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978-0-521-47569-3 - The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities

Colin G. Calloway

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This study presents the first broad coverage of Indian experiences in the American Revolution rather than Indian participation as allies or enemies of contending parties. Colin Calloway focuses on eight Indian communities as he explores how the Revolution often translated into war among Indians and their own struggles for independence. Drawing on British, American, Canadian and Spanish records, Calloway shows how Native Americans pursued different strategies and endured a variety of experiences, but were bequeathed a common legacy as a result of the Revolution.

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The American Revolution in Indian country

**Crisis and diversity in Native American
communities**

COLIN G. CALLOWAY

Dartmouth College



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For Marcia, Graeme, and Megan

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“That event was for us the greatest blow that could have been dealt us, unless it had been our total destruction.”

—Chiefs of the Iroquois, Shawnee, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw and Loup Nations to Francisco Cruzat, governor of Saint Louis, August 23, 1784.

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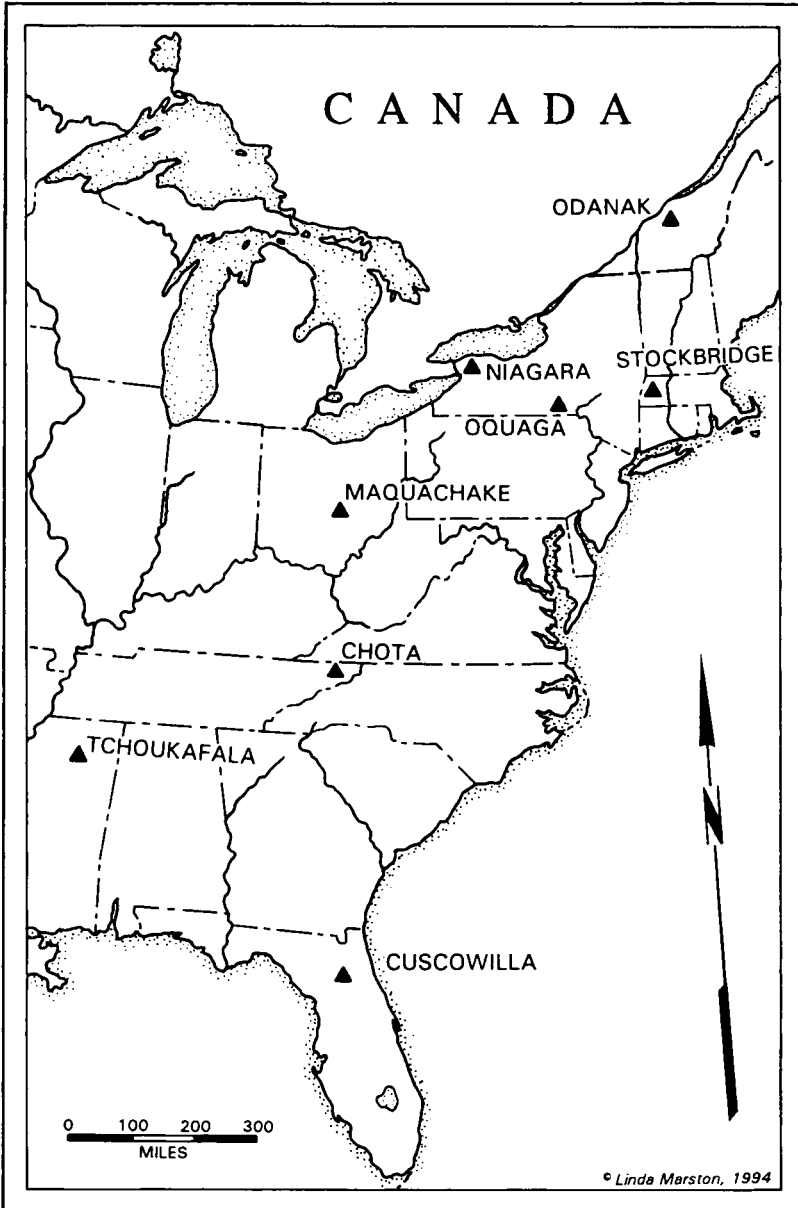
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Map 1. Approximate location of the eight Indian communities.

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Preface

As a British citizen living in the United States and studying the American Revolution, I frequently encounter widely divergent views on that event. Taking account of polar British and American perspectives can be a relatively simple matter. Defeat becomes victory; villains become heroes, and a tragic loss of empire translates into the triumphant birth of a new nation. However, taking account of the perspectives of people who do not fall so easily into Whig and Loyalist camps can be much more difficult. Where does one stand when the conventional positions on the Revolution offer no solid ground?

The American Revolution occupies a central place in American history, historiography, and mythology. Nevertheless, more than two hundred years after the event, the full story of many of the people who lived through it remains to be told. Recent historians have addressed this omission and investigated popular movements, the participation of African Americans, the experiences of women, the tales of local communities, and so on, to get a better sense of what was going on backstage in revolutionary America while the two Georges and their generals acted out their historic roles on center stage. The political upheaval and social ferment of the times involved much more than throwing off the imperial authority of Great Britain, and was not confined to the cities of the eastern seaboard. Historians have looked to the peripheries of revolutionary America to examine those people who invaded Indian lands in defiance of first imperial and then federal authority, who challenged or ignored the control of eastern elites, and who protested the distribution of rewards in postrevolutionary society or questioned the dominant society's vision of a new republic.¹

However, with few exceptions, revolutionary revisionism and recognition of

¹ For example: David Szatmary, *Shay's Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986); Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Michael A. Bellesiles, *Revolutionary Outlaws: Ethan Allen and the Struggle for Independence on the Early American Frontier* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993).

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the far-reaching nature of the American Revolution has not yet embraced American Indians. In general, historians of the Revolution have not been particularly interested in Indians, and scholars of Indian history have not paid much attention to the Revolution. Historians who have considered Indians in the Revolution have focused on the competition for tribal allegiances, the Indians' role in the fighting, their contribution to the outcome of the struggle for independence, and the symbolic significance of their involvement. They have considered Indians as military and political units, but rarely have they asked about the experiences of Indian people caught up in the conflict, examined the effects of the war on the Indians' home front, or considered Indian groups as human communities.² Alternatively, when scholars focus on Indian experiences, the eight years of the Revolutionary War often receive short shrift. The recent *Blackwell Encyclopedia of the American Revolution* contains two essays on Indians: one covers the twenty years before the Revolution; the other focuses on the period after the Revolution.³ Although some events – the Indian removals of the 1830s, the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887 – figure prominently as landmarks in American Indian history, the Revolution tends to get lumped together with everything else that was going on in late-colonial or early national America. After all, this was a “white man’s war” and only secondarily involved or affected Indians.

The national mythology accords Indians a minimal and negative role in the story of the Revolution: they chose the wrong side and they lost. Their contribution to the outcome of the Revolution was therefore negligible, and their

² Barbara Graymont's twenty-year-old study of the Iroquois in the Revolution and James O'Donnell's slim narrative of the southern Indians' participation remain the standard texts. Other essays and papers have struggled to find a framework that will make sense of the complexity and confusion of American Indians and the American Revolution. Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1972); James H. O'Donnell, III, *The Southern Indians in the American Revolution* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973); S. F. Wise, “The American Revolution and Indian History,” in John S. Moir, ed., *Character and Circumstance: Essays in Honour of Donald Grant Creighton* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1970), 182–200; Francis Jennings, “The Indians' Revolution,” in Alfred F. Young, ed., *Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976); idem, ed., *The American Indian and the American Revolution* (Chicago: Occasional Papers of the Newberry Library Center for the History of the American Indian, 1983); Kenneth M. Morrison, “Native Americans and the American Revolution: Historic Stories and Shifting Frontier Conflict,” in Frederick E. Hoxie, ed., *Indians in American History* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Davidson, 1988), 95–115; Bernard Sheehan, “The Problem of the Indian in the American Revolution,” in Philip Weeks, ed., *The American Indian Experience* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Forum, 1988), 66–80; Andrew McFarland Davis, “The Indians and the Border Warfare of the Revolution,” in Justin Winsor, ed., *Narrative and Critical History of America*, 8 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1884–9), vol. 6: 605–84.

³ Peter Marshall, “The West and the Indians, 1756–1776,” and James H. Merrell, “Indians and the New Republic,” in Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, eds., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the American Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, 1991), 153–60, 392–98. Likewise, Francis Jennings, “The Indians' Revolution” is rooted firmly in midcentury.

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treatment after the Revolution justified. Because many Indians sided with the British, they have, from the Declaration of Independence onward, been portrayed as allies of tyranny and enemies of liberty. Yet Indian people in revolutionary America, whether they sided with rebels, redcoats, neither, or both, were doing pretty much the same thing as the American colonists: fighting for their freedom in tumultuous times. The Revolution was an anticolonial war of liberation for Indian peoples too, but the threat to their freedom often came from colonial neighbors rather than distant capitals, and their colonial experience did not end with American independence.

We cannot tell the full story of revolutionary America without including American Indians, and we cannot begin to grasp the reality of the Revolution for Indian people without shifting our focus to Indian country and to Indian communities. Any broadly brushed treatment of Indian involvement and experiences is likely to obscure and distort local diversity; only by looking at different groups and communities can one get a sense of the range of experiences of Indian peoples in these times. Indian villages, as much as New England towns, were communities living in and responding to revolutionary conditions, although getting at their story is, of course, much more difficult.

Scholars who have tried to view the Revolution from an Indian standpoint have found it understandably difficult to divorce the years 1775–83 from the changes affecting Indian America throughout the eighteenth century. For Indian people in eastern North America, the entire century was an age of revolution, a pivotal era in which “the balance tipped irrevocably away from the Indian.”⁴ In some ways the Revolution only intensified familiar pressures on Indian lives and lands. The Indians’ “War of Independence” was well under way before 1775, was waged on many fronts – economic, cultural, political, and military – and continued long after 1783.

War was nothing new in Indian country in the eighteenth century, but the Revolution generated new sources of conflict and new levels of violence that destroyed much of the world Indians, and non-Indians, had created there. As elsewhere in North America, old structures, traditional patterns of behavior, and long-standing alliances broke down in a climate of tumult and change. Religious ferment and dissension split Indian congregations and communities as well as white ones. Dissident groups challenged established authority in Indian country as well as in colonial society. Refugees from war and hunger choked forts and villages. By the end of the Revolution, Shawnees from Ohio were living in Missouri, New England Indians were living among the Oneidas in New York, and there were two Iroquois leagues: one in New York State, the other on the Grand River in Ontario. Stockbridge Indians from Massachusetts,

⁴ James H. Merrell, *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 280.

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who had been loyal allies of the crown in earlier wars against the French, now turned away from the king and made common cause with the rebels, defying the authority of their Mohawk “fathers” in doing so. In the meantime, their home community underwent final transformation into a white man’s town. Abenaki Indians who had been driven north and suffered bitter losses at the hands of New Hampshire rangers in the Seven Years’ War now returned south and served alongside the rangers in defense of the Connecticut Valley, while their relatives who remained at Odanak evaded British recruitment efforts. Delaware and Shawnee chiefs who counseled moderation found themselves swept aside by the current of events in the Ohio Valley. Young Cherokee warriors challenged the authority of older chiefs and joined hands with militants from the north. Alliances that cut across old tribal lines became the norm.⁵ Seminole communities in northern Florida asserted autonomy from the parent Creek confederacy and engaged in their own version of “nation building.” Chickasaw headmen who had been steadfast in loyalty to Britain throughout the century found that, by 1783, they needed to develop new foreign policies to preserve their independence in a region now coveted by both Spaniards and Americans.

Anthropologists remind us that social beings exist “not in a world of events but in a world of meaning,”⁶ and scholars of Indian history struggle increasingly to develop sensitivity to the emic realities of native societies, and to guard against their own etic preconceptions. A former president of the American Society for Ethnohistory has questioned “whether the American Revolution was a real event for American Indians,” or whether it represented only “the paternal substitution of George the First for George the Third.”⁷ It is true that the American Revolution in Indian country can be understood only in the context of a longer-term and larger turmoil, and that the American winning of independence did nothing to alleviate this turmoil. But to see the Revolution only as substituting a president for a monarch is to place too much weight on its outcome and on what Anglo-Americans saw as its most importance consequence. It ignores the searing impact that the Revolution had *in Indian country*, and the significance of the events that occurred there for the people whose lives they disrupted. The substitution of President Washington for King George may not have been an important event for Indian people, but burning villages in the course of the conflict that produced the substitution undoubtedly was, and the new situation resulting from the substitution had far-reaching repercussions in Indian country. When Indian chiefs told the Spanish governor of Saint Louis

⁵ Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745–1815* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

⁶ Henry S. Sharp, “Memory, Meaning, and Imaginary Time: The Construction of Knowledge in White and Chipewyan Cultures,” *Ethnohistory* 38 (1991), 162.

⁷ Raymond D. Fogelson, “The Ethnohistory of Events and Nonevents,” *Ethnohistory* 36 (1989), 142.

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in 1784 that the American Revolution constituted “the greatest blow that could have been dealt us,” they were talking about a real event and they called it that, but for them the important point about the Revolution was the flood of American settlers it unleashed onto their lands.⁸ Indian people were deeply affected both by the consequences of the Revolution and by its course, irrespective of its outcome. The meaning of the Revolution, for them, was very different; the event itself was all too real.

In the end, white Americans excluded Indians from the republican society the Revolution created. Despite their absence from much of the historical literature, Indian people were everywhere in colonial America.⁹ In 1775, Indian nations, despite intrusive and disruptive pressures unleashed by European contact, still controlled most of America west of the Appalachians. In 1783, when Britain transferred that territory to the new United States, most of it was still in Indian hands, but a new era had begun. The American revolutionaries who fought for freedom from the British Empire in the East also fought to create an empire of their own in the West. Contention over Indian land was an old story by 1775, but the Revolution elevated acquisition of Indian lands into a national policy. The new nation, born of a bloody revolution and committed to expansion, could not tolerate America as Indian country. Increasingly, Americans viewed the future as one without Indians. The Revolution both created a new society and provided justification for excluding Indians from it.

The American Revolution generated new policies, new ideologies of republicanism, and new social experiments, all of which affected Indian people directly and indirectly. To do justice to these issues would expand this book beyond manageable limits and carry the story well into the nineteenth century. Many of the chapters in this book look before 1775 and beyond 1783, but the Revolutionary War years remain its core and its focus. My purpose is not to present a complete narrative of events during these years, but rather to examine a number of Indian communities as case studies of how Native Americans fared during the conflict, and to offer suggestions as to what the American Revolution meant for these people.

“Indian country” has a range of legal, economic, cultural, and political meanings. It is used here simply to mean where Indian people lived. This broad definition permits inclusion of the Stockbridge Indians, who by the time of the Revolution lived in a town surrounded by white settlements, as well as the Chickasaws, who at the end of the Revolution still dictated which and whether outsiders should enter their country. The term “Indian country” is not intended to indicate the existence of separate Indian and white worlds.

⁸ *Spain in the Mississippi Valley* vol. 3, pt. 2: 117.

⁹ James H. Merrell, “Some Thoughts on Colonial Historians and American Indians,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d series, 46 (1989), 94–119. See also James Axtell, “Colonial America without the Indians: Counterfactual Reflections,” *Journal of American History* 73 (1986–7), 981–96.

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My use of “community” is similarly loose, referring usually, but not always, to a group of people living in face-to-face association and occupying a common location, either permanently or seasonally. What Europeans called tribes were often aggregates of communities; many Indian communities were also multiethnic units rather than members of a single tribe. A community sometimes comprised several villages in a particular area rather than a single town in a single location. Names of communities should often be regarded as “addresses” rather than tribal designations. Native Americans were accustomed to accommodating a variety of groups and individuals within flexible bonds and fluid social structures. Approaching the Revolution in Indian country on a community-by-community basis rather than a tribe-by-tribe one seems to better reflect the social and political realities of Indian society. As Richard White has pointed out, Indian country was largely a world of villages.¹⁰

Although sympathetic to the view that one should call people what they call themselves, I have retained the names of individuals and groups in the form I thought would be most readily identifiable for most readers. Where a person’s Indian name appears regularly in the records I have retained it; so, for example, Little Carpenter appears as Attakullakulla in this book. Otherwise I have used the English name, for example White Eyes instead of Koquethagecton.

The author does not pretend to try and tell the “Indian side of the story.” Nor, in concentrating attention on Native Americans, does he forget that this was a civil war for others too. As the experience of thousands of Loyalists, or a glance at the war in the southern backcountry reminds us, Indian communities were not the only ones to suffer and fracture during these calamitous times.¹¹ This is a non-Indian view of Indian history, and a non-American view of American history, written by an expatriate Briton who holds no brief for British colonialism but who believes that distance and objectivity can be as valuable as “inside information” in writing good history. The communities discussed in this volume represent small patches of a huge tapestry. That tapestry must be fully pieced together before we can begin to appreciate the experiences of all the participants in the American Revolution or understand the full meaning of the story of this nation’s birth.

¹⁰ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹¹ For example, Ronald Hoffman, Thad W. Tate, and Peter J. Albert, eds., *An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry during the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985); John S. Pancake, *This Destructive War: The British Campaign in the Carolinas, 1780–1782* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1985), esp. 83–90.

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Most of the research for this book was done in the East; most of the writing was done in the West; much of the thinking about it was done on long trips across country. I am grateful to my family – on both sides of the Atlantic – for accepting my way of life, which has taken me out of *their* lives so often and for so long, and to my colleagues at the University of Wyoming for putting up with my frequent absences.

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This study has benefited greatly from the expertise, collegiality, and helpfulness of people at a wide range of institutions. I am grateful to the University of Wyoming's William Robertson Coe Library, and particularly the interlibrary loan staff, who invariably pursued my requests with diligence and effectiveness; the British Museum and Public Record Office; the Library of Congress; the Newberry Library; the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan, where Rob Cox helped make a short visit productive beyond my expectations; Yale's Stirling and Beinecke libraries; the Massachusetts Historical Society, Massachusetts Archives, and Boston Public Library; the New Hampshire Historical Society; the Vermont Historical Society; the David Library of the American Revolution, where David Fowler and Ezra Stone made my visits pleasant as well as productive; the New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscript Division; the New York State Archives; the Connecticut State Library, Archives Department, and the Connecticut Historical Society; the National Archives of Canada; Dartmouth's Baker Library; the Stockbridge

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Ideas and versions of chapters were tried out before audiences at meetings of the American Society for Ethnohistory, the Organization of American Historians, the Conference for Iroquois Research, the Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife, and the New England Historical Association, as well as at the David Library of the American Revolution, Brown University, the Capitol Historical Society, the University of Wyoming, Dartmouth College, Keene State College, and the Yorktown Victory Center.

At the University of Wyoming I have been blessed with three successive departmental chairs – the late Lawrence Cardoso, Herbert Dieterich, and William H. Moore – who ensured that university administration did not get in the way of research, writing, and teaching. Sharon Brown was always patient with my computing ineptitude and helped solve many problems. Linda Marston prepared the maps, and my colleague and good friend Phil Roberts compiled the

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My thanks go to all of the people who have helped, directly or indirectly, to make this book possible. They share credit for whatever is good in it, and bear no responsibility for whatever is not. During most of the years when this book was taking shape in Wyoming, Marcia kept together our home in Vermont, while trying to maintain a career of her own. Our children, Graeme and Megan, arrived while the book was being researched and written, and have made me understand, as never before, what events such as those described here meant for people who were parents.

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AGI, PC

Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba. Transcripts of parts of this collection are available in several archives in the United States. The P. K. Yonge Library at the University of Florida at Gainesville holds a microfilm edition of the collection. The author consulted the microfilm calendar of the collection at Duke University's Perkins Library (M5989); specific documents were obtained at the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, and the Library of Congress.

American Archives

Peter Force, comp. *American Archives* 4th series, 6 vols. Washington D.C., 1837–46, and 5th series, 3 vols., Washington D.C., 1848–53.

ASPIA

Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Clair Clarke, eds., *American State Papers, Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States (1789–1815), Class II, Indian Affairs*. Washington D.C.: Gales & Seaton, 1832.

C.O. 5

Public Record Office, Kew, England. Colonial Office Records, Series 5: America and the West Indies. Over the years, the author has consulted the original manuscripts at the British Public Record Office (C.O. 5), transcripts of the Library of Congress (LC, C.O. 5), and the printed documents relating to the American Revolution (*DAR*).

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Carleton Papers	Public Records Office, Kew, England, Gifts and Deposits. Carleton Papers or Headquarters Papers of the British Army in America: P.R.O. 30/55 (also available on microfilm).
Clements Library	William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
Clinton Mss.	Henry Clinton Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
<i>DAR</i>	K. G. Davies, ed., <i>Documents of the American Revolution, 1770–1783</i> (Colonial Office series), 21 vols. Shannon: Irish University Press, 1972–82.
Draper Mss.	Lyman Copeland Draper Manuscripts, State Historical Society of Wisconsin. On microfilm.
<i>Frontier Advance</i>	Louise P. Kellogg, ed., <i>Frontier Advance on the Upper Ohio, 1778–1779</i> . Madison: Wisconsin State Historical Society, 1916.
<i>Frontier Defense</i>	Reuben G. Thwaites and Louise P. Kellogg, eds., <i>Frontier Defense on the Upper Ohio, 1777–1778</i> . Madison: Wisconsin State Historical Society, 1912.
<i>Frontier Retreat</i>	Louise P. Kellogg, ed., <i>Frontier Retreat on the Upper Ohio, 1779–1782</i> . Madison: Wisconsin State Historical Society, 1917.
Gage Papers	Thomas Gage Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
Haldimand Papers	Correspondence and Papers of Governor General Sir Frederick Haldimand, 1758–91, British Museum, London, Additional Manuscripts 21661–21892.
Hand Papers	Library of Congress, Peter Force Transcripts, Series 7e, reels 13–14, items 55–7, Edward Hand Papers, 1775–1846.
H.M.C.	Historical Manuscripts Commission, London.
<i>Johnson Papers</i>	James Sullivan et al., eds., <i>The Papers of Sir William Johnson</i> , 15 vols. Albany: SUNY Press, 1921–65.

Cambridge University Press

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Abbreviations

L.C., C.O.5.

Colonial Office Records, Series 5, transcripts in Library of Congress.

Mass. Archives

Massachusetts Archives. In the Massachusetts State Archives at Columbia Point, Boston.

Morgan Letterbooks

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Colonel George Morgan Letterbooks, 3 vols., 1775–9.

MPA, FD

Mississippi Provincial Archives, French Dominion. Vols. 1–3, edited by Dunbar Rowland and A. G. Sanders (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1927–32); vols. 4–5, edited by Dunbar Rowland, A. G. Sanders, and Patricia Kay Galloway (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984).

MPHC

Collections of the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, 40 vols., 1874–1929.

NAC, C-1223

National Archives of Canada, Records Relating to Indian Affairs (R.G. 10), second series, microfilm reel C-1223: Minutes of Indian Affairs, 1755–90.

NYCD

E. B. O'Callaghan and Berthold Fernow, eds., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, 15 vols. Albany: Weed, Parsons, 1853–87.

NYPL

New York Public Library.

North Carolina Colonial Records

William L. Saunders and Walter Clark, eds., *The Colonial and State Records of North Carolina*, 30 vols. Raleigh: Secretary of State, 1886–1914, vols. 1–9.

North Carolina State Records

Saunders and Clark, eds., *Colonial and State Records of North Carolina*, vols. 10–30.

PCC

Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774–89, National Archives Microfilm, No. M247.

Penn. Archives

Pennsylvania Archives, first series, 12 vols., Philadelphia, 1852–6.

Report on American Mss.

“Report on American Manuscripts in the Royal Institution of Great Britain,” 4 vols. *Historical Manuscripts Commission*,

Cambridge University Press

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- Revolution and Confederation* 59. London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1904–9.
Colin G. Calloway, ed., *Revolution and Confederation*. Vol. 18 of Alden T. Vaughan, gen. ed., *Early American Indian Documents: Laws and Treaties*. Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1994.
- Revolution on the Upper Ohio* Reuben G. Thwaites and Louise P. Kellogg, eds., *The Revolution on the Upper Ohio, 1775–1777*. Madison: Wisconsin State Historical Society, 1908.
- Schuyler Papers NYPL, Philip Schuyler Papers, Indian Papers, 1710–96, boxes 13–15, reel 7.
- Spain in the Mississippi Valley* Lawrence Kinnaird, trans. and ed., *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765–1794: Translations of Materials from the Spanish Archives in the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley*. American Historical Association, Annual Report for the Year 1945 (Washington D.C., 1946–9.), vols. 2–4: Part 1: The Revolutionary Period, 1765–1781; Part 2: The Post-War Decade, 1782–1791; Part 3: Problems of Frontier Defense, 1792–1794.
- Virginia State Papers* William P. Palmer et al., eds., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts Preserved in the Capitol at Richmond*, 11 vols., Richmond: James E. Goode, 1875–83.
- WHC Wisconsin State Historical Society Collections.
- Writings of Washington* John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745–1799*, 39 vols. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931–44.

Note: In order to keep notes to a manageable length, names of correspondents and dates of correspondence have been omitted in cases where page or folio numbers serve adequately to locate the documents.