PEOPLE OF THE AMERICAN FRONTIER
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The Coming of the
American Revolution

Walter S. Dunn Jr.
Dedicated to John G. M. Barth and his descendants
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Preface

Fifty years ago my first article on an Indian war party raiding Kentucky in the 1770s was published in the *Detroit Historical Society Bulletin*. At the time I wondered why there was so much data on that raid and very little on others. I assumed from the secondary sources (studies of the period that were done at a later time) that many raids had been conducted on the frontier settlements. The facts were quite different. Even during the Revolution few war parties attacked the settlers. War parties attacking settlers were comparatively rare in the previous twenty years as well. For the most part the Indians and the whites coexisted.

The notable examples of friction were about money. The basic issue was contention over fur and land. The French and colonial traders competed for the wealth imbedded in the control of the fur trade. The land jobbers schemed to seize title to Indian lands.

When the colonists gained the upper hand in the fur trade from 1760 to 1763, the French encouraged the Indians to drive out the colonists and destroy the British army forts that provided havens for the colonial traders. In 1763 the Indians slaughtered British army garrisons and colonial traders while the French watched passively or helped the Indians. The natives stole the trader’s goods, and whatever the Indians left the French confiscated.

When the land jobbers manipulated a few Indians to give land to the land companies in 1768, the British government intervened to the outrage of the powerful merchants, leading them to resist the British. In 1775 the British army paid the Indians to attack the colonial settlers. In both instances
the motivation was not traditional hostility or vague concepts, but financial gain. On both occasions the Indians were well rewarded for their efforts.

Not only have secondary sources missed the basic issue but have created the illusion of widespread violence and death on the basis of contemporary documents written by individuals hundreds—if not thousands—of miles from the frontier. In the past fifty years I have meticulously created a file of more than twelve thousand names associated with frontier activity. The index is based on primary sources (original documents of the period). Missing from the huge index are the names of the Indians and the French and colonial farmers, few of whom could read or write and who therefore were seldom mentioned by name. Names of members of the other groups were found in widely scattered sources. Given that most names appeared repeatedly, I must assume that the file is fairly complete and provides a basis for generalizations; for example, that few traders were killed by the Indians. The file tells us that the French traders remained active for a decade or more, but the paddlers worked only two or three years.

Another source of statistical data is the large quantity of financial records from the period. The number of shirts, guns, and other merchandise carried west by the traders gives us a fairly accurate estimate of the number of Indians in contact with the French and the colonists. Data showing exports of fur compared to the quantities of fur in the financial records indicates the shifting control of the fur trade. The lack of significant quantities of goods needed by the frontier farmers tells us that there were far fewer settlers than the secondary sources imply.

Although social life is not often mentioned in the documents, here and there a snippet appears. The lives of women and children were almost completely ignored. Gathering and meshing the notes together provided a basis for much of the lifestyle described in this book.

Firsthand experience has been helpful in writing the book. My family were dairy farmers for more than a hundred years in Wisconsin, from 1881 to 1983. My wife’s great-grandfather, John G. M. Barth (1834–1917), was born in Germany and married Frederika Kurdt (1841–1929) in 1864. After being discharged from the German cavalry after the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, the family with six children emigrated from Bremen, Germany, in 1881 to seek a better life in the United States and, with a son of draft age, to escape the many conflicts in Europe fought to unite Germany into one empire.

Barth soon had his own farm in Wisconsin. After joining the family in 1959 and helping with chores from time to time, I learned firsthand the backbreaking labor of farming. My older relatives were a gold mine of information concerning crop yields, planting, and other agricultural activities.
Until the 1930s farming had not changed significantly from the methods described in the eighteenth-century documents. The horses still needed loving care and were otherwise prone to sickness. Corn was planted in rows in cultivated fields rather than in rows of small hillocks as the Indians had planted it centuries before. Nature determined the most productive methods. The plows were still pulled by horses. Hunting still provided a source of meat. Cattle and pigs were raised and butchered on the farm for beef and pork. The major change in agriculture was the railroad, which opened new markets and made dairying a profitable business.

As a museum curator and director for more than forty years I had the opportunity to work with every weapon and implement mentioned in the text. At museum meetings, entertaining Indian ceremonies matched the descriptions in the documents. With local tribes I developed displays, and I even attended a meeting of the Iroquois tribes in New York under the name “Doccadun” (Dr. Dunn).

As part of my undergraduate education, I lived in England for three years and learned about rigid class distinctions. My university friends lived a completely different lifestyle from my relatives in Sunderland. The aristocratic attitude, difficult to describe, was alive and well in the 1950s and helped me comprehend the positions taken by the British government in the eighteenth century.

All of these life experiences helped me understand everyday life on the eighteenth-century American frontier. A few words in a reference evoked an immediate response. For example, rather than finding myself faced with endless research to describe a duffle coat, I remembered that I had worn one for three years!

Heather Staines of Greenwood Press has been helpful in suggesting the theme of this book and seeing it through publication. I especially thank George, William, and Robert Wendeberg for spending time explaining to me many details about farming and hunting. The book never would have been completed without the assistance of my wife, Jean.
Before 1760 the thirteen American colonies were closely tied to the seaboard. Although a few traders from Albany dealt with the Indians south of Lake Ontario, the primary exports to Europe from America were tobacco from Virginia; flour, provisions, and lumber from Philadelphia; naval stores (material used in ship building) from New England; and deerskin from the South. None of these exports involved a very complex business organization. In Pennsylvania the farmers took their wheat to the miller, where it was ground into flour and sold to the merchants in Philadelphia for export. In Virginia ships from England came directly to docks on rivers bordering the plantations to pick up loads of tobacco. Credits earned by the exports to England, the West Indies, and southern Europe were used to purchase English manufactured goods.

All of this exchange of commodities shifted in the decade of the 1760s. Great Britain decisively defeated its protagonist France after a bitter war that acquired the name “The Great War,” until that name was superseded by the conflict of 1914–18. The French and Indian War, or the Seven Years’ War as it is now called, created an economic upheaval throughout the world. An incredible expansion of British manufacturing was spurred on by the demands of the war, creating the Industrial Revolution. The demand for weapons, uniforms, rations, and subsidies for European armies nurtured the Industrial Revolution in Britain, based on new technology, just as World War II would later foster a similar revolution in the U.S. economy. The
Seven Years’ War transformed Britain into the dominant world power of that era, just as the United States became the dominant power in 1945.

The spoils of the war included the undisputed acquisition by Britain of Canada, along with the American Midwest, which became one of the most productive regions in the world. The West, previously blocked by the French, was then open for exploitation. The westward movement began in the middle of the eighteenth century when a few colonial fur traders crossed the Appalachian Mountains to compete with French traders in the Ohio Valley. The defeat of the French opened the way for colonial merchants and land speculators to begin westward expansion on a grand scale.

The golden opportunity for gaining wealth from the natural resources of the region was obvious to the colonial merchants of the eighteenth century. Immediately after the war a flood of adventurers went west to make their fortunes trading low-cost British guns, cloth, kettles, and other products to the Indians for furs to supply the rapidly growing number of English hatmakers. British and colonial merchants also flocked to Montreal, Quebec, Albany, Fort Pitt, Detroit, Michilimackinac, and Illinois when the restraining hand of the French government was removed in 1760. Multimillion-dollar investments were made in merchandise and the means to deliver it to consumers.

The downside was that the Seven Years’ War had left Britain with an enormous debt that the wealthy British landowners were reluctant to pay. The British tax structure placed the heaviest burden on the landowners, whereas few taxes were paid by the beneficiaries of the Industrial Revolution in the new imperial economy—the manufacturers. Faced with opposition from landowners in the British Parliament to the continued high taxes, the British government looked for additional sources to help finance control of the western land. Prior to its acquisition of Canada and the West, Britain had spent very little money in the American colonies. Expenditures changed radically during the war and continued after 1760. To London, the seat of the British government, the obvious source for funds to pay the cost was the American colonies themselves, for they would reap the greatest rewards from westward expansion. However, American merchants were as reluctant to pay as the British landowners, especially as the proposed taxes were to be paid in British currency referred to as “sterling” and sent back to London. The unfortunate result was that the sterling received by American merchants from lavish expenditures on the British army in America, which had financed an enormous boom in the colonies, would be sent back to London to pay the taxes rather than to purchase British goods. Without the sterling from army purchases in America, merchants would be hard pressed to pay for imports from England. The dispute regarding who was to pay for western expansion led to the dissolution of the empire.
In the mid-eighteenth century the everyday lives of the people on the American frontier were scarcely mentioned in documents, letters, or newspapers. However, 10,000 people in contact with the Indians on the frontier north of the Ohio River played a major role in determining the future of America. More than a century ago Frederick Jackson Turner declared that the frontier was the dynamic force that shaped the United States. The continual drive westward created an open society that lasted until most of the desirable land was occupied by the end of the nineteenth century.

For centuries the various Indian tribes east of the Mississippi River maintained a village life with limited trade with other tribes and annual moves from summer villages to winter hunting grounds. This relatively uneventful existence ended when Indians were contacted by the French after their exploration and occupation of the Great Lakes. The Indians were fascinated by exposure to new and sturdier utensils compared with their clay pots, for example, and were very much attracted to the guns used by the French. As their medium of exchange they offered to trade their furs for these guns. Even though the tribes added such niceties to their lifestyle, as well as the guns for convenience in hunting, their way of life did not change. They still hunted and trapped in the winter near their villages and farmed at their summer villages in the spring. The women and young girls continued to work the fields while the men hunted, and the young warriors trained with their bows and arrows in anticipation of hunting and tribal warfare.

Contact between the Europeans and the tribes did bring about some changes in Indian society. For over a century French traders had been supplying the tribes with guns, cloth, hardware, tobacco, and brandy at comparatively high prices. The traders’ goods improved the life of the Indians. Wool trousers replaced the buckskins, which turned hard and scratchy once they got wet and dried. Kettles for boiling tough venison, needles for sewing clothes, and blankets for warmth were all products that improved Indian life. Because beaver, deer, and other fur-bearing animals were plentiful, the Indians had little trouble meeting the French demands.

The Indians could not be characterized as drunken brawlers because their only opportunity for unlimited access to that pleasure was at or near the trading posts during trades. Although the French limited liquor sales and gifts, the less compassionate colonial traders from New York and Pennsylvania used excessive gifts and sales of liquor in an attempt to wrest the trade from the French. A little liquor goes a long way when the imbiber is not used to alcohol. When drunk, the natives were known not only to sell their furs cheap but also to sell even the clothes off their backs. Stealing was a natural characteristic of anyone involved in the trade. The traders more or less stole the furs from the Indians, and the natives stole from the stores,
but usually only small items placed conspicuously to entice theft and encourage them to do business at a particular store. On occasion, however, Indians would rob a trader of his entire stock.

The French Canadian lifestyle revolved around the fur trade. The most sought-after commodity in the colder climates was the furs. The cold winters of Canada, New York, and the Ohio Valley produced animals with heavy, fine fur. Deerskin was the product of the warmer southern areas such as Illinois. Each spring about a hundred canoes left Montreal for the West, paddled by about six hundred experienced traders and raw farm boys making a trip to obtain cash for their farm families. In the fall the canoes headed back to Montreal laden with furs, but some of the French traders remained behind in the Indian villages to continue supplying the Indians during the winter with ammunition, brandy, and other needs. The close association of the Indians and the French made it very difficult for the colonial traders to compete, even though they offered goods at lower prices.

The French were comfortably situated in North America in 1754 and getting along well with the natives, but their lives were suddenly disrupted by the Seven Years’ War between France and England. The French territory in America became one of the spoils of the war. However, the British occupation of its new colony was not without its thorny issues, such as the French resistance to surrender the lucrative fur trade.

The French farmers, who were not as interested in expanding their agricultural economy as the colonial farmers, were a good market for manufactured goods from Europe in exchange for their produce. Although all farmers brought their farming methods from Europe, they were very much influenced by and adopted some Indian ways. Corn introduced by the Indians became a staple in the newcomers’ diets, and they also used their planting, harvesting, and food preparation techniques.

When the French army left America in 1760, the French traders stayed. Indian affairs became troubled when the French used the tribes as a weapon against the British merchants from Montreal and the colonists from New York and Pennsylvania in order to maintain a stranglehold on the fur trade. After many years of friendly coexistence with the French, the Indians were inclined to trust them and believed their lies that the British and the colonists were the natives’ enemies.

The French influence on the Indians was furthered by a cultural intermingling with the tribes over the years. The winterers often had Indian common-law wives and raised children who became traders and the wives of traders. The métis, the children of these marriages, played a major role in the fur trade. Because of their tribal heritage, their Indian relatives protected
them during the winter and made it safe for them to trade without fear of being robbed by roving bands.

The French had not seriously infringed on Indian territory in more than a century, but the colonial traders were the forerunners of permanent occupation by settlers. They came from Albany, New York, and Pennsylvania. Because of the French opposition the colonials did most of their business at posts including Detroit, Michilimackinac, Oswego, Fort Niagara, and Fort Pitt. However, some ventured into the Indian villages in the early 1760s, and many were killed during an Indian uprising in 1763.

The traders for the most part can be characterized as surly and bold, obviously necessary attitudes to lead a dangerous life in the wilderness. In New York the Albany traders were less adventurous and were satisfied to trade at Oswego and Fort Niagara. The Pennsylvania traders often ventured into the Indian villages west of Fort Pitt. Most of them traded in the forts rather than risk their lives in the Indian villages.

Close behind the traders were settlers eager to acquire land of their own for farming. Much of the good land east of the mountains had been occupied by 1760. The West beckoned those who looked for economic security in owning and cultivating their own land. Younger sons, indentured servants who had served their terms, and discharged soldiers all wanted land.

When soldiers were discharged many decided to remain in America as farmers and traders. Many Germans had been enlisted in the four battalions of the Royal American Regiment, and Scots had formed three regiments to fight against the French in America. In 1775 Germans made up 10 percent of the colonial population. The discharged soldiers made up the ranks of the traders who were provided with goods by seaboard merchants and then made their way into the wilderness to trade with the Indians. Many of them were eager to obtain land and begin farming. The former soldiers and indentured servants obtained farms and raised families, a way of life that was very difficult to attain in Europe, where they worked for small wages or gave most of their harvest to landlords.

The soldiers still in uniform lived a comparably good life as long as the Indians were peaceful. Garrison duty on the frontier was far more relaxed than the harsh life in barracks in Europe. Food and drink were plentiful and few demands were made on their time. Many did some trading on the side with the Indians, using part of their rum ration to obtain favors.

Greed was the major cause of disturbance that in the end brought the entire fabric of frontier society crashing. The French in Canada and along the Mississippi River did their best to maintain control of the fur trade. The colonial merchants who wanted an ever-increasing share of the furs saw half of the fur going down the Mississippi River to New Orleans for shipment
to France and most of the rest going to Montreal to Scottish merchants who sent the fur to England. The British army made no attempt to prevent the wealth’s escaping from the colonists, yet the British government insisted unfairly that the colonists pay to maintain the army.

Over and above the competition for fur, America became a very large market for British goods, especially from the British industries developed for the production of war materials. The Indians, the farmers, and the merchants were excellent customers for this high productive capacity. At the same time the British army became a very good customer for colonial provisions.

Britain sent regiments to America supposedly to replace the French army in the new colony in order to keep the peace and to protect the natives from overzealous traders and colonists. In reality, America was a good holding ground and an excellent excuse for King George III, who became king in 1760, to maintain a larger peacetime army than Parliament would have agreed to finance at home. Royal politics even led him to discharge potentially troublesome Scottish officers in America rather than have them return to England, where they could possibly threaten the throne again.

The merchants were the middlemen between the frontier and the manufacturers in England. As the wholesalers with warehouses who imported in bulk, they made and lost fortunes. More than any other group in America, the colonial merchants suffered from British regulations and lack of support in colonial struggles with the French. The largest and most overextended Pennsylvania merchant company, Baynton and Wharton, finally lost its shirt in Illinois in a last-ditch attempt to seek a larger slice of the trade, only to be thwarted again by the French. Its last grandstand attempt left Baynton and Wharton with a fortune of unsaleable merchandise that it sold at a loss to other traders and the French.

To the colonists, the army played a lesser role in protection and more of a role as a substantial market for provisions, an avenue readily exploited by the merchants. After losing the struggle for the fur trade to the French, the merchants rebounded to a certain extent by supplying the army in return for sterling bills of exchange that could be used to pay off their debts in England to balance their trade. However, when George III economized by moving the army from the frontier to the East Coast, that market also disappeared. After a wholehearted attempt to take control of the trade from the French, by 1768 the colonial merchants had failed and faced bankruptcy.

Again, not all was lost. In a final attempt to succeed in America these same merchants became land “jobbers,” or speculators, hoping to sell land to the colonial farmers in their thirst to move westward across the boundary of the Appalachian Mountains. One last time the colonists were thwarted
when Britain discouraged westward expansion fearing unrest and resistance from the Indians who held the land.

In addition to furs and land, another commodity for sale in the colonies was slaves bought in Africa from tribal kings who had captured them from other tribes during warfare. The slaves were used particularly as workers in the Virginia tobacco fields, the sugarcane fields in the West Indies, rice plantations around New Orleans, and cornfields in Illinois. They also worked as servants and, sometimes, concubines in wealthy homes in colonial cities.

The various groups and individuals in America had set the stage for a healthy economy not only to supply furs for beaver hats in aristocratic Europe, but as a haven for adventurous newcomers either fleeing from oppression or just enticed by the magic of a new life in a land that promised to fulfill their dreams.

The eighteenth-century frontier was in a continual upheaval as the various cultures interacted and competed. Any change in economic conditions created friction as some groups gained and others lost. In the early 1760s the Indians, the newly arrived British merchants in Canada, and the colonial merchants were gaining, whereas the French lost their monopoly of the fur trade. The pioneer settlers were rapidly absorbing land east of the Appalachians and anticipated taking Indian land west of the mountains. But the settlers’ hopes were quickly dashed by the Proclamation of 1763, which limited development to the area east of the mountains.

Even though France lost the Seven Years’ War, the French traders persistently resisted colonial efforts to trade with the Indians, often using them to violently oppose the colonists. Indian tempers flared and led to Pontiac’s Uprising in 1763. After that fracas, in an attempt to protect both the Indians and the traders, the British leaders ordered the restriction of trading to the army posts, where the army could regulate trade, control the flow of liquor, and protect the traders. This restriction worked to the advantage of the French, who did not intend to abide by any rules.

The attempt of the colonial merchants to profit by using rum and British goods to compete with the French for the fur trade in Canada was rebuffed by Pontiac’s Uprising, which was directed at the colonial traders and instigated by the persistent French. The rules promulgated by the British government to maintain peace on the frontier in reality returned the fur trade to the French, who were assisted by new British entrepreneurs in Montreal and Quebec, many of them former army officers. Eventually the American merchants were shut out completely by the French and British merchants in Canada. The potential profits from the British acquisition of Canada were closed to the colonists while newly arrived British merchants made alliances with the French in Quebec and Montreal. The refusal of the French in
Illinois to sell their furs to American merchants left the colonists with only the army as their primary market. When the army left Illinois in 1768, that market vanished as well.

The colonial market of consumers, on the other hand, was expanding. After the Seven Years’ War manufactured goods, cloth, guns, hardware, leather goods, china, and more were available at low cost as British merchants vigorously entered the North American market. The American colonies became the largest market for British goods. The merchandise was purchased with money from British expenditures on the regiments in America and the colonies’ exports to Europe and the West Indies.

The Middle Colonies and the frontier offered a limitless opportunity for the sale of British goods. Ninety percent of the colonists were farmers. In both New England and the middle colonies, most were subsistence farmers cultivating ten acres and raising cattle and hogs. Their small surpluses paid for the purchase of luxury items. The small size of the farms was restricted by the ability of an overburdened farm family to plow, plant, and harvest the crops while caring for the animals that formed a necessary part of farm life. Nevertheless, the combination of the small quantities of surplus wheat from thousands of farms did provide grist for flour mills that found a ready market in the British West Indies and southern Europe.

The domestic market was fueled by the explosive growth in population. The thirteen colonies grew rapidly in the mid-eighteenth century fed by a steady stream of immigration and a high birthrate. In 1760 there were 1.6 million people living in the thirteen colonies and 76,000 in Canada. In that same year, the population of the British Isles was less than 10 million, and so the Americans represented a substantial portion of the total population of the British Empire. By 1775 one-third of Americans had been born abroad or were children of immigrants. Blacks made up 17 percent of the population. In 1756 there were 13,500 blacks in New York and 85,000 whites. There were 10,000 blacks out of 180,000 people in Pennsylvania.

The population of New York in 1760 was 117,000 and of Pennsylvania, 217,000. The largest cities in 1763 were Philadelphia, with over 22,000 people; New York, with 18,000; Boston, with 22,000; and Charleston, with 10,000. Philadelphia was the fifth-largest city in the British Empire. In the same period there were 50,000 Iroquois in New York, 75,000 other Indians north of the Ohio River, and over 90,000 Indians south of the Ohio River, for a total of 215,000 Indians. In 1766 in Canada there were 69,000 French, 7,400 Indians, and a few British immigrants and colonists.

All of the people on the colonial frontier were dependent on one another. If the Indians were displeased by colonial traders who used cheap rum to take their fur, the Indians reacted against the traders and settlers. Pontiac’s
Uprising in 1763 forced the English to stop the trade with the Indians temporarily. If the traders were robbed, the merchants in the ports lost enormous amounts of money and went bankrupt. The presence of the army to maintain peace on the frontier placed a heavy burden on the British taxpayer.

To the best interest of all was maintaining a peaceful climate on the frontier. Everyone benefited. The Indians obtained goods that made their lives far more pleasant. The traders and merchants made fortunes to enable them to live well when they returned to the coast, and the settlers could farm in safety.

With England favoring the fate of the Indians and protecting tribal land while French competition limited their profits in the fur trade, the colonists became even more disgruntled, and many merchants were instrumental in the coming revolution. Although the media was far simpler in the eighteenth century, still it played a role in shaping colonial actions. The news that people read in their local newspapers and inflammatory information on handbills posted in public places as well as flamboyant speeches at gatherings determined their attitudes. The colonial media in the eighteenth century was controlled by merchants in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and other large cities. During the 1760s the merchants began a campaign to reduce—if not end—the power of Parliament on American affairs. The motives of this campaign were to prevent sterling being returned to England in the form of colonial taxes and to end British efforts to block the exploitation of the West.

Rather than using the more intellectual argument of the loss of sterling, the colonial media concentrated on abstract issues; for example, taxation without representation. Revenue taxes had been collected in America for over a century without protest because the money remained in the colonies. Rather than a reaction against increased taxation, the Boston Tea Party was in fact staged to protest the reduction of British taxes on Indian tea, threatening the profitable illegal tea trade with Holland. All but ignored in the press and in speeches was the second issue, London’s interference with western expansion.

When opposition to the Indians intensified in the 1770s in the drive for expansion, the Indians allied themselves with the British and the French Canadians who were attacking the frontier settlements. For that reason military resources had to be diverted, from time to time, from the coast to the frontier, a measure General George Washington could ill afford. Taking advantage of the situation, the French government, always eager to embarrass Britain, supplied the colonial army with weapons and other goods. French assistance proved invaluable to the Americans in the Revolution.
The interpretation in this book varies somewhat from the consensus of opinion among current authors. My emphasis on the economic causes of the Revolution contrasts to the emphasis on the political and philosophical reasons others have forwarded. On the frontier the issues were land and trade. As long as the British army paid its bills with sterling, few frontier merchants objected.

Others may question my view of the Indians. Despite their growing dependence on the fur traders for the enrichment to their lives in adding metal pots, trousers, and guns, the Indians could have survived without these luxuries. The use of the bow and arrow continued into the nineteenth century. Trade among the tribes took place as characterized here before the coming of the fur traders.

Another issue is why so many Scottish troops were sent to America and disbanded there, while English regiments were sent back to England on a rotation scheme. There is little if any documentation on this issue, but the Scots may have been expressing their loyalty to King George II by volunteering and, once in America, saw economic opportunities.

Perhaps the main disagreement is my contention that the frontier was a unique environment. Life and ideas in the Philadelphia, New York, and Boston areas may have been similar to those on farms in western Pennsylvania. I am sure that we all agree on the heroism of the people on the frontier who fostered the foundation of today’s United States of America.
The Indians

In the mid-eighteenth century Indian life and culture in the area north of the Ohio River and surrounding the Great Lakes was based on agriculture. Hunting and fishing were used to supplement what was basically a vegetarian diet. The Indians did not hunt on a major scale because they had no way to preserve meat other than smoking it. They did not become full-time hunters but hunted in the fall and winter because that was when the animal coats were at their prime.

The arrival of the white man did not change the Indians’ life a great deal. The trade goods, though adding convenience, did not alter basic patterns. Hoes made of bone were replaced by metal tools, but the process of cultivating corn remained the same. American farmers today still plant corn just as the Indians did except that they use machines instead of deer antlers to dig and sow crops. Sweet corn planting was staggered so that part of the crop ripened at biweekly intervals. Nature still determines successful farming and sets the rules of life. If corn rows are planted too close together, the yield will be less. The main difference is that the Indian women did most of the field work, while men did most of work in colonial families. However, colonial farm wives often worked in the fields as well.

Even the availability of liquor did not make a major change in their life because they drank very little compared to the Europeans. Tales of drunken Indians were exaggerated because most white men saw Indians only
when they visited the trading posts, an event similar to a modern 
convention.

As game in the vicinity of their permanent summer villages was soon 
exhausted, the tribes were forced to travel to hunting grounds each fall. 
The hunting ground changed as the supply of game was reduced. They 
made minimal use of furs and deerskins for clothing. The Indian cycle of 
farming during the summer and hunting in the fall was the same as the twenty-
first-century American farmers’. The hunting tradition was not common in 
Europe because hunting preserves were reserved for the aristocracy, but the 
colonists on the American frontier soon adopted the Indian tradition.

Neither was violence a way of life. Taking white captives or captives from 
other tribes was intended not to harm people but to introduce new blood 
lines to a village. The tradition in most cultures has long been that marrying 
close relatives breeds defective children. The war parties were an opportunity 
for the young braves to prove their manhood while adding to the gene pool.

The war parties consisted of twenty to forty young men. The tribes north 
of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi River attacked the Cherokee 
in the south and the Pawnee in the west. The southern Indians relied on 
deer skin for clothing and venison for food. The tribes in the west used 
buffalo for meat and clothing.

Before the Seven Years’ War disrupted life in the Great Lakes area by 
transferring the territory from France to Britain, the Indians had lived at 
peace with the French and the colonists. The long years of a good tribal 
relationship with the French would have continued with the colonists were 
it not for the competition for the fur trade. The French would not give up 
the profitable fur trade even though France had lost the war and its land in 
America. In order to retain control of the fur trade in America, the French 
encouraged the Indians to conduct a type of guerrilla warfare by subsidizing 
the Indians to fight the colonists. The relationship between the Iroquois and 
the New York colonists is a peaceful example because the French 
could not interfere. From the time of its first encounter with the “noble 
savage,” the British government was protective and treated the Indians with 
respect.

Because of the continuing French-British conflict regarding the fur trade, 
the intuitive Indians saw an opportunity to play one nation against the other 
and became amateur entrepreneurs in finding the best deals for their fur and 
skins. European trade goods were an enticement as metal pots made life 
easier compared with fragile clay utensils. Liquor became a factor only when 
the colonists tried desperately to upstage the French traders by bribing the 
Indians with this new pleasure to get their furs. The Indian trust in the French 
was imbedded in their long amicable experience.