

Published by the  
GNADENHUETTEN MONUMENT AND  
CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

Organized October 7th, 1843

A True History  
of the  
**MASSACRE**

of  
Ninety-Six  
Christian Indians

at  
GNADENHUETTEN,  
OHIO

March 8, 1782

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William Lilienthal & Sons, Cambridge, Ohio

## GNADENHUETTEN MASSACRE

Alas! alas! for treachery! the boasting white man came  
With weapons of destruction,—the sword of lurid flame;  
And while the poor defenceless ones together bowed in prayer,  
Unpitying they smote them all while kneeling meekly there.

The cry of slaughtered innocence went loudly up to heaven;  
And can ye hope, ye murdering bands, ever to be forgiven?  
We know not,—yet we ween for you the latest lingering prayer  
That trembled on your victims lips, was, "God, forgive and spare!"

### HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

The first successful attempt at preaching the Gospel to the heathen Delawares, inhabiting the eastern section of the present state of Ohio, was made by the Moravian Missionary, David Zeisberger, in the spring of 1772; and in the course of a few years several flourishing congregations of Christian Indians were planted on the banks of the Tuscarawas River. But after the breaking out of the Revolutionary war in 1775, the Moravian Missionary establishments at Gnadenhuetten, Salem and Schoenbrunn on the Tuscarawas River, in Ohio, among the Indians, were frequently interrupted, and the faith and patience of the Missionary brethren and the Indian congregations often severely tried. As their religion taught them to cultivate the art of peace instead of war, and as they wished to preserve neutrality between the English and their Indian allies on the one hand, and the Americans on the other, they were subject to constant

suspicion, and were treated in a hostile manner by both parties. The English Governor at Fort Detroit, influenced by the calumnies of their enemies, believed that the Christian Indians were partizans with the Americans, and that the Missionaries acted as spies. In order to rid himself of them, he sent a message to Pimoacan the half-king of the Wyandots, to take up the Indian congregations and their teachers, and carry them away. This man, instigated by the Delaware, Captain Pipe, a sworn enemy to the mission, at length agreed to commit this act of injustice.

In August 1781 a troop of warriors amounting to upwards of 300, commanded by the half-king, the Delaware Captain Pipe, and an English Captain Elliott, made their appearance at Gnadenhuetten to accomplish this cruel object. The half-king and his retinue put on the mask of friendship and proposed the removal of the Christian Indians as a measure dictated by a regard for their safety. This proposal they respectfully declined, promising, however, to consider their words, and return an answer, the next winter.

The half-king would probably have been satisfied with this answer, had not the English officer Elliott and Captain Pipe urged him to persevere. The consequence was, that the hostile party became peremptory in their demands, and insisted on their removal. Their vengeance was particularly directed against the missionaries, and they held frequent consultations in which it was proposed to murder all the white brethren and sisters, and even the Indian assistants. Finally after much violence, and many barbarous cruelties they compelled the Christian Indians and their teachers to emigrate, leaving behind them a great quantity of corn in their stores, besides a large crop just ready to be gathered, together with potatoes and other vegetables and garden fruits.

In the beginning of October, 1781, the Missionaries, with the greater part of their congregation, arrived under the escort of the Wyandots at Sandusky. Here their savage conductors abandoned them, and loaded with plunder, returned to their homes, leaving them to shift for themselves in a country that was destitute of game, and every means of support. Pimoacan exulted in the accomplishment of his designs, and informed them that being now in his dominions, they were bound to obey his mandates, and commanded them to hold themselves in readiness to go to battle with him.

For a time the exiles roved to and fro, seeking a favorable locality for their stay over winter, and at length pitched upon a spot, situated on the East side of the Upper Sandusky, as the best they could find. Yet even here the country was dreary and barren, and they were at a loss to conceive whence the means of supporting so many should come during the winter, which had already set in. Their small stock of provisions was nearly exhausted, and the missionaries had to depend upon the voluntary contributions of those members who had a little Indian corn left.

With their usual diligence, rising through faith above all disheartening trials, they commenced at once building huts for the winter. During their labors their daily meetings were kept under the broad canopy of heaven. When the shadows of evening fell upon them, they seated themselves around fires in the open air; one of the missionaries delivering to the listening circle a short discourse. At times, some of the strolling savages would also attend, not to hear the gospel preached, but to scoff and laugh. What a sight! The genius of religion might hover over it, and point to the redeeming power which accompanied the cross of Christ! Wild Savages cleaving to the hope

of eternal life amid all the ill fortune that seemed at every step to mark their Christian pilgrimage! But their joy no man could take from them.

A message then came to them from the commandant at Detroit, that the Missionaries should quickly repair thither. Glad of the opportunity to exculpate themselves and refute the many lies propagated respecting them, four of the teachers, with several Indian brethren, obeyed the summons. They appeared before the court martial at that place; their conduct was investigated, especially in relation to the imputed "correspondence with the rebels, and frustrating of the intended attacks of Indians upon the frontiers," and they were completely exonerated from all blame. [Dr. Doddridge in his Notes on the Indian Wars appears to me to have given credence to the charges of the Moravians, having often sent runners to Fort Pitt to give notice of the approach of war-parties, and so far violating the terms of neutrality, upon insufficient authority. It is not denied, that the Christian Indians relieved the prisoners, who were carried through their settlement, and often dissuaded their heathen kinsmen from pursuing their expeditions, but their hearts were equally open to every other appeal of suffering humanity. It would appear strange, that a circumstance like the one conceded by Dr. Doddridge, should not have come to light before the tribunal at Detroit, confronted as they were with their enemies, the chief of whom, Captain Pipe, after some fruitless evasions, was obliged to confess, that he had calumniated them.]

The governor endeavored to atone for the ill-treatment he had brought upon them, by every act of kindness. He provided them with suitable clothing and other necessaries, repurchased their watches for them, and parted

from them with most marked expressions of esteem.

Thankful for the gracious interposition of God in their behalf, the Missionaries returned home, and were greeted with unbounded joy by their people, who had apprehended that they would be kept prisoners, as had also been the commandant's original intention. Notwithstanding their extreme poverty, the following months were a joyful season to them, and they celebrated Christmas with cheerfulness and a blessing, in their newly built log chapel.

The year 1782 had now commenced, and their situation was distressing in the extreme. A supply of 400 bushels of Indian corn, which had been fetched from the deserted towns was again exhausted, and famine stared them in the face. Provisions of all kinds were wanting; corn was very scarce throughout the country, and such as had it asked, a dollar for three or four quarts; the winter was unusually severe, and wood difficult to be obtained. The cattle began to die of hunger; and the congregation were driven to the necessity of supporting themselves upon their carcasses. In some instances babes perished for want of nourishment from their mother's impoverished breasts.

In these deplorable circumstances, after due deliberation, the Indians came to the determination to return once more for food to their forsaken fields, where the corn was still standing. Having formed themselves into several divisions, they set out, in all about one hundred and fifty men, women and children, the greater part to return no more, but to fall a sacrifice to the treachery and revenge of the white men, in the notorious massacre at Gnadenhuetten. [My authorities for the following narration, are Zeisberger's Journal, Holmes' and Loskiel's Histories, Willet's

Scenes in the Wilderness, and Doddridge's Notes.]

The actors in this foul transaction consisted of a military band of about one hundred men, from the western parts of Virginia and Pennsylvania, under the command of Col. David Williamson. The murder was premeditated; for their purpose was to proceed as far as Sandusky, in order to destroy all the Moravian Indians. Among the incentives to this expedition against a quiet and peaceable people were the unusually early depredations of the savages upon the Ohio settlements, in the month of February, which, it is alleged, led to the conclusion, that the murderers were either Moravians, or that the warriors had their winter quarters at their towns; in either case the Moravians being in fault, the safety of the frontier settlements required the destruction of their establishments. Besides the dismissal—of Shabosh and some Christian Indians, who had been captured in the fall (by Col. Gibson of Pittsburgh) which was but a common act of justice, gave great offense to the neighboring settlers. Men of the first standing in those parts, in consequence, volunteered to accompany Col. Williamson; each man furnishing himself with his own ammunition, and provisions, and many of them traveling on horseback.

Col. Gibson, of Fort Pitt, dispatched messengers, (as soon as he heard of the plot) to warn the Indians of the approaching danger, but they arrived too late. From another quarter, however, they received timely notice, but, unfortunately they thought the information unworthy of credit. So secure did they feel at their occupations, that they neglected all their usual precautions. Parties were at work in the cornfields, at each of the three settlements, Gnadenhuetten, Salem and Schoenbrunn. They had already made fine progress, and gathered

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a large quantity of grain, and were beginning to bundle up their packs in order to take their final leave of the places, when suddenly the militia made their appearance.

When within a mile of Gnadenhuetten, Col. Williamson's party had encamped for the night and reconnoitered their position. On the morning of the 6th of March, the following plan for an assault was then devised. One-half of the men were to cross the river, and attack the Indians who were at work in their cornfields on the West Side, whilst the other half, being divided into three detachments, were to fall simultaneously from different quarters upon the village on the East side. When the former division reached the river, they could not ford it, because it was high and filled with floating ice; but, observing something like a canoe on the opposite side, a young man of the party swam across, and brought over what proved to be a large sap-trough. In this, going two by two, they commenced crossing, but impatient at the delay, a few got over, swimming at its side and holding fast to the edges. In this manner sixteen had crossed over, when the sentinels, who were in advance, discovered a lad, named Joseph Shabosh, the son of the assistant missionary, fired at him and broke one of his arms. The rest hastened to the spot, sending word by those who remained on the East side, for the other detachments to march upon Gnadenhuetten, without a moment's delay, supposing that the firing would have alarmed the inhabitants. With most piteous entreaties young Shabosh begged them to spare his life, representing that he was the son of a white man; but, regardless of his cries and tears, they killed him with their hatchets, and scalped him. After thus whetting their appetites in his warm life-blood, the party approached the plantations.

The first to discover their approach was an Indian named Jacob, a brother-in-law to young Shabosh, who was employed near the banks of the river, tying up his corn. Remaining unperceived, he was about to hail them, supposing them to be a friendly party, when at that instant they shot at one of the brethren, who was just crossing the river from the town. Upon perceiving this, Jacob fled with the utmost precipitation, and before their faces were turned towards him, was one of sight. Had he acted with some coolness and courage, he might have saved many a valuable life; especially by proceeding to Salem and giving the alarm. But instead of this, fear led him to flee several miles in an opposite direction, where he hid himself a day and a night.

The party of sixteen, now drew near to the Indians, who were at work in their fields, in considerable numbers, having their guns with them, and finding that they were greatly outnumbered, accosted them in a friendly manner. They pretended to pity them, on account of their past sufferings, said that they had come to conduct them to a place of safety near Pittsburgh; and advised them to discontinue their work at once, and return with them to the town, to hold a further parley. To all this the Indians, anticipating no harm from American soldiers, and ignorant as yet of the murder of Shabosh, cheerfully acceded. Not dreaming that they were to be caught "like fish in an evil net, and as birds that are caught in the snare," they rejoiced, that they had found such true friends, and imagined they saw the hand of God in it, who was about to put an end to all their suffering, and lead them to a more secure and pleasant country.

The other detachments had meanwhile arrived at the village, where they found but one man, and a woman, whom they shot, as

she was hiding in the bushes. But so prepossessed were the Indians, with the idea of removing, that nothing was able to shake their confidence in the white men. They cheerfully surrendered their guns, hatchets and other weapons, upon receiving the promise that they should be restored to them at Pittsburg, showed where they had secreted their communion wine and their valuables, in the woods, helped them to pack them up, and began to make every preparation for the journey to Pittsburgh.

The native assistant, John Martin, had gone to Salem, immediately upon the arrival of the party, to inform the inhabitants of the state of affairs; and the next day a troop of horsemen rode down to bring them all in. With the same confiding trust, in their professions of peace and good will, they returned with them, conversing on the road, upon religious topics, in which their attendants joined, with much appearance of piety. "Simple children of the forest, how dove-like had Christianity made you! How little did you dream of deliberate deceit, and base treachery, and that as sheep you were being led to the slaughter!" Arriving at the river's bank, opposite Gnadenuhuetten, their eyes began to be opened, however, when it was too late. They discovered spots of blood on the sand, which excited disquietude and alarm; and soon their boding fears received full confirmation. As they entered the town, all were seized, as those in it had been a short time before; their guns and pocket knives were taken by their conductors, they themselves were pinioned, and confined in two houses standing some distance apart; the men in the one, and the women with the children in the other. Here they met together, as associates for the last time, in sorrow. Here they mingled their tears and their sympathies,

and here their prayers ascended to the throne of grace.

The miscreants now held a consultation, to decide the fate of their prisoners. The charges which they brought against them were, that their horses, as also their axes, pewter basins, spoons, and all they possessed had been stolen or obtained, by improper means, from the white people, and also, that they were warriors, and not Christians. But all of them were utterly false and frivolous. On the contrary, it is presumable, that the expedition would never have been undertaken, or at least not so imprudently conducted, if they had anticipated resistance. The whites well knew the pacific principles of the Moravian Indians, and calculated on blood and plunder, without having a shot fired at them. With a mere show of defense, it is likely, that such men might have been repulsed. Some deeds of blood were also no doubt, imputed to these Indians; for according to the statement of the missionaries, the Wyandot and Delaware warriors, who were inimical to the Gospel, had always made it a point to return from their campaigns, through their settlements, in the expectation that it would bring the whites upon the Moravians. Some warriors, too, had accompanied them on their return from Sandusky, crossed the Ohio and committed several murders, and on their way back, stopped near Gnadenuhuetten, where they impaled a woman and a child; but it is equally certain, that the Christian Indians had no part in the matter. Two of these warriors were captured at the same time, and tomahawked outside of the town, by the white men. As to the other charge, it rested upon no other foundation than that one man is said to have found here the bloody clothes of his wife and child, which were plainly those of the woman and child killed as aforesaid near

the town, and secreted here by their enemies. Others may have recognized property in the hands of the Indians, since it is probable that the warriors, in their passage through the villages, were in the habit of bartering various articles of value, (in lieu of money,) for provisions, but if this was contrary to their neutral engagements, it was also unavoidable, as the warriors had both the will and the means to compel them to give them whatever they wanted.

On such pretexes the Indians were condemned to death, and the blood-thirsty troops were clamorous, to begin the butchery without delay, but the officers hesitated. Can it be doubted, however, that, if they had been averse to the crime, they might have checked the vindictive spirit of their unprincipled subordinates? And had Col. Williamson been the brave man, he is represented to have been, would he not have staked his life upon their defense, rather than that the unoffending and pious captives should perish? It was probably, therefore, more for the sake of appearances, and to devolve at least a part of the awful responsibility upon their men, than from any motives of mercy, that they determined first to let it be put to a vote of the whole corps. Col. Williamson, himself, put the question, in form: "Whether the Moravian Indians should be taken prisoners to Pittsburgh, or be put to death;" and requested that all those who were in favor of saving their lives, should step out of their line and form a second rank. On this, sixteen or eighteen stepped forward, and upwards of eighty remained. The fate of the Indians was thus decided on, and they were told to prepare for death, a brief respite till the morrow, being all that was granted them.

During the night, the murderers deliberated whether they should burn them alive or tomahawk and scalp them, and a few proposed

milder measures; but the voice of mercy was overruled, and it was determined to butcher them one by one. The Indians were at first overwhelmed at the news of their impending fate; but quickly collecting themselves again, and patiently submitting to the inscrutable decree of the Lord, whose servants they had become, they spent the night in prayer, in asking pardon of each other, for whatever offence they had given, or grief they had occasioned, and in exhorting one another to a faithful and meek endurance of their trials to the end. One of their number, whose name was Abraham, and who had become a grievous back-slider, whereby he had occasioned the missionaries and the Christian Indians great sorrow, on realizing that only a few hours remained to him, for repentance, earnestly turned to the Lord, and most humbly confessed to Him and to his fellow Indians, his many and great sins. "Dear Brethren," said he to the latter, "you well know, that I have been a bad man, that I have grieved the Lord; that I have caused our teachers much sorrow; and that I have not done the things that I ought to have done. But now I give myself anew to Jesus, and I will hold fast to Him until I die." At the dawn of the morning, they offered up fervent supplications to God their Saviour, and united in singing praises unto Him in the joyful hope that they should soon enter into His glorious presence, in everlasting bliss. In this hour, the consolations of divine grace abounded in their souls; they felt the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, and being cheerfully resigned, they awaited the summons of their executioners.

It was the morning of the 8th of March, on which the awful scene was enacted. The murderers came to them, whilst they were engaged in singing, and asked, whether they were ready to die? To which they received the answer,



that they had commended themselves to God, who had given them the assurance in their hearts, that he would receive their souls. The carnage then immediately commenced. By couples they were led bound into two houses that had been selected for the purpose, and aptly termed the "Slaughter Houses," the men to the one, and the women with the children to the other, and as they entered they were knocked down and butchered. A Pennsylvanian of the party conducted the slaughter of the brethren. Taking up a huge mallet, (the house having been occupied by a cooper), he said, looking at it, and handling it, how exactly this will answer for the business. With this, as the instrument of death, he continued knocking down one after the other, until he had killed fourteen with his own hands. He then handed the mallet to one of his fellow murderers, saying: My arm fails me; go on in the same way; I think I have done pretty well. (This was related by a lad who escaped out of the house, and who understood English well.) The very first of the Indian brethren, who was butchered, was Abraham, the reclaimed back-slider, whose long, flowing hair attracted the notice of the murderers, because it would make, as they said, a fine scalp, and who, had it not been for the dreadful massacre, commencing with him, might, perhaps, have remained what he was before, and have finally perished in his sins! Of the horrors, that were enacted in the house of the poor women and children, we have no further account than that a woman, called Christina, who had resided in Bethlehem, Pa., and could speak English well, fell upon her knees before the Captain, and begged him to spare their lives, but was told that it was impossible. So ferocious had the murderers become, that they were not satisfied with merely destroying their

lives, but disfigured the dead and dying bodies in a horrible manner.

Thus perished at least ninety innocent persons, of all ages, from the grey-haired sire, down to the helpless innocent, at its mother's breast. Leaving the houses, which were now reeking, with the blood and the mangled remains of their victims, the murderers went to a little distance, making merry over the horrid deed; but returning again, they saw one named Abel, who, though scalped and mangled, was attempting to rise, and dispatched him.

The whole number of the slain was ninety-six; but of these some were killed before the general massacre, as Shabosh and his wife and several, who, in attempting to escape by swimming the river, were shot. Several warriors were likewise killed at the same time, outside of the town. Of the whole number of Moravian Indians, forty were men, twenty-two were women, and thirty-four were children. Five of the men were respectable native assistants, viz: Samuel Moore, Tobias Jones, Isaac Glickican and John Martin. Samuel Moore and Tobias had been members of the congregation of that eminently devoted servant of God and most faithful missionary, David Brainerd, after whose death they left New Jersey and joined the Moravians. Samuel had received his education from Brainerd himself, could read and was so well acquainted with the English language, that for many years he served in the capacity of interpreter. The others, also, bore excellent characters, and were very useful members of the Church. Isaac Glickican had been a sachem, and was noted among his countrymen, for superior wisdom and courage.

Only two lads of fourteen or fifteen years of age, effected their escape, from the hands of the murderers. One of these was knocked

fession of the Saviour in their sufferings, their meek endurance and triumphant Christian death, bear testimony to the Truth as it is in Jesus, as long as the memory of the atrocious deed shall last.

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Compiled by Rev. S. S. Wolle, from Diaries Ziesbergers & others.

## APPENDIX

In order to perpetuate the memory of the ninety-six Christian Indians, who, on the 8th of March, 1782, fell innocent victims to the brutal ferocity of a lawless band of whites, and whose meek endurance of their great sufferings, crowned as it was, with a triumphant death, is worthy of commemoration, a Society was organized, on the 7th of October, 1873, having for its object, the erection of a suitable monument on the site of the massacre, near the present village of Gnadenhuetten, Tuscarawas County, Ohio.

The first officers were:

Rev. Sylvester Wolle, President.

Jacob Blickensderfer, Vice President.

Edward Peter, Treasurer.

Lewis Peter, Secretary.

Israel Ricksecker,

Christan Blickensderfer,

Charles B. Peter, Directors.

Said Society, having obtained the control of about six acres of the ground on which the ill-fated Indian village of Gnadenhuetten formerly stood, and on which the location of the two slaughter-houses, with that of other buildings, can still be identified, fenced it in, cleared off the underbrush, with which it was overgrown, and then proceeded to collect funds for the erection of the projected monument. These funds were, as fast as they were received, judiciously invested, and gradually increased until in the year 1870, Brother Isaac Blickensderfer was commissioned to contract with R. S. Miller of Logansport, Indiana, for the monument, which now marks the site of the massacre. The material of which it is composed is subcarboniferous lime-stone, of a light brown color; its total cost being about \$3,000, and its dimensions as follows: The pedestal, comprising three parts, is at its base, 8 ft. 10 in. and at the top, 4 ft. 9 in. square;

the height being 10 ft. 4 in. The tapering shaft is 3 ft. 3 in. square at its base, and 1 ft. 10 in. at the top; its height being 25 ft. 3 in. which makes the entire monument 35 ft. 7 in. high. The erection of it was completed on the 4th of June, in the aforesaid year, and it was unveiled and solemnly dedicated on the day following. The oration was delivered by Bishop Edmond de Schweinitz of Bethlehem, Pa., and the music rendered by the Moravian church and trombone choirs of the same place, together with the unveiling of the monument, by four Delaware Indians, from the New Fairfield mission in Canada, (all of whom were lineal descendants of those who were massacred), greatly added to the interest and impressiveness of the occasion, at which about ten thousand persons were in attendance.

The Society, having thus accomplished the object for which it was organized, was now formally merged into The Cemetery Society, which, in consequence thereof, assumed the name of The Monument and Cemetery Association of Gnadenhuetten, Ohio.

This society received as a gift from The Moravian Society, for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen, the title to the above mentioned six acres of land, laid them out in walks and ornamented the grass-plots with shrubbery and evergreens. Said Association now takes charge of the preservation, both of the Monument Grounds and the Cemetery adjacent thereto.

The historic interest of the place is enhanced by its having become, on the 4th of July, 1773, the birth place of the first white child born in the state of Ohio, and named John Lewis Roth. The monument and its grounds are visited by persons from all parts of our country and frequently by men of distinction.

The president of the society will cheerfully conduct visitors through the grounds, when desired.