

The Historic Shawnee Nation

Historical information on the past and present day Shawnee People	
Total population	
	14,000
Regions with significant populations	
	Oklahoma (also a small community in Ohio)
Languages	
	Shawnee, English
Religions	
	traditional beliefs
Related ethnic groups	
	Sac and Fox, Kickapoo

The **Shawnee**, or *Shawano*, are a people native to North America. They originally inhabited the areas of Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky and Pennsylvania. Today, the largest part of the Shawnee nation still resides in Oklahoma; another group live in Ohio.

- Like many other Algonquians, the Shawnee generally joined forces with the French against the British during the conflicts of the [French and Indian Wars](#). After the [American Revolutionary War](#), two Shawnee brothers rose to prominence. Tenskwatawa known as the Prophet, preached a rejection of white ways, especially Christianity and alcohol, and a return to the traditional lifestyle. He also claimed to have power to fight against the whites, a claim that was proved false by [William Henry Harrison's](#) successful attack on his village. His brother, [Tecumseh](#), was a great [orator](#) and visionary and dreamed of a great Indian country of allied tribes ranging from [Canada](#) to the [Gulf of Mexico](#). Tecumseh was not opposed to the white people; and he even joined forces with the British against the Americans hoping for their support in establishing an Indian homeland. However, he was killed in the [War of 1812](#), and their dream of a united Indian rebellion and homeland faded. Today Tecumseh is revered as one of the greatest Indian warriors and political leaders, and a national hero in Canada.

History

The prehistoric origins of the Shawnees are quite uncertain. The other Algonquian nations regarded the Shawnee as their southernmost branch, and other Algonquian languages have words similar to "shawano" meaning "south." However, the stem *shawan* does not mean "south" in Shawnee, but "moderate, warm (of

weather)." In one Shawnee tale, Shawaki is the deity of the south. Some scholars have speculated that the Shawnee are descendants of the people of the prehistoric Fort Ancient culture of the Ohio country, although other scholars disagree, and no definitive proof has been established.

Before contact with Europeans, the Shawnee tribe consisted of a loose confederacy of five divisions which shared a common language and culture. These division names have been spelled in a variety of ways, but the phonetic spelling is added after each following the work of C. F. Voegelin.

- *Chillicothe* (Chalahgawtha) [Chalaka, Chalakatha]
- *Hathawekela* (Asswikales, Sweickleys, etc.) [Thawikila]
- *Kispokotha* (Kispoko) [kishpoko, kishpokotha]
- *Mequachake* (Mekoche, Machachee, Maguck, Mackachack) [Mekoche]
- *Pekuwe* (Piqua, Pekowi, Pickaway, Picks) [Pekowi, Pekowitha]

Membership in a division was inherited from the father. Each division had a primary village where the chief of the division lived; this village was usually named after the division. By tradition, each Shawnee division had certain roles it performed on behalf of the entire tribe, although these customs were fading by the time they were recorded in writing by European-Americans and are now poorly understood.

This arrangement gradually changed due to the scattering of the Shawnee tribe from the seventeenth century through the nineteenth century.



Shawnee distribution around 1755

Sometime before 1670, a group of Shawnee had migrated to the Savannah River area. The English of Province of Carolina based in Charles Town were first contacted by these Shawnees in 1674, after which a long lasting alliance was forged. The Savannah River Shawnee were known to the Carolina English as "Savannah Indians." Around the same time other Shawnee groups migrated to [Florida](#), [Maryland](#), [Pennsylvania](#), and other regions south and east of the Ohio Country. Historian Alan Gally speculated that this Shawnee diaspora of the middle to late seventeenth century was probably driven by the Iroquois Wars that began in the 1640s. The Shawnee became known for their widespread settlements and migrations and their frequent long-distance visits to other Indian groups. Their language became a lingua franca among numerous tribes, which along with their experience helped make them leaders in initiating and sustaining pan-Indian resistance to European and Euro-American expansion.^[4]

Prior to 1752, they had a headquarters at Shawnee Springs near Winchester, Virginia, where the father of the later chief Cornstalk had his court. At some point, they had settled in the Ohio country, the area that is now [West Virginia](#), southern [Ohio](#), and northern [Kentucky](#).

The [Iroquois](#) later claimed the Ohio Country region by right of conquest, regarding the Shawnees and Delawares who resettled there as dependent tribes. A number of Iroquois also migrated westward at this time, and became known as the Mingo. These three tribes—the Shawnee, the Delaware, and the Mingo—became closely associated in the Ohio country.

Sixty Years' War, 1754–1814

After the Battle of the Monongahela, in 1755, many Shawnees fought with the French during the early years of the [French and Indian War](#) until they signed the Treaty of Easton in 1758. When the French were defeated, in 1763, many Shawnees joined Pontiac's Rebellion against the British, which failed a year later.

The Royal Proclamation of 1763, which was issued during Pontiac's Rebellion, drew a boundary line between the British colonies in the east and the Ohio Country, which was west of the [Appalachian Mountains](#). The Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768, however, extended that line westwards, giving the British a claim to what is now West Virginia and Kentucky. Shawnees did not agree to this treaty: it was negotiated between British officials and the Iroquois, who claimed sovereignty over the land although Shawnees and other Native Americans hunted there.

After the Stanwix treaty, Anglo-Americans began pouring into the Ohio River Valley. Violent incidents between settlers and Indians escalated into Dunmore's War in 1774. British diplomats managed to isolate the Shawnees during the conflict: the Iroquois and the Delawares stayed neutral, while the Shawnees faced the British colony of Virginia with only a few Mingo allies. Lord Dunmore, royal governor of Virginia, launched a two-prong invasion into the Ohio Country. Shawnee Chief Cornstalk attacked one wing, but was defeated in the only major battle of the war, the Battle of Point Pleasant. In the Treaty of Camp Charlotte, Cornstalk and the Shawnees were compelled to recognize the Ohio River boundary established by the 1768 Stanwix treaty.

Many other Shawnee leaders refused to recognize this boundary, however, and when the [American Revolutionary War](#) broke out in 1775, a number of Shawnees advocated joining the war as British allies in an effort to drive the colonists back across the mountains. The Shawnees were divided: Cornstalk led those who wished to remain neutral, while war leaders such as Chief Blackfish and Blue Jacket fought as British allies.



At Vincennes in 1810, Tecumseh loses his temper when William Henry Harrison refuses to rescind the Treaty of Fort Wayne.

In the Northwest Indian War between the [United States](#) and a confederation of Native American tribes, the Shawnee combined with the Miamis into a great fighting force. After the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794, most of the Shawnee bands signed the Treaty of Greenville a year later, in which large parts of their homeland were turned over to the United States.

Other Shawnee groups rejected this treaty and joined their brothers and sisters in [Missouri](#) and settled near Cape Girardeau. By 1800, only the Chillicothe and Mequachake tribes remained in Ohio while the Hathawekela, Kispokotha, and Piqua had migrated to Missouri.


In 1805, a nativist religious revival led by Tenskwatawa emerged. Tenskwatawa urged natives to reject the ways of the whites, and to refrain from ceding any more lands to the United States. Opposing Tenskwatawa was

the Shawnee leader Black Hoof, who was working to maintain a peaceful relationship with the United States. By 1808, tensions with white settlers and Black Hoof's Shawnees compelled Tenskwatawa and his brother [Tecumseh](#) to move further northwest and establish the village of Prophetstown near the confluence of the Wabash and Tippecanoe Rivers (near present-day Battle Ground, Indiana).

Tenskwatawa's religious teachings became widely known. Although [Tecumseh](#) would eventually emerge as the leader of this confederation, it was built upon a foundation established by the religious appeal of his younger brother, known as the Prophet. Relatively few of these followers were Shawnees. Although Tecumseh is often portrayed as the leader of the Shawnees, most Shawnees in fact had little involvement with Tecumseh or the Prophet, and chose instead to move further west or to remain at peace with the United States.

In September 1809, [William Henry Harrison](#), governor of the newly formed Indiana Territory, negotiated the Treaty of Fort Wayne in which a delegation of half-starved Indians ceded 3 million acres (12,000 km²) of Native American lands to the United States.^[5] Harrison was under orders from Washington to negotiate with Indians that claimed the lands that they were ceding. However, he disregarded these as none of the Indians he met with lived on the lands that they ceded.



 This 1848 drawing of Tecumseh was based on a sketch done from life in 1808. Benson Lossing altered the original by putting Tecumseh in a British uniform, under the mistaken (but widespread) belief that Tecumseh had been a British general. This depiction is unusual in that it includes a nose ring, popular among the Shawnee at the time, but typically omitted in idealized depictions.

Tecumseh's opposition to the treaty marked his emergence as a prominent leader. Although Tecumseh and the Shawnees had no claim on the land sold, he was alarmed by the massive sale. Tecumseh revived an idea advocated in previous years by the Shawnee leader Blue Jacket and the [Mohawk](#) leader Joseph Brant, which stated that Indian land was owned in common by all tribes, and thus no land could be sold without agreement by all. Not ready to confront the United States directly, Tecumseh's primary adversaries were initially the Indian leaders who had signed the treaty. An impressive orator, Tecumseh began to travel widely, urging warriors to abandon accommodationist chiefs and to join the resistance at Prophetstown (Tippecanoe). Tecumseh insisted that the Fort Wayne treaty was illegal; he asked Harrison to nullify it, and warned that Americans should not attempt to settle on the lands sold in the treaty.

While Tecumseh was in the south, Governor Harrison marched up the Wabash River from Vincennes with more than 1,000 men on an expedition to intimidate the Prophet and his followers. They built Fort Harrison (near present Terre Haute) on the way. While at Fort Harrison, Harrison received orders from Secretary of War William Eustis authorizing Harrison to use force if necessary to disperse the Indians at Prophetstown. On

November 6 1811, Harrison's army arrived outside Prophetstown, and Tenskwatawa agreed to meet Harrison in a conference to be held the next day.

Tenskwatawa, perhaps suspecting that Harrison intended to attack the village, decided to risk a preemptive strike, sending out his warriors (about 500) against the American encampment. Before the dawn of the next day, the Indians attacked, but Harrison's men held their ground, and the Indians withdrew from the village after the battle. The victorious Americans burned the town and returned to Vincennes. Harrison (and many subsequent historians) claimed that the Battle of Tippecanoe was a deathblow to Tecumseh's confederacy. Harrison, thereafter nicknamed "Tippecanoe," would eventually become President of the United States largely on the memory of this victory.

The battle was indeed a severe blow for Tenskwatawa, who lost prestige and the confidence of his brother. However, although it was a significant setback, Tecumseh began to secretly rebuild the alliance upon his return from the south. Since the Americans were at war with the British in the War of 1812, Tecumseh also found British allies in [Canada](#). Canadians would subsequently remember Tecumseh as a defender of Canada, but his actions in the War of 1812—which would cost him his life—were a continuation of his efforts to secure Native American independence from outside dominance.

So live your life that the fear of death can never enter your heart. Trouble no one about their religion; respect others in their view, and demand that they respect yours. Love your life, perfect your life, beautify all things in your life. Seek to make your life long and its purpose in the service of your people. Prepare a noble death song for the day when you go over the great divide. Always give a word or a sign of salute when meeting or passing a friend, even a stranger, when in a lonely place. Show respect to all people and grovel to none. When you arise in the morning give thanks for the food and for the joy of living. If you see no reason for giving thanks, the fault lies only in yourself. Abuse no one and no thing, for abuse turns the wise ones to fools and robs the spirit of its vision. When it comes your time to die, be not like those whose hearts are filled with the fear of death, so that when their time comes they weep and pray for a little more time to live their lives over again in a different way. Sing your death song and die like a hero going home.—Chief Tecumseh, Shawnee Nation

After the war



 Tenskwatawa


Several hundred Missouri Shawnee left the United States in 1815 together with some Delaware people and settled in [Texas](#), which was at that time controlled by [Spain](#). This tribe became known as the *Absentee Shawnee*; they were once again expelled in 1839 after Texas had gained its independence three years earlier. These people settled in [Oklahoma](#), close to present-day Shawnee and were joined, in 1845, by Shawnee from Kansas that shared their traditionalist views and beliefs.

In 1817, the Ohio Shawnee signed the Treaty of Fort Meigs, ceding their remaining lands in exchange for three reservations in Wapaughkonetta, Hog Creek (near Ada) and Lewistown (here together with the [Seneca](#)).

[Missouri](#) joined the Union in 1821 and, after the Treaty of St. Louis in 1825, the 1,400 Missouri Shawnees were forcibly relocated from Cape Girardeau to southeastern [Kansas](#), close to the Neosho River.

During 1833, only the Black Bob's band of Shawnee resisted. They settled in northeastern Kansas near Olathe and along the Kansas (Kaw) River in Monticello near Gum Springs.



 Shawnee Chief Black Hoof (Catecahassa) was a staunch opponent of Tecumseh's confederation and an ally of the United States in the War of 1812.

About 200 of the Ohio Shawnee followed the Prophet Tenskwatawa and joined their Kansas brothers and sisters in 1826, but the main body followed Black Hoof, who fought every effort to give up the Ohio homeland. In 1831, the Lewistown group of Seneca-Shawnee left for the Indian territory (present-day Oklahoma). After the death of Black Hoof, the remaining 400 Ohio Shawnee in Wapaughkonetta and Hog Creek surrendered their land and moved to the Shawnee Reserve in Kansas.

During the [American Civil War](#), the Black Bob's band fled from Kansas and joined the *Absentee Shawnee* in Oklahoma to escape the war. After the Civil War, the Shawnee in Kansas were once again dispelled and moved to Oklahoma—whereupon the Shawnee part of the former Lewistown group became known as the *Eastern Shawnee* and the former Missouri Shawnee became known as the *Loyal Shawnee* (due to their allegiance with the Union during the war). The latter group was regarded as part of the Cherokee nation by the United States because they were also known as the *Cherokee Shawnee*.

Culture

The Shawnee language is a Central Algonquian language spoken in parts of central and northeastern [Oklahoma](#) by only around 200 **Shawnee**, making it very endangered. It was originally spoken in [Ohio](#), West Virginia, [Kentucky](#), and [Pennsylvania](#). It is closely related to the other Algonquian languages Mesquakie-Sauk (Sac and Fox and Kickapoo). The stem for the word Shawnee, *shawa*, is historically preserved as a word meaning "warm," in reference to the Shawnee weather beings of the sun, and this word was also rooted in the word for "south wind." The Shawnee considered the Delaware Indians as their spiritual and cultural grandfathers, as well as the root for all of the Algonquin tribes. Identical language proves their oral history.

As with most American Indian groups, the most popular and traditional ritual was the expression of dance. The ritual year of the Shawnee opened with the Spring Bead Dance and concluded with the Fall Bead Dance. A Green Corn Dance was celebrated by some Shawnee at the beginning of the ritual year as well, being related to the first ripening of the corn and maize in early summer. They revered the moon because of their hunting and gathering lifestyle, and the lunar cycles played a role in the times of their ritual dances.

The Shawnee had a reputation for being [nomadic](#), so they adapted a migratory [hunter-gatherer](#) lifestyle out of necessity and survival. Having very little political organization within the Shawnee, each of the five Shawnee divisions operated almost completely independently, which made it difficult to discern who the "head chieftain" was when they would all convene together. A chieftain was hereditary and bore the title for life, passing it on to his sons. War chiefs however were chosen based on their conquests and skill.

The Shawnee believed in a supreme being called *Moneto* who gave blessings to the deserving and sorrow to those in disfavor. The "Great Spirit" of the Shawnee was a grandmother who wove a net which she would drop over the world, catching those who proved worthy to go to a better life; those who fell through the net would suffer as the world ended. Shawnee were to be accountable to their own [conscience](#) for judgment:

The "Golden Rule" of the Shawnees was: "Do not kill or injure your neighbor, for it is not him that you injure, you injure yourself. But do good to him, therefore add to his days of happiness as you add to your own. Do not wrong or hate your neighbor, for it is not him that you wrong, you wrong yourself. But love him, for Moneto loves him also as he loves you."

Contemporary Shawnee

Today there are three federally recognized tribes and one state recognized tribe in the United States:

- *Absentee Shawnee*, consisting mainly of *Hathawekela*, *Kispokotha*, and *Pekuwe*, living on the Absentee Shawnee Indian Reservation
- *Eastern Shawnee*
- *Loyal Shawnee*, or *Cherokee Shawnee*, formerly an official part of the [Cherokee](#) nation
- The *United Remnant Band of the Shawnee Nation*, or *Kispokotha*; recognized by the State of Ohio.

A population survey done in 2004 indicated that there are approximately 12,000 people living in the United States today of Shawnee descent, mostly in the states of [Ohio](#), [Pennsylvania](#), and [Kansas](#). There are presently about 14,000 Shawnee, most in [Oklahoma](#), although some are scattered throughout [Alabama](#);

The Shawnee Nation, United Remnant Band) reside in Ohio, while other descendants of non-affiliated Shawnee, some from historical remnant pocket communities, are scattered throughout the old homelands and elsewhere.

Notable Shawnee

Some notable Shawnee individuals include:

- [Tecumseh](#), the outstanding Shawnee leader, and his brother Tenskwatawa attempted to unite the Eastern tribes against the expansion of white settlement; see also Tecumseh's War. This alliance was broken up by the Americans, leading to the Shawnee's expulsion to Oklahoma.
- **Blue Jacket**, also known as *Weyapiersenwah*, was an important predecessor to Tecumseh, and a leader in the Northwest Indian War. Blue Jacket surrendered to General ["Mad" Anthony Wayne](#) at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, and signed the Treaty of Greenville, ceding much of Ohio to the United States.
- **Cornstalk**, Blue Jacket's most prominent predecessor, led the Shawnee in Dunmore's War, and attempted to keep the Shawnee neutral in the [American Revolutionary War](#).
- **Blackfish**, known in his native tongue as *Cot-ta-wa-ma-go* or *kah-day-way-may-qua*, was a war chief of the Chillicothe division of the Shawnee. Little is known about him, since he only appears in written historical records during the last three years of his life, primarily because of his interactions with the famous American frontiersmen [Daniel Boone](#) and Simon Kenton.

- **Black Hoof**, also known as *Catecahassa*, was a respected Shawnee chief and one of Tecumseh's adversaries. He thought the Shawnee had to adapt culturally to the ways of the whites in order to prevent decimation of the tribe through warfare.

Notes

1. ↑ James H O'Donnell, *Ohio's First Peoples*, (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004, [ISBN 0821415255](#))
2. ↑ James H. Howard, *Shawnee!: The Ceremonialism of a Native Indian Tribe and its Cultural Background*, (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1981. [ISBN 0821404172](#) [ISBN 0821406140](#))
3. ↑ [Shawnee Traditions](#), Vision ePublications. Retrieved November 12, 2007.
4. ↑ Alan Gallay, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717*, 55, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002, [ISBN 0300101937](#))
5. ↑ [Treaty with the Delawares, Etc., 1809](#). Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau. Retrieved November 12, 2007.
6. ↑ [Shawnee History](#), Lee Sultzman. Retrieved November 12, 2007.
7. ↑ [The Shawnee](#), J. Miller, 1998. Retrieved April 22, 2008.
8. ↑ Excerpted from *The Life of a Shawnee* by W. L. Mundell.

References

- Callender, Charles. "Shawnee" in *Northeast: Handbook of North American Indians*. vol. 15, ed. Bruce Trigger. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1978. [ISBN 0160723000](#)
- Clifton, James A. *Star Woman and Other Shawnee Tales*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984. [ISBN 0819137138](#)
- Edmunds, R. David. *The Shawnee Prophet*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1983. [ISBN 0803218508](#).
- Edmunds, R. David. *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*. New York, NY: Pearson Longman, 2006. [ISBN 0321043715](#)
- Edmunds, R. David. "Forgotten Allies: The Loyal Shawnees and the War of 1812" in *The Sixty Years' War for the Great Lakes, 1754–1814*. 337-51. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2001. [ISBN 0870135694](#)
- Gallay, Alan. *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002. [ISBN 0300101937](#)
- Howard, James H. *Shawnee!: The Ceremonialism of a Native Indian Tribe and its Cultural Background*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1981. [ISBN 0821406140](#).
- O'Donnell, James H. *Ohio's First Peoples*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004. [ISBN 0821415255](#)
- Sugden, John. *Tecumseh: A Life*. New York, NY: Holt, 1997. [ISBN 0805061215](#)
- Sugden, John. *Blue Jacket: Warrior of the Shawnees*. Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000. [ISBN 0803242883](#)
- Waldman, Carl. *Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes*. Checkmark Books, 2006. [ISBN 9780816062744](#)

External links

All links retrieved November 26, 2007.

- [Absentee Shawnee Tribe](#)
- [Shawnee History](#)
- [Shawnee Indian Mission](#)

- [Shawnee Nation URB](#)
- ["Shawnee Indian Tribe" at Access Genealogy](#)
- [Treaty of Fort Meigs, 1817](#)

Credits

New World Encyclopedia writers and editors rewrote and completed the *Wikipedia* article in accordance with *New World Encyclopedia* [standards](#). This article abides by terms of the [New World Encyclopedia:Creative Commons CC-by-sa 3.0](#) License (CC-by-sa), which may be used and disseminated with proper attribution. Credit is due under the terms of this license that can reference both the *New World Encyclopedia* contributors and the selfless volunteer contributors of the Wikimedia Foundation.