

The “First White Child”: A Study in the Imagined Homes of Family History

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Despite the wide presence of “home” in sentimental cards, songs, and even home décor, “home” and our ideas of home are far from innocuous expressions. Rather, as postcolonial scholar Rosemary Marangoly George writes in the *Politics of Home*, “Imagining a home is as political an act as is imagining a nation.” More than a material place of residence, the rhetoric of home also functions to signify political ideas of who belongs in a given “home.” Thus, when we imagine “home,” we imagine places *and* the people who do and do not belong within our idea of “home” or “homeland.”

Importantly, how we imagine and speak of home is not limited to discourses of familial, domestic belonging but also functions within discourses that shape national identity. As George discusses, the early American colonial processes of marking territory as either “home” or “abroad” began a rhetorical narrative of locating the U.S. within political notions of home.¹ By marking the nation-state as “home” and the “foreign” as abroad, the rhetoric of home shapes national identity. In my larger project, I discuss multiple instances of this interplay of the rhetoric of home, nation, and Christianity from the politicization of “homespun” in the Revolution to the creation of the department of “Homeland Security” post 9/11. In this paper, I explore how the imagined “home” conveyed in a family story communicates values of white nationalist expansion justified in part by a civilizing Christian identity. In doing so, my hope is to show how family stories and genealogical studies contribute to ideas of racial, religious, and national belonging.

The story is that my ancestor was “the first white child born in Paulding County, Ohio.” I have no memory of learning this story. I only remember knowing it and understanding that it was something of which I should be proud.

The story refers to David Clark Carey, born on January 21, 1826 to Isaac Carey and Abigail (Hudson) Carey. The attribution of Carey as the “first white child born in Paulding County, Ohio” appears in the 1892 “Brief History of Paulding County, Ohio” by Everett Budd.² In this same

¹ Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 2-3.

² Everett Budd, “Brief History of Paulding County, Ohio” in *Historical atlas of Paulding County, Ohio : containing maps of Paulding County, townships, towns and villages : also maps of the United States and state of Ohio, together with a statement of the settlement, growth and prosperity of the county, including a personal and family history of many of its prominent citizens : illustrated*, Contributors: Oliver Morrow and Frederick W Bashore, (Madison, Wis. : Western Pub. Co.), 1892. Online access: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g4083pm.gla00025>

county history, seven other children are likewise marked as the “first white child” born to one of the twelve townships within the county. A search for the phrase “first white child” on Newspapers.com returns more than 80,000 hits. While the phrase first appears on January 5, 1807 in a Montpelier, Vermont newspaper, the usage of the phrase increases significantly in the 1890’s before dipping during World War 1 only to surge to its highest peak in 1937.³

On March 28, 1934, for example, *The Salem News* of Salem, Ohio ran a front-page article entitled, “Who Was State’s First White Child?” Although the Ohio Society chapter of the Daughters of American Colonists wished to commemorate the birth place of the first white child born in the state, they were uncertain which white child was indeed first. Apparently the Society made a decision, because in September they installed a bronze plaque to mark the birthplace of John Lewis Roth, born in 1773 at a Moravian mission, Gnadenhutten, to a Moravian clergyman and his wife. At the plaque’s installation, Harlow Lindley, a curator with the Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society, recalled the 1782 “massacre of ninety-six Christian Indians” at the Mission by a group of American militia when the baby was but 5 years old. Lindley notes that one of those killed, Christina, a Mohican, had been a sponsor of the baby at his baptism.⁴ To be born as “the first white child” at that time in that place meant arriving amidst violent conflict.

Prior to the Revolution, the French and Indian War shifted European claims on the land north and west of the Ohio River from the French to the British. The British attempted to keep the peace and discouraged white settlers from crossing the Appalachians into the Ohio River valley.⁵ However, after the Revolution, the young U.S. government passed the 1787 Northwest Ordinance to officially open the area to white settlement. These intentions conflicted with a well-organized Confederacy of Indigenous nations ready to fight to restrain further white settlement into this region. When the U.S. organized a military response to this Western Confederacy, my ancestor and David Clark Carey’s grandfather, Shadrach Hudson, joined the fight.

³ As recent debates around the removal of Confederate statues and memorials has made clear, the largest number of monuments were built in the early 1900’s. In further research, I would like to explore the relationship of this timing and these monument with those established to mark the “first white” children. Miles Parks, “Confederate Statues Were Built To Further a ‘White Supremacist Future’,” August 20, 2017, NPR.org. Accessed online November 18, 2021: <https://www.npr.org/2017/08/20/544266880/confederate-statues-were-built-to-further-a-white-supremacist-future>

⁴ Lindley, “John Lewis Roth”, p. 256. What Lindley did not share, but may have been known by his audience, is that this attack by a group of 150 American militiamen came in angry defiance of official orders to not attack the Christian settlement. William Hogeland, *Autumn of the Black Snake: George Washington, Mad Anthony Wayne, and the Invasion that Opened the West*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), 83.

⁵ For an extensive discussion of this frontier dynamic surrounding the Revolution, see Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007).

Born in the vicinity of Morristown, New Jersey in 1775, a young Shadrach grew up with his own father away fighting in the Revolution. Then, in 1791, a 16-year-old Shadrach traveled west to Ohio to fight. Setting out from the Cincinnati area up the Miami River, soldiers led by General St. Clair began to cut military roads through the dense forest before suffering an overwhelming defeat. In response to this defeat, President Washington recalled General Anthony Wayne from retirement to lead the first standing army of the United States.⁶ Wayne would take two years to assemble and train his troops before cutting more roads deep into Ohio forests until finally defeating the Western Confederacy in August 1794 at Fallen Timbers, near today's Toledo.

When I visited the site of Fallen Timbers in December 2018, I discovered a relatively new park created from reclaimed farmland. Although the forest that had given the battle its name was mostly absent, many hundred saplings filled the fields, still nested within protective sheathing. Walking the paths, I read the signs placed to remember not only this battle, but also some of which preceded Fallen Timbers. Of St. Clair's 1791 defeat, the plaque read:

St. Clair's Defeat: 630 Dead (37 Officers), 283 Wounded. Worst American Defeat at the Hands of the Natives. 97.9% Casualty Rate.

Shadrach Hudson survived that defeat, then remained in Ohio.

Following the Battle of Fallen Timbers, a treaty signed in 1795 at Greenville established a dividing line between white settlement to the south and American Indian lands to the north. However, as the white population of Ohio increased from 60,000 in 1803 to over 800,000 in 1826, the pressure for more and more land increased.⁷ By 1812, war erupted amidst the tensions between the British to the north, the Americans pushing west, and various American Indian nations as they allied themselves to the U.S. or, more likely, the British. Shadrach Hudson again joined the fight as a U.S. soldier. When the Treaty of Ghent ended this war in 1814, it included a clause for peace between the Americans and the American Indians.⁸ In theory, the 1795 Greenville treaty line would remain the demarcation between white settlers and American Indians.

In fact, the line had already begun to erode, including an 1805 treaty with the Ottawa who had been allowed to stay in Ohio only if they moved to "reservations." By 1817, federal officials were calling American Indian leaders of the region to sign a new treaty which would replace the Greenville Treaty line with townships as defined by the strictures of the 1785 Land Ordinance (eg. 6-mile square sections so visible to those flying over the midwestern states⁹). Although the

⁶ Hogeland, *Autumn of the Black Snake*, 125, 184-5.

⁷ Mary Stockwell, *The Other Trail of Tears: The Removal of the Ohio Indians*, (Yardley: Westholme, 2014), loc. 1517-1518.

⁸ Mary Stockwell, *The Other Trail of Tears*, loc. 906 or "Treaty of Ghent, December 24, 1814" in *American State Papers, Foreign Relations*, III, 745-753.

⁹ Lawrence J. Vale, *From Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 96.

reservation locations and size of lands given and received was contested and a new treaty signed in 1818, the general principles remained. In effect, these new treaties opened much of the land north of the Greenville Treaty line for white settlement. By February 1820, the Ohio state legislature officially divided the newly acquired land into counties and surveying of townships and lots was underway.¹⁰

In the gap between the 1818 Treaty and the 1820 creation of counties, Shadrach Hudson moved to northwest Ohio. Selecting a site on the Auglaize River to create a homestead, Hudson settled within three miles of the nearby Ottawa reservation at Oquanaqua. Additional reservations for the Ottawa, Shawnee, and Wyandot were accessible up and down the same river. A passage from a “History of Paulding County” written by Clark Talbert Carey, son of David and great-grandson to Shadrach, clearly indicates the presence of the Ottawa:

Shadrack Hudson ... did not allow a few Indians here to and there to swerve him from his purpose, but pulled off his coat and began the building of a log-house—that famous house that came to be known as the first to be built in Paulding County. [At] each end the house he built chimneys of flat stones gotten out of the river. ... Indians frequently drifted by in canoes. [At] last many times some of them would [ask] permission to lie in front of those fireplaces over night. He never refused them, it is said, and usually they would be on their way up-stream by daylight next morning.¹¹

It was at or near this house that Shadrach’s daughter Abigail gave birth to David Clark Carey.

Thus, to say that David Clark Carey was the first *white* child in Paulding County is very likely a true statement. But the rhetoric of the “first white child” when utilized within memorial talks, bronze plaques, and family history implies a kind of celebratory achievement that merits critical assessment. In my own experience, I received a family history that spoke of Carey’s birth and included images of the famous log cabin, but did not emphasize or include references to the active presence of the Ottawa living nearby until their forced removal in the 1830’s.¹² Nor did the story make clear that Shadrach Hudson’s military service meant that he had been part of the violence to take land the Ottawa, Miami, Seneca, and Delaware actively defended from white settlers. Finally, I certainly did not understand that the Hudson and Carey families would travel to the area along roads first carved for such military pursuits. To be “first” meant wading into violent conflicts about who did and did not belong in these places, about who could and could not call the place “home.”

For historian Amy Kaplan, this violence and anarchy on the frontier contributed to the process of constructing the U.S. Empire.¹³ Kaplan argues that both continental expansion and overseas

¹⁰ Everett Budd, “Brief History”.

¹¹ Photocopy from Family Records.

¹² Mary Stockwell, *The Other Trail of Tears*, loc. 3991 and 4167.

¹³ Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

empire building participated in the process of empire that aimed to create a “monolithic system of order” upon “an extensive territory”.¹⁴ The survey protocols of 1785 Land Ordinance to define orderly grids of six-miles-square townships enabling white settlement clearly illustrate this imperial logic of creating order from chaos. The Ordinance also contained provisions for some of the surveyed lots to be reserved for the establishment of schools, churches, and other institutions of establishing “civilization.” Finally, the Ordinance also required that land be cleared of the “foreign” Native peoples—by sale of land in treaties or by forced removal. To create new homesteads and expand the new national “home”, the foreign must be removed and the anarchy contained.

To further underscore the political interplay of “home” with nation and empire, Kaplan argues that the “female realm of domesticity and the male arena of Manifest Destiny were not separate spheres at all but were intimately linked.”¹⁵ While the female realm of domesticity reproduced the order of civilization within the household, the male arena of Manifest Destiny extended the reach of civilization into the anarchy of frontier—signaled by the presence of domestic homesteads. To describe these interwoven processes of creating the boundaries of empire, Kaplan coins the term “manifest domesticity.” The creation of homesteads functioned to create and police boundaries of order between the civilized home(stead) and the anarchy of the foreign. Shadrach Hudson’s pioneer log cabin and the birth of the “first white child” signaled both the arrival of “civilization” and U.S. power.

To sustain the risky and violent process of continental expansion, hopeful religious discourse promoted the project of “manifest domesticity.” To illustrate the connection between the religious rhetoric of home and the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny, Kaplan turns to Catherine Beecher. For Kaplan, Beecher’s introduction to *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* “inextricably links women’s work to the unfolding of America’s global mission as “exhibiting to the world the beneficent influences of Christianity, when carried into every social, civil, and political institution.””¹⁶ In other words, women are charged with a global mission of sharing the civilizing influence of Christianity. Beecher writes, “[T]o American women, more than to any others on earth, is committed the exalted privileges of extending over the world those blessed influences, that are to renovate degraded man, and ‘cloth all climes with beauty.’”¹⁷ For Beecher, Christian women are responsible for “influencing” the globe into becoming a more civilized place. Civilizing the globe, however, starts at *home* for Beecher. For this reason, what follows the grand introduction on the purpose of women’s labors is a manual for creating a strict order within the domestic household. In this way, Beecher connects domestic and global housekeeping as efforts to create and maintain a civilized order influenced by Christian morality.

¹⁴ Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 13.

¹⁵ Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 17-19.

¹⁶ Kaplan, *Manifest Domesticity*, 29. Quote from Catharine Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, (Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon and Webb, 1841), 14.

¹⁷ Beecher, *Domestic Economy*, 14. Quoted in Kaplan, *Manifest Domesticity*, 29.

These intertwined threads of Christianity, domesticity, violence, and the establishment of a white, civilized nation all appear in Everett Budd's "History of Paulding County." Referring again to Hudson's log home, Budd writes,

"It's builder, Mr. Hudson, was a soldier with St. Clair, was at the battle where that general was defeated by the Indians; also in the war of 1812, during which he visited the Maumee valley, where, being impressed with its fertility and natural beauties, he afterward settled. ... Mr. Hudson and his wife lived a life of piety, and daily gathered their large family around the family altar."

This reference to the piety of Hudson and his wife is quoted repeatedly on family history sites such as cwcfamily.org. A page on this site devoted to Isaac and Abigail Carey quotes at length from a 1989 book *Our Hudson Family History*, saying:

Abigail helped her husband roll logs and pick and burn brush in their first clearings. Many a day she would spin and work until after midnight. She was endowed with a deep belief in God and gave loving Christian training to her children. She sang hymns and Isaac attempted to follow her lead but she claimed he could sing more tunes for the same hymn than anyone she knew. Abigail was well equipped to face the ruthless requirements of pioneer life.¹⁸

For this family history, the requirement of U.S. pioneer life was hard work to create and sustain the homesteads combined with Christian piety. Layering on the detail of David Clark Carey as "the first white child born in Paulding County," also communicates whiteness as part of that recipe.

As a final note, the Isaac and Abigail Carey page on cwcfamily.org emphasizes multiple times how they were lifelong members of the Methodist Episcopal church. However, this elides a complexity of religious identity that even the 19th century Hudson and Carey families may not have known. Both families trace back to New Jersey and then further back to Dutch New Amsterdam. Indeed, they both trace back to the same man, Cornelius Meyln, a founding patroon of Staten Island whose enormous portrait adorns the wall of the Borough Hall today. And yet, this Dutch ancestry and strong Reformed heritage becomes subsumed in family history as the Hudson-Carey families become members of the Methodist church first in Defiance and then in Charloe—the town founded on the nearby site of the old Ottawa reservation. David Clark Carey's daughter, Anna, and her husband, Cyrus Bedford May, were also both members of the Charloe Methodist church where their funerals were held. Anna and Cyrus's grandson, Zane, was my grandfather, and like his May ancestors, he remained a Methodist until the day I helped to lead his funeral in 2019. In the meantime, I grew up in a Reformed Church in the

¹⁸ <http://cwcfamily.org/careyis.htm>. H. Ezra Eberhardt Jr and Robert M. Hudson, compilers, *Our Hudson Family History, Fourteen Generations in the Family of Abraham Hudson (1750-1829) of Morristown, New Jersey, Sergeant in the American*, (Gateway Press, 1989)

deeply Dutch influenced area of West Michigan—never suspecting that this too was part of our family history.

In recounting this family history, I have sought to show some of what was remembered and what was forgotten. By contextualizing the story received of an uncomplicated pioneer history of prideful “firsts” within a larger political project of a building a white, Christian nation, I have sought to show how the telling of decontextualized and depoliticized memories of family and home can shape the understanding of both personal and national identity . As received, the stories conveyed pride in whiteness as well as in “firstness” without consideration of the violent impact on those who were not-white, not-Christian, and not part of the imperial project of “civilizing” the chaos. In an era in which we are facing debates over Confederate monuments and national identity, perhaps we might also consider the function of memorializing the “first white child” born to places all across the nation.