
A quarter of a century ago the anthropologist Noel William Schutz, Jr., lamented that the Shawnee Indians had been neglected by scholars. Today their significance is still widely underappreciated. The memory of Tecumseh, it is true, remains a durable monument to Shawnee enterprise, but long before his rise on the eve of the War of 1812 Shawnees were acknowledged pan-Indian diplomats. As John Norton, an adopted Mohawk, testified in 1804, the tribe was recognized as "the most leading nation of the [Indian] Confederacy—most polished in their language & manners & those who convene the Councils & bring the rest together" (p. 352). Shawnees orchestrated resistance to the white settlement of the Old Northwest over a period of seventy years, and their influence filtered deep into the South, spurring the Cherokee war of 1776 and the Seminole and Creek uprisings of 1812–1814.

However, apart from their stand for Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana, Shawnees commonly responded to pressure by migrating, and their extraordinary peregrinations partly explain the lack of an adequate modern history of the tribe. Ranging widely between Canada and Mexico, the Shawnees left source materials that are scattered and difficult to marshal. Randolph Noe's excellent bibliography, which describes nearly three thousand published references, reflects this rich past. The extensive indices allow students to pursue selected themes, but the references are grouped around chronological time periods and demonstrate the uneven scope of the writing. Most treat the tribe's occupancy of the Ohio Valley before "removal" in the 1830s, but while the experiences of the emigrant communities in Missouri, Kansas, and elsewhere now attract attention, research on twentieth-century Shawnee history remains depressingly thin.

The great strength of this book is its comprehensiveness. Nearly all the pertinent items are here, along with many little-known articles and dissertations, and most scholars will make discoveries among these gleanings. Inevitably, in a work of such scope, there are some omissions. The biographies of Clark, Wayne, and Harrison, respectively written by James A. James, Paul David Nelson, and Dorothy B. Goebel, ought to have found a place, while Carl J. Fliegel's index of the Moravian records details essential Shawnee documents. The most striking omission is the Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History, edited by Helen H. Tanner and published in 1987. Given the confusing movements of Shawnee communities in the colonial and early national periods, this is an essential reference. However, there are surprisingly few oversights, and the listing of such legal documents as statutes at large and executive orders is particularly thorough.
If there is a criticism, it is that the evaluation of sources might have had a sharper edge. Much that has been written about the Shawnees is unreliable. For example, Thomas Wildcat Alford's description of the responsibilities of the different divisions of the Shawnee tribe is not applicable to the eighteenth century. The Mekoche division, not the Chillicothe or Hathawekela, managed tribal affairs, and Alford's much repeated errors (pp. xix-xx) have led to serious misinterpretations of Shawnee politics. To his credit, Noe usually cautions readers about questionable sources, and some notorious examples of fraudulent writing have wisely been omitted altogether.

Quibbles aside, this conscientious, wide-ranging, and valuable volume is a mandatory first stop for any student of the Shawnee. What we now need is a balanced history of the tribe—that one hopes Noe will undertake—and the restoration of these people to their rightful place in American history.


A Fragile Capital: Identity and the Early Years of Columbus, Ohio.

A Fragile Capital offers a broad description of the origins and forty years of development of the capital city of Ohio. In addition, it describes the process of creating a new city to serve as the capital of the state. Unlike most local historians, Charles C. Cole, Jr., does not just follow a chronological description of the happenings in Columbus from 1812 until 1850. Rather, the book is organized by topic, including business, politics, education, religion, the arts, transportation, and the press. This arrangement opens the possibility of penetrating the background in depth, which the author accomplishes.

Cole relies on primary sources such as letters, diaries, legal documents, and newspapers, rather than depending, as so many local historians do, on folklore and other informal sources. While the use of primary sources tends to emphasize white male leaders, the author has also worked to uncover evidence about the role of women and the antislavery efforts in political activity.

Change is the theme of the capital city's first four decades. The impact of the improvement in highways and railroad building and their effect upon the mobility of the people of central Ohio is explored. Cole analyzes the increase in writing and publishing and illustrates that cultural opportunities in Columbus expanded during this period, by mid-century attracting internationally known performers such as Swedish soprano Jenny Lind.