



Pontiac in council

Wars and Battles

Pontiac's Rebellion

1763-1766

The Indian tribes of the Ohio Valley were surprised and angered by the defeat of their French allies in the [French and Indian War](#); the natives were in possession of their homelands and had little feeling of loss during their association with Frenchmen.

When word arrived in the Ohio Valley that the tribes were expected to turn their loyalty to a new European monarch, [George III](#) of Britain, they were outraged.

Native anger was understandable and was rooted in several issues beyond their refusal to acknowledge defeat in the recent war:

- English dominance in North America meant the construction of new forts and the movement of new settlers into traditional Indian lands. The earlier French presence had been slight and the relationship often harmonious.
- British traders lacked the reputation for fairness in dealing with the Indians that had been the hallmark of the French. The natives had become dependent on European firearms, ammunition and other manufactured goods, and were now forced to deal with untrustworthy English partners.
- British arrogance was well-known among the Indians. The French in many instances had married native women and been adopted by the tribes. Few British followed that example and many expressed utter contempt for the natives' lifeways and worth as human beings. Tensions were further heightened when, in early 1763, Sir [Jeffrey Amherst](#), the new North American governor-general, announced that he would discontinue the practice of presenting annual gifts to the tribes, an event long honored by the French. The Indians were insulted by this snub, but also were angry to be denied the expected tools, blankets, guns and liquor.

The resulting widespread unhappiness presented a platform for a native visionary, who was known simply as the Delaware Prophet. He preached ardently for a return to traditional ways and for the rejection of contact with the British. This platform was soon adopted by the then undistinguished Ottawa chieftain, Pontiac (c.1720-1769), who was known primarily for his oratorical skills and as a supporter of the French in the recent war. His message found sympathetic ears among the Delaware, Seneca, Chippewa, Miami, Potawotomi and Huron, among others. The resulting conflict in the Ohio Valley has been labeled Pontiac's Rebellion or Pontiac's Conspiracy by non-Indians.



The chief held a war council with like-minded tribes in April 1763. A plot to take over [Fort Detroit](#) by subterfuge was foiled, but Pontiac led an attack against that installation in May and set up a siege. Later during the summer, a British force attempted to free the fort by launching a surprise attack against Pontiac's village. The plan was discovered and the attacking British soldiers suffered heavy casualties in the Battle of Bloody Run (July 31, 1763). Pontiac continued his unsuccessful efforts at Detroit into November.

To the east, another British bastion, Fort Pitt, was also the target of allied Indians. British relief forces under Colonel Henry Bouquet were en route to the besieged fort when they encountered a large Indian force. The resulting Battle of Bushy Run (August 5-6, 1763) was costly to the British, but they successfully preserved Fort Pitt.

Despite these two defeats, the allied tribes were highly successful during much of 1763. Eight British forts fell, which included major installations at Presque Isle, Sandusky and Michilimackinac. Fort Niagara saw no action during the uprising.

The British campaign in 1764 featured the efforts of two different armies:

1. Henry Bouquet conducted warfare against the Shawnee and Delaware in western Pennsylvania. His success enabled [Sir William Johnson](#) to negotiate a peace arrangement.
2. Colonel John Bradstreet was assigned to the Great Lakes region, where his efforts to conclude treaties with the resident tribes came to nothing.

After 1764, Pontiac's influence among the tribes waned rapidly. He made recruiting trips into the South and West but found few interested parties. In 1766, Johnson managed to conclude a general peace treaty in which Pontiac received a pardon. He lived quietly for several more years before being killed by a fellow Indian.

One of the prime results of Pontiac's Rebellion was the decision of British policymakers to issue the [Proclamation of 1763](#), a measure designed to shut down white settlement of the West until organizational reforms could be effected. American reaction to this measure was immediate and heated.

It is also important to note that most of the fighting against the Indians during this uprising was conducted by British regulars. The colonial soldiers had performed poorly during the French and Indian War (with a number of exceptions, including [Rogers Rangers](#)) and were purposely excluded by British commanders.

The terror generated on the frontier by the Indian attacks fostered much bitterness. A number of racial incidents occurred, including the brief appearance of the [Paxton Boys](#) in Pennsylvania.

Wars and Battles

Paxton Boys

1763-1764

The village of Paxton (Paxtang), a few miles east of [Harrisburg](#) in eastern Pennsylvania, became a hotbed of racial and political unrest during [Pontiac's Rebellion](#). Still part of the frontier in the 1760s, the area was populated by many rough-and-tumble Scots-Irish immigrants who had grown weary of the colonial assembly's inattention to their vulnerability to attack. Requests for soldiers — or guns, powder and lead at the very least — were ignored by the legislators, many of whom were Quakers with strong pacifist convictions.

A group of Paxton men took matters into their own hands in December 1763 and raided a small settlement of Conestoga Indians in Lancaster County. The frontiersmen's fury was misplaced, however, since those natives had long lived in peace with their neighbors and had not participated in any way in the current uprising. Six Indians were killed in the attack and 14 taken captive; all of the prisoners were murdered several weeks later.

News of these events prompted Governor John Penn to issue warrants for the arrest of the perpetrators, but sympathetic frontiersmen refused to assist in bringing the Paxton Boys to justice.

The malcontents next singled out a settlement of Moravian Indians who lived near the town of Bethlehem. Fortunately for these peaceful Christianized natives, they managed to flee from their homes for protection in [Philadelphia](#), which was then capital of Pennsylvania and the headquarters of a contingent of British soldiers. The Paxton Boys were outraged that the government would spend tax monies on protecting Indians but would provide nothing for the defense of its citizenry. The Moravian Indians remained in protective custody in Philadelphia for more than a year.

In January 1764, a group of Paxton Boys began a march on the capital; the number of participants has been estimated to be between 600 and 1,500. As the mob neared Philadelphia, panic reigned. The strange spectacle of pacifists arming themselves with muskets and rolling cannon into public squares was observed. Church bells tolled the alarm. A possible disaster was averted in early February, when [Benjamin Franklin](#) and other civic leaders ventured out to consult with the mob's leaders. An accommodation was reached in which the march was disbanded in return for the arrangement of a meeting between Paxton leaders and colonial officials. This airing of grievances occurred, but little was done for the plight of the frontiersmen.

The adventure of the Paxton Boys was important for two reasons. First, it was a measure of the hostility that had developed between frontiersman and Indian; many white settlers concluded during Pontiac's Rebellion that the races could not live together. Removal and extinction were the only solutions. Second, the march on Philadelphia was an early example of regional and social tension. Later American history would reflect further cases of the strain between the urban and rural, the haves versus the have-nots and the newcomers against the establishment.

Pontiac's Rebellion

▪ *Read the handout to answer the following questions.*

1. What issues made the Native people angry with the British?
2. Who was the Delaware Prophet and what did he preach?
3. Describe the Native battles during 1763. Where did they defeat the British?
Where did they lose?
4. Describe the British Campaign of 1764.
5. What was the prime result of Pontiac's Rebellion? How did the American's react?
6. Why didn't American colonial soldiers fight against Pontiac and his forces?
7. Name two reasons why the adventures of the Paxton Boys were important.
8. How did Chief Pontiac die?