

Coreys in the Battle of Wyoming

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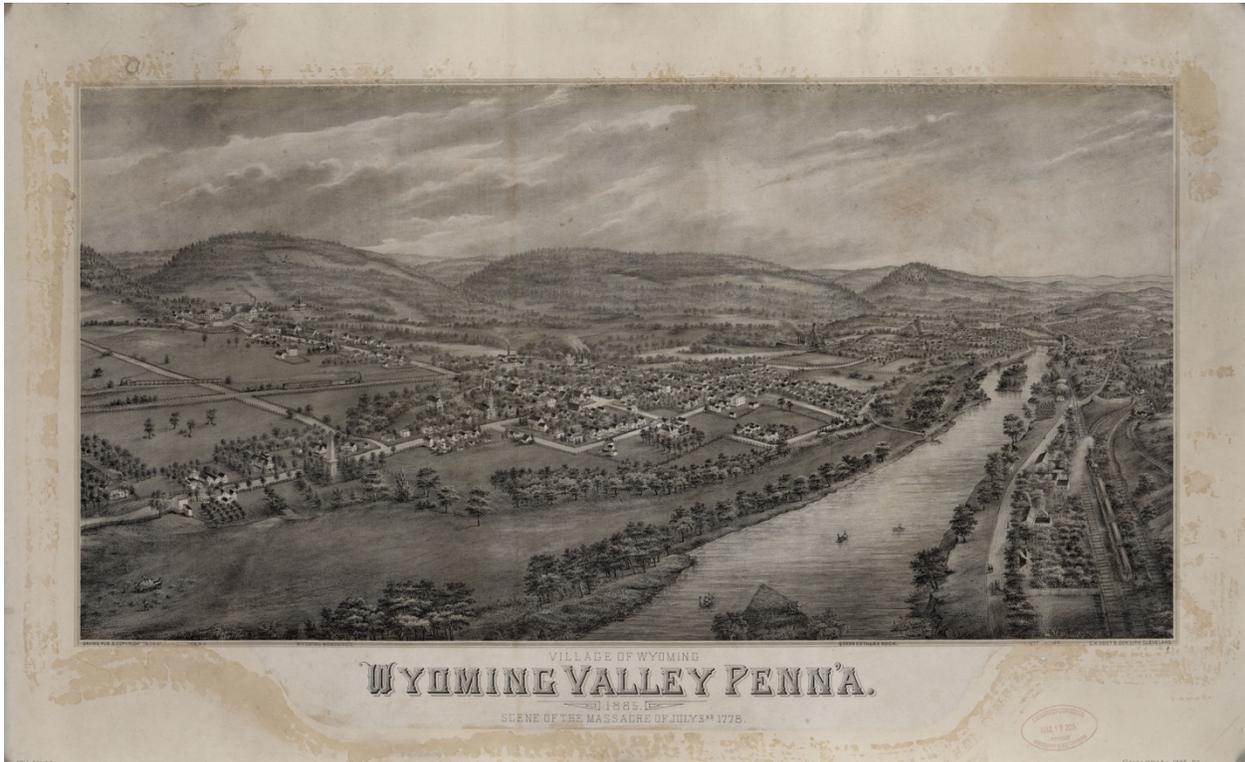


Fig. 1. Village of Wyoming, Wyoming Valley, Pennsylvania, 1885¹.

The Battle of Wyoming, which occurred 3 Jul 1778, was a crushing defeat for the patriots living in the Wyoming Valley, and the massacre which followed the battle resulted in further terror and death.

Four males with the Corey surname—Jenks, Rufus, Anson, and Silas—died in the battle or its immediate aftermath, and stories of escape of two other Coreys—Joseph and Gabriel—have been found.

The Wyoming Valley

The name Wyoming is derived from a Lenape (Delaware) word meaning "large plains." The valley is about twenty-five miles in length, three and half miles wide, and lies along the Susquehanna River in present-day Luzerne County in northeastern Pennsylvania.²

Conflicting Interests

The Indians

The Iroquois Confederacy, also known as the Haudenosaunee, controlled the Wyoming Valley in the mid-eighteenth century, when multiple conflicting interests collided in the area. The five, and eventually six (the Tuscarora were the last to join), nations of the Iroquois were organized according to a longhouse metaphor. A longhouse was the traditional multifamily dwelling of the Haudenosaunee. The figurative longhouse of the Iroquois Confederacy spanned the Great Lakes region in what is now the state of New York, with the Senecas on the west and the Mohawks on the east. The Cayuga, Onandaga, Oneida and Tuscarora lived in the territory between the western and eastern gatekeepers. The Iroquois created a southern buffer which encompassed the Wyoming Valley with tribes they had displaced from the east, including the Lenape (Delaware), Shawnee, Mohegan, Nanticoke, and Mahican tribes.³ The Lenape were tasked with protecting trails to the Iroquois Longhouse and repelling white settlers.

The Susquehannah Company

In 1753, the Susquehannah Company was formed in the Connecticut Colony. The goals of the company were to purchase land from the Indians in the Wyoming Valley and to facilitate migration to the area from the overcrowded Connecticut colony. Besides Connecticut Yankees, colonists from Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey sought land in the Wyoming Valley via the company, either to settle themselves or to turn a profit. The Susquehannah Company was relying on a grant made by King Charles II in 1662, which extended the Connecticut colony westward to the Pacific Ocean. This extension included the northern part of Pennsylvania and encompassed the Wyoming Valley. In 1754 representatives of the Susquehannah Company and British American colonies met with representatives of the Iroquois at Albany, New York. Pennsylvanians were rebuffed in their attempts to purchase the Wyoming Valley, but the Susquehannah Company representatives succeeded, reportedly by getting the Iroquois representatives extremely drunk.⁴ The Seven Years (French and Indian) War (1756-1763) delayed settlement of the Wyoming Valley by New Englanders. An attempt at settlement by Yankees in 1762 ended the following year with the death of settlers in an Indian attack. Survivors abandoned the valley, and the Yankees made no further attempts at settlement until 1769.

In 1775, Connecticut created the Town of Westmoreland from the territory which included the Wyoming Valley. Westmoreland was attached to Litchfield County, Connecticut. In October 1776, the Connecticut assembly, at the request of the settlers, transformed Westmoreland Town into Westmoreland County.

The Pennamites

Unfortunately, in 1681, King Charles II had made an overlapping grant to Pennsylvania that included the Wyoming Valley. In addition, the Iroquois, not happy with the ceding of the Wyoming Valley to the Susquehanna Company by their intoxicated representatives in 1754, renounced the sale and sold the area to Pennsylvania by a treaty signed at Fort Stanwix, New York in 1768⁵. Pennamites (Pennsylvanians) felt their claims to the Valley superseded those of the Connecticut Yankees. To assert their jurisdiction, the Pennsylvania county of Northumberland was established 21 Mar 1772⁶. Northumberland was a large county that later contributed land to numerous smaller counties. Luzerne County, established 25 Sep 1786⁷, contains the Wyoming Valley⁸, site of the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre metropolitan area.

Competing Connecticut and Pennsylvania land claims resulted in tensions between the Yankee and Pennamite settlers. Three Pennamite-Yankee Wars ensued, in 1769-1770, 1774, and 1784⁹. The opposing sides alternated in imprisoning each other and capturing each other's forts and homes, but the Yankees always returned after being forced out of the valley.

A commission appointed by the Continental Congress met in Trenton, New Jersey, and ruled on 30 Dec 1782 that lands within the boundaries of Pennsylvania were in fact under the jurisdiction of Pennsylvania and not Connecticut, but that did not put an end to hostilities. The Trenton Decree did not resolve the issue of Connecticut land titles held by the Yankee settlers. On 27 Mar 1787, "an act for ascertaining and confirming to certain persons, called Connecticut claimants, the lands by them claimed within the county of Luzerne, and for other purposes therein mentioned"¹⁰ was passed by Pennsylvania's legislature. The law was controversial, and it was suspended in 1788 and ultimately repealed in 1790¹¹. Not until 1799 were the contested claims settled by the Compromise Act, which appointed a commission to examine claims and make final judgments¹².

The Battle

The Yankee settlers of the Wyoming Valley sided, for the most part, with the patriots in the American Revolution. On 3 July 1778, Butler's Rangers, a group of Haudenosaunee warriors and Tories, some of whom were Pennamites previously driven from the valley by the Yankees, engaged the settlers' militia in a bloody battle in Exeter Township. Estimates vary concerning the numbers on each side, but the Yankee militia were clearly outnumbered and suffered heavy casualties. Estimates for Butler's Rangers range from about 700 to 1600 men. Seven hundred is probably closer to the actual number¹³. The Yankee force was about three hundred seventy-five¹⁴. The battle lasted only about forty-five minutes. After they were routed by Butler's Rangers, the survivors fled, and many were taken prisoner, tortured, or killed in the hours after the battle.

The William Corey of Portsmouth Line

Extracted birth records¹⁵ of Rhode Island include the following dates and places for the births of children of Jonathan Corey*, (Joseph³, John², William¹) and Martha Cook (daughter of Peleg Cook and Martha Jenckes):

Susannah	18 Aug 1748	Warwick
Jenckes	13 Dec 1749	Warwick
Benjamin	8 May 1751	East Greenwich
Deborah	5 Nov 1752	Exeter
Mary	8 Nov 1754	Exeter
Martha	26 Aug 1756	East Greenwich
Rufus	31 May 1759	East Greenwich
Anson	8 Dec 1760	East Greenwich

The birth of a ninth child, Joseph, was not recorded in the Rhode Island records, and the family may have left the colony by the time he was born in 1762[†].

Among New England settlers in the Wyoming Valley in 1769 were Jenks Corey^{16 17} and his father Jonathan Corey¹⁸. The location of the Jonathan Corey family between June 1761, when he was a justice of the peace in East Greenwich¹⁹, and 1769 has not been discovered.

Jenks Corey and his brothers Rufus and Anson were among those killed in the Battle of Wyoming, and their names appear on a commemorative monument erected in the town of Wyoming (Fig.2) Their father Jonathan appears in a list of “men resident in Hanover from 1776 to 1778 who from old age, sickness, want of weapons or absence from the township were not in the Wyoming Battle and Massacre July 3, 1778.” It is possible he was among members of the 24th Connecticut (Westmoreland) Regiment who were serving elsewhere at the time of the Wyoming Battle. He appears on the muster roll of the 24th, serving one month and 15 days during the period 28 June 1778 to 1 October 1778²⁰. Rufus and Anson, who were nineteen and seventeen respectively at the time of the battle, were likely living in Jonathan’s household at the time of the battle. Jenks, age 28, was survived by a widow and three children²¹.

* Jonathan Corey’s birth appears in the extracted Rhode Island records as 22 Jan 1723/4. Some confusion has been created because children of Elisha Corey are mixed into a list of children of Joseph Corey in the transcribed record, but Jonathan was likely a son of Joseph and Rebecca Corey.

† Birth year implied from tombstone inscription. He died 11 Jun 1818, aged 56 years.

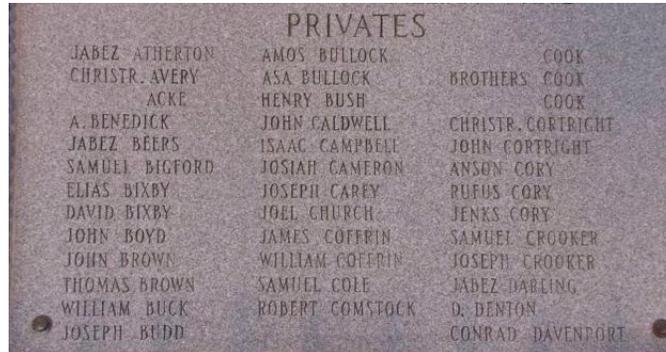


Fig. 2. Detail of plaque, Wyoming Monument

A diary kept by schoolteacher John Hurlbut, Jr provides some important clues to family relationships in Hanover Township:

On the 14th of December, 1779, I engaged to teach a school in Hanover for 3 months in the 20th year of my age.

John Hurlbut, Junior

SCHOOL ACCOUNT—SUPPLIES—WOOD

1st, I supplied the 1st wood for 5 days.
 Mr. Franklin and Mr. Forsyths 13 days.
 Then father 6 days.
 Then Mrs. Corey 6 days
 Mr. Franklin and Mr. Forsyths 2 days.
 Then Mr. Corey 7 days.
 Then Mr. Franklin 5 days.
 Lieut. Franklin 4 days.
 Mr. Elliott 5 days.
 Mr. Elliot 1 day.

LIST OF PUPILS

Naphtali Hurlbut 71 days.
 Anna Hurlbut 18 days.
 Catharine Hurlbut 29 days.
 Lydia Hurlbut 26 days.
 Joseph Corey 52½ days.
 Rebeckah Corey 48 days.
 Lucy Corey 52 days.
 Benjamin Corey 69 days.
 Olive Franklin 45 days.
 Raswell Franklin 65 days.
 Susannah Franklin 70 days.

Alexander Forsyths 71 days.
Elisha Forsyths 71 days.
Father's (children) 144 days.
Mr. Corey's 221 days.
Mr. Franklin's 180 days.
Mr. Forsyths' 142 days.

March ye 11th, 1780, this day is a consummation of ye school. Joseph Corey learnt to write and to sypher to the Rule of 3. Rebeckah and Lucy and Benjamin Corey learnt to read and to write. Olive Franklin learnt to write, Raswell to read and write, Susannah from the alphabet to read a good hand. Alexander Forsyths learnt to read, Elisha learnt the alphabet and to spell in 4 syllabels.²²

It is likely that Mrs. Corey who donated wood for the school's stove was the widow of Jenks Corey, and Mr. Corey was her father-in-law Jonathan, who was appointed administrator of Jenks's estate 14 Mar 1779²³. The teacher's careful accounting of the number of days each student attended school suggests that the school would have operated on a subscription basis, with the teacher paid by each student's family for the number of days the student spent in school. Jonathan apparently paid for his son Joseph as well as the three children—Rebeckah, Lucy, and Benjamin—of his late son Jenks.

The names Jonathan and Joseph Corey appear on the payroll of the company of militia commanded by Captain John Franklin at the Post of Wyoming from 3 April to 4 May 1780²⁴. Joseph would have been about 17 at that time. Joseph Corey was in the list of Captain Franklin's First Company, 5th Connecticut Militia Regiment in the winter of 1781-2²⁵.

Joseph was no doubt "one young man by the name of Corey"²⁶ who, along with John Inman, captured Pennamite Garrett Shoemaker in June 1784. Inman and Corey were joined later by John Swift, captain of their militia company. In his deposition concerning the incident, Shoemaker stated that he heard "Swift, Inman, & Corey threaten that they would be the death of every Pennamite on the Ground." They then mentioned a few names of Pennamites "whom they threatened not only to murder, but to roast into the bargain...Swift, Inman & Corey beat the Deponent with their iron Ramrods, then knock'd him down with their Guns, mashed his foot, broke one of his thumbs and two of his Ribs."²⁷

Numerous depositions from other Pennamite settlers documented acts of intimidation and violence on the part of the Yankees during the summer of 1784, culminating in the Battle of Locust Hill (now known as Locust Ridge), when Jacob Everett, of the Pennamite militia, was killed by the Yankee militia with a bullet to the head on 2 Aug 1784. A tavern keeper, Eliphalet Emmons, noted that among men returning from Locust Hill after the battle was "one Corey,"²⁸ again undoubtedly Joseph.

On 8 Aug 1784, Colonel John Armstrong led 315 Pennamite militia troops into the town of Wyoming and arrested thirty Yankees who had been under the command of Captain Swift at

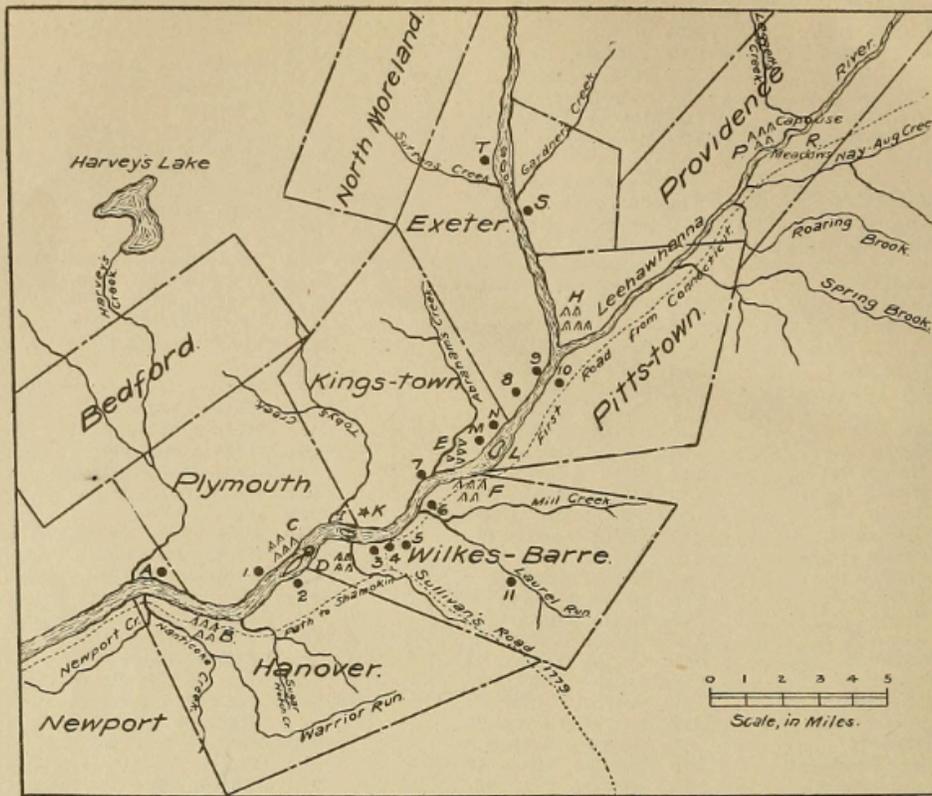
Locust Hill²⁹. They were put in irons and marched to the prison at Easton, Pennsylvania. An additional 46 Yankees were marched to the Sunbury jail. Two escaped in transit, four escaped on arrival a Sunbury, and the rest were released on bail³⁰.

Almost certainly under duress, Captain John Franklin of the Yankee militia provided the Pennamites a list of “Names of the persons who have borne Arms in the late outrages” dated 11 Aug 1784. Joseph Corey’s name appears on that list³¹.

Joseph Corey was among imprisoned Yankees who requested release from the harsh conditions in the Easton jail in a petition to the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania.³² Apparently, their request fell on deaf ears, and on 17 Sep 1784, twenty-five prisoners[‡] escaped when Edward Inman overpowered an assistant jailer and used his keys to unlock the two cells holding his fellow prisoners³³. Eleven of the escapees were apprehended³⁴. They remained incarcerated for another three months before charges against them for the murder of Jacob Everett at Locust Hill were brought before a grand jury, which found the accused had acted in self-defense, and they were released³⁵.

Joseph Corey appears in the 1790 census of Salem Township, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, but Jonathan does not appear in Luzerne County. Jonathan was back by 22 Nov 1797, when for “The parental regard I have for my son, Joseph Corey, of Salem Township,” he executed a deed for Lot No. 11, one hundred acres of the Fourth Division of lots in Pittston, adjoining the Wilkes-Barre line³⁶. Both appear on 1798 tax lists of Luzerne County, Jonathan in Pittston Township, and Joseph in Salem Township³⁷ (Fig. 2) A date of death for Jonathan has not been discovered.

[‡] Accounts vary as to the number of prisoners. Thirty were said to have been arrested and marched to the Easton jail, but only twenty-seven signed a petition for release. Several sources put the number of escapees at twenty-five.



MAP OF WYOMING VALLEY IN THE EARLY DAYS

The above map shows the location of the first five original townships laid out in the Wyoming Valley in 1768 by the Susquehanna Company (Wilkes-Barre or Wyoming, Hanover, Plymouth, Kings-town and Pittst-town) and the position of the Forts, Indian villages, and other historical places of the early days and settlement of Wyoming. The Forts are indicated on the Map with figures, and the Indian villages, battle fields, islands, etc., are marked with letters as follows:

(1), marks the site of Shawnee Fort, where a garrison composed of old men, with the women and children of the neighborhood were stationed before and during the Wyoming Massacre; (2), Stewart's Block-house; (3), Fort Durkee; (4), Fort Wyoming; (5), Wilkes-Barre Fort; (6), Ogden's Fort, and later the site of Mill Creek Fort. The first settlement in Wyoming Valley was made here; (7), Forty Fort; (8), Wintermoot's Fort. The Wyoming Massacre was near this spot; (9) Jenkins' Fort; (10), Pittston Fort; (11), Fort Defense. (A), Plunkett's Battle, Dec. 24, 1775;

(B), Nanticoke Indian village; (C), Shawanese Indian village; (D), Indian village of Maughwauwame (Wyoming); (E), Mohican Indian village; (F), Wanamense Indian village (Jacob's Plains); (H), Delaware Indian village, Asserughney; (I), Fish Island; (K), Kingston; (L), Monocacy Island; (M), Wyoming Monument; (N), Queen Esther's Rock; (O), Fuller's Island, the largest island in the Susquehanna in the Wyoming Valley. As early as 1787 it contained about fifty acres. Later it was known as Richards' Island. (P), Monsey Indian village; (R), Indian burying ground; (S), where John Gardner settled in 1769 in what is now Ransom township; (T), place where John Gardner was captured by Indians, July 1, 1778.

The townships contained 16,000 acres each. The name Wilkes-Barre, in the early days was written with but one capital and without a hyphen.

See "Indian History of Wyoming Valley," page 17-18; "Frontier Forts," page 37-46, and "Wyoming Massacre," page 46-55.

Fig. 2. The original five townships surveyed by the Susquehannah Company in 1768 included Wilkes-Barre, Hanover, Plymouth, Kingston, and Pittston. Jonathan Corey and his son Jenks were among 200 New England settlers in Hanover Township in 1769. In 1790, the lots owned by Jonathan and the late Jenks were sold at a sheriff's sale³⁸. Jonathan's whereabouts are unknown until 1797-1798, when he had property in Pittston Township. Plymouth later became Salem Township, where Jonathan's son Joseph resided from 1790 to 1798. Source of figure: Stephens, J.B. *History and directory of Newton and Ransom townships, Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania*. Published by the author, 1912, p. 8.

Joseph married Prudence Parks, date not documented, before moving to New York. A brief mention in a history of Allegany County, states, "Joseph Corey (father of Hon. Joseph Corey[§]), whose three brothers were killed at Wyoming, and who narrowly escaped death himself (only two out of a company of nine boys escaping by swimming down the river to the fort^{**}, settled in Arkport, Steuben County, in 1804, and moved to Almond in 1812. He was appointed a justice of the peace by Governor Tompkins, in 1813, and died from a fall in his grist-mill in 1816."³⁹ This source erred regarding the year of his death, which was in fact 1818.

The John Cory of Southold Line

Elnathan Corey (Jonathan^{3††}, Isaac², John¹) probably moved around 1777 from Goshen, Orange County, New York to Kingston Township, in the Wyoming Valley. He bought lot 34 in the district 20 May 1777⁴⁰, and he appears on the 1777 tax list for the Kingston District⁴¹. At some point before that, he had purchased an acre of the adjacent lot 35⁴². There he built a mill on Abraham's Creek, on land north of Wyoming Avenue and west of 8th Street in present-day Wyoming, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania (Fig. 3).

[§] Joseph W Corey 1802-1893 (Joseph⁵, Jonathan⁴, Joseph³, John², William¹)

^{**} Forty Fort, a stockade erected in 1772, named to honor the first forty New England settlers who came to Kingston Township under the Susquehannah Company in 1769.

^{††} The will of Jonathan Corey of Orange County, New York, dated 10 Dec 1768 and proved 11 Feb 1770 included son Elnathan among the heirs. Jonathan, born 7 Sep 1697 in Southold, Long Island, m. 1st Mary Conklin, b. ca. 1700, who was probably the mother of Jonathan's seven children, five of whom survived to be named in his will. Identified by the officiant, Rev. Nathaniel Hunting, as "Jonathan Kore of Goshen" he m. 2nd, Rebecca Talmage Conklin, widow of John Conklin, in East Hampton, Long Island 14 May 1745. He m. 3rd, Patience____, identified as his wife in his 1770 will. Further information about her has not been found.



Fig. 3. 1792 map showing the location (arrow) of Elnathan Corey's mill in Kingston Township, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania.⁴³

Elnathan probably died around 1790, as land records concerning his property after that year refer only to his sons Isaac, Gabriel, and John. Notably absent is the name of another son, Silas. An article based on an interview with a nephew of Silas gives some insight into his fate. Jonathan Corey, the subject of the article could have been the son of either Gabriel or Isaac, based on available evidence. The article from *The Evening Gazette* of Port Jervis, New York dated 29 September 1877 follows:

AN AGED COUPLE

JONATHAN COREY OF HIGHLAND—SKETCH OF HIS LIFE

I recently had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Jonathan Cory of the town of Highland, Sullivan county. He is almost four score and a half, is a smart, sociable, intelligent, christian, gentleman, and an example of activity for many of our young men of the present day. Mr. Cory was born at Abram (Abram is an old Indian name) Plains Wyoming county, Pa, March 20, 1790. When I saw him he was on a visit at his son's, Mr. H.D. Cory^{††}, near Barryville. He was threshing buckwheat in company with others, "for exercise" he said. I asked him to give a little history of his life. He said he was past 87 years of age, could walk 18 miles in a day without fatigue; had done it only a short time before for his pension papers.

He was born just at the close of the Revolutionary war. His parents with others were driven by the Indians from Wyoming to Dolson Town, Orange county, N.Y. His uncle, Silas Cory, was captured by the enemy, his skin was pierced full with pine splinters, and then he was raised from the ground with poles, and burned in the presence of the other prisoners. Major John Wood of Goshen, N.Y. was taken prisoner the same time. He gave a "sign" to Brant^{§§} and was spared, but remained a prisoner for seven years.

His wife^{***}, daughter of Mr. Joshua Davis, was born in the town of Minisink 82 years ago, and is a niece of Col. Thurston^{†††} who fell in the Minisink battle at Beaver Brook, and is as cheerful and happy as himself. They were married by Elder Ball, a Baptist minister of Minisink, in the year 1815, and lived together pleasantly for 62 years, without even thinking of being divorced, which is undoubtedly too much the custom now days.

I.V.C.

^{††} Henry D. Corey 1824-1895.

^{§§} The episode with John Wood and Chief Joseph Brant actually occurred at the Battle of Minisink, New York in 1779.

^{***} Fannie Davis 1796-1885.

^{†††} Colonel Benjamin Tusten.

The diary/autobiography of Howard Coray ^{†††} confirms the children of Elnathan Corey and Abigail Green: “Gabriel Coray, Isaac Coray, John Coray (Grandfather), Silas Coray (Granduncle), Abigail Coray (Grandaunt).”⁴⁴

The Revolutionary War pension file of Gabriel Corey provides further evidence of his brother Silas’s fate in the massacre which followed the Battle of Wyoming. In his deposition, Gabriel stated he had “...a brother in the engagement who was taken prisoner and after having the Indians spear through him several times he was burned to death.”⁴⁵ Gabriel went on to recount his own retreat to Monocanock Island after the battle, where he narrowly escaped capture by the Indians by hiding in a bunch of grape vines and wandering through the woods for five days, subsisting on the buds of trees and shrubs, before finding his way back to Forty Fort (Fig. 4). His deposition stated that “...early the next morning the fort was deserted by the Americans and [he] returned to the State of New York.”⁴⁶ He married Esther Monroe in Goshen, Orange County, NY 25 June 1780, and was back in Luzerne County, along with Elnathan, John, and Isaac in 1790. By 1800, he was back in New York, and by 1820, Gabriel lived in Pike County, Pennsylvania, where he died 2 Jul 1840.

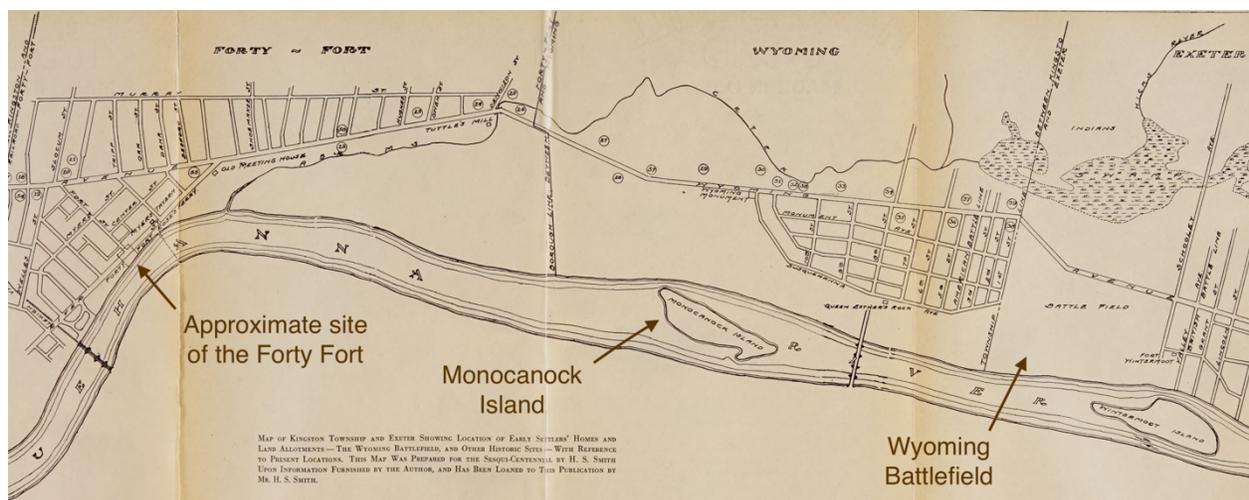


Fig. 4. Map detail showing the battlefield in Exeter Township. Gabriel Corey and other Yankee survivors retreated to Monocanock Island in the Susquehanna River, where many were captured and tortured. Gabriel found his way back to the Forty Fort after five days of wandering through the woods, a day before the fort was abandoned by the Yankees. Original map published in: William Brewster. *History of the certified township of Kingston, Pennsylvania, 1769 to 1929: together with a short account of the fourteenth commonwealth*. School District of the Borough of Kingston, 1930.

No record has been found of Gabriel’s brother Isaac participating in the battle. Isaac was back in Goshen, Orange County, New York on 12 Nov 1778, when he married Tabitha Deans. Census records show him in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania in 1790 and Minisink, Orange County, New York in 1800. Further details of his life have not been discovered.

^{†††} Howard Coray 1817-1908 (John5, Elnathan4, Jonathan3, Isaac2, John1) held several positions in the Church of Latter Day Saints, including secretary to Joseph Smith. His grandfather John appears to have been the first to adopt the “Coray” spelling.

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⁴⁴ Book of Mormon Central (n.d.). *Howard Coray.* Doctrines and Covenants Central.

<https://doctrineandcovenantscentral.org/history/howard-coray/>

⁴⁵ *Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Application Files* [database online with images] Fold3. Revolutionary War Pension File of Gabriel Corey, p. 5. <https://www.fold3.com/image/16225977>.

⁴⁶ Revolutionary War Pension File of Gabriel Corey, p. 5.