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Sidelights on the Lochry Massacre

By Earl W. Crecraft, Akron, Ohio

A résumé of the story of the Lochry massacre must begin by way of introduction with some reference to the Revolutionary hero, George Rogers Clark. The capture of Vincennes in 1779 had spurred the British at Detroit as well as the Indians north of the Ohio, to greater efforts. It was for this reason—together with the need for greater forces—that we find Clark postponing a march against Detroit and preparing for exertions on a larger scale.

Major DePeyster subsequently became the new commandant at Detroit, succeeding Governor Hamilton, who had been captured at Vincennes. DePeyster was soon busily engaged in placating the Indians. He was drawing on his home government for greater funds and supplies. He was cultivating friendship with disaffected frontiersmen, and with the Tories—of which latter class he himself was one, having emigrated from New York State some time earlier.

He was rewarding such outlaw fighters as Simon and George Girty, Joseph Brant, Alexander McKee, and Mathew Elliot for their attacks on American settlements. In all these operations, DePeyster was hopeful of winning back the ground already lost to Clark, and of raising British prestige in the Northwest, and in the Mississippi Valley.

Clark, meanwhile, was also rallying or attempting to rally his resources. He was visiting various settlements along the Ohio, especially on the Kentucky side. He was corresponding with Washington and Jefferson; with Colonels John Gibson and David Brodhead, the latter being commandant at Fort Pitt. He made trips up and down the Ohio and even went to

Virginia to interview county lieutenants and other persons in higher places of authority.

Out of this situation emerges the figure of Colonel Archibald Lochry. This ill-fated leader came from Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. His neighbors had by action of their county council decided to join with Clark in his "expedition against the Indians." As county lieutenant of Westmoreland, Lochry became responsible for raising a force of three hundred men. When he and his forces finally left home, however, he had raised only 104 men, and the job itself had cost many weeks of effort and had involved many fatal delays.

Volunteers were loath to leave home. Most of them felt that they were needed to protect their own localities. The attempt to draft militia was a failure. When the men asked where their provisions were to be had, and asked about equipment, ammunition, guns, and reinforcements, they were answered with promises. They were promised land grants, and stores of food. They were promised clothing and equipment. They were promised an adequate defense of their homes while they were away, and so on. Promising was a typical condition of the times. In fact, the currency that was offered in payment for obligations was altogether promissory in character and the character of it very poor at that.

Clark was having the same experience as Lochry, although on a larger scale. From Fort Pitt he wrote to Jefferson that he was taking every step in his power to raise volunteers. "what number we shall get," he said, "I cant as yet Guess. . . . The disapointment of Seven Hundred men from Frederick, Berkly & Hampshire I am afraid is too great a Stroke to recover as in fact the greatest part of this country is in subordination to neither Pensylvania or Virg[a]."

Not until the first week in August, 1781, therefore, instead of the middle of June, did Clark with a small force of four hundred men, instead of the two thousand he had originally requested, leave Fort Pitt, and drop down to Wheeling ahead of Lochry.

At Wheeling, Clark expected Lochry's force to join him. There also he expected to add considerably to his own forces by enlisting more men for the expedition. Among those enlisting at this place was Charles Cracraft, who had already served with Colonel Brodhead in an excursion against the In-

dians. It is the story as told by Major Cracraft to his son William, and as put in writing in 1853 for the historian, Lyman C. Draper, that came into the possession of the writer of this paper several years ago and caused him to become interested in the Lochry expedition.

Parenthetically the writer should add that the name, Cracraft, has—like the name, Lochry—been spelled in diverse ways. The English spelling is Cracroft or sometimes Craycroft. In America, it has been and is now variously spelled as Cracraft, Craycraft, Creacraft, and Crecraft.

In the list of members of Lochry's command we find Captains Robert Orr, Samuel Shannon, William Campbell, and Thomas Stokely. In addition we find Lieutenant Isaac Anderson, whose journal of the expedition has been frequently consulted.

From the blockhouse in Westmoreland, where they started, the Lochry forces went by land to Fort Pitt; then by water to Wheeling. Slightly over one hundred men made the start, but considerably more than half of the number were destined never to return home.

Clark's stop at Wheeling was for five days longer than he had planned. His men were impatient with the delay and with the expedition itself. Many did not have a clear idea of the objective; and those who thought they saw it clearly, were not certain that anything would come of it, especially since they had already witnessed at first hand the disappointing results of the enlistments and militia drafts. With a restless body of men, therefore, Clark left Wheeling about the 9th of August, and moved further down the river, fearing to delay longer in a place so near the home environs of his men. But before leaving Wheeling he took care to leave provisions and instructions for Colonel Lochry.

Traveling down the Ohio at the season when the river was lowest was an extremely slow process. Large boats for the horses were required; somewhat smaller boats for companies of men and stores; and swifter and smaller boats for scouts and dispatches. The river route from Wheeling to the place where final disaster overtook Lochry's expedition, was considerably over five hundred miles. According to Anderson's journal, this trip consumed approximately sixteen days,

which means that the rate of progress was a daily average of only thirty miles.

As we review the story of the disaster we note that the first step in the short series of events leading to Lochry's misfortune was his failure to arrive at Wheeling in time to join Clark on the voyage down the river. Making the trip was a familiar experience by this time for Clark. But for Lochry's men, the voyage was a new adventure and the country was strange.

When Lochry learned at Wheeling that Clark was but twelve hours ahead of him, he sent a small detachment by land to overtake Clark with Officer Wallace at the head. The messengers reached the General at Middle Island. Clark immediately replied in writing to Lochry, saying that he was augmenting Wallace's return command with eight alert men; that he was sending back fifteen days' provisions; that he was leaving below one large horse boat and further equipment under the protection of a few men. He concluded, saying, "I have suffer'd much lately but you again encourage me."

In compliance with this promise, Clark, now two days' journey below Wheeling, left Major Charles Cracraft with a small command at Camp Three Islands to wait for Lochry. Cracraft's orders read: ". . . wait at this place for his arrival which will probably happen in about Six days from this date—Should Col°. Lochry fail to arrive in Eight days you are hereby directed to proceed with your command & stores down the River untill you overtake me." A postscript was added: "you will follow in one small boat with the Stores in case you are not overtaken . . ."

At the mouth of the Great Kanawha River Clark left a letter attached to a pole giving directions to Lochry to follow down the river. This precaution apparently was taken by Clark in addition to his leaving Major Cracraft at Three Islands—unless we are to suppose that this act of Clark's has been confused by some writers with the act of leaving Major Cracraft, and with the act also of the latter, in not waiting for Lochry to arrive.

The second incident—and, according to some, the most important incident—which contributed to the capture of Lochry's men, was the capture of Captain Shannon. The latter officer was in the Lochry party from the start. But

when Colonel Lochry began to realize that he could not overtake Clark, he sent Shannon ahead in a swifter boat with a small command, to inform the General that a juncture was imperative.

Shannon and his men were captured by the Indians before they reached Clark. In this way the enemy, watching every move along the Ohio and intending to attack if the occasion was presented, came into possession of a dispatch which revealed to them that Clark and Lochry were separated, and that Lochry's party was much the weaker. It was this discovery that led to the attack on the latter. The Indian forces were not yet strong enough to attack Clark.

The picture presented thus is clearly outlined; first, Clark and his forces going down the river making brief stands at intervals, but keeping ahead of Lochry's troops; second, Lochry, with a much smaller number, with few provisions, with a small supply of ammunition, trying to overtake Clark; third, Lochry sending a small detachment ahead to acquaint Clark of the situation and this detachment falling into the hands of the Indians; fourth, Clark leaving a small detachment behind to encourage Lochry's descent of the river and this detachment falling into the hands of the Indians; fifth, Indians along the northern bank of the Ohio learning the movements of the Americans and hoping to strike a blow that would protect not only the British post at Detroit, but also the lands that they regarded as their own.

Here it should be noted that there are some minor conflicts in the statements of the facts. Major Cracraft's instructions say that he was to wait six or eight days.[1] In a letter written in 1853 by William Cracraft, son of Major Charles Cracraft, to Lyman C. Draper, the statement is made that the Major and his men were to wait only two days. Again, Lieutenant Anderson's journal states that on August 15th, six days after leaving Wheeling, Lochry's men found Major Cracraft waiting for them, and that he started ahead of them that night to overtake Clark. But in the letters of William Cracraft to Lyman Draper, we find that two days passed with no Lochry or troops appearing; that in the meantime, some of the men under Cracraft having deserted, the latter started

1. Printed in James, James A. (ed.), *George Rogers Clark Papers* 1771-1781 (*Illinois Historical Collections*, vol. VIII), p. 584 (Springfield, Ill., 1912).

down the river with his few remaining men; that this party got along without any adventure until they passed the mouth of the great Miami, where the Indians under Brant and Girty were collected in large numbers; and that here the Cracraft party was captured three or four days before the arrival of Lochry.

At this point an explanatory statement is perhaps in order. Draper, the well known collector of historical material, whom I mentioned above, addressed several written inquiries to William Cracraft which the latter proceeded to answer and from among which I have chosen three. The first inquiry was in regard to the manner in which Major Cracraft was captured and the nature of his captivity. The second was in regard to the particulars of Lochry's defeat. And the third was whether any men under Cracraft were used by the Indians to entrap the Lochry party.

Draper's correspondent replied to the first question by stating that his father's party had no exciting experiences going down the river until they saw two or three Indians on the bank. The Indians were armed and immediately fired at them in the boat, and then ran along the shore toward a bend in the river just ahead. He further stated that his father's party surmised that they were to be attacked; that when they passed the sharp turn in the river they came in full view of a large number of Indians and that the latter commenced firing; that several canoes of Indians made out toward them; that his father seeing that they were overpowered, waved his hat as a sign of surrender; whereupon the Indians ceased firing, approached them, and towed the captive boat to the shore.

To the second question Draper's correspondent replied that when Lochry's party came along three or four days later, Major Cracraft was at the time bound to a tree, and, although in hearing, was so far removed that he could not see the slaughter. He told the correspondent that the encounter was neither a battle nor a skirmish; that there was a great want of discipline among Lochry's troops; that many of them had put to shore for the purpose of cooking; that many were wasting their ammunition in shooting at useless objects along the river, and that most of their guns were empty, the result being panic and disaster.

After the fray Colonel Lochry was taken down the river

bank and tomahawked. The same fate was also that of Captain Shannon. Captain Stokely was wounded. Later on, by permission, Major Cracraft, who was adept at amateur surgery, extracted the bullet from the back of Stokley's neck. Ninety men were killed or taken prisoners. Cracraft and most of the prisoners were soon started on their way towards Detroit.

To the third question—whether any of the men under Major Cracraft were used to entrap the Lochry party—the correspondent replied that he had never heard that this was so, or that any of the men had been so used. His father was positive that lack of discipline was the cause of the disaster.

In English's account of Lochry's capture in the *Conquest of the Northwest,* we do find, however, that the Indians forced Captain Shannon's party, captured on their way from Lochry to Clark, to station themselves at a prominent place on the north side of the river. From here they were to be compelled to hail Lochry's party and induce them to surrender. "It is said," states English, that "the prisoners were stationed at the head of an island about three miles below a creek flowing into the Ohio." The creek as well as the island are now known respectively, as Lochry Creek and Lochry Island. But the plan of the Indians in making use of Shannon and his men did not prove necessary. The Lochry party was attacked at a point higher up the stream.

When Major Cracraft was captured and was about to be towed ashore, he recalled that he had on his person General Clark's written order by which he had been directed to wait for Lochry two days, and then, if the latter had not arrived, to proceed down the Ohio to the mouth of the Kentucky River where General Clark intended to halt for a while. In getting out of the boat, the Major, remembering the order, and fearing the enemy would get hold of it, took it out of his pocket and after rolling it into a small compass while he was standing in the water, stuck it in the sand under his feet.

When he and his party got ashore he was soon in the presence of Brant, the Mohawk chief, who then went by the name of "Colonel" and was in a full suit of British uniform. Cracraft was then questioned by Brant, as to what forces were coming down the Ohio River, whereupon, says the correspondent, "My father answered in the negative." When Brant

asked the prisoner, in good English, for his papers, the latter gave him his commission.

Brant scanned over the papers and in very strong language said to his captive, "You are a Virginia officer, the first I have had the pleasure to see." And after giving vent to a volley of harsh language and with his sword uplifted he swore he had a mind to split him down. The Major replied, "I am your prisoner and you can do as you please." Brant replied, "I know that, damn you."

It was then that Cracraft was stripped of his clothes and tied to a tree. Shortly afterwards, says his son, Simon and George Girty came and gave him a pair of drawers, a shirt and a hat. Some of the auditors of this paper may already have read the new book by Thomas Boyd entitled *Simon Girty*, in which the author takes pains to bring out such incidents as this, and gives us perhaps for the first time a picture that shows that Simon Girty had a human side to his character along with the well known brutal side. But we should note that Draper's correspondent speaks of Simon and George Girty as though both brothers were present with Brant at the Lochry capture. The better authority is that only George was present; and that Simon Girty at that time was on his way southward from Upper Sandusky in company with the British and the Canadian Rangers and with large Indian forces, all of whom shortly after the Lochry defeat, joined forces with Brant and then started toward Clark's camp at the Falls of the Ohio.

Draper's correspondent further relates that the same day, or the day after the defeat, one of Lochry's men, being severely wounded, was brought near the spot where Major Cracraft was fast. The man was placed on a log where he appeared to be in much agony. In a short time an Indian came up and surveyed the poor fellow for a minute or so, then advanced to where Cracraft was tied, and pulled off the latter's hat. He put the hat on his own head, then walked up to the wounded man and looked at him again, then returned and put the hat back on Cracraft's head. He then whirled about and with his tomahawk clove the wounded soldier's head asunder.

The correspondent repeated several other incidents which he said he had heard Major Cracraft, his father, relate. The

same day that Cracraft's men were taken prisoners most of them were tied with tugs or thongs of raw hide around above the elbow, and then fastened across the back and then to a stake or tree. Whilst the Major was in this situation, an old Indian warrior came to the captive and, sitting down, commenced feeling his arms and legs. After passing his hands along the captive's limbs several times and looking the latter in the face, the Indian said, "Can you run very fast?" "Oh no," the prisoner replied. The Indian then spoke out, "You tell lie," and immediately afterwards he left; in a short time he returned with additional rope and secured his captive more firmly.

Brant, the chief of the Indian party, had on a recent occasion given himself a slight cut on the leg with his sword. Finding that the wound was becoming inflamed and having learned that Major Cracraft was skilled in curing wounds, Brant ordered the latter to be brought to his headquarters. Brant then requested the captive to do something for his wound, and the wound was dressed at once.

"I remember hearing my father say," relates Draper's correspondent, "that Brant spoke English fluently and that at that time he told my father that he had at one time thought he would not take any prisoners, and would slay all that fell into his hands; but that after a little reflection he thought that the Great Spirit would be angry if he spared none."

The correspondent continues:

> In a few days my father and most of his fellow prisoners were marched off under various parties of Indians for Detroit. They had much suffering on the way as a matter of course, as they had nothing fit for a civilized man to eat and but little fit for a savage. I well recollect his relating that while they were on their journey and were not far from the mouth of the Maumee River, the Indian who had charge of the squad of prisoners, made a halt for a few days. Being sore pressed for something to eat, some of the Indians crossed the river to where an Indian trader in provisions resided. The Indian who had charge of the prisoners bartered his shirt (which was of calico) for some corn and squashes. Returning to camp he gave over his purchases to some half dozen or more hungry prisoners and then lay down to get some rest or sleep. With the aid of a camp kettle the captives cooked their corn and squashes.

Meanwhile, the Indian fell asleep or appeared to be so. "My father," says the correspondent, "went to the Indian (who was called John) and told him to get up and eat. The Indian

at first refused, saying in as good English as he could, 'You have not enough to eat yourselves.' It was with difficulty that my father could prevail on the Indian to eat that food which he had sold his own shirt to obtain."

This Indian was of the Mohawk tribe. Shortly after this, states the correspondent, they traveled on to Detroit, where the prisoners were given over to the commandant of the post. In the following spring many of the prisoners were sent by lake to Fort Niagara. My father, who was included among the rest, says the correspondent, declared that as soon as he got ashore the first person he met was John, the Indian, who seemed as much rejoiced to see him as an old friend. "I have heard my father say," declares the correspondent, "that if he could ever meet with John he would divide his last loaf with his Indian friend. I mention this incident with lively recollections, since it is a strong case and is suggestive of the nobleness of that celebrated chief and warrior, Logan."

Soon after Cracraft was given over to the British officer in command at Detroit, he, together with several of his fellow officers, signed a parole of honor, by which they were permitted to go as far as three miles, provided they returned by sunset. This gave them some exercise and made their captivity more tolerable.

Their treatment by their captors was as good as would be expected, considering the circumstances of the place. The officer in command was Major DePeyster. He sent for Cracraft shortly after his arrival, seemed very kind to him, and lamented the unhappy state of the colony. He then tried to hold out the idea that there might be a pardon granted yet to the rebels, and that there was a fine opening in the British Army for talents, and so on. "The advances of Major DePeyster became so strong on the subject," continues the correspondent, "that my father, wishing to break off the negotiations, replied in the language of Job, that naked he came and naked he would return rather than turn his back on his country. He never received another invitation from DePeyster."

Subsequent to this, Cracraft was taken to Fort Niagara, and then to Quebec. The second winter he spent on the Isle of Orleans, just above Quebec. After this he was taken down the coast to New York, then up the Hudson to Newburg, where he was exchanged and permitted to go to his home in western Pennsylvania, from which he had been absent two years.

In concluding, the writer cannot neglect the larger aspects of the Lochry adventure. Whether Lochry had evidence of danger which should have put him on his guard is still a topic of inquiry. We read in Anderson's journal of the expedition that on August 17 two of Lochry's men went out to hunt and never returned. Again on August 20 the Lochry party met two of Shannon's men who told Lochry that, while in the woods, they had heard a number of guns which they supposed were fired by Indians attacking the rest of the Shannon party. Such statements as these apparently add to the evidence that the leader should have thought danger was near. Also in English's account we read that it seems strange that Lochry did not act with greater caution; but the same authority generously adds that the helpless condition of the party should be remembered, and that they were in a strange country and were almost out of ammunition.

In so far as any belief may yet be entertained that deserters from Clark's forces aided in the downfall of Lochry, we should perhaps recall an observation made by Theodore Roosevelt in his *Winning of the West*—an observation connected with a similar charge in another battle. He said: "In all these encounters the beaten party was fond of relating the various deeds of some of its members, who invariably state that they would have conquered had they not been deserted by their associates."

The sacrifices of the men under Clark and Lochry were undoubtedly great. These heroes are deserving of the greatest honor in the memories of the present generation. But such defeats as Clark and Lochry suffered, only serve to magnify the principal fact that the American frontiersmen were destined to move westward regardless of temporary disasters and that the British and the Indians were destined to surrender the country.

Lochry's defeat was one event in a series of reverses. But it could not help serving a useful purpose in stimulating the frontiersmen to a great appreciation of the strength of the foe. It gave the men of the time a realization that even greater sacrifices would be necessary if the country was to be won from the Indians. And today it causes the present generation to appreciate more the debt it owes to the pioneer forefathers. Lochry was one of those leaders who made the supreme sacrifice along with his men. His objective in a

military sense, like that of Clark, was not reached. Viewed singly, his expedition may be judged a complete failure. But it aroused the Americans to a needed realization of the strength of the enemy and it contributed to the greater efforts which the states subsequently made in winning the great Northwest.