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Dispelling the Myth: Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Indian Life in Kentucky

by A. Gwynn Henderson

Misconceptions about the people who lived in what is now the state of Kentucky before it was settled by Euro-Americans and Afro-Americans take many forms. These incorrect ideas range from the specific (how the native peoples dressed, how their houses appeared, how they made their living, what language they spoke) to the general (the diversity of their way of life, the length of their presence here, their place of origin, their spiritual beliefs, and the organization of their political and economic systems).

The most enduring fallacy about Kentucky's indigenous inhabitants — the myth of the Dark and Bloody Ground — concerns how these peoples used the land. This legend would have us believe that Indians never lived permanently anywhere in Kentucky, but only hunted and fought over it. The myth has been and continues to be perpetuated in children's books,¹ in scholarly books and journals,² in histories,³ and in magazines.⁴ It persists despite the fact that "Kentucky" is simply a geographic construct, despite the

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Unless indicated, accompanying photographs appear courtesy of the author.

¹William Cunningham, *The Story of Daniel Boone* (New York, 1964).

²Willard R. Jillson, *Early Frankfort and Franklin County, Kentucky* (Louisville, 1936), 3-7.

³Lewis Collins, *Historical Sketches of Kentucky* (Maysville, 1847), 17-18; Carl E. Kramer, *Capital on the Kentucky: Two Hundred Years of Frankfort & Franklin County* (Frankfort, 1986), 5.

⁴The name of the Department of Fish and Wildlife's monthly magazine is *The Happy Hunting Ground*. A featured section in every 1992 issue of *Muzzle Blasts*, the official publication of the National Muzzle Loading Rifle Association, is called "From the Dark and Bloody Ground." This supposedly appropriate title is in recognition of Kentucky's bicentennial of statehood. In 1985, Elizabeth A. Moize's article about Daniel Boone in *National Geographic* claimed, 824, that "Except for brief periods, the Indians built no villages in Kentucky . . . reserving the land for hunting."

continued use of many place names that refer to Indians,⁵ and despite the fact that no such notion exists for the surrounding “geographic constructs” of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and Tennessee.⁶ It is a legacy of our pioneer past,⁷ handed down from generation to generation since the first Euro-American settlement of central Kentucky. Therefore, it seems only fitting, in a volume devoted to Kentucky images, that we reexamine the Dark and Bloody Ground myth. How did it evolve? How can we assess its ultimate validity? What can archaeological and archival research offer concerning Kentucky’s Indian inhabitants, especially those who lived in the Bluegrass and along the Ohio River?

I

“A dark cloud hung over the land, which was known as the Bloody Ground”

The most likely source of the myth of the Dark and Bloody Ground was a statement made during Richard Henderson’s negotiation and signing of a March 16, 1775, treaty transferring a large part of what is now Kentucky from the Cherokee to the Transylvania Company. As the transaction was being completed, The Dragging Canoe, a Cherokee Indian leader present at the signing, was reported to have said that a dark cloud hung over the land known as the Bloody Ground.⁸ The Dragging Canoe’s cryptic statement implies that some kind of conflict was associated with the region Henderson was purchasing. But whether it represented the reciting of historical fact or a warning for the future is difficult to evaluate on the basis of the phrase alone.

⁵Such names include, among others, Indian Bottom, Indian Camp Creek, Indian Old Fields, Indian Grave Gap, and Shawnee Spring. Thomas P. Field, *A Guide to Kentucky Place Names* (Lexington, 1961).

⁶Apparently, the myth includes West Virginia. Dr. Kim A. McBride, a native West Virginian and a historical archaeologist in the University of Kentucky’s Department of Anthropology, was told no permanent aboriginal settlement occurred in her home state. Such a pronouncement is as untrue of West Virginia as it is of Kentucky.

⁷John Filson, *The Discovery, Settlement, and present state of Kentucke*, The North American Experience Series (New York, 1962; orig. pub. 1784), 8.

⁸Archibald Henderson, *The Conquest of the Old Southwest: The Romantic Story of the Early Pioneers into Virginia, the Carolinas, Tennessee, and Kentucky, 1740-1790* (New York, 1920), 233-34; Douglas W. Schwartz, *Conceptions of Kentucky Prehistory: A Case Study in the History of Archaeology* (Lexington, 1967), 9.

Certainly, in 1775 the region was being contested.⁹ The Cherokee, along with other native groups, used portions of the region with permission of the Shawnee, who claimed much of it.¹⁰ The Iroquois wanted to control the Ohio Valley and were encouraged by the English under terms of an earlier agreement made with the Shawnee.¹¹ Moreover, the English colonies of North Carolina and Virginia also laid claim to parts of the region.¹² Henderson's new title could only complicate these matters.

Given this web of conflicting interests, it is one thing to imply that control of the region had been disputed in the past or would be in the future. The latter possibly would be borne out by fighting in the Bluegrass after the mid-1770s between the Shawnee, who were trying to maintain their control, and the settlers, who were trying to wrest the land from them in order to build communities. It is a completely different matter to interpret The Dragging Canoe's statement to mean that native peoples had fought over but never lived in what is now Kentucky.

It is possible that during the years immediately following 1775, the myth of the Dark and Bloody Ground was applied only to the present and immediate past history of the Bluegrass. At that time, most Indian villages had been moved north of the Ohio River for safety, and the indigenous people returned in small groups only to hunt and camp during the winter. Yet, even before Kentucky became a state, the myth had taken on the all-encompassing perspective that is expressed today: all of Kentucky was never the permanent home for any indigenous groups. Rather, the land was merely a "happy hunting ground" or the scene of "pre-historic carnages."¹³

II

This myth owes its persistence to a number of factors:¹⁴ differences between Euro-American and aboriginal ideas of land ownership, distinctions the settlers perceived between historic Indian culture and the remains left by prehistoric Indian groups, the benefit

⁹Archibald Henderson, *Conquest of the Old Southwest*, 196-251.

¹⁰Schwartz, *Conceptions of Kentucky Prehistory*, 9-10.

¹¹Archibald Henderson, *Conquest of the Old Southwest*, 357-58 (n. 137).

¹²*Ibid.*, 237-51.

¹³Jillson, *Early Frankfort and Franklin County*, 4.

¹⁴Schwartz, *Conceptions of Kentucky Prehistory*, 9-11.

land speculators derived from encouragement of this myth, the violent conflicts between Indians and Bluegrass settlements during the 1770s and 1780s, and the legend's early codification by widely read author and land speculator John Filson. To the settlers, land was property, like jewelry or clothing. And like any possession, it could be bought and sold. To the Indians, land could be used, but it could not be owned by anyone. Land was controlled or considered the territory of a particular kin-group, lineage, or village, not an individual. Other groups could negotiate for the use of the land, but no group could own it. When the settlers "bought" land, then, they were buying it for their personal, exclusive use. When the Indians "sold" land, though, it was access to the land or use-rights they were selling, not the land itself. Land was available for all to use because from the Indians' point of view the land could not be owned. The settlers considered this to mean that "no one" owned the land and therefore had no claim on it, which meant it was free for the taking.

Another factor served to support the myth: the real cultural differences between the prehistoric and historic Indian groups. The settlers recognized that the Indians they encountered did not build mounds. Because the pioneers believed that the Indians they knew lacked the technology and cultural sophistication to build mounds, they concluded that other people, a "vanished race" called the Moundbuilders,¹⁵ had to have built the mounds and earthworks in central and northeastern Kentucky. Thus, the settlers did not consider the Indians they knew to be related to these prehistoric people. The native peoples they met face to face were newcomers, too, and so the Euro-Americans considered their own claims as newcomers to the land as valid as the Indians'.

The pervasiveness of the myth and the tenacity with which it has survived to the present may also be due in part to the violent late-eighteenth-century settler-Indian conflicts and to the early publication of *The Dragging Canoe's* statement. At the height of Indian raids, Euro-American settlers undoubtedly considered that a dark cloud had indeed passed over Kentucky, turning it into a bloody ground. Filson's book, *The Discovery, Settlement, and present state*

¹⁵See Gordon R. Willey and Jeremy A. Sabloff, *A History of American Archaeology* (San Francisco, 1974), 30-54, for an excellent discussion of the Moundbuilder controversy and its resolution.

of *Kentucke*, followed on the heels of this violent fighting and twice ascribes Kentucky by its violent, supposedly Indian, name. (Filson also indicates the Indians called Kentucky the Middle Ground.)¹⁶ The historian-speculator refers to Kentucky as the “Dark and Bloody Ground” and as “an object of contention, a theatre of war, from which it is properly denominated the Bloody-Grounds.”¹⁷

III

Twentieth-century archaeological research documents that Kentucky, like the other states in the middle Ohio River Valley, was inhabited by native peoples for over twelve thousand years.¹⁸ From the earliest migratory hunters late in the Ice Age, through the hunters and gatherers of the Archaic period, to the moundbuilding small-time gardeners of the Woodland period who traded with distant peoples for copper and marine shell, to the farmers whose permanent villages contained upwards of one thousand or more inhabitants, research at archaeological sites in every county has recovered the artifacts of Kentucky’s past inhabitants. The places where thousands of chipped stone arrowheads and groundstone axes have been recovered across the state were not the scenes of combat as historian Filson claimed.¹⁹ Rather, the sites were the locations of Indian camps and villages built in the same place over hundreds or even thousands of years. Did Indians ever live in Kentucky? Absolutely!

People were living in what is now Kentucky by 10,000 to 9,000 B.C. and perhaps even earlier.²⁰ They lived in small, mobile groups within large territories, hunting woolly mammoths, mastodons, and other animals and foraging for plant foods. The climate in the Ohio Valley during this, the Paleoindian period, resembled that of Canada. As the regional climate developed into what it is like today, Indian life became more complex and varied as groups became increasingly familiar with the resources of their

¹⁶Filson, *Kentucke*, 8.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 8, 10.

¹⁸David Pollack, ed., *The Archaeology of Kentucky: Past Accomplishments and Future Directions*, 2 vols. (Frankfort, 1991).

¹⁹Filson, *Kentucke*, 8, 10.

²⁰Kenneth B. Tankersley, “Paleoindian Period,” in Pollack, *Archaeology of Kentucky*, 73-142.

area. In cycle with the seasons, they hunted deer, exploited aquatic resources such as fish and freshwater clams, and collected wild plant foods, especially hickory nuts. Group size increased, as did the overall regional population. This period, from 7,000 to 1,000 B.C., is called the Archaic period by archaeologists.²¹

During the Woodland period (1000 B.C. to A.D. 1000),²² the use of plant food resources increased to a point that small gardens were planted by the region's inhabitants, though hunting, fishing, and plant food collecting continued to be their mainstay. Increased differences between the material goods of the regions point to the development of distinctive cultures. Some groups continued to live mobile lives, while others chose to build more permanent villages. The building of large burial mounds in the Bluegrass region reflects the increased complexity of ceremonial life, while the exchange of ritual items with groups outside the Ohio Valley points to the participation of these people in extraregional religious movements.

Two different cultures, both of which were village farming peoples, developed in the region during the Late Prehistoric period (A.D. 1000-1750). Along the floodplains and lowlands of the Mississippian plateau in western Kentucky lived groups archaeologists refer to as Mississippian,²³ while those denominated as Fort Ancient lived in the rolling uplands of the Bluegrass and the rugged mountains of eastern Kentucky.²⁴ These people were the ancestors of the Indian groups first visited by the explorers and traders, and with whom the settlers later fought. The Mississippian people lived in large, fortified towns that contained over one thousand people, in smaller villages, and in single-family hamlets. At their towns they built plazas and large flat-topped mounds of earth on which they placed their temples. These villages were part of an extensive exchange network that extended throughout the midwestern and southeastern United States. The Mississippian farmers grew corn, beans, and squash in their fields; hunted deer, elk, wild turkey, and the plentiful waterfowl of the backwater sloughs; and collected wild plants. Mississippian leaders were chosen from par-

²¹Richard W. Jefferies, "Archaic Period," in *ibid.*, 143-246.

²²Jimmy A. Railey, "Woodland Period," in *ibid.*, 247-374.

²³R. Barry Lewis, "Mississippian Period," in *ibid.*, 375-466.

²⁴William E. Sharp, "Fort Ancient Period," in *ibid.*, 467-557.

ticular families, and their society was made up of different social classes. The Fort Ancient people lived in large, permanent summer villages, which sometimes exceeded five hundred people. In the winter the able-bodied dispersed into smaller hunting camps of fewer than fifty people. Their villages were surrounded by their fields of corn, beans, squash, sunflower, and tobacco. Although they depended mainly on their crops for food, they also hunted deer, bear, elk, and wild turkey; trapped smaller game; fished; and collected wild plant foods. Leaders of Fort Ancient communities were selected on the basis of personal achievement. After A.D. 1400, Fort Ancient groups, like the Mississippians, also participated in long-distance exchange.

It is clear from this very brief synopsis that the middle Ohio River Valley, including what is now Kentucky, was inhabited permanently and for a long time before arrival of the Euro-Americans. Yet, there may still be some element of truth to The Dragging Canoe's statement, if it is considered within a particular region and a more restricted timespan. In those areas of Kentucky first settled by the Euro-Americans, the Bluegrass in central Kentucky and lands along the Ohio River, it is possible that many of the villages may have been abandoned shortly before the settlers arrived. Documents suggest that the Indians relocated their permanent summer villages north of the Ohio River, for fear of reprisals from the British (after the fall of Fort Duquesne in 1758).²⁵ However, they may have continued to live in the area in small groups during the winter. The practice of establishing winter hunting camps may have been interpreted by some settlers to mean that the indigenous groups only hunted in the area. The settlers would have encountered only small groups of Indians, primarily men, while the women and children remained at the secluded winter camps.

IV

In order to consider the validity of The Dragging Canoe's statement more completely, it is necessary to review what is known about Indian culture in the Bluegrass and along the Ohio River during that time directly before and contemporary with the earliest

²⁵A. Gwynn Henderson, Cynthia E. Jobe, and Christopher A. Turnbow, *Indian Occupation and Use in Northern and Eastern Kentucky During the Contact Period (1540-1795): An Initial Investigation* (Frankfort, 1986), 52-54. See also note 34.



British Museum



Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

“The Contact period was a time when two vastly different cultures, one indigenous and one foreign, encountered each other and underwent significant developments that altered them both. It is the story of enormous change and the eventual transformation of native cultures, brought about by the appearance of Europeans in the New World and the influence of the disease, technology, and world view they brought with them.” The rendering of a pre-Contact Indian in body paint (*left*) stands in stark contrast to the image drawn from life in 1796 of a Shawnee dressed in silver ear and septum ornaments, blue cloth shirt and breechclout, red cloth leggings, and red garters with blue zigzag.

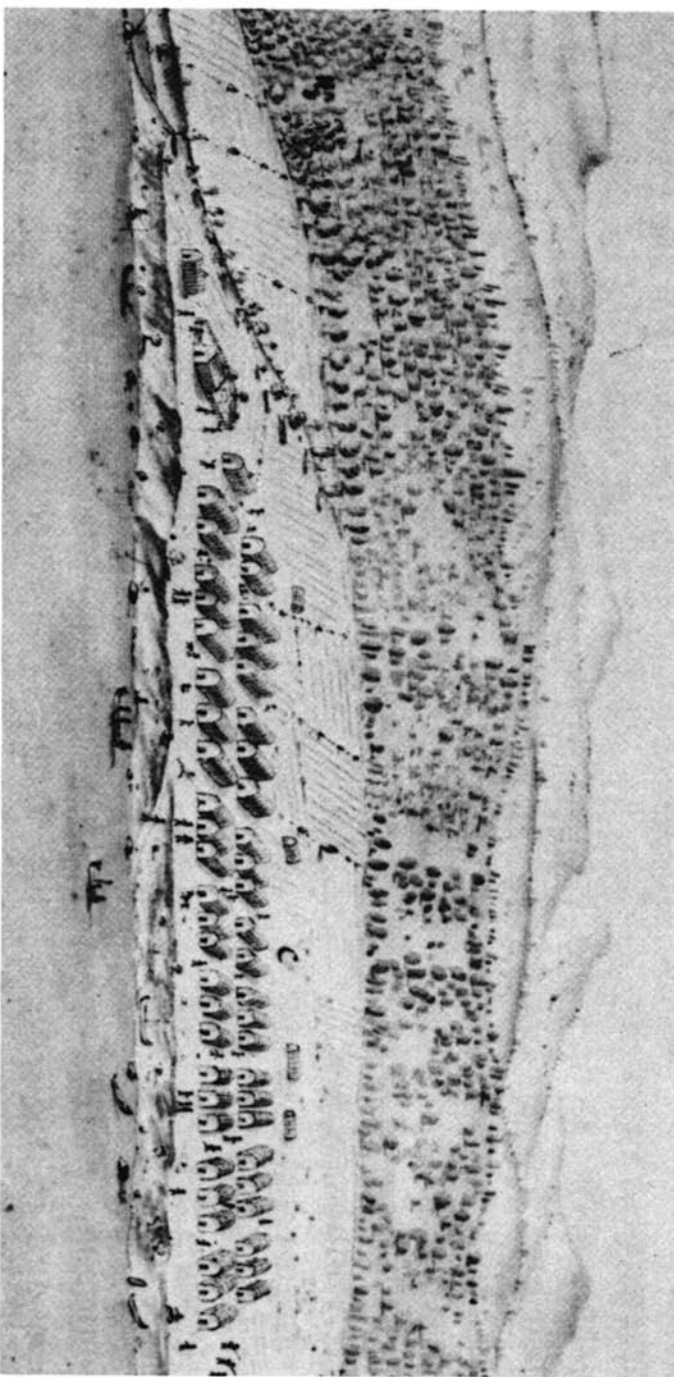
Euro-American arrival. Occurring on the threshold of written history,²⁶ this era is sometimes called the Contact period (A.D. 1540-1795) by archaeologists.

²⁶*Ibid.*; A. Gwynn Henderson, ed., *Fort Ancient Cultural Dynamics in the Middle Ohio Valley*, Monographs in World Archaeology, no. 8 (Madison, Wisc., 1972).

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²⁷A. Gwynn Henderson et al., *Indian Occupation and Use*, 193, 198-99; A. Gwynn Henderson, David Pollack, and Christopher A. Turnbow, "Chronology and Cultural Patterns," in A. Gwynn Henderson, ed., *Fort Ancient Cultural Dynamics*, 270-78; Christopher A. Turnbow and Cynthia E. Jobe, "The Augusta Site," in *ibid.*, 83-97; John R. Hale, "A Fort Ancient Village at Augusta, Kentucky [1981]," Office of State Archaeology, University of Kentucky; Joseph E. Granger and Philip J. DeBlasi, "Archaeological Data Recovery in a Segment of the West Second Street Forced Main Right-of-Way [appendix, 1983]," in Hale, "Fort Ancient Village," 260-98; Lee H. Hanson, Jr., "The Hardin Village Site, Gp 22, A Late Prehistoric Village in Northeastern Kentucky" (Master's thesis, University of Kentucky, 1963); *idem*, *The Hardin Village Site*, Studies in Anthropology, no. 4 (Lexington, 1966); David Pollack, Mary Lucas Powell, and Audrey Adkins, "A Preliminary Study of Mortuary Patterns at the Larkin Site, Bourbon County, Kentucky," in David Pollack, ed., *Current Archaeological Research in Kentucky* (Frankfort, 1987), 188-203; Christopher A. Turnbow and Cynthia E. Jobe, "The Goolman Site: A Late Fort Ancient Winter Encampment in Clark County, Kentucky," in David Pollack, Charles D. Hockensmith, and Thomas N. Sanders, eds., *Late Prehistoric Research in Kentucky* (Frankfort, 1984); Christopher A. Turnbow, Cynthia E. Jobe, Nancy O'Malley, Dee Ann Wymer, Michelle Seme, and Irwin Rovener, *Archaeological Excavations of the Goolman, Devary, and Stone Sites in Clark County, Kentucky*, Department of Anthropology, Archaeological Report, no. 78 (Lexington, 1983); A. Gwynn Henderson, *Kentuckians Before Boone* (Lexington, 1992).

²⁸Important sources of archaeological data include A. Gwynn Henderson et al., *Indian Occupation and Use*; A. Gwynn Henderson and David Pollack, "The Laughlin Site," in A. Gwynn Henderson, ed., *Fort Ancient Cultural Dynamics*; David Pollack and A. Gwynn Henderson, "A Preliminary Report on the Contact Period Occupation of Lower Shawneetown (15 GP 15), Greenup County, Kentucky," in Donald B. Ball and Philip J. DeBlasi, eds., *Proceedings of the Symposium on Ohio Valley Urban and Historic Archaeology*, vol. 1 (Louisville, 1983), 1-10; David Pollack and A. Gwynn Henderson, "Contact Period Developments in the Middle Ohio Valley," paper read at the Forty-eighth Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, Pittsburgh, 1983; *idem*, "A Mid-Eighteenth Century Historic Indian Occupation in Greenup County, Kentucky," in Pollack et



“We can get a picture of Fort Ancient society based on the size of their houses, the items buried with their dead, and on analogies drawn from studies of tribal groups elsewhere in the world and North America.” Lower Shawneetown probably resembled the Mohawk village of Caughnawaga, on the St. Lawrence River in Canada, pictured above in a mid-eighteenth-century sketch.

Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

The Indians who lived in this region in the 1600s went about their day-to-day lives very much like their ancestors had done for over two hundred years. Some aspects of their daily lives, such as the foods they grew and the animals they hunted, had apparently changed little in almost six centuries. They lived in large, permanent villages during much of the year, but from the late fall to early spring those who were not sick, or too old or too young to leave, dispersed into smaller, winter hunting camps. Located near rivers and larger streams, the villages consisted of clusters of homes. These houses were long, rectangular structures with rounded corners. Wall and roof frameworks were made of wooden posts set into the ground, chinked with small, rounded pebbles or rocks collected from the river. Either thatch, bark, mats, or skins covered these frameworks. Interior partitions broke up the space within each house. Doors were placed at each end and hearths were located on the floor in the center. Pits for storage lined the walls. Bundles of dried food also hung from the rafters. Areas beyond the houses served as places for trash disposal.

We can get a picture of Fort Ancient society based on the size of their houses, the items buried with their dead, and on analogies drawn from studies of tribal groups elsewhere in the world and

al., eds., *Late Prehistoric Research in Kentucky*, 1-24.

A. Gwynn Henderson et al., *Indian Occupation and Use*, synthesizes the ethnohistoric and historic data for this period but focuses almost exclusively on English-language sources. Works consulted include Charles A. Hanna, *The Wilderness Trail, or the Ventures and Adventures of the Pennsylvania Traders on the Alleghany Path, With Some New Annals of the Old West and the Records of Some Strong Men and Some Bad Ones*, 2 vols. (New York, 1911); Lois Mulkearn, comp. and ed., *George Mercer Papers, Relating to the Ohio Company of Virginia* (Pittsburgh, 1954); Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, vols. 17-18 (Madison, Wisc., 1906-1908); idem, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, vol. 69 (Cleveland, 1900); idem, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, vol. 1 [1750-1764] (Cleveland, 1904); Erminie Wheeler Voegelin, *An Ethnohistorical Report on the Indian Use and Occupancy of Royce Area II, Ohio and Indiana*, vol. 1 (New York, 1974); Kenneth P. Bailey, ed., *The Ohio Company Papers, 1753-1817* (Arcata, Calif., 1947); Lucien Beckner, "Eskippakithiki: The Last Indian Town in Kentucky," *Filson Club History Quarterly* 6 (1932): 355-82; Randolph C. Downes, *Council Fires on the Upper Ohio* (Pittsburgh, 1940); Albert T. Volwiler, *George Croghan and the Western Movement, 1741-1782* (Cleveland, 1926); and unpublished collections of Lyman C. Draper at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin (available on microfilm). Sources of maps included Lloyd Arnold Brown, *Early Maps of the Ohio Valley* (Pittsburgh, 1959); William Edward Myer, "Indian Trails of the Southeast," Bureau of American Ethnology, Annual Report, no. 42 (Washington, D.C., 1928), 727-857; and Thomas D. Clark, *Historic Maps of Kentucky* (Lexington, 1979).

North America.²⁹ It can be estimated that between thirteen and twenty-six people lived in each house. Therefore, three hundred to five hundred people lived in each village. Each household was made up of extended families or kin-based groups, and each village was made up of several of these groups, which are called lineages or clans. One or more leaders within the village, selected not by birth but by the strength of their own personal character and achievements, were responsible for maintaining order. Among other duties the leaders settled internal disputes, coordinated exchange, and negotiated alliances with other villages.

The winter hunting camps were located in narrow stream valleys or in rockshelters in the mountains, away from the large rivers and larger streams. These encampments were composed of oval sleeping huts surrounding a larger, rectangular structure that served as the focus for domestic activities. Bark covered the frameworks of the sleeping structures, themselves constructed of wooden posts set into the ground and chinked with rocks. Fewer than five people could live in the oval huts, based on an estimate of floor space. Therefore, probably fewer than thirty people, representing extended family or kin-related groups, lived in the winter camps. Winter camps in rockshelters were arranged to fit within the space protected by the shelter walls and ceiling. Some food, such as corn, was brought from the village, but subsistence activities focused mainly on hunting, meat and hide processing, and the collecting and processing of wild plants.

Despite the fact that these people lived part of the year in these winter camps, their permanent residences were their summer villages. And because they were farmers, fields surrounded their summer villages. Crops were tended, with digging sticks and freshwater mussel shell hoes. Northern Flint corn, beans, squash, tobacco, and sunflower were among the plants they cultivated. They smoked tobacco in stone pipes made from Ohio pipestone or

²⁹Conrad Heidenreich, *Huron: A History and Geography of the Huron Indians, 1600-1650* (Toronto, 1971); Alan W. Johnson and Timothy Earle, *The Evolution of Human Societies: From Foraging Group to Agrarian State* (Stanford, 1987); Bruce G. Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660* (Kingston, 1987); idem, "Maintaining Economic Equality in Opposition to Complexity: An Iroquoian Case Study," in Stedman Upham, ed., *The Evolution of Political Systems* (Cambridge, 1990); David Pollack and A. Gwynn Henderson, "Toward a Model Fort Ancient Society," in A. Gwynn Henderson, ed., *Fort Ancient Cultural Dynamics*, 281-94.

catlinite. They also collected wild plants, such as hickory nuts, grapes, sumac, and pokeberry, to use as food or medicine. They stored their food in aboveground cribs or silos, or in ceramic jars made from a mixture of clay and crushed mussel shell. Water and other items also were stored in these jars, which were used to cook food as well. Smaller, hemispherical bowls were used to serve smaller food portions.

Hunting was also an important subsistence pursuit, carried out in small groups or by individuals equipped with bows and arrows tipped with either triangular, chipped-stone arrowheads or antler tines that had been sharpened to a point. Deer, bear, and elk were hunted, as were wild turkey, squirrel, fox, raccoon, and rabbit. Hides were prepared with bone beamers and multipurpose teardrop-shaped scrapers, which were also used in plant processing and woodworking. Other kinds of tools, such as awls and punches, and ornaments, such as beads and pendants, were manufactured from animal bone and animal teeth. Using nets woven from grasses, as well as bone fishhooks, the Indians also fished the rivers and streams. They collected freshwater mussels and ate raw or in stews the mollusk inside. The Indians used the whole shells as spoons or to cultivate their crops, or crushed them to use in the manufacture of ceramic vessels. They also used shell as the raw material for ornaments. Disc beads were made from local shells, while other ornaments, called gorgets, were made from the shells of marine mollusks. These items, bearing designs similar to those on ornaments recovered from villages in Tennessee, were acquired through long-distance exchange networks with groups living in the Southeast. Gorgets were made from portions of lightning whelk shells. Marine snail or cone shells also were pierced and strung on cordage and worn as necklaces.

What the groups living in the Bluegrass and along the Ohio River exchanged in return is not known. They may have provided certain food items, medicinal plants, or worked animal hides, but it would be difficult to identify the exchange of these materials, since they are perishable. It is possible that salt was exchanged for marine shell ornaments. Many weak salt licks were located in their homeland,³⁰ and broad, shallow vessels made by molding clay in

³⁰Ian W. Brown, *Salt and the Eastern North American Indian: An Archaeological Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980).



University Press of Kentucky

“Ornamental gorgets, made from the shells of marine mollusks, were acquired through long-distance exchange networks with groups living in the Southeast.” This gorget was excavated at a prehistoric (1400s-1600s) Hardin Village site in Greenup County.

pits have been found near some salt licks and at several villages inhabited in the 1600s. It is possible that the Indians living in this region produced more salt than they needed so that they could exchange it for marine shell with groups to the south. Alternatively, they could have traded Ohio pipestone, a soft, easily carved stone from which smoking pipes were made. Regardless of what they exchanged, the fact that the native inhabitants of the Bluegrass and middle Ohio Valley wanted marine shell ornaments from the Southeast suggests that they may have shared with those groups more than just a need for ornaments. The fact that they placed these marine shell ornaments with their dead suggests these objects served some religious function, a practice which itself implies shared religious beliefs.

The seventeenth-century Indians of the Bluegrass and middle Ohio Valley buried their dead within their villages. Most individuals were interred in shallow pits; some were covered with limestone slabs. The graves were usually located in clusters beyond the houses in distinct mortuary areas. Graveside ceremonies included



“Some individuals were buried with marine shell ornaments. Others were buried with shell disc beads, ceramic vessels, stone tools, bone tools, and bone ornaments. The metal ornaments are commonly bits and pieces of other items, like metal pots, that were cut into pieces, rolled and strung, cut and pierced, and worn as pendants, or as bracelets or wire rolled into coils.”



ritual feasting, at the conclusion of which a ceramic vessel was broken over the limestone slabs. Some individuals were buried with marine shell ornaments, which suggests these individuals had achieved some kind of importance during their lives. Others were buried with shell disc beads, ceramic vessels, stone tools, bone tools, and bone ornaments. Some graves contain brass and copper ornaments and, very rarely, glass beads. The metal ornaments are commonly bits and pieces of other items, like metal pots, that were cut into pieces, rolled and strung, cut and pierced, and worn as pendants, or as bracelets or wire rolled into coils. Direct contact with Euro-Americans was not necessary to acquire these ornaments; they were passed along the same exchange routes as the marine shell. These items do not occur in the houses or trash pits in the villages, but only in graves. By the mid- to late 1600s, the Indians interred some of their dead in multiple graves of from four to thirty individuals, or in mass graves estimated to contain the remains of over one hundred individuals densely packed into a small space. This kind of burial may reflect the appearance of foreign diseases in the region. Because these people had never been exposed to Euro-American diseases, these illnesses spread quickly through the communities and the region, killing large numbers of people.

One topic remains to be discussed — that of ethnic identity. It is difficult to correlate completely an archaeologically documented culture with a historically documented people because the criteria used to define archaeological cultures are different from those used to identify historic groups of people. Archaeologists *create* archaeological cultures by examining artifacts and noting their temporal and spatial boundaries. These “heuristic” cultures seldom represent “real” historically documented groups, which are difficult to distinguish on the basis of artifacts alone. Thus archaeological cultures, such as Fort Ancient, cannot be equated to tribes. Similarly, historically documented groups are not static; their customs can change, in some situations quite radically, especially during times of contact such as occurred in Kentucky in the late 1600s and in the 1700s. Also, many different names can be given in the documents to the very same people, depending on a number of factors, some as unrelated as the country of origin of the *person* who assigned the name.

Very early historic references to groups in the Bluegrass and in the middle Ohio Valley are not eyewitness accounts, but rumors

told to explorers of other regions. The cultures mentioned consist of the Shawnee, the Mosopelea, and the Honniasontkeronon.³¹ Other assemblages could have lived in the area, but many had vanished or been absorbed into other bands before Euro-Americans actually visited the region. Despite these difficulties, researchers generally agree³² that the archaeologically documented Fort Ancient culture of the seventeenth century in this region is related in some way to the historically documented people who in the mid-1700s were called Chaouanon by the French, or Shawanese by the English.³³ Today they are referred to as the Shawnee.

Indian life in Kentucky in the mid-1700s was similar to, but also differed in many ways from, that of the seventeenth century. The Indian population had been severely reduced due to the spread of infectious diseases like smallpox, measles, and influenza. In the space of a single generation, these sicknesses had afflicted entire villages, killing many inhabitants. Though not completely wiped out, much of the Indians' culture was lost. Lacking a system of writing, these people had passed down information by word of mouth about their ceremonies and traditions from generation to generation. With the deaths of so many people who possessed this knowledge, much of these peoples' culture, their shared beliefs and ideas, disappeared forever. The survivors of the Euro-American diseases were forced to adapt and adjust to this new situation. Some stayed in the region, joining with the survivors of their villages to build new villages. In other cases, people from different ethnic groups joined together, creating large multiethnic villages, or the remnants of the tribes moved away, beyond the sphere of Euro-American influence. The early decades of the eighteenth cen-

³¹A. Gwynn Henderson et al., *Indian Occupation and Use*, 168-72, 174-75, 180; Voegelin, *An Ethnohistorical Report on the Indian Use and Occupancy*; James B. Griffin, *The Fort Ancient Aspect: Its Cultural and Chronological Position in Mississippi Valley Archaeology* (Ann Arbor, 1943); Louise Phelps Kellogg, ed., *Early Narratives of the Northwest, 1634-1699* (New York, 1917); Jerry E. Clark, "Shawnee Indian Migration: A Systems Analysis" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 1974).

³²Charles Callender, "Shawnee," in Bruce G. Trigger, ed., *Northeast*, vol. 15, Smithsonian Institution, *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William Sturtevant (Washington, D.C., 1978), 622-35; Clark, "Shawnee Indian Migration"; James B. Griffin, ed., *Archaeology of the Eastern United States* (Chicago, 1952); David Pollack and A. Gwynn Henderson, "A Mid-Eighteenth Century Historic Indian Occupation in Greenup County, Kentucky," in Pollack et al., eds., *Late Prehistoric Research in Kentucky*.

³³A. Gwynn Henderson et al., *Indian Occupation and Use*, 27.

ture also witnessed the arrival of native groups from the East, who were trying to distance themselves from the American colonists.³⁴

The information from eyewitness accounts that becomes available for the Bluegrass and the middle Ohio Valley beginning in the late 1730s, coupled with archaeological data, helps to paint a picture of mid-eighteenth-century Indian life. The names of some of the groups that lived here are known: the Shawnee, the Mingo (Seneca-Iroquois), the Cherokee, and Tutelo.³⁵ Much of the information centers on Lower Shawneetown, called Sonnioto by the French and possibly Chillicothe by the Indians themselves,³⁶ which was founded in the late 1730s and abandoned in 1758.³⁷

The Indians of the mid-1700s, like those of the 1600s, lived in large, permanently occupied villages. In the case of Lower Shawneetown, it was almost twice as large as early villages, if eyewitness estimates of twelve hundred inhabitants are correct. The village plans also were similar to those of the 1600s: house clusters arranged along large rivers or streams. Lower Shawneetown also was described as having a council house larger than the others and covered in light bark.³⁸

Some houses resembled those of the 1600s — long, rectangular buildings of single-set post construction. But others, described in the ethnohistoric sources as huts, cabins, or houses, were different. Standing side by side with the former, these new types of houses were large, built of squared logs, and covered in bark or clapboard. Some even had chimneys. These structures

³⁴These accounts are presented and evaluated in these major sources: Hanna, *The Wilderness Trail* . . . ; Mulkearn, comp. and ed., *George Mercer Papers*; "Diary of a Trip from Detroit to the Ohio River, May 22 - August 24, 1745," in *Archives of the Seminary of Quebec* (Quebec, 1745); Rev. A. A. Lambing, ed., "Celoron's Journal," *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society Publications* 29 (1920): 335-96, 481-83; Thwaites, ed., *Collections* . . . Wisconsin, vols. 17-18; idem, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, vol. 69; idem, ed., *Early Western Travels*, vol. 1; Alfred T. Goodman, ed., *Journal of William Trent* (Cincinnati, 1871); A. Gwynn Henderson et al., *Indian Occupation and Use*.

³⁵A. Gwynn Henderson et al., *Indian Occupation and Use*, 168-76, 181-91; Voegelin, *Ethnohistorical Report on Indian Use and Occupancy*; Griffin, *Fort Ancient Aspect*; William Elsey Connelley, *The Founding of Harman's Station* (New York, 1910); James Mooney, *Historical Sketch of the Cherokee*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Annual Report, no. 19, pt. 1 (Washington, D.C., 1900), 3-584; William C. Sturtevant, "Oklahoma Seneca-Cayuga," in Trigger, ed., *Northeast*, 537-43.

³⁶Hanna, *The Wilderness Trail* . . . , 1: 146, 327.

³⁷A. Gwynn Henderson et al., *Indian Occupation and Use*, 21-62.

³⁸Mulkearn, comp. and ed., *George Mercer Papers*, 16.

reflect the incorporation of Euro-American house construction techniques and design by the Indians. Unlike seventeenth-century villages, mid-1700s villages were multitribal, created by the amalgamation of the survivors of the epidemics and the new Indian groups moving west. Despite this multitribal character, villages were still referred to as Shawnee, Miami, or Delaware towns because one group predominated. It is unclear from the documents exactly how village society was organized. However, various men are mentioned by name as chiefs at Lower Shawneetown, such as Big Hominy, Taminy Buck, and Lo-a-peck-a-way.³⁹ These men met in council with colonial government representatives at Lower Shawneetown and traveled to Philadelphia to meet with officials there. They undoubtedly fulfilled a leadership role in mid-eighteenth-century Indian society, and probably, like their seventeenth-century counterparts, were the heads of kin-based groups. It also can be inferred, given the spatial arrangement of these villages, that the residents were organized along kin lines, although how the other ethnic groups residing in these towns were incorporated (possibly through marriage, adoption, or the development of fictive kinship ties) is unknown.

Dispersal into winter camps in the mid-eighteenth century is described in the documents, which reflects the persistence of another seventeenth-century activity, the continuation of native subsistence practices. These people farmed and hunted as their forefathers had done. The remains of charred Northern Flint corn and the remains of animals similar to those found at seventeenth-century villages have been documented archaeologically. Ethno-historic sources also provide evidence for the continued pursuit of wild game and the collecting of wild plants, though these sources also mention that game was scarce and that the Indians had to range considerable distances for wild foods.⁴⁰ Given the suggested similarity of subsistence at this time with that of the 1600s, it is not surprising that mid-1700s ceramic vessels were very similar to those of the seventeenth century, both in form and method of manufacture. These vessels occur as fragments in trash pits and as whole pots in burials. Triangular arrowheads and stone scraping

³⁹Hanna, *The Wilderness Trail . . .*, 2: 138-39.

⁴⁰A. Gwynn Henderson et al., *Indian Occupation and Use*, 61.



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“Mid-1700s ceramic vessels were very similar to those of the seventeenth century, both in form and method of manufacture. These vessels occur as fragments in trash pits and as whole pots in burials.”

tools continued to be manufactured and used in hunting, hide preparation, plantfood processing, and woodworking. Stone grinding tools and pipes, like those of the seventeenth century, also were used, but so were Euro-American kaolin pipes.

By the mid-1700s, certain items of indigenous manufacture had been replaced by Euro-American counterparts. The documents mention that these people made salt, yet the saltpan vessels of the past are absent. The Indians appear to have substituted large iron pots for these ceramic vessels in the processing. While the arrows of their ancestors were used in hunting, so were Euro-American firearms acquired in trade. The bone beamers and awls, the shell hoes and spoons, and the ornaments made from both materials were no longer being made, replaced in part by iron knives, glass beads, and silver earrings. The wide variety of artifacts of Euro-American manufacture and their occurrence in trash pits signifies that these items had been incorporated into all aspects of daily life. Once the Indians became dependent on firearms and other functional items, they were bound into close economic relationships with the Euro-Americans, a dependency which undermined their self-sufficiency.

The dead in the mid-1700s, as in the 1600s, were buried in clusters of two or three in mortuary areas near the houses. Most individuals, like those of the seventeenth century, were interred singly in shallow pits; the multiple or mass burials of earlier times are lacking. Although no stone-covered graves have been documented, indirect evidence suggests that burial structures were

erected over some deceased individuals. Grooves entirely encircling the body, or parallel grooves along the long axis and post holes at each end of the burial pit, are interpreted as the remains of decayed wood or other materials used in the construction of burial structures. Unlike seventeenth-century burials, those of the mid-1700s did not contain bone and shell fragments. Some of these items had been replaced by Euro-American counterparts (silver earrings and broaches or glass beads), while others were no longer available because of the disruption of the indigenous exchange networks. This discontinuity, along with the decimation of native groups by disease and the new cultural expressions that resulted, suggests that the rich religious symbolism reflected by the engraved gorgets of the 1600s was no longer important or was expressed in other ways. Ceramic vessels and other items of native manufacture continued to be placed in the graves of the deceased in the mid-1700s, however, along with a few items of Euro-American manufacture. While these items are not identical to those placed with the dead of the 1600s, no wholesale replacement of aboriginal items by Euro-American items in the graves of mid-1700s Indians in the Bluegrass and the middle Ohio Valley can be documented. This phenomenon did occur outside the region.

A very important difference between seventeenth- and mid-eighteenth-century Indian life lies within the realm of trade. It has already been mentioned how trade with the Euro-Americans drew the Indians into a dependency on these foreign goods. But the very nature of trade had changed as well. Exchange was no longer carried out between aboriginal groups over long distances, nor was it integrated into the social fabric of the culture and restricted and controlled by village leaders. English or French traders who came from the East — either by way of the rivers or overland through the mountains on trails — brought goods directly to the native inhabitants and built trading houses in their midst. Each person could trade individually. And the goods exchanged — deerskins for metal pots, cloth, firearms and accoutrements, powder, and silver jewelry — were mainly functional items. The Euro-Americans also brought their politics and conflicts, and the Indians in Kentucky found themselves caught up in disputes over land claims and allegiances. Alliances and treaties were made, broken, and made again. One commodity, alcohol, had a seriously disruptive influence on mid-eighteenth-century Indian life.



“Trade with the Euro-Americans drew the Indians into a dependency on these foreign goods. Exchange was no longer carried out between aboriginal groups over long distances. English or French traders brought goods directly to the native inhabitants and built trading houses in their midst.” Artifacts excavated from Lower Shawneetown include (*above, clockwise*) Jew’s harp, stone pipe, tinkling cones, silver earbob, and pendants; (*below, top to bottom*) kettle bail ear, scissor handle, and clasp knife.



Many more changes within Indian culture would occur after the mid-eighteenth century, but this is where the story of their permanent occupancy of the Bluegrass and the lands along the Ohio River ends. If the actions of the inhabitants of Lower Shawneetown can be used to gauge the actions of other groups,⁴¹ it would be safe to say that near the end of the French and Indian War, after the English captured Fort Duquesne at the forks of the Ohio in 1758, many of Kentucky's Indians moved north. They no longer maintained large villages south of the Ohio River, though they may have held onto smaller communities and winter camps in the region. Thus was the stage set for the development of the myth of the Dark and Bloody Ground.

V

As the first wave of Euro-American settlers reached the Bluegrass and the middle Ohio Valley, the new arrivals encountered small groups of Shawnee, Mingo, Delaware, Miami, and Wyandot (Huron) men who were hunting in the region. While the Indians' primary summer villages were located north of the Ohio River, which the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix established as the boundary between Indian lands to the north and English lands to the south, small communities or winter hunting camps continued to be occupied south of the Ohio River. As more and more Euro-Americans moved to the region, the Indians relocated even these communities north of the Ohio or moved to more remote areas. By the 1770s, the hunting parties had been transformed into raiding parties that harassed the early settlers.

Therefore, it is not surprising that The Dragging Canoe's 1775 statement about a "dark and bloody ground" was interpreted to mean the Indians had never owned, bought, or lived in, but had merely fought over, the land south of the Ohio River. Certainly, the nature of Indian use and occupancy of this region witnessed by the earliest settlers would have borne this out. This factor, combined with the very different world views of the settlers and the Indians, the rush to profit on land speculation, and the realities of the con-

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 52-54; "Journal of Fredrick Post from Pittsburgh, 1758," in Samuel Hazard, ed., *Pennsylvania Archives*, series 1, vol. 3 (Philadelphia, 1853), 560; "George Croghan's Journals, . . . [May 23, 1765]," in Clarence W. Alvord and Clarence E. Carter, eds., *Collections of the Illinois State Historical Society* [British series, vol. 2], vol. 11, *The New Regime, 1765-1767* (Springfield, Ill., 1916), 27.

flicts that shortly would follow, resulted in the myth of the Dark and Bloody Ground.

Myths are perpetuated, despite a consideration of the facts, as long as people distrust those who are different from themselves and as long as dominant groups refuse to see the value of all ways of life. The myth of Kentucky as the Dark and Bloody Ground is not valid; it applies neither to the entirety of the Commonwealth nor to the complete expanse of its prehistoric past. Careful consideration of the information available from archaeological, ethnohistorical, and historical sources exposes it as nothing more than that: a myth.