

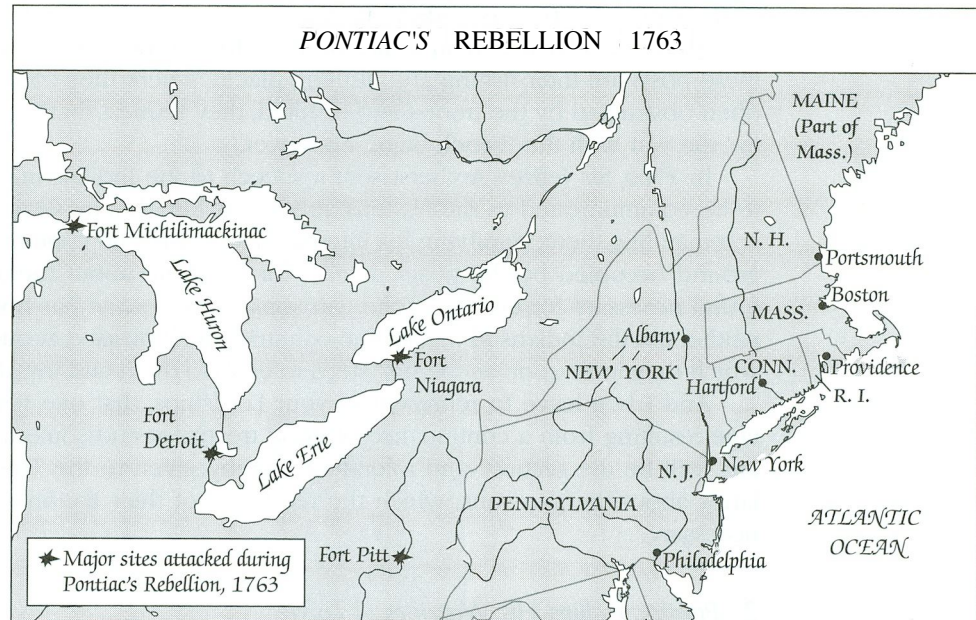
C. Pontiac's Rebellion and Its Aftermath -----

I. Sir William Johnson Describes the Indians' Grievances (1763)

Britain's triumph over France in 1763 proved a classic example of a Pyrrhic victory. It led first to renewed conflict with the Indians of the Great Lake-Ohio Valley region and then to mounting problems with the seaboard colonists. Those problems eventually contributed heavily to the outbreak of the American Revolution. Almost immediately after peace was declared, the British announced that they would discontinue the French practice of supplying the Indians with arms and ammunition. Britain also made clear its intention to fortify the territory it had wrested from France. Peoples of the Five Nations, or Iroquois Confederacy, were especially embittered, as their wartime alliance with Britain had led them to expect better treatment. A coalition of Indian peoples led by the Ottawa chief, Pontiac, rose up against the British, first attacking the fort at Detroit and eventually storming all the British garrisons in the region, from Fort Pitt in the east to Michilimackinac in the west. The British dispatched Indian commissioner Sir William Johnson to placate their Indian foes. In the passage from one of his reports that follows, what does he identify as the Indians' chief complaints? Which does he deem justified?

... The French, in order to reconcile them [the Indians] to their encroachments, loaded them with favours, and employed the most intelligent Agents of good influence, as well as artful Jesuits among the several Western and other Nations, who, by degrees, prevailed on them to admit of Posts, under the Notion of Trading houses, in their Country; and knowing that these posts could never be maintained contrary to the inclinations of the Indians, they supplied them thereat with ammunition and other necessaries in abundance, as also called them to frequent congresses, and dismissed them with handsome presents, by which they enjoyed an extensive commerce, obtained the assistance of these Indians, and possessed their frontiers in safety; and as without these measures the Indians would never have suffered them in their Country, so they expect that whatever European power possesses the same, they shall in some measure reap the like advantages. Now, as these advantages ceased on the Posts being possessed by the English, and especially as it was not thought prudent to indulge them with ammunition, they immediately concluded that we had designs against their liberties, which opinion had been first instilled into them by the French, and since promoted by Traders of that nation and others who retired among them on the surrender of Canada, and are still there, as well as by Belts of Wampum and other exhortations, which I am confidently assured have been sent among them from the Illinois, Louisiana and even Canada for that purpose. The Shawanese and Delawares about the Ohio, who were never warmly attached to us since our neglects to defend them against the encroachments of the French, and refusing to erect a post at the Ohio, or assist them and the Six Nations

¹Sir W. Johnson to the Board of Trade, November 13, 1763, in Francis Parkman, *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1908), vol. 2, Appendix, pp. 210-213.



with men or ammunition, when they requested both of us, as well as irritated at the loss of several of their people killed upon the communication to FOIt Pitt, in the years 1759 and 1761, were easily induced to join with the Western Nations, and the Senecas, dissatisfied at many of our posts, jealous of our designs, and displeased at our neglect and contempt of them, soon followed their example.

These are the causes the Indians themselves assign, and which certainly occasioned the rupture between us, the consequence of which, in my opinion, will be that the Indians (who do not regard the distance) will be supplied with necessaries by the Wabache and several Rivers, which empty into the Mississippi, which it is by no means in our power to prevent, and in return the French will draw the valuable furs down that river to the advantage of their Colony and the destruction of our Trade; this will always induce the French to foment differences between us and the Indians, and the prospects many of them entertain, that they may hereafter become possessed of Canada, will incline them still more to cultivate a good understanding with the Indians, which, if ever attempted by the French, would, I am very apprehensive, be attended with a general defection of them from our interest, unless we are at great pains and expense to regain their friendship, and thereby satisfy them that we have no designs to their prejudice.

The grand matter of concern to all the Six Nations (Mohawks excepted) is the occupying a chain of small Posts on the communication thro' their country to Lake Ontario, not to mention Fort Stanwix, exclusive of which there were erected in 1759 Fort Schuyler on the Mohawk River, and the Royal Blockhouse at the East end of Oneida Lake, in the Country of the Oneidas, Fort Brewerton and a Post at Oswego Falls in the Onondagas Country; in order to obtain permission for erecting these

posts, they were promised they should be demolished at the end of the war. General Shirley also made them a like promise for the posts he erected; and as about these posts are their fishing and hunting places, where they complain, that they are often obstructed by the troops and insulted, they request that they may not be kept up, the war with the French being now over.

In 1760, Sir Jeffrey Amherst sent a speech to the Indians in writing, which was to be communicated to the Nations about Fort Pitt, &c., by General Monkton, then commanding there, signifying his intentions to satisfy and content all Indians for the ground occupied by the posts, as also for any land about them, which might be found necessary for the use of the garrisons; but the same has not been performed, neither are the Indians in the several countries at all pleased at our occupying them, which they look upon as the first steps to enslave them and invade their properties.

And I beg leave to represent to your Lordships, that one very material advantage resulting from a continuance of good treatment and some favours to the Indians, will be the security and toleration thereby given to the Troops for cultivating lands about the garrisons, which the reduction of their Rations renders absolutely necessary

2. *Pontiac Rallies His Warriors (1763)*

His appeals for trade goods and firearms rebuffed by the British, in April 1763 Pontiac summoned a meeting of leaders from several Indian groups at a Pottawattamie village on the banks of the Ecorse River near Detroit. There he laid out his plan to throw the British out of the land. What role does he see for France, recently expelled from the continent by British arms? How realistic was his plan?

The day fixed upon having arrived, all the Ottawas, Pontiac at their head, and the bad band of the Hurons, Takee at their head, met at the Pottawattamie village, where the pre-meditated council was to be held. Care was taken to send all the women out of the village, that they might not discover what was decided upon. Pontiac then ordered sentinels to be placed around the village, to prevent any interruption to their council. These precautions taken, each seated himself in the circle, according to his rank, and Pontiac, as great chief of the league, thus addressed them:—

"It is important, my brothers, that we should exterminate from our land this nation, whose only object is our death. You must be all sensible, as well as myself, that we can no longer supply our wants in the way we were accustomed to do with our Fathers the French. They sell us their goods at double the price that the French made us pay, and yet their merchandise is good for nothing; for no sooner have we bought a blanket or other thing to cover us than it is necessary to procure others against the time of departing for our wintering ground. Neither will they let us have them on credit, as our brothers the French used to do. When I visit the English chief, and inform him of the death of any of our comrades, instead of lamenting, as our

²From "The Pontiac Manuscript," a diary thought to be of a French priest who may have been an eye-witness to the events he describes. In Francis Parkman, *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1908), vol. 2, Appendix, pp. 223-224.