According to Dr. Paul Zbiek, the Iroquois gained control of this area about 1675 when they finished the conflict known as the Beaver Wars (1638—1674). This clash involved various Native tribes over control of the fur trade (Luzerne County 21). The Iroquois were actually a confederacy made of 6 united nations: the Mohawk, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Oneida and Tuscarora (after 1722). Although white residents would not begin to establish permanent homes until 1769, Natives under the control of the Iroquois had been in the valley for nearly 100 years. They had lived here for many years before the Iroquois tightened their grip over this area.

After the war, the Iroquois now controlled a vast area that included parts of Delaware, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. The problem for the Iroquois was that they simply didn’t have enough warriors to defend the vast territory. They had little choice but to invite other Native tribes who had been displaced by White settlers into their territory. Sally Lottick makes that point in her book *Bridging Change* (25-30).
Lottick writes: “In 1758, Christian Frederick Post, Moravian missionary to the Indians, wrote,

*They settle these New Allies on the Frontiers of the White People and give them this as their Instruction: “Be Watchful that no body of White People may come to settle near you. You must appear to them as Frightful Men, and if not withstanding they come too near give them a Push we will secure and defend you against them….’”* (26).

**UNDER THE IROQUOIS Thumb**

The Wyoming Valley was very important to the Iroquois as it lay on the “southern flank of their territory and controlled the trails important in both war and diplomacy from the junction of the North and West Branches of the Susquehanna at Shamokin (now Sunbury) to Onondaga (now Syracuse)” (Lottick 25). The Shawnee were the first to come into the valley under this agreement with the Iroquois. The Shawnee had lived along the southeastern coast of the present-day United States until they were pushed out by White settlers (Lottick 26). In 1701, at the invitation of the Iroquois, the Shawnee settled in the lower valley near Plymouth. Over the next 60 plus years, the Mahicans, Mohegans, Lenni-Lenape or Delaware, Tuscarora, and Nanticokes resided in the valley. The
Tuscarora eventually moved farther north and joined the Iroquois confederacy about 1722. The Nanticokes, too, left the area to move north. One of the larger groups who settled in the upper valley were the Lenni-Lenape who came about the same time as the Shawnee who lived in the Lower Valley. They had been pushed out of land along the Minisink area of the Delaware River farther east by the Walking Purchase (Lottick 27, 34).

THE WHITES MOVE IN

Though the Iroquois tried to protect this area from invaders, they weren’t the only ones with plans for the valley. In 1752, about 250 people in Connecticut formed the Susquehanna Company for the purpose of settling here (Williamson and Fossler 2). Evidently, the population in Connecticut had increased to the point where those who were pioneers at heart felt the need to move west. They would come over the Native American Cushetank path originally designed for foot traffic. The travel here would take several weeks. It was made more difficult because the path had to be widened for the wagons from Connecticut.

In 1662, King Charles II had given Connecticut the right to claim the land in what is now the northern half of Pennsylvania in 1662.
Unfortunately, he gave the same land to William Penn just nineteen years later. This meant that settlers from Connecticut, settlers from Pennsylvania, and, of course, the Native Indians each claimed the valley as their own. Who would end up with the land? The answer required two civil wars, intrigue, false arrests, massacres, murder, and court battles.

Pennsylvania, however, did not recognize the prior claim of Connecticut’s charter from King Charles II in 1662. Nor would the government of Pennsylvania recognize any validity in any transaction between the Natives and the Connecticut Yankees that involved Pennsylvania soil.

One of the quirks of this disputed territory was who owned the land. According to the charter of Connecticut, the Yankees could own the land outright. First, the Pennamites had to pay some money to the Penns, and then an individual could lease or rent the land from Pennsylvania. The fact that the Yankees could own the land outright gave them great incentive to fight for this area. The Penns tried desperately to hold onto the area by encouraging first Indians and then white settlers loyal to the Penns to move in.

The British and the French both opposed any colonial settlement beyond the Appalachian Mountains. The French knew that farming would disrupt their fur trade, and the British did not want the
responsibility of protecting settlers in the mountains. The Iroquois also opposed these moves. This is why they had the Shawnee, the Nanticoke, the Mahicans and the Lenni Lenape move here. Still the Connecticut Yankees moved here anyway despite the opposition from all of those groups. That was the catalyst for war.

While plans were being made by the Connecticut Yankees to settle the valley, the Moravian missionary John Martin Mack confirmed the tensions in his journal:

“Wyoming is in critical condition. The New Englanders in possession of a Royal Charter, lay claim to Wyoming. The Pennsylvanians hold it is within the Proprietary grant, and wish the Indians to sell it to them. Thus the Indians are in a dilemma” (Lottick 37).

**BEHIND THE SCENES**

The story behind this grave situation involves several players. The first group was the Lenni-Lenape or Delaware. The common name of “Delaware” is not an English translation of “Lenni-Lenape.” but it came from their earlier residence in the Delaware River Valley. By 1682, the Lenni-Lenape, or Delaware, had been defeated in war by the Iroquois. As a defeated people, they had to obey their conquerors in all issues (Lottick 34).

Forty odd years later, the Lenni-Lenape suffered from the injustice of the 1737 Walking Purchase. That swindle left them without much of their hunting grounds located near the Delaware River. The Lenni Lenape had supposedly agreed to give land to the Penns—as much land as a man could walk in a day and a half north of Neshaminy Creek in Bucks County. From that point a line would be
drawn eastward to the Delaware River. The Indians thought this meant that a man would walk at a normal pace. Instead, the Penns had a path secretly cleared by woodsmen, and three men, including Edward Marshall, started to walk briskly (some accounts say run) for nearly 60 miles over eighteen hours. (One man dropped out after eighteen miles, a second in the morning of the second day. Time off was taken at night.) When the line was drawn eastward from Edward Marshall’s stopping point, the lost territory for the Natives included most of Northampton, Monroe, and Pike counties—and that included most of their hunting grounds (Lottick 34). In 1742, the Lenni Lenape were told by the Iroquois to go to Wyoming Valley. Instead, part of the group went to the Ohio River in western Pennsylvania, but the largest group stayed here (Lottick 28).

Their early settlement near what is now the Firwood section of Wilkes-Barre was hit hard by an epidemic, and the group moved northward to Plains late in 1743.

CONFLICT BETWEEN THE ENGLISH AND FRENCH

To complicate matters, the French and Indian War (1756—1763) broke out on the North American continent. It was part of the larger, global conflict known as the Seven Years’ War. At Easton in 1758, a conference was held to work out a plan for peace, which would not be easy. One of the Native representatives was the chief of the Delaware, Teedyuscung. He had come to Wyoming Valley from Gnaddenhutten (meaning cabins of grace) on the Lehigh River. The Nanticokes wanted him to assume leadership of them while they were under the control of the Iroquois (Lottick 35). He arrived on April 24, 1754, with 65 Delaware and Mahicans. His arrival was right in the midst of the conflicting land claims and during the growing frontier
tensions between the French, the British, and the Indians.

Clearly, Teedyuscung would have his hands full. He was getting pressured to give up land by Connecticut Yankees who wanted to move into the Wyoming Valley. Natives also wanted him to take up arms against the British, and the Pennamites who also wanted the land added to his misery.

The situation became more complicated when one of the Connecticut Susquehanna Company agents, John Lydius, had a few Mohawk chiefs sign off on the lands of Wyoming Valley in 1754 at Albany—after reportedly getting them drunk. That incident was hotly disputed by all involved. However, the Iroquois Confederacy had an agreement among the 5 nations that all major decisions about land sales were to be made as a group at their council. One member of the confederacy could not sell lands without the consent of all the members. Although some Susquehanna Company members agreed that the sale should be voided, others said it was legal.

The Delaware were dismayed when a number of the Connecticut settlers came to the Wyoming Valley (Lottick 37). Under their chief (he called himself King Teedyuscung), they protested to the Iroquois, Thomas Penn, and Sir William Johnson—the man in charge of Indian Affairs for the British. They threatened to leave the valley and go to Ohio to live with the French. That would mean the Iroquois would be without their “gatekeepers.” The Iroquois were frustrated with the situation and angry with the Mohawks, who allegedly “sold” the land though they denied they made the “sale.”

Of course, the British, the French and their Indian allies continued to wage war against each other. By 1763, the tide turned against the French and their Native allies, and the war ended.
However, right before the war did end, the Western Delaware were waging war against the British, and the Eastern Delaware in the Wyoming Valley were facing invasion from Connecticut. Teedyuscung would get no help from either the British or the French who were in great need themselves (Lottick 38).

After 4 peace conferences, Teedyuscung did manage to help coordinate negotiations between the Lenape, the Iroquois, and the Pennsylvanians. These three groups sided against the Yankees who continued to move into the area by 1762 near Mill Creek. To compound the issue, the Susquehanna Company settlers at that time did not have the support of the Connecticut government or British government for their move to the valley. Once New York boundaries were established, any claims to the west of Connecticut should have resulted in new opportunities for the British crown. Meanwhile, Thomas Penn (representing Pennsylvania) was lobbying the British government and the Council of Privy. While he appears to have won his legal point in London, the practical part was possession of the land over here. The Yankees were accomplishing that (Jones “Settlement”).

Despite the opposition from all of those groups, the Connecticut Yankees continued their plan to move here anyway. John Shickellamy, Iroquois chief at Shamokin warned the Susquehannah Company that:

“whosoever of the white should venture to settle any land of Wyoming or thereabouts, belonging hitherto to the Indians, will have his Creatures killed first, and If they did not desist they themselves would be killed without distinction. Let the consequence be what it would.”
UPRISING ON THE FRONTIER

Trouble was about to boil over here in the valley just as the French and Indian War was winding down. The Ottawa Indian chief, Pontiac, tried desperately to push the British settlers back across the Appalachian Mountains. Natives including the Delaware, Seneca, and Ojibwa joined the Ottawa and captured eight forts in Maryland, Ohio, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. Volunteers immediately responded to protect their homes against the threat, which would soon find its way to the valley.

When it became obvious that the Connecticut Yankees intended to not just trade but to build homes and cultivate the land, the Indians complained again to the governor of Pennsylvania. That seemed to do little good for the Indians. The settlers built a fort on Mill Creek near what is now the General Hospital in 1762. They cleared land, planted crops, and they were warned not to return by Teedyuscung. The Iroquois had charged him with keeping white settlers out of the area in order to protect the southern gateway of the Iroquois longhouse in New York. By the following year, however, Teedyuscung was dead. He was killed (some say murdered) in a cabin fire in the spring of 1763 at his home on Ross Street in Wilkes-Barre. After that, most of the Delaware moved out (Lottick 43). So, when these Yankees returned to the valley in 1763, they met little resistance.
That would soon change. In October of that year, the settlers were attacked by Delaware and nearly wiped out. The alleged leader of the Western Delaware warrior party was Captain Bull, the son of Teedyuscung. As mentioned earlier, just what Shickellamy of the Iroquois had warned about had come to pass.

Though the conflict begun by Pontiac would continue for months, once the Indians suffered several defeats and no longer had French help, the alliance between the tribes ended. Pontiac was forced to sue for peace by 1766. White settlers stayed out of the valley until 1769.

Now that the French and Indian War was over along with the threat from Pontiac, the British wanted to expand territory for their settlers yet keep the Indians from attacking. At Fort Stanwix in 1768, the Iroquois were persuaded to give up claims to Wyoming Valley in order to have peace (Dziak 53).

SETTLEMENTS---AND THE YANKEE-PENNAMITE WAR

By February of 1769, Connecticut Yankees were moving into the valley. Their colony claimed the land by charter from King Charles II in 1662. The rich, fertile soil coupled with the river that would provide fish for food and water for power was a powerful incentive to pull them away from a crowded colony. When they arrived, they chose the west side of the river as the best site for them.

As they were preparing to set up on their location within the Wyoming Valley, Captain Ogden met them. He was the sheriff from Northampton County which had jurisdiction for Pennsylvania over
Wyoming Valley (Lottick 45). He arrested three Yankees and told the others to go back to Connecticut.

While the Yankees left, they made plans to come back in March. 300 more came in May. From earlier visits to northeastern Pennsylvania, the colonists laid out their townships in what is now Luzerne, Lackawanna, Wyoming, Bradford, and Susquehanna counties. Each one was five miles square and contained fifty shares each of which was about 300 acres (Harvey A History 374). The valley itself was divided into five sections or townships—Wilkes-Barre, Kingston, Plymouth, Pittston, and Hanover which was originally Nanticoke. Outside of the valley, 12 more townships planned, making 17 total. Each section was to start with 40 settlers and a mandate to build a church and a school. The area was later attached to the town of Westmoreland in Litchfield County to be ruled as part of the Connecticut government.

The Yankee townships were named for people or places in England. Most settlers left from the port of Plymouth in England, Kingston is named in honor of the monarch, while Pittston was named for the prime minister William Pitt. Of course, Wilkes-Barre was named for the two Parliament members sympathetic to the colonial cause while Hanover reflects the name of the British royal house from the accession of George I in 1714 (Lottick 46).

The Pennsylvania settlers were not about to let the Connecticut Yankees settle the area without a fight. In fact, Pennsylvania surveyors were setting up two manors—Stoke and Sunbury. Manors are the Quaker term for land distribution.

At first, only members of the Susquehanna Company were eligible for land plots. However, members quickly realized that the size of the plots were too large for one family to work, and so opted to open up the claims to a lottery system where anyone could settle the land as a freeholder. That is, the settler could own the land forever. This idea did two things: ensured that the area would be settled quickly and therefore be easier to hold for the Yankees. Large estates would be minimized. In fact, most families (92.5 percent) had between ten and fifty acres
Next, the area would be open to Pennsylvanians, too. They had a different way of owning land—they didn’t or rather they couldn’t own the land.

Pennsylvanians had to lease the land from the Penns which was much less desirable to any settler. It would seem that no one would want to pay rent to the Penns on land he worked when he had the chance to own it outright. Loyalty to the Penns and Pennsylvania, however, outweighed ownership of the land—at least in the beginning.

YANKEE-PENNAMITE WARS

That brings us to the Yankee-Pennamite Wars. This would turn out to be a long-running civil war interrupted by the American Revolution. Forty of the Yankees chose to make their fort on what we now call River Street in Forty Fort. A larger group, led by John Durkee, joined them in May. They built their own Fort Durkee across the river on what is now Ross Street. In June, armed Pennamites ordered the Yankees to get out of the Wyoming Valley. By September, the Yankees were forced to leave again by Captain Ogden and the Pennsylvanians. They came back in 1770, the same year as the Boston Massacre, and retook their Fort Durkee. Yankee John Durkee laid out plans for the new city of Wilkes-Barre.

In January of 1771, the Pennamites, led by Captain Ogden, created a new fort closer to the Yankees near Northampton Street and South River Street. They named it Fort Wyoming. Eight months later, the Yankees, led by Zebulon Butler, laid siege to it and forced the Pennamites to leave. Over the next four years, the Yankees built gristmills, built other forts, and surveyed more land. Crops were planted, roads were made, and schools and churches were planned. By
1775, nearly 2000 people lived in what the Yankees called the township of Westmoreland (Dziak 56, 57).

By 1775, national events in Boston and elsewhere were overshadowing the civil war in the valley. The Continental Congress recommended to the Pennamites that they resolve the issue of valley ownership. Instead, they attacked the Yankees—and lost.

**THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM**

Under Zebulon Butler’s leadership, the Yankees won the Battle of Rampart Rocks (near Nanticoke) and pushed the intruders out. The Yankees barely had time to enjoy their victory over the Pennamites. When the American Revolution broke out, men from this area hurried to join the Continental army. In the coming months, Captains Robert Durkee and Samuel Ransom recruited over 170 more men for the 24th Connecticut to help George Washington.

They joined Washington’s army at Morristown on January 1, 1777. Valley men from the two companies fought in the Battles of Mill Stone River, Bound Brook, Germantown, Brandywine, and Fort Mifflin. After spending the winter at Valley Forge, they fought in the battle of Monmouth.

So many fathers, sons, and brothers left to help fight the British, the valley was left with inadequate defense. One historian, Sheldon Reynolds, estimated that Wyoming gave eight times its “fair share” of men (Dziak 85). Although Zebulon Butler was concerned about this depletion of able-bodied men, little could be done. Washington and the army were desperate.
When Washington was pushed out of Philadelphia, he headed for Valley Forge. Unfortunately, that area could not supply his beleaguered army with much needed supplies. Instead, he and the Congress looked to the valley to provide what was needed. The British were keeping an eye on the valley residents too, knowing full well that they could not allow Washington to get resupplied.

**BATTLE OF WYOMING**

During the French and Indian War, the British lost many battles during the early years as they tried to bring the European style of fighting to this theater of action. By 1777, they had learned new lessons. They knew that smaller, faster, groups using Indian style warfare was the better choice. Under Major John Butler, they organized such a unit to attack Wyoming.

At first, John Butler had trouble convincing the Iroquois to join the fight. None of the Six Nations wanted to get involved. Nonetheless, Butler gave them trinkets and feathers. He appealed to them as warriors, and reminded them of the lies, insults and atrocities committed by the Patriots against the Indians. Finally, with the help of a Mohawk chief named Joseph Brant, some were convinced to join him. Other volunteers were eager to become part of the band, too. They were loyalists who had been pushed out of Wyoming Valley by the Connecticut Yankees, and they were eager to have a chance to return.

From the valley, Colonel Denison pleaded with the Continental Congress for help. Wyoming was woefully depleted of men. They had left to join with Washington to fight the British. Now the valley was unable to carry on a fight for its own protection. Zebulon Butler was away, too, leaving Nathan Denison in charge. Rumors were circulating about impending attacks. The reports were not unfounded as valley
residents saw small bands of Indians and Loyalists roaming about in the area directly north.

Meanwhile, the 24th Connecticut were with the Continental Army in 1778 when this organized force of British and Tory soldiers (known as Butler’s Rangers) and Seneca Indians, perhaps as many as 600, came into the valley in late June. The valley was protected by about 350 older men and younger boys led by Colonel Nathan Denison of Forty Fort and Colonel Zebulon Butler of Fort Wilkes-Barre. This force was made of males too old or too young to fight with the 24th Connecticut. The Continental Congress later released the men to go home to the valley, but it was too late to prevent what became known as the Wyoming Massacre.

The valley residents were instrumental in supplying Washington’s army with grains, needed supplies, and men. It wasn’t surprising, then, that the British and their Indian allies would target the frontier settlement. Part of their reasoning was to attack the homes and families left behind so that colonial soldiers would desert Washington’s army, weakening the defense of the rebellious colonies. They also wanted to destroy any supplies that might aid the Continentals.

Not all those in the valley were in the Patriot camp. Unfortunately, some of the loyalists lost their homes and possessions when the Patriots pushed them out. Now, they wanted revenge. Other settlers from New
York and New Jersey with no ties to Connecticut were arriving in the valley, too. Most leaned toward Britain. So, the valley Yankee residents formed a Committee of Safety to watch them.

In late June and early July of 1778, a force of some 600 Seneca Indians, loyalists, and British soldiers known as Butler’s Rangers headed for the valley. Those Patriots in the valley had some protection on the east side of the river from Fort Pittston, Fort Jenkins a stockaded house known on the west side of the river as West Pittston, Forty Fort, and Fort Wilkes-Barre. One other fort in Exeter was named Wintermoot. The Patriots were suspicious of this family as the Wintermoots wanted no help from the Yankees while the fort was being built.

The British and Indians were under the leadership of Major John Butler (no relationship to the Patriot Zebulon Butler.) They invaded from the north as they followed the Susquehanna River into the valley. They met and ambushed the Harding brothers on their farm a few miles north of the valley. The alarm went out to the rest of the Patriots, and most rushed to Forty Fort.

It was at Forty Fort that a decision had to be made about whether to attack the British or wait for British to attack the fort. Zebulon Butler,
a colonel in the Continental Army was home on leave. He was asked to take command assisted by Colonel Nathan Denison.

The debate grew heated at times. The number of the enemy was not known to the Patriots. Leaving the fort would be dangerous, yet staying in the fort while their homes and crops were destroyed did not seem like a very good alternative. Lazarus Stewart, a well-known Indian fighter (and some say murderer), had been wanted by Pennsylvania authorities for atrocities against the Natives. He fled to Connecticut and wound up in Wyoming Valley. Reportedly, his voice now called for leaving the fort to prevent wanton destruction.

That’s what the majority wanted as well. Straws were drawn to determine who would remain in the fort to protect the women and children. Luke Swetland was one of those who stayed behind.

Men left the fort marching to the tune of St. Patrick’s Day in the Morning. Their leaders were very concerned. While the men felt they were ready, Zebulon Butler and Nathan Denison did not share that opinion. About a mile and a half after the group left Forty Fort, they stopped at Abraham’s Creek—and the debate about what to do renewed. Butler and Denison thought that place was advantageous for defense. It had the creek for water, and the enemy would have to cross it under fire. Plus, Forty Fort was close by for retreat. The ground was on a slight rise, and the plain and woods were in clear sight (Dziak 138). The men were busy as they set their defenses. Once finished, however, the men grew weary of the wait—and wanted to strike at the enemy instead. As the hours passed, so did their patience.

In the midst of this, Captain Durkee of the Westmoreland Independent Company and two others rode up to the group. They recounted to Butler and Denison that the rest of their company, about sixty men, were within two days march of the valley. If the enemy could be held in check, more help would arrive.
That wouldn’t happen as the men were tired of waiting and wanted to mount an attack. Denison and Butler were against the idea, but most everyone else wanted to get at the enemy and threatened to go without their leaders (Dziak 141). The Wyoming Valley army could be split which would virtually assure the enemy of victory, so Butler decided to go with the men (Dziak 142).

The enemy would know shortly about the Patriot decision to cross Abraham’s Creek. They began to prepare their defense near present-day Schooley Avenue and Valley Streets in Exeter.

Old Smoke, the Indian chief in charge of that part of the unit, had some of his warriors lay down near the river bank; others were lying in wait on what would become the west side of the battlefield. Butler’s line kneeled behind a wooden fence and also lay in the grass. Wintermoot Fort was ordered to be set ablaze as a ruse to make the Patriots think the British were leaving.

When the Patriots were about a mile away, the officers had the men spread out and stand shoulder-to-shoulder. The line was over 1,000 feet long. Forty-seven-year-old Colonel Butler commanded the portion of line closest to the river while Colonel Denison had command of the men farthest away.

By 5:00 p.m., the men had covered the distance and found themselves in an open field near the now-burning Fort Wintermoot. Across the field was the fence that Butler knew would be a perfect place for an ambush. He didn’t have to wait very long to find out that he was right.

Shots were fired at the Patriots; they fired back, marched a short distance, reloaded and fired again. That would happen two more times and then the Rangers fired and began to fall back. The Patriots thought they were retreating and began to push forward. Their line became irregular as they moved.

Once the line passed a little farther, it was now the Indians turn to attack. They came against the flank or side of the Patriot line completely surprising the men. Only one Patriot had been lost so far on the northern part of the line, but now they were falling fast. The number of Indians
was greater than the whole Patriot army (Dziak 159).

Denison gave orders to fall back and form an oblique—a right angle to blunt the Indian attack. By the time the word was passed along the ranks, it became fall back and retreat. That word, retreat, was the beginning of the end for the Patriots as their line began to crumble.

With some men still fighting on the battlefield, others began to move, then run toward the river with the Indians, Rangers, and loyalists in hot pursuit. Most of the Patriots who tried to cross the river were killed by the Indians who were waiting by the river bank. The rout would not last long, but the resulting massacre would last all night.

One man, Henry Pencel, escaped and hid in the thickets of nearby Monocanock Island. When he was found hiding behind a log, he promptly got to his knees and begged for his life. But his captor reportedly said he would not spare his life for “you are a damned rebel.” According to Harvey, the captor “then shot
him, struck him of four or five times with a tomahawk, and then scalped him (1022). The captor was Henry’s younger brother, John. The scene was witnessed by Giles Slocum who later escaped and reported the incident to others. It is known as the “Fratricide at Wyoming.”

The massacre revealed cruelties rarely seen on the American battlefield. Some of the captured victims had their heads cut off; Captain Bidlack was thrown onto the burning embers of Fort Wintermoot and held there by pitchfork. Some were tied to trees with flaming branches and pine knots stabbed into their bowels (Dziak p. 184) According to John Butler, 227 scalps were taken.

Survivors came back to Forty Fort bringing new stories of what they saw. One of the stories told was about a group of 18 Yankee Patriots who were taken to a flat rock. About 200 Indian warriors and one woman surrounded them, Queen Esther (or perhaps her sister, Esther). Reportedly, Queen Esther would dance and sing and then bring out a maul and bash the brains out of one captive at a time.

On the dawn of the following morning, July 4, the survivors had nothing to celebrate. Fort Pittston would also surrender their freedom; Fort Jenkins had already done so the day before. Forty Fort would be offered terms of surrender about eight o’clock in the morning.

Nathan Denison opened the gates and rode out to meet John Butler. The terms were clear. All forts were to be handed over, any continental soldiers were to be made prisoners of war, and all militiamen
were to be disarmed (Dziak 195). By July 8, the enemy would be gone from the valley.

THE GREAT RUNAWAY

They would not be the only ones who left. Many of the settlers who had such high hopes leaving the Forty Fort the afternoon of July 3 had been killed. The women, children, and men who lived saw their homes and crops burned, their animals taken. Hundreds of refugees would now take part in what has been called the “Great Runaway.” Some went down the river to Sunbury; others went to Fort Penn (modern day Stroudsburg) on the Delaware River or back to Connecticut (Dziak 208). Some of those who tried to make it through the Pocono Mountains were lost in what was called the Shades of Death or the Great Swamp. The area was filled with dense forest and thick undergrowth. Animals and insects plagued the weary, heartsick travelers. Few horses or oxen were around to help carry or pull loads. Food was in short supply; many died and were buried where they fell.

It wasn’t long before there were no more settlers left. Estimates of those killed range from over 120 to 376 (Dziak 214). No one knows for certain how many died in the wilderness, but estimates are usually around 200 people. The devastation, however, was complete.

Edmund L. Dana served as a captain of the Wyoming Artillerists in the Mexican War, and later as a Colonel of the 143rd PA regiment in the Civil War. He was elected as a judge in Luzerne County following that conflict. He wrote his thoughts of the Massacre of Wyoming:

*The battle was not one of the great battles in history, either in skill displayed, the numbers engaged, or in the casualties suffered. It was fought against superior numbers, arms, and discipline, and in defense of life and home. ...[It] was not a great*
battle directly in its results, as affecting the struggle for Independence by the Colonies. It was not great in point of the number of men engaged in the conflict. But it was great in this: The exaggerated story of the atrocities committed by the British troops and their allies [after the battle], fired the heart and nerved the arm of every American patriot in this broad land, wherever the story became known (Harvey 1077).

A FRESH LOOK AT WYOMING

The horrors of the battle and the massacre that followed were tragic and cruel. Congress, however, knew that Wyoming could not simply be abandoned. It was too important as a defense against invasion, so they began to plan how to take the area back. Zebulon Butler, who had eluded capture after the battle, was chosen to lead the troops and militia in an effort to regain the valley.

Butler worked with Colonel Thomas Hartley who burned with desire to clear the area of Indian threat. John Franklin, who had been assigned to Butler, was transferred to Hartley’s command. Just two weeks after the Wyoming Massacre, Hartley’s group attacked native villages along the Susquehanna as far north as Tioga including the area where “Queen” Esther supposedly lived. They returned in October of 1778.
In the meantime, Butler and his men were reorganizing the area. From their new base, dubbed Camp Westmoreland (in Wilkes-Barre), they began to bury the dead who still lay where they had fallen in July. Butler also set up defenses against roving bands of outlaw natives and whites. Still, the Iroquois longhouse was a threat. That would be taken care of by an army led by General John Sullivan. He would lead 3,000 men with all of their pack animals and wagons through the wilderness. Five hundred woodsman were needed to clear a path for the army. In July of 1779, they left Wyoming and began their trek into Iroquois territory with the cry of “Remember Wyoming.” From July through October, they destroyed scores of Indian villages, stores, and crops in the valley and north to the Finger Lakes.

Dziak writes: “the patriots torched about forty Iroquois towns, made up of perhaps 1,200 cabins, and destroyed about 160,000 bushels of corn along with ‘a vast quantity of other valuable Indian crops” (Dziak 225). By early October, Iroquois had been defeated for all practical purposes. Sullivan and his army returned to the valley to be greeted by thankful citizens and a celebratory feast.

NOT ALL THE DANGER PASSED

A few months later in November of 1778, a young girl named Frances Slocum was taken by the Indians from her family’s home in Wilkes-Barre. She eventually grew up to marry a Miami Indian chief and lived in Peru, Indiana. Maconaquah, The Little Bear, kept her past a secret until she was an elderly woman. She then told a visiting reporter who wrote about her interesting story. Several years later, her brother
found out about her and came to her home. He wanted her to return with him, but she had spent all but five years of her life with the natives and preferred staying with them.

Luke Swetland was also captured by the Indians and kept for nearly a year before he escaped. His wife Hannah left the Wyoming Valley and moved back to Connecticut. She was there when her husband returned to his home in Wyoming. He then went to Connecticut, rejoined his wife and family, and then travelled back to Wyoming.

A year later, in 1780, Indians abducted Benjamin Harvey. He was taken to Fort Niagara and later released. Upon walking back to his home in Plymouth, he discovered the lake that now bears his name.

In 1783, two years after the Battle of Yorktown and just as the Treaty of Paris was being signed to end the American Revolution, the Pennamites took over Fort Wyoming from the Yankees and renamed it Fort Dickinson. They also tried to change the name of Wilkes-Barre to Londonderry. Arrests of Yankees continued, and the debate over who owned the land continued for a number of years.

Meanwhile, Ethan Allen was invited to come and aid the Yankees as an entirely new state was proposed—Westmoreland. Colonel John Franklin thought this was an excellent idea as a new state would not be under the jurisdiction of either Connecticut or Pennsylvania (Lottick 69). He was arrested and imprisoned by Pennsylvania authorities. This touched off a firestorm of protest. Franklin was kept in prison for almost a year, but was finally released by the Pennsylvania authorities. He eventually settled in Athens and was later appointed as High Sheriff of the new county (Lottick 51).

By 1786, the settlers petitioned the state of Pennsylvania to make a new county that included Wyoming. They were successful, and the new county was named in honor of the French ambassador Anne Caesar de la Luzerne. The document was signed by Ben Franklin. King Louis XVI
of France had appointed Luzerne as his minister in 1779 to the declared new nation. The new county was carved out of then Northumberland County. It included part of what is now Bradford County and all of the present day counties of Lackawanna, Susquehanna, and Wyoming. Creating a new county lessened the political turmoil in Wyoming. Now the area was no longer under the control of Northumberland County and its sheriff. New county officials elected by the people could serve their constituents and help resolve the land claims issue. This was a difficult issue because under the Articles of Confederation because there were not any courts set up to handle disputes between states (the U.S. was not yet under the authority of the Constitution.) The question was about which state had jurisdiction over the situation in Pennsylvania: was it Connecticut or the new proposed state of Westmoreland or was it Pennsylvania? In 1782, Pennsylvania received a favorable decision from the commission appointed in Trenton to settle the dispute: Pennsylvania owned the land. The Yankees were told to move out to western Pennsylvania. That would not happen without a fight and the Yankees formed an army.

Though the issue was quite contentious and saw physical conflict for many years, each side was weary of the fighting. Connecticut dropped her claim to the territory in 1786. Yet it would take several more years of arrests, threats, and people dying on both sides before the Yankee-Pennamite Wars finally came to an end in 1799 with the Compromise Act of 1799. Though Pennsylvania owned the land, it was decided that the Yankees could keep titles to their farms as the new county of Luzerne (and not Westmoreland) was incorporated into the commonwealth of Pennsylvania.