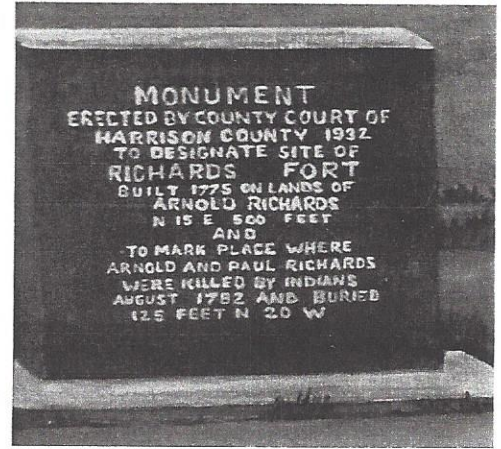
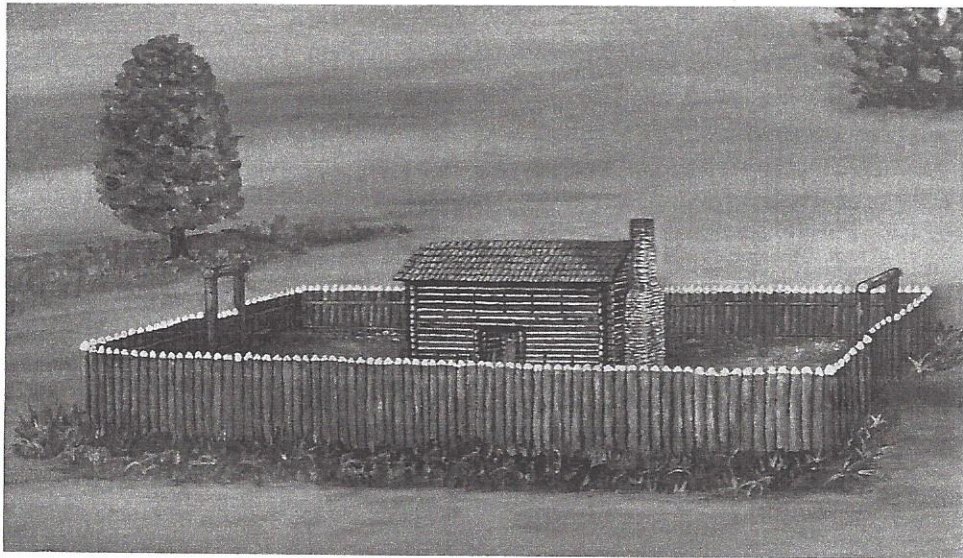


# Millford Wheel

Summer 2016



Left- Artist depiction of what the palisaded Richard's Fort looked like.

## The Richards' Brothers Among Early Settlers to Meet a Grisly Fate on Frontier

The genealogical records show that this line of Richards originated from John Jacob Reichart. He was born in Germany about 1715 and emigrated to Philadelphia, PA by way of Rotterdam, Holland on a ship named "Patience" in September of 1749. It was around this time that, like many immigrants, the spelling of his last name was changed. His spouse is unknown, but he became the father of ten children, all of them boys who would eventually settle over the mountains in the dangerously wild frontier of western Virginia. The Richards, along with the Col. William Lowther family, the Hughes, the Washburn's, Morrison's, and Davisson's were among that first group of pioneers in the hills and hollows surrounding the West Fork in what is now Harrison County, West Virginia.

John served during the French and Indian Wars and so was granted 400 acres of land in the West Fork River valley to include his settlement in 1771. His sons were also granted tracts of land for their service in this struggle and would settle in various places

around the region. His sons Jacob, Conrad, Arnold, and Paul all stayed close in carving out their homesteads as indicted by early land certificates: *Conrad Richards, 400 acres at the mouth of Lost Creek, to include his settlement made in 1773, with a preemption to 1000 acres adjoining...Jacob Richards, 400 acres on Sycamore Creek, to include his improvement made in 1771...Arnold Richards, 300 acres on the West Fork River, adjoining lands of William Lowther, to include his settlement made in 1773...Paul Richards, 400 acres on the West Fork, adjoining lands of Arnold Richards, to include his settlement made in 1774.*

Arnold's land included what is now the property the West Milford Community Building is situated on. Conrad's property was on the opposite side of the river from what is now West Milford.

Emboldened by the French and incensed by the degradations imposed by the settlers' incursions, the Natives were bent on washing the forests clean with blood to rid the "White Devils"

from their midst, not knowing they were just a pawn in a much larger and deadlier world game and would soon be banished forever from their ancestral lands.

### Richard's Fort

There is, or was, some discrepancy in the historical record as to the true location of Richard's Fort. The fact is there were two. In some accounts the fort is said to be near the mouth of Sycamore Creek (on the road to Clarksburg) and others just east of where West Milford now stands (close to the community bldg.). The explanation is that Jacob Richards erected a small blockhouse on his land on Sycamore as part of his "improvement" made in 1771 to help guard against Indian attacks while the difficult task of land clearing took place in the area. However, by 1774-75, Arnold, with considerable help, had built a much larger, and more traditional palisaded (or walled) fort on his property that could accommodate a large group of the area families when it was time to "fort up", which was often in those days. This is the fort



mentioned in the history books and is also mentioned as Arnold's Fort, Lowther's Fort, and West Fork Fort. It was described as a strong fort, where, "Within its walls many a pioneer family of the West Fork Valley found refuge from the storm of barbarian warfare. It played an important part in the terrible scenes enacted in this vicinity in 1778, and in the years immediately following."

McWhorter's history (1915) states, "The site of Richard's Fort is marked by the spring which was inside of the palisade and now known as the Fort Spring. It would furnish water for all domestic purposes, including stock. A slight ridge embracing perhaps half an acre still shows the contour of the stockade. I have often traced its boundaries, and in former years it was plainly visible, but now it is nearly obliterated by the plow. The enclosure was an oblong square, extending east and west."

The following year, these men and other future *Clarksburgers* built Nutter's Fort and helped patrol the entire region to the Ohio in the militia under the command of Col. William Lowther. The payroll list of Captain Lowther (the Colonel would come later) for the 1774 Lord Dunmore's War, which culminated in the Battle of Point Pleasant, is full of the names of every available man of the area, including Conrad, Arnold, and Paul, each for 132 days of service.

Times remained tense for the area's residents for many years and then the Shot Heard 'Round the World ushered in the American Revolution and exacerbated the struggles of settlement and protection of the frontier.

1778 was particularly brutal for our area as far as native attacks go. Conrad became the first of the Richards to suffer. Withers' *Chronicles of Border Warfare* describes, "The cessation on the part of the savages, of hostile incursions, induced an abandonment of the forts, and the people returned to their several homes, and respective occupations. But aggression was only suspended for a time. In October, two Indians appeared near the house of

Conrad Richards, and finding in the yard a little girl at play, with an infant in her arms, they scalped her and rushed to the door. For some time they endeavored to force it open; but it was so securely fastened within, that Richards was at liberty to use his gun for its defense. A fortunate aim wounded one of the assailants severely, and the other retreated, helping off his companion. The girl who had been scalped in the yard, as soon as she observed the Indians going away, ran, with the infant still in her arms and uninjured, and entered the house—a spectacle of most heart-rending wretchedness."

Conrad's wife would tell a slightly different story when relating the events in her later life. She was quoted, "The children were playing in the yard when two Indians appeared. All escaped into the house except one toddler, the youngest, which could not keep up with the rest, and was tomahawked and scalped by one of the Indians, who then threw its little body against a corncrib. Mrs. Richards would weep as she narrated how she could see the feet of her youngest born, her "baby," "sticking up" against the corn crib, and was unable to go to its assistance.

This account differs from that of Withers, which states that the two Indians "finding the little girl at play, with an infant in her arms, scalped her, and rushed to the door." But Withers was historically inaccurate at times and "Tradition is sometimes more accurate than history."

According to both Withers and Mrs. Richards, Conrad and one of the Indians fired at the same time, Richards' ball passing through the Indian's body, while the latter's shot wounded Richards in the arm. The Indians retreat and Conrad slips out of a rear window of the cabin and makes his way across the West Fork River to seek help "at Lowther's Fort."

*Withers*' also tells the events of August 6, 1782. "In August as Arnold and Paul Richards were returning to Richard's fort, they were shot at by some Indians lying hid in the cornfield adjoining the fort, and both fell from

their horses. The Indians leaped over the fence immediately and tomahawked and scalped them.

These two men were murdered in full view of the fort, and the firing drew its inmates to the gate to ascertain its cause. When they saw the two Richards' were down, they rightly judged that the Indians had done the deed; and Elias Hughes, ever bold and daring, taking down his gun, went out alone at the back gate, and entered the cornfield, into which the savages had again retired, to see if he could not avenge on one of them the murder of his friends. Creeping softly along, he came in view of them standing near the fence, reloading their guns, and looking intently at the people at the fort gate. Taking a deliberate aim at one of them, he touched the trigger. His gun flashed, and the Indians alarmed ran speedily away."

Conrad, who was born in Germany in 1847 and made that Trans-Atlantic voyage at the age of two, lived until around 1807. He and his wife had 9 known children. It is unclear what became the fate of the toddler mentioned in the story.

Paul, born in 1750 after emigration, was around age 32 when he was killed outside the fort in 1782. His wife and two daughters under the age of five were inside the fort at the time.

Arnold, born in 1754, was around age 28 when he was killed alongside his brother in view of the fort gate that summer day in 1782. He had a wife named Martha and three young daughters under the age of 10. He and Paul were buried together near the fort.

In 1932, the Harrison County Court and Sons of the American Revolution erected a stone memorial describing the event. It is next to the road leading to Muttontown and is accessible from the community bldg. parking lot.

***Watters Smith to West Milford  
Oktoberfest 5K Run/Walk  
-Saturday October 8—***

*Mark your calendars for this event.  
It is a growing success and a main  
fundraiser for us. Don't forget  
about the pie contests!*