

*Always a People**Oral Histories of Contemporary Woodland Indians*

Collected by Rita Kohn and W. Lynwood Montell

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. Pp. xix, 297. Illustrations, index. Paperbound, \$24.95.)

*Long Journey Home**Oral Histories of Contemporary Delaware Indians*

Edited by James W. Brown and Rita T. Kohn

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. Pp. xxvii, 416. Illustrations, bibliography, index. \$34.95)

These books have some common origins and themes, and a shared focus on presenting the voices, personal stories, and observations of contemporary Native Americans. Their connecting thread is the work of Rita Kohn, an adjunct professor of Journalism at Indiana University—Purdue University, Indianapolis, who became deeply involved in these projects in the early 1990s. Numerous other people collaborated and supported what was clearly a labor of love to make these volumes possible.

Always a People first appeared in 1997 and was reprinted in 2008 to appear in tandem with *Long Journey Home*, which is discussed below. Its oral histories, recorded in the 1990s, reflect the thoughts and life experiences of forty individuals, largely (but not exclusively) of Algonquian heritage and with northeastern and mid-western tribal roots. They range in length from a few to a dozen pages (surely many of the originals were longer; editing has tidied and focused these texts to an extent that is rather hard to gauge). The voices come from members of eleven Woodland

nations. More than half of those interviewed are from Oklahoma, and their diversity reflects the diversity of Indian peoples removed at various times to that “Indian Territory”: Delaware, Miami, Ottawa, Peoria, Sauk/Fox, Shawnee. Five Potawatomis are represented, all Michigan-based. The Delaware people exhibit the widest dispersal, seven being based in Oklahoma, and three in Ontario, Canada. The range is completed by two Chippewas (Wisconsin), one Winnebago (Nebraska), and one Oneida (New York). Several speakers are of mixed ancestry, both Native and non-Native, but identify through kin ties and community and cultural experience with a particular tribal group.

The texts appear in alphabetical order by surname, with tribal identities supplied in individual entries. This choice lends support to the generalized concept of “Woodland Nations” advanced in the preface, but also means that readers interested in retrieving, say, the Delawares or Potawatomis as a group have to search for them. Given that tribal identities have clearly remained

important to the individuals involved, grouping them under those headings would have been helpful for people interested in tracing distinctiveness and enduring significance. But one thrust of the book is to highlight commonalities, and in that it succeeds. Commentaries about childhood, experiences of racism, language loss, survival, the importance of grandparents and other kin, and success in various occupations and Native leadership roles echo time and again through these verbal self-portraits. As for portraits, a remarkable feature of the book is its reproduction in color of the fine oil portraits, done by Evelyn J. Ritter, of almost all of the speakers. Overall, the book provides a rich overview of Woodland Indian leaders and thinkers reflecting on their personal histories, lives, and situations in a decade in which their families' and communities' trials and losses across the centuries culminated in the revival of identity and pride at the end of the twentieth century.

Long Journey Home came about as readers of the first volume became aware of how much Delaware history was based in Indiana. The editors and others worked over four years to gather interviews with the descendants of the White River (Indiana) Delawares whose homeland had become the Bartlesville area of Oklahoma, and to provide them with historical context. The book opens with a short introduction, "Historical Information about the Lenape," by Deborah Nichols-Ledermann and

James A. Rementer; it briefly but vividly portrays how a people once based in New Jersey and parts of New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware became so widely dispersed across areas ranging from Ontario to Oklahoma. Part 1 brings forward older Delaware voices with Indiana roots by means of printing ten interview transcripts recorded in Oklahoma in 1937-38 under a Works Progress Administration writers' project grant. Part 2 presents three edited interviews conducted in 1968 by Katherine Red Corn. Part 3 contributes two further interviews done in 1995, and Part 4 offers thirty-one "Contemporary Interviews" done for this project.

The book closes with an Indiana focus, offering a "Roundtable Discussion on the Lenape Program at Conner Prairie Living Museum, Fishers, Indiana," in which those involved with the museum reflect on the content and significance of the museum's Delaware educational and cultural work with schoolchildren and the general public. Their contribution builds on the fact that several of the Oklahoma Delawares interviewed in the book refer to the museum, having visited it to help in the programming and rebuild historical connections, and for their own interest. Another public offering related to this book should be mentioned; in 2003, a video documentary entitled *Long Journey Home* was created and shown widely on public television.

These two books, taken together, fulfill their goals very well and

offer much insight into the experiences and views of current generations of Native Americans from the Midwest to Oklahoma. *Long Journey Home*, with its sharpened focus on Delaware people, moves beyond the construct of “Woodland Nations” to show that while Delawares have intermarried widely with others and are kin to many, a distinct tribal identity endures at the core of people’s lives, through a strong historical sense and cultural awareness transmitted through families from ancestors and grandparents, and often retrieved through renewed community bonds that may reach across long distances. The editors say that their intent throughout “has been to bring honor

to all indigenous people while enabling one group to emerge as a multi-dimensional, multi-facted society” (p. xvii). Similar volumes might well be done for each of the other “Woodland Nations” whose voices speak in *Always a People*.

JENNIFER S. H. BROWN is Professor, Department of History, and Director of the Centre for Rupert’s Land Studies, at the University of Winnipeg, Canada. She has published widely on Northern Algonquian and Métis history and the fur trade, and particularly on Ojibwe documentary and oral history from the Berens River region in Manitoba and northwestern Ontario.

