CHAPTER IV.

THE FRENCH AND ENGLISH CLAIMS TO THE TRANS-ALLEGHENY REGION—GEORGE WASHINGTON'S VISIT TO THE FRENCH FORTS IN 1753.

THE written history of the section of country embraced in and between the valleys of the Monongahela and Youghiogheny Rivers, like that of all this part of the State of Pennsylvania, commences at about the middle of the eighteenth century. At that time both France and England were asserting their respective claims to the dominion of this wilderness region west of the mountains; and it was in the conflict which resulted from the attempts of each of these rivals to expel the other, and to enforce their own alleged rights by the fact of actual possession, that the events occurred that are here to be narrated, and which mark the beginning of the history of the southwestern counties of Pennsylvania.

The claim which France made to the ownership of this territory was based on the fact that the adventurous explorer La Salle descended the Mississippi River in 1682, and at its mouth, on the 9th of April in that year, took formal possession, in the name of the French sovereign, of all the valley of the mighty stream, and of all the regions, discovered and to be discovered, contiguous to it, or to any and all of its tributaries. Sixty-seven years later (1749), Captain Celeron, an officer in the service of the king of France, and having under his command a force of about three hundred men, penetrated southward to the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers, where he took and confirmed the French possession of the valleys of these tributaries, burying metallic plates, duly inscribed with a record of the event, as evidences of actual occupation.

England, on the other hand, claimed the country by virtue of a treaty made with the Six Nations at Lancaster in June, 1744, when the Indians ceded to the British king an immense scope of territory west of the royal grant to Penn,[2] co-extensive with the limits of Virginia, which at that time were of indefinite extent. At a subsequent treaty held (in 1752) at Logstown, on the Ohio, below Pittsburgh, one of the Iroquois chiefs, who had also taken part in the Lancaster treaty, declared that it had not been the intention of his people to convey to the English any lands west of the Alleghenies, but that, nevertheless, they would not oppose the white man's definition of the boundaries.

The Six Nations in council had also decided that, notwithstanding their friendship for the English, they would remain neutral in the contest which they saw was imminent between that nation and the French, both of which were now using every effort

[1] The circumstances attending this Indian outrage are thus narrated by Judge Veech: "This case, as related by Joseph Mendenhall, an old soldier and settler at the place known as Mendenhall's Dam, in Menallen township, was thus: About three and a half miles west of Uniontown, on the south side of the State or Heaton road, which leads from the poor-house through New Salem, etc., and within five or six rods of the road, on land now (1869) of Joshua Woodward, are the remains of an old clearing of about one-fourth of an acre, and within it the remains of an old chimney. Two or three rods southeastward is a small spring, the drain of which leads off westward into the 'Burnt Cabin fork' of Dunlap's or Nemacolin's Creek; and still farther south, some four or five rods, is the old trail or path called Dunlap's road. The story is that in very early times—perhaps about 1767—two men came over the mountains by this path to hunt, etc., and began an improvement at this clearing, and put up a small cabin upon it. While asleep in their cabin, some Indians came to it and shot them, and then set fire to the cabin. Their names are unknown. So far as known, this is the only case of the kind that ever occurred within our county limits."

[2] It was supposed at that time that Penn's Western Boundary would not fall to the westward of the Laurel Hill.

to strengthen themselves in the occupation of the territory bordering the head-waters of the Ohio.

In the year 1750 the "Ohio Company" (acting under an English charter and royal grant, the operation of which will be noticed elsewhere) sent its agent, Christopher Gist, to the Ohio River, to explore the country along that stream, with a view to its occupation and settlement. Under these instructions he viewed the country along the west bank of the river, from the mouth of the Allegheny southwestwardly to the Falls of the Ohio (opposite the present city of Louisville, Ky.), and in the following year (1751) he explored the other side of the stream down to the mouth of the Great Kanawha. In 1752 he was present, as agent of the "Ohio Company," at the Logstown treaty, already mentioned, and took part, with Col. Joshua Fry and the two other commissioners of Virginia, in the proceedings with the chiefs of the Six Nations.

These and other movements on the part of those acting under authority of the British king, caused the French to bestir themselves, and move more energetically towards the occupation of the country west of the Alleghenies. Early in 1753 they began to move southward from Lake Ontario through the wilderness towards the Allegheny River, and on the 21st of May in that year intelligence was received that a party of one hundred and fifty French and Indians "had arrived at a camping-place leading from the Niagara to the head of the Ohio."[1] Again, on the 7th of August, a report was received "of the passage of a large number of canoes, with French troops by Oswego, on their way to the Ohio."

This intelligence of the aggressive movements of the French caused the English home government to adopt more energetic measures than had previously been employed to meet and resist their advance into the Ohio River country. Among the official communications addressed by the Earl of Holderness, secretary of state, to the governors of the several American provinces, was one to Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia, containing directions concerning the French encroachments. The letter of the secretary was sent by a government ship, and reached Dinwiddie in October, 1753. In pursuance of the instructions contained, the governor appointed and commissioned GEORGE WASHINGTON, then a youth of only twenty-one years,[2] but one of the adjutants-general of the military forces of Virginia, as bearer of dispatches to the commanding officer of the intruding French on the Ohio,[3]—charged, also, with the duty of ascertaining the numbers and equipment of the French forces there, what forts, if any, they had erected, and various other items of military intelligence, which are made clear in his letter of instructions, of which the following is a copy:

"*Whereas*, I have received information of a body of French forces being assembled in a hostile manner on the river Ohio, intending by force of arms to erect certain forts on the said river within this territory, and contrary to the dignity and peace of our sovereign, the king of Great Britain.

"These are therefore to require and direct you, the said George Washington, forthwith to repair to Logstown, on the said river Ohio, and, having there informed yourself where the said French forces have posted themselves, thereupon to proceed to such place, and, being there arrived, to present your credentials, together with my letter to the chief commanding officer, and in the name of his Britannic Majesty to demand an answer thereto.

"On your arrival at Logstown you are to address yourself to the Half-King, to Monacatoocha, and the other sachems of the Six Nations, acquainting them with your orders to visit and deliver my letter to the

[1] Meaning the head of the river since known as the Allegheny, which having been discovered by the French explorers many years before anything was known of the Monongahela, was in those early times regarded as the main stream. The Iroquois name of the Alleghany was *O-hee-go*, and the French adventurers who passed down its current to the present city of Pittsburgh rendered the name *Ohio* in conformity with the orthography of their language. In the English the *pronunciation* only is changed. It was not the French alone who regarded the Allegheny as the main Ohio, for we find that Washington in his journal and dispatches mentioned Venango as being situated "on the Ohio." Another name which the French gave to the Ohio, and applied to the stream e en to the head of the Allegheny, was "La Belle Rivière,"—The Beautiful River.

[2] Following is a copy of the commission:

"To GEORGE WASHINGTON, ESQUIRE, ONE OF THE ADJUTANTS-GENERAL OF THE TROOPS AND FORCES IN THE COLONY OF VIRGINIA.

"I, reposing especial trust and confidence in the ability, conduct, and fidelity of you, the said GEORGE WASHINGTON, have appointed you my express messenger; and you are hereby authorized and empowered to proceed hence with all convenient and possible dispatch to the part or place on the river Ohio, where the French have lately erected a fort or forts, or where the commandant of the French forces resides, in order to deliver my letter and message to him; and after waiting not exceeding one week for an answer, you are to take your leave and return immediately back.

"To this commission I have set my hand and caused the great seal of this dominion to be affixed, at the city of Williamsburg, the seat of my government, this 30th day of October, in the twenty-seventh year of the reign of his Majesty George the Second, king of Great Britain, &c., &c., annoque Domini 1753.

"ROBERT DINWIDDIE."

And the following was the tenor of the Governor's passport:

"*To all to whom these presents may come or concern, greeting:*

"*Whereas*, I have appointed George Washington, Esquire, by commission under the great seal, my express messenger to the commandant of the French forces on the river Ohio, and as he is charged with business of great importance to his Majesty and this dominion,

"I do hereby command all his Majesty's subjects, and particularly require all in alliance and amity with the crown of Great Britain, and all others to whom this passport may come, agreeably to the law of nations, to be aiding and assisting as a safeguard to the said George Washington and his attendants in his present passage to and from the river Ohio, as aforesaid.

"ROBERT DINWIDDIE."

[3] He had previously sent a messenger on a similar errand. In a letter to the Lords of Trade he said, "My last to you was on the 16th of June, to which I beg you to be referred. . . . The person sent as a commissioner to the commandant of the French forces neglected his duty, and went no farther than Logstown on the Ohio. He reports the French were then one hundred and fifty miles farther up the river, and I believe was afraid to go to them."

French commanding officer, and desiring the said chiefs to appoint you a sufficient number of their warriors to be your safeguard as near the French as you may desire, and to wait your further direction.

"You are diligently to inquire into the numbers and force of the French on the Ohio and the adjacent country; how they are likely to be assisted from Canada; and what are the difficulties and conveniences of that communication, and the time required for it.

"You are to take care to be truly informed what forts the French have erected, and where; how they are garrisoned and appointed, and what is their distance from each other, and from Logstown; and from the best intelligence you can procure, you are to learn what gave occasion to this expedition of the French; how they are likely to be supported, and what their pretensions are.

"When the French commandant has given you the required and necessary dispatches, you are to desire of him a proper guard to protect you as far on your return as you may judge for your safety, against any straggling Indians or hunters that may be ignorant of your character, and molest you. Wishing you good success in your negotiation, and safe and speedy return, I am, &c.,

"ROBERT DINWIDDIE.

"WILLIAMSBURG, 30 October, 1753."

On the day of his appointment Washington left Williamsburg, and on the 31st reached Fredericksburg, Va., where he employed Jacob Van Braam as a French interpreter. The two then went to Alexandria, where some necessary purchases were made. Thence they proceeded to Winchester, where packhorses were purchased; after which they rode to Wills' Creek (Cumberland, Md.), arriving there on the 14th of November. "Here," said Washington in his journal of the tour, "I engaged Mr. Gist[1] to pilot us out, and also hired four others as servitors,—Barnaby Currin and John McQuire, Indian traders, Henry Steward, and William Jenkins; and in company with these persons left the inhabitants the next day."

The party, now including seven persons, moved from Wills' Creek in a northwesterly direction, and crossing the Youghiogheny River into what is now Fayette County, proceeded by way of Gist's place,[2] to Frazier's, on the Monongahela, ten miles above its junction with the Allegheny. They had found the traveling through the wilderness so difficult that the journey to this point from Wills' Creek occupied a week. Referring to this part of the route, the journal says, "The excessive rains and vast quantities of snow which had fallen prevented our reaching Mr. Frazier's, an Indian trader, at the mouth of Turtle Creek, on Monongahela River, till Thursday the 22d. We were informed here that expresses had been sent a few days before to the traders down the river, to acquaint them with the French general's death, and the return of the major part of the French army into winter quarters. The waters were quite impassable without swimming our horses, which obliged us to get the loan of a canoe from Frazier, and to send Barnaby Currin and Henry Steward down the Monongahela with our baggage to meet us at the forks of the Ohio."

Crossing the Allegheny, Washington found Shingiss, the Delaware king, who accompanied the party to Logstown, which they reached in twenty-five days from Williamsburg. On their arrival they found the Indian Monakatoocha, but the Half-King was absent, hunting. Washington told the former, through his Indian interpreter, John Davidson, that he had come as a messenger to the French general, and was ordered to call and inform the sachems of the Six Nations of the fact. The Half-King[3] was sent for by runners, and at about three o'clock in the afternoon of the 25th he came in, and visited Washington in his tent, where, through the interpreter, Davidson, he told him that it was a long way to the headquarters of the French commandant on the Allegheny. "He told me," says the journal, "that the nearest and levelest way was now impassable by reason of many large miry savannahs; that we must be obliged to go by Venango, and should not get to the near fort in less than five or six nights' sleep, good traveling." He told Washington that he must wait until a proper guard of Indians could be furnished him. "The people whom I have ordered in," said he, "are not yet come, and cannot, until the third night from this; until which time, brother, I must beg you to stay. I intend to send the guard of Mingoes, Shannoahs, and Delawares, that our brothers may see the love and loyalty we bear them."

Washington was anxious to reach his destination at the earliest possible time, but, in deference to the wishes of the friendly Tanacharison, he remained until the 30th of November, when, as it is recorded in the journal, "We set out about nine o'clock with the Half-King, Jeskakake, White Thunder, and the Hunter, and traveled on the road to Venango, where we arrived the fourth of December, without anything remarkable happening but a continued series of bad weather. This is an old Indian town, situated at the mouth of French Creek, on the Ohio, and lies near north about sixty miles from Logstown, but more than seventy the way we were obliged to go."

On the 7th the party set out from Venango for the

[1] Christopher Gist, agent of the "Ohio Company," who, a few months previously—in 1753—had located and built a cabin near the centre of the territory of the present county of Fayette, at the place now known as Mount Braddock.

[2] "According to the best observation I could make," said Washington in his journal, "Mr. Gist's new settlement (which we passed by) bears about west-northwest, seventy miles from Wills' Creeks."

[3] Tanacharison, the Half-King, was and always continued to be a firm and steadfast friend of the English, but he lived less than a year from the time when Washington met him at Logstown. His death occurred at Harrisburg, Pa. (then Harris' Ferry), in October, 1754.

French fort, and reached it on the 11th, having been greatly impeded "by excessive rains, snows, and bad traveling through many mires and swamps." On the 12th, Washington waited on the commander, acquainted him with the business on which he came, and in the afternoon exhibited his commission, and delivered the letter from Governor Dinwiddie. While it was being translated he employed his time in taking the dimensions of the fort and making other observations with which he was charged. In the evening of the 14th he received the answer of the commandant to the Governor; but although he was now ready to set out on his return, he could not get away until the second day after that, as the French, although treating him with the greatest outward show of politeness, were using every artifice with his Indians to seduce them from their allegiance and friendship to the English, and were constantly plying them with brandy, which made the Indians loth to leave the place. Washington could not well go without them, and even if he could have done so, he would have been very unwilling to leave them behind him, subject to the dangerous influence of the French officers and French brandy.

Finally, on the 16th, he induced the Half-King and other Indians to leave, and set out from the fort for Venango, which was reached on the 22d. There the chiefs were determined to remain for a time, and therefore Washington's party was compelled to proceed without them, accompanied only by the Indian, Young Hunter, whom the Half-King had ordered to go with them as a guide. The journal of Washington narrates the events of this stage of the journey as follows: "Our horses were now so weak and feeble, and the baggage so heavy (as we were obliged to provide all the necessaries which the journey would require), that we doubted much their performing it. Therefore, myself and the others, except the drivers, who were obliged to ride, gave up our horses for packs to assist along with the baggage. I put myself in an Indian walking-dress, and continued with them three days, until I found there was no probability of their getting home in reasonable time. The horses became less able to travel every day, the cold increased very fast, and the roads were becoming much worse by a deep snow, continually freezing; therefore, as I was uneasy to get back to make report of my proceedings to his Honor, the Governor, I determined to prosecute my journey the nearest way through the woods on foot. Accordingly, I left Mr. Van Braam in charge of our baggage, with money and directions to provide necessaries from place to place for themselves and horses, and to make the most convenient dispatch in traveling. I took my necessary papers, pulled off my clothes, and tied myself up in a watch-coat. Then, with gun in hand and pack on my back, in which were my papers and provisions, I set out with Mr. Gist, fitted in the same manner, on Wednesday the 26th."

On the following day the two travelers fell in with a party of French Indians,[1] one of whom fired on them, but fortunately missed. They took the fellow in custody, and kept him with them till nine o'clock at night, when they let him go, and they continued on their way, walking all night, to be out of reach of pursuit. On the next evening at dark they reached the Allegheny just above Shannapin's town. In crossing the river on an improvised craft, Washington was thrown off into the icy current, where the water was ten feet deep, but saved himself by catching at the logs of the raft. They were then obliged to land on an island, and to pass the night there, but in the morning found the river sufficiently frozen to enable them to cross in safety on the ice to the left bank of the river. They suffered severely from cold and exposure, and Gist had his fingers and toes frozen, but they succeeded in reaching Frazier's, at the mouth of Turtle Creek, on the Monongahela, in the evening of the 30th of December.

The journal proceeds: "As we intended to take horses here [at Frazier's], and it required some time to find them, I went up about three miles, to the mouth of the Youghiogheny, to visit Queen Alliquippa, who had expressed great concern that we passed her in going to the fort. I made her a present of a watch-coat and a bottle of rum, which latter was thought much the better present of the two. Tuesday, the 1st of January, we left Mr. Frazier's house, and arrived at Mr. Gist's, at Monongahela,[2] the 2d, where I bought a horse and saddle." From Gist's Washington proceeded on his return journey, and, without experiencing any notable incident or adventure (except meeting a party bound for the forks of the Ohio for the purpose of building a fort there, as will hereafter be noticed), reached Williamsburg on the 16th of January, 1754, and delivered the letter of the French commandant to Governor Dinwiddie.

The preceding narrative of the journeying of Governor Dinwiddie's young envoy to and from the

[1] Gist, however, in his diary, does not mention any *party* of Indians, but only the one who fired on them. He says, "We rose early in the morning and set out about two o'clock, and got to the Murderingtown, on the southeast fork of Beaver Creek. Here we met an Indian whom I thought I had seen at Joncaire's, at Venango, when on our journey up to the French fort. This fellow called me by my Indian name, and pretended to be glad to see me. I thought very ill of the fellow, but did not care to let the Major (Washington) know I mistrusted him. But he soon mistrusted him as much as I did . . . It was very light and snow was on the ground. The Indian made a stop and turned about. The Major saw him point his gun at us, and he fired. Said the Major, 'Are you shot?' 'No,' said I, upon which the Indian ran forward to a big standing white-oak, and began loading his gun, but we were soon with him. *I would have killed him, but the Major would not suffer me.* We let him charge his gun. We found he put in a ball, then we took care of him."

[2] "Monongahela" was a name at that time applied not only to the point on the river at the mouth of Redstone Creek, but also, indefinitely, to a large scope of country adjacent to it, comprising a considerable portion of the present county of Fayette, between the rivers Monongahela and Youghiogheny. As Gist's was then almost the only settlement in all that region, it was a principal point, and known as Monongahela. Gist himself had so named it, as is shown by some of his letters.

French fort "Le Bœuf," is given in these pages at considerable length, less on account of the importance of the events and incidents related, than because it has reference to the first and second appearance of George Washington in the territory of Fayette County, which he afterwards frequently visited, and became largely interested in as a property owner. Within this territory is the spot which has become historic as his first battle-ground, and here were first disclosed his highest military abilities, in the wild and disordered retreat of Braddock's army from the field of disaster on the Monongahela.

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[1] That the strength of Trent's company did not exceed *thirty-three* men is stated in the deposition (elsewhere given in this work) of Ensign (afterwards Major) Ward, the officer in command when the company and the fort which they were building at the head of the Ohio were surrendered to the French about two months later. There appears no reason to doubt Ward's statement, as he was certainly in a position to know the facts; yet it is difficult to reconcile it with what is found in a letter addressed by Governor Dinwiddie, of *Virginia*, to Governor Hamilton, of Pennsylvania, dated Williamsburg, March 21, 1754, and also in a letter from George Croghan to Governor Hamilton, dated March 23, 1754. In the letter first referred to, Dinwiddie says, " . . . In January I commissioned William Trent to raise one hundred men; he had got *seventy* and has begun a fort at the forks of the Monongalio." And Croghan (who had then just returned east from the Ohio) said in his letter, "Mr. Trent had received a *commission from the Governor* of Virginia, and had enlisted about seventy men before I left Ohio. I left him and his men at the mouth of Monongalio building a fort, which seemed to give the Indians great pleasure and put them in high spirits." (*Colonial Records*, vi., page 21.) Perhaps Croghan included soldiers and laborers, while Ward had reference only to the former. There seems to be no other explanation of the discrepancy in the statements.