

IMAGES

. . . then and now

From The Indian Hill Historical Society



Buckingham Lodge
1861

A Chronicle of the Shawnee in the "Ohio Lands"

Many things in the Village have in their names the word "Shawnee," an Eastern Indian woodland tribe with history in the region. The word Shawnee, from the Algonquin "shawan," means southerner, since the tribe originally occupied land further south than most Algonquins in Canada. In the 1600's Shawnee villages existed in the Ohio Valley, but warring Iroquois drove the tribe out of the area. They became a wandering tribe, and traveled in extended family groups throughout 15 states of the Eastern woodlands. In 1725, when the Miami offered the Shawnee the territory north of the Ohio River as repayment of a debt, the Shawnee converged in the "Ohio Lands" again, and the Miami gained powerful neighbors as a buffer against European intrusion.

Rejuvenation of the Shawnee resulted, and they led a more settled existence. There were five divisions of Shawnee, each with a responsibility – religion, warfare, health and political affairs. Each tribe had its own political, religious, and military unit; and though there was no central organization, there was a strong sense of tribal identity. The Shawnee respected Nature, and believed that their Creator, "Our Grandmother" entrusted the natural world to them. All things in nature, including trees, rocks, animals, and celestial bodies were sacred, each with a spirit or soul. Shawnee villages had clustered one-room family lodges constructed of saplings. Large villages had log council houses for ceremonies. Trade with outsiders augmented their subsistence lifestyle.



In the spring, after a ceremonial Bread Dance, planting was done by the women. Corn, beans, squash and pumpkins were the main crops. The warriors went off to battle, often returning with enemy captives. Planting, hunting and fishing reached a peak in the summer, marked by the Green Corn Dance. In the fall, harvest was celebrated with another Bread Dance; and several weeklong hunts by male Shawnee secured meat for winter. Winter was a relaxed time, and most Shawnee remained inside. Families spent time learning traditions, religion, and stories. Winter was also the time when adolescent males pursued their quests. (For months, a young man, under the direction of an older warrior, would rise at dawn, run naked through the forest to an icy pond, break the ice, dive to the bottom, and return to camp with proof of his dive.) This built discipline and inner strength to withstand extreme duress.

Shawnee men and women had distinct roles: the women were farmers, gatherers, and craftspeople; the men were hunters, traders, and warriors. Children were trained early in a strong moral code and were taught to be supportive of other tribe members.

Their names (chosen by two adults other than their parents) were chosen in a ceremony, and a person's name was believed to have significance in his destiny. Fathers taught skills to their sons, and mothers instructed their daughters.

Toward the end of the 18th century, wars and conflicts with other tribes, the British, and the American settlers ("Long Knives") forced the Shawnee to begin migrating again. Allies of the French during the French & Indian War and of the British during the American Revolution, the Shawnee led forays against American settlements in southern Ohio and Kentucky. Shawnee warriors were unequaled in woodland fighting, and their mastery of tracking, stealth and ambush, and tirelessness earned them a formidable reputation. The British encouraged the Indians to fight the settlers, and for many years they were used as pawns by European powers. As the century closed most Shawnee had ceded land in southern Ohio at the Treaty of Greenville (1795). Tecumseh, reputedly the greatest Shawnee chief, refused to sign the Treaty and tried to establish an alliance of all tribes to protect Indian land rights and shun white man's ways. However, his death toward the end of the War of 1812 marked the end of organized Native American resistance in the woodlands of Ohio.

Today Shawnee bands live in Oklahoma, Missouri, and Ohio, adapting to American culture but maintaining tribal customs. This proud people whose trails once crisscrossed Indian Hill facilitated the development of the region. Their struggles to keep their land remain an important part of the area's early history and settlement.