

ABSTRACT

MILLER, JENNIFER LYNN. *Captive Sisters: Cultural Intermediaries on the Pennsylvania Frontier*. (Under the direction of Holly Brewer.)

The years surrounding the Seven Years' War were a time of turmoil for both colonists and Native Americans. Pennsylvania is a microcosm of the cultural changes that occurred throughout the colonies and within Native American society as new ideas of race and gender took hold. Colonists who were taken as Indian captives played a primary role as cultural intermediaries. This paper explores the experiences of three young women: Mary Jemison, Barbara Leininger, and Regina Leininger, who were captured from the Pennsylvania frontier as children in 1755, spent several years living within their adoptive tribes, and eventually published captivity narratives relating their individual experiences. These women's narratives help reveal how both Native American and colonial ideas and understandings of gender and race were impacted through the captivity experience, and how frontiers and captives in early America functioned to adapt and create both Indian and colonial society. Both cultures came to accept race as a stable characteristic, but while captivity challenged colonial patriarchy, it also undermined the traditional power of Native American women. The consequences of these changes were profound, triggering an increase in racialized violence and contributing to the restructuring of Native American social systems.

Captive Sisters: Cultural Intermediaries
On the Pennsylvania Frontier

by
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DEDICATION

To Weldon, for his support and patience.

BIOGRAPHY

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Introduction

William Penn's colony in the New World was created to be a bastion of peace, pacifism, and tolerance in a world dominated by violence and strife. Perhaps more so than any other colony, Pennsylvania delayed conflict and maintained a harmonious relationship with its Native American neighbors. However, as a continuously increasing population pushed settlers into the back country, the fragile coexistence William Penn structured for his "Peaceable Kingdom" began to splinter. The "Walking Purchase" of 1737, in which Penn's successor swindled the Delaware Indians out of thousands of acres of land, hastened the disintegration of Native American and colonial relations. The disillusionment of Native Americans regarding the colonists' honest intentions helped spur them toward French alliances as the peaceful colony transformed into a battleground during the Seven Years' War.¹

Although ostensibly an imperialist battle between the British and French empires, the Seven Years' War was a transformative period for the English colonies of North America. For the first time, the colony of Pennsylvania abandoned its pacifist ideals and went to war with its Native neighbors. On the North American continent, hostilities between the English, French, and their respective allies raged for nine years, from 1754 through 1763, when the war was officially ended with the Treaty of Paris.²

¹ William Pencak and Daniel Richter, *Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), ix-xii.

² Colin Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen: 1763 and the Transformation of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

The years surrounding the Seven Years' War were a time of turmoil for both colonists and Native Americans. While empires clashed in a desperate game to gain control of the continent, there were profound changes taking place far beyond the battlefields. Pennsylvania is a microcosm of the cultural changes that occurred throughout the colonies, as new ideas of race and gender took hold. Colonists who were taken as Indian captives played a primary role as cultural go-betweens that has been largely overlooked in the scholarship of the Seven Years' War. This paper explores the experiences of three young women who were captured from the Pennsylvania frontier at the outbreak of the Seven Years' War and examines how these women acted as cultural intermediaries between Native American and European American society. Mary Jemison, Barbara Leininger, and Regina Leininger all were abducted as children in 1755, spent several years living within their adoptive tribes, and eventually published captivity narratives relating their individual experiences. Their stories reveal how both Native American and colonial ideas and understandings of gender and race were impacted through the captivity experience, and how frontiers and captives in early America functioned to adapt and create Indian and colonial society.

Pennsylvanians living on the frontier found themselves heavily involved in the conflict and were far more vulnerable to attacks and raids than those who resided in the established towns in the east. The decades leading up to the Seven Years' War witnessed a marked increase in the number of non-English and non-Quaker immigrants settling in Pennsylvania, and many of these newcomers journeyed to the frontier to establish family farms. The push to move recent immigrants from the

eastern cities to the western frontier came not only from the settlers themselves, but from provincial officials who sought to create a buffer zone between bustling cities in the east and their Native American neighbors in the west. The influx of German and Irish immigrants, stereotypically considered unkempt and prone to violence, provided just the class of people Pennsylvania officials sought to shield the wealthy denizens of the east.³

The violence between Native Americans and colonists demonstrated a decidedly racial element that functioned throughout the war to harden racial understandings and boundaries between the two groups. As a result of the French and Indian war, both white and Native Pennsylvanians increasingly embraced an ideology that located racial differences in the physical body.⁴ The formation of this distinct racial ideology was intimately tied to understandings of gender in both Native American and colonial society, and grounded all future interactions between them in a new worldview defined by racial categories and intolerance.⁵ Native Americans bore the brunt of the new racial ideology as whites increasingly ceased to differentiate between peaceful Indians and enemies, initiating violent land disputes and incidents such as the Paxton Boys Massacre.⁶

While scholars have explored how captivity and inter-group conflict shaped concepts of gender and race in white society, little research has examined how captivity ultimately shaped Native American society. Given the sheer numbers of

³ Krista Camenzind, "From the Holy Experiment to the Paxton Boys: Violence, Manhood and Race in Pennsylvania During the Seven Years' War" (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, San Diego, 2002), 232-3.

⁴ Camenzind, "From the Holy Experiment to the Paxton Boys," x-xi.

⁵ Camenzind, "From the Holy Experiment to the Paxton Boys," 1-3.

⁶ Camenzind, "From the Holy Experiment to the Paxton Boys," 8-13.

captives taken during the Seven Years' War, it is impossible to ignore the implications captivity held for Indian society. While captivity challenged colonial patriarchy, it also undermined the traditional power of Native American women. The diminishing power of women in Iroquoian society was the result of not only encroaching white settlements that steadily eroded Iroquois land and missionaries sent to convert Native Americans to Christian ways, but of the hundreds of white captives adopted into Indian families and living in their midst. Reawakening movements in the late eighteenth century could successfully codify the disempowerment of women because Native American culture had been primed to accept patriarchal social structures and had slowly been moving in that direction throughout the eighteenth century.

The narratives of Mary Jemison, Barbara Leininger and Regina Leininger serve as a snapshot of captivity in Pennsylvania during the Seven Years' War. Their stories give a nuanced understanding of how captives acted as cultural intermediaries between Native American and European American society. Taken together, these three women's narratives help reveal how both Native American and colonial ideas and understandings of gender and race were impacted through the captivity experience, and how frontiers and captives in early America functioned to adapt and create both Indian and colonial society. The consequences of these changes were profound, triggering an increase in racialized violence and contributing to the restructuring of Native American social systems.

Chapter 1 ***“Best Poor Man’s Country”: The Pennsylvania Frontier***

To appreciate how Mary Jemison, Barbara Leininger, and Regina Leininger fulfilled their roles as cultural intermediaries, it is vital to understand the world in which they lived. Pennsylvania was the fastest growing British colony during the mid-eighteenth century, with floods of European immigrants pouring into the state between 1730 and 1755. As a result, the landscape changed rapidly from dense forest to plowed fields as newcomers gravitated toward the “unsettled” lands west of Philadelphia.¹

Native Americans, who had been struggling to adapt to the European onslaught of disease, non-native plants, and domestic animals for over two hundred years, grew increasingly anxious as westward settlement encroached on their land. It was during these uneasy times that “go-betweens” gained prominence as they shuttled messages between Native Americans and Pennsylvania officials, negotiating compromises and peace. Although the Iroquois tribes who dominated western Pennsylvania initially fought to stem the tide of settlers through diplomacy, they eventually lost faith in diplomatic efforts and turned to violence as the Seven Years’ War erupted. One primary objective unique to Iroquois “mourning war” entailed seizing captives intended for either adoption or revenge killing. Scholars have conducted substantial research on the captives taken throughout the colonial period, and recent scholarship has focused on issues of gender and race in captivity.

¹ Camenzind, “From the Holy Experiment to the Paxton Boys,” 231-2.

Most of our knowledge about Indian captives emerges from captivity narratives, a genre of American literature that flourished in early America. Captivity narratives were written or dictated by former captives and generally based on fact, albeit many were transformed by authors or editors into spiritual tales, racist propaganda, or adventure stories.

In 1991, Richard White first espoused the idea of a “middle ground,” which treated the frontier as an area in which the Native American, French, English, and eventually American empires intersected. Within the middle ground, Native Americans were able to successfully safeguard their standing in the Great Lakes region by playing the French and British against one another through diplomacy and trade.² This middle ground set the stage for go-betweens capable of negotiating the space between empires and maintaining constantly shifting political alliances.

James Merrell explored the territory of go-betweens who translated and mediated relations between the Pennsylvania Indians and colonists in his book *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier*, published in 1999. Despite go-betweens not holding a prominent place in American history, Merrell argued that these negotiators were responsible for maintaining the “long peace” between colonists and Indians that stretched from the colony’s initial founding until the Seven Years’ War, as they trekked across the frontier, carrying messages, smoothing over cultural differences and misunderstandings, and maintaining “the

² Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

path between people.”³ Although Merrell focused his work mainly on the go-betweens who traversed the forests of Pennsylvania during the first half of the eighteenth century, the need for such mediators was not a new development in early America, nor did the demand disappear with the outbreak of hostilities in the 1750s.

With the diminished French presence following the Seven Years’ War, the middle ground began to unravel. Alan Taylor continued to examine the relationships between settlers, Indians, and those who served as go-betweens beyond the colonial period and through the Revolutionary War, when Indians attempted to cope with the overwhelming influx of settlers who sought to divide the land into farms, reservations, and nations.⁴ Taylor’s work examined how the role of go-betweens changed when the middle ground further dissolved following the American victory in the Revolution and the weakened British Empire in North America. The era of Richard White’s middle ground, where whites and Indians met each other with mutual accommodations and compromises, was drawing to a close as Native Americans faced a burgeoning and land hungry America with no powerful ally at their side.⁵

While both Merrell and Taylor looked at individuals who purposely devoted their time to negotiating the middle ground between colonists and Native Americans, there were a number of people who became cultural mediators involuntarily.

Throughout the Seven Years’ War, Indian raiders swept the Pennsylvania

³ James Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 28-35.

⁴ Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 10-13.

⁵ Taylor, *The Divided Ground*, 6-15.

backcountry, attacking individual homesteads, burning houses, fields, and killing, mutilating, or capturing settlers. The practice of captive taking in Native American war culture led to large numbers of European Americans being taken from their culture and assimilated into Indians tribes to varying degrees. These captives served as cultural go-betweens, bringing with them gender expectations, religious beliefs, and political ideals. Seizing captives during war was a common practice of both Native Americans and European colonists during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but during the Seven Years' War the numbers of captives taken in Pennsylvania increased dramatically.

Although seizing captives in times of war was standard practice, adopting captives into the family was a feature of war foreign to Europeans. In the Iroquois nation, war was often triggered by different desires than the traditional European motivations for battle. According to Daniel Richter, the Iroquois "mourning-war" served as a mechanism for "restoring lost population, ensuring social continuity, and dealing with death."⁶ When a member of the Iroquois nation died, the power of his or her nation was weakened due to the loss. Unlike Europeans, however, the Iroquois believed that the deceased person's spirit and power could effectively be replaced by ceremonially transferring their social role to another member of the tribe in what was referred to as a "requickening" ceremony.⁷ The adoptee not only provided a physical presence, but served to alleviate the emotional trauma the family of the deceased suffered. The Iroquois held that uncontrolled grief caused by the

⁶ Daniel Richter, "War and Culture: the Iroquois Experience," *William and Mary Quarterly* 40 (1983): 528-59.

⁷ Richter, "War and Culture," 531.

death of a tribal member could threaten the stability of the community, but that the requickening ceremony functioned to ease the pain of loss.⁸

In most cases, war captives were adopted and filled the place left behind by the deceased, although many captives taken in New England during the early Indian-white conflict were wanted more for their ransom value than for adoption. However, as James Axtell argued, captives taken in Pennsylvania following the collapse of peace in 1753 were largely taken to replace members of the Indian tribe who had died as the result of fighting or disease. Therefore, women and children were the primary targets of Indian raids during the Seven Years' War.⁹ Captives were often taken to a French fort prior to proceeding to their captors' village, where less desirable captives were given to the French as prisoners of war while young captives who could be more easily assimilated remained with the Indians.¹⁰

In the event that the requickening ceremony did not end the family's sorrow, war captives provided another outlet for grief. Rather than living as a part of the family, captured prisoners could be subjected to ritual torture and then executed. Interestingly, the captives doomed to torture and death were also adopted by the grieving family, and during the days following the adoption were given feasts and referred to as family. Then, however, the adoptees were poked with firebrands, scalped, and stabbed in the chest or neck.¹¹ It appears that adult men were more likely than women or children to be executed. Linda Colley estimated that of the

⁸ Richter, "War and Culture," 531.

⁹ James Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers: The Cultural Origins of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 192.

¹⁰ Axtell, *Native and Newcomers*, 192.

¹¹ Richter, "War and Culture," 534.

3,000 captives taken from Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Maryland in the late 1750s and early 1760s, white males were “nineteen times more likely to be slaughtered than their female counterparts.”¹²

The Iroquois mourning war created different goals for battle than those pursued by Europeans. Historically, the importance of capturing live prisoners for ceremonial usage overshadowed the desire to kill the enemy or destroy their villages. The Iroquois were unwilling to sacrifice warriors while fighting, as losing additional men would undermine the basic reason for battle – to replenish the population.¹³ However, the fighting in Pennsylvania during the Seven Years’ War indicates that this focus had begun to change, perhaps as a result of increased exposure to European ways of war. Although Indians raiders continued to seize significant numbers of captives throughout the war, they also increasingly burned houses and barns to the ground, slaughtered livestock, and torched fields and caches of crops.¹⁴

Indian captives taken during the Seven Years’ War were often later redeemed and returned to their families, and were sometimes sold to the French as prisoners of war to be exchanged back to the British. However, many of the Europeans who were captured and adopted chose to remain with the Indians, even when given the opportunity to return to colonial society. Captives who chose to remain within the Native American tribes were particularly troubling to European colonists, and have intrigued generations of historians.

¹² Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 179.

¹³ Richter, “War and Culture,” 535.

¹⁴ Camenzind, “From the Holy Experiment to the Paxton Boys,” 45.

Historians have long struggled to explain why so many captives chose to remain with their adopted Indian families and what factors facilitated assimilation into Native American tribes. In the early 1970s, J. Norman Heard methodically picked through dozens of captivity narratives in hopes of answering these questions and explaining why some captives fought against returning to colonial society while others sought every chance to escape and claimed to prefer death to captivity. His study explored the national origins and family backgrounds of captives, as well as their age at the time of capture and how long they remained with the Native American tribes. Ultimately, Heard failed to determine any specific characteristics that would indisputably explain why some captives acculturated to Indian life quickly and others never fully adapted. Heard concluded that captives taken under the age of twelve more completely assimilated than older captives, and those who were held for longer periods of time tended to more fully assimilate, as one would expect. He also noted that higher numbers of women remained within Native American society, but declared that teen-aged women usually retained a desire to return to white society more so than men.¹⁵

While Heard strove to understand what was different about the colonists who remained part of the Indian tribe, James Axtell maintained that “the English captives who foiled their countrymen’s civilized assumptions by becoming Indians differed little from the general colonial population when they were captured.”¹⁶ Axtell contended that the Indians “obviously chose their captives carefully so as to

¹⁵ J. Norman Heard, *White Into Red: A Study of the Assimilation of White Persons Captured by Indians* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1973).

¹⁶ Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 191.

maximize the chances of acculturating them to Indian life,” and paid particular attention to what he termed the “educational process” of assimilation.¹⁷ This process was initiated immediately, as captives were given moccasins and snowshoes to replace their hard-heeled shoes and speed their journey. Axtell maintained that this exposure to superior Indian technology served as a beginning point for captives’ conversion to Indian life. He concluded that the features of Indian culture itself, with its strong sense of community, integrity, social equality, mobility, and adventure, rather than any trait of the captives, convinced them to stay.¹⁸

However, James Axtell’s extensive research on “white Indians” led him to concede that there was one significant exception to his conclusion that “no discernable characteristic or pattern of characteristics” differentiated those captives who assimilated to Indian culture from those who rejected it. Like Heard, Axtell noticed that women and children of both sexes composed the majority of captives who rejected white society in favor of remaining with their adoptive Native American tribes. Heard and Axtell were not the first historians who recognized that women seemed particularly drawn to Native American culture, although Heard does stand alone with his contention that young women secretly harbored a desire to return to white society. In 1925, Alice Baker and Emma Coleman published their research on New England captives taken to Canada between 1689 and 1730. The data Baker and Coleman gathered revealed that women were far more likely than men to remain in Indian society rather than return to their homes. Using all known

¹⁷ James Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 175.

¹⁸ Axtell, *Native and Newcomers*, 212-3.

information regarding New England captives, including local tradition as well as baptismal and marriage records, Baker and Coleman successfully traced the fate of 270 captives, 128 females and 142 males. Their data revealed that 27% of female captives chose to remain with the tribe, while only 13% of males made the same decision. When the captives were examined by age category, an even more interesting trend emerged. Fifty-eight percent of females captured between the ages of 12 and 21, the age bracket where young women devoted increasing time to marriage prospects, stayed with their captors, while only 23% of males in the same age group did.¹⁹

After analyzing Baker and Coleman's work in the early 1980s, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich concluded, "That twice as many females as males remained can be attributed to...the primacy of marriage."²⁰ She suggested that many young women married into the tribe because "in courtship, proximity is more important than any other factor."²¹ Ulrich argued "if these captives did not prove as resolute as New England ministers might have hoped, it was because they had always known that their future life would depend more than anything else on the choice of a mate." However, given the general colonial perception of Native Americans as "savages" and the traumatic experience of being kidnapped into an utterly foreign culture, it seems likely that there were factors at play beyond mere proximity that convinced women to marry and remain in the tribe. Taken together with Axtell's argument that captives stayed because of their appreciation of the social freedoms in Native

¹⁹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc, 1982), 203-5.

²⁰ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 208.

²¹ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 209.

American culture, which could be applied even more so to women considering the restrictiveness of colonial society, Ulrich's proposal that marriage dictated where young women would place their loyalties seems possible.

Nonetheless, the fact that women historically stayed with their captors in significantly higher numbers than their male counterparts suggests that Indian culture offered them opportunities and benefits even beyond those that Axtell cited. Because Indian captivity narratives were generally recorded and published after captives returned to the European colonies, not much is known about those individuals who rejected life in the colonies to stay with the Native Americans. However, understanding why individuals made this choice is necessary to untangle the complex relationships between the European colonists and the Natives who had occupied the land for centuries before the Europeans arrived. The best explanation is perhaps that the women who chose to stay with the Native Americans did so because Indian culture offered them more independence, status, and power than did the European colonial society.

Prior to extended contact with Europeans, many Indian tribes held women in higher esteem than their European counterparts. Many tribes, notably the Iroquois, were matrilineal and women held powerful political and religious positions.²² The original Iroquois nation was comprised of the Seneca, Mohawk, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Oneida tribes.²³ In contrast to the status of colonial women, Iroquoian women were respected within the tribe as leaders, although they also lived and worked in separate spheres than their male counterparts. Approximately one quarter of

²² Barbara Mann, *Iroquoian Women: The Gantowisas* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 9, 26.

²³ Axtell, *The European and the Indian*, 31.

American Indian tribes were matrilineal, and of these, the Iroquois women enjoyed one of the highest consolidations of power.²⁴ The concepts of power and equality that existed among the Iroquois were difficult for the Western mind to accept, and Europeans blithely ignored the status native women commanded and promptly promoted men as the commanders of the tribe.²⁵

It is essential to understand the Iroquois worldview in order to comprehend how Indian women, unlike colonial women, were able to maintain a place in society that was both separate from and equal to that of men. The Iroquois held that the universe and all parts within it naturally existed in independent but interdependent halves. Likewise, men and women were understood to occupy different halves that intertwined to create the human whole.²⁶ The Iroquois sought to recognize both sexes in religious, harvest, mourning, and political ceremonies and rituals, thus balancing the “male and female principles of the biotic world and all that such recognition implies.”²⁷

Politically, women in the Iroquois nation had “extensive political, social, and economic powers and, in turn, they made up the powerful Council of Clan Mothers which, when in session, frequently played a dominant intertribal role.”²⁸ Women leaders (the gantowisas) shared equal, and perhaps held more power in the tribal government than men. Their authority was written into the Constitution of the Five (later Six) Nations, and later versions of the Great Law pointedly stated that “men of

²⁴ Valerie Mathas, “A New Look at the Role of Women in Indian Society,” *American Indian Quarterly* 2, No. 2. (Summer, 1975): 135.

²⁵ Mann, *Iroquoian Women*, 187.

²⁶ Man, *Iroquoian Women*, 90-1.

²⁷ June Namias, *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 199.

²⁸ Mathas, “A New Look,” 135.

every clan of the Five Nations shall have a Council Fire ... this council shall have the same rights as the council of the women.”²⁹ This phrasing indicated that the rights and authority of the women were assumed – it was only necessary to clarify that men indeed shared these same rights.

The gantowisas “enjoyed sweeping political powers, which ranged from the administrative and legislative to the judicial.”³⁰ These women were in charge of the local clan councils, held the power to appoint warriors, nominated male sachems and Clan Mothers, conducted funerals, and held all of the tribes’ lineage wampum.³¹ Furthermore, these women could end a war by forbidding their sons to go, or by refusing to supply the necessary food for the war party. They also had the power to initiate a war party for the purpose taking captives, whose fate then rested in the women’s hands.³² Barbara Mann believed that the power the gantowisas held has largely been lost to the historical record because the Iroquois left no written records, thus leaving interpretations of their government to European men who recorded their (inaccurate) assumptions of what was taking place. Because European observers had no concept of a government system led by women, they often elevated the male speakers to “kings,” dismissed the women as mere “wives,” and insisted on conducting their business with only the men.³³ Not all Europeans were blind to the power Iroquoian women held, however. In 1724, Father Lafitau, a Jesuit priest, wrote:

²⁹ *The Constitution of the Iroquois Confederacy: the Great Binding Law, Gayanashagowa*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/iroquois.html>. (Accessed May 3, 2007).

³⁰ Mann, *Iroquoian Women*, 116.

³¹ Mann, *Iroquoian Women*, 116-7.

³² Mathas, “A New Look,” 135.

³³ Mann, *Iroquoian Women*, 119-120.

Nothing is more real, however, than the women's superiority. It is they who really maintain the tribe, the nobility of blood, the genealogical tree...In them resides all the real authority... they are the soul of the councils, the arbitrators of peace and war; they hold the taxes and public treasure; it is to them that the slaves [captives] are entrusted; they arrange the marriages; the children are under their authority; and the order of succession is founded on their blood.³⁴

Lafitau's quote proves that although European males tried their hardest to overlook the power of the *gantowisas*, the influence these women wielded was evident to even those most steeped in European patriarchal traditions. Certainly captives newly adopted into the Iroquois tribes would have quickly recognized that the patriarchal social structure they were accustomed to was not the model for Native American society.

Within the Iroquois tribe, women also held a central role in religious life and practice. They took responsibility for the bones of ancestors, spoke to the spirits, held sweat lodges, and led services.³⁵ The myths that formed the Iroquois understanding of the universe had women as important players. In fact, two of the three "lynchpins of the cosmos" were "Grandmother Moon (Sky Woman) and Mother Earth (the Lynx)." It was believed that Sky Woman gave the Iroquois the Three Sisters (Corn, Beans, and Squash) as well as tobacco. Mother Earth provided potatoes, melons, and sunflowers. Unlike Christianity, which credited creation to one (male) God, Iroquois creation myths involved several creators. Significantly, the

³⁴ Mann, *Iroquoian Women*, 182

³⁵ Mann, *Iroquoian Women*, 294.

Iroquois believed that women provided the most vital foods and the basic necessities of life.³⁶

By the mid-eighteenth century, however, the power Iroquoian women had once enjoyed embarked on a slow but steady decline. Historian Anthony F.C. Wallace has examined the history of the Seneca tribe and the prophet Handsome Lake throughout the late colonial and early republic period. Handsome Lake, whose popular teachings sparked a religious revival among the Seneca, combined elements of ancient traditions and Native religious ideals with Christianity.³⁷ Among the many changes that Handsome Lake initiated, perhaps the most significant for Native American women were those which drastically undercut the political and economic power women traditionally wielded.³⁸ Throughout the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth century, Iroquois women enjoyed broad powers in electing chiefs, calling for war or raids designed to take captives, and maintaining control of food supplies. Furthermore, Iroquois women exercised free sexual choice, retained all of their property in marriage, and dissolved marriages with little difficulty.³⁹ As the Iroquois were increasingly forced onto reservations following the Revolutionary War, Iroquois women witnessed a steady decrease in their influence. Wallace believed that Handsome Lake's reforms codified this disempowerment of women, and positioned the husband-wife relationship over that of the mother and daughter.⁴⁰ While Wallace discussed how the Iroquois' traditional way of life was undermined as

³⁶ Mann, *Iroquoian Women*, 13.

³⁷ Anthony Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1970), 3.

³⁸ Wallace, *Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*, 28.

³⁹ Wallace, *Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*, 29-31.

⁴⁰ Wallace, *Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*, 28.

they were increasingly forced onto reservations, he did not address how their culture was influenced by the sheer numbers of captives becoming part of the tribe and bringing with them patriarchal traditions and practices.

At the same time that Iroquois culture faced profound changes in their ideas of gender, European America was struggling to redefine its own understandings of gender and race. In 1983, June Namias explored these issues in her book *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier*. Namias believed that “captive drama presents us with an intersection of cultures,” and examined how Euro-Americans adapted understandings of gender and sexuality when challenged with “a foreign enemy of another color and culture.”⁴¹ Although other historians had noted differences in the number of women and men who were taken captive and adopted, Namias was the first to closely analyze captivity as a gendered experience and explore how captivity differed for men and women. Namias suggested that focusing on the captivity and subsequent narratives of white women helped white Europeans cement their ideas of gender and culture in contrast to those of the Native American “other.” Moreover, there “was and is a raw power in these gendered images.”⁴² Not only did these images work to promote sympathy for the women and children captured by Native Americans, but they justified male retaliation against Indian captors. In her work, Namias also extended the discussion of issues of miscegenation. She believed that although sexual relations between whites and Indians were alarming to colonial whites, they were not necessarily seen as

⁴¹ Namias, *White Captives*, 9.

⁴² Namias, *White Captives*, 264.

unnatural to the extent that white and black sexual relations were.⁴³ Namias's work suggested that although racial categories were strengthening throughout the eighteenth century, there was still room for maneuvering between racial lines.

As Namias demonstrated, one of the main conduits for these emerging portrayals of gender and race were narratives written by Indian captives. Captivity narratives emerged as a popular literary form in seventeenth century America and enjoyed widespread readership well into the nineteenth century. Current understandings of how captivity narratives fit into American culture have shifted in recent decades as historians added feminist and historicist views to captivities. However, despite these new aspects, the dominant understanding of early captivity narratives as variations of established New England genres of literature has remained consistent.⁴⁴

Captivity narratives are widely accepted as the first truly American literary form. As popular literature, captivity narratives could be molded to fit immediate cultural needs, addressing various cultural, political, or social problems.⁴⁵ Therefore, while Indian captivity narratives printed prior to 1700 embraced Puritan piety and appeared as extensions of early New England literary forms such as spiritual autobiographies, sermons, jeremiads, and conversion literature, subsequent narratives in the eighteenth century descended into "a depraved state of escapist entertainment or racist propaganda."⁴⁶ Mary Rowlandson's *Sovereignty and*

⁴³ Namias, *White Captives*, 111.

⁴⁴ James Hartman, *Providence Tales and the Birth of American Literature* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 29.

⁴⁵ Hartman, *Providence Tales*, 30.

⁴⁶ Hartman, *Providence Tales*, 29.

Goodness of God, printed in 1682, is considered the original and preeminent captivity narrative.⁴⁷

Early captivity narratives, heavily influenced by Puritan providence tales, often spoke of God's anger and mercy. Captives sought to understand their misfortune, attributing their plight to God's displeasure with themselves or with Puritan society. Captivity was regarded as a test of one's faith, and any event or unexpected act of kindness was quickly analyzed for signs of divine intervention.⁴⁸

Rebecca Faery maintained that early captivity narratives, particularly Mary Rowlandson's, were manipulated by editors and publishers to support the Puritan theocracy, provide sanction for English colonialism, and support both gender and racial hierarchies.⁴⁹ Both Roy Pearce and Alden Vaughan cited Cotton Mather's influence in converting captivity narratives into a unique sub-genre of Puritan literature, so that by the early to mid-eighteenth century, captivity narratives no longer concerned themselves primarily with religious concerns but focused instead on generating hatred towards the French and Native Americans.⁵⁰ As captivity narratives abandoned overt religious themes, they increasingly focused on sensationalized descriptions of captivities, complete with vivid depictions of torture and murder. Richard Slotkin, in *Regeneration through Violence*, suggested that captivity narratives explore an early American concept of violent transcendence and

⁴⁷ Hartman, *Providence Tales*, 29.

⁴⁸ Hartman, *Providence Tales*, 32.

⁴⁹ Rebecca Blevins Faery, *Cartographies of Desire: Captivity, Race, and Sex in the Shaping of an American Nation* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 43.

⁵⁰ Hartman, *Providence Tales*, 29-30.

functioned as a means for colonists to vicariously experience life among the Indians, thus indulging hidden desires to live as the Indians did.⁵¹

In many ways, captivity shaped early America. While largely unrecognized for their role as cultural go-betweens, Indian captives comprised a significant segment of the colonial population. As they moved from colonial to Native American society, captives gained new language skills, experienced new religious and political structures, and often adopted new worldviews. The following stories explore how three young women captured from the Pennsylvania frontier at the onset of the Seven Years' War functioned as cultural intermediaries between Native American and European American society. Mary Jemison, Barbara Leininger, and Regina Leininger share several commonalities: all were abducted as children in 1755, all lived with their adoptive Indian families for several years, and all eventually published captivity narratives relating their experiences. However, these women also experienced captivity differently, related their narratives under varying circumstances, and ultimately relayed nuanced messages to their readers. Their stories reveal how captives in early America functioned to adapt and create both Indian and colonial society.

⁵¹ Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: the Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 20-1, 560-1.

Chapter 2

The White Woman of Genesee: Mary Jemison

Perhaps one of the most widely known Indian captivity narratives, *A Narrative in the Life of Mary Jemison*, was published in 1824. Jemison, taken captive by the Shawnee in 1755, was then adopted into the Seneca tribe.¹ The popularity of this narrative was certainly due in part to the fact that it offered one of the best insights into the life of a woman who rejected white society to remain with the Seneca tribe. However, this story also serves to clearly demonstrate how Mary Jemison used her life and experiences as an acculturated Seneca woman to act as a cultural intermediary between white and Native American culture.

Unfortunately, Mary Jemison never learned to read or write, and as a result her contemporaries and future generations were left with her story as interpreted by James Everett Seaver, a white man unfamiliar to Jemison prior to interviewing her for her story. Because we do not have Seaver's notes, we have no way of knowing what questions he asked, or Jemison's exact response to them. Although the narrative is written in first person, it is important to remember that it is Seaver's voice as well as Jemison's that we are hearing.²

The assumptions Seaver carried with him while writing are revealed in no uncertain terms in the preface to the narrative, where he noted "Without a knowledge of the lives of the vile and abandoned, we should be wholly incompetent

¹ James E. Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, ed. Kathryn Derounan-Stodola, *Women's Captivity Narratives* (New York: Penguin Book, 1998), 119. Seaver states that Jemison was captured in the spring of 1755, however, Derounan-Stodola states in her introduction that the date of capture was April 5, 1758.

² Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 120-1.

to set an appropriate value upon ...the finest traits in the character of the most virtuous” and later continued “The following shows...what changes may be effected in the animal and mental constitution of man; what trials may be surmounted; what cruelties perpetrated, and what pain endured.”³ Seaver anticipated that Jemison’s narrative would be “sought and read with avidity, especially by children,” and therefore assured his readers that “the line of distinction between virtue and vice has been rendered distinctly visible; and chastity of expression and sentiment have received due attention.”⁴ Although Seaver offered his assurances that “no circumstance has been intentionally exaggerated by the paintings of fancy,” we don’t know what stories or details Seaver may have subtly manipulated or eliminated altogether in his effort to clearly delineate “virtue” and “vice.” Near the end of his preface, Seaver entreated his “kind readers” to overlook any errors contained in the narrative, or to place them on Mary Jemison rather than himself, reasoning that “her journey of life...has been interwoven with troubles, which ordinarily are calculated to impair the faculties of the mind.”⁵ Seaver concluded his preface by emphasizing his hope that Mary Jemison’s life story would engender a “tendency to increase our love of liberty.” By the time Seaver has completed his preamble, one has to wonder how similar the narrative contained in his book is to the narrative Mary Jemison told.

Despite the apparent bias on the part of the author, Jemison’s voice carried through the narrative, revealing a glimpse of a happier life than the one Seaver suggested and providing insights into why she chose not to return to the life in the

³ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 122-3.

⁴ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 123.

⁵ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 124.

white society she left behind. Jemison's ability to retain her own voice and dignify the actions of the Seneca within the lines of Seaver's writing bear witness to her impressive ability to act as a cultural intermediary, effectively functioning within both Seneca and white culture. Many of the stories and events Jemison shared with Seaver serve to not only defend Seneca culture, but to quietly critique the dominant white culture. Although Seaver intended to portray Mary Jemison as a victim of "the atrocities of the savages in former times," Jemison demonstrated that as an acculturated Seneca woman, she had learned to maneuver within white society and use white cultural practices to her advantage. Throughout the narrative, Jemison described events that portray white culture as misguided and white people as dishonest and corrupt. In fact, one entire chapter of the narrative is devoted to the antics of Ebenezer Allen, a white man from Pennsylvania who came to "reside with the Indians," and throughout his stay committed adultery, murder, and theft.⁶

When Seaver first met Jemison, he noted that "her appearance was well-calculated to excite a great degree of sympathy," and pondered what her condition would have been had she "enjoyed the blessings of civilization."⁷ Jemison was dressed in "the Indian fashion," although Seaver stressed that this is not out of necessity but rather her choice, despite the fact that "her property is sufficient to enable her to dress in the best fashion, and to allow her every comfort of life."⁸ By emphasizing that Jemison could afford to dress in "the best fashion" but chose not too, Seaver reinforced the image of Jemison as a white woman who had been

⁶ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 169-77.

⁷ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 128

⁸ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 128.

thoroughly “Indianized.” Not only Jemison’s clothing, but her habits spoke to her complete acculturation. Seaver noted that Jemison slept on the floor, with only animal skins for cushion, felt comfortable sitting on the floor or on a bench, and held her food in her lap or hands.⁹ Furthermore, Jemison did not ascribe to Christianity, but her ideas of religion “correspond in every respect with those of the great mass of Seneca.”¹⁰ In a move that indicated the degree of Jemison’s distrust of white society, she would not speak to Seaver without Thomas Clute, her “protector” and legal advisor, present as well.¹¹ Seaver wrote that without Clute’s presence, “we should have been unable to have obtained her history,” and suggested that Jemison felt she needed counsel due to her “ignorance of the manners of the white people.”¹² It seems that an alternative explanation for Jemison’s hesitance is more likely – she required the counsel of a trustworthy white man because her life experiences had provided her with *knowledge* of “the manners of white people” in their dealings with Native Americans.

At the end of Seaver’s depiction of Jemison, one has to question his initial query regarding Jemison’s condition and the assumption that she would have been better off with “the blessings of civilization.” Notwithstanding Seaver’s vivid portrayal of Jemison as deserving “a great degree of sympathy,” by all appearances, Jemison was enjoying a life that relatively few other single, female octogenarians could have claimed in the early nineteenth century. In addition to owning her own house, she owned land and livestock, rented out “a number of houses” to tenants who worked

⁹ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 129.

¹⁰ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 129.

¹¹ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 129.

¹² Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 129.

her land “upon shares,” was physically active, and had a mind and memory that Seaver was forced to acknowledge “exceeded my expectation.”¹³

According to Seaver’s narrative, Jemison’s parents, Thomas and Jane Jemison, were born and raised in Ireland and sailed to Pennsylvania in either 1742 or 1743 with their three children, John, Thomas, and Betsey. Mary Jemison was born during the journey to America. Shortly after reaching Philadelphia, the family moved to the Pennsylvania frontier, “to an excellent land lying on Marsh creek.”¹⁴ There, the family struggled to carve out a homestead in the wild, amidst the “midnight howl of the prowling wolf, and the terrifying shriek of the ferocious panther.”¹⁵ During this time, Jane also gave birth to two more sons, Matthew and Robert. Mary Jemison recalled her childhood in idyllic terms, claiming “health presided on every countenance, and vigor and strength characterized every exertion.” Although she could not read or write as an adult, Jemison stated that as a child she learned to read a little, and memorized the Catechism and prayers.¹⁶

The only shadows over Jemison’s sunny youth were the “stories of Indian barbarities,” which “frequently excited in my parents the most serious alarm for our safety.” As Jemison grew older, the years witnessed increased violence as English and Native American relations began to unravel and the Seven Years’ War edged nearer. Jemison recalled that “many murders were committed; and many captives were exposed to death in the most frightful form.”¹⁷ On “a pleasant day in the spring

¹³ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 127-8.

¹⁴ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 130-1.

¹⁵ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 130-1.

¹⁶ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 132-4.

¹⁷ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 132.

on 1755,” Jemison was captured by a party of six Indians and four Frenchmen, along with her mother and father, her siblings Robert, Matthew, and Betsey, and a visiting neighbor with her three children. Jemison’s brothers Thomas and John escaped capture by hiding in the barn.¹⁸ At the time she was taken captive, Mary Jemison was about twelve years old.¹⁹

Jemison described the captives’ suffering as their captors swiftly marched them westward, but refrained from the graphic descriptions of violence and gore that often characterized other captivity narratives of this time. She recalled hiking with no food or water, as an Indian followed close behind with a whip to lash those who struggled to keep pace. When the children cried for water, they were offered urine. After marching for two days, Jemison’s captors placed a pair of moccasins on her feet and led her and another young male captive “some distance into the bushes, or woods, and there lay down with us to spend the night.”²⁰ The next morning, the rest of the Indians and the Frenchmen appeared at the camp without the other captives. Jemison’s fears that her family had been killed were confirmed later in the journey, when her captors “took from their baggage a number of scalps and went about preparing them for market.”²¹ Jemison recognized her family’s scalps, stating “My mother’s hair was red; and I could easily distinguish my father’s and the children’s from each other.”²²

¹⁸ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 134-5.

¹⁹ Seaver states that Jemison was captured in the spring of 1755; however, Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola states in her introduction that the date of capture was April 5, 1758. Using Seaver’s date, Jemison would have been either twelve or thirteen years old when she was taken captive. According to Derounian-Stodola’s calculations, Jemison would have been about fifteen.

²⁰ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 137.

²¹ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 138.

²² Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 138.

Although Jemison lamented the loss of her family, she also informed Seaver that her captors “made me to understand that they should not have killed the family if the whites had not pursued them.”²³ Jemison’s captors were likely honest about the circumstances surrounding their decision to kill the other captives, and probably intended to either adopt or hand over the others to the French as prisoners of war. However, if Jemison is correct in claiming that “the whole neighborhood turned out in pursuit of the enemy, to deliver us if possible,” her captors would have quickly realized that their group of ten captives severely inhibited their chance of outrunning a posse. Forced to cut their losses in order to make a successful escape, the Indians chose the two captives who were young enough to be assimilated into the tribe but who could keep up the demanding pace needed to outdistance their pursuers. The scalps they took from the dead captives would have garnered a reward from the French without slowing the party down as live captives would have.²⁴

As the small group ventured onward, one Indian stayed behind and “with a long staff picked up all the grass and weeds that we trailed down by going over them. By taking that precaution they avoided detection; for each weed was so nicely placed in its natural position that no one would have suspected that we had passed that way.”²⁵ This was a precaution the captors had not taken before, further suggesting that they were now being actively pursued.

²³ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 138.

²⁴ Axtell, *European and the Indian*, 216-7.

²⁵ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 137.

It is interesting to note that the Indians carefully removed Jemison and the other young captive destined for adoption far from the rest of the group before killing those left behind. Although Jemison suspected the worst when she was separated from her family, she neither saw nor heard them being killed, and her fears were confirmed only days later.²⁶ Given that many captives, including Jemison, related incidents where the Native Americans tortured and killed captives, one can speculate that the care the Indians took in this particular instance to spare Jemison from witnessing her parents' murder was calculated to ease her transition in to her adoptive tribe.²⁷

Jemison's ability to rationalize (if not necessarily justify) her captors decision to kill the other captives speaks volumes about the Indians ability to "convert" captives to Native American culture. Jemison's captors began her acculturation almost immediately, replacing her hard shoes with moccasins. In this gesture, the Indians initiated the physical transformation from white society to Native American society and demonstrated their superior adaptation to the landscape. As James Axtell noted, replacing captive's hard-heeled shoes with "the footwear of the forest" was often one of the first transactions the Indians carried out. It was one of the almost universally approved ones as well, as captives often reflected on the comfort of moccasins compared to traditional European shoes.²⁸

²⁶ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 137-8.

²⁷ Later in Jemison's narrative, her adoptive mother forbids Jemison and her sister to attend the execution of a captive on the grounds that it would upset Jemison too much, as she had recently been a captive herself. From this example, it seems that when possible a certain amount of attention was paid to sheltering adoptive captives from traumatic events.

²⁸ Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 195-6.

After traveling for several days, the group arrived at Fort Du Quesne. Prior to entering the fort, Jemison's captors combed her hair and painted both her hair and face red, "in the finest Indian style." Although Jemison was unaware of it at the time, this was the beginning ritual of an adoption ceremony that continued the following day after she was given to two "pleasant looking squaws of the Seneca tribe."²⁹ The women took Jemison downriver to a small Seneca village, where they continued the ceremony by removing and discarding all of Jemison's clothes. They then washed her in the river and dressed her "in complete Indian style." Before long "all the Squaws in the town" surrounded Jemison, where they "immediately set up a most dismal howling, crying bitterly and wringing their hands in all agonies of grief for a deceased relative." Jemison soon realized that she was adopted to replace their deceased brother, and "being now settled and provided with a home," she began to adapt to Indian life.³⁰

When Jemison had lived with the Seneca for a few years, her sisters arranged for her to marry She-nin-jee, a young warrior. Although Jemison told Seaver that she approached her marriage with "a great degree of reluctance," and indicated that she went through with it only because she did not dare to cross her sisters, it is apparent that the match was a happy one. She-nin-jee is described as "a noble man...elegant in his appearance; generous in his conduct; courageous in war; a friend to peace and a great lover of justice." Perhaps suspecting Seaver's doubt, Jemison declared "...strange as it may seem, I loved him!" The couple "lived

²⁹ Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 200-1. Part of the adoption ritual in which white captives became full members of the tribe included painting captives' faces, dressing them in traditional clothing, and decorating them with feathers and jewelry to symbolize their new identity as Indians.

³⁰ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 140-4.

happily together” and had two children, a daughter who died shortly after birth, and a son who Jemison named Thomas. Unfortunately, She-nin-jee fell ill and died after only a few short years of marriage.³¹ When her son Thomas was about four years old, Jemison married Hiokatoo, a warrior several years her senior. Jemison stated that Hiokatoo treated her “with tenderness, and never offered an insult.” Jemison and Hiokatoo had four daughters, Jane, Nancy, Betsey, and Polly, and two sons, John and Jesse.³²

Based on her descriptions, both of Jemison’s marriages seem amicable and she appears to have genuinely loved and respected both of her partners. Therefore, her initial insistence that she did not have any choice in her first marriage seems odd, particularly given the fact that Seneca women were generally given complete freedom in choosing their mate. It is possible that Jemison misinterpreted her sisters’ suggestions and unnecessarily felt pressured into a marriage. However, it is perhaps even more likely that Jemison played up her uncertainty in order to preserve her image in the eyes of her white audience, who certainly would have expected revulsion on her part at the idea of marrying an Indian, as no respectable white woman would have willingly taken an Indian husband. By positioning herself as being opposed to the match, Jemison created an image of herself that the white readers could relate to. Consequently, when Jemison expressed her surprise at falling in love and the admiration she had for her husband, perhaps she hoped that some of her readers would be persuaded to reexamine their prejudices.

³¹ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 147-156.

³² Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 148, 158.

During her life with the Seneca, Jemison had many opportunities to return to colonial society. The only time she appeared to regret not leaving the Seneca was relatively soon after her capture, when she went with the Seneca to Fort Pitt to “make peace with the British.”³³ When the British began questioning Jemison about her circumstances, Jemison’s adopted sisters “became alarmed, believing that I should be taken from them,” and quickly left to return home, “so great was their fear of losing me, or of my being given up in the treaty, that they never once stopped rowing till they got home.”³⁴ Although Jemison stated that “the sight of white people who could speak English inspired me with an unspeakable anxiety to go home,” she continued “Time, the destroyer of every affection, wore away my unpleasant feelings, and I became as contented as before.”³⁵

Several years later, Jemison actively hid from a white man determined to return her to white society. John Van Sice, a Dutchman, attempted to capture her in order to receive a bounty being offered to those who returned white prisoners to a military post where “they might be redeemed and set at liberty.” After becoming aware of Sice’s intentions, Jemison declared “I was fully determined not to be redeemed at that time...I carefully watched his movements in order to avoid falling into his hands.”³⁶ Jemison was so frightened at the thought of being forced to leave the tribe that she “stayed three days and three nights in an old cabin at Gardow, and then went back trembling at every step for fear of being apprehended.”³⁷ When she

³³ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 145.

³⁴ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 146.

³⁵ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 146.

³⁶ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 156.

³⁷ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 157.

returned to village, she issued an appeal to the chiefs in council, and was relieved when they “gave orders that I should not be taken to any military post without my consent; and that it was my choice to stay.”³⁸ Her ordeal was not over, however, as “the old king of our tribe told one of my Indian brothers that I should be redeemed, and that he would take me to Niagara himself.” As Jemison’s brother quarreled with the “old king,” her sister spirited her away from their dwelling and into hiding, where Jemison remained until the “old king” gave up looking for her and “went to Niagara with the prisoners he had already in his possession.”³⁹

This particular incident proves the extent to which Jemison considered herself part of the Seneca tribe. Unlike the earlier encounter with whites at Fort Pitt, where Jemison seemed conflicted about returning, here Jemison had no inclination to return to white society. In fact, she actively fought against being returned, and used every avenue that she could to protect herself. Although her initial reaction was merely to flee the village and the men hoping to redeem her, Jemison returned and appealed to the tribal council for protection. In this act, Jemison demonstrated that she regarded herself as a full member of the tribe, and the council indicated their agreement by speaking out on her behalf. When it became apparent she would need protection beyond that of the council, Jemison relied on her family network to hide and defend her from those who sought to “redeem” her.⁴⁰

At this point in Jemison’s life, there were few external factors tying her to the Seneca. She was still young and had been recently widowed, leaving her with few

³⁸ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 156-7.

³⁹ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 157-8.

⁴⁰ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 156-8.

familial ties in the tribe. Although she had a child, her son was quite young and could have assimilated into white society. As Jemison herself was never tattooed or otherwise marked and had retained her ability to speak English, it seems likely that she could have successfully integrated back into white society as well. However, Jemison chose not to leave the Seneca. She doesn't elaborate on her reasons for remaining with the tribe, but one can begin to understand why she stayed in her comments about life within the tribe. At one point, after she had lived for the Seneca for approximately four years, Jemison stated:

With them was my home; my family was there, and there I had many friends to whom I was warmly attached in consideration of the favors, affection and friendship with which they had uniformly treated me, from the time of my adoption.⁴¹

From this and other similar statements, it seems clear that Jemison had accepted her adoptive Seneca family as her own and considered herself as much a part of it as she had her birth family. Therefore, it is curious that later in the narrative, after Jemison was offered yet another chance to return to white society, she gave much different reasons for remaining with the Seneca.

Following the Revolutionary War, Jemison's brother Kau-jises-tau-ge-au told her that she should return to white society if she wished. Jemison declined and told her brother that her choice was to "stay and spend the remainder of my days with my Indian friends, and live with my family as I had heretofore done." The rationale that she gave Seaver for her decision was that even if she could find her relatives, she feared that they would despise her "large family of Indian children," and "treat us

⁴¹ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 148-9.

as enemies; or, at least with a degree of cold indifference.”⁴² It is hard to know exactly how to read this apparent reversal in Jemison’s desires, from fighting to remain with the Indians to lamenting the fact that she could never return to white society after nearly thirty years of living with the Seneca. Perhaps it was merely her way of justifying her choice to stay with the Native Americans to Seaver and his white readers. Or perhaps it reflected the increasing animosity between white Americans and Native Americans as Pennsylvania’s pacifist origins faded into the past, increasingly replaced with racist and violent rhetoric.⁴³

In Jemison’s narrative we can see her attempts to describe and defend Seneca culture while simultaneously suggesting that white culture was no less corrupt. She described the Indians as “naturally kind, tender and peaceable towards their friends, and strictly honest,” and while acknowledging white perceptions of Indians as savage and cruel, explained “those cruelties have been practiced, only upon their enemies, according to their ideas of justice.”⁴⁴ At the same time, Jemison related various tales about individuals and groups of whites that showed them taking morally questionable actions and suggested that whites, by introducing alcohol and attempting to “civilize” the Indians, were ultimately responsible for many Native American social ills.

Jemison specifically named “the use of ardent spirits amongst the Indians” as the primarily reason for “jealousies, quarrels, and revengeful battles between families and individuals,” and suggested that prior to the introduction of alcohol no

⁴² Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 178.

⁴³ Camenzind, “From the Holy Experiment to the Paxton Boys,” x-xi.

⁴⁴ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 150.

people could have lived “more happy than the Indians did in times of peace.”⁴⁵

Jemison praised Native American attributes and maintained that:

The moral character of the Indians was...
uncontaminated. Their fidelity was perfect,
and became proverbial; they were strictly honest;
they despised deception and falsehood; and
chastity was held in high veneration.⁴⁶

In this particular passage, Jemison appears to both subtly critique white society and respond to particular criticisms leveled against the Indians. By pointing out that Native Americans honored all of their promises and obligations and “despised deception,” Jemison elevated them above white society and silently condemned the actions of whites, who consistently and deliberately broke promises and swindled the Indians out of their land. Similarly, she challenged the common portrayal of Indians as sexually promiscuous and unrestrained by declaring that chastity was a virtue and “a violation of it was considered sacrilege.”⁴⁷ Jemison painted a picture of the past where Indian culture was defined by tranquility and honor, only to contrast it to an Indian culture wrought with conflict, directly caused by the introduction of alcohol. She decried liquor as “a poison that will soon exterminate the Indian tribes in this part of the country, and their names without a root or branch.”⁴⁸

Jemison had personal experience with the destructiveness of alcoholism not only among the tribe but within her own family, as all three of her sons died in alcohol-related incidents. Thomas, her eldest son, was prone to “fits of

⁴⁵ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 149, 160.

⁴⁶ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 160.

⁴⁷ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 160.

⁴⁸ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 183-4.

drunkenness” where he “seemed to lose all his natural reason, and to conduct like a wild or crazy man.”⁴⁹ During one such episode in the summer of 1811, Thomas struck Hiokatoo and then attacked his own brother John. After a brief struggle, John dragged Thomas out of the house and “there killed him, by a blow which he gave him on the head with his tomahawk.”⁵⁰ Less than a year later, John attacked his younger brother Jesse and his brother-in-law George Chongo after an argument that began “in consequence of the whiskey that they had drank that day.” The ensuing fight left Chongo “whipped” and Jesse dead with “eighteen wounds so deep and large that it was believed that either of them would have proved mortal.”⁵¹ John met his own violent end a few years later after a night of drinking with two Allegheny Indians. According to Jemison, John’s drinking partners “with an axe cut his throat, and beat out his brains, so that when he was found the contents of his skull were lying on his arms.”⁵²

Although it appears that Jemison’s sons had a penchant for drunken brawling, Jemison strove to make it clear that their downfall was the result of alcohol, not any inherent character flaws on their part. Despite the fact that Thomas initially attacked John, and had previously threatened to kill Jemison as well, Jemison described him as “naturally good natured, and possessed [of] a friendly disposition, he would not have come to so untimely an end, had it not been for his intemperance.”⁵³ Her son Jesse she characterized as “uniformly very mild and friendly,” and noted that he

⁴⁹ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 181.

⁵⁰ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 182.

⁵¹ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 194-5.

⁵² Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 200.

⁵³ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 183-4.

“occasionally became intoxicated; but never was quarrelsome or mischievous.”⁵⁴ It was only for her son John Jemison declared “I could not mourn him as I had for my other sons,” for he had “caused me unspeakable trouble and grief.”⁵⁵ By attributing much of the violence and disharmony present in Native American society to the influence of alcohol, Jemison could criticize Indian society by placing the blame squarely on white influence.

Jemison also blamed white attempts to “civilize” Native Americans for other problems in Indian society and condemned the attempts that were being made to educate the Indians:

The attempts which have been made to civilize and Christianize them by the white people, has constantly made them worse and worse; increased their vices, and robbed them of many of their virtues; and will ultimately produce their extermination.⁵⁶

Jemison did not specify which actions by the whites she was referring to, or how exactly attempts to “civilize” the Native Americans had corrupted them.

However, one can speculate about how Jemison arrived at her opinions. At one point in her narrative, Jemison briefly mentioned that “my house was the home of Col’s Butler and Brandt, whenever they chanced to come into our neighborhood.”

The “Col’s Butler and Brandt” whom Jemison referred to are Sir John Butler and Joseph Brandt, who commanded combined forces of Loyalists and Indians in attacks against the colonists during the Revolutionary War.⁵⁷ Joseph Brandt, a Mohawk Indian whose original name was Thayendenegea, had attended a colonial boarding

⁵⁴ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 195-6.

⁵⁵ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 200-1.

⁵⁶ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 149.

⁵⁷ Derounian-Stodola, *Women’s Captivity Narratives*, 349.

school whose primary mission was to convert Indian boys to Christianity and teach them to become schoolteachers and missionaries. Brandt left the school with a well-developed cultural hybridity which enabled him to impress European gentility while also influencing his fellow Native Americans. He also held a vital role in coordinating diplomatic and military efforts between the British and Iroquois. However, several western Iroquois leaders, particularly the Seneca war chief Sayenqueraghta, distrusted Brandt's fluidity between cultures and feared he would betray them.⁵⁸ Although Jemison herself possessed many of Brandt's abilities to transcend the cultural boundaries between white and Indian society, she neither gained the status that he did within either culture nor operated so obviously in the white sphere. Jemison's position that white attempts to civilize Indians instead "robbed them of many of their virtues" may have been a reaction to what she and other Seneca saw as Brandt's duplicity.

While Jemison's wariness of white society no doubt had roots in the general distrust that most Native Americans had of whites, Jemison herself experienced encounters with unscrupulous white men that likely reinforced her negative images. In addition to John Van Sice, the Dutchman who attempted to kidnap Jemison in order to "redeem" her, Jemison witnessed the actions of Ebenezer Allen, a white man who made friends with Jemison's son Thomas, and fell prey to the manipulations of George Jemison, a white man who claimed to be her long-lost cousin.

⁵⁸ Taylor, *Divided Ground*, 86-90.

Ebenezer Allen came to live with the Seneca near the end of the Revolutionary War. Allen's reason for fleeing Pennsylvania to reside with the Seneca was not given in Jemison's account beyond mention of "some disaffection towards his countrymen," but his actions lead the reader to suspect his neighbors were not sad to see him go. A Loyalist, Allen became acquainted with Indians as he fought alongside them against the colonial revolutionary forces. Jemison stated that his "cruelty was not exceeded by any of his Indian comrades," and detailed an attack on a frontier family where Allen beheaded the husband then grabbed an infant and "holding it by its leg, dashed its head against the jamb." She added that rumors held that after killing the child, Allen "opened the fire and buried it under the coals and embers." Jemison's description of the child's death echoes many stories contained in captivity narratives of the day accusing Indians of disposing of infants by "knocking them on the head." While Native Americans were no doubt guilty of killing infants in such a manner, Jemison's story emphasized that whites were not immune from committing such atrocities themselves.⁵⁹

While Jemison and the rest of the tribe were willing to overlook Allen's violent actions, they were decidedly less forgiving after he stole a belt of tribal wampum and carried it "as a token of peace from the Indians to the commander of the nearest American military post." The Indians, presumably Iroquois although Jemison does not specify, who were "dissatisfied with the treaty of peace" that ended the Revolutionary War and determined to continue fighting, found themselves "chagrined and disappointed beyond measure," at this turn of events, but "as they

⁵⁹ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 177.

held the wampum to be a sacred thing,” felt obligated to end the hostilities and declare peace with the United States.⁶⁰

No longer welcome to stay with the Seneca, Allen moved down river and built a grist and saw mill. Shortly thereafter, he disposed of his roommate, an “old German...by the name of Andrew” by throwing him out of a canoe and leaving him to drown in the river. When Allen shoved another elderly man into a river later in the narrative, Jemison insinuated that he did so in order to marry the old gentleman’s young widow.⁶¹

Jemison never specifically condemned Allen’s penchant for gathering wives, but did provide interesting insights into his matrimonial record. The young widow whose unfortunate husband met his fate walking alongside a river became (perhaps unknowingly) Allen’s third wife. His first wife, Sally, was an Indian woman. He had then married Lucy, a white woman, who remained unaware that she was to be “a joint partner with Sally” until after she had married Allen. Lucy “made herself contented,” however, after Allen pacified her by making Sally her slave.⁶² The young widow (whose name we never discover), married Allen shortly after he had married Lucy. Apparently dismayed to discover that she would also be a “joint partner,” she left Allen after about one year “in a state of concubinage.”⁶³ He then proceeded to marry Morilla Gregory, another young white woman. One of Morilla’s sisters also “lived with Allen about a year.”

⁶⁰ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 170-1.

⁶¹ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 175.

⁶² Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 175

⁶³ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 175

Despite having betrayed the Indians earlier by misrepresenting them at the peace treaty, Allen “prevailed upon the Chiefs to give to his Indian children a tract of land.” When the Chiefs granted him the land, ostensibly to care for his children born to Sally, Allen promptly sold it to Robert Morris, thus destroying “the claim of his children.” In one final dastardly twist, Allen died and bequeathed everything to Morilla and her children, thus leaving Sally, Lucy, and the rest of his children without land, money, or any other resources.⁶⁴

The story of Ebenezer Allen’s life and crimes really has very little to do with Mary Jemison’s life beyond the fact that he lived in the same Seneca village, and remained in the area even after he was no longer welcome to stay with the Indians. Therefore, it is important to think about why Jemison felt the need to share Allen’s escapades in detail, and why Seaver devoted an entire chapter of the Jemison narrative to Ebenezer Allen. Seaver’s motivations appear relatively straightforward – as an author attempting to sell books, he likely included Allen’s antics in order to entertain his audience with tales of violence, scandal, and dark humor. In all likelihood, however, Jemison possessed ulterior motives. Through her eyes, Allen’s illicit behavior served as a critique of white society.⁶⁵

As public opinion within white society grew increasingly racist and uniformly condemned Native Americans as “savages,” Jemison subtly challenged the labels placed on the Indians by portraying the life of a white man who broke the rules of etiquette and decency in both white and Indian society. In some incidents within of

⁶⁴ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 175-7.

⁶⁵ Derounian-Stodola, *Women’s Captivity Narratives*, 121. Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola suggests that Jemison’s detailed account of Allen’s actions was an attempt to critique white culture as a whole by using the Indian “oral tradition of the self-vindication narrative.”

the story, Jemison was clearly responding to specific accusations that whites made against their native neighbors. One action commonly portrayed in published captivity narratives and roundly condemned by whites as “savage” was Indian warriors killing a white infant by smashing or “knocking” its head against a doorframe, tree, or other solid object. By sharing a story in which a white man took a white child and not only “dashed it’s head against the jamb,” but then proceeded to discard the child’s body in a burning stove, Jemison clearly challenged the assumption that whites were less prone to committing atrocities. Likewise, in revealing Allen’s multiple wives, Jemison reminded white society that although it may not formally approve of the polygamous relationships many Indian tribes condoned, members of white society could behave the same way.

If Jemison emphasized some of Allen’s actions to demonstrate that whites were not morally superior to Native Americans, his other actions suggested that whites might even be morally inferior. Allen’s betrayal of the Indians who offered him a place to live showed his dishonesty and manipulative tendencies. Furthermore, Allen demonstrated his individualistic greed by selling the land that the tribe granted to him, intended for the benefit of his “Indian children,” for his own gain. He also turned his back on family obligations and rejected the Native American mandate to share wealth by giving all of his money and possessions to only one wife and her biological children upon his death, leaving his other two wives and remaining children to rely on outside family and friends for financial support.

Jemison’s comparison between Seneca and white society did not end with her critique of Ebenezer Allen’s life. She continued her commentary on the

depravity of white society with the story of George Jemison. While Jemison was merely an observer of Allen's actions, George Jemison capitalized on Jemison's generosity toward her family and eroded her trust of white society even further.

In the spring of 1810, George Jemison, who claimed to be Jemison's cousin, contacted her. Jemison stated in her narrative that her Indian friends (and presumably her husband) were "pleased to hear that one of my relatives was so near," and Jemison "accordingly had him and his family moved into one of my houses."⁶⁶

When Jemison discovered that George was in debt and "destitute of the means of subsistence," she proceeded to pay off his debt of seventy dollars, and then bought him livestock, tools, and "other provisions and furniture; so that his family was comfortable."⁶⁷ After George and his family had been living on Jemison's land for "some six or seven years," George appealed to Jemison give him the fourteen acres that he had been farming, as well as an additional twenty-six acres so that he might have land that "he would call his own."⁶⁸ Mary "felt disposed to give him some land," but "knowing my ignorance of writing, feared to do it alone, lest they might include as much land as they pleased, without my knowledge." Nonetheless, when George continued to pressure her, Jemison agreed to sign the deed giving George forty acres of land without consulting her friend Thomas Clute, a white man who helped her conduct legal affairs. Unfortunately, Jemison's fears were well-founded, for she later discovered that "the deed instead of containing only forty

⁶⁶ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 196.

⁶⁷ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 196-7.

⁶⁸ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 197-8.

acres, contained four hundred, ” which George later sold “for a trifle to a gentleman in the south part of Genesee county.”⁶⁹ Although Jemison kicked George off of her land after she discovered he had swindled her out of 400 acres of land, she had already supported George and his family for more than eight years. Jemison later concluded that George Jemison was not related to her in any way.⁷⁰

Mary Jemison’s narrative reveals the life of one white woman who chose Indian society over life in the colonies. Although initially taken against her will, Jemison had numerous opportunities over the course of her life to return to white society, but chose instead to remain with her adopted Indian family. James Seaver wrote that his reason for recording the narrative was to demonstrate “what trials may be surmounted; what cruelties perpetrated, and what pain endured,” in hope that these “lessons of distress...may have direct tendency to increase our love of liberty.”⁷¹ However, what we are left with is an account of how one woman used her life experiences to serve as a cultural intermediary between European American and Native American culture. Jemison’s work as a “go-between” began when she was taken captive as a child and continued with the publication of her narrative. Her skills and ability to navigate between cultures can be seen in her mediations between individual whites and Senecas, as well as in her attempts to explain aspects of Seneca culture, particularly war habits and the role of women within the tribe.

⁶⁹ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 198.

⁷⁰ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 196-99.

⁷¹ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 123-4.

One curious aspect of Jemison's long years with the Seneca that is never thoroughly addressed in her narrative is how she managed to retain her native tongue. Jemison stated "my sisters would not allow me to speak English in their hearing," but also indicated that she repeated her prayers and catechism whenever she was alone. When Jemison met with Seaver nearly seventy years later, he noted that she "speaks English plainly and distinctly, with a little of the Irish emphasis."⁷² Given that many captives who remained within Native American tribes for any significant length of time lost their ability to speak English, it seems strange that simply reciting her catechism and prayers would have been enough for Jemison to retain her native language. Most likely, Jemison did not lose her ability to speak because she encountered other English-speakers at different points and was able to converse with them.

Despite the fact that Jemison's sisters forbade her to converse in English when she first arrived in the village, they must not have been too strict after she had settled into life in the tribe. After only a year of captivity, Jemison's sisters took her to visit Fort Pitt, where she conversed with white people who "appeared very much interested on my behalf." This was shortly before her sisters hurried her back to the canoe, but nonetheless, the contact gave Jemison a chance to practice her English skills again. Approximately two years after Jemison was captured, her village moved to a summer camp in Wiishto, where they met a Delaware village also residing in the same area. The Delaware had five white captives with them, all of whom spoke English. While this encounter plays no significant role in the narrative,

⁷² Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 127.

it does demonstrate how Jemison and other captives met each other and interacted early in their captivity, thus allowing them to maintain their language. After Jemison gained the ability to speak the Seneca language and adapted to the tribe, her adoptive family might not have been threatened by her use of English. Furthermore, as increasing numbers of white settlers continued to move into Indian territory, the members Jemison's small village might have realized the potential benefits of having a fluent English speaker among them and encouraged her interactions with whites.

At times throughout the narrative, Jemison not only conversed with white captives, but occasionally interceded on their behalf. The most dramatic example of her intervention occurred when she entreated a party of Shawnee Indians to release a white captive they "had just begun to torture for the sole purpose of gratifying their curiosity in exulting at his distress." Jemison's pleas eventually persuaded the Indians to release their prisoner, and "as soon as he was liberated he made off in haste."⁷³ References to other interactions with white captives litter Jemison's narrative, but most do not include details beyond passing mention of the captives. She referred to captives Joseph Smith and William Newkirk, as well as "a man by the name of Price" individually, but otherwise only spoke of "a woman and her three daughters," or "the five prisoners."⁷⁴ Although we can only speculate about the exact nature of the interactions between Jemison, an acculturated woman, and other more recently taken white captives, it seems that her presence would have served to ease their transition to Native American culture and protected them from any mistreatment.

⁷³ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 151.

⁷⁴ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 158-62.

Jemison's interactions and actions as a "go-between" with whites were not limited to other white captives, but occurred with free whites as well, particularly after the Revolutionary War, when Native American captive taking in Pennsylvania dramatically decreased. Although she recounted her negative encounters with Ebenezer Allen and George Jemison in great detail, Jemison relied on other white men whom she trusted to advise her in legal matters. In particular, she mentioned Mr. Micah Brooks, Esq. and Mr. Jellis Clute, Esq., who helped her to petition the New York legislature for her naturalization, thereby allowing Jemison to hold the 18,000 acres of land she had received at the Treaty of Big Tree in 1797 in her own name rather than having the land fall under the general ownership of the Seneca nation.⁷⁵ Nothing in Jemison's narrative would indicate that she was ever suspicious of her two lawyers, or of her friend Mr. Thomas Clute. Nonetheless, it appears that her trust was misplaced. Shortly after her petition for naturalization was confirmed, Jemison signed over seven thousand acres of land to Jellis Clute and Micah Brooks. Mr. Thomas Clute, Jemison's trusted neighbor who accompanied her to visit James Seaver and brother of Jellis Clute, received "a lot of land on the west side of my reservation," in exchange for "managing" Jemison's property for her. According to Jemison, Thomas Clute was consistently "faithful and honest in all his advice and dealings with, and for, myself and family."⁷⁶ He may well have been faithful, but he was also exorbitantly well-compensated, as were Jellis Clute and Micah Brooks, for

⁷⁵ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 204-5; and Namias, *White Captives*, 185. Namias explains that the land naturalization act allowed Jemison to hold the land in her own name, thus allowing her to retain it for her family after the Seneca nation was displaced and forced onto reservations in western and southwestern New York.

⁷⁶ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 205.

their advice. By 1823, Jemison's eighteen thousand acre estate had dwindled to a mere four thousand.⁷⁷

Throughout the narrative, most of the interactions Jemison has with white non-captive Americans revolve around legal dealings with white men. However, as Jemison's land slowly became an island amid a sea of white farmers, the example that she set as the matriarchal leader would have been evident to the white families, and particularly the white women, surrounding her. Jemison's understanding of herself as a Seneca woman entitled her to political and familial power beyond that which most white women expected, and challenged the notion that white women were better off than Native American "squaws."

Although Jemison did not specifically address how the treatment of women differed between European American and Native American society, glimpses of women's lives come through her narrative. Early European colonists had a tendency to categorize Indian women as overworked servants to their idle husbands, and that stereotype persisted throughout early American history. A French priest, Father Julien Binneteau, wrote in 1699 "The women alone till the soil, and sow; they do this carefully, and consequently the corn is very fine and abundant. The idleness of the men is the cause of all their debauchery."⁷⁸ However, Jemison described the work of the Seneca women by stating, "Our work was not severe; and that of one year was exactly similar, in almost every respect, to that of the others, without the

⁷⁷ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 205-6.

⁷⁸ Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, "Travels and explorations of the Jesuit missionaries in New France," Vol. LXV, *Lower Canada, Mississippi Valley, 1696-1702*. <http://puffin.creighton.edu/jesuit/relations/> (Accessed 3 May 2007), 73.

endless variety that is to be observed in the common labor of the white people.” She later added “...we could work as leisurely as we pleased.”⁷⁹

Jemison informed Seaver that Seneca women were responsible for gathering all the necessary fuel, planting, harvesting, child care, and cooking, but added “their task in probably not harder than that of white women, who have those articles provided for them; and their cares certainly are not half as numerous, nor as great.”⁸⁰ Women in the tribe worked together to a larger extent than many colonial women would have, thus turning each day into a mixture of labor and socializing.

Jemison seemed to enjoy many of the customs that gave women more power in Iroquois society. The names of Jemison’s children are significant. Jemison stated that “To commemorate the name of my much lamented father, I called my son Thomas Jemison.”⁸¹ Three of her other children (Jane, Betsey, and John) were named after her mother, sister, and brother, and all of her children were given the last name Jemison.⁸² The names of Jemison’s children could be construed to demonstrate her connection to her lost past in white society. There is a more important point, however – Jemison chose the names she wished for her children. In naming her children, Jemison may have opted for traditional English names, but she also adopted the matrilineal structure of Iroquois society and assigned the children her last name and lineage.⁸³

⁷⁹ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 149.

⁸⁰ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 148.

⁸¹ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 148.

⁸² Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 130, 135.

⁸³ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 119.

Jemison's description of her life at the time that her narrative was recorded shows the continuing influence of the matrilineal tradition in her life. During her interview with Seaver, she said "I live in my own house, and on my own land, with my youngest daughter, Polly, who is married to George Chongo, and has three children."⁸⁴ The fact that Jemison owned her own land and house is more in line with Indian custom than with European, where a widowed mother would usually reside with one of her children in their house. Rather, Jemison's daughter and her husband followed Indian custom and moved to Jemison's house after they were married.⁸⁵

Throughout her life, Mary Jemison served as a go-between for Seneca and white society. Evidence of how both Native American and colonial ideas and understandings of gender and race were impacted by captivity is apparent throughout her story. Jemison embraced the status offered her by Seneca society and modeled the matrilineal societal structure to the white neighbors who eventually surrounded her in her later years. However, Jemison was also aware of the criticisms leveled at Native American women by white society and addressed accusations of promiscuity and misrepresentations women's status in her narrative. Although Jemison considered herself Seneca, she acknowledged that others considered her white and capitalized on that fact to portray the Seneca in a sympathetic light and critique the failings of white society. Jemison's story is an example of how frontiers and captives in early America functioned to adapt and create Indian and colonial society.

⁸⁴ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 209.

⁸⁵ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 209-10.

Jemison's influence as a cultural "go-between" continued, and perhaps expanded beyond what she could have ever expected, following the publication of her narrative in 1824. James Seaver's book initially garnered interest among the residents of western New York, but quickly took off and sold over one hundred thousand copies the first year it appeared in print. The narrative emerged as a national and international phenomenon, eventually going through twenty-seven printings and twenty-three editions over the course of the next 105 years.⁸⁶

At the time she met with Seaver, Jemison was still living on her own land in the Genesee Valley. However, soon afterward she sold her remaining land and moved to the Buffalo Creek Reservation. Mary Jemison died in 1833. In the mid-nineteenth century, William Prior Letchworth, a philanthropist interested in Native American life, created a state park in the Genesee Valley and moved Mary Jemison's old home into the park. In 1874, Mary Jemison's remains were transferred from her burial place in Buffalo, New York, to be buried beside her old house, now located in Letchworth State Park.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Namias, *White Captives*, 165-7.

⁸⁷ Namias, *White Captives*, 162-3.

Chapter 3

Fleeing from the Savage Host: Barbara Leininger

In the fall of 1755, as violence in Pennsylvania escalated and the colonies slid towards the Seven Years' War, sisters Barbara and Regina Leininger were captured from their home at Penn's Creek, Pennsylvania. At the time of their capture, Barbara was twelve years old and her younger sister Regina ten. Much like Mary Jemison, the sisters were initially part of a larger group of captives who were marched westward and later divided between the Native Americans who had captured them. When this split occurred, the sisters were separated and proceeded on to Indians villages in different locations.¹

Unlike Mary Jemison, however, each sister was adopted into her respective tribe alongside another white captive who had endured the march westward beside them. For both Barbara and Regina, it was these companions rather than their adoptive Indian siblings who eventually came to function as their new family members. Barbara Leininger was adopted into the same Indian village as Marie Le Roy, the daughter of Swiss immigrants who had lived less than a mile from the Leiningers'. Given the close proximity of their homes, it is likely that the two girls knew each other prior to their capture, but if so Barbara does not mention that fact in her narrative. Although Marie Le Roy's exact age is never given in the narrative, it seems that she and Barbara were roughly the same age, as Barbara tends to refer

¹ Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg, "Regina, the German Captive," *Pennsylvania German Society Proceedings*, XV (1906): 83. This text is a translation made by the Rev. J.W. Early, of Reading, PA and published by the Pennsylvania German Society in 1906. The original text was written in German by Henry Muhlenberg, and published in the *Hallische Nachrichten* in 1765.

to them jointly as “we two girls.” When Barbara eventually fled eastward, Marie accompanied her and together they published *The Narrative of Marie Le Roy and Barbara Leininger* upon reaching Philadelphia in 1759.²

Regina Leininger was adopted along with a two-year old girl, whose given name never appears in her original narrative. Although Regina was only ten years old herself when she was captured, she functioned as the child’s surrogate mother. Just as Barbara and Marie escaped together, Regina and the little girl were redeemed together and the child returned to and continued to live in Regina’s home.³

Barbara and Regina’s stories were published years apart, as Barbara successfully escaped after four years of captivity while Regina remained in captivity for nine years, until Colonel Bouquet’s victory at 1764 forced many Indian tribes in the surrounding area to return their adopted captives. Having two narratives written by sisters who shared a common family and background experience on the Pennsylvania frontier, and who were captured during the same raid, gives an unique opportunity to see how these two young women reacted differently to their captivity and how their perceptions of themselves and of Native American society varied. The Leininger sisters’ narratives also give insights into how perceptions of Native Americans by white captives differed when compared to Mary Jemison’s captivity. Whereas Jemison chose to remain within her adoptive tribe and therefore shared

² Barbara Leininger and Marie LeRoy, “Narrative,” *Pennsylvania German Society Proceedings*, XV (1906): 112. This text is a translation made by Bishop Edmund de Schweintz of Bethlehem, PA and published by the Pennsylvania German Society in 1906. The original narrative was given in German and published by the German Printing Office in Philadelphia, PA in 1759.

³ Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 88.

her story as an acculturated Seneca woman, both Barbara and Regina Leininger eventually returned to colonial society and related their stories from the perspective of captives. Unlike Jemison's narrative, which was printed in English and received a widespread readership within months of publication, both Barbara and Regina's narratives were originally recorded and published in German and therefore enjoyed a smaller initial audience. Only after several decades were both captivity narratives translated into English.⁴

The background information that the narratives contained regarding the Leininger family is scant. Neither Barbara nor Regina's narrative contained their mother or father's full name. Barbara stated in the beginning of her narrative that her parents came to Pennsylvania from Reutlingen, Germany "about ten years ago," which would place their arrival roughly in the late 1740s. The family moved to the western edge of Pennsylvania shortly after their arrival, presumably to take advantage of the cheap and plentiful land available on the frontier. The Leininger family had four children, with two sons in addition to their two daughters. One son died during the Indian raid in which Barbara and Regina were captured. The other son and the girls' mother were absent during the raid, thus avoiding capture or death, and appear in the conclusion of Regina's narrative.⁵

Both Barbara and Regina's narratives began with an account of the Indian raid in which they were captured. On October 16, 1755, Barbara and Regina were

⁴ Muhlenberg, "Regina, the German Captive,"; and Leininger, "Narrative." The earliest English translation of Barbara Leininger's narrative that I was able to find was published in 1906 by the Pennsylvania German Society. An interpretation of Regina Leininger's narrative by Reuben Weiser was published in English in 1860, but this version bears little resemblance to the original narrative. The earliest English translation of Regina Leininger's original narrative I was able to find was also published in 1906 by the Pennsylvania German Society.

⁵ Muhlenberg, "Regina, the German Captive," 82; and Leininger, "Narrative," 111.

at home working with their father and older brother. Their mother and other brother were gone for the day, traveling to a local grain mill a few miles away. In Regina's narrative, "savages suddenly fell upon them (the house), slaying the father and the son in their usual barbarous manner."⁶ Barbara's narrative gave a more extended version of events, where two Indians appeared at the door and first demanded rum and tobacco. There was no rum in the house, but Barbara's father gave the Indians a pipe filled with tobacco. The visitors proceeded to smoke the pipe before abruptly declaring "We are Allegheny Indians, and your enemies. You must all die!" Barbara and Regina's father was immediately shot and their brother tomahawked. The two girls were bound and dragged into the woods, where they joined a larger group of Indians, along with Marie Le Roy and the young child who later becomes Regina's "daughter."⁷

Shortly after the two sisters arrived, their captors were joined by additional groups of Indians with prisoners, and the group of captives grew to ten. Of these ten, there was "one man, one woman, five girls and three boys."⁸ Besides the live captives, the Indians claimed "six fresh and bloody scalps." The following morning, Barbara stated that the "Indians again went out to kill and plunder," returning that evening "with nine scalps and five prisoners."⁹ It appears that the band of Indians conducting these particular raids did not expect to be immediately pursued, as the entire group spent the first night camped in the forest only "about a mile" from the farms that they had raided earlier in the day, and apparently only traveled "about two

⁶ Muhlenberg, "Regina, the German Captive," 83.

⁷ Leininger, "Narrative," 112.

⁸ Leininger, "Narrative," 113.

⁹ Leininger, "Narrative," 112.

miles” further the second day. After the Native Americans had finished gathering captives and scalps from the immediate area, they marched their captives westward, with the older children carrying younger ones on their backs. Regina stated that the group was “urged on mercilessly,” although their “feet were worn to the quick, laying bare the bones and tendons, so that they thought they must die because of the agony and the sufferings which they endured.”¹⁰

On the third morning after the Leininger sisters had been captured, the Indians “divided the spoils.” The girls were separated from one another, and at that point their narratives diverged. Barbara and Marie Le Roy “fell to the share of an Indian named Galasko,” and continued their journey westward, while Regina and the young child were “given over to an old ill-tempered Indian squaw.”¹¹

Although Barbara and Regina had no way of knowing it at the time, the raid in which they were captured was the first in a series of attacks by Delaware Indians that ultimately resulted in over 700 settlers being killed or taken captive between the autumn of 1755 and the spring of 1756. These raids were the result of Delaware anger over the continued encroachment of their land and recent negotiations between the Pennsylvania government and the Iroquois nation in Albany, where the Iroquois had given Pennsylvania proprietors Delaware land. The raid that October ended the long-standing peace that had been negotiated between the Delaware and William Penn in 1682, and succeeded in largely clearing white settlers from sections of the Pennsylvania frontier. Most of the victims were German and Irish immigrants enticed to the west by Pennsylvania officials hoping to form a buffer zone between

¹⁰ Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 84.

¹¹ Leininger, “Narrative,” 113; and Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 84.

Native American territory and eastern cities. The attack on Penn's Creek that began on October 16, lasted three days, and managed to wipe out most of the Penn's Creek settlement.¹²

As Barbara and Marie continued their journey westward with their "new master" Galasko, he allowed them to ride his horse while "he and the rest of the Indians walked." Despite this charitable gesture and Barbara's grudging acknowledgement that Galasko was "tolerably kind," she wasted no time in taking advantage of her mount and trying to escape. However, she was "immediately recaptured and condemned to be burned alive."¹³ Her captors first gave her a French Bible, which they had taken from Marie Le Roy's house, "in order that she might prepare for death," but replaced it with a German Bible when Barbara informed them that she could not read the French version. As Barbara read her Bible, her captors "made a large pile of wood and set it to fire, intending to put her into the midst of it," but spared her life after "a young Indian begged so earnestly for her life that she was pardoned, after having promised to not attempt to escape again, and to stop her crying."¹⁴

Leininger offered no additional details about this "young Indian" who so desperately pleaded for her life, leaving us to speculate as to why he wanted her saved. It is possible that the Native Americans never had any intentions of actually burning Barbara, and that she unknowingly participated in an adoption ritual. It is also possible that Barbara was entirely right about her situation and the Native

¹² Richard Grimes, "The Emergence and Decline of the Delaware Indian Nation in Western Pennsylvania and the Ohio Country, 1730-1795," (Ph.D. Diss, West Virginia University, 2005), 53-59.

¹³ Leininger, "Narrative," 113.

¹⁴ Leininger, "Narrative," 113-4.

Americans did indeed plan to execute her in order to exact revenge for their losses, and simultaneously serve as an example to other captives who might have been contemplating escape. Had the Indians merely wanted to dispose of a troublesome captive, it certainly would have been quicker and much less labor intensive to simply shoot or tomahawk her rather than spend the time gathering wood for a fire, particularly as the groups had not yet reached their destination and were still trekking through the forest. In this case, the young Indian may have simply been interested in protecting a valuable captive.

The captives reached their destination in December, arriving at the Indian village of Kittanny (or Kittanning), where many of the Delaware war parties had originated. Here, the captives were greeted “according to Indian custom.” Every captive received “three blows each,” likely in the Native American custom of forcing prisoners to run the gauntlet. However, Barbara described the blows as being “administered with great mercy,” and concluded that “we were beaten merely in order to keep up an ancient usage, and not with the intention of injuring us.”¹⁵ While Leininger was correct in believing that the gauntlet was not necessarily intended hurt the prisoners forced to run through it, she did not seem to be aware that this ceremony was part of her adoption ritual. As most captives were taken to replace lost family members within the tribe, the gauntlet served as a ritual intended to symbolically purge the captives of their whiteness while providing mourning Indians an opportunity to “exorcise their anger and anguish.” Successfully passing through

¹⁵ Leininger, “Narrative,” 114-5.

the gauntlet initiated captives into the tribe and began their cultural transformation.¹⁶ After this point, Leininger was most likely considered a member of the tribe by the other Native Americans in the village, whether she fully understood and appreciated her change of status or not.

While Barbara lived with the Indian tribe, she worked at tasks typical of Native American women. She stated that she “had to tan leather, to make shoes (moccasins), to clear land, to plant corn, to cut down trees and build huts, to wash and cook.”¹⁷ Barbara did not elaborate on whether she worked individually or communally with other women, but at times mentioned traveling with groups of Indian women to complete tasks such as “gathering roots,” suggesting the women did labor in communal groups.¹⁸

Barbara’s only complaint about life in the Indian village was “the want of provisions.” She lamented the lack of lard and salt, and described the hunger that forced her to rely on “acorns, roots, grass and bark,” with nothing to make this “new sort of food palatable excepting hunger itself.”¹⁹ While Barbara’s narrative suggested that this diet was typical of the Delaware, the tribe in the western part of the state was in fact struggling in the face of starvation as a result of drought and over-hunting. It was not only Barbara and the other captives who were reduced to eating grass and bark, but the rest of the tribe as well.²⁰

¹⁶ Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 200.

¹⁷ Leininger, “Narrative,” 114.

¹⁸ Leininger, “Narrative,” 118.

¹⁹ Leininger, “Narrative,” 114-5.

²⁰ Grimes, “The Emergence and Decline of the Delaware Indian Nation,” 29-31.

On September 8, 1756, Lieutenant Colonel John Armstrong led a force of three hundred Pennsylvania militiamen in a retaliatory strike against the Delaware, targeting the village of Kittanning.²¹ Barbara stated that as the militia approached, she and Marie (and presumably other captives as well) were “immediately conveyed ten miles further into the interior, in order that we might have not chance of trying, on this occasion, to escape.”²² Although Barbara and Marie were not redeemed at this point, Colonel Armstrong succeeded in freeing ten captives, and proceeded to burn all of the Delaware’s crops and food supplies before retreating eastward.²³

Some captives living in Kittanning attempted to flee in hopes of joining Colonel Armstrong, but were not so lucky. Barbara’s captivity narrative catered to colonial visions of savage Indians with a particularly gruesome account of an English woman who fled her Indian captors in an attempt to reach Colonel Armstrong’s troops. After the runaway found herself “recaptured by the savages,” Barbara stated that the Englishwoman “was put to death in an unheard-of way.”²⁴ The Native Americans first scalped her, and then laid “burning splinters” over her body before they “cut off her ears and fingers, forcing them into her mouth so that she had to swallow them.”²⁵ Leininger maintained that the torture began at nine o’clock in the morning and lasted until “toward sunset when a French officer took compassion on her, and put her out of her misery.” After the woman was dead, “the Indians

²¹ Grimes, “The Emergence and Decline of the Delaware Indian Nation,” 62.

²² Leininger, “Narrative,” 115.

²³ Grimes, “The Emergence and Decline of the Delaware Indian Nation,” 62-3.

²⁴ Leininger, “Narrative,” 114.

²⁵ Leininger, “Narrative,” 115.

chopped her in two, through the middle, and let her be until the dogs came and devoured her.”²⁶

Barbara’s account of the torture did not end there. Her next sentence recounted the scene of “an Englishman...who had likewise attempted to escape with Col. Armstrong.” His torture “continued about three hours,” and “his screams were frightful to listen to.” The Indians attempted to burn him alive, but could not keep up the fire as it began to rain. They then “began to discharge gunpowder at his body,” and when “the poor man called for a drink of water, they brought him melted lead, and poured it down his throat.” Unsurprisingly, this “draught at once helped him out of the hands of the barbarians, for he died on the instant.”²⁷

These two depictions of gruesome torture stand in sharp contrast to any of the scenes appearing in Mary Jemison’s narrative. While Jemison did acknowledge that ritual executions took place within the tribe, she took pains to explain that such events were only practiced “according to their ideas of justice.”²⁸ These prolonged executions, if they indeed occurred as Barbara described, likely did fall under the Indian’s ideas of justice. The executions took place immediately after the village had been attacked, their food supplies for the coming winter destroyed, and more than fifty members of the tribe killed.²⁹ The two English settlers who were executed had obviously shown their affinity for the enemy by attempting to flee the Delaware village. If these two whites were adopted members of the tribe, which they very likely were, their actions would have gone beyond mere sympathy for the invaders

²⁶ Leininger, “Narrative,” 116.

²⁷ Leininger, “Narrative,” 116.

²⁸ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 150.

²⁹ Grimes, “The Emergence and Decline of the Delaware Indian Nation,” 62-3.

and betrayed their adoptive families as well. Barbara Leininger did not use these two graphic execution scenes to provide any insights into Native American ideas of justice, however. Rather, these sensationalistic accounts served to depict the Native Americans as savage and to cast doubt on their humanity. The gratuitous violence contained in the two stories, particularly that of the English woman, suggests that they may have been elaborated upon for their propagandistic value, either by Barbara and Marie as they were composing their narrative or by an enthusiastic editor wishing to boost book sales by titillating readers with blood and gore.³⁰

Following the destruction of Kittanning in 1756, some of the remaining Delaware tribe traveled to Fort Duquesne to confer with the French. Barbara and Marie le Roy accompanied their Indian masters to Fort Duquesne, where they lived with the French for two months. Despite the hard life in Kittanning that Barbara depicted earlier in her narrative, when reflecting on her time in the French forts, she stated “in some respects we were better off than in the Indian towns; we could not, however, abide the French.” Barbara never gave any additional information about why the French were so difficult like, but presumably viewed the French as equally responsible for her captivity. When given the choice between remaining at Fort Duquesne and returning to the Indian village, both girls determined that “it would be better for us to remain among the Indians.”³¹

³⁰ Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, *The Indian Captivity Narrative 1500-1900* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 119-121. Derounian-Stodola raises questions about the authenticity of these two torture scenes, as the narrative is not in first person and therefore it is questionable if Barbara Leininger and Marie Le Roy actually witnessed the events.

³¹ Leininger, “Narrative,” 116.

It is worth considering why, despite her characterization of the Native Americans as “savages,” Barbara ultimately chose to bide her time with the Indians rather than remain at Fort Duquesne in hopes of being exchanged as a prisoner of war. Barbara gave very practical reasons for her decision – the Indians were decidedly more likely to make peace with the English than were the French, and “there would be more ways open for flight in the forest than in a fort.”³² Although these are both reasonable points for leaving the French fort, Barbara’s enthusiasm about the fact that she “could again eat bread,” and claim that the French made her “various favorable offers” in hopes of persuading her to “forsake the Indian and stay with them,” would seem to indicate that life within the French fort promised a more stable, not to mention more appetizing, food supply and possibly less strenuous work.³³ Barbara’s rejection of the French fort in favor of returning to an Indian village suggests that life with the Delaware was not as dismal as other parts of her narrative insinuated. She did not fear for her life at the hands of the Delaware, and apparently the food supply was not so limited that she feared starvation.

Despite witnessing the fates of the two unsuccessful escapees, Barbara, along with three other captives, decided to attempt an escape from the tribe. After nearly four years of captivity, Barbara, Marie Le Roy, and two young English men, Owen Gibson and David Breckenreach, fled the Indian village of Moschkingo where they had been staying and eventually made their way to Pittsburgh.³⁴ The decision to flee eastward originated with Barbara and David Breckenreach in February of

³² Leininger, “Narrative,” 116.

³³ Leininger, “Narrative,” 116-7.

³⁴ Leininger, “Narrative,” 122.

1759. When Barbara informed Marie of their plan, Marie agreed to accompany the two others only if they waited until spring arrived, when “the weather would be milder.” Although the attempt took nearly four years to make, after the three captives promised each other support, they began planning their escape in earnest. In the middle of March, 1759, the group snuck out of camp with two pounds of dried meat, a quart of corn, four pounds of sugar, and a gun.³⁵

The circumstances that allowed the captives to successfully sneak out of the Delaware village speak volumes about the degree of trust these captives had gained during their time with the tribe. As the day of their flight approached, Barbara “pretended to be sick, so that she might be allowed to put up a hut for herself alone.” Later that day, as the women worked gathering roots, Barbara slipped out of her tent and “visited a German woman, ten miles from Moschkingo.”³⁶ The German woman, Mary, gave Barbara the provisions for their trip and also introduced her to Owen Gibson, the English captive who became the fourth member of the group. Barbara’s visit to Mary was granted a mere paragraph in the narrative, and emphasized the gaining of provisions rather than the trip itself.

This raises some interesting questions. We can fairly assume that Mary was also a captive, because Barbara said that Mary “had made every preparation to accompany us on our flight,” but had “become lame and could not think of going along.” But how did Barbara and Mary know each other? Did they live in the same village at some point? Perhaps Mary was the unnamed woman who was captured in the same group as Barbara? It is also interesting to speculate that Barbara must

³⁵ Leininger, “Narrative,” 119.

³⁶ Leininger, “Narrative,” 118-9.

have made this same trip in the past. Barbara certainly would have gained some sense of the local terrain due to her movements with the tribe, and she appears to know exactly where she is going; she had no trouble finding Mary's house. Did Barbara undertake other trips alone while she lived with the Indians? Even if we can only speculate about the answers to these questions, we certainly can be sure that Barbara was gone for a significant amount of time in order to undertake a twenty-mile round trip venture. The fact that nobody bothered to question where she had been, or perhaps did not even notice she was gone, proves that Barbara had a considerable degree of freedom in her everyday movements. The escaping group also carried with them a gun and a tomahawk. Barbara did not mention how they acquired these weapons, but apparently the captives either were allowed access to weapons or were able to smuggle them out of the camp. Either possibility suggests that the "prisoners" were not closely watched and went about their daily business largely unsupervised.

Barbara recounted the captives' flight through the wilderness in vivid detail, from their good fortune in discovering an Indian raft to carry them across the first river to their despair as provisions dwindled and the loss of their flint and steel resulted in long, cold nights with no fire. Despite a bear attack, the near drowning of both Barbara and Marie, and the long trek through rain and snow, the small group eventually made their way to Pittsburgh.³⁷ When they approached the fort, calling for help, Colonel Mercer "sent out a boat to bring us to the Fort." However, when the crew first glimpsed the runaways, Barbara stated that they "thought we were Indians,

³⁷ Leininger, "Narrative," 119-122.

and wanted us to spend the night where we were.”³⁸ Eventually, the crew was persuaded that they were dealing with English prisoners, and rowed the group into the fort. Colonel Mercer promptly “ordered for each of us a new chemise, a petticoat, a pair of stockings, garters, and a knife.”³⁹

Several aspects of Barbara’s first interaction with other “free” European Americans are intriguing. While Barbara did not consider herself in any way a Native American, the distinction was not so obvious to the soldiers who rowed across the river to pick up the former captives. Evidently, the captive’s conversion to Native American culture was thorough enough that other whites were uncertain of their true identity based solely on appearance. The soldiers’ hesitancy reflects the uncertainty during this time period that surrounded conceptions of race as a biological and unchanging human characteristic. Prior to the eighteenth century, racial identity was not understood as stable, but rather as a trait that could be transformed through the adoption of different appearance, belief, or behavior. Thus, European colonists held out hope that Native Americans could be “bleached” and harbored fears that white captives would, quite literally, become fully Indian. By the Seven Years’ War, the idea of race as a fixed biological trait was gaining ground, but the time of defined racial categories had not yet arrived.⁴⁰ It is telling that immediately after the runaways entered the fort, Colonel Mercer issued them new clothing, ridding them of their Indian attire and reestablishing their “white” appearance and identity. For Barbara and Marie, the new clothing also functioned to

³⁸ Leininger, “Narrative,” 121-2.

³⁹ Leininger, “Narrative,” 123.

⁴⁰ Camenzind, “From the Holy Experiment to the Paxton Boys,” 25-6.

reinforce their status as white *women*, providing them with the appropriate garb of respectable females in the form of petticoats, stockings, and garters.

After a day within the fort, the captives met with a detachment under the command of Lieutenant Mile and traveled to Fort Ligonier, and after a short stay there continued on to Fort Bedford. Owen Gibson remained at Fort Bedford while the rest of the party continued on through Lancaster. While David Breckenreach stayed in Lancaster, Barbara and Marie Le Roy proceeded on to Philadelphia. Barbara did not offer any information about why she and Marie chose to continue on to Philadelphia, or about their experiences in the city. Perhaps they had relations in the city, or maybe they traveled onward specifically to find a publisher for their narrative. In any case, the young women successfully found their way to the German printing office, where their narrative was published.

At the end of her narrative, Barbara assured her readers that her story was not designed to merely depict her hardships and trials, but to

serve the inhabitants of this country, by making them acquainted with the names and circumstances of those prisoners who we met...parents, brothers, sisters, and other relations will, no doubt, be glad to hear that their nearest kith and kin are still in the land of the living and that they may hence entertain some hope of seeing them again in their own homes, if God permit.⁴¹

Barbara then proceeded to list information about forty-seven other captives she had met while living with the Indians, thirty-nine of whom she knew by name. She

⁴¹ Leininger, "Narrative," 123.

detailed where they were currently living, as well as the location from which they had been taken and how long they had been in captivity.⁴²

Barbara's impact as a cultural intermediary is considerably different than Mary Jemison's. The most obvious distinction is Barbara's lack of interest in actively creating greater understanding of Native American culture and customs among European Americans. As Barbara clearly stated in her narrative, her primary intention was to provide families with information about their captive relatives. However, Barbara Leininger's narrative not only alerted colonial families of the whereabouts their captive family members, but provided a greater understanding of day to day life within the Delaware tribe and also depicted how Pennsylvanian attacks on Native American tribes impacted white captives residing within the tribe.

One of the greatest contrasts between Barbara Leininger and Mary Jemison's narratives is the degree of sympathy toward Native Americans evident in their stories. Part of this is certainly due to the fact that Jemison related her story after several decades of living with the Seneca whereas Leininger had only a few years of experience within Delaware culture. Inevitably, Jemison would have a more detailed understanding of Indian culture and of the meanings behind customs and rituals, as well as a more nuanced view of relations between Native Americans and European Americans. Leininger, despite her four years living with the Delaware, never considered herself part of the tribe or attempted to visualize current events through Indian eyes. She did not couch violent events with detailed explanations of the motives and reasoning behind them as Jemison did, or point out the equally

⁴² Leininger, "Narrative," 123-6.

abhorrent actions of whites. Leininger made no overt attempt to rationalize the Indians' behavior, yet nonetheless gave her readers a glimpse into the Native American psyche by discussing events such as the adoption ceremony.

Leininger's most important impact as a cultural go-between came from her detailed descriptions of the captured men, women, and children she met during her time with the Delaware. The end of her narrative listed information about forty-seven captives. Most of the descriptions included names, the location where the individual was originally captured, and their whereabouts when Leininger met them. Many of the descriptions also included the ages of the captives, and some listed the names of other uncaptured family members who might be searching for their relatives. Leininger added that her list was not comprehensive, as she "became acquainted with many other captives, men, women, and children, in various Indian towns, but did not know, or could not remember their names."⁴³ In the conclusion of the narrative, Leininger wrote that both she and Mary Le Roy planned to move to Lancaster, and encouraged anyone seeking more information about captured family members to contact them, as they would be "heartily willing to give...any further information which may lie within our power."⁴⁴

Although she set out with the intent to provide information and reassure families who yearned for news of their missing relatives, Barbara Leininger's narrative also painted a picture of everyday life for captives in the Delaware tribe. She described their living conditions, the types of food they ate, the kinds of labor required of them. Perhaps the most unexpected feature of Leininger's description

⁴³ Leininger, "Narrative," 126.

⁴⁴ Leininger, "Narrative," 126.

was the sheer number of captives that she interacted with during her time with the Native Americans. The indication that white captives were able to form their own community of sorts within the Indian tribe may have assuaged the fears of families who had lost a mother, sister, or brother to captivity.

Leininger's depiction of the battle for Kittanning related to her readers the ways in which white captives experienced the war between the British colonials and the French. For many of the captives, fighting between the Native Americans and English increased the captives' vulnerability. For those whites who had assimilated into the tribe, the advancement of English troops raised fears that they might be recaptured and returned to the colonies against their will. Those wishing to return to the colonies also faced increased risks, as unsuccessful attempts to flee were harshly reprimanded and Native Americans shuttled their captives further west to avoid them being redeemed.

At a time when Pennsylvania was witnessing a substantial increase in militarization in response to the growing violence on the frontier, Leininger's narrative pointed out the danger in attacking Indian towns to recover captives. While Armstrong's offensive against Kittanning recovered ten captives, it also endangered the lives of many other captives in the process. Although Leininger never offered her opinion on the actions of the Pennsylvania militia, her narrative does leave the reader with the suggestion that white violence against Native Americans would serve only to beget more violence against whites.

Chapter 4

Allein und doch nicht ganz alleine: Regina Leininger

In the fall of 1764, Colonel Henry Bouquet defeated the Native Americans near Bushy Run, thus ending the hostilities along the Pennsylvania frontier. The peace agreements negotiated between Bouquet and that Native Americans demanded the release of all white captives held by the Delaware, Shawnee, and Seneca “whether adopted in your Tribes, married, or living amongst you.”¹ Over two hundred captives, all of whom had been taken within the previous nine years, were handed over to Bouquet, after which they traveled eastward to be reunited with the families they had left behind. One of these captives was Regina Leininger.

In February, 1765, Regina Leininger, then aged nineteen, arrived at the office of Reverend Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg along with her widowed mother. Muhlenberg, a Lutheran minister, had arrived in Pennsylvania from Germany in 1742 with the mission to minister to the scattered settlements of German Lutherans in eastern Pennsylvania. In a curious twist, Muhlenberg married the daughter of Conrad Weiser, the well-known Indian translator, in 1745.² According to Muhlenberg, Regina and her mother “had come this distance of sixty or seventy miles” to procure a Bible and hymnbook for Regina, who had “continually pled for the book in which the Lord Jesus speaks so kindly to men and they were permitted to speak to him.”³ Muhlenberg, who admitted that he was pleased by the women’s visit

¹ Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 193.

² Theodore G. Tappert, “Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg and the American Revolution”, *Church History* 11, No. 4, (December 1942): 284.

³ Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 88.

“very much because of the peculiar circumstances of the case,” took the opportunity to record Regina’s story.

Regina’s captivity narrative first appeared in Muhlenberg’s *Hallische Nachrichten* reports sent to the Lutheran church leaders in Germany in 1765. Muhlenberg had a very specific motivation behind recording Regina Leininger’s narrative. At the end of her account, Muhlenberg stated that Regina’s story “again shows how necessary, profitable, and advantages are those schools in which true Christian doctrine and the example of Christ are impressed upon the minds of the young and implanted in their hearts,” despite the fact that Regina never attended such a school herself.⁴ There is also some reason to be suspicious of the accuracy of Muhlenberg’s interpretation, as he noted that although Regina “could still understand German pretty well,” she now relied on “the Indian language” as her primary means of expression.

Regina’s inability to speak German fluently explains why her mother accompanied her to Muhlenberg’s office, as Regina likely relied on her mother to help her effectively communicate. However, due to these language barriers, we are left with some degree of uncertainty as to how much of Regina’s own voice is present in her narrative. It is likely that while she would have been able to communicate major events and circumstances, many of the details and much of the interpretation contained in the narrative would have been Muhlenberg’s.⁵ Nonetheless, it is important to examine Regina’s story because her narrative gained prominence in the American Lutheran church during the late nineteenth century and

⁴ Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 89.

⁵ Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 89.

thereby continued to influence perceptions of Native Americans and the experience of captivity. Unlike Mary Jemison, who sought to increase understanding of Native American culture, or Barbara Leininger, who desired to share information about other captives, Regina Leininger's role would be to reassure European Americans that if properly trained, their children would maintain Christian values even in the face of extreme hardship.

As one would expect, the beginning of Regina Leininger's narrative closely paralleled that of her sister Barbara's, relating the events preceding their capture and the beginning of their flight west. Regina's version did not contain many of the details that Barbara's narrative did, such as the specific number of captives taken or the number of days that the group traveled on their journey. However, the lack of details should perhaps not be surprising given that Regina lived in captivity nearly twice as long as her sister did and was recalling events from her childhood.

Regina stated that after traveling "about four hundred English miles," she and Barbara were separated. Regina, along with "a two-year-old child," continued on for "more than one hundred miles" before eventually reaching their final destination. Unlike Barbara, Regina did not give the name of the Indian village where she settled, or the name of the tribe who eventually adopted her, although it is likely that she was also adopted into the Delaware tribe. We are only told that she, along with the child, was given to "an old ill-tempered Indian squaw," in order to serve as "her slave for life."⁶

⁶ Muhlenberg, "Regina, the German Captive," 84.

Although the Indian woman who adopted Regina and the young child had one son, Muhlenberg wrote that the son often would leave the village for a week or more, and therefore “neglected (to provide for) his mother.”⁷ As a result, Regina was responsible for the welfare of both the older woman and the young captive child, and feared that if she failed to live up to the woman’s expectations, she would be “put to death.”⁸ Like Barbara, Regina stated that food and provisions were “very scant,” and she often resorted to “wild roots, e.g. artichokes, garlic, etc,” and gathered “the tender bark of trees and vegetables to preserve the family alive.” Regina supplemented the food supply with “all kinds of living creatures, such as wild rats, field mice, and other animals which she was able to capture.”⁹

Despite Muhlenberg’s depiction of the situation, it is likely that Regina and the young child were adopted by the older Indian woman rather than enslaved by her. The fact that the Indian woman had no family beyond her single son suggests that Barbara and the child were adopted to fill the place of other family members who passed away as the result of war or disease. It is curious that Muhlenberg even labeled Regina and the young child as “slaves,” because earlier in the narrative he acknowledged that “it is the custom among these people, if perchance parents are deprived of their children in war, that they are replaced by captives taken by them.”¹⁰ His presentation of the captives as slaves rather than as adopted family members served to cast the Indians as villains and eliminated the need to question how

⁷ Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 85.

⁸ Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 85.

⁹ Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 85.

¹⁰ Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 84.

Regina might have felt about leaving her Native American family after living with them for nine years.

It is also significant that Muhlenberg wrote that Regina worked to gather food and firewood when the “worthless” son was not at home. Either Muhlenberg purposely sought to perpetuate the image of Indian men as lazy or he was truly ignorant of how European and Native American gender roles differed.¹¹ It is unlikely that Regina would claim that her work load resulted from the son’s absence, as she surely would have learned enough about Native American society in her nine years with the tribe to recognize that she was laboring in the same tasks that other women were. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that the son traveled so often and for such extended periods because he was a member of either a hunting or war party. Presumably Regina would not have labeled the son as “worthless” but would have viewed him as fulfilling the duties expected of him.

For nine years, Regina lived with the Native Americans in western Pennsylvania. Muhlenberg related that initially, Regina was “naturally benumbed” and “could not do more than preserve an animal existence.”¹² As one would imagine, Regina blamed her condition on her long journey from home, “the deprivation of all the necessaries and comforts at the hands of the savages,” and her constant fear and dread of this “miserable mode of existence.”¹³ Nonetheless, Regina found time to reflect on “the prayers, the passages of Scripture and the

¹¹ Derounian-Stodola, *The Indian Captivity Narrative*, 64. Derounian-Stodola argues that the common portrayal of Native American men as lazy was used by white to justify seizing Indian lands.

¹² Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 85.

¹³ Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 85.

sacred hymns which...became her chief delight.”¹⁴ Regina stated that the Word of God “gradually expanded into life, and in her tribulation brought peace, rest and comfort to her life.”¹⁵ According to Muhlenberg, Regina’s focus on her religion eventually allowed her to overcome her trauma, and she apparently spent considerable time “on bended knees, under the trees...with the child beside her, uniting in prayer.” Muhlenberg seems oblivious to the contradiction that presents itself in his portrayal of Regina both slaving away to survive and enjoying enough free time to engage in lengthy prayers in the forest.

Muhlenberg treatment of religion in Regina’s narrative is particularly interesting when compared to other captivity narratives. According to Muhlenberg, it was only during Regina’s captivity that “divine truths were developed in her soul as a seed which begins to grow.” As Muhlenberg saw it, life with Indians and their “miserable mode of living” served as “a good assistant and means of restraint to curb the sinful flesh and its growing desires.”¹⁶ This is a notable departure from most other captivity narratives published in the mid-eighteenth century, which appeared predominantly as anti-Indian propaganda and rarely reflected religious expression. Although at times Regina’s narrative resembles more closely the early captivity narratives that did revolve around providence and divine intervention, it does not fit neatly into this category either. Early captivity narratives often viewed Indian captivity as divine punishment for wrongdoing, and surviving ones captivity

¹⁴ Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 85.

¹⁵ Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 86.

¹⁶ Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 86.

proved a return to providential favor.¹⁷ While many subjects in early captivity narratives credited their return home or their captors' demise to God's will, Regina's narrative presented a different scenario. Muhlenberg never suggested that the child Regina was guilty of any backsliding, nor that the Indians' defeat was necessarily God's will. Instead, Muhlenberg proposed that Regina was not truly a Christian until after her capture and residence with the Indians, when the "seed" of Christian truth that her parents had taught her began "to grow."¹⁸

Following Colonel Bouquet's victory in 1764, the Native Americans took Regina and the young girl who had lived with her throughout their captivity to Fort Pitt, where she joined a large group of captives who were to be returned to their homes on the Pennsylvania frontier. The group proceeded eastward to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where a notice placed in the paper invited all who had family members or friends captured by Indians to come "and claim their own."¹⁹ Regina's mother and brother heard news of Bouquet's victory and traveled to Carlisle in hopes of finding Regina among the reclaimed captives, but were sorely disappointed when they could find no one who resembled Regina in the crowd. It was only when Regina's mother heard Regina repeating the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and singing her favorite hymns in German that she recognized her daughter. Muhlenberg explained that Regina's mother was otherwise unable to identify her daughter, because Regina "was more than eighteen years old, fully grown to womanhood,

¹⁷ Derounian-Stodola, *The Indian Captivity Narrative*, 18-24.

¹⁸ Muhlenberg, "Regina, the German Captive," 85.

¹⁹ Muhlenberg, "Regina, the German Captive," 87.

stout, with the bearing of an Indian and speaking the language of the savages.”²⁰

This admission is reminiscent of Barbara’s return to colonial society, when the white men who rowed across the river to collect Barbara and her fellow escapees were initially unconvinced that they are not Indians. Nonetheless, happily reunited, Regina and her mother “fell upon each other’s neck shedding tears of joy.”²¹ The young girl who had been with Regina since their capture returned home with her as well, when “no one could be found who recognized her as their own child.”²²

Although Barbara and Regina Leininger’s stories have much in common, the sisters ultimately reacted to captivity in drastically different ways. Whereas Barbara attempted her first escape within days of being captured and fixated on escape until she successfully achieved it, there is no indication that Regina ever considered running away. Part of the reason Regina never attempted an escape could have been her attachment to the other young captive child, who lived with her throughout their captivity. The child “clung to Regina and looked to her for comfort,” and the two remained together even after Regina reunited with her mother, as the child “was not willing to leave her foster mother and clung affectionately to Regina so that she could not be kept back.”²³ Assuming that Regina felt the same attachment to this young girl that the child obviously felt toward her, Regina would have not wanted to leave her behind but also would have recognized that her chance of escape was slim if the child accompanied her. It is also possible that Regina did not consider running away because she did not have a network of peers with whom to plan such

²⁰ Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 87.

²¹ Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 88.

²² Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 88.

²³ Muhlenberg, “Regina, the German Captive,” 88.

an attempt. For Barbara, the eventual escape only became realistic after a small group combined their resources and knowledge, which allowed them to successfully navigate the forest and survive the two weeks it took them to reach Fort Pitt. A third possibility is simply that Regina assimilated into the tribe more thoroughly than her older sister did and did not harbor a strong desire to return home again.

Overall, Regina Leininger's narrative is as interesting for what it does not contain as for what it does. Missing from her account are the omnipresent scenes of torture and violence that appeared in nearly all other captivity narratives published during this time period and largely defined the narrative genre of the eighteenth century.²⁴ Aside from her initial description of the attack in which she was taken captive, Regina did not mention a single other violent event throughout her narrative. This is remarkable, because even Mary Jemison, for all of her attempts to meld the Indian into a more sympathetic character, described prisoners of war being tormented and burned alive. The lack of any sensationalized accounts of Indian violence hints that Regina either lived in a particularly peaceful tribe or was protecting the image of her adopted family.²⁵ For his part, Muhlenberg, who appears less interested in publishing Regina's story for the masses than in using it for an exciting Sunday school lesson, seemed disinclined to sensationalize her story. Muhlenberg's story showed considerably more restraint than many other narratives published at the time. Although his disdain for the Native Americans was evident as he referred to the Indian woman as an "old hag" and dismissed her son as

²⁴ Derounian-Stodola, *The Indian Captivity Narrative*, 23-6.

²⁵ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 165; and Muhlenberg, "Regina, the German Captive," 83.

“worthless,” Muhlenberg refrained from branding the Indians “devils” or “bloodthirsty.”

Regina Leininger’s role as a cultural intermediary is less overt than either Mary Jemison’s or Barbara Leininger’s. Regina shared (or Muhlenberg recorded) relatively little information about Native American customs or culture, either positive or negative, and did not attempt to explain those she did mention. Nonetheless, Regina’s narrative served as a counterweight to the anti-Indian propaganda that flourished during the Seven Years’ War by presenting Native Americans in a more prosaic light.

The lack of violence and bloodshed in Regina’s narrative challenged the common perceptions of Native Americans as “savages” that abounded in captivity narratives of her day. In doing so, Regina not only rejected the negative portrayals that painted all Indians in the same light, but offered an alternative vision of the Indian as neither good nor bad. Furthermore, Regina served in some degree to calm fears among European Americans that white captives would inevitably become “Indianized.” Although she gained the “bearing of an Indian” and relied on “the language of the savages,” Regina also remained fundamentally a Christian woman even after nine years of life within Native American society. To those reading Regina’s narrative, this would suggest that Indian lifestyles and Christianity were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Indeed, Muhlenberg went so far as to suggest that it was not captivity alone but the Indian “mode of living” that allowed Regina’s faith to blossom. While it would be a stretch to claim that Regina Leininger’s narrative served as a call for tolerance towards Native Americans, it did offer a more

moderate view of Indians that the vast majority of captivity narratives published during the eighteenth century.

Although it is possible to find traces of Regina's influence in Muhlenberg's words, even within the lines of her own narrative Regina's voice remains elusive. Unlike her sister Barbara or Mary Jemison, who were able to dictate their experiences in their native tongue, Regina was faced with language barriers that proved largely insurmountable. As a result, Regina's role as a cultural intermediary between Native American and white society can only be caught in glimpses and the full impact of her experience remains harder to assess than that of Barbara Leininger or Mary Jemison.

Chapter 5

Those In-Between: Captives as Cultural Intermediaries

The narratives of Mary Jemison, Barbara Leininger and Regina Leininger provide a microcosm of the lives of female captives taken during the Seven Years' War in Pennsylvania. The similarities between these three young women are striking, as are the differences in how they adapted to Indian culture. All three women were captured from their homes on the Pennsylvania frontier in the year 1755, shortly after the outbreak of the Seven Years' War and the signing of the Albany treaty. However, each experienced a different outcome to her captivity. Jemison successfully assimilated into her adopted Seneca tribe and remained with them throughout the remainder of her life, marrying and raising her children as members of the Seneca nation. Barbara Leininger bided her time within the Delaware tribe, plotting her escape and eventually managing to successfully make her way back east to Philadelphia. Regina Leininger, despite her long stay with the Delaware, clung to her German Lutheran background and returned to her home at the close of the Seven Years War.

As these narratives reflect, Pennsylvanians living on the frontier were far more vulnerable to attacks and raids than those who resided in the established towns in the east. In the decades leading up to the Seven Years' War, Pennsylvania saw a marked increase in the number of non-English and non-Quaker immigrants settling in the colony. Between 1727 and 1739, approximately 15,000 German and 25,000 Irish immigrants docked in Philadelphia and Delaware ports.¹ Many of these

¹ Camenzind, "From the Holy Experiment to the Paxton Boys," 173.

immigrants eventually settled on the Pennsylvania frontier, where they could find available farmland but where they also faced the risks that came with frontier living. Mary Jemison, Barbara Leininger, and Regina Leininger were all the daughters of recent immigrants. Mary Jemison's parents were Scottish-Irish immigrants who had arrived in the country in 1742 or 1743 and settled in western Pennsylvania.² Barbara and Regina Leininger were the children of German immigrants who also came to America around 1742 and moved to the interior of Pennsylvania, approximately one hundred miles west of Philadelphia.³

The migration of recent immigrants from the eastern cities to the western frontier was encouraged by provincial officials who sought to create a buffer zone between the bustling cities and their Native American neighbors. Concerned about attacks from the west, Pennsylvania officials looked to the influx of German and Irish immigrants, stereotypically considered unkempt and prone to violence, to shield the wealthy inhabitants of the east.⁴ For captives taken during the Seven Years' War, this meant that they could hope for little support from the Pennsylvania government, which largely overlooked frontier defense. The vast majority of captives were poor, already looked down upon by their established English neighbors in the east, and residing in a largely unfamiliar territory. Therefore, when Indian raiders killed over 1,500 settlers and captured an additional 1,000 along the Pennsylvania and Virginia frontiers in the 1750s, the inhabitants of the frontier relied mainly on one another for protection and rallied together to defend their land and family. Krista Camenzind

² Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 130.

³ Muhlenberg, "Regina, the German Captive," 82.

⁴ Camenzind, "From the Holy Experiment to the Paxton Boys," 232-3.

has suggested that the violence that swept the Pennsylvania frontier during the Seven Years' War destabilized the patriarchy of the backcountry because it "interrupted men's abilities to farm, to control their land and the labor of their dependents, and to protect their dependents from an outside threat."⁵ Thus, while scores of captive women and children discovered the more egalitarian and matrilineal structure of Native American society, white men scrambled to reassert their traditional authority.

One of the ways that men sought to reaffirm their power was through the publication of anti-Indian and anti-French captivity narratives that painted Native Americans as dark-skinned, savage "others" and cast women as defenseless victims who required male protection. Captivity narratives that espoused anti-Indian sentiments were certainly not a new development in America, but eighteenth century narratives took on an increasingly racist tone rarely seen in earlier works.⁶ The new racial ideology that emerged in the eighteenth century established race as a permanent and unchanging trait located in the physical body. Prior to this, European Americans understood race as the result of climate, bodily humors, religion, or "civility," all of which could theoretically be altered under the proper conditions.⁷

This new understanding of racial difference, which grew increasingly accepted throughout the eighteenth century, had profound implications for both Native American and European American society. However, Native Americans bore the brunt of the new racial ideology as whites increasingly ceased to differentiate

⁵ Camenzind, "From the Holy Experiment to the Paxton Boys," 251.

⁶ Derounian-Stodola, *The Indian Captivity Narrative*, 22-3.

⁷ Camenzind, "From the Holy Experiment to the Paxton Boys," 14-6.

between peaceful Indians and enemies.⁸ The Paxton Boys' violent outburst in 1763, which left twenty peaceful Indians dead, is perhaps the most well-known example of the deadly consequences associated with the new racial ideology taking hold in America. As Pennsylvanians began to conceptualize race as a stable characteristic, they no longer had to fear captives completely losing their whiteness as they became "Indianized."⁹ This is not to propose that general fear of captivity decreased, but the idea that white captives could quite literally transform into Indians began to disintegrate, thereby suggesting that white captives could always be re-established into white society.

This new approach to racial identity can be seen in Mary Jemison, Barbara Leininger, and Regina Leininger's narratives. Barbara and Regina's narratives were recorded in the mid-eighteenth century, when understandings of race were changing but race had not yet been uniformly accepted as a stable property. In both stories, upon returning to white society, the women were initially thought to be Native American because of their dress and stature. Barbara and her cohorts had to work to convince the soldiers in Fort Pitt that they were in fact white, while Regina's own mother could not identify her daughter because Regina had acquired "the bearing of an Indian." Both narratives also described the women being given European clothing immediately after their reintroduction to white society. With the outside alterations to their appearance, the women could once again be easily identified as white.¹⁰

⁸ Camenzind, "From the Holy Experiment to the Paxton Boys," 8-13.

⁹ Namias, *White Captives*, 150-2.

¹⁰ Leininger, "Narrative," 122; and Muhlenberg, "Regina, the German Captive," 87.

By the time Mary Jemison's narrative appeared in 1824, however, we see none of this racial ambiguity. Mary Jemison was undisputedly "the white woman," despite the fact that she was the most acculturated of these three women and considered herself more Indian than white. Regardless of her clothing, habits, or beliefs, in Seaver's eyes and in those of his nineteenth century readers, Jemison always had been and forever would be white.¹¹

European Americans were not alone in their struggles to define what separated them from their Native American neighbors. Native Americans in the eighteenth century were also preoccupied with understanding if and how they were inherently different from the European settlers invading their lands. Unlike European American culture, Indian culture was implicitly inclusive. The widespread practice of adopting war captives rested on the assumption that a captive was capable of shedding their former identity and adopting an entirely new one through undergoing a series of rituals and residing in their new community.¹² Therefore, suggesting that Native Americans would accept the idea of race as a fixed and unalterable trait seems counterintuitive. Nonetheless, Native Americans were in fact the first to refer to Europeans uniformly as "whites" and themselves as "red."¹³ Further evidence for this shift in the understanding of racial differences between Indians and whites appears in the spiritual renewal movements that sprang up throughout the Iroquois

¹¹ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 124-6.

¹² Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 200-2.

¹³ Camenzind, "From the Holy Experiment to the Paxton Boys," 17.

world in the mid-eighteenth century and advocated that Indians reject European influences and return to their traditional ways.¹⁴

As captivity narratives worked to establish a racial “other,” they also raised questions about gender and sexuality. Women undoubtedly experienced captivity in gendered ways. Within European American society, women were defined by their roles as wives, mothers, and daughters. When torn from their homes, often in attacks that left their spouse, father, or children dead, and displaced from the familial structures that encompassed their world, women were forced to become self-reliant and form a new identity in a foreign world. While some narratives reinforced the patriarchal structure of European American society by depicting stories that emphasized the vulnerability of women and children on the frontier and established the need for male protectors, others challenged patriarchy by highlighting women’s bravery and resourcefulness.

The fact that Indians targeted women and children as captives to replace members of the tribe lost to war or disease throughout the Seven Years’ War provided ample fodder for narratives that portrayed women in dangerous situations without the benefit of a male protector.¹⁵ Eighteenth century captivity narratives, particularly those published around the time of the Seven Years’ War, are notable for their frequent inclusion of graphically violent scenes depicting women’s physical victimization.¹⁶ However, while in some ways used to establish a role for the male defender, captivity narratives also at times questioned the need for male protectors.

¹⁴ Wallace, *Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*, 239.

¹⁵ Namias, *White Captives*, 69-70.

¹⁶ Derounian-Stodola, *The Indian Captivity Narrative*, 22-3.

Barbara Leininger and Marie LeRoy, captured in a raid that left their supposed protectors dead, eventually took matters into their own hands, coordinating and executing an escape plan. Although they were accompanied by two male captives, nothing in their narratives give the impression that the two women relied on the men. They appear to have done most of the planning and procured the necessary provisions for the journey.¹⁷ Likewise, in Mary Jemison's narrative, Jemison turned to her sister for help when she needed protection from the white man attempting to return her to colonial society.¹⁸ While these narratives at times show vulnerable women, they also show resourceful women who relied on their own abilities and on one another to survive.

Captives challenged white gender expectations in other ways as well. Perhaps the best example of a captive challenging white gender expectations is Mary Jemison. Although Jemison never returned to white society after her adoption into the Seneca tribe, her later years were spent living on land surrounded by white farmers.¹⁹ Therefore, Jemison regained close contact with white society without leaving her adoptive culture. Jemison's lifestyle and substantial property holdings had the potential to open the eyes of frontier women to new possibilities and perhaps made local white men uneasy.

Mary Jemison adopted many of the customs that gave women more power in Iroquois society. Her husband lived with her in the house that she owned, and white farmers rented and cultivated her land. Jemison adhered to the matrilineal tradition

¹⁷ Leininger, "Narrative," 118-22.

¹⁸ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 156-8.

¹⁹ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 207-10.

of giving her children her own last name rather than her husband's name. Although she opted for traditional English names, the fact that Jemison also adopted the matrilineal structure of Iroquois society and assigned the children her last name and lineage is significant.²⁰ While it is unlikely that Jemison's actions prompted any frontier women to demand that they share ownership of family land or to rename their children, she did represent an alternative understanding of how society could be structured.

It is interesting to consider the widespread popularity of Jemison's narrative when it was published in 1824. Part of Jemison's appeal to nineteenth century America might have simply reflected a growing fascination with Native culture and society. As Indian removal became a heated issue in national politics and Native Americans were increasingly distanced from the heavily populated eastern states, white Americans began to view the disappearing Indians with a certain romanticized nostalgia. Changes within white society itself could also explain the popularity of Jemison's narrative. The early nineteenth century witnessed a burgeoning social reform movement, in which women, especially white, middle-class women, tackled a variety of social problems. Operating under the belief that women could exert a virtuous influence on a corrupt world, these women reformers pushed the boundaries of acceptable public activity and in the process challenged assumptions about gender, class, and race.²¹ To these women, Jemison's story and life choices held a certain relevance to their own lives.

²⁰ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 119-20.

²¹ Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women in Antebellum Reform* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2000), ix.

Although Native American society was more egalitarian than European society, it held distinct gender roles as well. Captivity narratives demonstrated that when female captives were taken into Native American tribes, they performed jobs and tasks that were traditionally viewed as feminine work. Mary Jemison spoke at length about her duties within the tribe, and although Barbara and Regina both referred to themselves as “slaves” at different points in their narratives, they were laboring within traditional gender roles and alongside other women. In contrast to farms on the frontier, where most women labored alone or alongside their husbands, the cooperative work practices in Native American society offered women a chance to develop and maintain a distinct female community.²²

Once female captives adopted into the tribe reached puberty, they were free to marry and usually had a significant degree of freedom in choosing their mate. Mary Jemison detailed her two marriages extensively, both of which appeared to be companionate and loving.²³ Neither Barbara nor Regina Leininger spoke of potential marriages amongst the Indians, which is interesting (albeit not entirely surprising), considering that both of them would have reached marriageable age while living with the tribe. Barbara’s failure to mention marriage is perhaps to be expected, given that she never appeared to seriously entertain the idea of remaining with the Indians and spent most of her four years with the Indians awaiting her chance to flee. However, it is intriguing to ponder whether Regina Leininger would have married had she not been redeemed by Colonel Bouquet. Considering the degree of her acculturation, it is entirely likely that Regina would have eventually wed.

²² Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 148-9.

²³ Seaver, *A Narrative in the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 140-4, 156-8.

Although her narrative contained no information that would suggest Regina married, it is possible she had a husband when she was redeemed by Colonel Bouquet. Accounts of the Bouquet expedition indicate that many female captives had to be restrained in order to prevent them from running away to rejoin their Native American husbands.²⁴ If Regina had considered marrying while in the tribe, or left a husband and child behind, she likely would not have openly discussed it after returning to white society for fear of being ostracized. As Regina certainly would have realized, in a society where women's livelihoods were largely dependent on marriage, rumors of a previous sexual union with an Indian could easily ruin future prospects. It appears that Regina never married after returning to white society, which suggests that if nothing else, gossip might have circulated about a previous relationship. However, it is difficult to determine if this was the case with any degree of certainty.

While scholars have explored how captivity and inter-group conflict shaped concepts of gender and race in white society, the question of how captives shaped Native American society has been unexamined. The role of captives as cultural intermediaries has not received much attention in the field, as most scholars focus on how white captives shared understandings of Native American culture with white society. This is largely because the best sources available for understanding captivity are the narratives published by returned captives and aimed at a white audience, which lend themselves to explaining how captivity influenced white culture. However, to fully understand how Native American cultures were changing

²⁴ Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 193-4.

in the eighteenth century, we have to look beyond how the practice of taking war captives impacted captives to how it ultimately impacted the captors themselves.

Given the sheer numbers of captives taken during the Seven Years' War, it is impossible to ignore the implications captivity held for Indian society. Prior to European settlement in America, Native Americans would have taken captives from neighboring tribes who usually held similar beliefs and customs to their own culture. However, once Indians began taking captives primarily from the ranks of the European Americans, they faced the task of assimilating people with beliefs and customs very different from their own. By nearly all accounts, the Native Americans succeeded admirably in converting white captives to their own way of life, especially if they were young.²⁵ But as Native American populations continued to decline as the result of warfare and Old World disease, their own culture weakened and the number of captives needed to replenish the population simultaneously increased.²⁶

As white captives learned to navigate their way through Native American culture, they were exposed to new ways of understanding the world and structuring society. Nearly all aspects of life introduced new features, from political and power structures, religious beliefs, social customs, and farming techniques to the clothing worn and food consumed everyday. However, white captives also carried with them ideas, expectations, and assumptions that shaped their worldview and inevitably gave Native Americans an alternative way to understand their world.

In their narratives, both Mary Jemison and Barbara Leininger discussed relationships that they had with other white captives. Barbara's narrative in

²⁵ Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 193-7.

²⁶ Axtell, *European and the Indian*, 248-50.

particular gives a sense of the number of captives living within close proximity to one another, as she listed detailed information about forty-seven captives she met while living with the Indians in addition to the captives she escaped with. The details that Barbara knew about the captives listed in her narrative – other family members' names, the dates they were captured, where they came from – indicates that she had more than just a single quick contact with them.²⁷ The fact that Barbara never adapted to Native American culture is very likely a consequence of her continuous contact with other whites. If there were sufficient numbers of white captives residing in one area to form their own small community, they would have had little motivation to assimilate into the larger Native American society around them.

The diminishing power of women in Iroquoian society can be attributed not only to encroaching white settlements that steadily eroded Iroquois land and evangelizing missionaries who sought to convert Native Americans to Christian ways, but to the hundreds of white captives adopted into Indian families and residing in their midst. Reawakening movements such as Handsome Lake's could successfully codify the disempowerment of women in the early nineteenth century only because Native American culture had been primed to accept patriarchal social structures throughout the eighteenth century.

The narratives of Mary Jemison, Barbara Leininger, and Regina Leininger create a vivid and insightful portrayal of captivity in Pennsylvania during the Seven Years' War. Their stories provide a nuanced depiction of how captives acted as cultural intermediaries between Native American and European American society.

²⁷ Leininger, "Narrative," 123-5.

These women's narratives combine to reveal how both Native American and colonial ideas and understandings of gender and race were impacted through the captivity experience, and how frontiers and captives in early America functioned to profoundly adapt and create both Indian and colonial society.

Conclusion

Mary Jemison, Barbara Leininger, and Regina Leininger's stories linger in popular culture even today. Their narratives, reinterpreted and bereft of torture scenes, have largely fallen into the world of children's literature under the heading of "historical fiction." The longevity of these stories reflects the intrigue that surrounds those who are able to transcend cultural boundaries and become the "other" even in our present day.

Mary Jemison's narrative, by far the most popular of the three in its original edition, has also seen the most revisions and adaptations. The first revision of Jemison's narrative appeared only a few short years after the original in 1824. When James Seaver passed away in 1827, his younger brother William published a revised version of Mary Jemison's story, complete with a detailed account of Jemison's alleged conversation from a "pagan" back to a Christian.¹ Jemison's narrative was edited again in the mid-nineteenth century by Charles Vail and Arthur Parker, scholars who attempted to find the factual basis of the narrative while preserving Jemison's place in legend. In the twentieth century, Jemison's story reemerged in libraries and book stores around the country as Lois Lenski's book *Indian Captive: The Story of Mary Jemison*. Lenski's popular reinterpretation eventually garnered twenty printings and won the celebrated Newberry Honor Book Award in 1942.²

¹ Namias, *White Captives*, 157

² Namias, *White Captives*, 165-7.

Barbara Leininger's narrative remained relatively untouched until recently. Originally published in German after her escape in 1759, the English edition of Leininger's narrative only appeared in the 1906 edition of the Pennsylvania German Society's journal "Proceedings." Despite its long absence from print, Leininger's story was recently revamped by home school author Tracy Craven Leininger, who claims Barbara and Regina Leininger as her ancestors. Published in 2003, the fictional *Alone, Yet Not Alone: the Story of Barbara and Regina Leininger*, transformed Leininger's story from a captivity narrative to a evangelical tale intended to persuade children and parents that it was due to her faith in God that Barbara was able escape her "darkest hour."³

Although Regina Leininger's story had somewhat of a religious perspective in Muhlenberg's first recording in 1765, later versions downplayed her acculturated life and exaggerated the role of religion in Regina's eventual redemption. The first adaptation and English translation of Regina's narrative appeared in 1860, under the title *Regina, The German Captive*. Written by Reuben Weiser as an evangelical text for Lutheran Sabbath schools, *Regina the German Captive* bore little resemblance to the original narrative. Weiser acknowledged that he had "sometimes drawn upon my imagination, "but claimed the major events were based on truth. However, as Weiser's imaginative touches included significant alterations to the story, such as killing Barbara in the opening scene, his story ultimately can not be taken as anything but fiction. The most recent incarnation of Leininger's narrative "*I Am Regina*," was published in 2001 by Sally Kahn, an author of juvenile fiction. Kahn's

³ The American Vision. *Alone, Yet not Alone*. <http://www.americanvision.com> (Accessed February 9, 2008.)

interpretation focused less on Regina's religion and instead attempted to describe her life after she was adopted. Although also a work of fiction that goes far beyond the original narrative, Kahn's adaptation perhaps still managed to move closer to truth than Weiser's version.⁴

Over two hundred years after these three women were captured from the frontier of central Pennsylvania, their stories continue to intrigue readers. It may be impossible to ever truly understand how Mary Jemison, Barbara Leininger, and Regina Leininger perceived their experiences in captivity and viewed their role as cultural intermediaries. However, their narratives allow us a glimpse of life on the early American frontier and an inkling of how captivity shaped both white and Native American culture.

⁴ *I Am Regina*. <http://www.amazon.com>. (Accessed February 9, 2008.)

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