THE TREATY AT FORT FINNEY, 1786
Broken Agreements, Broken Relationships

As colonists and later the Americans, crowded into Native American lands in the Ohio Valley and beyond, large chunks of those land where usurped from the natives. This story was typical of the many mistreatment foisted upon the Indians. The Fort Finney treaty was a prelude to the war for Ohio's


************************************************

In January 1786 some 230 Shawnee men and women, most of them Mekoches, made their way slowly down the Great Miami. Their leaders were Moluntha, head chief of the tribe; Kekewepelothy (Great or Tame Hawk), known as Captain Johnny, and Aweecony, both prestigious war chiefs; Nianimsica; Wapachcawela; Red Pole, a relative of Blue Jacket; Nihipeewa; Nehinissica, one of the most respected of the younger chiefs; and Cawechile, the senior female civil chief. They traveled with heavy hearts, because they were going at last to treat with the American commissioners, at Fort Finney, a square stockade the Big Knives had thrown up at the mouth of the Great Miami.

TROUBLE IS COMING UPON US FAST

They were doing it without the endorsement or support of the Indian confederacy, doing, in fact, what the Wyandots and Delawares of the Sandusky had done. nd yet this was the same Captain Johnny who had declared before Shawnee, Mingo, Delaware, Cherokee, and Wyandot listeners at Wakatomica only two months before that "one or two nations . . . cannot do anything without the whole [of the confederates] were there present." But here they were, on their way to see Richard Butler, Samuel Parsons, and their old enemy, George Rogers Clark.10

They had tried to hold out. The commissioners had summoned the Shawnees to Fort Finney the previous September, but representatives of the tribe had already called on the Iroquois near Niagara and heard Brant and Sayenquenaghta denounce the Fort Stanwix proceedings, proclaim them invalid, and declare they would lay Indian grievances before the American Congress. In September, after learning of the upcoming negotiations at Fort Finney, the Shawnees had invited Delawares, Cherokees, Wyandots, Potawatomis, Kickapoos, and Miamis to talks in Mackachack, and they had told the American messengers sent to them that they would attend a treaty only in the presence of all the tribes. They had no wish to negotiate at Fort Finney but hoped to organize a general meeting at Detroit. Complained Black Snake, "This is not the way to make a good or lasting peace, to take our chiefs prisoners [hostages], and come with soldiers at your backs."

Yet the Shawnees had finally been forced to go to Fort Finney. Some of their warriors, visiting the fort, reported that other Indians were coming in, including the ubiquitous Wyandots and Delawares from the Sandusky, and Moluntha and his chiefs may have worried that whatever the Shawnees did, the Americans would find some signatories to a treaty. Nor were the Big Knives tolerating any procrastination. They summoned the Shawnees twice and then told them that the treaty would close unless the tribe arrived. The Shawnees were told they must choose now between peace and war. Moluntha remembered how the Shawnees had been isolated in 1774, and he dared not risk it. With most of his Mekoches he reached the fort on 15 January. They put a bold face on it, performing a traditional peace ceremony, but the hostility many of the warriors felt for the Big Knives and the treaty was plain enough.
When the event got under way on 26 January the commissioners adopted the same belligerent stance that had wrought the earlier treaties. The Shawnees had been defeated, and their British friends had ceded their lands to the United States. To avoid punishment, the tribe must cooperate and accept such boundaries as the Americans chose to give them.

"We do not understand measuring out the lands," replied Captain Johnny, the principal Shawnee speaker. "It is all ours!" The few trade goods the Americans were now offering should be given to "other nations." The Shawnees wanted peace and would surrender any white prisoners they had, but the commissioner threatened that neither give hostages nor cede territory.

Momentarily the commissioners were disconcerted, but they soon struck back fiercely. If the Shawnees refused the terms, there would be war. "We plainly tell you that this country belongs to the United States. Their blood hath defended it, and will forever protect it." By some accounts the commissioners swept the Indian wampum from the table, trampled it underfoot, and abruptly terminated the council.

It was enough. The Shawnee chiefs capitulated, to the fury of some of the warriors, a few of whom quit the council in disgust. Six hostages were surrendered, and on 31 January marks were put to a treaty relinquishing almost the entire tribal homeland in southern and eastern Ohio. Moluntha, Captain Johnny, and Red Pole were among those who put their marks to the paper.

The Mekoches were supposed to speak for the nation, but too often they had been traduced for giving way to the Big Knives, and so they were again. About 318 Shawnees eventually attended the treaty, about a third of the Ohio Shawnees and probably most of the Mekoches. They had not been authorized to sell the Shawnee country, country that had been given them by the Great Spirit, country the Shawnees could surrender only at the cost of Waasha Monetoo's already wavering favor. Not only that, but the treaty flatly contravened the principles agreed on by the Shawnees and other Indians, that no land could be sold without the consent of all the tribes.

It was not surprising that most Shawnees disavowed the treaty. Old Moluntha's stock declined, while Captain Johnny, who had stood up to the commissioners, enjoyed greater prestige. Four years later, in an intertribal council, the great Ottawa Egushaway recalled that

the commissioners of the United States came, as though to frighten our relations, and repeated to them the old stories that they had conquered all his children of every nation, and all our lands within the limits of bounds I have already mentioned; and they required the Shawnee nation to sign an acknowledgement thereof, and to give
hostages. What answer did the Shawanese give to this? Listen, whilst I repeat it to you! That man there before you, with the great plume on his head [Captain Johnny]. Look at him! He it was who spoke like a man in behalf of his whole nation, and on behalf of all nations here present.  

Moluntha was by no means blind to such reasoning. Three months after the humiliating treaty he joined the Shade and Red Pole in an appeal for British help: "We never have been in more need of your friendship and good offices. We have been cheated by the Americans, who are still striving to work our destruction, and without your assistance they may be able to accomplish their ends." But he clung to a thread of hope that peace might be preserved and was frustrated at his inability to lead his nation into a better relationship with the United States.

The Shawnees may have been a small and relatively weak people, but they had not been defeated, and there was little likelihood of such a clumsy instrument as the treaty of Fort Finney being accepted. They promised to restore white prisoners, but few were returned, and the six warriors taken as hostages soon found ways to escape and return to their people. By June 1786 Moluntha, like Cornstalk before him, had failed to make a bridge between the Shawnees and the Big Knives. In a message sent to Fort Finney he admitted that

the nation is divided; that the people of Chillicothe will not hear reason. They will not give the prisoners up. In fact . . . a party of them are as much inclined for war as anything else. . . . They are fully of the opinion that their king [head civil chief] and sachems [chiefs] have sold both land and warriors, and are determined not to agree to what has been done. Molunthy gives us information of four men being killed by the Mingoes on the waters of the Muskingum. He says that he advised the Mingoes and Cherokees to be quiet, but they would not hear him. He desires us to have patience. He is striving all he can to fulfill the promises made to our chiefs [commissioners] at the council fire.'. If the treaty of Fort Finney had seized the land, it had been done one at the expense of the peace.

By about 1750, most of the Shawnee divisions had gathered together in the Ohio Valley, principally in Ohio itself. Previously, Europeans became aware of them in the Ohio Valley by about 1669. Shortly thereafter, they had been scattered from the Ohio Valley by Indian wars (Beaver Wars). Most settled in the southeast states of South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama. In 1692, a southern group moved into Maryland, settling on the upper Potomac River. In 1694, a group moved from the Upper Ohio to New Jersey and Pennsylvania. More southerners came to Pennsylvania as William Penn began to populate his domain with colonists. Those Penn arrivals caused the Shawnees (and Delawares) to migrate back to the Ohio Valley. The French and Indian War from 1754 to 1763 generally did not involve the Shawnees. However, colonists began pushing west in earnest and the fight for lands was on.

The Fort Finney event result in a split in the Shawnee Tribe of Indians, pitting a peace faction (primarily Mechoche) opposing warring warriors. The upshot was that the Shawnees repudiated the treaty and if was never enforced. In 1787 and 1788, a mixed group mixed Shawnee group
migrated to southeast Missouri but that is another set of migratory stories.

The Avalon Project: Treaty With the Shawnee: 1786

Articles of a Treaty concluded at the Mouth of the Great Miami, on the North-western Bank of the Ohio, the thirty-first day of January, one thousand seven hundred and eighty-six, between the Commissioners Plenipotentiary of the United States of America, of the one Part, and the Chiefs and Warriors of the Shawnoe Nation, of the other Part.

ARTICLE 1.
THREE hostages shall be immediately delivered to the Commissioners, to remain in the possession of the United States until all the prisoners, white and black, taken in the late war from among the citizens of the United States, by the Shawanoes, or by any other Indian or Indians residing in their towns, shall be restored.

ARTICLE II.
The Shawanoes do acknowledge the United States to be the sole and absolute sovereigns of all the territory ceded to them by treaty of peace, made between them and the King of Great Britain the fourteenth day of January, one thousand seven hundred and eighty-four.

ARTICLE III.
If any Indian or Indians of the Shawanoes, or any other Indian or Indians residing in their towns, shall commit murder or robbery on, or do any injury to the citizens of the United States, or any of them, that nation shall deliver such offender or offenders to the officer commanding the nearest post of the United States, to be punished according to the ordinances of Congress; and in like manner, any citizen of the United States, who shall do an injury to any Indian of the Shawanoes, or to any other Indian or Indians residing in their towns, and under their protection, shall be punished according to the laws of the United States.

ARTICLE IV.
The Shawanoes having knowledge of the intention of any nation or body of Indians to make war on the citizens of the United States, or of their counselling together for that purpose, and neglecting to give information thereof to the commanding officer of the nearest post of the United States, shall be considered as parties in such war and be punished accordingly: and the United States shall in like manner inform the Shawanoes of any injury designed against them.

ARTICLE V.
The United States do grant peace to the Shawanoes, and do receive them
into their friendship and protection.

ARTICLE VI.
The United States do allot to the Shawanoe nation, lands within their territory to live and hunt upon, beginning at the south line of the lands allotted to the Wiandots and Delaware nations, at the place where the main branch of the Great Miami, which falls into the Ohio, intersects said line; then down the river Miami, to the fork of that river, next below the old fort which was taken by the French in one thousand seven hundred and fifty-two; thence due west to the river de la Panse; then down that river to the river Wabash, beyond which lines none of the citizens of the United States shall settle, nor disturb the Shawanoes in their settlement and possessions; and the Shawanoes do relinquish to the United States, all title, or presence of title, they ever had to the lands east, west and south, of the east, west and south lines before described.

ARTICLE VII.
If any citizen or citizens of the United States, shall presume to settle upon the lands allotted to the Shawanoes by this treaty, he or they shall be put out of the protection of the United States. On testimony whereof, the parties hereunto have affixed their hands

G. Clark
Richard Butler,
Samuel H. Parsons,
Aweecony, his x mark
Kakawipilathy, his x mark,
Malunthy, his x mark.
Musquaconocah, his x mark
Meanymsecah, his x mark,
Waupaucowela, his x mark,
Nihipeewa, his x mark
Nihinessicoe' his x mark,

(The Shawnees)

Attest:

Alexander Campbell, Secretary Commissioners

Witnesses:

W. Finney, Maj. B. B.
Thos. Doyle, Capt. B. B.
Nathan MeDowell, Ensign
John Saffenger,
Henry Govy,
Kagy Galloway, his x mark,
John Boggs
Samuel Montgomery
Daniel Elliott
James Rinker,
Nathaniel Smith,

Joseph Suffrein, his x mark, or Kemepemo Shawno, Isaac Zane, (Wyandot) his x mark,

The Half King of the Wyandots,
The Crane of the Wyandots, their x mark,

Capt. Pipe, of the Delawares, his x mark,
Capt. Bohongehelas, his x mark
Tetebockshicka, his x mark,
The Big Cat of the Delawares, his x mark
Pierre Droullar.

Source:
Indian Affairs : Laws and Treaties
Vol II (Treaties)
Compiled and Edited By Charles J. Kappler LL. M.
Clerk to the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

Treaties Between the U.S. and Native Americans Page

© 1997 The Avalon Project. William C. Fray and Lisa A. Spar, Co-Directors.
The Avalon Project : Treaty With the Shawnee : 1786 was last modified on:
07/11/2001 05:15:02
Fig1. Map of Ohio during the 1750 to 1800 time period
Drawn by G. C. Hinshaw

This article compiled by G. C. Hinshaw
3 Cambridge
Elizabethtown PA 17022
717-689-2250
ghinshaw3@comcast.net
October 23, 2015