

## A Short Story of the Miami of Kekionga

Many hundreds of years ago, before the arrival of the European people, this land, which today is called the United States of America, was inhabited by over 500 tribal nations, with a population that covered the entire continent from sea to sea.

One of these tribes, of Algonquian heritage, the Miami, who called themselves Twightwee, had villages that were spread out over the area now called Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, lower Michigan and Wisconsin. The name Miami may have come from the Ojibwe, who lived in the Great Lakes region, who called them Omaumeg, which means "those who live downstream". The tribes that are called Eel River, Piankashaw, and Wea were also considered a part of the Miami peoples.

Kekionga, meaning "blackberry patch", became the principal village of the Miami. Kekionga occupied the ground above the flood plain of the Maumee and the St. Joseph rivers. In the late 1700s eyewitnesses reported that the area was surrounded by wide expanses of cornfields, herds of cattle, and many gardens growing pumpkins, melons, and squash. There were also dome-shaped houses for family dwellings, log homes, and bark-covered long houses, used for community and spiritual gatherings.

Mishikinakua, Little Turtle, a famous Chief of the Miami, called Kekionga "that Glorious Gate through which all the good words of our chiefs had to pass, from the North to the South and from the East to the West". The Glorious Gate referred to a 9-mile portage between the three rivers called St. Joseph, St. Mary and Maumee, connecting them to the Wabash River on the West. This portage became the gateway to the entire North American continent for those who traveled the waterways. The Miami were the Gatekeepers of this Glorious Gate. It was here that the Miami and their allies held back the encroaching Americans longer than anywhere else in the country.



First contact between the Miami and Europeans was in the mid 1600s with the French Jesuits. At first there were good relations between the French and the Miami. Trading between the peoples flourished. But when the British, who were enemies of the French, came into the area, tensions increased. The Europeans were bringing their wars, hostilities and religious conflicts into the Land of the

Indians. Both the French and British used the Indians to fight their battles against each other. This was also complicated by long held hostilities between many of the tribes of the region. The French had a different spirit of interaction with the Indians than the British. The French primarily wanted trade and learned to respect Native customs. The British primarily wanted land and often were only interested in pacifying or dictating to Native peoples.

This was a confusing time for the Miami and other tribes. Many short-lived alliances and treaties were made. It was a time of confusion, misinformation, uneasy alliances, wars and conflicts. This was intensified by the growing influence of the American Colonies in the mid to late 1700s.

The conflict between the French and British culminated in the French and Indian War of 1754-1763, in which both the French and British recruited the Indians. The Miami were allied with the French, and their war chief Little Turtle fought in battle against a young George Washington commanding American Colonials, who were at that time aligned with the British. Washington was defeated twice in battle and narrowly escaped death at the hands of the Miami and allied forces. George Washington considered the Miami to be the greatest Indian opposition to colonial expansion. He carried this opinion into his later Presidency of the U.S.A.

At the end of this conflict, the French and British signed the 1763 Treaty of Paris, where the French relinquished their claim on all of North America East of the Mississippi to the British; however the Native Americans were not consulted.

In 1776 the American colonies claimed their independence from Britain and fought the Revolutionary war. This conflict ended with the 1783 Treaty of Paris, where the British granted Independence to the American Colonials and relinquished their claim to the land. Again Indian Territory was affected without consulting the Indians. The British continued to hold on to some land areas and used their Indian allies against the newly formed American government. During this period the Miami became the most powerful Native American force in the region.

The Miami and other tribes knew what had happened to the tribes on the East coast, and were prepared to defend their land. Tensions continued to escalate between the Indians and Americans; scalping, torture, murder and mayhem became the norm, participated in by both sides. An estimated 1500 Natives and the same number of settlers died during this period.

One of the worst examples of this happened at Gnadenhutten, Ohio in 1782. A Pennsylvania militia, under the command of an American Colonel of the Revolutionary war, massacred ninety-six pacifist Moravian Christian Indians of the Delaware (Lenape) Tribe. This was in reprisal for Shawnee raids into Pennsylvania. Even though the militia knew these peaceful Indians were not involved in the raid, they were so filled with vengeance that they voted to kill them anyway. They were told they would be killed in the morning. The Indians spent the night praying, singing hymns and confessing their sins to each other. In the morning as they knelt in prayer, they were bludgeoned to death with wooden mallets; 28 men, 29 women and 39 children were murdered and scalped. Two boys escaped to tell of the massacre. No criminal charges were ever filed against those who participated in the killings. The First Nations people were adding the shedding of their blood to the Witness of Jesus.

As the news of this massacre reached the ears of the Miami and other tribes, they were infuriated against the Americans and began to plan reprisals. Any hopes of a peaceful cohabitation quickly melted into preparation for the possibility of war.

The Miami had mixed relations with the United States. Some villages supported the American colonists during the Revolutionary war, while other villages were openly hostile. The Miami of Kekionga remained allies of the British, but were not openly hostile to the United States.

On August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1789 the U.S. Congress ratified the "Northwest Ordinance" that identified the Northwest Territory and set the precedent for the Westward expansion of the newly formed United States. It also made this promise to the Indians, signed by our first president, George Washington:

*"The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians; their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and, in their property, rights, and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress; but laws founded in justice and humanity, shall from time to time be made for preventing wrongs being done to them, and for preserving peace and friendship with them."*



Thousands of settlers began to pour into this part of the country, neither the Indians or U.S. Government could stop them. The U.S. did not trust the neutrality of the Miami and so one year later, in 1790, President George Washington, wanting to establish a military Fort at the "Glorious Gate", sent General Josiah Harmar to invade Kekionga.

The Miami were forewarned and had removed families and children from the villages. Finding no warriors or families at Kekionga General Harmar's men plundered the Villages and burned 12,000 bushels of corn. He then sent his soldiers to search the surrounding region for the Indians, on the way they were ambushed and defeated by warriors under the leadership of Little Turtle. Harmar retreated and camped to the south. When he learned that the Miami had returned to Kekionga, he attacked them again near the confluence of the three rivers in "The Battle of Kekionga". He was defeated and retreated to Fort Washington, which is present-day Cincinnati.

In 1791 territorial Governor Arthur St. Clair met with Congress and was ordered by the U.S. to again attack the Miami at Kekionga and secure the area for an American Fort. The Miami, Shawnee, and Delaware allied tribes, led by Little Turtle and Blue Jacket, defeated St. Clair's army in the worst defeat ever suffered by the U.S. in battle with the Indians.

George Washington then called on Revolutionary War General "Mad" Anthony Wayne to train an army, the first official U.S. Army, to take Kekionga. Little Turtle watched Wayne for a year and then advised the Tribes to treaty for peace. The Council of tribes disagreed, so Little Turtle stepped down and Blue Jacket of the Shawnee became war chief. General Wayne, in the Battle of Fallen Timbers, near present day Toledo, Ohio, defeated the Indian Confederacy. The U.S. then occupied Kekionga and a Fort was built there and named Fort Wayne. The garrison Wayne left behind suffered from a rash of violence, suicides, and insanity.

This defeat lead to the Treaty of Greenville in 1795, signed in Greenville Ohio, overseen by Anthony Wayne under the direction of President George Washington. Representatives of the Wyandot, Shawnee, Chippewa, Kickappo, Kaskaski, and several bands of the Delaware, Ottawa, Patawatomini and Miami including Wea, signed the treaty that ceded land to the Americans and defined a boundary with the U.S. and tribes west of the Ohio River.

This treaty also gave the U.S. permission to build Forts and Trading Posts in many strategic locations in the Northwest Territory, designated as Indian Lands. The true motives of this were later revealed in a secret letter from the President to the newly appointed Governor of the Northwest Territories, William Henry Harrison that revealed the plan to bury the Indians in debt to the trading posts, and to pressure them into relinquishing more land in exchange for the debt.

This led to a series of treaties that slowly but surely began to whittle away at Native lands, including those of the Miami. The U.S. continued a divide and conquer strategy to eventually obtain all the Indian lands. The Miami were moved onto reservations and finally to a big reservation near present day Huntington.

In 1830 President Andrew Jackson betrayed the Cherokee and other tribes and in defiance of the Supreme Court signed into Law the Indian Removal Act. All tribes were to be removed to lands West of the Mississippi. Even though treaties were to be negotiated, eventually even those tribes who would not negotiate were forcefully removed. In what is called the Trail of Tears over 4000 Cherokee died of exposure and starvation in one forced march. The first people to walk the Trail of Tears was a band of Ohio Seneca in 1832, included were small groups of Shawnees and Ottawas. The trail entered Indiana at Richmond and proceeded west through Indianapolis.

The Removal Act also eventually affected the Miami. In 1846, those families that owned private property were allowed to stay in Indiana while the rest were removed. On October 7, 1846, 555 Miami were loaded at gunpoint onto canal boats and relocated to eastern Kansas and then finally to Oklahoma. An estimated 500 to 1500 of the Miami remained in Indiana.

This was not a good time to be an Indian. Most of the white population lived in fear and suspicion of the Indians. The U.S. Government introduced policies of cultural assimilation. Native ceremonies and religion were outlawed. This included the introduction of boarding schools for Indian children. The children were often forcefully removed from their homes and deposited in the military style schools. Sometimes the children were stolen from their homes without permission of parents. One terrible example of this was when Forty Hopi Indian village leaders, who refused to allow their children to be taken, were imprisoned in Alcatraz. A law was passed that made it illegal for Indians to leave the reservations.

Because of extreme corruption and mismanagement of the U.S. Bureau of Indian affairs, Christian organizations were eventually given oversight of the assimilation

and civilization of the Indians, in hopes that they would do a better job. This also proved to be a sad failure, instead of helping, these organizations continued to perpetrate a great injustice to the many children and families affected.

The division of the Miami people, by the State of Indiana and the Federal Government, still exists to this day. The Miami Tribe of Oklahoma became federally recognized. Those Miami who stayed in Indiana continued to gather and maintain their tribal identity and were officially recognized in an 1854 treaty. However, in 1897 the U.S. government terminated the tribal status of the Indiana Miami. No explanation for this action was ever given. Soon all tribal lands were lost to taxes and other land speculations.

The Miami Nation of Indiana, in 1984, submitted a petition to the B.I.A. for recognition once again. The tribe was denied recognition due to insufficient evidence of tribal government/community presence during specific "War years (WW1/WW2)", from the opinion of the Bureau. A lawsuit was filed and in 1993 a federal judge ruled that the federal government had no right to remove this status.

The tribe filed an appeal to the Supreme Court in 2002. The court agreed that the federal government had no right to remove the Tribal Recognition; however, they also ruled that the statute of limitation had run out for the appeal.

Upon promises by Indiana Federal Senators in early 2000, the Miami were given hopes that if they signed away some of their treaty rights they might be recognized by Law in a Congressional attempt to restore the acknowledgement. The Miami agreed, but despite Council's signoff of specific Treaty Rights, the bill was never supported as promised by the Federal Senators. Congressman Mark Souder introduced that Bill. At this time the tribe has exhausted all efforts to get this unlawful act corrected.

The Miami Nation of Indiana has not given up hope, but is still waiting to be heard.

