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INDIAN, *MÉTIS*, AND EURO-AMERICAN WOMEN ON MULTIPLE FRONTIERS

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No single object better embodies the hopefulness of early relations between Pennsylvanians and Indians than the so-called Great Treaty Wampum Belt. It portrays two men holding hands—one English, one Lenape—to symbolize peace. The chunkier figure wearing a broad-brimmed hat is supposedly William Penn. Whatever the identity of the figures, one thing is clear to the Western eye: they are male. To the English way of thinking, diplomacy was the province of men, and perhaps by the 1680s the Lenapes had learned that Europeans expected to negotiate only with men. But in traditional Indian societies, women were an integral part of the decision-making process, and women continued to attend treaty conferences well into the eighteenth century, in spite of objections by some colonial officials. Perhaps the Native creators of the belt conceived of the figures as generically human, not specifically men. Among the Lenapes, the primary distinctions are between animate and inanimate, human and animal, and the language lacks the gender-specific personal pronouns that English has.¹ So too the wampum belt vocabulary distinguished between humans and animals and symbolic designs, but not between men and women. In the Lenape view, women were incorporated into the belt and the agreement that it represented.

Ever since the treaty belt came into William Penn's hands, it has been

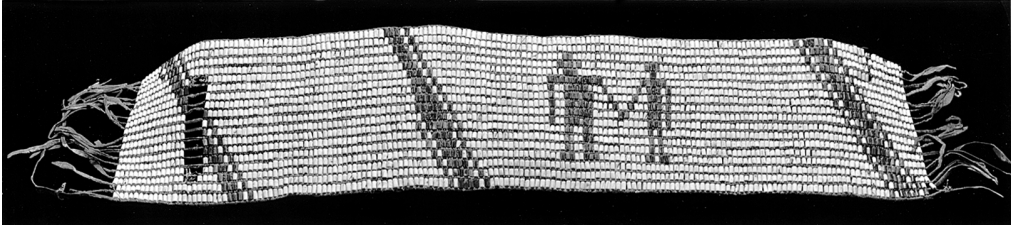


Figure 5 The Great Treaty Wampum Belt, said to represent the agreement between William Penn and the Lenapes at Shackamaxon. Courtesy of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania Collection, Atwater Kent Museum of Philadelphia.

the property of men or male-dominated institutions, and no one has paid any attention to who actually created the artifact.² Traditionally, women were responsible for gathering the raw materials and creating the wampum belts used at treaty conferences. This work involved sewing, customarily the work of women in both European and Native American homes. Sometimes the women produced single, individually crafted items; at other times, the work included large quantities of mass-produced goods.³ Women separated animal sinew to form long threads and carved bone needles for sewing. They gathered shells or traded goods with coastal tribes whose women and children had gathered the shells. Both men and women carved the beads and drilled their holes. Then women planned out the design of purple figures and lines on a white background and began to string the beads, finishing off the ends of each string with decorative knots. Finally, they sewed the strings together. Then the belt went from women's hands into the hands of men. The centuries of silence about women's part in creating the Great Treaty Belt make it an apt metaphor for women's more general historical place on the frontiers between Native Americans and Pennsylvania colonists.⁴

Like their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons, women lived on multiple frontiers—linguistic, economic, diplomatic, legal, religious, social, and personal—where European, African, and Native women interacted with each other and with men of every ethnicity.⁵ Lenape, Oneida, Mohawk, Seneca, Tutelo, and Miami women spoke, traded, and sometimes fought with Swedish, English, French, Scots-Irish, and German women and men. Women interacted cross-culturally on a personal, locally based level far more often than they did in the public arenas of war, diplomacy, and the law. On the social frontier, Native, European, and African women per-

formed everyday activities within a community: sharing hospitality, child-care, gardening, and other work; providing medical care and assisting at each other's childbirths; exchanging information about everything from recipes to gossip.⁶ Even the most intimate environment of home and family could become a frontier, not only when strangers came to call or stay overnight, but also on a more permanent basis, through intermarriage, the adoption of captive or orphaned children, and the marriages of children.⁷

Because diplomacy was, in the European world, solely the province of men, Pennsylvania's leaders wondered at the presence of Indian women at treaty conferences and often treated them as irrelevant. As Europeans came in ever-increasing numbers, and Native peoples retreated farther inland, Lenape and Shawnee women came less frequently to these formal meetings. The meetings themselves moved farther from the centers of Euro-American settlement—from Philadelphia, to Lancaster, to Easton, to Fort Pitt—and fewer English and German women came into contact with Native women and men. With the reduction of interactions including women, the danger of interracial violence increased and led to even less cross-cultural contact, creating a vicious cycle that culminated in war. As long as women remained deeply involved at every level of social interaction, there was peace; as women disappeared, or were forced from such interaction, there was war.

Of course, multiple frontiers are simply historians' constructs, categories invented to help make sense of what otherwise would seem a hopelessly messy confusion of past lives.⁸ Neither women nor men thought in terms of multiple frontiers; they lived them. In reality, the frontiers all overlapped and intersected. But separating them out for analysis may help us understand women's and men's roles and experiences better. Just as historians have asked, "Did women have a Renaissance?" and questioned whether the American Revolution was merely "an illusion of change" for women, we might ask, "Did women have a middle ground?" And if they did, how did it differ from the "middle ground" of their fathers and brothers, husbands and sons?⁹

In order to find women on the multiple frontiers of colonial Pennsylvania, we need to dig a bit deeper in the archives, as well as at archaeological sites, than historians have done in the past. Bits and scraps of evidence indicate that women were present in all the contact arenas, even if they are largely absent from the official documents and private papers kept by elite males. Historians have all too often taken the silence of the documentary



record to mean the absence of women. In order to recover the activities of both Native and European women, we need, as Helen Rountree says, to “go far beyond milking the limited historical resources for all they are worth,” although the scattered bits of written evidence on women provide a starting point. But we need to do more than this; we need to “read beyond words,” to read the silences in the documents, and to engage in a bit of “controlled speculation.”¹⁰ Some of the potential tools for this sort of imaginative (but by no means imaginary) history are ethnographic and historical analogy, genealogy and family reconstitution, and the technologies—such as beadwork and basketry—preserved in Native communities or reconstructed in living history programs. Last but not least, the historian can resort to human talents, such as common sense and empathy, to explore questions of how people might have acted or why they reacted as they did.¹¹

As the most visible woman in the written record of interactions between Native people and Pennsylvania colonists, Isabelle Montour serves as a convenient focal point for examining all these frontiers. In summer and fall 1745, Madame Montour—as she was always known in Pennsylvania’s records—welcomed a succession of visitors into her home in the central Susquehanna Valley, that great crossroads of the mid-eighteenth century. In early summer, she received interpreter Conrad Weiser and Moravian missionary Joseph Spangenberg, who were on their way home from Onondaga. In September, Moravians Martin and Jeannette Mack came to stay at her house for a month to begin their mission to the local community of Delawares, Tutelos, and Oneidas. Shortly afterward, Isabelle’s sister Marguerite and her Mohawk husband passed through with a mule train on their way from the Great Lakes to Philadelphia with packs of furs ready for sale. A few days later, a war party of Iroquois, including one of Isabelle’s sons, stayed overnight on their way to fight the Cherokees to the south.¹²

By 1745, Madame Montour was nearly eighty years old and had long since ended her service as an interpreter between colonists and Native peoples. She was then living with her son Andrew and his wife on an island in the Susquehanna, opposite the trading community at Shamokin, at the conflux of major north-south and east-west axes of Pennsylvania’s mid-eighteenth century frontier. She had lived all her life at such frontier junctions—in Trois Rivières, Michilimackinac, Detroit, Albany, and Otsawakin, fifty miles above Shamokin—but her life epitomizes more than just

geographic frontiers. As an interpreter and go-between, she had been active on linguistic and diplomatic frontiers, not only between Europeans and Natives but also between the Haudenosaunee and the Great Lakes Indians. She had grown up in the St. Lawrence Valley speaking her mother's Central Algonquin and her father's French, and in the course of her life she had learned a variety of Algonquian and Iroquoian languages, as well as English and some German and Dutch. As the widow of one Oneida warrior and mother to another, she knew military frontiers all too well; she also knew the more pervasive personal violence that sometimes erupted in the absence of full-scale war. As a trader, she bought and sold on economic frontiers. And as a Catholic living on the borderlands between Protestant Anglo-America and traditional Native communities, she lived on multiple religious frontiers.¹³

Underlying these multifaceted frontiers were other, more pervasive arenas for intercultural contact. In the years when she traveled long distances, from the Great Lakes to Albany and back, Montour had enjoyed the hospitality of other women; in her old age, she showed the same hospitality to younger Natives and Europeans. From within her own home, in the various communities where she spent time, she lived on social frontiers. Finally, she embodied the most intimate frontier of all, that within the family itself. The child of a French-Indian marriage, she was part of the early formation of the people called *métis* in New France.¹⁴ After an early marriage to a French voyageur, she married Carondowana, an Oneida war chief. Her siblings married Algonquin, Sokoki, Abenaki, Miami, and French spouses; her children and grandchildren had French, Delaware, Oneida, and Seneca wives and husbands.¹⁵

Isabelle Montour first entered the public record on the linguistic frontier when she became an official interpreter for New York in 1709, after the murder of her brother, who had led groups of Great Lakes Indians to Albany and interpreted for them. She interpreted for New York Governor Robert Hunter from 1709 until his departure from the colony in 1719, although her name was seldom listed in the minutes. According to one contemporary, Hunter was so suspicious of the official interpreters in Albany that "he had allwise a French woman standing by him who had married one of our Indians to inform him whether the interpreters had done their part truly between him and the Indians." Without her, Hunter said, he would be at a loss, "for I shall never be able to hear the truth but by her means."¹⁶ Montour was one of just a few women who served as official



interpreters in the mid-Atlantic region; she may have been the only one to travel as an official go-between, which the records indicate that she did once in 1712, going to Onondaga at the behest of the Albany commissioners.¹⁷

By 1727, Isabelle Montour was attending meetings between Pennsylvania's Provincial Council and Iroquois or multinational Indian delegations. Although she served as the "interpretress" of record only once, colonial leaders like James Logan and Conrad Weiser consulted with her about events along the Susquehanna, north to Onondaga and west to the Miami country, where she had relatives. A close look at Madame Montour's career reveals that her role may, indeed, have differed from that of male counterparts who served as official interpreters at public treaty conferences. She usually served in a more private capacity, as a personal interpreter for colonial leaders, often at secret meetings with Native representatives. At treaty conferences, her multilingualism enabled her to check the accuracy of other interpreters' work. In between treaties, she gathered information from distant sources through her far-flung family network.

Montour's work behind the scenes of public meetings has parallels in the documented work of women in other instances; it also suggests that there may have been many more undocumented cases of women interpreters. By focusing on the official interpreters taking part in the "clash of empires" saga, historians may have missed evidence that women interpreted in less public forms of cross-cultural interaction.¹⁸

The English preference clearly was for male interpreters, but when qualified men were unavailable, women took on the work of interpreting at treaty conferences.¹⁹ More often, the records hint, they served as private interpreters for traders, officials, and missionaries. Alice Kirk is the only other female interpreter of record—she interpreted from English into the Delaware language at two 1722 meetings—but she, Isabelle Montour, and other multilingual women interpreted among individuals on more mundane occasions. In 1728, the Provincial Council instructed its male envoys that "it might be advisable that Elizabeth Cornish, who speaks the language, should privately between themselves enter into as close a discourse as possible with Civility [a Conestoga chief] about what news he hears." It was in this private realm of diplomacy, in "close discourse," that women were most valuable in crossing the linguistic frontiers that separated Europeans from Indians in every aspect of life.²⁰

Many of Pennsylvania's official interpreters, traders, and go-betweens had multilingual wives or other female relatives who provided essential linguistic expertise. Marriage to multilingual spouses was also an asset to Pennsylvania's traders whose wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters ran the everyday operation of the trading posts that bore their male relatives' names. During the long absences of their go-between husbands, women like Martha Bezaillon and Esther Harris were able to communicate with their Native trading partners along the Susquehanna. Anne Le Tort, the wife and mother of French Huguenot traders and go-betweens, communicated with the Delaware women and men who came to trade, as well as with rival Swedish traders. Later in the century, George Croghan and Thomas McKee had Native wives.²¹

Among missionaries, women often were more multilingual than their husbands. Jeannette Rau was said to be fluent in Mohawk, and Moravians applauded her marriage to Martin Mack in part because her language skills would assist his mission. Other Moravian ministers found spouses who could interpret Algonquian languages for them. Christian Frederick Post married a Wampanoag woman who had been baptized as Rachel; after her death, he married Agnes, a Lenape woman. John Jacob Shebosch married a Mohegan woman in 1746. European second languages were also an asset: when David Bruce and his wife visited the Montours in 1743, her French enabled him to communicate better with the Montour family. Isabelle and her sister Marguerite spoke French, but their husbands and children preferred to speak the native languages of the men, Oneida or Mohawk, and so the Montour women spoke on behalf of their families in encounters with most Europeans.²²

Euro-American officials and clerks often noted that Indian women attended treaty conferences, usually as an unnamed crowd of "women and children" present at meetings between Natives and Europeans. This pattern remained constant throughout the colonial period. The rhetoric of such meetings was that of brotherhood between Indians and Europeans—"we shall be as friends and brothers," both sides claimed—although the Indian delegation nearly always included women. On one occasion, the Conestoga community made the presence of their women explicit: "An Indian [man] spoke in behalf of the women. We are concluded [included] in the alliances . . . as well as our men; so we ask the governor's protection

and desire the governor will kindly accept this present of skins.” Governor Keith proclaimed that Pennsylvanians were “ready to protect and defend you . . . as friends and sisters.”²³

In his painting of the Great Treaty, Benjamin West marked the presence of women with a single figure of an Indian mother with her child. The painting, like nearly all the documentary records, does not have any parallel portrait of an English woman, but indirect evidence shows that Euro-American women were present at treaties as well. In 1701, when groups of Delawares, Susquehannocks, and Shawnees visited William Penn at his homes in Philadelphia and Bucks County, Native women were part of the delegation, but only their husbands, fathers, and sons signed the official documents. In July, Penn and his wife, Hannah Callowhill, hosted a party

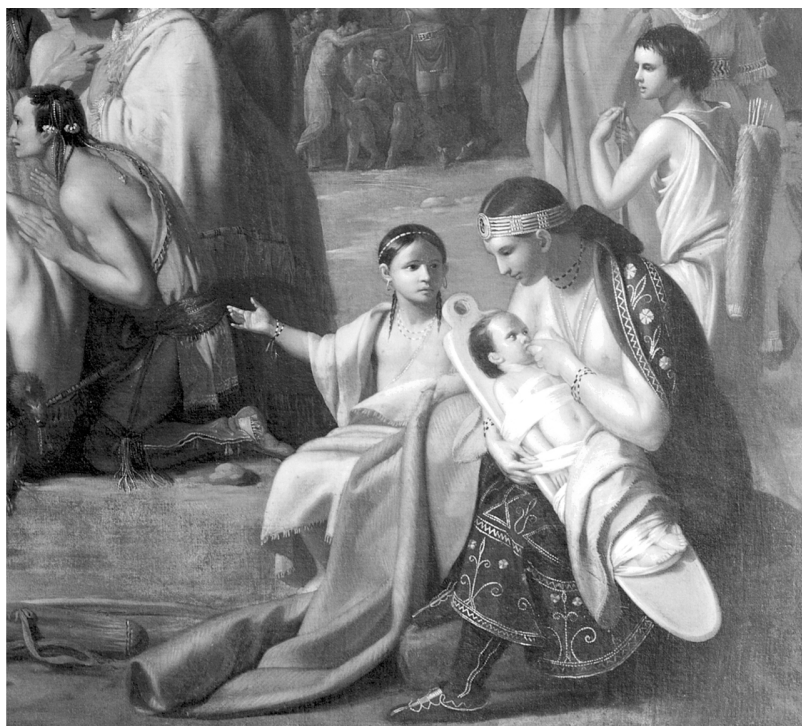


Figure 6 In the eyes of Euro-Americans, women could appear only on the periphery of diplomatic life. Detail of Benjamin West's *William Penn's Treaty with the Indians*, 1771. Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Gift of Mrs. Sarah Harrison (The Joseph Harrison, Jr. Collection).

of a hundred Delaware Indians from Conestoga at Pennsbury. The Penns were about to return to England after staying in the colony for less than two years, and the Indians were making a farewell visit. The official records note only the group's appearance before the Provincial Council in Philadelphia a few days earlier, but a visiting Quaker minister recorded events at Pennsbury. The Delawares "went out of the house into an open place not far from it, to perform their cantico or worship," John Richardson wrote. After preparing a small fire, the men sat around it in a circle, while the women and children formed an outer circle. They sang "a very melodious hymn, which affected and tendered the hearts of many who were spectators." As they sang, they began to beat on the ground, and then "they rose up and danced a little about the fire, and parted with some shouting like triumph in rejoicing." Two months later, a group of Susquehannocks and Shawnees came to Pennsbury for a similar farewell visit, but in this case no one recorded the presence of the women who surely were there.²⁴

Iroquois women and children were in a delegation that met Governor Keith at Conestoga in 1721, but they returned home by canoe up the Susquehanna while the men continued on to Virginia. (Perhaps the men were off to fight the Cherokees, but they did not divulge their purpose to the Pennsylvanians.) On their departure, the Iroquois men thanked the governor for the provisions and his "great care of them and their families."²⁵ In 1768, Indian agent George Croghan treated with a succession of groups of Native men, women, and children, but he usually recorded numbers for only the adult male participants.²⁶

Women on all sides supported treaty conferences and military expeditions through traditional patterns of women's work. At peace conference sites, Delaware and Iroquois women worked with their husbands to erect wigwams for their families to stay in for the duration. Women cooked the meals, mended clothing, and did laundry. On military expeditions, when Indian men traveled without their families, colonial authorities sometimes hired women from local communities to perform these tasks. When delegations came to Pennsbury, Hannah Penn and her servants prepared food and drink for all those in attendance. Upon his arrival at Carlisle in 1758, Christian Frederick Post hired a local woman to cook for the Delaware partners accompanying him westward. Her job was "to dress their victuals, which pleased them well."²⁷ In the 1760s and 1770s, Pennsylvania women whose husbands or other relatives were stationed at Fort Pitt made shirts and caps by the dozens for trade and baked bread to feed provincial sol-



diers and their Native allies. Under the threat of conflict, normal domestic economic activity took on diplomatic overtones.²⁸

Among Indians, women took part in the decisions made at conferences, as well as the decision to attend a particular treaty in the first place. Time and time again, Indian messengers conveyed their excuses to colonial authorities; "women and children" provided the reason the men could not travel. Shawnees and Cayugas reported that they could not attend a 1722 meeting in Philadelphia because "provisions being very scarce in their towns, they could not leave their families destitute." The other nations had been delayed because "the people of the Five Nations wanted provisions so much, and were so busily employed in looking out for food . . . [and] busy getting victuals as fish out of the rivers and some venison from the woods, but now squashes and pompions [pumpkins] are come they will be able to travel."²⁹ While men did most of the hunting and women most of the farm work, both were, in fact, family and communal efforts because the usual procedure was for women to process the deer the men killed and for entire families to work together to harvest crops. This communal work pattern was often the reason that Native families chose not to undertake the lengthy journey from the Susquehanna to Philadelphia but asked the governor to come to Conestoga instead, as they did in 1721.³⁰

In September 1745, Marguerite Montour and her husband Katarionaka passed through the Susquehanna Valley of central Pennsylvania with a pack of ten horses loaded with deerskins. Marguerite was *métis* and her husband, known to the English as Peter Quebec, was probably Mohawk. They had come from four hundred miles to the west, where they lived most of the year, trading English and French goods for furs and skins from the Miami and other Great Lakes nations. This 1745 trip was probably not unusual; it may well have been an annual event. What was unusual was that Moravian missionaries recorded Marguerite's trip and so left historians with rare documentary evidence of women's involvement in Pennsylvania's eighteenth-century trade.³¹

Pennsylvania's official colonial records give short shrift to Euro-Indian trade as a whole, particularly since much of it was illegal, and they contain few hints of the role of women in it. Older historians who relied on these official records often omitted even those hints of a female presence, obscuring the trail for their successors.³² Recent historians have done much to recover the Native perspective on the story, but the focus has usually

been on Native men and their relationships with European men.³³ Women's names do appear, though infrequently, in the unofficial records of Pennsylvania's trade, in such items as diaries, account books, receipts, and personal correspondence. The few recorded female names represent merely the tip of the iceberg, leaving unmentioned the extent to which women participated, from "harvesting" the animals, to skinning them and dressing the furs and skins, to transporting them for sale. Women were in fact often the silent partners in the trade—silent, that is, in the written historic records that were kept, for the most part, by European men.

The trade required a physical and social space where traders from very different cultures could travel unmolested and meet on common ground to exchange their goods. Trade required peace among nations and among individuals, and peace required communication both on the diplomatic level and on the level of face-to-face personal interaction.³⁴ It was during personal interaction that women occasionally drew the attention of the record keepers, and usually under particular circumstances: when men were absent, when women had essential skills that no available man had, and when crime or violence made women victims or witnesses.

Trade was a family enterprise among Europeans, Natives, and *métis*. French, English, and German women—wives and daughters of the men registered as "Indian traders" with the Pennsylvania government—were clearly partners in their husbands' and fathers' businesses with Native people. Along the Schuylkill and Susquehanna rivers, Anne Le Tort and Esther Harris ran the trading posts that bore the names of their husbands. Marguerite Montour transported furs as surely as her husband did; she was also the family's interpreter and the family connection to merchants in Philadelphia. Women were in fact not merely participants in trade; they were essential to it. On both sides of the Atlantic, women played a role in creating the goods of the trade, which included many more products than just furs. Deerskins were an important part of the Native contribution to the trade, as were feathers for use in European beds and pillows. Native women in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania, as elsewhere, collected and bundled feathers, trapped small animals, skinned both large and small animals, stretched skins, and dressed furs. They frequently traveled with their husbands to the woods, where together they set up hunting camps. When Weynepeeweyta, a Shawnee, went with her Seneca husband to their usual hunting camp on Monocacy Creek, she was following the traditional pattern of shared labor described by Moravian missionary John Heckewelder:



while her husband hunted, the woman took supplies to the camp and set up "housekeeping." She "takes pains to dry as much meat as she can, that none may be lost; she carefully puts the tallow up, assists in drying the skins, gathers as much wild hemp as possible for the purpose of making strings, carrying-bands, bags, and other necessary articles, collects roots for dyeing." Heckewelder neglected to say that she also prepared food and took care of other daily necessities, not only for her husband but also for other hunters and traders passing through the woods.³⁵

"The husband," Heckewelder wrote, "generally leaves the skins and peltry which he has procured by hunting to the care of his wife, who sells or barter them away to the best advantages for such necessities as are wanted in the family." One Pennsylvania document records the identities of some of these Native women and the sales they made at the Le Tort family's trading post. French Huguenot refugees, Anne and Jacques had come to Pennsylvania in about 1687 with their son James. As the Lenapes and their trade moved westward, the Le Torts moved too, from their first post on the Schuylkill River north of Philadelphia, to the Susquehanna River, near Conestoga, a mixed community of Susquehannock, Conoy, Shawnee, and Delaware Indians. Native women as well as men came to trade, and the Le Torts recorded their transactions, generally identifying the women by their husbands' names. Loosemon's wife bargained for a kettle in exchange for a raccoon skin and the furs of three foxes. Skeetah, the wife of Happecan, received a blanket for two fox furs, and a packet of vermilion dye in exchange for a raccoon. Aspebloagh, a young woman trading in her own right, exchanged a doeskin for a shirt. A Conoy woman traded one fox fur for a looking glass. These women clearly were conducting their own transactions for the products of their own labor—the dressed skins of small animals that they had perhaps trapped themselves—and they traded for goods that they themselves would use. Whereas Lenape and Conestoga men traded for guns, powder, and axes, the women sought cooking pots and fabric and dye for clothing items. Historians have speculated that Indian women pushed men to trade for goods like metal kettles that would lighten their job of food preparation, but the Le Torts' list shows Indian women acting in their own names. Perhaps they were able to bargain directly with the Le Torts because a French woman was an integral part of the business, operating the trading post herself much of the time.³⁶

In the one recorded incident where we can hear Anne Le Tort's voice, she appears as a strong woman managing the family business while her husband was away. Competition over trade led to violence between rival European traders, especially if they were of different national origins. The Le Torts' cabin became a focal point for Pennsylvania's trade and a lightning rod for attacks by English and Swedish traders who resented competition and believed that French traders were easy marks because colonial authorities perceived the French and French-allied Indians as the enemy. While Jacques Le Tort was abroad on a visit to England, his wife had given trading goods to the Indians on the promise that furs would be delivered, but rival Peter Yokum, a Swede, tried to persuade the Indians to deliver their furs to him instead in exchange for rum. The Provincial Council summoned Anne to Philadelphia, where Yokum accused her of conspiring with the French and the "French Indians" because she was "tradeing in remote and obscure places where they [the Le Torts] still continue their former way of freedom of commerce with natives." The witnesses against her, Polycarpus Rose and Thomas Jenner, testified that she had become violently angry: "Ryding by the house of Madam LeTort Polycarpus asked her how she did she answered Where have you been hee sayd at Peter Yoakhams she said their was no path for Swades and English rogues there for noe English rogues or Swad shall come on her ground and run in a fury with a horse whip and whipt Polycarpus and called for Lewis to help her a French Canada prisoner taken by our Indians." In her defense, Le Tort said "that the Indians are much indebted to her and little to peter yokum, and that hee came before her hous with rum, and therewith enticed the Indians from her; whereupon shee in her anger, might call him and said Polycarpus Rose names."³⁷

European and Euro-American women not only engaged in trade but produced goods for it. On both sides of the Atlantic, they turned American raw materials into finished products, turned skins and furs into clothing and hats, spun and wove cloth to make shirts and blankets for the market. The surviving account books of Pennsylvania Indian agent George Croghan from the 1760s and 1770s offer glimpses into Anglo-American women's activities producing trade goods. Women like Ann Woodhouse, Hannah Swain, and Mary and Ann Girty at Fort Pitt made shirts and caps by the dozens for trade and baked bread to feed Pennsylvania soldiers and their Native allies. Often Croghan and other agents paid the husband, and



the account books show only the man's name. But in cases of widows and single women, the payments went directly to those who had done the labor.³⁸

On the Native side of the trade, women were essential to transport as well as to production. In May 1723, a New York clerk wrote, "Eighty men besides women and children belonging to several tribes who live upon the borders of Lake Huron and Lake Erie [had] come to Albany to trade." The New Yorkers were following their usual custom of counting only Native men, without giving the number of women and children, because they were interested in the wartime fighting potential of Indian groups, not their overall population. But the Great Lakes Indians traveled in family groups for a very practical reason: women and older children were needed to help paddle and portage the canoes.³⁹ In March 1725, the Albany clerk noted, Jean Montour and one hired man arrived in three canoes carrying forty bundles of skins. But two men could not have paddled and portaged three laden canoes; women and children must have been their silent companions. In June 1725, Joseph Montour and Jean Fafard came with nine canoes as far as Oneida Falls, where New York traders intercepted them and took their furs. The Albany clerk noted that they had come "in company with nine canoes of Twightwigh [Miami] Indians (among whom they live and are maryd to squas)." Undoubtedly some of the Miami in the nine canoes were these "squaws"—an Algonquian word for women that had not yet acquired its later derogatory connotations—but the clerk failed to note the presence of any women in the party at all.⁴⁰

Where river travel was impossible or difficult, such as traveling west to east in Pennsylvania, horses generally carried the furs to Philadelphia and then European trade goods on the way back. Women were essential to this mode of transport as well. Like Marguerite Montour, other Native women must have helped to lead packs of horses over Pennsylvania's "endless mountains" and across its rivers and streams, which were only partially navigable and at any rate did not traverse the colony from east to west.⁴¹

Much of women's cross-cultural interaction took place in the familiar, female realm of the home. Native and *métis* women took Euro-American travelers—usually men, but occasionally women also—into their homes. They cooked for their guests, prepared medicines, dressed wounds, and gave or sold them provisions so they could continue their journey. Euro-

American women less often took Indians into their homes, but Quaker and Moravian women and traders' wives sometimes did so, the former out of religious conviction, the latter from practical necessity. These private activities took on political, religious, or economic overtones. On the most personal frontier, Native women had sex (consensual or not) with, and sometimes married, Euro-American or *métis* men.

Penn and other European visitors commented on the generosity of Pennsylvania's Native people. When Marguerite Montour and her husband traveled from Miami country to Philadelphia, they probably spent some nights in Indian villages along the way. Native traditions of hospitality meant that peaceful travelers could reasonably expect to find food and shelter whenever they reached a Native settlement. Along the path in between villages, travelers might find huts or wigwams left by previous inhabitants for shelter or canoes hidden in the brush, left by previous travelers for the use of anyone who needed it. They might even find food, such as the half-deer that Moravian Bishop Spangenberg found along a Susquehanna trail. When Montour family members reached the Susquehanna Valley, they knew they could find a friendly welcome at the home of Marguerite's maternal aunt, Isabelle Montour. These family reunions might have gone completely unnoticed, but in 1745 Pennsylvania's famous "Madame Montour" had other guests as well, Martin and Jeannette Mack, whose journal recorded it.

The demands on Madame Montour's hospitality from summer to fall 1745 were probably unusual in their variety, but many Indian and *métis* women must have hosted colonial leaders, traders, go-betweens, and missionaries, as well as the more traditional guests: traveling relatives, friends, hunters, and warriors. In 1701, William Penn visited Conestoga, where he reportedly stayed in a longhouse. His willingness to lodge in a traditional Indian home made him unusual for a man of his stature, the majority of whom preferred the comforts of even the shabbiest European-style housing, alone or among non-Indian companions. Penn's acceptance of Native hospitality was an act not soon forgotten by his Conestoga "brothers"—and "sisters," the women who cared for him and made him comfortable as an honored guest while he carried on official negotiations with their husbands and other male relatives. Traveling Quaker ministers also found a welcome in Indian villages. In 1706, Thomas Chalkley reported visiting Shawnees and Conestogas at Conestoga, in the company of thirteen or



fourteen other Quakers and an interpreter. He met their “queen” or “empress,” Canatowa, whose “council to her tribe was, to receive and welcome the missionaries, as they came on a good errand.”⁴²

In similar circumstances, Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf refused Native hospitality and sat alone, reading, in a small isolated hut. He thereby earned the scorn of Susquehanna’s Native women and men and very nearly ruined the Moravian mission to the Indians before it had even begun. Only the considered efforts of later missionaries to stay in the homes of Native and *métis* women made the mission successful in subsequent years. Martin and Anna Mack spent a month at the Montours’ island home in 1745 before going to stay with Shickellamy. Madame Montour and her daughter-in-law cared for them and fed them as well as they could at a time of food shortages; in return, the Macks listened to Montour’s stories and complaints and, while her son Andrew was away hunting, helped her harvest her cornfield. In 1753, Martin Grube visited Marguerite Montour, by then known as “French Margaret,” on the West Branch of the Susquehanna. “She welcomed us to her hut,” he recorded in his journal, and “fed us milk and watermelon.”⁴³

Conrad Weiser and other go-betweens also cemented their relationships with the Indian contacts by staying with the Montours in Otstonwakin, with Shickellamy’s family in Shamokin, and with their Onondaga hosts in Haudenosaunee longhouses. Traders slept in Indian villages and hunting camps, although that fact made its way into the historic record only if some sort of problem occurred, since most traders were at best semi-literate and certainly did not keep journals. When the Le Torts had trouble collecting from their native trade partners, they recorded a debt, payable in furs, from a woman they knew only as “our land lady at the Conoy.”⁴⁴ In 1722, Weynepeeweyta, a Shawnee woman, welcomed English traders John and Edmund Cartlidge to spend the night in the hunting cabin she shared with her Seneca husband; her hospitality only entered the written record because of subsequent dramatic events. The next morning she tried in vain to prevent her husband, Sawantaeny, from getting into a fight with the Cartlidge brothers. When he died as a result of their vicious beating, her status as the relative of a Shawnee chief may have been one factor leading colonial authorities to take the charge of murder more seriously (see chapter 6, below).⁴⁵

Because of the long-standing tradition of hospitality among America’s original inhabitants, Europeans who wanted Native trading partners recip-

roated, if they were smart. Not all Europeans were. Often fear and cultural prejudice kept them from allowing Indians anywhere near their towns, let alone into their homes, and most never condescended to go into Indian dwellings. Besides the traders and interpreters, Quakers and Moravians were among the few people in English America who both extended hospitality to Native people and accepted Native generosity toward them.⁴⁶

On several occasions, William Penn welcomed groups of Native men, women, and children to his city house in Philadelphia and his country estate at Pennsbury, fifty miles above the city on the Delaware River. In their formal address, the Susquehannock leader Connodagtoh, Shawnee chief Opessah, and other representatives noted how unusual William Penn's behavior was. They thanked him for "giving, us as is well known, his house for our home at all times and freely entertaining us at his own cost and often filling us with many presents of necessary goods for our cloathing, and other accomodations, besides which what he had paid us for our lands, which no governour ever did before him."⁴⁷ When William Penn died in 1718, Pennsylvania Indians remembered Hannah Penn's hospitality and sent her a condolence gift of a cloak to wear through the "wilderness of care, or briars, and thorns" she faced as a widow.⁴⁸

As they welcomed guests into their homes, women provided food, clothing, shelter, and medicine across cultural lines. In both European and American cultures, healing was predominantly the province of women, and women were often healers across social and ethnic divides. Madame Montour provided "fever medicine" to Conrad Weiser when he stayed with her on his way to Onondaga, and he recorded, in his Native German, her directions for its preparation for both adults or children. During her stay at Shamokin, Jeannette Mack made visits to Native women who were sick. Providing medical aid was part of her ministry, and she was able to visit Native homes on her own, without an interpreter, because she spoke both Mohawk and Delaware languages.⁴⁹

Hospitality sometimes brought more conflict than understanding, and alcohol abuse by both Euro-Americans and Indians often created problems. As early as 1685, Lenape Indians were complaining about traders getting Indian men drunk and then abusing their wives. The culprits, they said, were Jasper Farmer's servants, who "made the Indians drunk, then lay with their wives, then beat both the men and the wives."⁵⁰ A few years after William Penn's visit to Conestoga, Pennsylvania's young deputy governor, John Evans, and his friend, William Penn Jr., did not behave as well



toward the colony's original inhabitants as had the Founder. They visited Conestoga, just as Penn Sr. had done, but they exhibited some "lewd" behavior of the "vilest" sort toward "the wives and daughters of the people at Conostogo." Although some Europeans believed that Native women were willing sex partners with any European man, the Pennsylvania proprietor had come to have different ideas and blamed any sexual activity on the young Englishmen involved.⁵¹ By 1706, Shawnee, Susquehannock, and Conoy men had learned to leave their wives at home. Their complaint was that the traders got them drunk and then cheated them of "the fruits of their labor."⁵² In 1730, in the midst of a drunken brawl, a Shawnee woman seized a gun from an Iroquois prisoner; the gun went off and hit a "white man," David Robeson, in the leg. At least this was the claim of Lenape leaders, who may have seen the advantage in pinning all the blame on a Shawnee woman and an Iroquois captive. Whether their story was true or not, it bears one similarity to Sawantaeny's murder. In both cases, Native women tried to break up a fight by taking men's weapons away.⁵³

Pennsylvania's traders and officials frequently blamed Indian women for the trade in rum, an argument that Indian and *métis* men embraced as a way to absolve themselves of blame. In 1718, Governor Keith told a visiting delegation from Conestoga that he would look into their accusation that traders were illegally bringing rum to their towns. But, he said, Conestoga's leaders bore some responsibility too: "They . . . must endeavour to prevent their women and young people from coming to Philadelphia to purchase and carry up rum from hence, which too many were ready to deliver them privately for their skins."⁵⁴ In 1729, the Provincial Council told Delaware, Conestoga, and Conoy leaders that their men "send their women for [rum] to all places where it can be had. . . . If your women would carry none, it would be more easy" to control its sale.⁵⁵ By 1754, colonial authorities, however, expressed some doubts about claims that women alone were responsible. They accused Lewis Montour, Andrew's brother, of disturbing the Indians at Aughwick "by bringing strong liquor to them. . . . Lewis sells it very dear to them, and pretends that his Wife, which is an ugly squa, does it."⁵⁶ Yet Native men seemed to assume that women would be the ones to travel to buy rum, so perhaps women were the main transporters of alcohol. Sassoonan, the Delaware leader at Shamokin, asked the Provincial Council, in 1731, for traders at Tulpehocken and Paxton to stock rum, "that their women may not have too long a way to fetch it." He did not want rum sold right in Shamokin, but he also did

not want the women to have to go all the way to Philadelphia or Lancaster for it.⁵⁷

On the most personal level of all, Europeans and Indians became members of each other's families through adoption or marriage. European and Native children went into the homes of the other group, sometimes willingly as apprentices or "truchements," sometimes unwillingly as captives or slaves. Native women married European men; occasionally European women married Native men. These more personal frontiers are less visible in the written records than the public frontier of diplomacy, but when they do become visible, they show women clearly as active participants in intercultural relations. Like the Susquehanna Valley frontiers outside the home, family frontiers could be much more complex than simply interaction between Indians and Euro-Americans. Living at various times with the French-Algonquin Isabelle Montour were her husband, who was Oneida, their son Andrew and his first wife, who was Lenape, and then his second wife, who was probably Oneida or *métis*, along with their children and Isabelle's niece Catherine, whose father was probably Miami. German, English, and Iroquois visitors regularly added more variety to the already diverse household. Nor was the religious frontier a simple matter of "Christians" divided from Indian "traditionalists." Montour expected Christian religious leaders to baptize her children as eagerly as she remembered Catholic priests baptizing children in New France. She was surprised and hurt when Zinzendorf refused to perform baptisms until a formal mission was established at Shamokin. Religion may have been a contested arena within Montour's own family. Andrew's wife does not seem to have been a Christian. Isabelle was particularly eager to ask the Moravians if there were Delaware Indians at Bethlehem, so perhaps she hoped that they would convert her daughter-in-law and thereby enable her grandchildren to receive baptism there.⁵⁸

Frontier history has become more complex as historians add more layers to the story of contact and interaction along social and cultural borders, in addition to the traditional military and political boundaries. Women are not just another layer to be added to the story but rather a component of each layer, with a presence on military, linguistic, diplomatic, economic, religious, and social frontiers. Recognizing their presence is the first, basic step in researching women's history, "making the invisible visible."⁵⁹ As Gerda Lerner has traced it, the initial step for each generation of women's



historians has been the resurrection of a few notable women, or “women worthies.” The second phase has been “contribution history,” the ferreting out of ways that women have “contributed” to the major events of history, as defined by men, through activities like nation building and warfare. The next phase has centered on a series of questions: What have been women’s actual experiences? How did they differ from men’s experiences? How have women been oppressed and victimized? How have they fought against oppression? This chapter has been an attempt to go behind the silences of the documentary evidence to uncover women’s contributions and experiences.⁶⁰

A few “notable” women have been part of the popular historical landscape of the early Pennsylvania frontier since the writing of county and state histories in the nineteenth century and, most visibly, through the commonwealth’s historical marker program, which provides a convenient window into the historical memory of women’s place on the colonial frontier. One of the earliest markers erected, in 1925, was to “Indian Hannah (1730–1802), the last of the Indians in Chester County”; in keeping with her status as a symbol of a “noble, disappearing race,” the marker omits her full name, Hannah Freeman, and her final residence, the county workhouse. Five markers memorialize either Madame Montour or her granddaughter “Queen Esther” Montour; these plaques all identify the women as Indians, ignoring their *métis* identity—a small part of denying what Gary Nash has called “the Hidden History of Mestizo America.”⁶¹ One marker identifies Pennsylvania’s most famous Euro-American captive of the Indians, Mary Jemison, whose much larger memorial is in New York, where she lived as a Seneca for most of her life. Other women named on markers appear with their husbands or children: Martha Bezaillon, wife of French Indian trader Peter Bezaillon, in Lancaster County; Sarah Shippen Burd, the daughter and wife of traders (Dauphin County); Marie Ferrée, the grandmother of “the first white child in the settlement” of Paradise Township, Lancaster County; and a group of eight Moravian women named with their husbands as part of that sect’s Dansbury Mission, destroyed in “the Indian uprising of 1755.” Other women are identified only by the husband’s names: trader Martin Chartier’s “Shawnee wife” and the “Widow Barr,” whose Franklin County home provided a refuge from Indian raiders in the 1750s.⁶²

The vast majority of wives, daughters, and mothers go unmentioned on the markers memorializing them, just as the trading posts they operated

bore only their husbands' names. Anthony Sadowski, John Harris, John Hans Steelman, John Hart, Frank Stevens—none of these men's wives rate any mention, whether they were Native or European, even though most of the women were essential to the business operations. Moravians mentioned women members more frequently than any other group, but, with the exception of the Dansbury Mission marker, all the markers mention only the men: David Zeisberger, John Heckewelder, Christian Frederick Post, John Ettwein. All their wives are invisible. Count Zinzendorf's daughter Benigna accompanied him on his mission and established a school for girls when she herself was only sixteen, but his is the only name on five markers.⁶³

The great majority of markers that mention women, though not by name, are memorials to the "massacres" of the Seven Years' War and the Revolution, mostly those committed by Natives on Europeans—the Penn's Creek Massacre; the Lee Massacre; the Leroy Massacre; the Sugarloaf Massacre; the Wyoming Massacre, in which Esther Montour supposedly played a leading role; and the Gnadenhütten Massacre, where traditionalist Natives killed Moravians and Native converts. A few markers commemorate European slaughters of Native women and men, although they rarely use the word "massacre" in this context. Rather, these murders are called the Squaw Campaign and the Paxton Boys' Riots.⁶⁴ Looking at the historical landscape of the commonwealth, women's experience on the frontier would seem to have been one of death and destruction, especially for European women. The overemphasis on the few years of war in the 1750s and 1770s skews the entire portrait of the frontier, especially for the image of women's experiences it conveys. In reality, women's cross-cultural experiences were at least as varied as men's.

The final step in Lerner's typology of women's history—once we have uncovered the women of the past, their roles, and their experiences—is to ask how these new insights might transform our general historical knowledge. This essay can only begin to hint at the possibilities. For historians of eighteenth-century Pennsylvania two related questions have loomed large. Why did Delaware, Shawnee, and Mingo warriors attack with such a vengeance in the 1750s after decades of peace? Conversely, why had the peace lasted so long, given the profound hostility that underlay European-Native interaction, hostility evident as early as 1685 in English servants' attacks on Native women? Because women were so often the victims of violence and war, perhaps the answers to these questions lie, at least in



part, with them. Peace lasted as long as Native women remained partners, even if silent partners, in the diplomatic process; as long as Native women lived, farmed, and hunted in the Delaware and Susquehanna valleys; as long as the most influential leaders in Pennsylvania's affairs had personal ties, through marriage or adoption, with Native women as well as Native men. When those social connections—relationships in which women were integral—broke down for all but a small minority of traders and missionaries, the possibilities for peace grew dim. The presence of women meant peace; their absence meant war.