'Taken to Detroit': Shawnee Resistance and the Ohio Valley Captive Trade, 1750-1796

Anna Margaret Cloninger

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‘TAKEN TO DETROIT’:
SHAWNEE RESISTANCE AND THE OHIO VALLEY CAPTIVE TRADE,
1750-1796

Anna Margaret Cloninger
Richmond, Virginia

Bachelor of Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2009

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Master of Arts

Anna Margaret Cloninger

Approved by the Committee, November 2011

Committee Chair
Associate Professor Brett Rushforth, History
The College of William and Mary

Associate Professor Andrew Fisher, History
The College of William and Mary

Associate Professor Paul Mapp, History
The College of William and Mary
In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the captive trade was an important element of Shawnee resistance to westward Anglo-American expansion. Until the transfer of Detroit to American control in 1796, a trade in white settlers centered around the fort provided Ohio Valley Shawnees with materials and military support vital to the defense of their territorial claims in the region. After the revolution, the trade also allowed British authorities in the area to maintain their claim upon territories surrendered to American control in 1783. The captive trade combined Shawnee military and economic resistance strategies, and sustained informal alliances with British and French allies. The end of those alliances amid European war at the end of the eighteenth century eroded the viability of the trade as resistance strategy. The end of the captive trade after 1796 signaled the frustration of Shawnee territorial claims to the Ohio Valley, and forthcoming removals to points west.
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For Paul and Margaret Armstrong, with my thanks and love, always.
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I: Introducing the Detroit Captive Trade

In a small historical society in southwestern Virginia, one of the odder relics of Indian captivity rests tucked away in a corner. Lexington resident Mary Moore took refuge in a cradle constructed by her husband, padded and finished to accommodate a small adult frame, reportedly as part of Moore’s attempts to combat nightmares about a childhood Indian captivity which began at the hands of Ohio Valley Shawnees, and culminated in years of service to a Loyalist resident of Canada. In 1786, Mary was taken captive during a Shawnee raid on her family’s farm in present-day Tazewell County, Virginia, and traded north to Detroit. By the time of her redemption three years later, Mary had witnessed the deaths of many of her family members and been bound into servitude far to the north of her home and most of her remaining family. When an opportunity finally arose to return home, Mary eagerly embraced the chance to rejoin Virginian frontier society. The striking image of Mary’s cradle, however, is only one part of a narrative characterizing a central element of the contest between Native Americans and American settlers for the resources of the Ohio Valley in the late eighteenth century. Mary’s transit to Detroit, and her captivity and labor there, was a story shared with hundreds of other frontier men, women, and children. A trade in captive Americans centered around the British fort at Detroit plagued the Ohio Valley, even after Detroit was officially declared American territory with the
close of the Revolutionary War, shaping settlers and resistance in the
area.¹

The captive trade was an arm of Native American campaigns to arrest the
tide of American westward settlement and preserve Indian territorial claims to the
region. By freeing captive-takers and their communities from the pressure of
producing all of the items which they required to subsist, the captive trade to
Detroit allowed the Shawnees to threaten American settlement of the Ohio Valley
even after the Treaty of Paris consigned the area to American control in 1783.
Despite treaties in the following years that promised to protect Native American
territorial claims west of the Ohio, Shawnee leaders worried that “Trouble is
coming upon us fast.” As thousands of Shawnees left the Ohio between 1774
and 1795 for points west under the pressure of American settlement, the captive
trade to Detroit allowed some of those who remained to feed, clothe, and
otherwise supply themselves, and defend their remaining claims to Ohio territory.
For British and French masters at Detroit, captives were valued as labor; for
political administrators at the settlement, captive exchanges were a way to aid
their Native American allies’ battle against a common American foe.
Understanding the structure of this trade, anchored at one end on the Great
Lakes, and radiating south and east, renders the early history of the Northwest
Territory in all of the political, economic, and social complexity which defined the
frontier region in the late eighteenth century. Detroit preoccupied the minds and

¹ This, and subsequent references to the Moore story, unless otherwise noted, are derived from
James Moore Brown’s The Captives of Abbe’s Valley (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of
Publications and Sabbath-school Work, 1854).
memory of politicians and frontier residents for decades, just as it troubled Mary Moore’s dreams.²

The official republic came belatedly to Detroit; the fort passed to American hands only in 1796, well after the Treaty of Paris assigned it to the United States, and it was not until the nineteenth century that the hundred-year-old settlement was incorporated as a city. Simultaneously, but not coincidentally, a century-old captive trade came to an end as well. The captive trade, with Detroit at its center, characterized the structure of the Ohio Valley generally, and Detroit in particular, in the last decades of French and British rule. Detroit faced two directions at once, as it both looked forward into a national future which integrated products and persons, and backwards towards a century of struggle in the region over which it presided. This dual focus manifested itself in the places, politics, and personalities which the captive trade embossed on public and private lives. Official figures like Henry Hamilton and George Rogers Clark were reviled or lauded for their involvement in the trade at Detroit. Contemporary residents and and nineteenth-century historians also assigned non-governmental figures like Daniel Boone and Simon Girty heroic or infamous roles in regional and local mythologies, for their participation, willing or otherwise, in the same institution. Less famous persons like Mary Moore and her older brother James also found two sides to the captive trade, which simultaneously tied together diverse populations within a contested region and divided the region’s residents into

captors and captives. The trade marked Detroit itself as a settlement both thoroughly frontier, and absolutely regional, national, and even international. The captive trade to Detroit at once supported eighteenth-century regional divisions by bolstering Shawnee attempts to restrict American settlement, and eroded them by the end of the century as American efforts focused on eliminating the persistent threat from Detroit.³

While the Treaty of Paris formally assigned much of the Ohio Valley to American interests, violence in the area accelerated after the revolution as resident Native Americans refused to unilaterally accept British territorial cessions. While hundreds of Ohio Valley Shawnees attempted to pursue peaceful negotiations with the American confederation, others chose force. With support from British commanders at Detroit, these Shawnees and their allies raided the valley unceasingly until 1795, killing and kidnapping American settlers and terrifying their neighbors. The trade in captive settlers funded further resistance, and provoked American retaliations over more than a decade.

One arm of Shawnee resistance tactics, the captive trade helped sustain the battle for the Ohio Valley until British withdrawal from Detroit ended their informal alliance with northwestern Indians. Sketching the shape of the captive trade to Detroit, and the importance of captivity as a Shawnee resistance strategy, highlights the way in which Shawnee resistance combined economic

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and military strategies towards territorial ends. A reading of captivity narratives and official records demonstrates that the importance of the captive trade for Shawnee resistance was not lost on British or American officials, or Ohio Valley settlers. The end of the trade signaled the frustration of Shawnee military campaigns in the eighteenth century, the withdrawal of British financial and military aid for Ohio Valley Shawnees, and forthcoming removals to the Missouri territory and points west. Further resistance had to await the reinvigoration of Pan-Indian confederacy in the nineteenth century.

**Historiography**

Outlining the structure of the Detroit-centered captive trade requires an appreciation of a set of local, regional, and national historiographies, and attention to the way in which they provide a context for understanding the trade. On a national scale, James Axtell’s “The White Indians of Colonial America” has dominated discussions of North American Indian captivity since its 1975 publication, often functioning as a blanket narrative for areas in which detailed studies of individual captivities were not available. In regional studies, eighteenth-century Indian captivity in New England and nineteenth-century captivities among Plains Indians and throughout the west have received significant scholarly attention.4

This has not been the case for the Ohio Valley, the western frontier of the eighteenth century. Intensive studies of captivity in the region have been limited to the most sensational and best-publicized incidents, namely Daniel Boone’s brief captivity with the Shawnees. More generally, scholarship on the Ohio Valley after the revolution slowed after Henry Adams’s analysis of the significance of northwestern Indians in the Jefferson and Madison administrations. Adams’s contemporary Francis Parkman dismissed the significance of the Native American threat to the American confederacy in the wake of Pontiac’s War, after which, in Parkman’s analysis, northwestern tribes “were destined to melt and vanish before the advancing waves of Anglo-American power, which now rolled westward unchecked and unopposed.” In the charge towards the Early Republic, scholars avoided the Ohio Valley Indians for much of the twentieth century, accepting Henry Knox’s optimistic insistence that “all the Indian tribes once existing in those states now the best cultivated and most populous have come extinct,” consigning the Indians “on this side of the Mississippi” to “the page of the historian.”

When northwestern Indians appeared in scholarship on the post-revolutionary period, they were, as James Merrell put it, “problems to be solved by federal policymakers.” On paper, policy makers like Henry Knox were

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frequently too sanguine about the disappearance of Native Americans from the northwest; as scholars like Richard White have highlighted, trans-Appalachian settlement was hardly uncontested in the post-revolutionary period. Merrell and Colin Calloway have emphasized the omnipresence of Indians throughout early modern America, a presence which was particularly strong in the Ohio Valley. Recent work on northwestern Indians has reoriented scholarly focus to Native American sources, political and religious practices, and motivations. Eric Hinderaker is one of a number of scholars who have begun to explore the varieties of Indian resistance in the Ohio Valley. Regional Native American confederacies, foreshadowing Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa, formed well before the nineteenth century; while thousands of Shawnees departed for Missouri in the post-revolutionary years, others remained in the Ohio Valley and built inter-tribal alliances to resist American territorial expansion through accommodation or violence. The anti-accommodationist confederacy looked to European as well as Native American allies, appealing to British Detroit for aid. Accounts of the confederacy have been attentive to the Ohio Valley raids and British support that sustained Native American resistance, but have failed to supply a treatment of the role that the captive trade played in this process. Scholarship on the Shawnees in Ohio has largely avoided discussion of the political significance of
white captivity, treating captivity instead largely for its potential to provoke settler
raids and recriminations. 6

Available sources on the captive trade outnumber the existing
historiography; a number of first-person accounts of captivity in the Ohio Valley,
as well as diplomatic and political records of the public and private concern
surrounding them, are readily available. The failure, thus far, to produce a study
of these materials which synthesizes this wealth of materials, has obscured the
central place which Detroit occupied in an eighteenth century captivity trade
peculiar to the region. Such a study undermines "White Indians'" assertion that
"when the long peace in the Middle Atlantic colonies collapsed in 1775, the

Republic," in Native Americans and the Early Republic, ed. Frederick E. Hoxie, Ronald Hoffman,
and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by
the University Press of Virginia, 1999), 333. The policy approach is prominent in Reginald
Horsman's extensive work on the period, including Expansion and American Indian Policy (East
Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967). I'm indebted to Professor Merrell's essay for
any understanding of the historiography of northwestern Indians in this period. Richard White,
The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815
Country": Indians and Colonists in Early America," in Strangers within the Realm: Cultural
Margins of the First British Empire, eds. Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (Chapel Hill:
published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of
Country," in Native Americans and the Early Republic: On the reorientation, see, for example,
Gregory Dowd, A Spirited Resistance: the North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815
(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). Eric Hinderaker, Elusive Empires:
Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
1997). A more recent treatment is David Andrew Nichols's monograph Red Gentlemen and White
Savages: Indians, Federalists, and the Search for Order on the American Frontier (Charlottesville:
University Press of Virginia, 2008). For an example of how the political and economic aspects of
the captive trade have been omitted from some of the finest scholarship on Native Americans and
the frontier in the eighteenth century, see, for instance, Colin G. Calloway's The American
Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities (New York:
and territorial contests on the Ohio mines the institution for clues about the social changes to
prisoner treatment wrought by the immediate social impact of what Calloway describes as total
war in the region. It does not appreciate the value of captivity as a political tool against the frontier
or as an avenue for feeding and funding violence in the region.
Indians of... the Ohio country had no Quebec or Montreal in which to sell their human chattels to compassionate French families or anxious English relatives. For this and other reasons, they captured English settlers largely to replace members of their own families who had died, often from English musketballs or imported diseases. A survey of contemporary narratives and correspondence demonstrates instead that Montreal and Quebec were not the only, or preferred outlets for a trade in Ohio Valley captives; regional Indian groups developed a thriving exchange with Detroit in the eighteenth century, easily accessible along the valley's extensive riverine system. With an outlet for captives readily available, hundreds of eighteenth-century victims were sold on to Detroit where some were ransomed, and others subjected to servitude, rather than being adopted in place of lost relatives by grieving Indian families.

Axtell's emphasis upon adoptive Indian captivity practices has been complicated in recent years by regional studies of the South and Southwest which have placed slavery or servitude under Indian and white masters alongside adoption and ransom in the spectrum of captive experiences. This new narrative has been most recently explored in Christina Snyder's Slavery in Indian Country, which effectively places slavery at the heart of Southern Indian captivity practices, but does not extend analysis to the Ohio Valley region, from Virginia to Detroit. A concerted attempt to place Detroit at the center of the regional captive trade works with recent efforts to understand the Ohio Valley as a region rather than as a border between the Northwest Territory and the civilized world. The

Detroit captive trade linked British and Indian interests to Virginian concerns even as it aggravated local tensions in the region, the economic promise of which meant that each party was loathe to surrender its claims in the area. \(^8\)

The captive trade to Detroit kept a system of bound white labor alive in the latter half of the eighteenth-century, alongside enslaved Indian and African workers. Placing this firmly within the context of a Detroit-based system provides one explanation for this phenomenon; the firmly French region, even under British administrators, had long relied upon *engagés* who were frequently bound to their employers for lengthy periods by restrictive legal contracts. More importantly, white captive labor at Detroit emerged organically from long-standing social practices among Native Americans in the upper country, social practices which assigned political or relational values as well as economic import to captive exchanges. Within the last two decades, scholars have begun to explore the ways in which slavery in the *pays d'en haut* was rooted in Native American understandings of alliance and negotiation. Brett Rushforth and Elizabeth Demers have drawn out the indigenous roots of Indian slavery in and around Detroit. Demers’s work on Michigan trader John Askin highlights the functions of slavery in Detroit’s eighteenth-century economies and households, and the influence of market forces upon local understandings of the institution, as

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economic considerations came to outweigh the social implications of exchanging captives or slaves. Rushforth keeps the focus firmly upon the role Indian slavery played in mediations between Native American and European concerns as well as the institution's roots in native practice, with attention to changing social markers of slavery's significance and uses.9

The transition of many captives from labor at and around Detroit to redemption also highlights the unstable nature of slavery and freedom as analytical categories in the eighteenth century. Within the region, forced labor was part of the process of captivity, not a permanent or heritable status. White captives laboring in and around Detroit described their servitude to persons outside of their families or communities as slavery, aligning their narratives metaphorically with revolutionary rhetorical styles, but their labor bore little resemblance to Southern systems of chattel slavery, or the race-based ideology which characterized American slavery more generally by the close of the eighteenth century. Both captivity and slavery, however, were at key moments characterized by the commodification of their victims. This discursive practice enabled captors or owners to group victims by their worth in currency or trade. The persistent reach of Lockean political philosophy enshrined the rights of

9 This practice persisted well into the nineteenth century; one of the most famous engagés of the period, Alexis St. Martin, provided William Beaumont with the opportunity to make detailed and extremely invasive observations of the gastric process, published in 1838 as *Experiments and Observations on the Gastric Juice, and the Physiology of Digestion* (Edinburgh: Maclachlan and Stewart). Elizabeth A. S. Demers, "John Askin and Indian Slavery at Michilimackinac," in *Indian Slavery in Colonial America*, ed. Alan Gallay (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), pp. 391-412. Brett Rushforth, ""A Little Flesh We Offer You": The Origins of Indian Slavery in New France," *William and Mary Quarterly* 60 no. 4 (October 2003): 777-808; Slavery, the Fox Wars, and the Limits of Alliance," *William and Mary Quarterly* 63 no. 1 (January 2006): 53-80.
commodity owners in the Anglo-American context, regardless of the race of the commodity in question. A common feature of captivity accounts in Detroit throughout the last years of the eighteenth-century is acceptance of this form of commodification, even amidst resistance to the conditions which created it. Matthew Bunn, in Detroit a few years after Mary Moore returned to Detroit, readily traded his freedom to a local trader in return for redemption from Shawnees at Detroit, even though it left him “a bound servant... [with] a great ransom to pay.” For many eighteenth-century victims of the Detroit captive trade, labor was a condition of life in the prevailing social context; responses to captivity and captive labor were created on the ground in response to local social, political, and economic structures and concerns, subject to only limited control by outside national or imperial interests. The trade to Detroit was a product of specific regional conditions in the eighteenth century.10

The local and regional origins of Indian captivity in the colonial Northeast in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, and the Plains and Southwest in the nineteenth century have been key elements of regional and topical historiographies. Along the Ohio Valley, white and African captives were traded and held as servants or slaves throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and into the first years of the nineteenth century, exchanges fueled by

the sustained conflict within the region. In Detroit in particular, the captive trade was an element of life at the fort from its settlement in 1701, and customary in the region long before that. At the beginning of an expedition to the Mississippi in 1673, Jacques Marquette observed that the Shawnees of the Ohio were both numerous and constantly the subject of Iroquois raids “carrying them into captivity.” By the middle of the eighteenth century, just before the beginning of the Seven Years’ War, British correspondents familiar with the area regularly discussed the sale of captives both between Indian groups in the Ohio Valley, and to French residents of Detroit. Redemption was not a simple process; for one captive, John Smith, his 1756 capture in present-day Augusta County, Virginia, was followed by two years of captivity at Detroit and Quebec, following which he was sent to London before being permitted to return home to the frontier.11

The Seven Years’ War spurred the existing regional trade in captives as British settlement increased in the Ohio Valley and local Native American groups applied to French administrators at Detroit for aid resisting their incursions. One correspondent complained to Sir William Johnson, future superintendent of Indian affairs, that he continued “received Advice of the Shawnese & Delawares getting Supplys” from Detroit, trading captives brought in by raiding parties headed by “that False & Faithless people the French.” British captives traded to French commanders at Detroit were routinely assigned to service with local

farmers, while hundreds of other captives remained among trading towns on the Ohio, where they served both Native American and French masters. Despite British complaints about French captive purchases, the fall of New France substituted one set of captive-masters for another; British officials and traders familiar with Indian affairs in the region quickly accustomed themselves to purchasing white captives from groups of friendly Ohio Valley Shawnees for domestic service. By 1761, with Detroit in British hands following the fall of Montreal, a houseguest of Sir William Johnson, the resident superintendent of Indian affairs, reported that Johnson had purchased a young woman from the Shawnees several years before, and that she was employed as a “Servant-girl” at his residence.12

Post-war British regulations limiting settlement in the Ohio Valley made little impression on settlers and speculators in the area, or on Indian captivity from the area. Turmoil in the region increased at the beginning of the Revolutionary War as assaults on Montreal and Quebec accelerated the captive trade to Detroit, as British governors, Indian Department staff, and Ohio Valley Native American groups made uneasy overtures to one another. Without attention to particular regional contexts, attempts to characterize captivity within the context of the Indian-American conflicts in the Ohio Valley and traditional

understandings of war and warfare have been problematic. Indian raids and American depredations took place apart from modern understandings of the state. They were frequently prompted by local and immediate circumstances and took place at the initiative of individuals and small groups, not always endorsed by larger socio-political structures. In this context, the Detroit captive trade is one of the best representations of conflict and innovation in the late eighteenth-century northwest. Despite the variety in the experiences of individual captives, the trade as a whole offers an avenue for understanding the larger structures and opportunities for conflict and accommodation in the region. The trade to Detroit tied together French, British, American, and Native American communities, even as it sprang from regional contests between those groups.13

The motives for captive-taking have been well defined in the existing historiography. Native American groups took British and American settlers and military personnel as well as members of other Native American groups to replace group members lost to disease or warfare, as revenge for raids by adversaries, or for ransom to European powers. For subjects of the Detroit-based captive trade, death, adoption or ransom were not immediate or inevitable;
instead, many were employed by Native American captors or European custodians at the end of the trading chain for a variety of household and agricultural tasks. Some were employed for a few days or weeks, while others, like Mary Moore, spent years in the service of Detroit-based traders and farmers. Katherine Derounian-Stodola suggested that the value of this last group of captives became so significant in the context of Indian relations which French and British powers in the early eighteenth century that it reduced the number of captives killed immediately after capture in ceremonial rites. Beyond fulfilling the need to replace lost members, the Detroit captive trade provided significant economic and political leverage for Native American, French, British, and American interests until the nineteenth century. While physically punishing the westward movement of white settlers into the Ohio Valley, the captive trade also sustained the territorial interests of resident Native American groups in both trade and currency.14

Successive North American governments blamed European rivals at Detroit for the persistence of the captive trade and the Indian depredations which supplied it. The same entities frequently assigned a portion of the blame to traders and other whites resident among Shawnee groups in the Ohio Valley as well. Official and epistolary critiques of the trade generally recognized that significant economic incentives offered by imperial rivals fueled Shawnee participation in the trade, with depredations blamed on, first, French, and later,

British allies at Detroit. As the Detroit captive trade accelerated in the middle of the eighteenth century, George Washington attributed the spread of Shawnee war hatchets to French influences, while other British military officials noted that the “French gave them [Shawnees] nothing Gratis,” but insisted upon the exchange of captives or deerskins for French supplies. The Shawnees and other Native American groups in the Ohio Valley applied captivity to their dealings with a variety of adversaries, both Indian and European. At the middle of the eighteenth century, the region’s “back Inhabitants” were prey to Shawnees driven to the region both by imperial wars and Virginia’s expansion, and “not less than Three hundred” were “in Servitude to them [the Shawnee] and the French on the Ohio.” Local political leaders were aware that captives in the Detroit trade network were exchanged both within Native American groups and between tribes and European powers as circumstances dictated.15

The practice of captive-taking in the region was not limited to Indian communities. British, French, and American settlers and military forces were all accustomed to captive-taking as well as slavery. They assigned different functional capacities to the two categories than did Indian captors in the Detroit captive trade; captives were rarely, if ever, integrated into their captors’ communities, were sought (in the eighteenth century) less for labor than for

information, and, if enslaved, were assigned a permanent status not eligible for ransom or redemption. Elite military figures might be held as surety for the good behavior of imperial rivals, handed south down the Ohio Valley to be held by Virginians, or north to be held at Detroit for transfer to Montreal or Quebec. While European and American powers assigned less porous boundaries to the lives of captives, the structure of the valley’s captive trade governed the acquisition and transfer of captives by every power in the region. This structure was in its last decades by the time of the raid which captured Mary Moore; by 1794, British officials were too preoccupied by continental wars to offer trade or aid to warring Shawnees, and the regional captive trade faded without its northern outlet. The trade in the decades of British administration at Detroit, however, highlighted the importance of the fort to regional contests for territory and trade.16

Sources

To construct an outline of the captive trade to Detroit, this study mines official and private correspondence, diplomatic and political records, and a host of captivity narratives. Narratives were selected for their relevance for both the period and location of this study, but their use as sources presents a number of challenge. Like the Moore narrative which opened this study, many were authored years or even decades after the events they recounted, or by third parties. Like the captivities which created them, captivity narratives served

functions specific to the immediate concerns of their authors, both documentary and rhetorical. One of the most popular methods for treating these sources has principally employed literary analysis. These studies have emphasized the religious content of captivity narratives across the American experience, as well as the ways in which language and structure reflected changing American views of the savage in public and private life. This study, while sensitive to close textual readings, follows a second, ethnohistorical approach, as suggested by William Fenton and modeled by James Axtell. It reads captivity narratives not only for information about the attitudes of their authors, but for insight into the relationship between Indians and white settlers and political or military groups.17

The most conservative bibliographers count the production of between 250 and 300 published captivity narratives from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Alden T. Vaughan, the best known modern bibliographer, limited his list to those works which “presumably record[ed] with some degree of verisimilitude the experiences of non-Indians who were captured by American Indians.” This included some of the best-known book length narratives, such as John Tanner’s *The Falcon*, as well as shorter narratives included in longer ethnographic or travel accounts like the *Jesuit Relations*. James Moore Brown, who recorded the story of his mother, Mary, and her family, was not the only third party author who was exposed to frontier stories of captivity and terror as a child.

Other nineteenth and early twentieth century chroniclers attempted to understand the frontier experience through the narratives of family members and neighbors. Contemporary publications included Royal B. Stratton’s 1857 *Captivity of the Oatman Girls* and Wesley Bradshaw’s 1869 *General Sheridan’s Squaw Spy*, both of which explored in sensational terms the captive experience on the Plains. Stratton, a Methodist minister, met his subjects after their captivity and redemption, while Bradshaw was the alias of Charles Wesley Alexander, who penned popular (and frequently fictionalized) accounts of current and historical events. Brown’s work distinguished itself from its contemporaries by its deliberately ethnographic approach to Indian culture in the Ohio River Valley and its frequent reference to other historical sources. The first three chapters of Brown’s eleven chapter treatment of his mother’s captivity described the physical and human features of the southwest Virginia valley where the Moore family settled. Brown recognized that “a dense population had at one time occupied this valley,” and went on to describe the hatchets, arrowheads, and pottery found in the vicinity. Like Stratton and Bradshaw, however, Brown also emphasized sensational violence and Christian themes. He highlighted the danger Mary and James Moore faced due to their captors’ “thirst for the blood of their captives,”
and claimed that Mary rescued not one, but two New Testaments from the ashes of her home, which she “retained in every vicissitude.”\textsuperscript{18}

Mary Moore’s story, like some other narratives compiled in New England and on the Plains, reflected the troubled progress of westward expansion in the face of Native American resistance. Moore’s narrative expressed both confidence in the process and knowledge that settlement displaced native populations. This awareness was reflected not in the captivity story itself, but in James Moore Brown’s introductory and editorial comments upon the ethnography and archaeology of his mother’s native county, based upon his mother’s recollections and supplemented with outside historical and anthropological information. Shawnees, wrote Brown, harassed the frontier not only because they were savage by nature, but because “they had been driven from many hunting-grounds; and many favourite districts which were formerly their dwelling-places, they saw in the possession of strangers.” As a result, Brown acknowledged, “it is not to be wondered that those who first settled there did not find it a safe home.”\textsuperscript{19}


\textsuperscript{19} For more on this transition in the content of other seventeenth to nineteenth century narratives, see Derounian-Stodola, \textit{The Indian Captivity Narrative}. Brown, \textit{Captives}, 39, 31.
The Moore narrative provides especially rich fodder for exploring Detroit, given its relatively concentrated information about the experience of Mary, her brother James, and Martha while resident in the fort's environs, complete with lively details of their captors and redemption. Other eighteenth century narratives by captives and travelers also suggested the strength of the links between Detroit and the captive trade in the valley. John Leith's 1777 capture left him beholden to Lieutenant-Governor Hamilton at Detroit, and recounts the arrival of prisoners for distribution six years before Mary Moore's capture, while seven years after her redemption Matthew Bunn found himself bound to a Detroit Indian trader for two years while he struggled to repay the man for his redemption. Travelers described the plight of Detroit-area captives taken from the Ohio Valley, as well as their reluctance to interfere in local matters and thereby aggravate imperial tensions further.20

II: Structuring the Captive Trade at Detroit

Detroit figured prominently in official British and American narratives as well as in first- and second-hand captivity accounts. The Detroit captive trade, and the alliance that it symbolized between British and Native American interests, created an atmosphere in which Americans came to believe that the outpost was the location of an unholy alliance between "the foes of liberty" and the "enemies of civilization." This might seem like a grand claim for an outpost which, at the height of its British administration, boasted an official total of 2,653 inhabitants. The relationship between Detroit military and commercial personnel and Ohio River Valley Indian tribes presented both a literal and metaphorical threat to American ambitions that far outstripped its modest size. In print, Detroit was shorthand for a variety of ills visited on American frontiers by Shawnees and other Native Americans before 1795, a wellspring for marauders and murderers; one report of a 1784 attack in the region described the Indian perpetrators only as "strangers, and on their way to Detroit." Correspondents from the frontier
described post-revolutionary Indian raids in the Ohio Valley as a "Campaign from Detroit."\textsuperscript{21}

Detroit grew more slowly between its 1701 founding and 1796 transfer to American administration than the St. Lawrence Valley settlements at Montreal and Quebec, but developed a core community of traders and farmers both within the palisade and without which cultivated trade with migratory Indian groups and practiced diversified agriculture which enabled French communities in the region to become self-sustaining. Trade and agriculture were symbiotic rather than mutually exclusive; by the last quarter of the eighteenth century, under British control, prominent traders like John Askin maintained both commercial operations and country establishments. Detroit and its surrounds supported both commercial and military interests for European and Native American residents; trade at the fort enabled northwestern Indians to cling to residences in the Ohio Valley, while advancing first French and later British military aims by harassing American settlers. Detroit looked eastward, to imperial centers, and west and south to Native American interests and trade routes. The captive trade at Detroit

\textsuperscript{21} Bernard Sheehan, "The Famous Hair Buyer General": Henry Hamilton, George Rogers Clark, and the American Indian," \textit{Indiana Magazine of History}, 79 no. 1 (March 1983): 2; "Survey of the Settlement of Detroit Taken 31st March 1779," \textit{Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collection} 10: 311-327. Official census records probably undercounted the region's residents; reflecting on a visit to Detroit shortly after its incorporation as a city, surveyor William Darby noted that "By the census of 1810, the inhabitants were then 4,762, falling short of 5,000. I cannot be led to consider this enumeration correct, there were in all reasonable modes of calculation, more than 6,000 people in this territory at that period." William Darby, \textit{A Tour from the City of New York to Detroit in the Michigan Territory, Made Between 2d of May and 22d of September, 1818} (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1962; first edition, New York, 1819), 200. "Albany, October 21," \textit{Virginia Journal}, published as \textit{The Virginia Journal and Alexandria Advertiser}, Issue 43 (November 25, 1784): 2. Colonel John Floyd to John May, April 8 1782, in \textit{Calendar of Virginia State Papers} 3:121.
took place in a context which integrated, however unwillingly, citizens of several nations, and political and commercial aims.\textsuperscript{22}

Like Detroit's free British and French residents, eighteenth-century captives in the area were employed and housed both in homes within the palisade and on farms in the surrounding region. Travelers observed captives employed in a variety of private pursuits as household servants and laborers. Farming out the supervision of prisoners and captives to private citizens was consistent with British administration of justice in the area; like captives, prisoners were also assigned to those who could pay their court costs and fines rather than being incarcerated at public expense.\textsuperscript{23}

The fur trade in the Ohio Valley allowed indigenous groups to establish long-term communities in the region. By the early decades of the eighteenth century, British and French traders sought out Native American hunters to exchange furs and skins, rather than waiting for migratory bands to visit centrally located entrepôts like Montreal and Albany as they had at the turn of the century. These trade networks allowed Ohio Valley Indians to reinforce limited seasonal migratory patterns to the Great Lakes, without losing community members to long distance trading trips to the Northeast. Routine movement between the Ohio Valley's southern terminus and Detroit to the north functioned for decades


\textsuperscript{23} "Jacob Lindley's Diary," Friends' Miscellany 590; Ephraim S. Williams, "Personal Reminiscences," in Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections, 8:235.
Despite diplomatic efforts to divide the territory between the end of the Seven Years’ War and 1795. The captive trade to Detroit, alongside fur trade networks, resisted American efforts to turn the Ohio River into a boundary rather than an artery. The captive trade physically linked American, British, French, and Indian concerns, and gave the lie to attempts to divide the north bank of the river from interests to the south. When British administrators

Detroit’s distance from British administrative centers at Montreal and Quebec allowed frontier systems like the captive trade to operate with little interference from imperial officials elsewhere. Instead, the captive trade allowed officials in residence at the fort to address local concerns about regional competition and conflict. Simultaneously, the fort’s centrality to the captive trade in the region, and the raids that supplied it, also addressed regional and imperial problems. From Detroit, British administrators employed raids and the captive trade to suppress American settlement in the Ohio Valley, and their refusal to close British forts to Shawnees in the Ohio Valley before 1794 frustrated American attempts to limit not only the captive trade but British and French trade more generally in the Northwest Territory. While the fort’s remove from Quebec allowed local trade and political practices like the captive trade to flourish,

administrative policies which directed Detroit officials to support Indian raids in the Ohio Valley came directly from imperial governors.25

The captive trade at Detroit in the latter half of the eighteenth century allowed French and British officials to pursue imperial policies which exploited readily available Native American resources. Following Gilles Havard’s critique of Richard White, the use of Native American negotiating tactics did not mean that French and British residents, both official and civilian, were not pursuing long-term empire building agendas. The trade, therefore, served both local, regional, and imperial problems; locally, captives provided labor alongside free laborers and slaves, while regionally and continentally the trade constrained American ambitions.26

Detroit-area residents were familiar with captivity and slavery by the middle of the eighteenth century. Slaves and captives were used to augment the labor force on area farms and trading expeditions. Traders like John Askin both used slaves in their own endeavors, and traded them on behalf of others. Trade under British administrators in the revolutionary years was not limited to Native American and black laborers; Askin chastised Charles Patterson in 1778 for allowing his son to be “sold to the Ottawas... he suffered much poor child with them.” Askin ransomed the boy with a female Indian woman in trade, but when it

25 While British officials closed Fort Miami to retreating Shawnees in 1794, ultimately forcing those warriors to the negotiating table, the Ohio Valley was not officially ceded along the lines of the 1789 Fort Harmar Treaty until the Treaty of Greenville was concluded in 1795; David Andrew Nichols, Red Gentlemen and White Savages, 174-5.

came to dealing with Native American and African slaves, he was less sentimental. Slaves for both household and trading purposes were traded away when Askin could not find use for them; the same year that Askin ransomed Patterson’s son, he traded away a black female slave when his household became “too numerous to keep her in my own house, & at present we want Bread more than Cooks,” and after finding that an Indian slave supplied by Jean Baptiste Barthe of Sault Ste Marie was “too stupid to make a sailor or to be any good whatever” sold the man to a fellow trader.27

Askin and his contemporaries were equally familiar with the prevalence of the captive trade around the fort and in the Ohio Valley more generally. Askin’s connections to Indian Department officials at Fort Detroit allowed him to stay abreast of local news as well as missives from American territories complaining about captive-taking to Detroit, even as he rode out the early years of the revolutionary conflict at Mackinac. His thoughts on the subject were not recorded, but the trade was the subject of multiple letters which Askin copied into his record book. Askin’s record book also described the varieties of labor

27 John Askin Papers, ed. Milo Milton Quaife (Detroit: Detroit Library Commission, 1928), 1:135, 107, 119. For an analysis of the construction of Indian slavery in New France, see Brett Rushforth, “‘A Little Flesh We Offer You’: The Origins of Indian Slavery in New France;” for the labor performed by Indian slaves in the area, see page 777. In the context of this paper’s understanding of captivity as a mechanism for creating and dissolving alliances, Rushforth’s “Slavery, the Fox Wars, and the Limits of Alliance” has been particularly instructive. For an exploration of Indian and African slavery in and around Detroit, as well as a more complete portrait of John Akin, see Elizabeth A. Demers, “John Askin and Indian Slavery at Michilimackinac.” Demers describes slavery as “embedded in the domestic and economic relationships of the eighteenth-century Great Lakes,” with “exchange [and] captivity... at the heart of indigenous slavery,” (391). Captivity, this paper demonstrates, was an important element of white servitude as well, and, as Demers and Rushforth demonstrate, one governed by Native American norms as well as white ambition.
practiced in the region; alongside notes about slaves he was in search of, Askin also recorded labor contracts between masters and white and Indian servants in the area.28

Actors in the Detroit captive trade functioned in personal, economic, and political capacities as the subjects and agents of regional trade networks. A patchwork of local, regional, and imperial European and Native American interests thrived throughout the eighteenth century from the southernmost point of the Ohio Valley north to Detroit. The commodification of captives lent another dimension to residents' identities; apart from cultural or national affiliations, they might represent economic opportunity when traded north. Part of the persistent threat of the trade in the region owed to the wide number of potential victims, as Anglo-American migration to the area accelerated across the last four decades of the century. The physical structure of the trade exposed settlements strung up and down the Ohio Valley, while the local and concentrated raiding pattern of Indian, American, and European powers exposed even powerful traders and officials to captivity in rival hands.29

Farmsteads on the eighteenth century Ohio Valley frontier were often at some distance from their neighbors by modern standards. Nonetheless, the captive trade and the raids which maintained it drove settlers to form communities which cooperated for a common defense, and news about the trade spread rapidly in the region. The Moores were not atypical settlers in the Ohio

28 Askin Papers, 1:218-9, 199-200.

Valley; towards the end of the eighteenth century, the crowded tidewater plains drove ambitious families west in search of cultivable territory, towards constructing homesteads in areas with “clear indications of an Indian village.”

The Moores constructed their home near two other families, even though Shawnee and Cherokee attacks at the beginning of the American Revolution persuaded those other families to depart for safer territory by the time the Moore children were taken captive. Three years before the raid in which Mary Moore was captured, and her parents killed, a Shawnee war party kidnapped her older brother, James, and carried him north to Detroit, where he was sold to a local French farmer. This event did not persuade the Moores to abandon their homestead, and did not dissuade the interest of other settlers to the Ohio Valley region. New settlers arrived to settle farmland on the Blue Stone, and a servant who survived the 1786 raid escaped to report the raid to the Moores’ closest neighbors. A party of local men set out to investigate the attack, while their families gathered in the community blockhouse for safety. While earlier raids had not entirely prevented American settlement along the Ohio Valley, Indian raids on the area diverted local resources from agriculture to defense, and prevented area settlers from bringing in crops and tending to livestock.30

In 1782, a year before James Moore was kidnapped from his family’s homestead, a Shawnee chief informed Frederick Haldimand, governor of

Quebec, that "we have always been the frontier." Throughout the eighteenth century, the Shawnee moved throughout the Ohio River Valley, which oral histories claimed as their homeland. By the middle of the century, semi-permanent Shawnee villages were common in the region. Shawnees were deeply involved in regional trade, but also had a fearsome reputation along the frontier as warriors. Following the 1774 battle of Point Pleasant, Colonel John Stuart of Greenbrier County described regional Shawnees as "the most bloody and terrible" of all Native Americans. This impression intensified after the revolution as Shawnees unwilling to honor British territorial cessions made without their consent made good on chief Kekewepellethe's warning that if American officials failed to restrain eager settlers, resident Shawnees would "take up a Rod and whip them back to your side."31

In the Ohio Valley, the Shawnee and their allies proved stubborn defenders of their hunting grounds in the post-revolutionary period, even as settlers descended "like a plague of locusts" on the region. The captive trade to Detroit was part of Shawnee military attempts to hold back the westward push for settlement. Before the Treaty of Paris, Shawnee chiefs were already desperate to shore up their hold on the Ohio Valley; trade was one way to build important alliances as many Shawnees fled the area. "We see ourselves weak and our arms feeble to the force of the enemy," a Shawnee chief informed British

negotiators at Detroit; “‘Tis now upwards of Twenty Years since we have been alone engaged against the Virginians.” Despite the depletion of their numbers, the frequency and severity of Shawnee raids on the frontier in the last half of the eighteenth-century led both British and American sources to identify the Shawnees and the Delawares as the most effective challenges to American settlement in the Ohio Valley. At the turn of the eighteenth century, the valley’s Shawnee population numbered between ten and twelve thousand, and travelers through the Ohio Valley remarked upon the omnipresence of Shawnee parties and villages in the region. Shawnee hunting grounds and residences ranged from southwestern Virginia and Kentucky north to Detroit, where the French post which would become Detroit capitalized upon their yearly migration to the area. Disease and warfare reduced Shawnee populations in the valley to roughly three thousand souls by the onset of the American Revolution, many of whom later fled for safer homes in Missouri, but Shawnee subsistence patterns depended upon hunting rather than agriculture-in-place, and their migratory patterns were not dislodged by the loss of members. With British trade goods available at Detroit until 1796, Shawnee seasonal migrations continued, even as the growing settler presence in the Ohio Valley complicated traditional migratory patterns by
hampering the physical movement of Shawnee villages and disrupting the seasonal hunting of deer and beavers for subsistence trade with Detroit.\(^{32}\)

Shawnee migratory patterns also depended upon and sustained decentralized power structures which allowed individual villages and war parties to exercise a substantial degree of autonomy. Stamping out longstanding relationships between Shawnees and Detroit proved impossible for British forces before the revolution, or American forces thereafter. Anglo-American settlement in the Ohio Valley disrupted seasonal hunting, but while furs for the Detroit trade were becoming more scarce in the eighteenth century, however, captives for commodification became more accessible. The captive trade fit into existing seasonal and economic routes within the valley, and by the middle of the eighteenth century, had been firmly anchored with one foot in Detroit. A contemporary captive observed it was common knowledge that the Shawnees and Delawares "dispose of Prisoners they take in War, by selling them... to private People." Some of the rhetoric surrounding the trade exposed its firmly regional nature; much as Detroit represented the source of all hostility towards the region, for Ohio Valley Indians, troublesome Americans were all Virginians. Both official and unofficial records most often defined the opposing ends of the trade in the post-revolutionary years as Detroit and Virginia, rather than British

strongholds and American territory. American troublemakers and captives were Virginians at least in name, if not in actual origin.33

Shawnee resistance to American settlement was no more uniform than settlers themselves. Thousands of Shawnees migrated westward after the American Revolution, and those who remained in the Ohio Valley were divided in their approaches to territorial claims. Older chiefs attended treaty negotiations at Fort McIntosh and Fort Finney after the Treaty of Paris, while younger war chiefs rejected their authority to negotiate on behalf of the Shawnees, and insisted that “God gave us this country, we do not understand measuring out the lands, it is all ours.” Villages, rather than balancing peace and war aims, often came to be dominated by one camp; an accommodationist chief confessed to Alexander McKee that even before the end of the Revolution, “Our People at the lower Towns have no Chiefs amongst them but are all Warriors.” In other towns, however, chiefs like Moluntha, one of the signers of the Treaty of Fort Finney in 1786, prevailed. The two perspectives occasionally negotiated side by side; while Moluntha handed a white belt to American negotiators at Fort Finney, Kekewepellethe offered a black wampum belt instead, defiantly informing American officials that “God gave us this country, we do not understand measuring out the lands, it is all ours. You say you have goods for our women

and children; you may keep your goods, and give them to the other nations, we
will have none of them." Acting on Kekewepellethe’s defiance, Shawnee warriors
set about protecting their territories with raids and captive-taking, bound for
British supplies at Detroit.34

Once sold at Detroit, captives could be employed locally in public and
private endeavors. Mary and James Moore and Martha Evans were dispersed to
French and British families on farms surrounding the fort, a practice established
by French administrators in the middle of the century. French officials were
consistently willing to purchase prisoners from their Shawnee allies, a position
which their British successors adopted. British officials moved smoothly into their
roles upon acquisition of the fort in 1760 towards redeeming prisoners, and after
the beginning of the American Revolution, were willing to employ those prisoners
at the fort rather than remitting them to their homes; three years after taking
command of Fort Detroit, Arent DePeyster (himself a former prisoner of war)
informed American frontiersman Owen Bowen that the man’s two daughters-in-
law, redeemed and employed at the fort for DePeyster’s entire tenure, “could not
be spared.”35

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McKee, “Journal of Negotiations with Indians at Pittsburgh,” May-June 1774, Library of Congress,
Peter Force Transcripts, Series 8D, reel 49, item 93, 10. National Archives Microfilm, Papers of
the Continental Congress, reel 69, item 56: 378.

35 Deposition of Corenlig Feeling, October 13 1756, in Sir William Johnson Papers, 2:648; David
www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=2831; Owen Bowen to Frederick Haldimand,
November 20 1783, in Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections, XX: 201.
Detroit captives, captors, and traders became part of nineteenth-century American mythologies. The images of Henry Hamilton, Simon Girty, George Rogers Clark, and Daniel Boone are inextricably intertwined with their participation, willing or unwilling, in the Detroit captive trade. Together with captives like Mary and James Moore, they embodied the way in which the captive trade both tied together the Ohio Valley's inhabitants and set them at each others’ throats. Hamilton, the “Hair Buyer General,” and Girty, the “White Savage,” have been memorialized as villains, while Boone’s American image has served his memory more kindly, and Clark is remembered as one of the revolution’s heroes. Hamilton’s image as a procurer and supplier was shorthand for the most common American complaints about the support of foreign officials and governments for the captive trade, while Girty embodied fears about equally dangerous white men who could not be trusted to keep their distance from Indian lives and lifestyles. Boone and Clark represented two different assaults upon Indian and British frontiers, one settler, the other military. As captives, James and Mary Moore embodied two entirely different experiences - one of opportunity, and the other of exploitation. These relationships effectively describe the structure of the Detroit captive trade itself. The trade both built reputations and destroyed them, even as it threatened some communities while maintaining others. At Detroit, where the captive trade was conducted in its most structured form, captives themselves could physically experience both ends of the captive trade’s function.
In the period between the end of the Seven Years’ War and the beginning of the American Revolution, official British policies directed commanders and traders at Detroit to take a hands-off approach to Indian-settler frontier raids and captivities, hoping to take advantage of frontier chaos to prod western settlers back into the fold. Their preoccupation with maintaining the security of newly-won Detroit against Pontiac and his allies between 1763 and 1766 played into administrators’ approach to Ohio Valley raiding. A garrison of two hundred men was required to protect the region in peace after Pontiac’s defeat, Leaving Detroit officials with few official troops to dispatch to settlements’ defense. This policy persisted until the expense of defending the frontier during Dunmore’s War eight years later persuaded British officials that settler encroachments across the Proclamation Line had to be more vigorously discouraged. As Henry Hamilton took command of Detroit in 1775, only a year after an expedition launched from Virginia forced the Shawnee to the negotiating table, policy shifted dramatically. At the behest of his superiors, Hamilton transformed Detroit’s position on the frontier to an activist one, encouraging Indian raids on the Ohio Valley, providing Indian Department officials and traders to participate in these engagements, and trading for the human proceeds of those raids at Detroit. Hamilton’s command of the region was never complete; years of benign neglect, characterizing earlier administrations, left a frustrated Hamilton to serve as chief judge, assessor, and policeman for an unruly assortment of permanent and temporary Native American, British, and French residents around the fort. Sending Indian raiding parties against the frontier was only one of Hamilton’s official duties; between
1775 and 1779, he was the chief representative of the physical manifestation of Britain's relationship with the Ohio Valley, Fort Detroit.36

Hamilton's correspondence reflected the complicated relationship of Detroit and its frontier allies and enemies. His own commissary records noted the presence of scalping knives among inventories intended for the Indian trade, even as he complained to his superiors of his inability to restrain unsavory treatments visited upon arriving captives by their Indian masters. In journals and letters, Hamilton manifested an ethnographic interest in the Ohio Valley Indians, even as he bemoaned the inability of Indian Department advisors to fully control the raiding parties to which they had been assigned. One constant of Hamilton's administration, however, was his willingness to exchange food, clothing, and other items with raiding parties at Detroit in return for Indian captives, an exchange which one sympathetic biographer characterized as "presents...for their services as warriors rather than for scalps." Hamilton's image, however, grew in the American mind from his less sympathetic encounters with captives and military opponents. George Rogers Clark famously dubbed Hamilton the "Hair-Buyer General" for his willingness to trade for scalps, while a Virginia Council order for Hamilton's imprisonment at Williamsburg following his 1779 capture on the Ohio at Vincennes borrowed directly from Detroit captive John

Dodge’s testimony about his experiences at Detroit when it levied the charge that Hamilton was not only responsible for “inciting the Indians to perpetuate their accustomed cruelties,” but furthermore had tendered “standing rewards for scalps, but offered none for prisoners.” While Thomas Jefferson and other council members eventually lost faith in Dodge’s testimony, suspecting the former captive of spreading misinformation about Hamilton, their doubt only resulted in the amendment of orders for Hamilton’s captivity to stress his responsibility for inciting raids; Hamilton’s reputation as the Hair Buyer General remained intact. Other reports from Detroit captives also asserted that Hamilton had traded for Indian captives whom he did not redeem to the frontier, further alleging that Hamilton had professed an unwillingness to do so until the end of the American insurrection. Whether or not Hamilton ever purchased a scalp, he was determined to use Indian raids and the captive trade at Detroit as an arm against the American Revolution in the West.\footnote{Haldimand Papers, 9:471; Bernard Sheehan, “‘The Famous Hair Buyer General:’ Henry Hamilton, George Rogers Clark, and the American Indian,” Indiana Magazine of History, 101 no. 4 (December 2005): 7; John D. Barnhart, Henry Hamilton and George Rogers Clark in the American Revolution (Crawfordsville, IN: R.E. Banta, 1951), 95; George Rogers Clark Papers, ed. James Alton James (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library Collections, 1912), 1:97; "Order of the Virginia Council Placing Henry Hamilton and Others in Irons," June 16, 1779, in Papers of Jefferson, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950) 3:292-294; "Daniel Sullivan’s Deposition," in Frontier Defense on the upper Ohio, 1777-1778, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites and Louise Phelps Kellog (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1912), 232.}

The captive trade during and after the Revolutionary War drove the obsession of George Rogers Clark and other Americans with the post at Detroit. American concern with Detroit was well known around the fort as well as in Virginia and along the Ohio Valley; much like rumors about raids on the frontier,
rumors about American designs on the fort were rife in surrounding areas. Four
years after the Treaty of Paris, a colleague of John Askin noted that in rumor,
Detroit had been “all Burnt, swallowed by Earthquake,” and, on a similarly
disastrous level, “Attacked & taken by the Americans.” This last, an aim of
George Rogers Clark from 1777 onwards, was never accomplished. By that time,
according to Henry Hamilton’s correspondence, more than a thousand warriors
were out raiding against the frontier, and local records reflected that from that
moment until 1795, frontier settlements were subjected to unrelenting raids from
parties they believed to have originated at Detroit. Shawnee leaders were not
insensible of the dampening effect the captive trade had on frontier settlement;
Frederick Haldimand reported in 1782 that the Indians “at Detroit complain
heavily of our permitting Prisoners to return to their Homes during the war, and
have frequently upbraided us with exposing them a second time to the
Resentment of the same Enemy.” By 1790, more than 130,000 settlers had
crossed the Proclamation Line into traditional Native American territories,
displacing hunting and trading routes and forcing thousands of Shawnees to
migrate out of the region. In 1785, Kekewepelletehe, attempted to negotiate with a
group of settlers; through an interpreter, he noted that everywhere Americans
were “drawing so close to us that we can almost hear the noise of your axes
felling our Trees and settling our Country.”

38 John Burnet to John Askin, March 6 1787, in John Askin Papers 1:283; Henry Hamilton to
Germain, September 1777, in Consul Wilshire Butterfield, History of George Rogers Clark’s
Conquest of the Illinois and Wabash Towns, 1778 and 1779 (Columbus, OH, 1904), 46; Frederick
Haldimand to Guy Carleton, November 11 1782, Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections
Negotiating with Americans was dangerous business; in one notorious incident, Cornstalk, a war leader turned peacetime negotiator, was murdered by Virginia militiamen under a flag of truce at Fort Randolph in 1777, along with his companions. Efforts to bring his killers to justice were fruitless, and, while some of his followers remained neutral in the American Revolution, many took refuge with British interests. In the post-revolutionary years, accommodationists were no safer than war chiefs; Moluntha of the Mekoche was reportedly cut down during a raid on the Scioto by Kentucky militiamen while clutching a copy of the Treaty of Fort Finney to which he was a signatory less than a year before. Settlers and their military representatives made few efforts to distinguish between neutral and hostile Indians, and treated the attempts of individual bands to negotiate the return of captives with distrust and even contempt. Alexander Bullitt, a lieutenant in the Jefferson County militia, complained to Virginia governor Edmund Randolph that Colonel Benjamin Logan had been duped into holding “a kind of Mock Treaty” with Shawnees implicated “in most of the mischief done in this Quarter” “for Exchange of Prisoners, [and] makeing Peace” “by what authority I suppose they Best Know.” Bullitt, and many of his contemporaries, also disputed the assertions of various officials familiar with the Shawnees that “most of the Tribes are pacifically inclined.” “The Fact is,” lectured Bullitt, “that all the Indians liveing on the Wabash are united with the Shawanese in an Active Offensive war against the country.” The aforementioned Logan, meanwhile, noted that while “there is no doubt but the Western Indiens is at war,” “Part of the Shawnies may be doing damage while the others are amongst us in a friendly manner.” Informed
by the failure of military expeditions to secure peace in the area, Logan advocated for negotiation as well as defense. His perspective had little appeal for many settlers and their representatives.39

Expeditions against Indian settlements and British outposts on the frontier, however, had limited success until British support of the Shawnees ebbed in 1794. After campaigns against the Shawnee towns proved ineffective at stemming frontier raids and captive-taking during the revolution, Clark persuaded Jefferson and the Virginia Council to allow him to “engage... against Detroit.” Clark’s frontier campaigns suffered due to settlers’ reluctance to leave farms and families unprotected in order to serve in far-ranging campaigns; recruiting from county militias proved frustratingly slow. A cobbled-together campaign captured Henry Hamilton in 1779, but failed to stem the captive trade to Detroit or raids in the Ohio Valley more generally. Less than a year after Hamilton’s capture, Virginia captives were so numerous in the Detroit region that Frederick Haldimand, then governor at Quebec, instructed Hamilton’s successor, Arents de Peyster, to intensify his efforts to distribute prisoners to labor on farms in the surrounding countryside, “under a Guard if necessary,” but allowed that if de Peyster was unable to effectively distribute their care, “a Part of them must be sent to this part of the Province.” Two years before James Moore’s captivity, raids in present-day Kentucky captured three to four hundred men and women, most

of whom were "separated from their Husband and given to... use them as
slaves." Clark's attempts to destroy the Detroit captive trade led him into savage
war; he took British and Indian captives of his own for information and ransom,
and commanded men who adopted the tactic which frontier Americans identified
as a signature of Native American warfare - scalping. Recent scholarship
considers it likely that Clark himself ordered that scalps be taken. In his efforts to
destroy Detroit's ability to send raids against the frontier, Clark drew very close to
the techniques used by war parties in the captive trade.40

Post-revolutionary campaigns by Clark's successors were no more
successful at stifling raiding and captive taking, and like Mary Moore, American
captives continued to be traded north to Detroit, where individual masters
exercised considerable latitude over their lives. James and Mary Moore's
experiences at the settlement were representative of promise of some masters,
and the perils of others; James Moore was purchased for fifty dollars by French
trader and farmer Batiste Ariome, a man whom he described as protective and
even paternal, and whose family and business James aspired to join. Moore was
trusted to work on a farm outside the palisade, and participated in trading
expeditions with his master, and by both his and Mary's accounts, considered
remaining in the Detroit region even after his redemption. Mary, unfortunately,

40 Thomas Jefferson to George Rogers Clark, January 29 1780, in Official Letters of the
Governors of the State of Virginia, 2:93; Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, February 10
1780, in Ibid.:101; Frederick Haldimand to Arents de Peyster, July 6, 1780, in Michigan Pioneer
and Historical Collection, 20:408-9; Benjamin Harrison to George Washington, October 25 1782,
in Official Letters of the Governors of the State of Virginia, 3:357-8; Clark to Leyba, January 23
1779, in Kinnaird, "Clark-Leyba Papers," 105; Bernard Sheehan, "'The Famous Hair Buyer
General'": 20.
was purchased by Stogwell, a less benevolent Loyalist trader; James found her in a condition so distressing at the fort that Alexander McKee, a prominent officer of the Indian Department, was persuaded to bring charges against her master. He succeeded, however, in convincing the man to release her without payment to James and family friend Thomas Evans, in the area in search of James, Mary, and his sister Martha. Several captives who met Jacob Lindley during a Quaker expedition through the area were less fortunate; all wanted to return to relatives in the Ohio Valley, but Lindley and his companions thought “it most prudent not to make strenuous exertions at present” to have the captives released. James Moore was not the only victim of the Detroit captive trade to see the region’s economic opportunities; in an account of his father William’s life on the frontier in the 1780s, Edward Tucker asserted that his father had voluntarily returned to Detroit after a childhood captivity in the region, where he took up service with the British Indian Department as an interpreter and cultivated a nearby farm.\textsuperscript{41}

The reputation of Detroit’s most famous revolutionary or post-revolutionary captive, Daniel Boone, was directly the opposite of the captive trade’s most notorious white raider, Simon Girty. Girty, like his superior Henry Hamilton, represented the most noxious threat to American settlement - the white trader and collaborator. Reports from kidnapped settlers and military commanders alike for two decades before the Jay Treaty had Alexander McKee, Matthew Elliott, the three Girty brothers, and other Detroit-based British Indian agents scurrying up

and down the Ohio Valley at the head of raiding parties dispatched from Detroit. Simon Girty was the most notorious of these; in most American reports, Girty was a savage collaborator and instigator, who reportedly relished William Crawford’s torture and death at Shawnee hands in 1782, directed the capture of hundreds of Americans on the Ohio Valley, and mercilessly interrogated many of them. In American print, Girty was haunted by Moravian captive John Heckewelder’s description of the trader and interpreter as a “wicked white savage.” Girty’s involvement with the Detroit captive trade made him representative of the threat the trade posed to the post-revolutionary frontier: white men collaborating with savages to endanger and exploit Americans.42

The “white savage” fared better in other accounts; Jonathan Alder reported that shortly after his capture by Shawnees in Wythe County, Virginia, Girty attempted to purchase the boy from his captors and send him on to Detroit. Thomas Ridout, taken captive by in 1787, asserted that Girty persuaded a Shawnee council to ransom him to Detroit. James Moore met Girty in Detroit, and while he did not record his impressions of the interpreter, turned to him for help in obtaining Mary’s release from a cruel master. Girty’s involvement in the captive trade was personal as well as professional; in 1784, he redeemed and married a captive named Catherine Malott. Favorable depictions of Girty failed to gain

traction against a negative flood of savage imagery, and American narratives memorialized him as a treacherous savage. Participation in the Detroit captive trade could not be honorable or patriotic for British agents with Indian allies.43

Boone’s capture during the American Revolution, according to Henry Hamilton’s report of the incident, took place at the direction of Indian Department interpreter Charles Beaubin, heading a Shawnee war party. Beaubin and Hamilton failed to entirely control the war party in question; while at least a dozen of the captives taken in the Boone raid were traded at Detroit, the Shawnees “took Boone with them expecting by this means to effect something.” Boone and several companions escaped shortly thereafter, returning to celebrity in present-day Kentucky. Memorialized as an American hero, Boone was precisely what Ohio Valley Indians feared; captured as a result of his incursions into Indian territories, Boone returned to the region and continued to lead parties of settlers and soldiers deeper into the Ohio Valley until 1799, only a few years after the captive trade to Detroit came to an end.44


44 Henry Hamilton to Guy Carleton, April 5 1778, in Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections 6: 359-60. On Boone, I have relied upon John Mack Faragher, Daniel Boone.
Beyond the political and rhetorical power of the captive trade in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary years, Detroit captive sales provided real economic benefits to both Native American captive-takers and those who employed captives in the Detroit region. Two pressures applied to Detroit administrators in charge of captives’ care: first, their inability to feed, clothe, and shelter the captives from public funds, and, second, the willingness of private citizens in and around the town to do so in return for the captives’ labor. Local farmers and traders employed a variety of bound labor; the 1779 census of the settlement counted 138 slaves, and more than twice as many hired young men and women. British administrators at the fort bemoaned the lack of supplies available to them from the middle of the eighteenth century, a situation worsened by American attacks on Montreal and Quebec at the beginning of the American Revolution which disrupted supply lines further. Henry Hamilton complained in 1776 that his own efforts to repair the fort had been hampered by his inability to hire local “Country people,” as he could not spare provisions from the Crown’s stores. Limited supplies contributed to officials’ willingness to hire out prisoners and captives alike, who could be “made to work out their fines... instead of being a city or county charge.” Some captives in the custody of Native Americans in the city reported that they’d appealed to traders or farmers to ransom them from their captors, then indentured themselves to these individuals for years at a time; as Matthew Bunn described the situation nearly a decade after Mary Moore’s
ransom, "I was freed from immediate death, and a bound servant... in a strange country... and a great ransom to pay."45

The captive trade at Detroit not only allowed British officials to provision captives at little cost to themselves but also allowed their Native American allies to resupply themselves at the fort. The trade allowed Indian captors to obtain items which were otherwise inaccessible as a result of the migratory lifestyle the Shawnees and others had long established in the Ohio Valley. Trading captives for clothing, weapons, and other articles at Detroit, Shawnees and their allies could maintain their presence in the Ohio Valley even as American raids on the frontier burned their villages and fields and made sustaining communities through agriculture difficult. Before the Jay Treaty surrendered control of the fort to American administration, in one resident’s recollection, “the Indians used to bring their white prisoners captured down in the Ohio campaign to Detroit, where they used to sell them for tobacco, and whisky, and money.” The market for Indian captives was wider than Hamilton and other officials; traders and farmers within the region also bought Ohio Valley captives from arriving Indian parties. James Moore was sold directly to a local French family, and three years later, Mary was bought by a British trader with an unsavory reputation. Matthew Bunn was dispatched to a variety of farms in the region by Thomas Smith, who redeemed him from his Shawnee captors at Detroit, while John Leith clerked for traders

45 “Survey of the Settlement of Detroit Taken 31st March 1779,” in Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections, 10:311-327; Lieutenant Governor Henry Hamilton to the Earl of Dartmouth, Detroit, August 29 - September 2 1776, MPHC, 10:264-270; Ephraim S. Williams, “Personal Reminiscences,” in MPHC, 8:234-38; Matthew Bunn, Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Matthew Bunn..., 26-32.
within the fort during his captivity in 1777 and 1778. In return, individuals like Bunn’s redeemer provided cash payments to Shawnee captors. By freeing captive-takers and their communities from the pressure of producing all of the items which they required to subsist, the captive trade to Detroit allowed the Shawnees to threaten American settlement of the Ohio Valley even after the Treaty of Paris consigned the area to American control in 1783.46

The Ohio Valley was in some respects uniquely suited for attacks upon the heart of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century American expansion. Backcountry residents not infrequently noted some variation on the theme that for hostile Indian groups, “supplies [were] already here provided, & the communication to the British Posts in Canada very safe and easy.” Communication with Detroit allowed Shawnee raiding parties to support themselves, and transmitted news about captives around the Ohio Valley. Within months of James Moore’s capture and trade to Detroit, his father was aware of his son’s placement. Moreover, Captain Moore heard from local traders that James had been placed with a well-respected family. James’s report of his captivity noted that he encountered at least one trader with whom he was familiar from the area of the Moore family’s homestead. Traders like the one James described exchanged information as well as goods, and could occasionally serve as families’ intermediaries to negotiate for captives’ redemption, given sufficient

incentives. Sherlock, the trader in question, had been dispatched in 1783 by Virginia officials to the Shawnee towns on the Ohio, where he was to “Indeavour to git as many of our prisnors as you Can.” After being informed that the prisoners on his “List... are all at Detroit,” Sherlock moved on to the settlement to begin negotiations there. He effected the release of at least one Detroit captive taken from the Ohio Valley, and after meeting James passed home to Virginia the news that James had been “purchased by a French trader, and was gone to Detroit.”\textsuperscript{47}

The flow of information which characterized the Moore captivity was not confined to family members and close friends; information about captivities and attacks flowed between communities as well. Within weeks of the attack on Abb’s Valley, reports of the raid had made their way to the state capital. A letter from Walter Crockett, colonel of the Montgomery County militia (and no stranger to attempts to defend the frontier) informed Governor Patrick Henry that county residents were “more Panic struck at this than they were at anything that happened to them in the course of the Last War.” Crockett muddled one of the raid’s particulars, noting that the Indians had killed Captain Moore “and his whole family,” but confirmed that the farmstead’s housing and fencing had been burned, and its livestock carried off. Crockett informed the governor that he’d dispatched a detachment from the county militia to defend the area, but cautioned that the

frontier was so extensive (covering, in his estimation, nearly eighty miles), that it would be impossible to effectively safeguard without reinforcements.48

News of the attack spread to other frontier communities within weeks. Two weeks after Crockett's report, Alexander Barnett of neighboring Russell County responded to Governor Henry's request for forty men for Montgomery County's defense by noting that nearly all parts of the frontier were "alike Exposed to Danger." Barnett's letter included a detailed account of the Moore raid, though, like Crockett, he omitted mention of the kidnapped children, and erroneously attributed the raid to local Cherokees. Generally, however, the captive trade failed to dissuade settlers from westward movement in the last three decades of the eighteenth century. In the years before the 1786 raid on the Moore family farm, several other families were "Kill'd and Captivated" in the area without triggering an eastward flood of Ohio Valley settlers. Nonetheless, both county and state officials constantly fretted that raids would depopulate the region. Detroit was more than an enemy to the north; it was right on the doorstep. After a season of summer raids on Ohio Valley farmsteads, one prominent resident of Fincastle County noted in a plea to Governor Harrison that with support from Detroit for Indian war parties, if "the war with the British continues another Year, it

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48 Brown, Captives, 29-30; Henry Howe, Historical Collections of Virginia (Charleston: Babcock & Co., 1845), 489; Walter Crockett to Patrick Henry, 26 July 1786, in Calendar of Virginia State Papers, 4:159-60; Walter Crockett to Patrick Henry, 26 May 1785, in Ibid, 31.
is more than probable the whole of the inhabitants will be killed, taken to Detroit, or driven away.\textsuperscript{49}

The 1783 and 1786 attacks on the Moore homestead in present-day southwest Virginia were only two incidents in a spate of Indian-American violence which erupted along the Ohio Valley in 1774 and continued until 1795, forcing Native American and Virginian residents to devote precious resources away from agricultural production toward military needs. Captive taking eroded the frontier, both by removing productive workers to Detroit, and by forcing families to take refuge in area forts and blockhouses from which they could not cultivate their farmsteads. For Shawnee war chiefs and their followers, however, it was part of a defense against white settlers who had unrelentingly “destroyed their lands [and] put out their fire.” Documentation of captives taken for Detroit in the region is less complete than that of depredations in New England. While insufficient evidence exists to establish how many Ohio Valley settlers were taken for the Detroit captive trade, the many reports of incidents of this nature which flooded government officials in the last quarter of the eighteenth century make it clear that captivity, and the captive trade, were pressing concerns for settlers and their representatives. The pace of the Detroit trade accelerated during the Revolutionary War; in a single raid upon present-day Kentucky in 1780, more than three hundred settlers were taken from the Ohio Valley by Shawnee and Delaware forces and traded north to “Detroit and it’s Neighborhood,” where

husbands, wives, and their children were separated and compelled to work for their own maintenance. Militia officers in the region described captive-taking and other Indian depredations as a "Campaign from Detroit" "design[ed] to disable the inhabitants" of the distressed region. Forts and blockhouses in the region were a drain on local and state funds, and ineffective at defending widely spread farming communities from raiding parties, which threatened to eliminate some communities entirely. After the Revolution, a rash of raids and depredations harassed frontier settlements each spring before retreating to Detroit; in late April 1787, a local official noted that his community had been the victim of three Shawnee raids in the last two months, and that without defensive aid from the state, "most of the County will be left Desolate." The 1786 Treaty of Fort Finney, in which area Shawnees agreed to vacate territories on the Ohio, had little effect on the captive trade; in an appeal to to British administrators at Detroit, Shawnee leaders described themselves as having "been cheated by the Americans who are striving to work our destruction and without your assistance may be able to accomplish their ends," and emphasized that American settlement in the Ohio Valley meant that "our people is very much scattered" and "being a lawless people can do nothing... but by fair words." Later that year, Mary Moore's captivity began.50

Mary returned from Detroit in 1791, with Shawnee raids still raging along the Ohio. American military attempts to quell Shawnee resistance, including captivity, were largely fruitless until three years later. European war led British officials to begin pulling back from the region and their allies there, while the United States Army developed both the funding and troops to launch a concerted campaign on Shawnee interests in the Ohio Valley. Fleeing the advance of General Anthony Wayne’s troops, Shawnee warriors saw the commanding officer of Fort Miami, where they had hoped to seek refuge, bar gates before them. At Detroit, officials also declined to supply warriors and refugees, and the captive trade came to the end of its usefulness. Shawnee warriors were forced to treat for peace in 1795, and the following year, the Jay Treaty formalized Britain’s resolve to withdraw from northwestern forts in American territory.51

Conclusion

Before the creation of the Northwest Territory in 1787, American military and political officials were frequently willing to admit settler culpability for some frontier raids and captivities. Virginia Governor Benjamin Harrison was “sorry for the fate of Col Crawford,” but hoped “it will prove a warning in future to the people in the back Country to abstain from such horrid Acts of cruelty as they were guilty of to the Moravian Indians.” This type of sentiment ebbed as American western settlement gained official recognition. Rufus Putnam’s report of an attack on the settlement of Belleville, in present-day West Virginia, was unusual for its admission that a raid which captured one female resident of the settlement “was prefaced by the white people Stealing a number of Horses of the Indians & refuseing to deliver them up when demanded.” By the 1790s, more typical references in both American and British correspondence referred to Indian raiding parties as *banditii*, transforming them into lawless criminals as well as enemies. While American control of the Northwest Territory was far from secure, efforts to negotiate for the return of prisoners or the cessation of hostilities increasingly gave way to military campaigns. While raids on the frontier
continued, thousands of Ohio Valley Shawnees began to depart the region for reservations in Missouri.\(^2\)

Improbable as it may have seemed to Virginia residents and officials on the post-revolutionary frontier, expeditions against the Ohio Valley frontier proved too expensive for Native Americans and their British allies in the region by 1795. Combatting the ambitions of France's revolutionary government eroded British military resources, as well as their commitment to feeding and funding Shawnee war parties at Detroit, or maintaining possession of Detroit itself. American campaigns against British and Indian strongholds on the Ohio that year bore fruit; Shawnees and their allies were obliged to recommit themselves to the cession of territory north of the Ohio, including Detroit. The following year, the Jay Treaty marked Britain's withdrawal from forts and settlements in the Northwest Territory. With their hunting grounds overrun by American settlers, and corn fields on Ohio tributaries in flames by 1794, Shawnee war leaders and their followers depended upon food and supplies from Detroit. The exchange of captives and trade goods dwindled as British commitment to maintaining influence over the Ohio Valley,

and Detroit, waned. The captive trade to Detroit ended as America took possession of the Detroit settlement. American settlement at both ends of the Ohio Valley eliminated the ability of regional Indians to exploit the resources of Detroit against the threat of Virginia. For decades, the trade had tied together the "Indian Coast" and the "Virginia shore," confounding efforts to establish defensible settlements within reach of Detroit, and giving the lie to J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur’s 1782 assertion that Native Americans “appear[ed] to be a race doomed to recede and disappear before the superior genius of the Europeans.” American administrators declined to enforce territorial prohibitions on black and Indian slavery consistently, but the market for Virginia captives at the fort evaporated. Without British allies available to purchase the fruit of raids on the Ohio Valley frontier, the regional trade was no longer profitable for Shawnees and other Indian groups.53

Detroit’s incorporation as a city in 1815 marked, according to one scholar, the thorough erosion of local "invented political practices" like captivity. An 1818 visitor described the area as the “uniting link between a vast interior, inhabited yet, in great part by savages, and the civilized Atlantic border,” with “the savage tribes... retiring, and civilized man extending his dwelling over the wide expanse.” Trade in the area continued to be transacted with "a foreign state" in a "separation of sentiment and action," but the fort was no longer the center of a

trade in American bodies. Less than ten years after the end of Mary Moore’s
captivity, American control of the Detroit settlement brought an end to the Detroit
captive trade. Mary lived the remainder of her life in Lexington, Virginia, less than
two hundred miles from her family’s homestead, but was never again threatened
with captivity. Nightmares about her Detroit captivity haunted her for the
remainder of her life, and led her husband to construct an invalid’s cradle in
which she could be rocked to sleep. The Detroit captive trade defined Mary’s
experience of the late eighteenth-century Ohio Valley, just as it had for thousands
of other American, British, and Native American residents of the region, all of
whom had their sights focused firmly on Detroit.54

The Treaty of Greenville has been described as the end of a two-decade
Native American Revolutionary War. Together with the Jay Treaty, it brought an
end to the Detroit captive trade, leaving Ohio Valley Native Americans with few
options for continued settlement in the area. Two years before, in 1793, Shawnee
negotiators had insisted to Americans that “if you seriously design to make a firm
and lasting peace, you will immediately remove all your people from our side of
that river.” After 1795, however, tens of thousands of American settlers flooded
westward, disrupting traditional migratory patterns and limiting access to hunting
and agricultural grounds, and without access to other goods through the captive
trade, the area’s remaining Shawnees were pushed towards Missouri. The trade

54 Catherine Cangany, Frontier Seaport: 14; William Darby, A tour from the city of New York, to
Detroit...: 190, 189, 188; James More Brown, The Captives of Abb’s Valley. On other instances of
invalid cradles, see, for instance, Nancy Goyne Evans, American Windsor Furniture: Specialized
87-92.
had helped to sustain Native American claims to the Ohio Valley in the face of American territorial ambitions for decades, but with Detroit in American hands, competing interests in the region had limited leverage against the frontier, and little hope of aid from Northern Indians in the Great Lakes region. As Detroit's American years began, the captive trade, and its links to regional concerns, faded away into obscurity. The Detroit trade's influence lived on in the heroes, villains, and ordinary citizens whose public images and private lives were defined by it.  

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