to the Sipahis' refusal to adopt the guns. Busbecq emphasized, multiple times, the pride that the Turks took in their cleanliness, and that the guns destroyed it. "Their hands [were] all begrimed with soot, their uniforms [were] dirty, and their clumsy powder-boxes and pouches [were] hanging down, so that they were a laughingstock to their comrades." Dirty and humiliated, the Sipahis could not accept a weapon that went against their sensibilities.<sup>27</sup>

The Sipahis also found the gun to be a cowardly weapon. Bows required great strength to fire and years of practice to aim properly. Guns, on the other hand, required only that a soldier place powder and ball into the gun and pull the trigger. They did not require nearly the same amount of effort on the part of a soldier in order to kill. The Sipahis saw this to be unfair and disgraceful because they had sacrificed years of their lives training for the capability to kill while someone with a gun needed to merely pull a trigger to be capable of the same. According to Busbecq, the Pashas commanding the Sipahis did not realize this. A messenger bearing the news of the Sipahis' defeat told them "did I not tell you that our men were overcome by the might of muskets? It was fire that routed us, not the valour of our foes." The Sipahis could not bring themselves to use such a shameful weapon.<sup>28</sup>

Another possible reason for refusing the firearm could come from class differences. The Janissaries who made up the vast majority of Ottoman gunpowder-using troops were slaves recruited from Christian families in captured territories who were indoctrinated into the service of the Sultan.<sup>29</sup> The Sipahis were landholders and volunteered year after year.<sup>30</sup> Due to firearms technology at the time, only infantry like the Janissaries could be equipped with handheld firearms when Mehmed first began using gunpowder weapons, so over the hundred years that followed between the siege of Constantinople and Busbecq's stays in the city, the firearm became exclusively a weapon of the slave class. For this reason, the Sipahis would have looked down upon the firearm as a weapon fit only for a slave and unworthy for a landholder. It would have been shameful and it would have made the Sipahis appear to be of a lower status if they

---

<sup>27</sup> De Busbecq, 124.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 122-123.

<sup>29</sup> Goodwin, 32; McNeill, 34.

<sup>30</sup> Goodwin, 65; McNeill, 34

were to use firearms.

Guns could not be used effectively from horseback until the time of Busbecq, during the reign of Suleyman. For centuries, the Ottoman Empire had been expanding, and saw its greatest expansion during Suleyman's reign.<sup>31</sup> Much of this expansion had been westward, towards the Europeans, whose cavalry used guns; cavalry that had been defeated time after time by Ottoman bows. To the Sipahis, who had killed many of these gun wielding Westerners, the gun must have appeared weak, because, had the gun been a superior weapon, the Sipahis would have been dead and the Westerners victorious. So, psychologically, the composite bow and Ottoman tactics were better than guns and Western tactics to the Sipahis, regardless of the strengths and weaknesses each entailed. Conversely, when Ottoman expansion slowed after Suleyman's reign, Western warfare would have been more appealing to Ottoman soldiers who were now no longer the victors of every conflict. This could be a possible reason why the Sipahis did eventually switch to using firearms.<sup>32</sup>

When Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq said in his letters "no nation has shown less reluctance to adopt the useful inventions of others," he was correct. The Ottoman Empire in Busbecq's time had adopted many great things from other cultures, most notably gunpowder weapons. It is very important to note, however, that Busbecq said "useful inventions." While gunpowder was *useful* to artillerymen and hand guns were *useful* to infantry like the Janissaries, guns were not *useful* to the Sipahis. While they could be less costly and time consuming to make and required less training to fire, guns lacked the rate of fire, range, and accuracy of bows. When on the battlefield, the only quality of guns that was better than that of bows was lethality. These aspects were fine for a Western style of warfare, but Ottoman tactics were incompatible with guns for these very reasons; without the ability to quickly move and send projectile after projectile into the enemy to weaken him, the Turks would have needed to change their tactics completely which would have derailed their expansion efforts.

At the same time, guns were incompatible with the social standing of the Sipahis. Guns were dirty and they humiliated the clean Sipahis. They were an unfair weapon that required much less skill and dedication to use effectively than a bow. They were the weapon of the

---

<sup>31</sup> De Busbecq, xxii.

<sup>32</sup> Grant, *Battle*, 130.

enslaved Janissaries, a class below the landholding Sipahis. And they were the inferior weapon of the Westerners that the Turks had been defeating for over a century. Nevertheless, the Ottoman Empire, despite the refusal of the Sipahis to use firearms, remained a Gunpowder Empire. From the time of Mehmed II, the Turks had used gunpowder to expand their empire through artillery and infantry. They adopted the technology when it was still considered a novelty to other nations and remained at the forefront of its use until the seventeenth century. It was the Ottomans' ability to use this useful invention effectively, not an overzealous utilization of sheer power, which marked them as a Gunpowder Empire.

Credibility and Incredulity: A Critique of Bartolomé de Las Casas's *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*

Alex Allen

A fierce advocate for the indigenous people of the New World, Bartolomé de Las Casas sought to promote awareness and enact legal change. Born in 1484, Las Casas grew up as exploration of the New World began. After embarking on several voyages to the New World, he saw firsthand the injustices committed against the natives.<sup>1</sup> Years later, following a religious conversion, he began elucidating the actions of the Christians in an effort to draw awareness to the Indians plagued by the Spanish presence and to compel the Spanish Crown to take action in order to maintain its religious legitimacy in the New World. Las Casas used *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* as a medium to this end. Despite its efficacy in producing a gruesome picture of slaughter and deceit, it leaves several questions unanswered. These unanswered questions and the excessive exaggerations, call into question the facts of the *Short Account*. In many contexts, Las Casas highlighted the innocence and purity of the Indians and the brutality of the Spaniards in order to draw attention to the magnitude of deaths incurred by the natives. Because he failed to present an adequate analysis of the factors contributing to the natives' deaths and failed to provide a complete description of the natives' actions and traditions, the legitimacy of his work must be questioned.

To convey his point effectively, Las Casas divided his account into sections and clustered the horrors geographically. He presented a similar overall trend in each section: natives met the Spaniards peacefully only to die through slavery and subjugation. Las Casas began by describing the kingdoms of Hispaniola. In Cibao, Las Casas characterized the indigenous people, particularly King Guarionex, as dutiful and virtuous – a people devoted to the Spanish monarchs.<sup>2</sup> Each householder under the king made annual contributions of gold and supposedly filled the entirety of a hollow gourd. When the availability of gold declined, Las Casas stated that the king suggested, in order to better serve the Spanish monarchs, that his people cultivate a vast expanse of the kingdom to produce crops.<sup>3</sup> The Spaniards did not endorse this potentially

---

<sup>1</sup> Bartolomé de Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, ed. Anthony Pagden (New York: Penguin Group Inc, 1992), xviii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

fruitful plan; one European raped the king's wife.<sup>4</sup> In terms of character, Las Casas noted that, though the king could have "easily...exact[ed] revenge" on the Spanish, he chose to go into exile.<sup>5</sup> The Spaniards subsequently butchered and killed his people.

Las Casas presented similar accounts in the kingdoms of Marien and Xaragua. Claiming to have met several high-ranking officials of King Guacanagari of Marien, Las Casas recounted how the kind and caring individuals cared for Columbus and his men after their ship crashed, and treated them as though they were "part of the same family."<sup>6</sup> Las Casas later stated that the same king died when attempting to escape the massacre. Regarding Xaragua, the "heart" of Hispaniola, Las Casas observed "no where were people of such quality and breed," and compared them to nobles and high lords, "handsome and "easy on the eye."<sup>7</sup> He also mentioned King Behechio and Queen Anacaona, who provided excellent services to the Europeans and allegedly saved their lives. However, even after they summoned 300 important locals to welcome the European governor, the arriving army ravaged the area and burned people alive.<sup>8</sup> This kingdom met a similar fate as Cibao: the caring and hospitable natives died solely, allegedly, at the hands of the Spanish.

News of these events spread and many of the indigenous people of Cuba retreated from their villages in fear. Those who remained attempted to greet the Spanish with gifts, yet the Christians, a word Las Casas used frequently and deliberately, slaughtered the natives without provocation.<sup>9</sup> Several days after this incident, Las Casas reported having regained the natives' trust. He gathered the nobles of the Havana province and promised that the people would not be harmed. However, the rapacious European commander broke the promise Las Casas made, seized the indigenous people, and burned them alive the following day.<sup>10</sup> Once again, Las Casas illustrated the docile and saintly characteristics of the natives; after all, he implied, how could such a gentle people understand the treachery of the Spanish?

This trend characterized the subsequent events Las Casas described. The generous indigenous people made gifts to the Spaniards and were subsequently tortured by the heartless Christians who sought additional tribute and sometimes went so far as to burn villages to the

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.,

ground.<sup>11</sup> Even the great Montezuma, who “showered the Europeans with thousands of gifts” and entertained them at banquets, fell to the Spaniards after they took him hostage in his own city.<sup>12</sup> In Trinidad, amiable natives welcomed a group of seventy Spaniards into their establishment “as though they were their own flesh and blood” and showered the Spaniards with food.<sup>13</sup> These natives, who Las Casas characterized as extremely generous people that rushed to give the Spaniards all they possessed, met the same fate as the other indigenous peoples. However, he mentions that one European commander who participated in this slaughter spoke to him. This commander allegedly admitted to feeling at home among the indigenous people and acknowledged that they treated him well.<sup>14</sup> Taken by itself, this account suggests that hundreds of thousands of natives, millions even, died hopelessly; that is to say, it made no difference that they greeted the Spanish amiably, gave all they had, and submitted to Christianity.

However, Las Casas conveniently omitted several important details to heighten the severity of the Spaniards’ actions, particularly in his discussion of how the natives died. In any section of his account, he noted deaths ranging from thousands to tens of thousands, even to millions in some cases. Though it goes without contention that the Spanish killed many people, the factor of disease seems far too important not to address. In particular, “Old World diseases” like smallpox decimated the populations of Mexico and allowed the Spanish to conquer Tenochtitlan. Disease also served as the catalyst for weakening Peru before the arrival of the conquistadores.<sup>15</sup> Without addressing disease or factoring it into his numbers, one could argue that the thousands of people who died because of slaughter actually died due to disease. Given that Las Casas omitted this critical detail, one may question what else he omitted to suit his purposes.

Additionally, Las Casas worked to establish the character of the indigenous people, yet he presents a superficial and one-sided view of the natives. He stated that the indigenous people sympathized with the Spaniards, gave the conquistadores all they had, and treated them as brothers. Though these details make the natives seem like saintly, “poor innocent peoples,” his

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 34-36.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>15</sup> Ronald Fritze, *New Worlds: The Great Voyages of Discovery 1400-1600* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 231.

ignorance of the natives' more aggressive side slanted his argument and rendered it less credible.<sup>16</sup>

For instance, in Cabeza de Vaca's account of his disastrous voyage to Florida, he described numerous customs of the indigenous people. Cabeza de Vaca dispelled the myth of weak native innocence and established them as cunning, strong, and, in some ways, cruel. As Cabeza de Vaca and the other survivors made their way from village to village, they encountered numerous tribes of Indians and were often captured and beaten.<sup>17</sup> In his discussion of indigenous arms and tactics, Cabeza de Vaca described their facility with the bow and arrow and eventually grew to respect that, in their particular environment, they had developed formidable ways to fight.<sup>18</sup> Cabeza de Vaca even pointed out that, as he and the four survivors traveled from village to village, bands of Indians would follow them and, taking advantage of the Spaniards' supposed abilities as healers, would loot the villages.<sup>19</sup> Cabeza de Vaca rightfully implied that the natives had a dark side; that they were human. Conversely, and very importantly, he posited "these people, in order to be attracted to becoming Christians...need to be treated well...indeed, there is no other way."<sup>20</sup> For a time, Cabeza de Vaca genuinely lived alongside the Indians and gained their respect. When he worked to deliver Christianity, they received it willingly and enthusiastically. Cabeza de Vaca certainly had a motive for his account, and while his attempt to rationalize the disastrous voyage may call some of his details into question, his account painted a more holistic picture of the indigenous people than Las Casas's account.

Furthermore, Jean de Léry, in his *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America*, noted that the indigenous people of the area fought with one another, took prisoners, and engaged in cannibalism. He stated that a village would take excellent care of a captured individual and later ritualistically kill and consume the prisoner.<sup>21</sup> He stated that the purpose of these practices was to instill fear into enemy tribes.<sup>22</sup> Though his account focused on drawing a comparison between previously-unconsidered similarities in European and New

---

<sup>16</sup> Bartolomé de Las Casas, 126.

<sup>17</sup> Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *The Account: Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's Relación*, ed. Martin A. Favata and José B. Fernández (Houston: Arte Público, 1993), 72.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>21</sup> Jean de Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America*, trans. and ed. Janet Whatley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 122-125.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 128-130.

World practices in an effort to criticize the Europeans, Léry's work, alongside Cabeza de Vaca's, shows that the native people of the New World had the capacity to engage in savage acts, akin to those of the Europeans. Las Casas failed to address this.

Taken together, Las Casas presented a slanted view of the New World people in an attempt to arouse sympathy. His omission of details regarding deaths, along with his seemingly obvious over-exaggerations regarding the indigenous people's kindness, detracted from the credibility of the document and makes it difficult to trust the other incidences discussed, namely the gruesome incidences of cruelty committed by the Spaniards. It goes without saying that the Spanish committed unspeakable atrocities in the New World. However, if Las Casas presented an impartial view of the Indians and considered all aspects leading to the deaths of the indigenous people, he would still have had considerable moral and religious ground to speak from. Though intended as a polemic to rouse emotions, Las Casas may have made the account more reliable if he did not avoid integral details.

“Bloody Outrages of a Most Barbarous Enemy:” The Cultural Implications of the Massacre at Fort William Henry

Colin Walfield

The August 10, 1757 massacre at Fort William Henry contradicted eighteenth-century European standards for warfare. Although British colonial opinion blamed it on Native American depravity, France’s Native American allies acted within their own cultural parameters. Whereas the French and their British enemies believed in the supremacy of the state as the model for conduct, Native Americans defined their political and military relations on a personal level that emphasized mutual obligations. With the fort’s surrender, however, the French and British attempted and failed to bring European cultural norms into the American wilderness. While the French triumphed in Fort William Henry’s capitulation, Native Americans required plunder, scalps, and prisoners to prove individual valor and an honorable victory. Denied the spoils of victory with the surrender, they seized the initiative in their assault on the siege’s survivors. The massacre at Fort William Henry revealed a gruesome divergence between two differing concepts of diplomacy and warfare.

**Hysteria and Infamy of the Massacre**

Montcalm’s 1757 summer offensive into New York terrified the American colonists. “That Fort William Henry was invested...by a body of *French* and *Indians*, is past Doubt, and very probably are at this time, in Possession of it,” bemoaned an August 8 article of the *New York Gazette*.<sup>1</sup> Continuing, it lamented, “If so, *Fort Edward* falls of Course, and where they stop is hard to determine.”<sup>2</sup> At the southern end of Lake George, both forts commanded a crucial junction of British imperial power in North America. From the Richelieu River to the north and down Lake Champlain and into Lake George, France had an almost unobstructed water route into the northeastern reaches of the British colonies. Guarding the portage between the lake and the Hudson River, both forts secured the heart of the New York colony. Terrifyingly though, with Fort William Henry’s fall, France and its Native American allies menaced the American colonists’ security and livelihoods.

---

<sup>1</sup> “That Fort William-Henry was invested...,” *New York Gazette*, August 8, 1757.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Just as Britain's own war effort floundered in North America, France seized the initiative. On the northeastern frontier, France held an overwhelming advantage over its opponents in its Native American allies. While the Mohawks deserted the British after heavy losses at the Battle of Lake George, other Native Americans flocked to France's standard.<sup>3</sup> Under it, following Montcalm's victory at Oswego in 1756, a coalition of tribes assembled from beyond the colonial cultural frontier.<sup>4</sup> To the colonists and British, they acted outside the norms of civilized warfare. Jonathon Carver's description in his 1778 *Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America* stressed this divergence in especially demonic terms:

When the Indians succeed in their silent approaches... a scene of horror, that exceeds description, ensues.... The figure of the combatants all besmeared with black and red paint, and covered with the blood of the slain, their horrid yells, and ungovernable fury, are not to be conceived by those who have never crossed the Atlantic.<sup>5</sup>

With Montcalm victorious at Fort William Henry, the American colonies appeared at the mercy of a barbarous conqueror. Explained Pennsylvania's Lieutenant Governor William Denny to the General Assembly on August 16, "Some grand Design is on Foot" that together with the continued "bloody Outrages of a most barbarous Enemy" threatened their destruction.<sup>6</sup>

The massacre at Fort William Henry went completely against eighteenth-century ideals of honorable combat. Granted a generous surrender by Montcalm, the defeated British garrison under Lieutenant Colonel George Munro expected a safe transfer to neighboring Fort Edward. According to the agreed terms, Montcalm granted them "the usual Honors of War" with the right to keep their arms, "baggage of the Officers and Soldiers," French protection for "all the sick and wounded," and for "their honourable defense," the right to keep "one Piece of Cannon."<sup>7</sup> Most importantly, he pledged "a Detachment of French Troops" for an escort on the retreat.<sup>8</sup> In return, they agreed not to serve against France or its allies for the space of eighteen months and

---

<sup>3</sup> Ian K. Steele, *Betrayals: Fort William Henry and the "Massacre,"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 71.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-80.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathon Carver, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America, in the Years 1766, 1767, and 1768* (London: C. Dilly; H. Payne; J. Phillips, 1781), 313.

<sup>6</sup> "The Speech of the Honourable William Denny," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, September 1, 1757.

<sup>7</sup> "Articles of Capitulation granted to Lieut. Col. Munroe," *Boston Gazette*, September 5, 1757.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

return the French, Canadian, and Native American prisoners taken in North America since the beginning of the war.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, France's Native American allies disregarded the agreed terms. First, by killing the sick and wounded and plundering the soldiers' property, and then, most infamously, by assaulting the retreating column. Colonial accounts written after the trauma painted a picture of unmitigated carnage. Carver, himself a witness, revealed a scene of ritualized slaughter. With "the war-woop given," he wrote, in the "horrid scene which now ensued; men, women, and children were dispatched in the most wanton and cruel matter, and immediately scalped."<sup>10</sup> Adding a demonic aspect, he continued, "Many of these savages drank the blood of their victims, as it flowed, from the fatal wound."<sup>11</sup> Altogether, rationalizing the event, the historian Ian K. Steele broadly estimated in his book *Betrayals: Fort William Henry and the "Massacre,"* that between 69 and 185 soldiers and civilians lost their lives, with many others taken into captivity.<sup>12</sup>

The massacre confirmed the colonists' fears of French duplicity and murderous intent. At Oswego, Montcalm's forces had failed to protect the surrendered British garrison and its entourage, and now they allowed another post-surrender killing. Because they did not "protect us from these insults," Carver concluded, "they tacitly permitted them."<sup>13</sup> Underscoring his opinion, he claimed, "I could plainly perceive the French officers walking about at some distance, discoursing together with apparent unconcern."<sup>14</sup> Although the British and American colonists held a distinctive advantage in manpower and supplies, France had seemingly dealt them a resounding defeat. They, in turn, blamed the massacre on French jealousy against the British North American colonies' prosperity. "'Tis certain," proclaimed the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on August 25, "that the Growth of the British Colonies has long been the grant Object of French Envy" and now they intended "to make the present War as bloody and destructive as possible!"<sup>15</sup>

### **Nature of the French and Native American Alliances**

The French North American war effort relied on Native American alliances. Compared to Britain's colonial model, France's stressed cooperation over conquest. Although still

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Carver, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America*, 320.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>12</sup> Steele, *Betrayals*, 144.

<sup>13</sup> Carver, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America*, 320

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>15</sup> "Fort William Henry," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 25, 1757.

interested in asserting their authority, with only one-tenth the number of British colonists spread out over a greater area, France's colonists lacked the same expansionist drives as their British counterparts.<sup>16</sup> Without the same colonial presence, they also lacked the British colonies' numerical support for defense. In addition, as a land and not sea power, France also could not project military power into North America to the same extent as the British. Against "the designs the English have against us," concluded the Chevalier de Raymond, a disgruntled, yet experienced, French officer, in his 1754 report of the colony, the French needed to employ "the panic fear that they have of Indians."<sup>17</sup>

In a frontier war, France needed reliable Native American aid and fighters skilled in frontier warfare. Although Canadians augmented their military capabilities, without a significant colonial population, Native Americans played an essential role in wilderness fighting and reconnaissance. Within "the woods of America," Louis Antoine de Bougainville, one of the Marquis de Montcalm's officers, stated in his journal, "one can no more do without them than without cavalry in open country."<sup>18</sup> This type of warfare, he believed, ideally suited their talents. In particular he praised "this talent they have of finding tracks in the woods," and through examination, discovering in great detail, "the number that have passed, whether they are Indians or Europeans, if the tracks are fresh or old, if they are of healthy or sick people."<sup>19</sup>

France, however, never directly controlled its Native American allies. Native Americans, instead, prized their freedom of action and rejected direct authority. As the Jesuit missionary, Pierre Roubaud, accompanying the expedition against Fort William Henry lamented, "The Savage is his own Master and his own King, and he takes with him everywhere his independence."<sup>20</sup> In making diplomatic choices, each tribe shrewdly calculated the possible advantages and disadvantages of their service. Despite their common enemies, they frustrated and confounded the French. "The caprice of an Indian," Bougainville wrote, "is of all possible caprices the most capricious."<sup>21</sup> Often, criticized as needlessly cruel to enemies, burdensome on

---

<sup>16</sup> Frank W. Brecher, *Losing a Continent: France's North American Policy, 1753-1763* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 20.

<sup>17</sup> *On the Eve of the Conquest: The Chevalier de Raymond's Critique of New France in 1754*, ed. and trans. Joseph L. Peyser (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997), 74.

<sup>18</sup> *Adventures in the Wilderness: The American Journals of Louis Antoine de Bougainville*, ed. and trans. Edward P. Hamilton (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 149.

<sup>19</sup> Bougainville, *Adventures in the Wilderness*, 54.

<sup>20</sup> Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France* (New York: Pageant Book Company, 1959), 70: 137.

<sup>21</sup> Bougainville, *Adventures in the Wilderness*, 37.

limited provisions, and prone to desertion, they encumbered the French war effort. Decrying their abuses and independence, Bougainville complained:

Everyone must have time to get drunk, and their food consumption is enormous. At last they get started, and once they have struck, have they only a single scalp or one prisoner, back they come and are off again for their villages... Each does well for himself, but the operation of the war suffers, for in the end they are a necessary evil.<sup>22</sup>

Native American societies rejected direct authority. Although tribal governments differed, few had autocratic systems of governance. Instead, they held power in common with elders respected as orators and advisors rather than absolute rulers, as in a European model.<sup>23</sup> James Smith's narrative of his captivity and adoption among the Ohio tribes during the 1750s stressed that in contrast to the European state, "The chief of the nation, is neither a supreme ruler, monarch or potentate," as they lacked control over diplomacy, assemblies, or taxation.<sup>24</sup> Instead, they held power through persuasion and never expected absolute deference. While "the village chiefs and war chiefs can have influence," Bougainville remarked, it "depend[ed] upon how much they exert it, and upon their attention to keeping the kettles full, so to say."<sup>25</sup>

France's effective command of its allies required an in depth understanding of their customs and traditions. Advised Raymond, "Only in studying their character, their customs, their passions, their nature, their tastes, their way of thinking, [and] of expressing themselves in their speeches" could an officer properly work with them.<sup>26</sup> In making and maintaining alliances, the French adapted to Native American cultural conceptions of power. Unlike the French, Native Americans rejected the European model of the state as a basis for diplomacy and instead emphasized the primacy of personal bonds and metaphorical familial relationships.<sup>27</sup> In New France, they saw their loyalty not to the French state, but directly to the king or colonial governor as the fatherly figure, the Great Onontio. Crucially, wampum belts underscored their

---

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>23</sup> William R. Nester, *The Great Frontier War: Britain, France, and the Imperial Struggle for North America, 1607* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2000), 91.

<sup>24</sup> *An Account of the Remarkable Occurrences in the Life and Travels of James Smith, During his Captivity with the Indians in the Years 1755, '56, '57, '58, '59* (J. Grigg, No. 9 N. Fourth Street, 1831), 148.

<sup>25</sup> Bougainville, *Adventures in the Wilderness*, 134.

<sup>26</sup> The Chevalier de Raymond, *On the Eve of the Conquest*, 58.

<sup>27</sup> Earle Lockerby, "Maintaining the Alliance: A French Officer's Account of the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, and Kennebec at Louisbourg in 1757," *Native Studies Review* 18, no. 2 (2009): 3, 16.

personal connections. “Their official records,” related Raymond, “are wampum belts” that recorded “the agreements and treaties made with them” and the colonial government.<sup>28</sup>

As fathers, the French authorities had obligations towards their metaphorical children. Differing from European systems of power where the father premeditated in religious, political, and familial relations, in Native American societies, the father could not compel obedience. Instead, he commanded authority primarily as a provider for his family.<sup>29</sup> Gifts ceremoniously signified both the foundations and renewal of these kinship ties. Reflecting on their relations, Raymond wrote, “In giving them these presents, let it always be in the name of the Great Onontio” and, expect in return, that they will be “faithful in obeying him and doing his will.”<sup>30</sup> In this, they created a compact whereby the French authority’s validity vested itself in reciprocal rewards. Lacking this, Native Americans felt no reason for obedience towards their French superiors. Advised Raymond, as measures of service, they required each gift be, “in proportion...to the importance of the matters that you have dealt with.”<sup>31</sup>

Likewise, France’s Native American allies believed in a communal style of warfare. Without the model of the state, they looked towards communal authority and concerns. Although the European presence in North America changed their methodologies, with a greater emphasis on killing, tribes still respected their traditional beliefs. War continued as an integral part of their cultures as a means for communal restitution and vengeance for deaths of family or neighbors.<sup>32</sup> “The passion for revenge,” Carver believed, animated communities with “vengeance pursued with unremitted ardor.”<sup>33</sup> In pursuing their objectives, each tribe accorded that each participant pledge a personal commitment to the communities’ concerns. At a war feast near Fort Duquesne J.C.B, a French soldier who served in North America, recorded meat “cut in small bits and distributed...to each warrior” with the group showing their dedication by eating the meat “as though wishing to do the same with their common enemy.”<sup>34</sup>

At the same time, however, Native American societies retained an individualist impulse in how they conducted warfare. James Smith, an adoptee in the Ohio region, documented one

---

<sup>28</sup> The Chevalier de Raymond, *On the Eve of the Conquest*, 58.

<sup>29</sup> Lockerby, “Maintaining the Alliance,” 16

<sup>30</sup> The Chevalier de Raymond, *On the Eve of the Conquest*, 58.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>32</sup> Nester, *The Great Frontier War*, 92.

<sup>33</sup> Carver, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America*, 299.

<sup>34</sup> J.C.B. *Travels in New France*, ed. and trans. Sylvester K. Stevens, Donald H. Kent, and Emma Edith Woods (Harrisburg: The Pennsylvania Historical Commission, 1941), 80.

man who, though esteemed “a great warrior,” justified his abstention from combat because he believed, “If the English and French had a quarrel, let them fight their own battles themselves.”<sup>35</sup> Willing participants, though, went to war with expectations for individual glory and required plunder, scalps, and prisoners to prove honorable conduct in combat. Witnessing returning warriors, Susannah Johnson, during her captivity at the Abnaki missionary village of St. Francis, underscored the ritual importance of these spoils even in a tribe more acculturated to the French. She wrote; the “Warlike ceremonial” required that “the captives or spoil which may crown their valor, must be decorated to every possible advantage” to reflect the village’s esteem.<sup>36</sup> Such plunder reflected individual achievement in battle. After General Braddock’s 1755 defeat, Smith recorded “several Indians” returning to Fort Du Quesne in “British officers’ dress,” complete with the various accoutrements “which the British wear.”<sup>37</sup>

Above all though, Native American societies prized live captives. They not only attested to the captor’s valor, but served practical functions as well. Although tribes may vent their vengeance through ritual tortures, more frequently, they valued captives for economic reasons. In addition to replacing lost members, by the mid-eighteenth century and Seven Years War’s outbreak, captives fed into a growing market in New France. Sold to Canadians as forced labor or ransomed back to the British colonies, they guaranteed their captors a reliable profit.<sup>38</sup> “They cannot make money half so fast any other Way,” recalled a letter from Montreal printed in the August 11, 1755 *New York Mercury*, “as by taking Englishmen and selling them for Slaves; and the French are very willing to buy them.”<sup>39</sup> New France’s market for healthy captives signified Native Americans’ transitions into a new European value system that at the same time allowed the continuance of tribal traditions.

Lacking captives, successful Native American warriors often took scalps as alternatives. Although progressive historians have often blamed the introduction of scalping on Europeans, scalps held a ritual significance predating European contact.<sup>40</sup> Collected as trophies, these offered proof of honorable combat. Shortly after his capture near western Pennsylvania, Smith

---

<sup>35</sup> Smith, *An Account of the Remarkable Occurrences in the Life and Travels of James Smith*, 86.

<sup>36</sup> Susannah Johnson, *A Narrative of the Captivity of Mrs. Johnson: Containing an Account of her Sufferings, During Four Years, with the French and Indians* (Windsor, VT: Thomas M. Pomrot, 1814), 54.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, *An Account of the Remarkable Occurrences in the Life and Travels of James Smith*, 20.

<sup>38</sup> Nester, *The Great Frontier War*, 93.

<sup>39</sup> “New Haven,” *New York Mercury*, August 11, 1755.

<sup>40</sup> James Axtell and William C. Sturtevant, “The Unkindest Cut, or Who Invented Scalping,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (July 1980): 451, 461.

recorded his captors giving a special “scalp haloo” accompanied with “quick and sudden shrill shouts of joy and triumph” for their grisly trophies.<sup>41</sup> Colonial bounties, just as with prisoner taking, however, transformed and encouraged the practice by incorporating it into the colonial economy.

### **Cultural Conflict in 1757**

The presence of large numbers of Native Americans from beyond the pale of New France’s value systems underscored the cultural divisions of Montcalm’s campaign. Among his coalition, he included, according to Bougainville, 820 “domesticated” warriors from New France’s Catholic mission villages near Québec and 979 from the mostly unconverted tribes of the West.<sup>42</sup> These western fighters lived far from Quebec and the center of French colonization; their societies differed greatly from the missionary villages on the St. Lawrence.<sup>43</sup> Since Montcalm’s victory at Oswego the previous year, news of spoils gained from a captured British fortress spread to the farthest reaches of New France and he easily gained recruits for a diverse coalition of allied tribes. For some, they lacked the presence of French interpreters, missionaries, or Canadian officers to assert French leadership and came instead as unpaid allies expecting plunder from the victory as their sole condition for participation.<sup>44</sup>

Their standards for war differed considerably from the ideals of eighteenth-century European combat. While the domesticated tribes on the St. Lawrence moderated their capacities for violence, the Western tribes persisted in exercising the utmost brutality upon their enemies. Horrified, Bougainville wrote his mother:

Listen to what the chiefs said to M. de Montcalm three days ago. “Father, do not expect that we can easily give quarter to the English. We have young men who have never yet drunk of this broth. Fresh meat has brought them here from the ends of the earth. It is most necessary that they learn to wield the knife and plunge it into an English heart.”<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Smith, *An Account of the Remarkable Occurrences in the Life and Travels of James Smith*, 21.

<sup>42</sup> Bougainville, *Adventures in the Wilderness*, 150-151.

<sup>43</sup> Steele, *Betrayals*, 80.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, *Betrayals*, 80-82.

<sup>45</sup> Bougainville, *Adventures in the Wilderness*, 331.

Worse still, their displays of martial values threatened the dispositions of the Eastern converted tribes.<sup>46</sup> Roubaud, for instance, stressed how their acts of brutality threatened his Abnaki catechumens' moral purity. While they had the spiritual potential of "perfect Christians," preventing them from beating British captives taken by the Ottawas in a raid on Lake George required his greatest powers of persuasion.<sup>47</sup>

This disparate coalition's viability hinged on Montcalm's leadership. Though Native Americans totaled only 1,600-1,800 of an approximately 8,000-men force, Montcalm's leadership over them remained crucial.<sup>48</sup> While European siege craft dominated the actual attack on the fort, he needed Native American forces to disrupt British intelligence on Lake George and isolate the fort's garrison. Despite their disparate backgrounds and intertribal rivalries, however, they united under his command. His victory at Oswego greatly boosted his esteem among them to heroic proportions. Bougainville recorded a Michilimackinac orator's opinion of "this famous man, who on putting his foot on the ground has destroyed the English ramparts" and now through his exploits, deserved, "the grandeur of the loftiest pine trees and the spirit of the eagle."<sup>49</sup>

Among these differing tribes, Montcalm exemplified the importance of France's personal diplomacy. As the Native American forces' overall leader in the field, he assumed the king's fatherly authority over all of them regardless of background. Even as many tribes threatened desertion with spoils and captives gained from previous raiding on Lake George before the siege, he, through personal persuasion (though his exact promises remain unknown), kept the army together.<sup>50</sup> Suiting his patriarchal role, he provided for and safeguarded the tribes' under his command. In his speech at the war council before the attack, which Bougainville transcribed, he informed the tribes that, that charged by "the great King," he came "to protect and defend [them]," and ensure "that [they] are made happy and invincible."<sup>51</sup> Now, to the "children of the same father, the Great Ononchio," he granted them "this belt as a sacred pledge" for "the defeat of the English and the destruction of Fort George [also known as Fort William Henry]."<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Steele, *Betrayals*, 80.

<sup>47</sup> Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 70: 109-115.

<sup>48</sup> Francis Jennings, *Empire of Fortune: Crowns, Colonies, and Tribes in the Seven Years War in America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1988), 316; Bougainville, *Adventures in the Wilderness*, 150-153.

<sup>49</sup> Bougainville, *Adventure in the Wilderness*, 115.

<sup>50</sup> Steele, *Betrayals*, 89-90.

<sup>51</sup> Bougainville, *Adventures in the Wilderness*, 147.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

### Massacre at Fort William Henry

The Native Americans expected a share in Montcalm's impending victory. Although they experienced varying degrees of French cultural influence, the various tribes under his command anticipated an appropriate compensation for their efforts in captives and other spoils. An Abnaki orator informed Montcalm, according to Roubaud, at the campaign's start, that as "thy children," they "share thy perils, and sure indeed that they will soon share thy glory."<sup>53</sup> Montcalm understood that, in order to sustain his force in the field, he needed to placate his allies. Reliance on Native American auxiliaries, just as at Oswego, however, jeopardized an honorable conclusion for the siege at Fort William Henry.<sup>54</sup> Tellingly, according to Bougainville, during the siege of Fort William Henry, Montcalm notified Monro, "That humanity obliged him to warn him" that "perhaps there would not be time, nor would it be in our power to restrain the cruelties of a mob of Indians of so many different nations."<sup>55</sup>

Monro's surrender with the honors of war imposed a foreign element into the American wilderness. Underscoring Montcalm's warning, one Abnaki, recorded by Bougainville, shouted, "Take care to defend yourself, for if I capture you, you will get no quarter."<sup>56</sup> Accustomed to fighting for the plunder, scalps, and prisoners, Montcalm's Native American allies did not see a fort's mere capitulation as an honorable victory. Although he secured the chiefs' pledges to respect the agreement, after the fort's surrender, he rapidly lost any influence he had over his Native American contingents. Not content with pillaging "what we had agreed to give up to them," Roubaud lamented, they resolutely ignored the agreed terms of surrender.<sup>57</sup> Horrifyingly, foreshadowing the next day's massacre, they fell upon the fort's hospital killing and scalping the sick and wounded. Roubaud even described one warrior brandishing "a human head" in triumph "as the most splendid prize that he could have secured."<sup>58</sup>

By accepting the surrender, Montcalm betrayed his allies' trusts. Under no absolute bond of loyalty to him or France, they accompanied the expedition for spoils that the surrender now denied them. As their metaphorical father, Montcalm created a compact whereby their loyalty required an appropriate reward. Lacking suitable spoils of combat, he failed in his duty and they

---

<sup>53</sup> Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 70: 105.

<sup>54</sup> Jennings, *Empire of Fortune*, 296, 318.

<sup>55</sup> Bougainville, *Adventures in the Wilderness*, 159.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-160.

<sup>57</sup> Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 70: 177.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 70: 179.

felt no reason to obey him. With only a select few warriors having such trophies, both the British and French appeared in collusion against their interests.<sup>59</sup> According to an article printed in *Scots Magazine* in October of 1757, “An English officer heard an Indian chief violently accuse the French general with being false and liar,” because they fought for “the plunder of the English,” and denied it, now “they would have it” regardless of the agreed terms.<sup>60</sup> An abortive attempt at retreat that night further enraged them because it revealed Montcalm’s intent to protect the garrison against their interests.<sup>61</sup>

When the British column left Fort William Henry, the Native Americans seized the initiative against the surrender agreement. First contented merely with plunder, they took away the column’s packs, clothes, weaponry, and other effects. Then, the retreat degenerated into a massacre as Montcalm’s estranged allies attacked the retreating soldiers. Ironically, according to Bougainville’s account, the supposedly “domesticated Abnakis of Panaomeska, who pretend to have recently suffered some bad behavior on the part of the English commenced the riot,” as “they shouted the death cry and hurled themselves on the tail of the column.”<sup>62</sup> Other tribes, sensing their opportunity for plunder, scalps, and prisoners, joined the attack. In sympathy, Roubaud recalled,

They were so many dead whose bodies very soon strewed the ground and covered the enclosure of the entrenchments. This butchery, which in the beginning was the work of only a few savages, was the signal which made nearly all of them ferocious beasts. They struck, right and left, heavy blows of the hatchet on those who fell into their hands.<sup>63</sup>

The Native Americans’ desires for captives, however, diminished the massacre’s scope. The actual killing lasted for a comparatively short period because it only facilitated their ultimate goal for prisoners.<sup>64</sup> Roubaud estimated that “the massacre was not of long continuance, or so great as such fury gave us cause to fear” because the British’s “patience” allowed the Native Americans to begin to “take them prisoners.”<sup>65</sup> Having witnessed the massacre, Carver implicitly reflected this motive in his account despite his many explicit denunciations of their

---

<sup>59</sup> Steele, *Betrayals*, 112-113.

<sup>60</sup> “Affairs in North American and the East Indies,” *Scots Magazine*, October 1757, 543.

<sup>61</sup> Steele, *Betrayals*, 113.

<sup>62</sup> Bougainville, *Adventures in the Wilderness*, 172.

<sup>63</sup> Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 70: 179-181

<sup>64</sup> Steele, *Betrayals*, 119.

<sup>65</sup> Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 70: 181.

cruelty. “Dexterously avoiding their weapons,” he plunged through the crowds of warriors “till at last two very stout chiefs” grabbed him.<sup>66</sup> Following this, his captors quickly ignored him for “an English gentleman of some distinction” dressed with “fine scarlet velvet” breeches that they soon killed for his resistance.<sup>67</sup> Carver’s narrative though, wrongly assumed Native American depravity as a motive. For instance, in describing “a fine boy” dragged away, he presupposed from “his shrieks” that he “was soon demolished” without accounting for the possibility that he had been taken away as a live captive, as often occurred with children.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, he himself defied his own expectations in survival. At any time during his escapades, his assailants might have killed him, and that they did not attested to ulterior goals in the massacre.<sup>69</sup>

### **Conclusion**

With Fort William Henry’s capitulation, Montcalm lost control of his army. “Nothing was more critical for us than the situation in which the French army was in,” Roubaud wrote.<sup>70</sup> Just as Monro surrendered, Montcalm’s own Native American allies deserted him. They served for spoils and they intended to get them regardless of the agreement Montcalm signed. Their relationship with French authority reflected their own cultural assumptions in regards to political power and warfare. They considered the French king and his representatives in New France as their fathers bound to provide for them in return for dutiful service. Montcalm, having failed in his duty with the surrender agreement, abandoned their reciprocal relationship and they resorted to massacre as restitution for the spoils of war.

---

<sup>66</sup> Carver, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America*, 322.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 322-223.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 323-324.

<sup>69</sup> Steele, *Betrayals*, 159.

<sup>70</sup> Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 70: 197.

## The Struggle to Create Soviet Opera

Miriam B. Grinberg

It is opera, and opera alone that brings you close to the people, that endears your music to the real public and makes your names popular not only with individual small circles but, under favourable conditions, with the whole people.<sup>1</sup> – Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, premier composer of symphonies, ballets, and operas in Imperial Russia in the mid- to late 1800s.

Tchaikovsky made this remark while living under a tsarist regime, but the pervasive, democratic, and unifying qualities of opera that he so vividly described appealed to an entirely different party: the Bolsheviks. Rather than discard the “bourgeois” remains of the Russian empire, the newly-anointed Soviet Union and its first leader, Vladimir Lenin, kept in place many artistic institutions such as opera theaters. However, it was not until Joseph Stalin, leader of the Soviet Union from about 1925 to 1953, seized the reins of power that any attempt was made to control the artistic content of opera. Realizing, as Tchaikovsky had many years earlier, that the populist nature of opera could more effectively spread cultural and political propaganda to the masses, Stalin embarked on a massive Soviet opera experiment that would last from 1936 until his death. In this experiment, Stalin used opera to both further enhance his growing cult of personality and to attempt to throw off remaining Western influences on Soviet musical development. Despite his best efforts, the brutality and repression of Stalin’s reign had the effect of crushing promising new composers while propping up banal and obedient musicians whose operas have long since been forgotten. Instead of the massive cultural movement he desired, Stalin’s operatic experiment failed to deliver even on its most basic promise: the birth of Soviet opera.

Opera in Russia had already cultivated a strong pedigree before Stalin began his grand project. Catherine the Great, a huge proponent of the arts, became the greatest patron of opera in Russia in the late 1700s, bringing Italian and German opera companies to perform in St. Petersburg and Moscow in such places as the newly-constructed Bolshoi Theatre.<sup>2</sup> However, during her reign and for most of the 1800s, only privileged and wealthy members of the upper

---

<sup>1</sup> Lyudmila Polyakova, *Soviet Music*, trans. Xenia Danko (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 99-100.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Bereson, *The Operatic State* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 121.

class financially supported the opera and were the only people who could attend it.<sup>3</sup> Only with the reign of Alexander III was the Bolshoi opened to the public for the first time in 1880, by which time composers like Tchaikovsky, Alexander Borodin, and Modest Mussorgsky had made a deep impression on Russian operatic music.<sup>4</sup>

With such an elite and exclusive heritage in Russian history, it seemed strange for the Bolsheviks *not* to discard opera completely once they took power with the 1917 Russian Revolution. Even Lenin regarded the Bolshoi as a “piece of pure landlord culture,” remarking that the opera house had a “pompous court style” to it.<sup>5</sup> However, as early as October 22, 1917, the Bolsheviks took control of the Bolshoi and Maryinsky (in Petrograd) theatres and placed them under the control of the Theatre Division of the People’s Commissariat of Public Education (NARKOMPROS).<sup>6</sup> The Bolshoi itself became a “focal point” for special events and meetings of the Communist Party after 1919, reaffirming its importance as a cultural and historical landmark.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, despite his own personal aversion to the arts, Lenin appointed a musician, Anatoly Lunacharsky, as first Commissar of Enlightenment.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to Lenin, Lunacharsky perceived opera as offering “a more civilized and controllable form of celebration, leading to a ‘noble’ intoxication that arose from mental engagement rather than chemical [alcoholic] stimulus.”<sup>9</sup> His idea of “noble intoxication,” coupled with his conviction that opera was superior to spoken theatre in being able to synthesize the arts of sight and sound, convinced Lenin to give Lunacharsky free reign over NARKOMPROS during the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in the early 1920s.<sup>10</sup>

Lunacharsky’s installment not only allowed for a wider measure of musical experimentation, but for governmental attempts to rework the *libretti* (scripts) of Western operas until they were deemed appropriate for the Soviet public. Such reworkings included changing Giacomo Puccini’s *Tosca* into *Struggle for the Commune* and Giacomo Meyerbeer’s *Les*

---

<sup>3</sup> William Kozlenko, “Soviet Music and Musicians,” *The Musical Quarterly* 23 (1937): 296.

<sup>4</sup> Bereson, *The Operatic State*, 124.

<sup>5</sup> Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Bereson, *The Operatic State*, 120.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>8</sup> Harlow Robinson, “Born That Way: Stalin’s tyrannical taste spelled bad news for opera in the U.S.S.R.,” *Opera News* 55 (1991): 23.

<sup>9</sup> Marina Frolova-Walker, “The Soviet opera project: Ivan Dzerzhinsky vs. *Ivan Susanin*,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18 (2006): 188.

<sup>10</sup> Bereson, *The Operatic State*, 120.

*Huguenots* into *The Decembrists*.<sup>11</sup> These attempts were largely unsuccessful, in part because Soviet audiences were already familiar with the original libretti and found the “improved” Soviet versions hard to swallow.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, in major opera houses across the Soviet Union, classical and Romantic-era works remained permanent fixtures in the Soviet musical landscape.<sup>13</sup> In fact, Soviet musicologists such as Boris Asafiev went so far as to suggest that “[a]cquaintance with the best examples of Western music will help the development of Soviet music, will liberate it from the amateurishness and speculation about ‘revolutionism,’ will lead towards the exploration of new forms and new means of musical expression.”<sup>14</sup>

The contradictory presence of bourgeois Western music in a proletarian state was not lost on outside observers, one commenting that “‘Tsarism has survived’” after visiting an opera house in the Soviet Union in 1929.<sup>15</sup> Such remarks were evidence of the growing problem that opera posed as a force of the bourgeoisie after the death of Lenin in 1924, and Stalin, his successor, was eager to rectify that problem.<sup>16</sup> He began his program of “reform” by removing Lunacharsky from his commissar post in 1929,<sup>17</sup> and by 1932, Stalin issued a resolution entitled “On the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations,” destroying the recently-created Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM) and putting in its place the Union of Soviet Composers (USC).<sup>18</sup> The USC was charged with responsibilities ranging from musical composition and education to mass propaganda and concert production.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, musical commissions were made in the USC, with opera commissions reaping rewards ranging from five to eight thousand rubles—the most of any of the musical categories.<sup>20</sup> This consolidation of power gave the state greater leeway in directly controlling the actions of theatre directors, composers, musicians, and anyone else involved in the production of an opera.

It was not until Stalin began his “Great Terror” in the mid-1930s that serious steps were taken to completely centralize the oversight and management of operatic life in Russia. One such

---

<sup>11</sup> Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia: 1917-1970* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972), 64.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Heinz Unger, *Hammer Sickle and Baton: The Soviet Memoirs of a Musician* (London: The Cresset Press Ltd., 1939), 65-66.

<sup>14</sup> Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life*, 65.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Robinson, “Born That Way,” 23.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> W. H. Kerridge, “The Union of Soviet Composers,” *The Musical Times* 75 (1934): 1073.

<sup>20</sup> Kerridge, “The Union of Soviet Composers,” 1074.

step was renaming the Maryinsky Theatre the Kirov Theatre in honor of the former head of the Leningrad Communist Party whose assassination had prompted Stalin's purges.<sup>21</sup> Another was Stalin's vicious crusade against Dmitri Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, which premiered at the Maly (Small) Theatre in Leningrad on January 22, 1934.<sup>22</sup> A pseudo-erotic satire criticizing merchant life during the 1840s, *Lady Macbeth* follows the story of Ekaterina Izmailova, a sophisticated woman who is driven to murder both by her own ambition and by the constraints of society.<sup>23</sup> After its premiere, critical and public praise were lauded on the 30-year-old Shostakovich, and *Lady Macbeth* was performed all over the Soviet Union before Stalin himself finally attended a performance at the Bolshoi Theatre two years later.<sup>24</sup> Unlike the adoring Soviet masses, however, Stalin was not impressed; some reports claim that Stalin muttered "trash" before promptly walking out halfway through the performance.<sup>25</sup> Shortly after this unequivocal rejection of the opera by Stalin, an article appeared in *Pravda*, a state-run propaganda journal, which condemned *Lady Macbeth*: "Shostakovich's opera enjoys great success with the bourgeois audiences abroad. Is it because its fidgety, shrieking, neurotic music tickles the depraved tastes of the bourgeoisie?"<sup>26</sup> Following this affair, Shostakovich's work was labeled "poison and forbidden" by the state, and the composer himself stated of the aftermath, "I was no longer the master of my life, my past was crossed out, my work, my abilities, turned out to be worthless to everyone."<sup>27</sup>

To combat the possibility of any opera like *Lady Macbeth* being produced in the future, Stalin organized a meeting of the State Committee for Artistic Affairs (KDI) shortly after the publishing of the original *Pravda* condemnation of Shostakovich's work. In this meeting, members of the USC were invited to the Kremlin to discuss a new "Soviet opera" project.<sup>28</sup> This project would involve the creation of entirely new operas based on state-approved libretti that focused on either "revolutionary" heroes—Emilian Pugachev, Spartacus, or the Decembrists, or

---

<sup>21</sup> Bereson, *The Operatic State*, 126.

<sup>22</sup> Jörg Von Uthman, "The Show Must Not Go On: How censors tried to protect us from 'dangerous' operas," *Opera News* 69 (2005): 24.

<sup>23</sup> Stanley D. Krebs, *Soviet Composers and the Development of Soviet Music* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1970), 191.

<sup>24</sup> Von Uthman, "The Show Must Not Go On," 24.

<sup>25</sup> Unger, *Hammer Sickle and Baton*, 221-222.

<sup>26</sup> Nicolas Slonimsky, "The Changing Style of Soviet Music," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 3 (1950): 240.

<sup>27</sup> Robinson, "Born That Way," 24.

<sup>28</sup> Frolova-Walker, "The Soviet opera project," 182.

on recent historical events such as the Russian Revolution and Civil War.<sup>29</sup> A strict dogma was also applied to the music, and composers were told to “glorify the achievements of the Soviet people; give a positive picture of the Soviet citizen in his relations with his fellowmen under the Soviet regime; subscribe to a contemporary ‘programme’; be bright, optimistic, straightforward and comprehensible; above all, have a ‘mass’ basis and draw its inspiration from the people and their folk-music.”<sup>30</sup> Aspects of production, from set design to vocal score, were likewise monitored by the KDI,<sup>31</sup> especially in national “treasures” like the Bolshoi Theatre, where Stalin had just witnessed *Lady Macbeth*.

Problems in undertaking such a massive initiative quickly arose, not the least of which was the unwillingness of many opera houses to work with untrained composers and librettists on the uncertain enterprise of Soviet opera.<sup>32</sup> Professional opera singers avoided the project as well, using their influence “to ensure that they would never have to appear in Soviet operas.”<sup>33</sup> Despite these difficulties, one opera managed not only to succeed, but also to win a stamp of approval from Stalin himself: *Quiet Flows the Don (Tikhii Don)* by the young composer Ivan Dzerzhinsky. Based on a state-approved, Socialist realist novel by Mikhail Sholokhov, the opera follows the lives of a Don Cossack family before, during and after World War I.<sup>34</sup> Dzerzhinsky interweaved popular folk songs throughout the music and unknowingly created a new genre: the “song opera,” which expressed “revolutionary ideas [. . .] by means of melodic elements borrowed from popular songs, in perfect keeping with the content.”<sup>35</sup> Although it was not as sophisticated in plot or musical composition as its predecessor, *Lady Macbeth*, *Quiet Flows the Don* was proclaimed the model for other Soviet operas to emulate, and Dzerzhinsky was quickly commissioned by the state to compose another opera.<sup>36</sup> The original director of the opera, Samuil Samosud, was likewise promoted to the directorship of the Bolshoi Theatre—this despite the fact that he had been involved in staging *Lady Macbeth* in Leningrad.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life*, 66.

<sup>30</sup> Cecil Parrott, “Music in the Soviet Union,” *The Musical Times* 100 (1959): 14.

<sup>31</sup> Frolova-Walker, “The Soviet opera project,” 194.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Krebs, *Soviet Composers*, 52.

<sup>35</sup> Danko, *Soviet Music*, 106.

<sup>36</sup> Frolova-Walker, “The Soviet opera project,” 192.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

Another product of Stalin's Soviet opera project was not originally a Soviet opera at all: Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar*. The opera's libretto had previously been reworked and the title changed to *Hammer and Sickle* during the 1920s, but a more focused attempt to transform the story of the opera was not undertaken until 1937.<sup>38</sup> Changing the title to *Ivan Susanin*, all references to the tsar were eliminated from the libretto and the ending scene, which had originally been the coronation of the tsar, was instead changed to the triumph of the Russian peasant leader Ivan Susanin over Polish agents trying to infiltrate the country.<sup>39</sup> This story was particularly relevant at the time of its premiere in 1939, a time of growing antagonism between Poland and the Soviet Union preceding the Second World War, and consequently served as a "patriotic spectacle" for Soviet audiences.<sup>40</sup> According to the account of a citizen who attended the premiere, at which Stalin and top Party officials were also present,

Before the Epilogue, the Government [including Stalin] moved from its usual box into the large central box formerly reserved for the Tsar, and watched the rest of the opera from there. When the audience noticed this, they began to clap, and continued clapping throughout the musical interlude that precedes the epilogue. When the curtain [calls began] [. . .], [the applause] grew ever louder until it became a tumultuous ovation. The Government was applauding the cast, the cast was applauding the Government, and the audience was applauding both.<sup>41</sup>

The effect of performing in this popular, Stalinist take on Glinka was not lost on professional opera singers either, and basses competed for the chance to play the role of Susanin onstage, realizing the many special state favors they could receive from doing so.<sup>42</sup>

Save for the triumphs of *Quiet Flows the Don* and *Ivan Susanin*, the success stories of Stalin's opera project numbered few and far between. Even Dzerzhinsky, the wunderkind of Soviet opera, failed to capture the public's and the Party's interest with his second opera, *Virgin Soil Upturned*. Although it had nearly the same origins as its predecessor—a basis in a Socialist realist novel, melodies based on popular folk songs, etc.—Dzerzhinsky had become arrogant with fame, and despite high expectations and a huge production budget allotted by the state, the

---

<sup>38</sup> Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life*, 29.

<sup>39</sup> Slonimsky, "The Changing Style," 249.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Anatoly Smelyansky, *Is Comrade Bulgakov Dead? Mikhail Bulgakov at the Moscow Art Theatre*, trans. Arch Tait (London: Methuen Drama, 1993), 304-305; quoted in Marina Frolova-Walker, "The Soviet opera project: Ivan Dzerzhinsky vs. *Ivan Susanin*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18 (2006): 207.

<sup>42</sup> Frolova-Walker, "The Soviet opera project," 209.

opera was a disappointment.<sup>43</sup> His first opera had also produced many imitators, all of whom had been lambasted by Soviet music critics and none of whom had come close to replicating Dzerzhinsky's success.<sup>44</sup> The failure to produce an original Soviet opera after *Quiet Flows the Don* continued into the World War II period, when production of Soviet operas went into steep decline. The "Great Fatherland War" called not only for a "full-blooded revival of Russian nationalism,"<sup>45</sup> but also a revival of Russian classical music—in other words, the works of "bourgeois" composers such as Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Borodin were widely performed, all in an effort to inspire patriotism.<sup>46</sup>

This rejuvenated patriotism was also displayed by famous opera performers from the Bolshoi, who performed for soldiers of the Red Army on the frontlines and donated their personal savings to the war effort.<sup>47</sup> Even when the Bolshoi and Maryinsky Theatres were hit by German bombs and mortar shells in the early years of the war, they were restored at record speed and even gained new additions by the end of 1944.<sup>48</sup> These theatres and their performers were so symbolically and physically important to the Soviet state that, on May 5, 1945 (also known as Victory Day), a concert was held on the steps of the Reichstag featuring famous Bolshoi opera singers.<sup>49</sup> Through this concert, the Soviets put on "a display of might and of dominance, military, artistic and cultural, and therefore political."<sup>50</sup>

In the post-World War II period, the wartime reversion to emulating classical Russian composers did not end; rather, the goal of the postwar period was to create "new 'Soviet musical classics'" using those same Romantic-era composers as paragons to which new composers should aspire.<sup>51</sup> Clearly, Stalin's Soviet opera project was on the wane in this environment, though not without one notable exception: Georgian composer Vano Muradeli's 1947 opera *Great Friendship*. Written for the thirtieth anniversary of the October Revolution, the opera traced the revolution as it occurred in the Caucasus amongst Russians, Cossacks, and various

---

<sup>43</sup> Krebs, *Soviet Composers*, 55.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>45</sup> Frolova-Walker, "The Soviet opera project," 200.

<sup>46</sup> Slonimsky, "The Changing Style," 249.

<sup>47</sup> Bereson, *The Operatic State*, 127.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 126-127.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Frolova-Walker, "The Soviet opera project," 210.

ethnic minorities.<sup>52</sup> Like many failed Soviet operas before it, *Great Friendship* was mercilessly torn apart by music critics, who hurled criticisms at it ranging from a “defective, anti-artistic work, with not a single memorable melody” to “confusing and discordant, full of continuous dissonances and ear-splitting combinations of sounds.”<sup>53</sup> In addition, the Central Committee complained that Muradeli’s libretto portrayed Russians as “monolithic reactionaries” while the Lezgins, an ethnic minority, were depicted as “heroic revolutionaries.”<sup>54</sup>

To the Stalinist state, such “falsities” in the libretto could not be overlooked. By February 1948 Andrei Zhdanov, the party boss of Leningrad and close advisor to Stalin, had sent numerous, lengthy reports to Stalin on the miserable state of Soviet opera.<sup>55</sup> Later that same year, the Party’s Central Committee, with the input of Stalin himself, released the resolution “On the Opera *Great Friendship* by Muradeli.”<sup>56</sup> This resolution stated bluntly that Muradeli’s libretto was historically inaccurate in its depiction of Georgian and Ossetian hostility to the Russians during the revolution; that Muradeli made insufficient use of folk melodies to distinguish the various ethnic groups; and that he did not properly convey the “beauty” and “clarity” of the classical Russian musical form.<sup>57</sup> In addition, the resolution castigated the “formalism” and modernist tendencies of composers like Shostakovich and Sergei Prokofiev:

In the pursuit of mistakenly understood innovation, they [the composers] have lost contact in their music with the needs and artistic taste of the Soviet people, formed a narrow circle of specialists and musical gourmards, lowered the high social role and narrowed the significance of music, confining it to the satisfaction of the perverted tastes of esthetic individualists.<sup>58</sup>

Sufficiently warned by this resolution, these same composers that had continuously been persecuted by the Soviet regime were compelled to send a collective letter to Stalin promising to

---

<sup>52</sup> Laura J. Olson, *Performing Russia: Folk Revival and Russian Identity* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 64.

<sup>53</sup> Slonimsky, “The Changing Style,” 251.

<sup>54</sup> Kiril Tomoff, *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 130-131.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>56</sup> Olson, *Performing Russia*, 64.

<sup>57</sup> Andrey Olkhovsky, *Music Under the Soviets: The Agony of an Art* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1955), 280-281, and Olson, *Performing Russia*, 64.

<sup>58</sup> “O opera ‘Velikaya Druzhba’ V. Muradeli, Postanovleniye TsK VKP (b) ot 10 fevralya 1948 g.,” *Sovetskaya Muzyka* 1 (1948): 3-8; quoted in Andrey Olkhovsky, *Music Under the Soviets: The Agony of an Art* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1955), 280.

compose “vivid realistic music that reflects the life and the struggles of the Soviet people.”<sup>59</sup> Shostakovich himself issued this remarkable statement following the resolution: “I know that the Party is right; I know that the Party shows its solicitude for Soviet music and for me as a Soviet composer.”<sup>60</sup>

In the aftermath of the musical purge of 1948, few other Soviet composers dared to produce a Soviet opera for fear that they should suffer the same fate as Muradeli. Muradeli’s fiasco, in fact, effectively put an end to Stalin’s Soviet opera project; with the exception of Yuri Shaporin’s 1951 opera *The Decembrists*, the movement to create a new and exceptional genre of opera in the Soviet Union was completely abandoned after Stalin’s death in 1953.<sup>61</sup> Despite the perceived successes of Dzerzhinsky’s *Quiet Flows the Don* and *Ivan Susanin*, most of the artistic control over opera productions at the height of the Soviet opera project was placed in the hands of ignorant and incompetent Party officials who had prevented promising composers from seeing productions through to completion.<sup>62</sup> In Shostakovich’s case, Stalin’s methodically planned annihilation of *Lady Macbeth* scared him off composing operas for the rest of his career.<sup>63</sup> The Soviet Union’s mid-war reversion to the tenets of classical Russian music was the nail in the coffin for the Soviet opera project, though it did not signal the diminishment of Stalin’s cult of personality. In fact, this cult only grew in the post-World War II period, as did his methods of spreading effective cultural propaganda by other means. Although this project failed to rally the Soviet masses in the way that Stalin hoped it would, it nonetheless stands out in the history of the Soviet Union as an intriguing facet of the tortured, hostile, yet fascinating relationship between the state and the musical arts

---

<sup>59</sup> Slonimsky, “The Changing Style,” 253.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>61</sup> Krebs, *Soviet Composers*, 177.

<sup>62</sup> Robinson, “Born That Way,” 24.

<sup>63</sup> Harlow Robinson, “The Case of the Three Russians: Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich,” *Opera Quarterly* 6 (1989): 71.

### Contributor Biographies:

Alexander Allen, class of 2011, is a major of Biology and minor of Neuroscience who intends to apply to medical school. Apart from his involvement in the sciences at Gettysburg College, Alexander participates in numerous musical ensembles in the Sunderman Conservatory of Music.

Katie Chandler is a senior from Damascus, Maryland with a double major in history and German. Other than working on the Historical Journal, Katie works as a Tour Guide for the Gettysburg Admissions Office and as a tutor for the German department. After graduating from Gettysburg, Katie will be working as an English Teaching Assistant in Villach, Austria.

Miriam Grinberg is a senior Political Science major and History minor from Holland, Pennsylvania. She studied abroad in Bath, England in fall of 2009 and will be attending Kansai Gaidai University in Hirakata City, Japan during the fall 2010 semester. She hopes to pursue a postgraduate degree in International Relations with a concentration on East Asia.

Liz Johns is a senior double major in History and Political Science. She will pursue a Master of Science in Library Science from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Nathan Lanan is from Souderton, Pennsylvania (a suburb of Philadelphia) where he is active in his Church and Scouting and has achieved the rank of Eagle Scout. When he was thirteen, Nathan started collecting ancient and medieval weaponry and soon began practicing archery. Winning the Greninger Prize has solidified his goal to become a writer of Historical Fiction.

Evan Rothera is a senior from West Windsor, New Jersey. Evan double majored in History and Spanish and minored in Civil War Era Studies. In addition to serving as the editor of the Historical Journal, he is also the co-editor of the Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era. In the fall Evan will begin his graduate work in History at Penn State.

Rachel Santose is a junior from Broadview Heights, Ohio and is currently finishing up her semester abroad in Bath, England. She is majoring in History and minoring in Civil War Era Studies. Besides serving on the staff of the Gettysburg Historical Journal, Rachel is also heavily involved in Gettysburg's Campus Activities Board (CAB) and Attic Advisory Board (AAB). Rachel is also a member of Phi Alpha Theta, Omicron Kappa Delta, and serves as a co-editor for the Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era.

Andrea Savadelis is a native of New Jersey and likes to ride horses and play her acoustic guitar in her spare time. Andrea has always wanted to be a teacher and fell in love with history due to the inspiration she received from her 9th grade history teacher, Mrs. Gesek. She completed a history major at Gettysburg College and is currently pursuing a Secondary Social Studies MAT at The College of New Jersey. Andrea is forever grateful for her family, friends, and professors who gave me inspiration to do great work. She hopes to one day give back to the educational community what it has provided her and more.

Elizabeth Ungemach is a Junior History major, Spanish minor from Wayne, NJ. She will be President of Newman Association, Vice President of the Civil War Club, and Secretary of the Interfaith Council in the Fall and enjoys reading and swimming outside of class.

Colin Walfield is a recent graduate (May 2010) with a major in History and a minor in Classical Studies. Colin studied abroad in Fall 2008 in Bath where he worked as an intern with the Museum of Bath at Work. Last Fall, he volunteered with the Eisenhower National Historic Site in Gettysburg. He currently lives on Long Island