

**ON THE BANKS OF THE WABASH LONG AGO**

**NARRATOR:**

I am your Narrator this evening to explain this title: "On the Banks of the Wabash Long Ago" by bringing to life the two persons who met each other only twice two centuries ago, but were instrumental in creating the State of Indiana: Tecumseh, Chief of the Shawnee Nation, and William Henry Harrison, Governor of the Indiana Territory and a General of the American Army. You will hear from both of them, but first let me set the table by extracting from three books of our library what happened in the Northwest Territory after the Revolutionary War.

Tecumseh was born in 1768 near Springfield, Ohio in the Shawnee Nation. Harrison was born in 1773, five years later, in Virginia, in the Harrison home on the James River, the sixth child of Benjamin Harrison, a patriarch, a delegate to the Continental Congress, who signed the Declaration of Independence and was also Governor of Virginia.

William Henry Harrison was only 18 when his father died in 1791. A family friend, Richard Henry Lee, recommended Harrison join the army which he did and was sent down as a Lieutenant over 80 men to be a Commander of Fort Washington located near Cincinnati and the Ohio River.

The Battle of Tippecanoe on November 7, 1811 could be foreseen by the Treaty of Greenville after General Anthony Wayne's victory in 1794 by the Americans defeating the Native Americans under the leadership of Miami's Little Turtle in the Battle of Fallen Timbers (near what is now Fort Wayne).

**NARRATOR:** The victory was the first major victory by the Americans in the Northwest Territory. For ten years (1784 – 1794), Indian warriors, using stealth, surprise and spying, endangered lives of white settlers north of the Ohio River. Many military efforts going north from Vincennes, Fort Knox and Cincinnati to Detroit were disasters. The British held Detroit and used the Indian warriors led by the Miami Nation Chief, Little Turtle, to repel all attempts at a cost of several thousand Americans.

The British in Detroit became the "Father" of the Indian warriors in supplying weapons, armaments, supplies, etc., but did not engage in accompanying the Indian warriors in combat.

President Washington in 1792 sent out of retirement, General Wayne, and 2,000 men to the Fort Washington area near the Ohio River for two years of training while visibly moving slowly north, building forts along the way, until the British forced the reluctant Chief Little Turtle to surprise and charge General Wayne's Army, but this time, the Americans were not surprised; the Indian warriors had to retreat. The Battle of Fallen Timbers lasted only an hour and a half before Little Turtle surrendered by having his warriors stop fighting and return to their homes.

He didn't know it at the time, and maybe never, but Tecumseh, Chief of the Shawnee Nation, was unaware that Lt. William Henry Harrison, with his 80 men, joined and fought with General Anthony Wayne's trained army, in the Battle of Fallen Timbers, following which Harrison was raised from Lieutenant to Captain.

**NARRATOR:** Nine months later, in 1795, the Treaty of Greenville was signed by a majority of well-represented tribes and nations of chiefs and chief warriors. Of the two biggest Nations, the Miamis and the Shawnees, Little Turtle, age 42, representing the Northern Miami Nation, signed the treaty, but Tecumseh, age 27, representing the Shawnee Nation, and other Ohio tribes did not.

The Little Turtle, Chief of the Miami Nation and leader of the Indian warriors for ten years, responded to assist General Wayne in writing the Treaty of Greenville which he signed on August 3, 1795 for his Miami Nation. Retired after losing the Battle of Fallen Timbers, Little Turtle chose the Americans over the British, assisted the Americans whenever asked and died in his 70s in northern Indiana.

The same invitation was made to Tecumseh, but he did not respond until he appeared on August 3, 1795 to explain why he was not signing the Treaty of Greenville on behalf of the Shawnee Nation and other tribes affected by the proposed eastern boundary line. Tecumseh, as their statesman, asked General Wayne to divide the land between the tribes he represented. Official records of that time showed Tecumseh, who had learned the English language, saying:

***TECUMSEH:*** "We wish to inform you of the impropriety of not fixing the bounds of every nation's rights; for, the manner it now lies in, would bring on disputes forever between the different tribes of Indians, and we wish to be by ourselves, that we may be acquainted how far we might extend our claims, that no one may intrude on us, nor we upon them."

**NARRATOR:** General Wayne declined to do this but, according to the same record, said:

"You Indians best know your respective boundaries." but then added:

"Let no nation or nations invade, molest or disturb any other nation or nations in the hunting grounds they have heretofore been accustomed to live and hunt upon, within the boundary which shall now be agreed on."

**NARRATOR:** The Treaty of Greenville, by majority vote, moved the east boundary of the Northwest Territory farther west to what is now the Indiana/Ohio state line from north to south, which meant to Tecumseh that his Shawnee Nation and other tribes east of that line were to move west. However, there was nothing in the Treaty of Greenville of having any lands west of the east border line made available for the Shawnees and other Ohio tribes who began to move west. Instead, they mixed largely with the Indian tribes west of the east border line (mostly other Delawares and Shawnees), but also making their homes in the hitherto unoccupied parts of southern Indiana, which often conflicted with the white settlers coming north of the Ohio River from Kentucky.

**TECUMSEH:** I believe treaties with tribes are meaningless unless Chiefs of all tribes sign each treaty—that all of us tribal redmen own the land, the common hunting grounds. No tribe nor men have a legal right to sell an acre of their hunting ground to the white men. The chiefs have no right to barter it away for a pewter ringlet or a keg of liqueur.

**NARRATOR:** On July 4, 1800, the U.S. Congress established Indiana Territory from part of the Northwest Territory and elected William Henry Harrison to be Governor. Harrison had been Secretary of the Northwest Territory for a short period of time. President Adams selected the members of the Legislative Council for the Indiana Territory, but the first Legislative Council had to elect a delegate to represent the Indiana Territory in Congress. After three weeks of electioneering,

**NARRATOR:** on October 3, 1799, Harrison was elected—by one vote over Arthur St. Clair, son of Governor St. Clair of the Northwest Territory—as the delegate to represent the territory in Congress.

Shortly after his election as Governor, Harrison chose Vincennes on the Wabash River as the capitol of the Indiana Territory where he had his abode constructed. Why Vincennes? Because, back in November 1778, during the Revolutionary War, General George Rogers Clark and his warriors won the battle of Vincennes against the British who were surprised and surrendered, thinking they were outnumbered, thanks in part to the citizens of Vincennes. The British never again had a more southern outpost.

Harrison did not attempt to get involved in the lands issue until he was appointed Governor of the Indiana Territory in 1800. In 1802, Governor Harrison wrote:

"There appears to be an agreement amongst them tribal Chiefs that no proposition which relates to their lands can be acceded to without the consent of all the tribes."

Governor Harrison negotiated six treaties within a four-year period from 1803 to 1806 for about 46,000 square miles of land in Illinois and southern Indiana.

**TECUMSEH:** This is a good example of how we Shawnees and Ohio tribes are cheated and why I would not sign the Treaty of Greenville—no invitation, no representation—no negotiation from the Chief Shawnee—no compensation, yet we are the ones being moved West by the Treaty of Greenville. These are our lands, not yours.

**NARRATOR:** The autumn of 1807 saw activity near the Wabash River a few miles north of what is now Lafayette. Tecumseh and his younger brother, a charismatic Shawnee Indian chief going by the name of the Prophet, had founded a town called Prophets Town, to which the Prophet attracted Native American men, women and children to gather for praying, singing and worshipping the Great Spirit. The Prophet urged his people to return to the "old ways". Between 1808 and 1810, the Prophet invited Governor Harrison twice to tour the Prophets Town which he did and Harrison invited the Prophet to Vincennes because of his concern that a number of Indian warriors with weapons and families were moving to Prophets Town. The Prophet assured Harrison that he sought peace.

The Governor of the Indiana Territory, William Henry Harrison, perceiving this gathering as a threat, assembled an army of 1,000 armed militiamen and moved up the Wabash River from Vincennes to a spot now called the "Tippecanoe Battlefield", just northwest of Prophets Town, overlooking the Tippecanoe River flowing into the Wabash River. The Prophet, perceiving this gathering as a threat, assembled Indian warriors from Prophets Town and made a surprise attack on Harrison's army the first night of their arrival. After a bloody battle, called the Battle of Tippecanoe, the Prophet was defeated. The Prophet had ignored his older brother, Tecumseh, not to take any precipitous action against Harrison's army.

**NARRATOR:** By invitation, Tecumseh met with Harrison in person on August 12, 1810 at Vincennes on the Wabash to talk peace, 15 months before the Battle of

Tippecanoe. Tecumseh was getting southern tribes to join with his Indians before engaging in wars.

**NARRATOR:** We have scanty evidence of what they said, but here is our imagination of what might have been said:

**HARRISON:** It is indeed a pleasure to meet once again with the renowned Indian Chief Tecumseh here at our little town of Vincennes on the banks of our mutually beloved Wabash River to talk peace.

***TECUMSEH:*** Yes, mighty white father, I am happy to see you again in the hope that my long trip down the Wabash will not be in vain, but I am concerned that you have many armed soldiers camped here.

**HARRISON:** It is regrettable that my precautions against a surprise attack offend your sensibilities, but you must remember that your brother, the Prophet, has invited me, and I have attended the Prophets Town and the peaceful atmosphere, but now I hear a number of your warriors and their weapons are staying there.

***TECUMSEH:*** My brother, the Prophet, had established Prophets Town to counter white settlements. He invited families to come together peacefully to sing pray and praise the Great Spirit under the Prophet's leadership.

**HARRISON:** We saw Prophets Town as a threat to peace and a hotbed of troublemaking warriors looking for an excuse to mount a surprise attack on our legitimate settlements. We saw the Prophet as a tool of the British.

***TECUMSEH:*** Listen, Father! Your refusal to withdraw the Treaty of Greenville will drive us farther apart. I cannot control my headstrong brother who thinks he is divinely guided.

**HARRISON:** There you go again, complaining about the Treaty of Greenville. That treaty is past history.

***TECUMSEH:*** By that evil treaty, moving the east border of the Northwest Territory west of the Shawnees, you took away the best forests and soil of what is now to become most of the State of Ohio. You have separated us from our western tribes without compensation or lands within the Northwest Territory.

**HARRISON:** The treaty was fairly negotiated with tribes most directly involved.

***TECUMSEH:*** The treaty is over-reaching and unfair.

**HARRISON:** May I remind you that we have met here to talk peace and not to rehash an old treaty. I invite you to join me up here on this stage so all may see and hear us together in peace.

***TECUMSEH:*** I choose to sit here on the ground, our ground, which is sacred to us.

**HARRISON:** I know that you Indians hold your hunting grounds to be sacred.

***TECUMSEH:*** First of all, I resent your dismissive lumping of us Native Americans as "you Indians". We are several nations, each with our separate languages, separate customs and separate religious practices honoring the Great Spirit. The French



understood that and treated us with respect. Secondly, your provocations have brought our attacks in self-defense.

**HARRISON:** My red brother, if you are so many different nations, how do you come before me purporting to speak for all the tribes? You are chief only of a small breakaway group of Shawnees.

***TECUMSEH:*** My mission is to unite all our nations to resist the continuing encroachment by white settlers on our lands. You say you come in peace, but you chop down our trees, plow up our soil and drive out our game.

**HARRISON:** The settlers have rights under our legitimate treaties with proper tribes, negotiated in good faith to buy the land from tribes who own the lands.

***TECUMSEH:*** In good faith! You select a few weak and starving Potawatomi chiefs and others, ply them with food and alcohol and promises and bribes. Then you wave in my face these treaties that you claim to bind all of us.

**HARRISON:** Bribes! We have paid for every acre and continue to pay annuities to the signatory tribes.

***TECUMSEH:*** Bah! Annuities! A few wagons of salt each year. I have told the tribes to reject these so-called "annuities".

**HARRISON:** You have threatened to kill those Miami chiefs who have signed a treaty. You want to renege on your treaties.

***TECUMSEH:*** They are evil treaties, evilly obtained. I will not stop speaking against them. In fact, I will soon travel south to recruit more tribes to our alliance. I will go as far south as Florida to recruit the Seminole nation if necessary. The so-called 10 o'clock line of the Treaty of Fort Wayne in 1809 and the Treaty of Greenville in 1795 must be abrogated.

**HARRISON:** You come speaking peace, but continue to agitate the tribes to war by continuing to build your alliance. Why can't you continue to seek peace as in your speech for peace in 1803 at Chillicothe? And why do you taunt me by wearing that blue British military jacket?

***TECUMSEH:*** Listen! Your treaties have forced eastern tribes west into our historic lands. These are foreigners to us here, with strange tongues and cultures. We are forced to share our fish and game with strangers. You give no thought to how these treaties affect our people in your insatiable thirst for our lands. This must stop and these treaties be reversed. It is you whites who are pushing our youths to do mischief. These treaties are forcing us to take the British side as tensions worsen between the United States and Great Britain.

**HARRISON:** What exactly do you want?

***TECUMSEH:*** We want initially for the 1795 Treaty of Greenville to be cancelled.

**HARRISON:** You expect me to rescind a treaty in effect for 15 years, after the Battle of Fallen Timbers? That treaty was approved by the president of the United States. Our current president, James Madison, would not cancel that treaty.

**TECUMSEH:** Listen, Governor, please tell President Madison that it is that treaty which is causing agitation among my people. I am not unaware of world affairs. War is coming again soon between the United States of America and Great Britain. We here in the Wabash valley will be a small part of the approaching conflict, but I know your leader will try to get Canada as an ally, by conquest if necessary. So when war comes between you and Britain, we will side with the British. You will have driven us there with your aggressive land policies.

### Epilogue

**NARRATOR:** Difficulties quickly escalated after another last ditch, unexpected meeting at Vincennes on July 27, 1811, between Tecumseh and William Henry Harrison, leading to the Battle of Tippecanoe on November 6 and 7, 1811. Tecumseh's loss there convinced him that the Native American's best hope lay with the unreliable British.

Tecumseh did indeed join with the British in the War of 1812 and died in the Battle of the Thames in Ontario, Canada on October 5, 1813. He was 35 years old. After the war, white settlers continued expansion westward and Harrison became president of the United States. The Indian Removal Act of 1830, signed by President Andrew Jackson, completed the process of cleansing the entire Northwest Territory of all Native American tribes.

There are few Americans who have not accorded admiration to Tecumseh's manly character, but perhaps none has paid higher tribute than Charles A. Jones, the Cincinnati poet, in whose poem to "Tecumseh, the Last King of the Ohio", occur these stanzas quoted in True Indian Stories by Jacob Piatt Dunn:

Art thou a patriot? – so was he –  
His breast was Freedom's holiest shrine;  
And as thou bendest there thy knee,  
His spirit will unite with thine;  
All that a man can give, he gave –  
His life – the country of his sires  
From the oppressor's grasp to save –  
In vain – quenched are his nation's fires.

Oh, softly fall the summer dew,  
The tears of Heaven upon his sod,  
For he in life and death was true,  
Both to his country and his God;  
For, oh, if God to man has given,  
From his bright home beyond the skies  
One feeling that's akin to Heaven,  
'Tis his who for his country dies.

**NARRATOR:** Harrison was born February 9, 1773 and died April 4, 1841, shortly after becoming President. Tecumseh was born March 1768 (circa) and died in battle October 5, 1813.

Given: October 13, 2014

Indianapolis Literary Club

William J. Wood  
(Tecumseh)

Henry C. Ryder  
(Narrator)

Stephen E. Towne  
(Wm. Henry Harrison)

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