

Ohio's First Peoples. By James H. O'Donnell III. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004. ix, 176pp Cloth, \$17.95, ISBN 0-8214-1525-5.)

Ohio University Press, a noted publisher of works on Ohio and regional history, has recently added James H. O'Donnell's *Ohio's First Peoples* to their collection, which includes *Religion in Ohio*, *Buckeye Women*, and Civil War memoirs by Ohioans. Professor O'Donnell who has written several works on American Indians is uniquely qualified to bring this significant aspect of Ohio's history to the general public, especially with the continuing celebration of the state's bicentennial.

Although there are no Indian reservations in the Buckeye State in the twenty-first century, the Indians did leave their imprint before their forced departure in 1843. O'Donnell points out not only the remnants of ancient civilizations that inhabited the region like the Hopewell and the Adena, but the numerous Indian place names that dot it. He proves to us that European settlers were not the only ones who would have agreed with the English traveler of 1817 who declared that Ohio was "a country beautiful and fertile . . . affording all that nature decreed for the comfort of man." For several millennia Ohio has been a magnet for settlers with water, mineral deposits, and fertile land in abundance. In this slim volume of 128 pages of text, O'Donnell tantalizes us with an overview of the rich history of the often forgotten, first peoples of Ohio. This is a project that is not designed for the specialist, but for the general public who want to explore further the achievements of Ohio's Indians and the disturbing challenges that they faced with the arrival of the Europeans, especially during the eighteenth century.

In following a chronological pattern, O'Donnell begins his study with the Adena and the Hopewell by quoting surveyor Rufus Putnam, one of the founders of Marietta, who declared them peoples of "ingenuity, industry, and elegance," especially after examining their earthworks at the mouth of the Muskingum River. Here the author introduces us to their culture and what can be understood because of what they left behind. He is well acquainted with the archeological literature on these cultures and summarizes it appropriately for the larger audience so as not to lose the interest and excitement of the reader. Those who desire more information have the benefit of an exhaustive endnote format, coupled with an extensive bibliography to guide them. The only topic that he does not introduce in this section relates to the Paleo-Indians who predated these vibrant cultures and used Ohio, such as Noble's Pond in Stark County, as one of their bases for their nomadic life style.

The major focus of *Ohio's First Peoples* is the series of encounters between the Europeans and the Indians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the same time we see the transformation of Indian economies which became dependent on European goods and the all-important fur trade while the Europeans' "constant demand for land, treaties concluded through fraud . . . , dishonest trading practices, recurrent outbreaks of European-introduced diseases and basic hatred" (29) undermined Indian cultures and forced many to move westward. Many of them had already migrated from the Atlantic seaboard with the encroachments of the whites. To add to the complexity of their lives, the Indians were enmeshed in the European struggle between the British and the French, sometimes called the second hundred years' war (from 1689 to 1815). For the Indians, however, their involvement in this political and economic web ended in the French and Indian War and the Battle on the Plains of Abraham with the defeat of the French. In discussing this encounter, Professor O'Donnell made his only noticeable error in the book by placing the Plains near Montréal rather than immediately outside the city of Québec. British

parsimony (especially after the exhaustive expenditures during this last “world” war) and its Indian policy of control led to Pontiac’s Rebellion and continued unrest in the Ohio country.

Indian-American relations continued to deteriorate during the fledgling United States’ war for independence. The image of despair and violence that Allan Eckert evoked in *That Dark and Bloody River* was reiterated by O’Donnell especially in his recounting of the massacre at Gnadenhutten. The onward march of the Europeans continued during the war and especially after it. Treaties with the British, like the one at Fort Stanwix which recognized the Ohio River and the western boundary for European settlements, were treated as worthless documents as large numbers of easterners moved into the fertile lands of the Ohio River valley. O’Donnell captures the desperation of the Indians and their desire to hold on to their lands in the face of this European onslaught. Military encounters, guerrilla actions, and occasional truces masked as treaty conferences marked the closing years of the eighteenth century. The Battle of Fallen Timbers and the resultant Treaty of Greenville in 1795 were two of the most prominent, especially with the resolve of General Anthony Wayne and the Washington presidency. But even these encounters could not stop the endless advance of the Europeans and proved to be only temporary measures at best. The War of 1812 and Tecumseh’s confederacy were unfortunately the last gasps of real resistance.

The last chapter of O’Donnell’s book focuses on the unfamiliar, i.e. the agonizing closing of Indian presence in Ohio. The Wyandots and few other Indian communities remained in the northern region of the state after the war with Britain, but were pressured to cede more and more of their lands. During these waning years, Indian mores were once again re-directed, this time with determined efforts by Christian missionaries like the Methodist John Stuart. By 1843, all of the remaining Ohio Indians were forced west to unspecified lands beyond the state of Missouri. Following the unethical “traditions” of the past, they were also defrauded in terms of the true worth of their lands and concomitant improvements which were under-assessed. As O’Donnell states in his conclusion: “Ohio’s first peoples had passed from the scene, leaving behind a rich legacy of place names and long-ignored artifacts.”

Marietta College’s James O’Donnell has presented us with a thoughtful, and at times a thought-provoking, introduction to the glories and the plight of Ohio’s Indians. Here we see the rich pattern of interaction with one another and with the Europeans whose ethnocentrism prevented them from understanding these cultures. This work was not written to give a detailed study of the Indians, but to provide a door through which the readers would explore these peoples and understand the challenges they faced before and after the arrival of the Europeans. The comprehensive bibliography and thorough system of endnotes (many of them discursive) provide superb avenues for additional research on this facet of Ohio’s history. The illustrations and maps are a strong feature and make it possible for the reader to understand and visualize well the topics under consideration. At times, one would want to fault the author for oversimplification such as in his discussion of the 1783 Treaty of Paris, but then one must realize the goals of the author in this work—this is only an introduction and superb one at that. By following the O’Donnell’s research path in the bibliography, one can uncover the larger picture. This book addresses the general public who want to know more about the history of Ohio and would also be most useful for high school and college students who are focusing on this region in their studies.

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