



American Indians in Ohio

Explore the American Indian cultures of Ohio before, during and after European settlement.

Background

American Indians played an important role in shaping the history of both Ohio and the nation. Ohio served as a leading center of trade and commerce for American Indians during the prehistoric era (a period for which there are no surviving written records), and as the battleground of the frontier during the 18th and early 19th centuries. Ohio can lay claim to many of the most influential early Indian leaders, including Tecumseh, Little Turtle, and Blue Jacket, as well as their adversaries, such as William Henry Harrison. The state was an important staging point for the conflict between frontier settlers and the local inhabitants. Ohio's native peoples played a vital role in shaping the policy of the U.S. government toward the settlement of land west of the Allegheny Mountains, and in its treatment of the land's indigenous peoples. They left their mark in the place names, landscape, and culture of Ohio.

Ohio had a particularly rich and thriving community of American Indians during the prehistoric era, beginning with Paleoindian nomadic hunters who arrived in the area around 15,000 years ago at the end of the Ice Age. The subsequent Archaic cultures (8000-500 BC) continued a hunting and gathering lifestyle, although the environment in which they were living had changed with hardwood forests and modern game animals replacing the Ice Age species.

Beginning around 800 BC, some American Indian groups began to cultivate crops such as squash and sunflowers and, since they were beginning to settle down near their gardens, started to make pottery for food storage and cooking. Archaeologists refer to these groups as the Woodland cultures, and they continued to occupy much of Ohio until at least AD 1200. The Adena people constituted one Early Woodland (800 BC-AD 100) group. They are particularly well-known for the conical burial mounds they constructed throughout central and southern Ohio, and their name comes from the Adena estate of Thomas Worthington in Chillicothe, on which was located a mound where archaeologists first found evidence of their culture. The Middle Woodland Hopewell Indians (100 BC-AD 500) continued to build burial mounds. However, they also constructed large earthen enclosures in geometric shapes (circles, squares, and octagons) to mark where their people gathered periodically to participate in many social and ceremonial events. Some of these sites were quite large—the Newark Earthworks complex spreads over an area of four square miles. The Hopewell people also maintained a large trade network extending as far as the Rocky Mountains of Wyoming, the Florida coast and Appalachians, and northern Lake Superior. For reasons that archaeologists are still trying to fathom, the Late Woodland Indians (AD 500-1200) discontinued the building of mounds and earthworks. However, they lived in larger settlements than those of the earlier Woodland people, perhaps in part because they began to cultivate corn, along with their other crops.

Beginning around AD 900 in some parts of Ohio, Late Prehistoric groups established permanent villages occupied by as many as 100-200 people each, in locations conducive to



growing corn. These groups included the Fort Ancient people in southern Ohio, the Sandusky people in northwestern Ohio, the Whittlesey people in the northeast, and the Monongahla people in the eastern part of the state. These cultures existed until around AD 1600. The events between the end of the prehistoric period and the earliest European explorations in the early 1700s are not clear. The spread of European diseases and intertribal warfare may have caused the people who survived these onslaughts to move out of the Ohio area. The tribes known from the historic period—the Shawnee, Delaware, Miami, Seneca-Cayuga, Wyandot, and others—moved into this region from farther east, north, south, and west. However, some scholars believe that the Fort Ancient people were the ancestors of the Shawnee.

The first historical records of American Indians in Ohio come from French missionaries who entered into the region in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. From these missionaries, historians know that six major groups settled in Ohio and its neighboring states: the Shawnee (in southern Ohio), Seneca-Cayuga (in central and northwest Ohio), Delaware (in eastern Ohio), Wyandot (in northern Ohio), Ottawa (in northwest Ohio), and Miami (in western Ohio). French land surveyors and fur traders had contact with American Indians for many years, trading guns and weapons for furs and other supplies to send back to Europe. Yet France never had firm control over the Ohio territory and had no permanent settlers attempting to farm and live in Ohio. As a result, the French traders and American Indians lived more or less peacefully for decades.

In the mid-18th century, however, the British began to compete with French traders for commercial supremacy. British surveyors began to move into what would become Ohio and Kentucky, and to threaten American Indian land much more aggressively than the French had. There were many struggles between France and Britain leading to the Seven Years War, known in North America as the French and Indian War. The American Indians, though disenchanted with the French, preferred them to the more forceful British land agents. The British won the French and Indian War, and assumed control over all former French lands east of the Mississippi River. Consequently, treatment of American Indians in Ohio began to change for the worse.

British imperial policy reflected a desire to restrain settlers from moving into these new lands, but these efforts were largely unsuccessful. American colonists began to move into the western lands, provoking a series of wars that eventually pushed American Indians further west. The first of these was Lord Dunmore's War, led by the forces of Virginia's Royal Governor John Murray, Earl of Dunmore. His army invaded Shawnee settlements in present-day West Virginia and pursued Shawnee armies across the Ohio River to modern Pickaway County, Ohio. There, in 1775, he signed a treaty with the Shawnee in which they agreed that they would not cross the Ohio River. Chief Logan, a Seneca-Cayuga chief from Ohio involved in Lord Dunmore's War, lamented in a well-known speech that, as a result of the violence and bloodshed of this era, "Who is left to mourn for Logan? Not one."

At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, American Indians supported the British, hoping that they could restrain land-grabbing colonists. The British attempted to lead a western campaign from Detroit, but were thwarted by American forces under George Rogers Clark.



Repeatedly, American Indians were punished for their support of the British. Chief Cornstalk of the Shawnee was killed when he attempted to lead a peace mission to the Americans, and, most notably, seventy-eight innocent men, women, and children of the Christian Indians at Gnadenhütten were massacred by the forces of Colonel David Williamson because they were suspected of aiding the British.

After the Revolutionary War ended and the Northwest Territory was organized under General Arthur St. Clair, the trend of forcibly moving American Indians continued. In 1785, the Delaware and Wyandot tribes were forced to sign the Treaty of Fort McIntosh, acknowledging their allegiance to the United States and limiting their movements to the northeast part of the territory. With British assistance, American Indians tried to fight the Americans to retain possession of their land. Governor St. Clair decided to use military force against them, but was soundly defeated on November 4, 1791, by a confederation of the Wyandot, Shawnee, Delaware and Miami under the leadership of Miami War Chief Little Turtle and Shawnee War Chief Blue Jacket. The defeat prompted the U.S. government to send General "Mad" Anthony Wayne to conquer the confederation. He succeeded by trouncing them at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in August of 1794. American Indians then signed the Treaty of Greenville in 1795, which limited all Ohio Indians to the northern portion of what would eight years later become the state of Ohio.

The American Indians, however, tried one last time during the War of 1812 to regain their land. Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa, with many others, mounted an American Indian revival, which led to fighting not only in Ohio, but throughout the west, in the hopes of defeating American settlers. William Henry Harrison defeated American Indian forces at the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811, and a combined army of Indians and British soldiers at the Battle of the Thames in 1813. These defeats spelled the end of Indian resistance in the Northwest; the remnants of Ohio's tribes signed the treaties of Maumee Rapids (1817) and St. Mary's (1818) limiting their land even further. By 1842, the remaining members of the Wyandot and Miami were forced to leave their reservation and move west across the Mississippi River.

Bibliography

Bureau of Indian Affairs. *Treaties Between the United States of America and the Several Indian Tribes From 1788 to 1837*. Washington: Langtree and O'Sullivan, 1887.

Carter, Harvey Lewis. *The Life and Times of Little Turtle: First Sagamore of the Wabash*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987.

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

Knepper, George W. *Ohio and Its People*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 1989.

Price, William B. *Mound Builders: Indians and Pioneers*. Parkersburg: Scholl Printing Co., 1956.



Prucha, Francis Paul. *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years : The Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts, 1790-1834*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.

Roseboom, Eugene H. and Weisenburger, Francis P. *A History of Ohio*. Columbus: The Ohio Historical Society, 1991.

Sword, Wiley. *President Washington's Indian War: The Struggle for the Old Northwest, 1790-1795*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974.

Thwaites, Reuben Gold. *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*. New York: Pageant Book Co., 1959.