LETTERS

To the Editor,

James Madison's article on heroes and changing times in the December 2005 issue inspires me to comment on two Miami Indian leaders who are revered among the Miami people to this day, but who are little known outside of the Miami Indian community. Camillus Bundy of Wabash County spent his life and personal resources defending Miami treaty rights. He was also a key figure in starting new tribal institutions that remain basic to the Miami Nation of Indians of Indiana. Carmen Ryan followed in Bundy's footsteps, working in the 1950s to gain claims awards from the Indian Claims Commission and to once again assert federal recognition for the Indiana Miami tribe.

Bundy, who was born in 1854, achieved full status as a Miami leader when he defended the right of tax exemption on Miami treaty land in the 1890s. After the tribe was denied federal recognition over this issue in 1897, he founded the Miami reunion in 1903 as a way of bringing Miami people together. In 1923 he sponsored the beginning of today's state-chartered Miami Nation of Indians of Indiana. At the same time he fought for Miami treaty rights, selling precious and rare Indian heirlooms to finance trips to Washington, D.C., to meet federal officials. Bundy died in 1935, leaving behind an active tribal council fully engaged in regaining tribal rights.

Bundy's leadership inspired Carmen Ryan to devote her life to the Miami tribe. Born in 1900 in Wabash County, she worked with the leaders who incorporated the tribe as the Miami Nation in 1937. In the late 1930s, she joined the League of Nations of North American Indians, which defended the rights of many midwestern and northeastern tribes. After World War II, she became a leading figure in gaining claims awards from

broken treaties for the Indiana tribe, traveling to the National Archives in Washington to research Miami treaties and documents. After Congress paid the initial claims awards in the 1970s, she uncovered the mismanagement of millions of dollars of Miami money by private banks.

Thanks to Ryan's well-documented research, there was no doubt as to the validity of the Miami treaty of June 6, 1854, and its subsequent defense by the tribal council of the Miami Nation when the tribe petitioned for federal recognition in the 1980s. She greatly assisted me in gaining access to Indiana tribal documents that supported recognition of the Indiana Miami tribe by the federal government. She died in 1985, during the federal recognition process.

In a lengthy report made in 1991, the U.S. Department of Interior recognized the validity of the 1854 Miami treaty. Unfortunately, the Seventh District of the federal court system denied federal recognition of the tribal government (and broke the 1854 treaty) on the basis of a 1992 administrative decision of the Branch of Federal Acknowledgment within the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Despite this setback, the example of these two courageous Miami leaders remains to guide the Indiana Miami tribe today. The tribal government continues in Peru, Indiana, and works with a tribal membership of more than 5,000, about half of whom live in the original tribal settlement area in the Wabash Valley between Peru and Fort Wayne.

STEWART RAFERT
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE