

## Book Reviews

*The Shawnee Prophet*. By R. David Edmunds. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983. Pp. xii, 260. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$16.95.)

The preface to *The Shawnee Prophet* reveals how R. David Edmunds, a careful student of Indian society and culture, gradually changed his views on the leadership contributions of the two Shawnee brothers, Tenskwatawa (the Prophet) and Tecumseh. The author's examination of manuscript sources relating to tribal affairs in the Old Northwest is very impressive. Edmunds recounts that when he examined documents for the period 1805 to 1810, Tecumseh's name hardly appeared. In contrast, the author mined several historical nuggets concerning the role of the Prophet. He concludes that the Shawnee religious leader served as the "catalyst for the Indian movement sweeping through the Old Northwest" (p. 92). Edmunds champions the role of the Prophet, yet he concedes that after the Treaty of Fort Wayne in 1809, Tecumseh and his militant Indian confederacy came to dominate the Indian movement. Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh allied themselves and their followers with the British in the War of 1812. Indian and British fortunes were dealt a heavy blow with Tecumseh's tragic death in 1813 at the Battle of the Thames. The Indian cause never recovered. The British and American governments refused to support the Prophet after the conflict. In summary, the religious leader's life drifted for the next twenty years. Edmunds's narrative of the Prophet's last two decades is little more than a sketch. About forty pages relate to the period 1815 through 1836, the year of his death.

The author has done much to rehabilitate the Prophet and to establish his true role as an Indian religious leader. Yet upon Tecumseh's death, the Shawnee brother tried to become a political leader but failed. While others maintained tribal positions of leadership, Tenskwatawa's opportunism and self-doubt shadowed him constantly. His former influence was gone, and he could never regain it.

Edmunds maintains that the Prophet has always been in the shadow of his brother. He is correct that Tecumseh has appealed to generations of white Americans because of their proclivity toward political and military leadership. It is true, however, that Americans have also recognized religious and cultural leaders who raised and maintained a faithful following or altered the direction of their culture. A more detailed comparison of the



TENSKWATAWA, THE SHAWNEE PROPHET

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis.

Prophet and his Shawnee rival, Black Hoof, would be instructive. The latter also saw and felt the powerful forces of acculturation. For over forty years the Ohio Shawnees followed Black Hoof as he worked and struggled to maintain their tribal integrity.

Despite Edmunds's mastery of sources and the weaving of an articulate biography, one is not convinced that Tenskwatawa was an Indian leader of the first rank. The Shawnee religious man died in obscurity on the Kansas plain.

*National Archives and Records Administration, George Chalou Washington, D.C.*