

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

Tecumseh: Shawnee Chief

The most famous Shawnee Indian chief, Tecumseh, has fascinated historians for centuries. A bold warrior, powerful orator, and respected leader, he resisted the expansion of the United States into Native American lands and attempted to create an intertribal alliance to effect that.

Born about 1768 near present day Chillicothe, Ohio, Tecumseh's name meant *shooting star* or *blazing comet*. His father was killed in 1774 during the Battle of Point Pleasant while fighting against colonial occupation of Shawnee hunting grounds. Shawnees then resided in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Tennessee, and part of Kentucky, with other bands elsewhere. Tecumseh was raised by his older brother and mother and learned the Shawnee customs and way of life. He witnessed the invasion of tribal lands, destruction of crops, and massacre of other Native Americans, and thus developed a hostility towards white men. As a youthful warrior, he participated in Shawnee raids on flatboats floating down the Ohio River.

Skirmishes between settlers and Native Americans were common on the frontier. The Shawnee viewed the newcomers as destroyers of the land. Though they traded with one another, each was wary of the other. While still a teenager, Tecumseh joined the American Indian Confederacy led by Mohawk Joseph Brant, who believed that Indian lands were held by all the tribes and no further land should be ceded to the United States without the consent of all tribes. For several years, Tecumseh lived amongst the Cherokees in Tennessee and took place in clashes in the South. During one raid, his older brother was killed, and Tecumseh inherited the role of chief. He honed his skills as a marauder in southern territories. He became a military strategist, learned to use various surprise tactics, and gained the admiration and devotion of his followers.

Tecumseh returned to Ohio and took part in the war in the Northwest Territory (which included Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota) which was led by another Shawnee chief, Blue Jacket. The governor of the Northwest Territory, General St. Clair was dispatched with about 1000 troops to Indiana in 1791 to quell tribal raids. The Battle of the Wabash was a victory for the American Indian Confederacy, with 952 of the 1000 American soldiers slain. Tecumseh was a scout during that battle. The United States was alarmed at the outcome – a disaster - and created a new army to subdue the tribes. Led by General Anthony Wayne, it was well trained and outfitted.

Three years later (1794) General Wayne and about 3000 troops encountered around 1400 Shawnees and their allies in northern Ohio at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, which was a devastating loss to the Native Americans. Many warriors were killed, and confidence in the ability of the tribes to defeat the white men eroded. The Native American confederacy fell apart. Disheartened, the Indians met with General Wayne to “bury the hatchet” at a council. In August 1795, the Treaty of Greenville was signed. Hostilities ceased and boundaries were defined. Two thirds of Ohio, part of Indiana, and sections of what are now Illinois and Michigan were ceded to the United States. Though 80 chiefs placed their totem marks on the parchment treaty, Tecumseh did not. He departed the peace council at odds with the older Shawnee chiefs, vowing to return the old lands to their rightful owners, the Native Americans.

For years, Tecumseh worked in the background, urging other Native Americans to unite against the white settlers. He traveled from the Ozarks to New York and from Iowa to Florida. With his brother, the Prophet, he established a village in Indiana. Members of many different tribes moved there. Here Tecumseh espoused the idea of an intertribal confederacy to counter U.S. expansion. His notable oratorical skills and reputation attracted many followers.

During the War of 1812, Tecumseh and his band of warriors (estimated at around 3500) joined forces with the British against the U.S. After various confrontations, the Battle of the Thames (Ontario, Canada) ended in a decisive victory for the U.S., and as a result of the fierce fighting, Tecumseh was killed on the battlefield in October 1813. This marked the collapse of any Native American confederacy and the end of resistance to American settlement of the area. A great leader, Tecumseh has become a folk hero. Even his foe, William H. Harrison spoke of him as “one of those uncommon geniuses who spring up occasionally to produce revolutions and overturn the established order of things.” Tecumseh is still revered as a noble and gallant chief.



**Painting of Tecumseh
based on 1808 sketch**