Exploring and Settling Western Virginia

Native American Clashes with European Settlers

Directions: Read the Native American Clashes with European Settlers and write a detailed summary explaining what the passage was about. This summary should **be in your own words.**

1. Emergence of Tribes

2. European Exploration & Settlement

3. Treaties

4. Native American Concept of Land

5. French & Indian War

6. Proclamation of 1763 & Pontiac's War

7. Battle of Point Pleasant

8. Revolutionary War & the Aftermath

Native American Clashes with European Settlers

Emergence of Tribes
By 1600, organized tribes such as the Delaware and Shawnee had moved into present-day West Virginia. In addition, the powerful Iroquois Confederacy began exerting its influence on the region. The Confederacy was an alliance of five Iroquois-speaking nations -- Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca -- formed in present-day New York in the late 1500s. In 1722, the Tuscaroras joined the Iroquois Confederacy, which became known as the Six Nations. When Europeans first explored western Virginia in the late 1600s, they discovered few Native Americans. Historian Otis Rice suggests this absence was due to the Five Nations, "which sought domination of the Ohio Valley as part of their effort to control the fur trade with the Dutch, and later the British. . . ." (WV: A History, 9). The Confederacy controlled the valley but other tribes were permitted to settle there. For example, a Shawnee village existed at present-day Point Pleasant and a Delaware village flourished at Bulltown in present-day Braxton County well into the 1700s.

European Exploration & Settlement
As the Confederacy fought smaller tribes for control of western Virginia, European colonists set their own designs on the Ohio Valley. In 1607, English colonists landed at Jamestown, Virginia. Based on various explorations, the British and French laid claim to the territory comprising present-day West Virginia and Native Americans were forced west. Many of the tribes were destroyed by constant warfare and catastrophic diseases. At the same time, trade with the Europeans proved a strong attraction, enabling the Indians to acquire valuable new products, such as guns, steel hatchets, cloth, and kettles. The fur trade in particular made many tribes powerful and more aggressive. The Indian nations successfully played one European power against another. For instance, the British formed an alliance with the Iroquois Confederacy to cut the French out of the lucrative fur trade. However, the Six Nations also negotiated treaties and traded with the French.

Treaties
As part of their negotiations, the British secured three treaties which opened the western Virginia frontier to European settlement: Treaty of Albany (1722) and Treaty of Lancaster (1744) with the Six Nations and Treaty of Logstown (1752) with the Delaware and Shawnee. At Lancaster, Virginia negotiators convinced the Six Nations to surrender their land to the "setting sun," which the Confederacy interpreted as the crest of the Alleghenies and the British interpreted as all of western Virginia. Following the Treaty of Lancaster and the end of King George's War (1748) between England and France, Virginia pioneers pushed west of the Alleghenies.

Native American Concept of Land
A major factor in the treaty disputes was Native Americans' concept of land. Indians fought among themselves over hunting rights to the territory but the Native American idea of "right" to the land was very different from the legalistic and individual nature of European ownership. John Alexander Williams describes this in his book, *West Virginia: A History for Beginners*:

> **The Indians had no concept of "private property," as applied to the land. Only among the Delawares was it customary for families, during certain times of the year, to be assigned specific hunting territories. Apparently this was an unusual practice, not found among other Indians. Certainly, the idea of an individual having exclusive use of a particular piece of land was completely strange to Native Americans.**

> The Indians practiced communal land ownership. That is, the entire community owned the land upon which it lived. . . .1

French & Indian War
In 1754, hostilities broke out between English and French troops in western Pennsylvania. English troops under a young commander, George Washington, were overwhelmed by the French at Fort Necessity, beginning a lengthy war for control of the American colonies. While the English had made it clear they intended to settle the frontier, the French were more interested in trade. This influenced the Delaware and Shawnee to side with the French. Although the Six Nations officially remained neutral, many in the Iroquois Confederacy also allied with the French.

Early defeats in the French and Indian War led Virginia Governor Robert Dinwiddie to construct forts in the South Branch Valley. From 1756 to 1758, Native Americans wreaked havoc on the new forts, attacking Fort Evans in present-day Berkeley County and forts Seybert and Upper Tract in present-day Pendleton County, as well as sites throughout the Monongahela, New River, and Greenbrier valleys. In November 1758, the British captured Fort Duquesne at present-day Pittsburgh, the key to French control of the Ohio Valley. The following year, French troops lost Quebec, crippling their military strength. The loss of French military support temporarily calmed tensions between Native Americans and settlers in western Virginia. The Treaty of Paris in 1763 ended the French and Indian War and gave England title to virtually all territory east of the Mississippi River.

Proclamation of 1763 & Pontiac's War
With the French eliminated, Native Americans were left alone in their fight against British colonial aggression. In the summer of 1763, Pontiac, an Ottawa chief led raids on key British forts. Shawnee chief Keigh-tugh-qua, or Cornstalk, led similar attacks on western Virginia settlements in present-day Greenbrier County. By the end of July, Indians had captured all British forts west of the Alleghenies except Detroit, Fort Pitt, and Fort Niagara. On August 6, British forces under Colonel Henry Bouquet retaliated, destroying Delaware and Shawnee forces at Bushy Run in western Pennsylvania, which ended the hostilities.

Fearing more tension between Native Americans and settlers, England's King George III issued the Proclamation of 1763, prohibiting settlement west of the Allegheny Mountains. However, many land speculators such as George Washington violated the proclamation by claiming vast acreage in western Virginia. The next five years were relatively peaceful on the frontier. In 1768, the Six Nations and Cherokee signed the Treaty of Hard Labour and the Treaty of Fort Stanwix, relinquishing their claims on the territory between the Ohio River and the Alleghenies to the British. With the frontier again open, settlers flooded into western Virginia and the speculators made small fortunes in rent on the lands they had acquired.

Battle of Point Pleasant
The Shawnee had never given up their claims to western Virginia and interpreted the rapid settlement as acts of aggression. Hostilities reached a climax in 1773 when land speculator Michael Cresap led a group of volunteers from Fort Fincastle (later renamed Fort Henry) at present-day Wheeling and raided Shawnee towns in what became known as Cresap's War. One of the worst atrocities of the conflict was the murder of several family members of Mingo chief Tah-gah-jute, who had been baptized under the English name Logan. Logan, who had previously lived peacefully with the settlers, killed at least 13 western Virginians that summer in revenge.

Virginia Governor John Murray, Earl of Dunmore, plotted to crush the Shawnee and end hostilities. Dunmore drew up a plan to trap the Shawnee between two armies. The governor personally led the northern army while land speculator Andrew Lewis led a smaller force from the south. But Shawnee leader Cornstalk struck the southern regiment before it united with Dunmore's troops. On October 10, 1774, Cornstalk's force of approximately 1,200 men attacked Lewis at the confluence of the Kanawha and Ohio rivers at present-day Point Pleasant. After the battle, which resulted in significant losses on both sides, the Shawnee retreated to protect their settlements in the Scioto Valley in present-day Ohio. As a condition of the subsequent Treaty of Camp Charlotte, the Delaware, Shawnee, and Mingo relinquished all claims to land south of the Ohio River. The Battle of Point Pleasant eliminated Native Americans as a force on the frontier for the first three years of the American Revolutionary War, which began in April 1775, clearing the way for peaceful settlement of the region.

Revolutionary War & the Aftermath
At the same time as Dunmore's War, tensions mounted between American colonists and the British. When the Revolutionary War began, many American soldiers who had previously served in the British army fought for the Continental Army. Native Americans remained generally neutral for the first two years of the war. In August 1775, the Shawnee, Delaware, Mingo, Seneca, Wyandot, Potawatomi, and Ottawa had agreed to the Treaty of Pittsburgh, recognizing the Ohio River as the Indian boundary and pledging neutrality. By the end of 1776, the treaty had fallen apart and Native Americans began randomly attacking settlements. In June 1777,

British negotiator Henry Hamilton met with tribal leaders at Detroit and gained the support of the Chippewa and Ottawa as well as some Mingo and Wyandot. This agreement nullified the Treaty of Pittsburgh and effectively brought most Native Americans into the war on the side of the British.

On the night of August 31, Wyandot and Mingo forces attacked Fort Henry at present-day Wheeling. During the three-day siege, the Indians destroyed most of the homes around the fort and killed a number of soldiers in the fort. With the support of the British, Native Americans had enormous initial success against colonists in the Ohio Valley.

One of the worst atrocities of the war on the frontier occurred at Fort Randolph at present-day Point Pleasant. In November 1777, Cornstalk and two companions visited the fort to inform Captain Matthew Arbuckle that the Shawnee had decided to support the British. Arbuckle was suspicious and held Cornstalk prisoner. After two hunters were killed near the fort, colonial militiamen assassinated Cornstalk and his son Elinipsico.

In the spring of 1778, the British, Wyandot, and Mingo launched an offensive on frontier forts. On May 16, Indians first attacked Fort Randolph then proceeded east to the Greenbrier Valley settlements. They attacked Fort Donnally, west of Lewisburg, for hours before reinforcements drove the Indians back.

In 1778, George Rogers Clark temporarily broke the British-Indian alliance with victories in the Illinois territory at Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes. Colonials rejected an attempt by Wyandots and some Shawnee to negotiate a peace in 1779. Although the main British army surrendered at Yorktown, Virginia, on October 19, 1781, occasional clashes occurred on the frontier. The bloodiest Revolutionary War battle in western Virginia began on September 10, 1782. Wyandot, Delaware, and British forces attacked Fort Henry. The most dramatic story associated with this siege of Fort Henry is the daring run of Elizabeth Zane, who allegedly carried gunpowder to the fort amidst heavy gunfire. The settlers held the fort and, after three days, the Indians and their British allies gave up. Soon thereafter, the British ordered a halt to all attacks on the frontier.

After the Revolutionary War officially ended in 1783, settlers again poured into western Virginia. Most Native Americans moved their villages westward into Indiana, although they occasionally raided forts in western Virginia. Frontier settlers, such as Lewis Wetzel, Samuel Brady, and Simon Girty, formed independent military units to combat these attacks, often perpetrating brutal assaults on Native Americans. Hostile actions between Indians and settlers continued in western Virginia until 1794, when General Anthony Wayne defeated Native Americans at Fallen Timbers in present-day northwestern Ohio. The subsequent Treaty of Greenville effectively removed all remaining Indian claims to western Virginia.

Notes

1. John Alexander Williams, *West Virginia: A History for Beginners* (Charleston, WV: Appalachian Editions, 1993), 64.

Native Americans