

War, Moravians and Neolin

- It has been said that many Christians are distressed when teachers of American history omit its religious elements. However, a good example of the union of American and Christian history comes from the close of the French (British) and Indian War, 1754-1763, and how it impacted our local history and religious commitment.

- This seven year war, triggered by George Washington, was fought by the British to expel the French troops and fur traders, and their Native American allies, from the area below the Great Lakes extending to Fort Pitt. It ended with the Treaty of Paris, 1763, which brought forth great displeasure for Native Americans over the British victory, and the postwar policies that British Gen. Jeffrey Amherst imposed upon them. The instigator of the hostile reaction was the Ottawa chief named Pontiac. What he began in 1763 is called Pontiac's War. .

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- In 1758 the British first promised that white settlers would not go westward into tribal land. In 1763 (the 250th anniversary was October, 2013) King George III issued a Royal Proclamation that the demarcation line was determined by whether the headwaters of the rivers flowed on the east or west side of the Appalachian mountains. White settlers, like our benefactor William Lea, crossed the mountain and staked their claims in Indian territory. The Native Americans wanted their land west of the mountain free and clear in order to farm, to hunt for game and to conduct a lucrative fur trade.

- After the British had expelled the French, the Indians no longer received their compensation of guns, tobacco and alcohol as French allies. Gen. Amherst denied this practice, to cut costs, to stop this form of bribery, and to restrict the sale of gunpowder. The Indians were insulted. A spirit of rebellion against the British was emerging among the tribes. A new spirit of faith was emerging in the lives of Indians and white Christians.

- As the French and Indian War began here, the forms of worship in England and in the colonies were seen to be cold and formal. In the colonies The Great Awakening movement was started to make evangelical worship, hymns and prayer ring with fervor, emotion and to build intimacy with God. Three leaders were George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley. Their work greatly influenced Christian worship.

- A spiritual movement had been founded in the 15th century by John Huss, who protested the practices of the Catholic Church. His later followers took the name Moravians in the 18th century and this Protestant church soon spread worldwide. In this country, they stressed missionary outreach, and in particular, to Native Americans to convert them to Christianity. The first Moravian congregation served the Mohicans in New York. Of local interest, in 1770, three local Indian chiefs requested the Moravians to establish a church in the Beaver Valley. The site chosen was named Frieden-

stadt, or City of Peace, north of Wampum Village, by today's Rt. 18 at the corner of Penndale Road. The church was transferred beside the Tuscarawas River in Ohio in 1773.

- In 1761, Neolin, a Native American, was known as the Delaware Prophet, who appreciated Christianity and perhaps even The Great Awakening movement. No doubt he was touched by the Moravian missionaries. He began to preach prophetically that the "Master of Life" told him that the way to Heaven was to reject European practices and return to traditional native ways. He said that diseases and food shortages were the signs of the Master's displeasure, so repent and turn from alcohol and resume monogamous marriage and sexual morality. One of Neolin's disciples was Pontiac, the Ottawa chief, who accepted Neolin's message. Pontiac could seek salvation except that it had to include warfare to drive the British Army out of their tribal lands.

- Pontiac repeated Neolin's teachings to the Indian confederacy, and in May 1763, they initiated almost simultaneous attacks on British forts. They began with Ft. Detroit, and then locally against Forts Presque Isle, Le Boeuf, and Venango, which were destroyed. Fort Pitt was hit in June, 1763 and placed under siege into July. Forts Ligonier and Bedford were hit but not destroyed. Gen. Amherst ordered that captured Indians be put to death, even by sending blankets infected with small pox to infect the tribes. Col Henry Bouquet came from Lancaster with reinforcements., They met at the Battle of Bushy Run on August 5, where Bouquet defeated the Indians. This ended the siege of Fort Pitt. It was not until July, 1766 that Pontiac and the British agreed to end the Pontiac's War.

- The ministry of the Moravians was not without some controversy by whites and Indians who felt it improper that Moravians sought to convert native Indians to Christianity. Some were converted and they became known as Moravian Indians. But as the victims of prejudice, the Moravians were told to move westward or be resettled at Fort Pitt. Most of them did move and they began three villages, one being Gnadenhutten, Ohio.

- A local tragedy occurred in 1782 when a party of Delaware Indians attacked the home of Robert Wallace in Florence, Pa. Robert's wife Mary and three children were abducted and she was murdered at Hookstown, Beaver County. Obadiah Holmes, Jr. and 90 local militiamen, led by Capt. David Williamson from Washington County, went to the Moravian village of Gnadenhutten, Ohio intent to kill all they suspected were guilty of murder. When Holmes and 16 militiamen saw the Moravian Indian villagers, their compassion would not allow them to kill anyone. They returned to Fort Pitt, but 96 Moravian Indians were massacred by the other militiamen. Obadiah and his wife Jane are buried in unmarked graves at Old St. Luke's Church and Burial Ground.

References: "The Crucible of War". Fred Anderson, Old St. Luke's archive, and various Internet web sites.