

The Fair Play Society

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The Fair Play society was organized by European squatters on Seneca land beyond the northwest frontier of Pennsylvania from 1769 through 1785. The area was so mountainous and so densely wooded that a map of that time labeled it *The Impenetrable Mountains*. Today the region is known as *The Pennsylvania Wilds*.



- 1763 French and Indian War ends
- 1769 **First settlers move onto Seneca land that later became Fair Play territory**
- 1770-'73 **Fair Play organized (40 families)**, Boston Massacre, Tea Act, Boston Tea Party
- 1774 First Continental Congress
- 1775 Lexington, Concord, Ticonderoga, Bunker Hill
At least 83 men from at most 150 families leave the valley to fight in the rebellion
- 1776 **Tiadaghton Declaration**, British abandon Boston, Declaration of Independence
- 1777-'80 **The Big Runaway**, Valley Forge, Benedict Arnold
- 1781-'83 Yorktown, Commons votes against continuing the American War, Treaty of Paris
- 1784 **The Last Purchase**
- 1785 **Fair Play replaced by Pennsylvania government (150 families at most)**
- 1788-'90 Constitution, Bill of Rights, First census shows 4,000,000 people in Pennsylvania

Nearest European settlement was 2 days away; seat of government was 10 days away.

British told the settlers to leave; Senecas killed everybody who didn't leave.

Frontier subsistence farmers cleared level land on waterways; completely self-sufficient in all things.

No industry but a very few grist mills and distilleries; no markets.

Three *Fair Play Men* were to do justice without reference to written laws; no appeal; no resistance.

Tight-knit families, political equality, social & economic independence, religious faith.

No churches, schools, doctors, or newspapers; nothing but farms, mills, and stills.

Individuals' status depended on character and industry.

Political loyalty was to liberty rather than to any organization.

Fair Play land laws were honored by the state government long after Fair Play ended.

An Eviction Under Fair Play Law

William King's testimony in the 1801 case of *Huff versus Latcha*. His testimony was preserved in Lloyd's *History of Lycoming County, Pennsylvania* as follows:

"William Paul went on the land and finished his cabin. Soon after a party brought Robert Arthur and built a cabin near Paul's in which Arthur lived. William Paul applied to the fair play men who decided in favor of Paul. Arthur however still lived on the land and would not go off. William Paul made a complaint to the Company [of local militia] at a Muster at Quinashahague that Arthur still lived on the land and would not go off, although the fair play men had decided against him. I was one of the [militia] officers at that time and we agreed to come and turn Arthur off. The most of the Company ... got a kegg of whiskey and proceeded to Arthur's cabin. He was at home with his rifle in his hand and his wife had a bayonet on a stick and they threatened death to the first person who would enter the House. The Door was shut. Thomas Kemplin our Captain made a run at the Door and burst it open and instantly seized Arthur by the neck. We pulled down the cabin and threw it into the river lashed two canoes together and put Arthur and his family into them and sent them down the river. William Paul then lived undisturbed on the land till the Indians drove us all off."

(That was The Great Runaway of 1781.)

A Criminal Indictment - Possibly Never Prosecuted Because of Fair Play Law

In the criminal court records of Northumberland County, Pennsylvania for August 1781:

The Grand Inquest for the Body of the County Aforesaid, upon their Oaths, and Affirmations do say present, that Cloud Boatman late of ~~your~~ the said county Yeoman, Thomas Toner late of ~~your~~ the said county Yeoman, William Speedy late of ~~your~~ the said county Yeoman, John Baker late of ~~your~~ the said county Yeoman, William Inglis late of ~~your~~ the said county Yeoman, & John Inglis, late of ~~your~~ The said county Yeoman, all late of the said county Yeomen On the Eighteenth day of August, in the Year of our Lord one Thousand Seven hundred & Eighty one ___ ___ at the Township of Penns, in the County Aforesaid .. one Good Hat, Eight Bushels Rice, with a Low Bed Tick, Eleven pound Tobacco, five pound Antimony with the Box it was in ___ two Spining Wheels, two Butcher knives, four Whet. Stones, Eight pound, Tallow, Harness Leather for one Quilor[?], three Red Cedar Milk Pails, one Small Dutch Padlock, one three Bushel Bagg, one pair of Trowsers with a hole on the Knee, three pound Leather, the Honey of one Bee hive, one New Wallet, one Good Leather Apron, one Bed Cord, one Red Cedar Water Bucket, one half Side leather, two Sides Leather, two Sides horse leather, one Dog Skin, Eight Bushels Wheat, one pair linnen Leggons, one new Sheep Skin Apron, one half Side Calf Skin, one pair leather Britches, Two Baggs Marked PS in which was about three pound linen & Woolen Yarn, & about three pound fine flax Tow[?], one Double plow line, one Cow halter, one Rush Collar with Hems & Traces, one Churn, one half Side Calf Skin, one pair hemp Traces, one pair Womens Yarn Stockings, Horse leather for about four [illegible] Soles one three Quart Kegg with the Vinegar, two New Shirts, a Cloth to Cover a Womans Saddle one half Side horse leather, two New Twilled Baggs, one pair Lincey Leggons Patch.d, on the knees, the Goods and Chattles of Ludwick, Smith ___ and one Feather Bed the Property of a Person unknown Then and there being found, feloniously did Steal take & Carry away, against the Form of Act of Gen.l Assembly in that Case Made & Provided and Against the peace & Dignity of this Common Wealth & a [illegible]