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BY JON SINATRA

THE FRENCH & INDIAN WAR IN COLORADO

Two and a half hours earlier I had stepped off a plane in Philadelphia, picked up my rental car and was driving toward my hotel in Wind Gap Twp., located in the Lehigh Valley, Northampton County, Pennsylvania. Two and a half centuries earlier General Braddock's defeat at Fort Duquesne had left the frontiers of this county wide open for invasion by the French and Indians. The Wind Gap, located within the Pennsylvania Walking Purchase Territory, was on the front lines of this invasion.

The cloudless summer sky made for a lazy 90 minute drive from the airport. Leaving the city behind and heading east toward the Delaware River, the beauty of centuries old church's and farm plantations soon began to dot the lush green landscape. Rubbernecking past these glorious old monuments of yesteryear, I rambled on down the road when I suddenly spotted, on the opposite side of the highway and through a massive cloud of dust and debris, a SUV tumbling end-over-end across the road! Whoa! I quickly stopped. Resting upside down in an eerie silence and through the dust and smoke a young girl appeared from the SUV and was pointing to me and in the direction of her mother who lay on the asphalt bleeding. As I held her mother in comfort, she extended her arms to me and took a deep breath as her eyes rolled back and closed.

Driving on to my hotel I couldn't help but think back to a time when I was growing up in Colorado. Riding bicycles my brother crashed hard on his! His screams were unbearable and he then closed his eyes. There was nothing that I could do for him and upon a highway outside of the Wind Gap, helpless defeat was again at hand. Prior to my brother's passing, I had lost my father to heart disease at 45. My mother had lost a spouse and a child.

THE PALATINE WARS

During the wars (1674-97) of Louis XIV and Philip of France they inflicted a frightful devastation of the Palatinate (Germany), one of the richest and most fertile lands of Central Europe, so that it might not support armies for the invasion of France. Heidelberg was taken, 1200 villages sacked and totally destroyed and the countryside laid to waste and mercilessly desolated. Hear the echo of their lament: "We are poor distressed Palatines whose utter ruin was caused by the merciless cruelty of France. Despoiled of all, even

homes, we were left without shelter in Winter (1708-09) so severe many froze to death. Nobody could pay or was paid. Good faith and confidence were destroyed, men became robbers, murderers and cannibals.”¹

THE PALATINE COLONIST

These beautiful Pennsylvania valleys were opened to settlement by Royal charter of King Charles II to William Penn on 5 March 1681; Penn’s treaty with the Indians in 1682 granting a piece of land along the side of which a man might ride on horseback between sunrise and sunset covering the distance from Philadelphia, east along the Delaware River to the Lehigh Valley, was ceded to Penn’s three sons by twenty-three Indian chiefs including five Nation tribal paramount chiefs, in October of 1763.

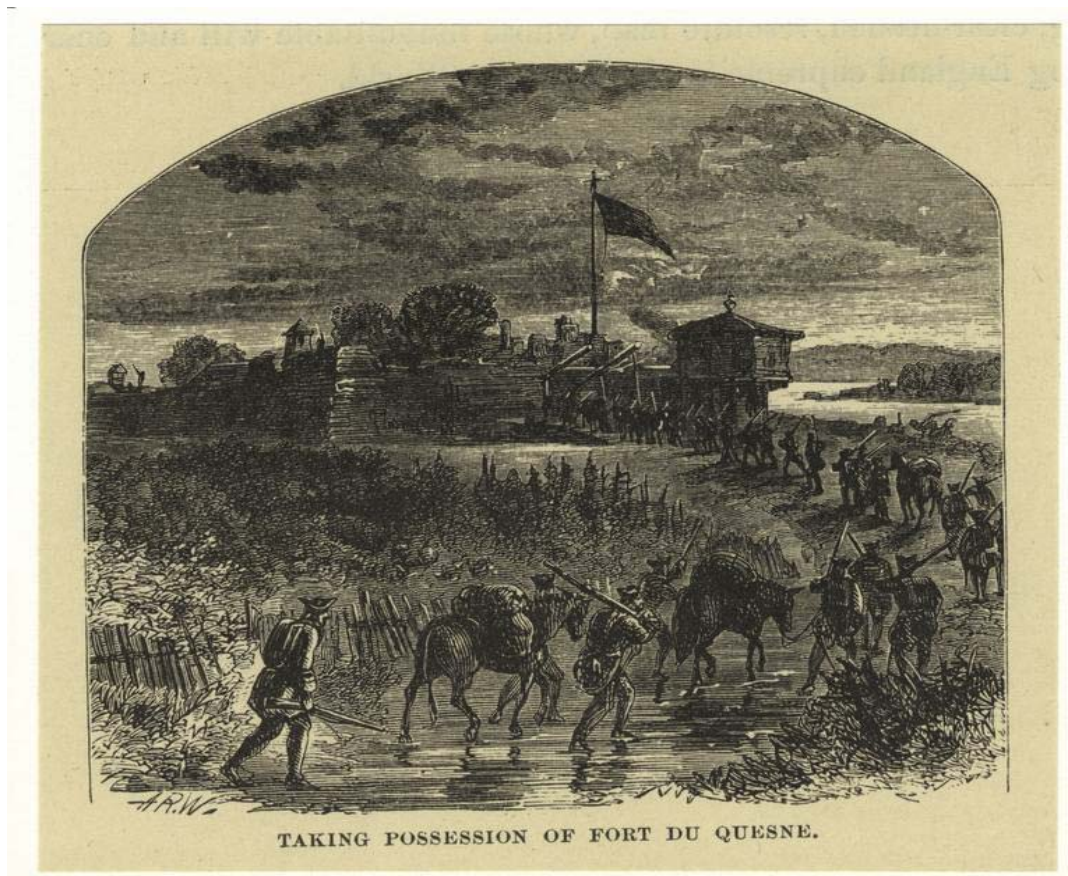
In 1738, The Palatines were pouring into Philadelphia aboard English ships. In September of this year the ship Robert and Alice arrived into Philadelphia Harbor with a full load of passengers, one of whom was Nicholas Heil. Migrating east along the Delaware, Nicholas would settle in the Lehigh Valley between the Blue and Lehigh Mountains. This area was within the bounds of the Pennsylvania Walking Purchase deal of 1737, where many of the colony’s new immigrants would settle, farm the land and raise their families. The Lehigh Valley was then a virgin forest well watered by many streams, broken only by buffalo and Indian trails. An early writer says: “A mile or so across the valley one reaches the Lehigh, which with a magical beauty shows united every charm of a delectable region. The forest trees push forward to lend the scene heightened grace, their branches flung far over the river and shadows cast. The forest is composed in part of several kinds of North American oak, sassafras, tulip tree, sour gum, chestnut, birch, elm, wild ash and many other species.”¹ The Palatines settled on this grant of virgin forest, built log cabins, cleared a plot and planted maize or Indian corn. A traveler of two centuries ago writes of them: “I have seen nothing anywhere in the farming line that has any resemblance to the splendid farming habits in Pennsylvania. I see nothing like poverty in these counties. The great massy barns with elegant sash and glass windows, their overgrown horses and cattle, their smooth plowed furrows, their haystacks, and snug warm houses, with coffers full of specie, their thick serviceable clothes, the ease and contentment, and above all, that noble independence which marks their steady looks and movements prove them to be a wealthy and happy people.”¹

THE OHIO VALLEY - 1754

Leading up to the battles with the French at Fort Necessity and Fort Du Quesne, the French had been “reminding” the Shawnee and Delaware Indian tribes of the Pennsylvania Walking Purchase “deal” made against them by the English. As these tribes began to break away from their English allies, they in turn quickly began to side with the French military. Thus the match had been struck and the crown was on the eve of a full blown war against the French & Indians.

FORT DU QUESNE - JULY, 1755

18 July, 1755. Lieutenant Colonel George Washington writes: “The General was wounded (Braddock), of which he died three days after. Sir Peter Halket was killed in the field, where died many other brave officers. I luckily escaped without a wound, though I had four bullets through my coat, and two horses shot under me.”²



FRENCH & INDIAN WAR

LEHIGH VALLEY - NORTHAMPTON COUNTY - NOVEMBER 1755

“During all this month the Indians have been burning and destroying all before them in the County of Northampton, and have already burnt fifty houses here, murdered above one hundred persons, and are still continuing their ravages, murders, and devastations, and have actually overrun and laid waste a great part of that county.”³

The Church of Nazareth, located in the Lehigh valley, record the events of this November within it's diary's: “And that evening, a breeze from the northwest carried the odor of smoke. Two dozen miles away, across the Blue Mountains, Moravians ran a farming settlement Gnadenhuetten, the “huts of grace.” The smoke that wafted over the mountains that night came from the burning mills, barns, stables, commissary, chapel and mission house of Gnadenhuetten. A dozen Indian warriors in black war paint and carrying muskets, tomahawks and scalping knives had attacked the settlement and killed or captured 11 of it's inhabitants. Some burned to death when the raiders torched their house. One man trying to escape was shot, hacked and scalped. A woman taken prisoner was later killed.”⁴

MOORE TWP. - LEHIGH VALLEY - JANUARY 1756

The Indians entered the township and committed a series of depredations and murders, firing the houses and barns of Nicholas Heil and five others and kidnapping Catherine Heil, one of Heil's children. She was never seen or heard from again. The dead bodies of the others, found after the maraud, were interred in the Moravian Church burying ground at Nazareth. This church had been used lately by the fleeing settlers from the French and Indian attacks. The church's diary's record this event: "Among the arrival at this place of fleeing settlers, Nicholas Heil, two sons and three daughters. One daughter is probably killed by the Indians."³



As the war quickly progressed, Nazareth township, now stood in the very path of the invading Indians and had to be held at all costs for the protection of the down state settlements. Small bodies of volunteer troops with rifles began passing through here, sometimes being fed and quartered at this church. On January 5, Captain Issac Wayne (Father of Revolutionary War General "Mad" Anthony Wayne), is sent by General Dr. Benjamin Franklin, to this church and arrives with 48 men to help protect the town. It is written in the church diaries of Captain Wayne at this time: "he is a nice careful person who is conscientious in regard to his office."⁴

WIND GAP, TWP. - LEHIGH VALLEY - 1757

Grandmother Keller and her two young sons sat by the fire for warmth. Earlier on this day Sept. 15, the Indians had attacked the Keller family and led captive the mother and her two sons, Joseph and John Jacob, to Montreal, Canada, after having killed and scalped Christian. Father Keller was at the time engaged with his team in seeding, and so far from his house , that he was not aware of the raid until his return in the evening. The bloody body

of his son (14 years old) found in a field at a distance from the house gave some light on the horrible event. Evidently that oldest son would also have been taken alive, but being fleet of foot, could not be captured. The probability is, that he first endeavored to hide in or behind the barn, and when that would not answer, ran across the field in the direction of Laurel Hill. This hill was covered thickly with evergreens - laurel, spruce, etc. - the only natural hiding place near. The Indian in pursuit of him, fearing that the neighborhood might be alarmed, shot and killed him with an arrow, then took his scalp as a trophy. Mother Keller and two sons were hurried away along and across the mountain. The Indians kindled a fire the same night, the air being cold. The mother had the agony of seeing the scalp (which she recognized) of her first-born being dried by the fire. After her arrival in Montreal, Canada, mother Keller was bartered off to some French officers whom as a captive she served three years. 5



KELLER HOME, MILL AND BLACKSMITH SHOP

WIND GAP, PENNSYLVANIA

A petition to the Governor dated October 5th 1757, concerning the dire straights throughout the Lehigh Valley, was written and signed by 78 elders of this area shortly after the Keller attack. Two of these being Nicholas Heil And John Peter Doll.

PETITION OF INHABITANTS OF NORTHAMPTON COUNTY

To the Honourable the Governor and General Assembly, &c: The petition of the back inhabitants, viz't, of the Township of Lehigh, situate between Allenstown, and the Blue Mountains, in the County of Northampton, most humbly sheweth: That the said township for a few years past has been, to your knowledge, ruined and destroyed by the murdering Indians. That since the late peace the said inhabitants returned to their several and respective places of abode, and some of them have rebuilt their houses which were burnt. That since the new murders were committed some of the said inhabitants deserted their plantations, and fled in the more improved parts of this province, where they remain. That unless your petitioners get assistance from you, your petitioners will be reduced to poverty. That the district in which your petitioners dwell contains 20 miles in length and eight miles in breadth, which is too extensive for your petitioners to defend, without your assist with some forces. That your petitioners apprehend it to be necessary for their defense that a road be cut along the Blue Mountains, through the township aforesd, and that several guard houses be built along this said road, which may be accomplished with very little cost. That there are many inhabitants in the said township who have neither arm nor ammunition, and who are too poor to provide themselves therewith. That several Indians keep lurking about the Blue Mountains who pretend to be friends, and as several people have lately been captivated thereabouts, we presume it must be by them. May it, therefore, please your honors to take our deplorable condition, and grant us men and ammunition, that we may thereby be enabled to defend our selves, our properties and the lives of our wives and children, or grant such other relief in the premises as to you shall meet, and your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray. 3

During the war, in 1760, Nicholas Heil was killed. Grandmother Heil had lost a spouse and a child. Shortly after the death of Nicholas and subsequent petition to the Orphans Court regarding his 5 remaining children, Peter Doll adopted Nicholas' son, John. Nicholas Heil and Peter Doll had rebuilt their burnt homes at the base of the Blue Mountains after the January, 1756 attack. John Doll, constructed a blockhouse that was used by the nearby settlers for their protection during these Indian raids. In addition to the main house, the blockhouse was built with two out-buildings that housed British soldiers and General Franklin's, Pennsylvania Associators. In 1758, General Franklin is sent by the Governor of Philadelphia to construct a string of forts along the base of the Blue Mountains in an effort to stem the tide of these Indian raids. During this time, in his military correspondence, General Franklin would use Doll's Blockhouse, as a reference point to the newly constructed forts. 3-6



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**JOHAN - NICKEL - HeIL
[DIED] THE 14th FEBRUARY
1760**

After her release in 1760 from Montreal, and subsequent return home to the Wind Gap, Grandmother Keller told of conversations she overheard while in captivity: “the Indians would return from their raids in the Lehigh Valley and speak (to the French officers), of the excellent marksman at the blockhouse that could shoot with accuracy at great distances.”⁵

Before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, John Heil, along with his younger brother, both married their neighbors, the Silvius Sisters. On April 4, 1756, younger brother, Nicholas Silvius, at the age of 12, was kidnapped by the Indians and spent five years in captivity in Montreal, Canada. Nicholas returned home from captivity at the age of 18 and on July 19, 1763, during Pontiac’s uprising, he joined Captain Jacob Wetterholt’s, 1st Company, 3rd Battalion of Rangers. The company service record below paints a picture of Nicholas Sivius: ³⁻⁸⁻⁹

Roll of all the men whom they have enlisted for the of three months of the Company
 Wetterholt stationed at Fort Summit full company for the months of July 1763

Rank	Company	Name	Qualified	for how long	their Births	Age	Tall	Face	Eyes	Hair	Trade	Qualified
1.	Capt.	Jacob Wetterholt	July 19.	0	Germany	36	5' 7"	Round	Brown	Brown	Aug. 25 1763	0
2.	Serjeant	Samuel	July 19.	0	Germany	27	5' 9"	Long	Gray	Brown	0	Aug. 25 1763
3.	Private	Truby	July 19.	0	Benfelon	27	5' 9"	Long	Brown	Brown	0	Aug. 25 1763
4.	Serjeant	Delius	July 20.	3 months	Germany	53	5' 10"	Round	Brown	Blond	0	July 29 1763
5.	Serjeant	Jacob Seckler	July 20.	3 months	Benfelon	25	5' 10"	Round	Brown	Brown	0	July 29 1763
6.	Capt.	George Davis	July 19.	3 months	Germany	25	5' 11"	Long	Brown	Brown	0	July 22 1763
7.	Capt.	Jacob Coomer	July 20.	3 months	Germany	25	5' 3"	Long	Brown	Brown	0	July 29 1763
8.	Private	Nicholas Silvius	July 19.	3 months	Benfelon	21	5' 10"	Long	Gray	Gelan	0	July 29 1763

NICHOLAS SILVIUS JULY 29 - 3 MONTHS PENNSYLVANIA - 21 - 5' 10" - LONG GRAY GELAN - 0 - JULY 29 1763
 (MENS NAMES) (QUALIFIED) (FOR HOW LONG) (THEIR BIRTHS) (AGE) (TALL) (FACE) (EYES) (HAIR) (TRADE) (QUALIFIED)

On October 8, 1763, Captain Wetterholt and his men had taken accommodations for the night at the house of John Stenton, on their march from Bethlehem, PA to Fort Allen, in the Lehigh Valley (20 miles from Doll's Blockhouse). When an ambush by a band of Delaware's led by Captain Bull, a son of Teedyuscung, attacked the Stenton home. It is written in 1st company's report of this attack: "Before daybreak some Delawares (Indians), attacked the house of John Stenton, where Captain Jacob Wetterholt, of the Province service, with a squad of men, was lodging for the night. The wife of James Horner, who was on her way to a neighbors for coals to light the morning fire, the Indians, fearing lest she should betray them or raise an alarm, dispatched her with their tomahawks. Thereupon they surrounded Stenton's house. No sooner had Captain Wetterholt's servant stepped out of the house (he had been sent to saddle the captain's horse) than he was shot down. The report of the Indian's piece brought his master to the door, who, on opening it, received a mortal wound. Sergeant Lawrence McGuire, in his attempt to draw him in, was also dangerously wounded and fell, whereupon the lieutenant advanced. He was confronted by an Indian, who, leaping upon the bodies of the fallen men, presented a pistol, which the lieutenant thrust aside as it was being discharged, thus escaping with his life, and succeeding also in repelling the savage. The Indians now took a position at a window, and there shot Stenton as he was in the act of rising from bed. Rushing from the house, the wounded man ran for a mile, and dropped down a corpse. Captain Wetterholt, despite his sufferings, dragged himself to a window, through which he shot one of the savages while in the act of applying a torch to the house. Hereupon, taking up the dead body of their comrade, the besiegers withdrew. 10

Surviving this attack of October, 1763, Nicholas Silvius, along with the Heil Brothers, all served together with the 4th PA Battalion during the American Revolutionary War. The 4th PA, was a Battalion of Army Rangers on the Frontiers of Northampton County, fighting Tories and Indians. This Battalion was commanded by General “Mad” Anthony Wayne early on in the Revolutionary War and in 1779, made up some of the 1500 troops led by General John Sullivan (Sullivan’s March), that was sent into the Blue Mountains of Pennsylvania to “route out” the Indians. This march ended at Fort Ticonderoga, N.Y. ³⁻⁹ Shortly after the end of the Revolutionary War, Grandfather John Heil, lost his wife and a daughter. And on down the line, seemingly it goes on. Each generation in succession, a spouse and a child is lost.

As I traveled around Northampton, County, recording the headstones and dwellings of these departed ancestors, I searched for the headstone of Nicholas Heil. I was looking forward to it, but at the same time feeling uneasy. In retrospect, it has been a long line of bad luck and coincidences. My mother had lost her brother, as well as her mother when they were young. Her grandfather had also lost a son and his spouse when they were very young. And on it goes from the French & Indian War to my Mother, eight generations later and just recently striking her granddaughter’s family with her loss of her daughter.

After my arrival in Wind Gap, I found the headstone of Nicholas Heil, as well as the spot where John Peter Dolls blockhouse stood in the Lehigh Valley during the French & Indian War. I stood among the quiet where the blockhouse once stood. Back before the United States was born, and listened to the sharp sounds of Indian hatchets thumping into thick white pine wood doors. My ancestors pleading and praying in German tongue for their lives to be spared during these unmerciful and mutilating attacks. Musket balls whizzing through the air. The sound of fire burning and the odor of thick smoke pouring from hefty log cabins.

As I sat at Grandfather Heil’s grave, I could see the land upon which the Indians kidnapped my Uncle Nicholas Silvius. Some of the Silvius headstones were in this same cemetery and I pulled my camera from the days newspaper from which it was folded in and snapped a picture of the their headstones. Sitting here I thought for a moment of the previous day’s events upon my arrival, and began to thumb through the paper when I came upon the auto accident within the pages. The young girls last name, who’s mother laid on the highway bleeding and within my arms not far from the Wind Gap, was Silvas.

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The Reading Eagle
Accident on 1-78 near Bethel, calls 3 rescue helicopters.

The order of the day today will be reading and re-reading, editing, etc. The many family pictures, personal family letters and family mementos before me of the past two centuries provide a stark and vivid reminder of the sufferings that have been handed down from generation to generation. All is quite powerful if one chooses to stand close enough to it and In 1994, after the passing of my mother and a second brother soon thereafter, I simply walked away in bewilderment. Not long ago, I had received a phone call informing me that that my Uncle Heil had passed away and that I was to be the executor of his estate. As I stepped back into this family line, much has happened since. In my attempt to try and put at least some of this family's past to rest with this "public offering of words" will be an attempt which knows no bounds. For as I sit here gazing out my window in reflective thought, in search of a word that may somehow best describe this family line over the past 258 years in America, the perfect word suddenly appears before me. Presenting itself, in all it's violent glory, a wicked tornado descends from above me! Whoa! The French & Indian War in Colorado.....

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**Thornton tornado bearing down upon my backyard at 136th & York St., June 7, 2009.
Longs Peak in the background.**

FOOTNOTES:

- 1 TWO CENTURIES OF KEMMERER FAMILY HISTORY - PUB. 1928
- 2 GEORGE WASHINGTON LETTERS
- 3 PENNSYLVANIA ARCHIVES / COLONIAL / VOL. I, V SERIES
- 4 MORAVIAN CHURCH OF NAZARETH DIARIES
- 5 HISTORY OF THE KELLER FAMILY - PUB. 1905
- 6 FORTS ON THE PENNSYLVANIA FRONTIER 1753-1758, FRONTIER FORTS OF PENNSYLVANIA - PUB. 1895
- 7 PENNSYLVANIA ARCHIVES VOL. VIII, V SERIES
- 8 F&I WAR VICTIMS OF THE INDIANS 1755-57 BY, WILLIAM H. RICKENBACH
- 9 SOCIETY OF THE SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION
- 10 NICHOLAUS WETTERHOLT'S DIARY [BROTHER OF THE MURDERED JACOB], PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY

MY GRANDPARENTS:

NICHOLAS HEIL x 9 GENERATION
JOHN HEIL x 8 GENERATION
GRANDMOTHER KELLER x 9 GENERATION
GRANDMOTHER (SILVIUS) HEIL x 8 GENERATION

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