

Benjamin Harvey, Sr.

Merchant, Soldier, Builder

WHEN?
1722-1795

WHERE? Plymouth, PA



EVENT
Harvey was one of the early settlers in the Wyoming Valley

VOCABULARY
Haudenosaunee
shad

The summer of 1769 had not begun with the usual blue skies. They had given way to more gray clouds and cooler temperatures. It didn't last long as heat waves arrived in July and August drying the fields and roads. That's when Benjamin Harvey, Sr., started to transport supplies from his home area in New London, Connecticut, to the new settlement of Wyoming settled by the Susquehanna Company. That is where some of his neighbors and friends were moving.



Due to a grant from King Charles II, this new area claimed by the Connecticut Yankees created a lot of excitement. Its fertile soil promised generous harvests whereas the soil in their home colony seemed to be wearing out. The natural waterway of the Susquehanna River was brimming with shad and other varieties of fish. It wove its course through the

valley boarded on either side by beautiful mountains filled with timber and game.

Plus, this new area was not crowded, though it was also claimed by Pennsylvania—and the Haudenosaunee. The Pennsylvanians, called Pennamites, also had received a grant from King Charles II—though it was nineteen years after the grant to the Yankees. Both colonies, then, felt they had a rightful legal claim to the land and that the other claimants were trespassers. The hostilities that resulted influenced the events of Benjamin Harvey's life.

Harvey was born in Lyme, Connecticut, in 1722 to John and Sarah Harvey. He was nearing 50 years of age when he brought his wagon into the Wyoming Valley for the Susquehanna Company. The company had already sent men to survey and then settle Wyoming. It was to be divided into five townships: Wilkes-Barre, Hanover, Pittston, Kingston, and Plymouth. When the Yankees arrived, however, they found Pennamites already there. Arguments, arrests, and violence followed over the next few years as both sides fought to occupy the land. These Yankee--Pennamite Wars as they were called would plague the valley until settled by the courts in the early 1800s.

Of course, Harvey didn't know what was ahead for him and his family as he decided to bring them into the valley. His wife, Elizabeth, died in Connecticut in 1771, followed less than a month later by the passing of his son twenty-year-old Seth. Harvey, though burdened by grief, brought Benjamin, Jr., and eventually moved his two other sons, Elisha and Silas, and two daughters, Lucy and Lois Harvey (Petrillo).

The peace and prosperity that Harvey was hoping to find would be elusive. The Yankees and Pennamites had been arresting one another, fighting had broken out and each side pushed the

other out of the valley. By the early 1770s, the Yankees had won control—at least temporarily--and now controlled the valley.

In Plymouth, Harvey built a new log home, grist mill and sawmill. The sawmill was powered by water from a nearby stream that emptied into the river (Petrillo). While Harvey was busy with his mills helping his community, the peace he enjoyed was about to be broken. By 1775, the Pennamites were planning to take back the valley. On their expedition from Berwick, they captured Benjamin Harvey, Jr., forcing him to pilot one of their boats up the river (Petrillo). The Pennamite arrival was met by Colonel Zebulon Butler and Connecticut Yankee militia. They forced the Pennamites back after some fierce fighting in December. Though the Pennamites lost the battle, they kept Harvey, Jr., as a captive releasing him a month later.



With the breakout of the Revolutionary War in 1775, his son Benjamin Harvey, Jr., joined the Continental army to fight the British. Unfortunately, he would die after falling into the icy waters of Millstone River near Princeton in 1777. That tragedy would be followed by more suffering for Harvey, Sr. The Wyoming Valley would soon be engulfed in war between the British and their Indian allies and the Yankees. Harvey, Sr., would lose another son, Silas, in



what became known as Battle of Wyoming. (Read more about the battle in lesson plans entitled Battle of Wyoming.) Harvey, Sr., would also lose his home after the British burned it. The following year he built a new home.

In early December of 1780, Harvey was entertaining some members of the Wyoming militia along with his son Elisha and his daughter Lucy and her friend Lucy Bullock. The party came to an abrupt end when British troops and Indians burst in and took all as prisoners. The women's faces were marked in black and they were sent back into the valley to tell their terrifying story. The men were taken north to Fort Niagara. Though John Franklin and more than 25 men took up the trail, they could not find the captives (Petrillo).

At age 59, Harvey was having trouble keeping the quick pace of his captives and as the story is told, was handed over to the Indians by the British. Tied to a tree, three young braves were each given a tomahawk and one at a time threw their weapon at the head of Harvey. Each missed their mark, and the Indian chief determined he was protected by the Great Spirit and was allowed to continue the journey. The captives, cold and hungry finally made it to the fort. The captives were forced to work on Loyalist farms near Niagara (Petrillo).

Harvey was released in May 1781 and made his way back to the Chemung River and then to Susquehanna. Thinking he might be recaptured after seeing signs that Natives were in the area, Harvey left the river and went into the wilderness. After several days of wandering through the forest, he happened upon the lake that now bears his name. Following the outlet of the lake, he followed the stream and found it was the same stream that powered his mills. He



was reunited with his daughter and through the intercession of George Washington, his son Elisha was returned to him as well.

After another breakout of the Yankee-Pennamite war, Harvey spent nine days in jail. After the settlement of that conflict, Harvey resumed rebuilding his life. He built a new grist mill on his land in 1785 and later married Katherine Draper. The grief of family loss, financial loss, as a captive, warrior, and businessman, yet determined to continually press on certainly reflects the brutal dangers and promise of life on the frontier.

He died at age 74 on November 27, 1795 in West Nanticoke. He final resting place is in Hollenback cemetery in Wilkes-Barre.

ONLINE RESOURCES

[Harvey Find a Grave](#)

[Harvey's Lake History Charles Petrillo](#)

PRINT RESOURCES

Harvey, Oscar J. A History of Wilkes-Barre Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. Wilkes-Barre, Pa. 1909.

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