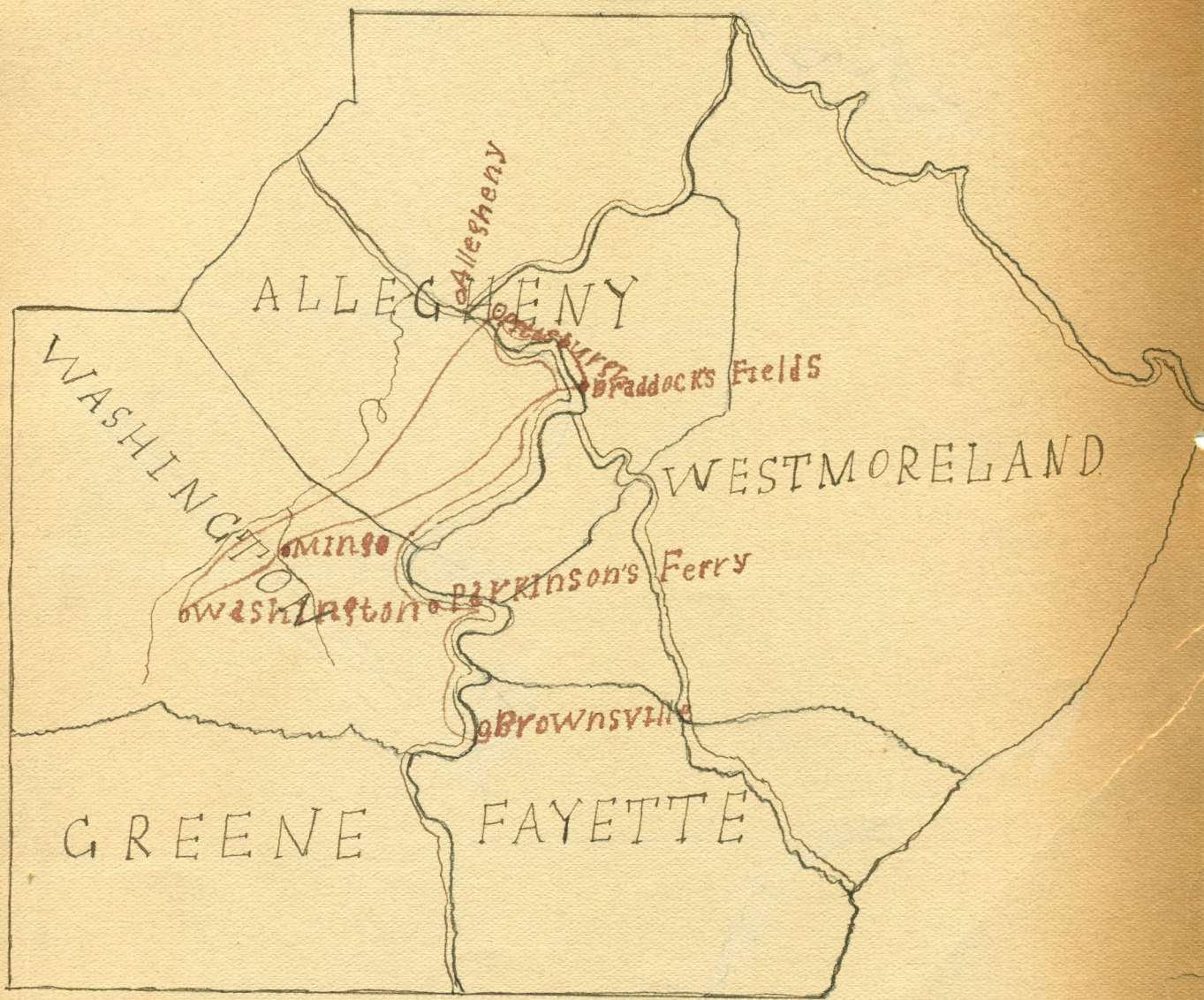


## T H E S I S .

Subject, The Whiskey Insurrection.

Name, Bertha C. Stewart.



ALLEGHENY

WASHINGTON

WESTMORELAND

GREENE

FAYETTE

Allegheny

Mingo

Washington

Parkin's Ferry

Brownsville

Braddock's Fields

There occurred in the southwestern part of Pennsylvania, along the Monongahela Valley and its adjacent region, from 1791 to 1794, a series of unlawful and violent revolts. In 1794, during Washington's administration, these revolts terminated in an extensive uprising, to which was applied the title "Whiskey Insurrection", and by which title it is known at the present day.

Upon the adoption of the constitution, it became necessary to provide means for supporting the government, for paying pressing Revolutionary claims, and for maintaining the army, which was still necessary for the protection of the frontier against Indian attacks.

The duties on imported goods were

far from sufficient to supply the wants of the new government, and taxes were laid on articles supposed to be the least necessary. At the suggestion of Alexander Hamilton, then Secretary of the Treasury, a bill was passed which provided for the imposition of an excise duty of four pence per gallon on all distilled spirits.

This bill was framed by Congress, against the strong opposition of the people of Western Pennsylvania, who thought that it bore more heavily and unjustly on the interests of the region west of the Alleghany mountains than on those of any other part of the Union. Grain was produced in abundance in this part of the state at that time, but there

was no home market for it, and freight in wagons to Philadelphia cost from five to ten dollars per hundred pounds. A horse could carry only about four bushels of grain, while he could carry the product of twenty-four bushels in the form of alcohol. Salt sold at five dollars per barrel, while iron cost from fifteen to twenty cents per pound. The only way left for the inhabitants to obtain a little money with which to purchase salt, iron, and other articles necessary in carrying on their farming was by reducing their grain into the form of whiskey and sending it over the mountains, or down the Ohio to Kentucky, which was then rapidly filling up and affording a market for that commodity. Thus, the people saw

what money was brought into the country by the sale of whiskey would be carried away in the form of excise duties. The inhabitants in this part of Pennsylvania were at that time, mostly of Scotch-Irish descent, whose earlier homes, or those of their parents had been in a land where whiskey was the national beverage and where excise laws were regarded as the most detestable of all measures of tyranny.

This rebellious sentiment was indicated by such open threats of violence, to any officers who might attempt the collection of the excise duty, that it became difficult to find any reliable person willing to accept the office of chief inspector of the western district. It was finally accepted by General John Neville of Allegheny County.

In May 1792, Congress passed an act making certain changes in the excise law, one of which was a reduction of about one-fourth on the duty of whiskey.

In August the citizens of Western Pennsylvania held a meeting in Pittsburgh, the proceedings of which showed that the feeling of opposition had been intensified instead of lessened. At this meeting a committee was appointed to prepare and have presented to Congress an address stating objections to the law, and asking for its repeal.

General Neville at first found great difficulty in finding a place in which to open an inspection office. The first one was located in Washington. Several different places were afterwards

secured for this purpose, but at each place violent acts were committed. Soon after a United States marshal was sent west with a number of writs to be served on non-complying distillers in the four counties, and against persons concerned in the previous riots.

These writs agitated the people and increased the hatred against Neville, who assisted in serving them. One day while he and the marshal were returning from their duty they were attacked near Mingo Creek by a large number of militiamen, belonging to the Mingo Creek Battalion. This attack was the beginning of the boldest outrage committed during the insurrection.

The insurgents, led by James M. Farlane, gathered reinforcements, obtained assistance from the garrison of the fort



at Pittsburgh, and marched to the residence of Neville, which was near Mingo Creek. Upon their arrival they found the house garrisoned by soldiers. They demanded that Neville should surrender himself, his commission, and his inspection books. They were informed that Neville was not there.

A firing then commenced on both sides which resulted in the killing of Mr. Farlane. His death so enraged the insurgents that they set fire to the residence, and Major Kirkpatrick who had defended it surrendered.

The next unlawful act was the robbing of the United States mail on the way from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia, in which was found five letters, the contents of which placed the writers under the public notice of the insurgents.

The originator of this was David Bradford. His object was to capture the mail in order to ascertain from its contents the sentiments of the people concerning the burning of Neville's house. It was discovered by these letters, that a strong sentiment of opposition existed among the principal men of Pittsburgh in regard to the lawless acts of the insurgents, and greatly alarmed Bradford who thought the burning of Neville's house should be justified.

He then issued a circular to the militia officers of these four western counties, demanding them to gather volunteers and assemble at Braddock's Fields, but this was not approved of by the most influential people, and through their influence Bradford yielded and sent out circulars that

they need not assemble until further notice be given, but these circulars had no effect and the men marched to the field. It has been estimated that between five and eight thousand assembled. The people of Pittsburgh had been informed that it was the intention of the insurgents to destroy that city, and they looked forward to the next day with sorrow.

On the following day the insurgents marched to Pittsburgh, but did no harm except burn Major Kirkpatrick's buildings. The next day they crossed to the south side of the Monongahela.

The national authorities were informed of these acts, and on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August, 1794 the president issued a proclamation ordering the insurgents

to disperse before September 1<sup>st</sup> following. At the same time he called for troops to be raised and equipped in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and New Jersey, and to be ready to march at short notice for the purpose of suppressing the insurrection, and enforcing the law.

About the same time commissioners were dispatched by the president and by the governor of Pennsylvania to offer amnesty to the insurgents on condition of complete submission.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of August a meeting of delegates from the four counties was held at Parkinson's Ferry (now Monongahela City). It is said that over seventy-seven hundred people assembled at this meeting. During the proceedings of the meeting news came of the calling

out of the troops and of the arrival of the commissioners. The receipt of this intelligence marked the highest point of the insurrection, and the people were awakened from their delusion.

The leaders of the insurgents, with the exception of Bradford, began to see that their cause was hopeless.

Bradford remained even more defiant than before, and made a speech to that effect, but it found no favor with any of the other leaders.

A standing committee was appointed, which consisted of one member from each township, the duty of which was the drafting of a remonstrance to Congress, asking for the repeal of the excise law.

A committee of three persons from each county was also appointed to meet any commissioners chosen by

the government, and report the result of the discussion to the standing committee. August 28<sup>th</sup> the standing committee met, where Brownsville now stands, to receive and act upon the report of the committee of conference.

All of the men present seemed to be strongly impressed with the sense of the critical situation of the country. Mr. Gallatin in an eloquent speech urged submission and presented the ruinous consequences of the continuance of the insurrection.

His speech was followed by a violent one from Bradford who sneered at the idea of surrender. The leaders with the exception of Bradford had decided to abandon the insurrection.

The meeting resulted so strongly in opposition to his views that he left

in disgust. This meeting, which lasted two days, marked the close of the insurrection. September 11<sup>th</sup> a vote was taken for submission and only about three thousand of the thirteen thousand inhabitants voted in favor of it. This alarmed the leaders of the insurrection who knew what consequences would follow, but in the course of a few days many of those who had strongly opposed it on the day of signing came and begged permission to sign it.

Thus, had the extensive rebellion not only dwindled into insignificance, but by the promptness of the president, another of those foundation stones had been laid, upon which the structure of our national government has been created.