

Tecumseh, Harrison, and The War of 1812*

Marshall Smelser**

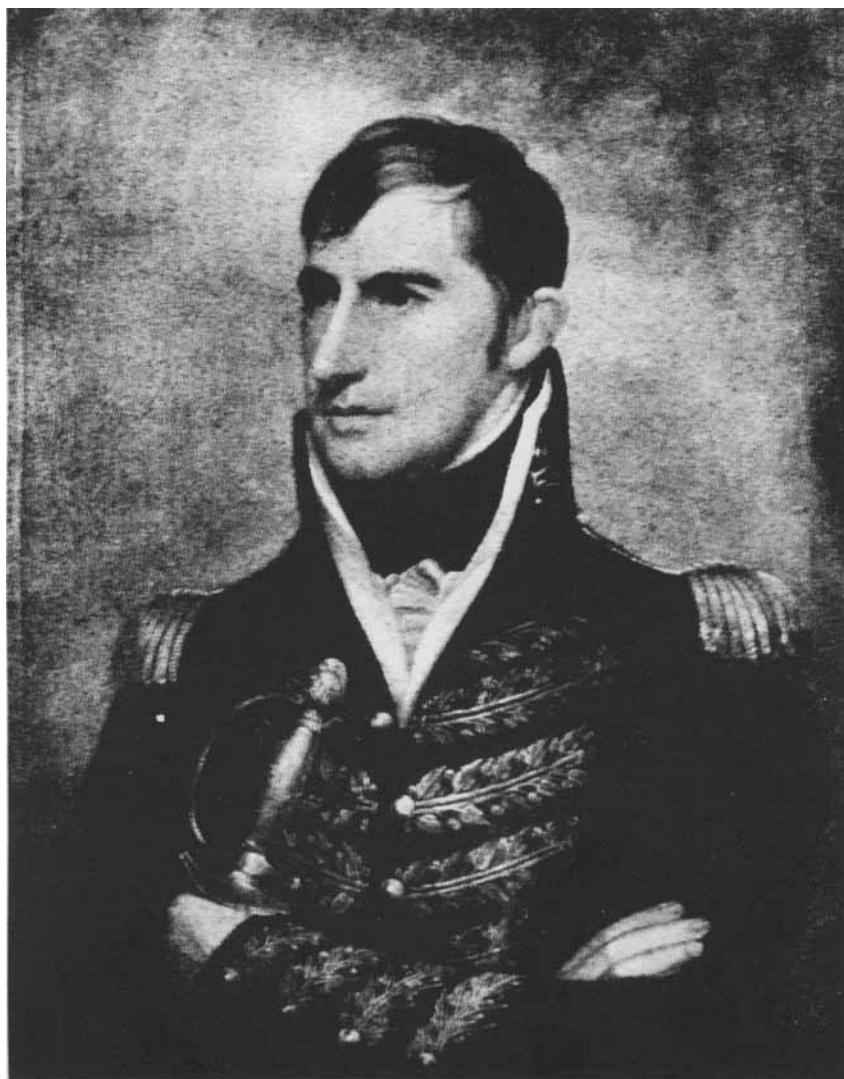
Indiana Territory had only twenty-five thousand citizens in 1810. When one reflects that the populations of Ohio and Kentucky combined were more than twenty-five times as great, it will be easily understood that the War of 1812 in the Old Northwest was more their war than it was Indiana's. Indiana was only a beachhead in the wilderness. The history of the war as it concerns Indiana is more biographical than geographical, more dramatic than analytic. This paper will treat it that way—as a high tragedy involving two able natural leaders. Like all tragedies, the course of its action gives the feeling that it was inevitable, that nothing could have been done to prevent its fatal termination. The story is the drama of the struggle of two of our most eminent predecessors, William Henry Harrison of Grouseland, Vincennes, and Tecumseh of the Prophet's town, Tippecanoe.

It is not easy to learn about wilderness Indians. The records of the Indians are those kept by white men, who were not inclined to give themselves the worst of it. Lacking authentic documents, historians have neglected the Indians. The story of the Indian *can* be told but it has a higher probability of error than more conventional kinds of history. To tell the tale is like reporting the weather without scientific instruments. The reporter must be systematically, academically skeptical. He must read between the lines, looking for evidence of a copper-colored ghost in a deerskin shirt, flitting through a green and bloody world where tough people died from knives, arrows, war clubs, rifle bullets, and musket balls, and where the coming of spring was not necessarily an omen of easier living, but could make a red or white mother tremble because now the enemy could move concealed in the forest. But the reporter must proceed cautiously, letting the facts shape the story without prejudice.

Tonight our story is a sad and somber one. It shows men at their bravest. It also shows men at their worst. We are dealing with a classic situation in which two great leaders—each a commander of the warriors of his people—move inexorably for a decade toward a confrontation which ends in the destruction of the one and the exaltation of the other. Tecumseh, a natural nobleman in a hopeless cause, and Harrison, a better soldier than he is

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From a painting attributed to Rembrandt Peale.

William Henry Harrison, in the dress uniform of the War of 1812.

The original portrait showed Harrison in civilian dress as Delegate from Northwest Territory in 1800. The Major General's uniform was superimposed in 1813.

Reproduced from Freeman Cleaves, *Old Tippecanoe: William Henry Harrison and His Time* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939.)



TECUMSEH

A print made from the only picture known to have been made of the Shawnee chief. It was painted from memory by an English officer who knew Tecumseh in the War of 1812.

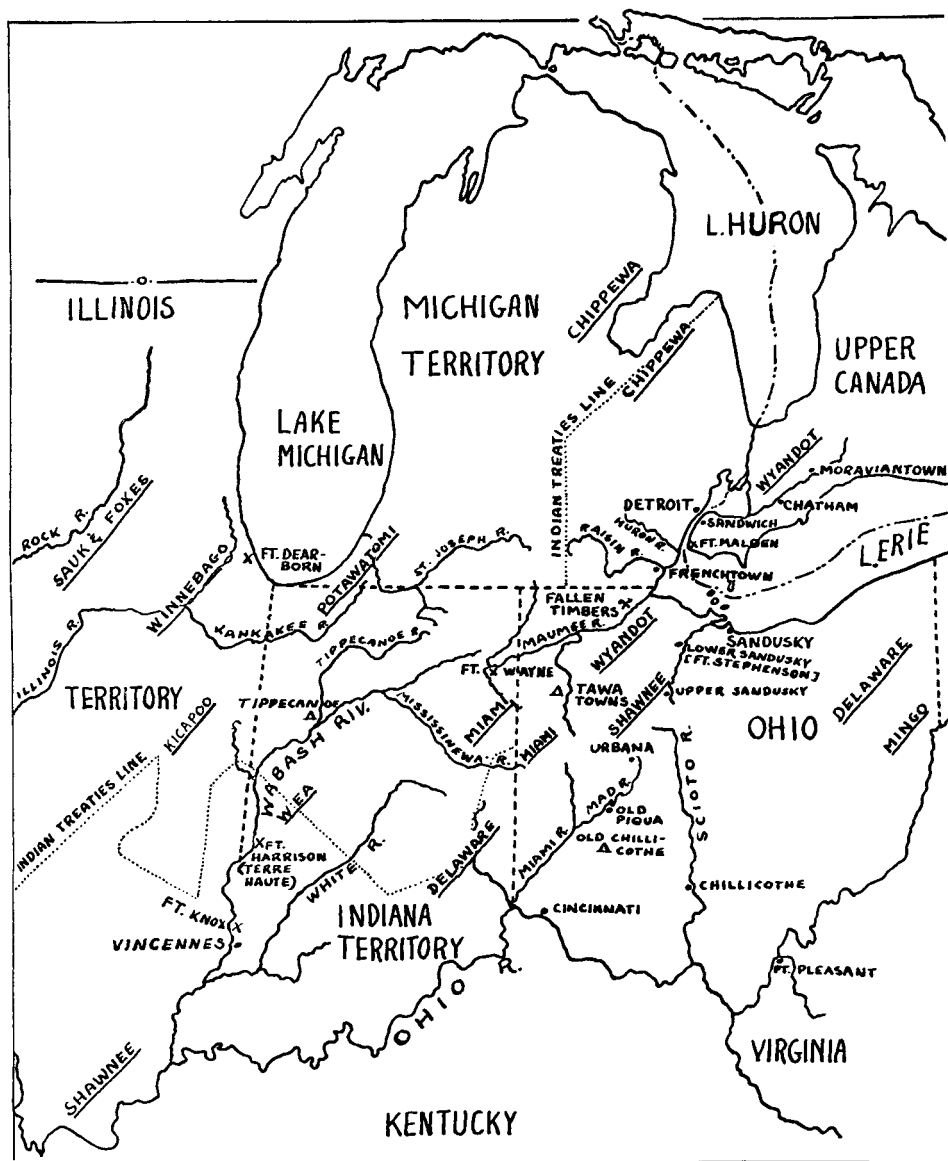
Reproduced from John M. Oskison, *Tecumseh and His Times: The Story of a Great Indian* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1938.)

generally credited with being, make this an Indiana story, although the last two acts of their tragedy were staged in Ohio and in Upper Canada. To understand why this deadly climax was inevitable we must know the Indian policy of the United States at that time; we must know, if we can, what the Indians thought of it; and we must know something about the condition of the Indians.

The federal government's Indian policy was almost wholly dedicated to the economic and military benefit of white people. When Congress created Indiana Territory, the United States was officially committed to educate and civilize the Indians. The program worked fairly well in the South for a time. Indiana Territory's Governor Harrison gave it an honest trial in the North, but the problems were greater than could be solved with the feeble means used. The management of Indian affairs was unintelligently complicated by overlapping authorities, a confused chain of command, and a stingy treasury—stingy, that is, when compared with the treasury of the more lavish British competitors for Indian favor. More to the point, most white Americans thought the Indians should be moved to the unsettled lands in the West. President Jefferson, for awhile, advocated teaching agriculture to the Indians, and he continued the operation of federal trading posts in the Indian country which had been set up to lessen the malevolent influence of private traders. These posts were successful by the standards of cost accounting, but they did nothing to advance the civilization of the Indian. Few white people wished the Indians well, and fewer would curb their appetites for fur and land just to benefit Indians.

The conflict between whites and Indians was not simple. The Indians were neither demons nor sculptured noble savages. They were not the single people Tecumseh claimed but were broken into fragments by language differences. Technologically they were farther behind the Long Knives—as the Indians called the frontiersmen—than the Gauls who died on Caesar's swords were behind the Romans. But they had a way of life that worked in its hard, cruel fashion. In the end, however, the Indian way of life was shattered by force; and the Indians lost their streams, their corn and bean fields, their forests.

Comparatively few white residents of the United States in 1801 had ever seen an Indian. East of the Mississippi River there were perhaps seventy thousand Indians, of whom only ten thousand lived north of the Ohio River. They were bewildered pawns of international politics, governed by the French to 1763, ruled in the name of George III of England to 1783, and never consulted about the change of sovereigns. As Governor Harrison himself said, they disliked the French least, because the French were content with a congenial joint occupation of the wilds while the white Americans and British had a fierce sense of the difference between mine and thine. The governor admitted the Indians had genuine grievances. It was not likely, for example, that a jury would convict a white man charged with murdering an Indian.



TECUMSEH, HARRISON, AND THE WAR OF 1812.

Line of dots indicates Indian line, 1809.

Tribal locales labeled at approximate centers and underlined.

Courtesy Marshall Smelser

Indians were shot in the forest north of Vincennes for no reason at all. Indians, Harrison reported, punished Indians for crimes against Long Knives, but the frontiersmen did not reciprocate. But the worst curse visited on the Indians by the whites was alcohol. Despite official gestures at prohibition, alcohol flowed unchecked in the Indian territory. Harrison said six hundred Indian warriors on the Wabash received six thousand gallons of whisky a year. That would seem to work out to a fifth of whisky per week per family, and it did not come in a steady stream, but in alternating floods and ebbs.

Naturally Indian resentment flared. Indian rage was usually ferocious but temporary. Few took a long view. Among those who did were some great natural leaders, Massasoit's disillusioned son King Philip in the 1670s, Pontiac in the 1760s, and Tecumseh. But such leaders invariably found it hard to unite the Indians for more than a short time; regardless of motive or ability, their cause was hopeless. The Indians were a Stone Age people who depended for good weapons almost entirely on the Long Knives or the Redcoats. The rivalry of Britain and the United States made these dependent people even more dependent. Long Knives supplied whisky, salt, and tools. Redcoats supplied rum, beef, and muskets. The Indians could not defeat Iron Age men because these things became necessities to them, and they could not make them for themselves. But yielding gracefully to the impact of white men's presence and technology was no help to the Indians. The friendly Choctaw of present Mississippi, more numerous than all of the northwestern tribes together, were peaceful and cooperative. Their fate was nevertheless the same as the fate of the followers of King Philip, Pontiac, and Tecumseh.

The Indians had one asset—land. Their land, they thought, belonged to the family group so far as it was owned at all. No Indian had a more sophisticated idea of land title than that. And as for selling land, the whites had first to teach them that they owned it and then to teach them to sell it. Even then, some Indians very early developed the notion that land could only be transferred by the unanimous consent of all tribes concerned rather than through negotiations with a single tribe. Indian councils declared this policy to the Congress of the United States in 1783 and in 1793. If we follow James Truslow Adams' rule of thumb that an Indian family needed as many square miles of wilderness as a white family needed plowed acres, one may calculate that the seventy thousand Indians east of the Mississippi needed an area equal to all of the Old Northwest plus Kentucky, if they were to live the primitive life of their fathers. Therefore, if the Indians were to live as undisturbed primitives, there would be no hunting grounds to spare. And if the rule of unanimous land cessions prevailed, there would be no land sales so long as any tribal leader objected. Some did object, notably two eminent Shawnee: Tecumseh, who believed in collective bargaining, and his brother, the Prophet, who also scorned the Long Knives' tools, his whisky, and his civilization. Harrison dismissed the Prophet's attack on land treaties as the result of British

influence, but collective conveyance was an old idea before the Shawnee medicine man took it up. The result of the federal government's policy of single tribe land treaties was to degrade the village chiefs who made the treaties and to exalt the angry warrior chiefs, like Tecumseh, who denounced the village chiefs, corrupted by whisky and other gifts, for selling what was not theirs to sell.

King George had reserved no rights for his Indian wards at the end of the War for Independence. From 1783 to 1871 the United States made 372 land treaties with the Indians under the constitutional treaty power, as though ragged bands of hungry and debauched Indians were sovereign nations, the equals of the British or Russian empires. President Jefferson himself submitted twenty-eight treaties to the Senate. Before the War of 1812, the northwestern tribes had lost legal title to nearly all of Ohio, much of southern Indiana, most of present Illinois, and a quarter of present Wisconsin and Michigan. Jefferson believed that only those Indians living on a tract when it was first discovered needed to be consulted. On that theory, only the Miami owned land still held by the Indians in the area between the Ohio, Illinois, and Mississippi rivers. Other tribes were allowed to sign as a courtesy, not a right—other tribes, that is, except the Shawnee. (Harrison told the Indiana territorial legislature that the Shawnee brothers' theory of collective ownership would make it impossible to buy land and was therefore absurd.) From the Treaty of Greenville in 1795 to the New Purchase Treaty at Fort Wayne in 1809, federal negotiators acquired forty-eight million acres in the Old Northwest. This brought Tecumseh to the center of the stage, with fire in his eye.

Jefferson's hope, written to Governor Harrison in February, 1803, was to draw the Indians into farming so they would need less land and would then trade their hunting land for farming equipment and supplies. Jefferson wrote that they should be allowed credit at government stores so the debts could be erased by more land cessions, and the tribes would in time either be absorbed as citizens or move west of the Mississippi. Looking back, it is hard to believe that the official policy of the United States was truly based on a sincere belief that the Indians were responsible nations. On the contrary, they were regarded as culturally and racially inferior. The Americans justified the Indian policy by British precedent, by the fact that the land *was* paid for, by the vastness of the unsettled regions remaining to the Indians, and by urging that agricultural land was indispensable to a growing United States. When Indians disagreed with these justifications, the disagreement usually was blamed on British conspirators. Tecumseh's theory of collective land sale was the only legal idea which had the faintest chance of stopping the steady advance of the Long Knives, and it had a very faint chance indeed. Tecumseh and his allies saw the steady reduction of Indians from free men to dependents. Annuities to Indians, arranged in the treaties, were cheaper for the United States than wars of extermination, but annuities degraded the

Indians to rags and drunken idleness. However, let us think of the problem in terms of realistic politics. If some seventy thousand people today owned everything north of the Ohio River and south of Tennessee, they would not be allowed to keep it. This is not a moral judgment but a political conclusion. If we accept the collective ownership theory, these Indians had more potential wealth per capita than any people on earth. Because they were ignorant of how to use it, they lived more miserably than the most wretched Russian serf of 1813 or Chinese coolie of 1963.

The name Tecumseh is said to be Shawnee for "Meteor" or "Flying Panther." Either one is fittingly descriptive, and the word might well mean both. Because of the lack of records, Tecumseh's life is an uncertain fable, but he was probably all Shawnee. No one seems to have written of his youth until ten years after his death. His early years were apparently those of any other young Shawnee who came to manhood in the 1780s, except that he was more intelligent and magnetic than most Americans, regardless of complexion. He was born five to eight years before the Declaration of Independence in some village on the headwaters of the Miami River in present Ohio. When not more than twenty-five years old he is believed to have led the repulse of a surprise attack on his tribe by the noted frontier fighter Simon Kenton. Like his nemesis, Harrison, Tecumseh had a minor part in the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794, where both seem to have acquitted themselves creditably.

Tecumseh's tribe, the Shawnee, were long actively hostile to the United States: from 1774 to 1794 there were at least sixteen armed clashes between organized Shawnee bands and Long Knives. The great warrior chiefs of Tecumseh's youth were Little Turtle of the Miami and Blue Jacket of the Shawnee tribe. After General Anthony Wayne's victory at Fallen Timbers, Little Turtle took a federal pension and came out for coexistence. Blue Jacket, citing the doctrine of collective diplomacy, remained unconciliated and gained some popularity. Tecumseh saw matters as Blue Jacket did. He became Blue Jacket's chief follower and later his successor as head of a militant Shawnee minority. It seems quite possible that Tecumseh had ambitions to be the principal Shawnee leader. And he could not gain this eminence by peaceful collaboration with white expansion. Certainly there were always important Shawnee opposed to him and his theories—but most of them seem to have been on the United States payroll. The opposition of suspiciously pacific Shawnee leaders explains Tecumseh's later denial of the authority of the village chiefs and his aggrandizement of the northwestern warrior chiefs.

In the late 1790s Tecumseh was building a reputation as hunter and warrior, gathering a band of admiring braves about him, and calling himself "chief." In 1798 his band settled on the White River. In the next several years he was influential enough to be respected and consulted on Indian matters by the settlers of the Miami and Scioto valleys. It was probably in

1805 or 1806 that he made his resolve to try to bar the Long Knives from further settlement in the wilderness. He set out on his ceaseless travel and agitation—a journey which ended in an unmarked grave. It was in the winter of 1805-1806 that his younger brother became the "Prophet" and began to supply the theology necessary to idealize Tecumseh's nativist movement. Like most primitive peoples, and some not so primitive, the Shawnee thought of themselves as a superior people, who once had been the favorites of the "Master of Life" but later had been corrupted and blinded by sin. It was the Prophet's self-imposed job to teach them virtue again. He predicted if they followed him they would soon regain their superiority.

By the time he found his life work Tecumseh was an impressive man, about five feet nine inches tall, muscular and well proportioned, with large but fine features in an oval face, light copper skin, excellent white teeth, and hazel eyes. His carriage was imperial, his manner energetic, and his temperament cheerful. His dress was less flashy than that of many of his fellow warriors. Except for a silver mounted tomahawk, quilled moccasins, and, in war, a medal of George III and a plume of ostrich feathers, he dressed simply in fringed buckskin. He knew enough English for ordinary conversation, but to assure accuracy he was careful to speak only Shawnee in diplomacy. Unlike many Indians he could count, at least as far as eighteen (as we know by his setting an appointment with Harrison eighteen days after opening the subject of a meeting). Military men later said he had a good eye for military topography and could extemporize crude tactical maps with the point of his knife. He is well remembered for his humanity to prisoners, being one of the few Indians of his day who disapproved of torturing and killing prisoners of war. This point is better documented than many other aspects of his character and career.

The Prophet rather than Tecumseh first captured the popular imagination. As late as 1810 Tecumseh was being referred to in official correspondence merely as the Prophet's brother. The Shawnee Prophet's preaching had touches of moral grandeur: respect for the aged, sharing of material goods with the needy, monogamy, chastity, and abstinence from alcohol. He urged a return to the old Indian ways and preached self-segregation from the white people. But he had an evil way with dissenters, denouncing them as witches and having several of them roasted alive. This revolted his fellow Shawnee. The Prophet gave up his witch hunts, announced an order from God to move inside the Indian treaties boundary in western Ohio, sent disciples to preach in far places, and drew throngs of Indian pilgrims, many of whom are alleged to have died of hunger or exposure on their pilgrimages. His usual effect on his Indian converts was an improvement of their conduct for several years, a return to old-fashioned ways of getting a living and old-fashioned malnutrition and exposure, and then a relapse into what might be called a kind of reformed prophetism, militantly antiwhite but not so eager to go hungry by boycotting white men's tools and trade. The Prophet claimed



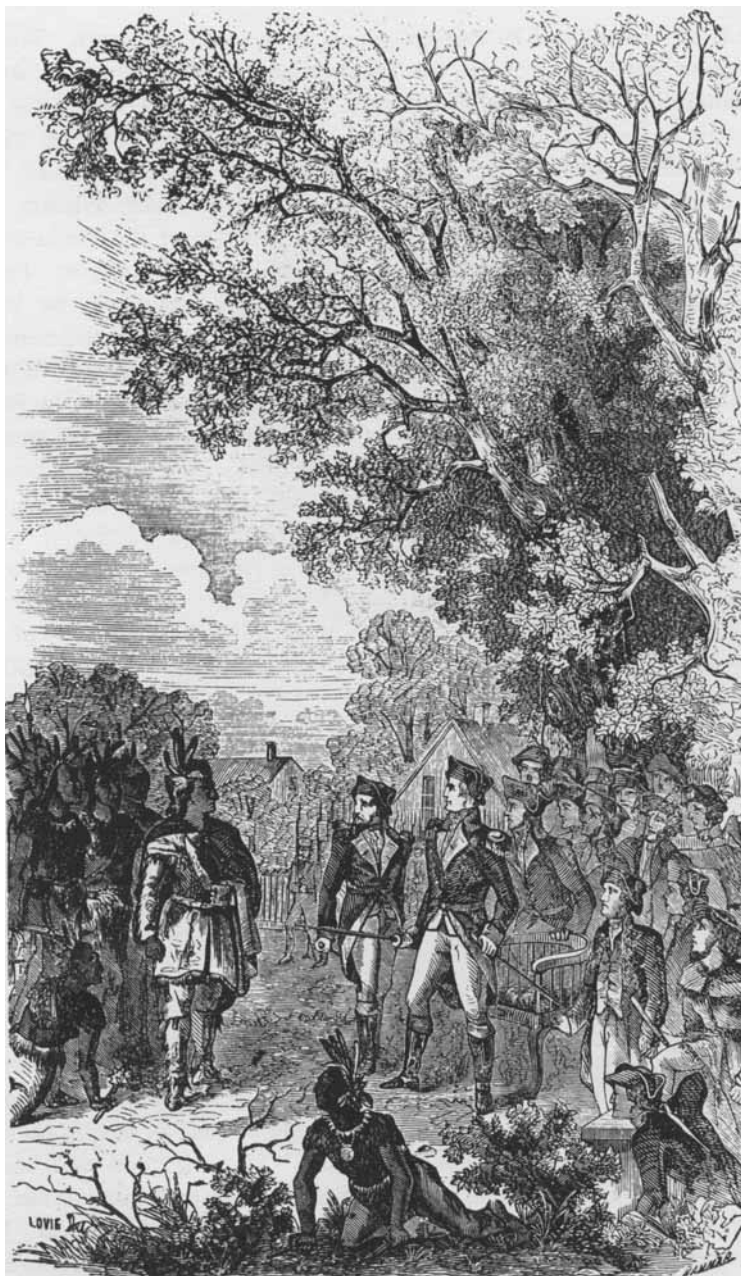
THE SHAWNEE PROPHET.

Reproduced from John B. Dillon, *A History of Indiana . . .*
(Indianapolis: Bingham & Doughty, 1859.)

to have been transported to heaven where he learned the truth. From the way Thomas Jefferson wrote of the Prophet later, one gathers that skeptical and rationalistic Long Knives thought the Prophet had not visited the Great Spirit in his heaven but had visited the British Indian agent in Fort Malden.

One of the skeptics unconverted by the Prophet and unimpressed by the divinity of his mission was Indiana Territory's first governor, William Henry Harrison, a retired regular officer, the son of a signer of the Declaration of Independence, appointed governor at the age of twenty-eight. Prudent, popular with Indians and whites, industrious, and intelligent, he had no easy job. He had to contend with land hunger, Indian resentments, the excesses of Indian traders, and with his constant suspicion of a British web of conspiracy spun from Fort Malden. The growing popularity of the Prophet alarmed Harrison, and early in 1806 he sent a speech by special messenger to the Delaware tribe to try to refute the Prophet's theology by Aristotelian formal logic. Harrison was not alone in his apprehensions. In Ohio the throngs of Indian pilgrims grew larger after the Prophet during the summer of 1806 correctly predicted an eclipse of the sun (forecast, of course, in every almanac) and took credit for it. A year later, when reports indicated the number of the Prophet's followers was increasing, the governor of Ohio alerted the militia and sent commissioners to investigate. They heard Blue Jacket deny any British influence on the Indians. At another meeting later at Chillicothe Tecumseh denounced all land treaties but promised peace. The governor of Ohio was temporarily satisfied, although Harrison still thought the Prophet spoke like a British agent and told the Shawnee what he thought. But in the fall of 1807 there was no witness, however hostile, who could prove that either Tecumseh or the Prophet preached war. On the contrary, every reported sermon and oration apparently promised peace. An ominous portent, however—at least in Harrison's eyes—was the founding of the Prophet's town on the Tippecanoe River, in May, 1808.

The Prophet visited Harrison at Vincennes late in the summer of 1808 to explain his divine mission to the incredulous young governor. Privately, and grudgingly, Harrison admitted the Prophet had reduced drunkenness, but he persisted in his belief that the Shawnee leader was a British agitator. The Prophet went to Vincennes again in 1809 and boasted of having prevented an Indian war. Harrison did not believe him. There is good evidence that in June, 1810, Tecumseh tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Shawnee of the Maumee Basin to move west in order to clear the woods for war. When Harrison learned this he sent a message to the Prophet's town. The "Seventeen Fires," he said, were invincible. The Redcoats could not help the Indians. But if the Indians thought the New Purchase Treaty made at Fort Wayne in 1809 was fraudulent, Harrison would arrange to pay their way to visit the President, who would hear their complaint. Tecumseh privately said he wished peace but could be pushed no farther. These rumblings and tremors of 1810 produced the first meeting of our two tragic protagonists.



GOV. HARRISON AND TECUMSEH IN COUNCIL AT VINCENNES.

Reproduced from John B. Dillon, *A History of Indiana . . .*
(Indianapolis: Bingham & Doughty, 1859.)

Tecumseh paddled to Vincennes with four hundred armed warriors in mid August, 1810. In council he denounced the New Purchase Treaty and the village chiefs who had agreed to it. He said the warrior chiefs would rule Indian affairs thereafter. Harrison flatly denied Tecumseh's theory of collective ownership and guaranteed to defend by the sword what had been acquired by treaty. This meeting of leaders was certainly not a meeting of minds. A deadlock had been reached. A cold war had been started. During the rest of 1810 Harrison received nothing but bad news. The secretary of war suggested a surprise capture of the Shawnee brothers. Indians friendly to the United States predicted war. The governor of Missouri reported to Harrison that the Prophet had invited the tribes west of the Mississippi to join in a war, which was to begin with an attack against Vincennes. The Indians around Fort Dearborn were disaffected and restless. A delegation of Sauk came all the way from Wisconsin to visit Fort Malden. Two surveyors running the New Purchase line were carried off by the Wea.

In the summer of 1811 Tecumseh and about three hundred Indians returned to Vincennes for another inconclusive council in which neither he nor the governor converted the other. Tecumseh condescendingly advised against white settlement in the New Purchase because many Indians were going to settle at the Prophet's town in the fall and would need that area for hunting. Tecumseh said he was going south to enroll new allies. It is important to our story that Tecumseh was absent from Indiana in that autumn of crisis. Aside from this we need note only that on his southern tour he failed to rouse the Choctaw, although he had a powerful effect on the thousands of Creek who heard his eloquence.

At this point it is important to note Governor Harrison's continuing suspicion that Tecumseh and the Prophet were British agents, or at least were being stirred to hostility by the British. British official correspondence shows that Fort Malden was a free cafeteria for hungry Indians, having served them seventy-one thousand meals in the first eleven months of 1810. The correspondence also shows that Tecumseh, in 1810, told the British he planned for war in late 1811, but indicates that the British apparently promised him nothing.

The year 1811 was a hard one for the Indians because the Napoleonic wars had sharply reduced the European market for furs. The Indians were in a state that we would call a depression. And we should remember that while Tecumseh helped the British in the War of 1812 it was not because he loved them. To him the British side was merely the side to take against the Long Knives.

In June and July of 1811 Governors William Hull of Michigan Territory and Harrison of Indiana Territory sent to the secretary of war evaluations of the frontier problems. Hull's was narrowly tactical, pessimistic, and prophetic of the easy conquest of Michigan if the British navy controlled Lake Erie. Harrison's, although in fewer words, was broadly strategic and more con-

structive: the mere fact of an Indian confederation, friendly to the British and hostile to the Long Knives, was dangerous; the Prophet's town (hereafter called Tippecanoe) was ideally located as a base for a surprise downstream attack on Vincennes, was well placed as a headquarters for more protracted warfare, and was linked by water and short portages with all the northwestern Indians; the little known country north of Tippecanoe, full of swamps and thickets, could easily be defended by natives, but the power of the United States could be brought to bear only with the greatest difficulty. Early in August, 1811, Harrison told the War Department he did not expect hostilities before Tecumseh returned from the South, and that in the meantime he intended to try to break up Tecumseh's confederacy, without bloodshed if possible. On their side, the Indians told the British they expected some deceitful trick leading to their massacre.

The military details of the Battle of Tippecanoe need not be exhausted here. Harrison's forces moved up the Wabash and arrived at Tippecanoe on November 6, 1811. When Harrison was preparing to attack, he was met by emissaries from the Prophet. Both sides agreed to a council on the next day. The troops encamped with correctly organized interior and exterior guards. Here the story diverges into two versions. White writers have said the Indians intended to confer, to pretend falsely to agree to anything, to assassinate Harrison, and to massacre the little army. They allege the Prophet had promised to make the Indians bullet proof. A Kickapoo chief later said to British officers that a white prisoner the Indians had captured told them Harrison intended to fight, not to talk. At any rate, the shooting started at about four in the morning, an unfortunate moment for the Indians because that was the hour of "stand to" or "general quarters" in the white army. Curious Indians in the brush were fired on by sentries. The Indians then killed the sentries. It was then, and only then, the Indians said, that they decided to fight. The battle lasted until mid morning, when the Indians ran out of arrows and bullets and fled. A detachment of Harrison's troops then burned the deserted village and the winter corn reserve of the Shawnee. Two days later the troops withdrew. The depth of the cleavage between Indians and whites is shown by the fact that the Potawatomi Chief Winnemac, Harrison's leading Indian adviser, came up the river with the troops but fought on the side of his bronze brethren. Harrison had 50 Kentucky volunteers, 250 United States infantry, and several hundred Indiana militia, who had been trained personally by him. Reports of losses vary. Indians admitted to losing 25 dead, but soldiers counted 38 dead Indians on the field. This was the first time in northwestern warfare than a force of whites of a size equal to the redmen had suffered only a number of casualties equal to those of their dusky enemies. Heretofore whites in such circumstances had lost more than the redmen had lost. Estimates of Indians in the fighting range from 100 to 1,000. Six hundred would probably be a fair estimate.

As battles go, Tippecanoe cannot be compared with Fallen Timbers in 1794 or Moraviantown in 1813, but it was politically and diplomatically decisive. Its most important effect was to divide the tribes in such a way as to make Tecumseh's dream fade like fog in the sun. At a council on the Mississinewa River in May, 1812, the tribes quarreled bitterly over the rashness of the young men, meaning Tecumseh's admirers, who had precipitated the fight. Tippecanoe was fought in Tecumseh's absence, against his express wish. It destroyed belief in the divine apostolate of the Prophet. After Tippecanoe there was to be no permanent confederacy. Tecumseh and his warrior chiefs could not head a proud and independent government. They could only be second class barbarian auxiliaries of the British.

Before Tippecanoe the British senior officers in Canada had discouraged Indian hostility towards the United States. The governor general obliquely reprimanded the Indian superintendent at Fort Malden for his partisanship on the side of the Indians. After Tippecanoe British military men thought it wise to cultivate the Indians. They suggested rescinding orders to Indian agents to be neutral and recommended that they issue ammunition as well as food.

In the spring of 1812 the Indian superintendent of Canada sent an Indian deputy to learn what had really happened at Tippecanoe. The agent reported that Tecumseh shrugged off the battle as only a minor skirmish. Tecumseh still had nearly a thousand warriors, drawn from twelve tribes, but they were short of weapons and food. They had received little powder and not an ounce of lead from the British in the first half of 1812. Because they lacked ammunition, the Indians could not hunt and were going hungry, and the free cafeteria at Fort Malden was busier than ever.

We might conclude that Harrison had driven Tecumseh to King George's side, but the alliance actually was natural and inevitable. Harrison's behavior met the approval of President Madison, who told Congress that military demonstration was necessary because of the menacing preparation of the Prophet.

When war was declared in 1812, Harrison was recalled to the army. But Indiana, despite two sieges and a surprise Indian attack against a small unprotected settlement, was a minor theatre of operations in the first year of the war. Thus, until Harrison's direct, victorious intervention in 1813, we are concerned mostly with the Shawnee hero, Tecumseh.

Detroit, a place of only seven hundred people, had to be held if the British at Fort Malden were to be prevented from supplying the Indians. Ohio easily raised twelve hundred militia. The regiment of regulars which had served at Tippecanoe joined this force. General William Hull took command at Dayton late in May, 1812. In July he reinforced Detroit, then crossed to Sandwich to menace the British positions. On their side, the British, with few settlers to draw on and few regulars to be spared from the struggle with Napoleon, hastened to strengthen Fort Malden physically.

Equally important, they gathered a council of several hundred Indians at the fort, among whom was, naturally, Tecumseh. In spite of the Americans' efforts to persuade the Indians to remain neutral, Tecumseh was able to hold more than three hundred warriors loyal to the British from the start. Hull fumed and proclaimed that Canadians who fought alongside Indians would not be given a chance to surrender. But Tecumseh sent west for more Indians. His power of persuasion showed itself early in August when he brought the Wyandot to join him under the Union Jack. The Wyandot had the highest tribal status and prestige among the northwestern Indians. Tecumseh thereafter tactfully gave public precedence and deference to the Wyandot warrior chief Roundhead, his military and moral inferior.

If Indians were valuable allies—a question we shall examine separately—Tecumseh was King George's best friend. He successfully led an all Indian seizure of Hull's outbound mail at Brownstown on the Huron River. Fifty of the United States troops escorting the mail were casualties but only one Indian was killed. The British regulars tried to imitate the Indian success four days later but failed in a bumbling fashion and suffered twenty-nine casualties. The British forces gained a good deal of respect both for their American opponents and for Tecumseh, who could outwit such fighters. The senior British officer in upper Canada flattered Tecumseh by asking for lessons in forest warfare and reported to the government in London that he did not believe there existed a wiser, more gallant Indian. By this time the Shawnee genius had gathered a thousand warriors, and he kept them from wasting gunpowder, and kept them sober.

When the dispirited Hull recrossed from Sandwich to Detroit, Tecumseh's pesky Indians were the first to cross in pursuit. When Hull surrendered Detroit without a shot on August 16, 1812, he explained his capitulation by saying that practically all of the northwestern Indians were British allies and that they infested his 200 mile line of communication so as to make his position hopeless. It was not quite that simple, as Harrison saw it, but to contemporary minds the Indians were responsible for the inglorious fall of Detroit. The key to the Indians was Tecumseh's magnetism, perseverance, and intelligence. And when Detroit fell, it was surely to Tecumseh's credit that his braves paddled back to Fort Malden under good discipline.

While Hull was losing Michigan, Harrison showed his wisdom in a long letter to the secretary of war, correctly sketching all of the northwestern military problems. His central proposal was to use Fort Wayne as the cardinal military base and to hang on until the United States Navy could control Lake Erie. Except that Fort Meigs became the advanced base, all of his predictions came true and all of his proposals were ultimately adopted. Harrison soon became a brigadier general in the United States Army.

The conduct of Indians in frontier warfare has always been at least interesting to later generations. It was more than interesting to contemporaries—to them it had a deadly fascination. A good deal of ink has been

used by partisans to blame the other side for starting atrocities. An English writer has insisted that the first scalp taken in the Detroit campaign was torn from an Indian by the teeth of a Kentuckian, a fact which he said the Indians used as a basis for claiming release from a promise not to fight barbarously. According to a British witness, in the absence of Tecumseh, Indians killed two prisoners of war early in August, one as a cool, calculated ceremonial revenge, the other in a raging fury. British regulars were present, but their commander, Colonel Henry Procter, said he could not intervene. There were no atrocities when Detroit surrendered. Tecumseh and a different British officer, General Isaac Brock, were present then. When fortifications near Detroit were destroyed after Hull's surrender, both Tecumseh and Roundhead were present and were well behaved. There were no murders, but there was much looting of private houses, and the Indians stole about three hundred horses. The nervousness of the British toward their excitable allies was shown when a brief armistice was arranged. A British general wrote to an American general that he would use the garrison at Detroit to protect the inhabitants, because the Indians would be impatient of the armistice. And, of course, the Fort Dearborn massacre, perpetrated by Indians intoxicated by recent British successes, happened on the day before the surrender of Detroit. Tecumseh was two hundred fifty miles from the Chicago River, but his invitation to the Indians at Dearborn to join the British has been blamed for the bloody business. The worst affair before Harrison made his intervention firmly felt was the massacre of the American wounded at Frenchtown by drunken Indians under Roundhead after Brigadier General James Winchester's disaster in the Battle of the Raisin River, in January, 1813. Tecumseh was not there. He was probably in the deep South, stirring up the Cherokee. The humane General Brock, who took Detroit, was also absent. His successor was the same Colonel Procter who had not intervened to prevent an earlier slaughter of prisoners.

General Harrison was in command of the holding operation in the northwest from spring to fall in 1813. Early in May Colonel William Dudley's force of nearly a thousand Kentuckians was trapped across the Maumee River from Fort Meigs in a brilliant maneuver by Tecumseh. Almost five hundred Kentuckians were taken prisoner. The Indians, in the presence of Procter again, set out grimly to slaughter the prisoners one by one. They killed a British soldier who interfered to protect the prisoners. When Tecumseh arrived, he intervened fiercely with threats of violence to his own warriors and stopped the slaughter. Procter is alleged to have disclaimed responsibility on the ground that the Indians were uncontrollable. A British officer has left us a shocking description of the Indian camp after this catastrophe. It was decorated with human skin (not only scalps), and its dogs were gorging on human flesh. The episode is said to have pained Tecumseh deeply because atrocious behavior by Indians would forfeit the moral basis of his cause. It was reported that when he found four Shawnee had been captured with the

United States soldiers he gave them friendly messages to take to their tribesmen, cautioned them not to fight against the British army, and sent them home unharmed. But Tecumseh's goal of teaching Indians to wage war more humanely was probably hopeless.

In early September Commodore Oliver Perry's improvised squadron annihilated British naval power above Niagara. The British spearhead at Fort Malden could now be cut off by landings to the east. General Harrison's vigil was ended. Procter moved swiftly to escape to the east, and Harrison followed even more swiftly. Tecumseh protested passionately against the British retreat, but it is said that a private lesson in the geography of upper Canada convinced him, and he in turn convinced the other braves. It was well for the British that Tecumseh was open to conviction, for the Indians in their anger might have turned their weapons against the Redcoats.

Less than a month elapsed between Perry's great victory at Put in Bay and Harrison's *coup de grace*. We cannot examine minutely Harrison's victory of October 5 at Moraviantown, sometimes called the Battle of the Thames. It was largely a victory of Kentucky over the British Empire. There were probably more Indians from Indiana on Procter's side than there were whites from Indiana with Harrison. Harrison's fighters, according to a British officer, differed little from Tecumseh's braves in their manner of fighting, while the conspicuously ornamented British regulars, he wrote, were victims led to slaughter in this kind of warfare. The leather clad United States troops were tough, brave, alert, and well commanded. Fighting as dragoons, they rode into battle, dismounted, and went to work with the rifle. The British had only twenty such mounted riflemen, all of whom fled.

The essence of the battle was that a surprised and hotly pursued Procter hastily posted his regulars in a ragged line on fairly open ground, with Tecumseh's Indians in the brush on the British flank. Harrison could not outflank his enemy. He therefore sent his mounted hellions in a direct assault against the British regulars. Thus audacity paid off. According to one report, the British were disorganized and killed or captured in less than one minute. Then the American troops dismounted and hunted the Indians through the brush until the Indians ran. It was all over in less than half an hour. Harrison won at Moraviantown with five brigades of Kentucky militia, many of them mounted, plus Colonel Richard M. Johnson's regiment of Kentucky militia cavalry, plus 30 Indians, and a mere 120 regular soldiers. Harrison's army suffered but 29 casualties. The British had 34 casualties, 33 Indians were found dead on the field, and 601 Redcoats surrendered.

What had Harrison accomplished at Moraviantown? With a force approximately equal to the enemy, he won a victory greater than Anthony Wayne's at Fallen Timbers—greater because Wayne faced only Indians who had no artillery, while Harrison battled Indians strengthened by eight hundred British regulars. Harrison's engineer officer, trained at West Point, said Harrison's tactics were novel but were justified by success. He included

Harrison in the phrase "great generals." An unnamed United States officer protested this as too faint praise, saying Harrison had used tactics developed by Frederick the Great and perfected by Napoleon: he concentrated his greatest force against the enemy's weakest point. This writer does not join the majority of historians in looking at the northwestern war with contempt. There were two decisive land victories in the War of 1812, which together broke the Indian power east of the Mississippi: Jackson's victory at Horseshoe Bend and Harrison's at Moraviantown. The Northwest was saved by Perry and Harrison less than sixteen months after the declaration of war. It is curious how often Harrison's name is omitted from the list of able generals who emerged from this war.

Another pertinent question is, what did the Indians accomplish? It can be concluded that whatever their price the Indians were no bargain to the British. They were at once indispensable and infuriating. In victory they were inhumane, in defeat they were invisible. General Procter said they were useful only when they were unnecessary. On several occasions British officers had to make decisions contrary to their best military judgment in order to keep the favor of the Indians. After any slight success the Indians were apt to go home to brag and to show off their scalps, their prisoners, and their loot. We have seen that they killed a British soldier for protecting prisoners from slaughter. In the previous summer, on a military mission under British command, they had killed and scalped a Canadian ally and tried to kill another, apparently from sheer exuberance of fighting spirit. Looking over the whole span of American history it is hard to find any instance where English speaking peoples gained any lasting military benefit from organized Indian help.

The last important question is, what became of Tecumseh? The standard popular view came to be that Colonel Richard M. Johnson shot him dead after Tecumseh had wounded him. Widespread belief in this proposition elected Johnson to the vice presidency of the United States, an office he did not ornament. Actually, the story has become a mishmash. Many of the documents were produced as reminiscences in the 1830s when Johnson was a rising political star. They were brought forward either to promote him or to frustrate his ambitions. Looking at the question in one way, *if* it were murder to have killed Tecumseh, an energetic prosecutor could get Johnson indicted, but an able criminal lawyer could get him off, on the evidence now available.

Harrison omitted Tecumseh's name from his victory dispatch, written four days after the battle, because he was not yet sure Tecumseh had been killed. When Harrison later became certain of Tecumseh's death, there were several nominees for the deed. At least twelve independent accounts of the episode, purporting to be fairly certain of the event, appeared in print from 1816 to 1872, all claiming to be founded on contemporary evidence, many contradictory, many based on hearsay, many based on the memories of old men. The two

least biased investigators were unable even to prove that Tecumseh was killed in the battle. No Indian admitted Tecumseh was dead until some time had passed. No white man was certain. From the information we have to work with, no conscientious coroner could certify the cause of death, where it occurred, when it occurred, who did it. But in a civil suit for damages, where the preponderance of evidence would be enough to settle the matter, the finger would point in descending order of probability to a Private David King of Kentucky, to Colonel William Whitley of Kentucky, who was killed in action and could not testify, and to Colonel Johnson. There is no reason to doubt that Tecumseh was killed at Moraviantown. The wife of the governor general of Canada publicly honored his mournful sister with her sympathy after the battle. But his grave is unmarked, unknown.

The legend of Tecumseh grew and grew, producing low grade poetry and drama, spurious orations, fantasies of his childhood, the election of Johnson as vice president and of Harrison as president. Only two fragments of the fable need attention here. Contrary to accounts of some artists, Tecumseh held no rank in the British army, although lesser men served as general officers in that army. And the famous "Tecumseh" statue at the United States Naval Academy is in reality the bronze replica of a ship's figurehead portraying the Delaware Chief Tammanend, the St. Tammany of Tammany Hall.

Harrison was promoted to major general. He sent his militia home, shipped his regulars east to the Niagara front, and soon resigned a second time from the regular army. Belittlers have said the whole northwestern war was a mistake, that all energy should have been concentrated on cutting the St. Lawrence River communication line. But we cannot say for certain what flag would float today over the lake and prairie province, over the Illinois and Wabash valleys, over the upper Mississippi, if the British had been firmly entrenched in those part at the time of a precariously negotiated peace. The mistake was not in trying to evict the British from the Old Northwest, but in doing it badly, until sharp young Harrison replaced doddering old Hull, and the navy's great victory let Harrison move invincibly by land.