

A History of Jonathan Alder: His Captivity and Life with the Indians. Ed. by Larry Nelson. (Akron: University of Akron Press, 2002. ix, 222 pp. Cloth, \$34.95, ISBN 1-884836-80-1. Paper, \$14.95, 1-884836-98-4.)

In 1795, Jonathan Alder settled in today's central Ohio. Shortly thereafter, other settlers began to move into the area; and within a decade the small community of Darby, composed of both white settlers and Indians, had been formed. Alder played a unique role in this young settlement. He acted as an interpreter and intermediary between the two races and helped them co-exist under unusually peaceful terms. "Here," Alder rejoiced, he "could lie down at night without fear . . . and [he] could rise up in the morning and shake hands with the white man and the Indians, all in perfect peace and safety" (119). The unusual, yet true story of this Ohio settler is told in autobiographical format in *A History of Jonathan Alder: His Captivity and Life with the Indians* (2002), edited by Larry Nelson, chief administrator at Fort Meigs State Memorial in Perrysburg, Ohio and adjunct professor of history at Firelands College of Bowling Green State University. The narrative recounts half a century of Alder's experiences, from his 1782 capture by Indians at the age of nine, to the early 1830's when the United States federal government removed the Indians with whom Alder had lived to the territory west of the Mississippi River.

Alder's story provides a rare glimpse into the Indian experience and frontier life in Ohio in the late 1700's and early 1800's at a time when the native nations of the region were experiencing the growing pressures of Anglo-American settlement. The account includes Indian traditions as commonplace as learning how to swim, traditional types of agriculture, learning to hunt, and courtship and marriage. It provides Alder's impressions of Ohio legendary figures and events, such as frontier hero Simon Kenton, the infamous Simon Girty, and the horrific burning of Colonel William Crawford at the stake. It also introduces the reader to other Ohio Indian captives, including John Bricke, Jeremiah and Robert Armstrong, James McPherson, and Samuel Davis. While Alder writes his life story as a white Ohio settler, his view of frontier Ohio is distinctly from the native perspective. Indeed, Alder claims, he "was getting to be an Indian in the true sense of the word" (80).

The Indian wars of the 1790's proved to be a turning point for Alder and the Indians on the Ohio frontier. Alder cheered the Indians' victory over General Arthur St. Clair and voiced the awe with which the Indians viewed General Anthony Wayne after the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794 and the Treaty of Greenville the following year. After the treaty, Alder left the Indian nation and moved to Darby where he became one of the first white settlers of the area. For a time, Alder, the Indians, and the frontier settlers would co-exist in peace, as his story reveals. These conditions would not last, however, as tensions increased between the two races prior to the War of 1812. As his Indian friends left the region, Alder was left in a somewhat unusual position, fearing the suspicions of his white neighbors more than the threats of an Indian attack. After their final defeat during the war, Alder's Indian friends were relegated to

reserves and then, in the early 1830's, were finally removed from their Ohio home to Kansas. With their removal, Alder considered his "career" with the Indians over and thus ended his narrative (178).

Alder's story occupied a prominent place in Ohio's popular culture in the latter half of the 1800s, and the history of the manuscript itself is just as fascinating as the life-story it contains. Alder wrote his memoirs in the 1840's, but by the time of his death in 1849, they had been lost. Portions remained, however, perhaps verbatim, within Henry Howe's monograph, *Historical Collections of Ohio* (1847). Following Alder's death, his son, Henry Clay Alder, recreated his father's story from memory, and this version formed the basis of George W. Hill's serialized account of Alder's life, "The Shawnees and the Capture of Jonathan Alder" (1882). Alder's story is told, again, in a county history by W. H. Beers (1883), supplemented by additional information gleaned from interviews with Alder's contemporaries. Half a century later, Doyle Davison, a descendant of Jonathan Alder's, produced a typewritten copy of Henry Clay Alder's manuscript. This copy, subsequently housed at the Ohio Historical Society, was forgotten until Nelson's recent discovery.

Nelson's edition includes Davison's 1935 forward, insertions of Hill's and Beers' accounts where Nelson felt they added to, or differed from Davison's version, and includes descriptive notes and a bibliography. An introduction by Nelson outlines Ohio's frontier era during which Alder lived, and provides an overview of captivity narratives such as Alder's. Although, as Nelson admits, this work does not serve the purpose of a primary source, it exists as a unique form of literature for its time. It also tells an interesting history and, if nothing else, gives valuable insight into the specifics of Jonathan Alder's life and the lives of the Ohio Indians with whom he lived. But while we have the facts of Alder's life, lost with his original manuscript is an irreplaceable perspective—the subtleties inherent in his own words and phrases as he told his personal reminiscences. The current narrative cannot help but be limited as told by members of the Anglo-American culture. At times, it presents typical nineteenth century romantic contrasts of savagery versus civilization, and readers are left wondering if these are Alder's sentiments or those of his chroniclers. Nonetheless, students of Ohio history, the Great Lakes frontier, and Indian life will find that this small book offers an interesting and, indeed, a vital point of view of frontier Ohio history—the Native American point of view as told by Jonathan Alder.

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