

# An Indian Battle at Rocky Springs?

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THERE PERSISTS in the annals of every community historical errors which are passed on by one writer to another, until the matter is accepted as fact.

Through Lancaster County histories, *Loudon's Narratives*<sup>1</sup> have been quoted to show the many massacres by Indians occurring during the days of the French and Indian War. This starts with an account of the attack on Rocky Springs. Now, whether Rupp<sup>2</sup> and Mombert<sup>3</sup> thought it referred to the local Springs is of course open to question, but later historians have assumed that it was the local Rocky Springs alluded to.<sup>4</sup> This is an error as the following facts will show.

Holding to Loudon's account, we learn that he mentions twenty-one points *west* of the Susquehanna, mostly in Perry, Cumberland and Franklin counties, where Indians massacres were perpetrated.

True, the Indians did make incursions east of the river, through the gaps in the South Mountains, coming close to Lancaster County at Paxtang, near Harrisburg; Quitipihilla and Swatara, near Lebanon; and Tulpehocken, near Reading.

The only direct invasion of Lancaster County (as at present constituted) occurred in Donegal Township, September 9, 1757, when a boy and girl were taken as captives. No account is given of a massacre there. All of the above mentioned places acted as a natural buffer region, which shielded Lancaster County from attack. Indeed, Donegal Township was so secure in the minds of many that they removed thereto for protection. According to the records of Donegal Church one William McDowell died there on September 12, 1759, aged 77 years, having fled from his home on the "Conecaeheague" in Cumberland (now Franklin) County

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<sup>1</sup> *Archibald Loudon's Narratives*, Carlisle, Pa., 1811.

<sup>2</sup> Rupp's *History of Lancaster and York Counties*, 1845, pp. 339 to 344.

<sup>3</sup> Mombert's *Authentic History of Lancaster County*, 1869, p. 171.

<sup>4</sup> Proceedings Lancaster County Historical Society, vol. 38, opp. p. 8; *History of St. James' Church*, Lancaster, Pa., p. 29. We question whether the local Springs were known as Rocky Springs in colonial times. The earliest record of the use of that name that we could find is shown in Bridgen's Atlas of 1864, marking the site as Michael Trissler's "Rocky Spring."

to the safety of Donegal Township, "when the settlement was obliged to fly by the barbarous Indian war."<sup>5</sup>

There were rumors in those days of threatened Indian attacks on our town, but fortunately in all cases they proved false. A report reached Maryland that Lancaster had been invaded and burned to the ground. Marylanders were ready to march to the relief of our town as word reached them that the report was false.

On December 1, 1755, Edward Shippen wrote to James Hamilton in Philadelphia, regarding an alarm at midnight the day previous, of a threatened Indian attack. After three hundred men had gathered in Penn Square, it was found how poorly equipped they were for such an eventuality, for among them there were but fifty guns and little ammunition. And this in a town noted for rifle makers. This was also a false report, but it proved the stimulus needed by the citizens to move them to construct a block house or stockade.

The following statement alone should settle the controversy as to the site of the Rocky Springs massacre: In the *History of Franklin County*, by Prof. J. Fraise Richard, 1887, pp. 10 and 11, appears a map showing the hamlet of Rocky Spring in Letterkenny township, a short distance north of Chambersburg. It was there on "March 29, 1757, the Indians made a breach at Rocky Springs, where one woman was killed and 11 taken prisoners."<sup>6</sup>

This was close to the scenes of other Indian raids, such as those at Chamber's Fort (Chambersburg), McDowell's Mill (Lemasters), etc.

As late as 1763, writing from Carlisle Colonel Henry Bouquet could say: "The road was nearly covered with women and children flying to Lancaster and Philadelphia."<sup>7</sup> This is another indication of the comparative safety of our county.

No, there wasn't an Indian massacre at or near Lancaster, but in the year just mentioned the Paxton Boys did massacre the hapless Indians who had been placed in the Lancaster jail for their own protection.

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<sup>5</sup> Rupp's, p. 345.

<sup>6</sup> Loudon's, p. 207.

<sup>7</sup> Rupp's, p. 345.