The Enduring Indians of Kansas: a Century and a Half of Acculturation

ISSN 0003-4827
Copyright © 1991 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.9566

Hosted by Iowa Research Online
100 THE ANNALS OF IOWA

Historians usually have celebrated what Alvin Josephy called “The Patriot Chiefs,” those resorting to arms to resist the white invader. Thus it is the Black Hawks, the Sitting Bulls, and the Geronimos who have received the most attention. Not so in this book. Joseph B. Herring has singled out for discussion and commendation those fragments of once powerful tribes that managed not only to resist removal from Kansas in the 1860s and 1870s, but succeeded in retaining significant elements of their old cultures. These are Indians who, in Herring’s phrase, “never forgot that they were Indians” (1). In case studies of these bands of survivors, the author describes the leadership and the strategies that enabled them to be acculturated without being assimilated. By thus focusing on the Indians themselves and how they overcame heavy odds, Herring places his account in the growing stream of “new Indian history.”

It would appear at first glance that this study covers some of the same ground as two earlier works. Herring himself is the author of an admirable study of Kenekuk, the Kickapoo Prophet, whose career is examined again in this volume. H. Craig Miner and William E. Unrau,
in their well-received *The End of Indian Kansas*, wrote at length about the expulsion of tribes from that state. But Herring notes that *The Enduring Indians of Kansas* contains new material on Kenekuk and that Miner and Unrau were primarily interested in the shabby tactics whites used to rid Kansas of most of its Indians, rather than in dealing with the tribespeople who succeeded in remaining in the state.

The thousand Indians who in 1870 still clung to their homes in Kansas included bands of Kickapoos, Chippewas, Munsees, Iowas, Potawatomis, Missouri Sacs, and a breakaway group from the Sacs of the Mississippi. All eventually were subjected to allotment as a device to make additional land available to white settlers and, presumably, to expedite Indian progress toward the white man's brand of civilization. The band of Sacs of the Mississippi headed by Mokohoko was finally forced into Oklahoma, where they continued to adhere to their traditional ways.

Herring traces into the 1980s the history of those bands remaining in Kansas. Each story is different, the only unifying theme being the need to react to the unremitting United States' pressure on the Indians to surrender land, native beliefs, and life styles. The cast of characters includes villains of both colors, avaricious intermarried whites, opportunistic mixed bloods, and the sometimes flawed leaders of the resistance movements. The colorful Eshtonoquot, a mixed blood Chippewa chief, is an example of leadership from an unlikely source. Notorious as a spendthrift, a womanizer, an alcoholic, a gambler, and a promoter of schemes to fill his own pockets, Eshtonoquot managed to persuade the Munsees to join his small band of Chippewas in rejecting Christianity and removal to Oklahoma. To defeat this charlatan, a Moravian missionary who looked upon the removal of the Indians from Kansas as an opportunity for his fellow Moravians to acquire land joined forces with the Indian agent to convince the Indians to remove. To nullify Eshtonoquot they recruited the chief's son, Edward McCoose, who set his price at $800, but sold out for a mere $128 raised by Moravian elders in Pennsylvania. The story goes on, but this gives an idea of its sometimes bizarre quality. Concentrating on Indian motivations and conduct reveals as diverse a group as the whites ever mustered in such a situation.

One is left to wonder if these Indians accomplished anything very unusual, except being able to remain in Kansas, and even that was at the price of taking up allotments and selling their surplus acreage to the United States. Their fight to maintain at least some of their traditions is admirable, but among every other Indian group of any size are to be found minorities who have been equally tenacious in preserving their unique form of Indianness.
The picture we get of the Kansas bands after they had evaded removal is not well defined. The Chippewas and Munsees in time will lose federal recognition, so that for their recent history the scholar can no longer draw on the voluminous government archives that are both a blessing and a trial to the researcher. The Potawatomis, Iowas, Missouri Sacs, and Kickapoos, however, are still to some degree wards of the government. They felt threatened by the termination policies of the 1950s and reacted vigorously. But like so many other Indian wards of the United States, they have become dependent on those government programs. The author quotes an anthropologist about the Kickapoo economy being devastated by budget cuts in Washington, and Herring also depicts the Sac business office being full of empty desks as a result of a decline in federal grants. It is ironic that Indians who pride themselves on their resistance to the United States have now become dependent on that government’s support.

This is a complicated story but one well worth telling. It also is a highly successful effort to shift the emphasis from a discussion of government policy and its application by agency officials to an evaluation of Indian tactics and stratagems. We need more studies of this type—thoughtful, well researched, and cogent.


REVIEWED BY EDWARD L. SCHAPSMEIER, ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

This is the first scholarly biography of Homer Earl Capehart (1897–1979), who served in the U.S. Senate from 1945 to 1963. Its author, William B. Pickett, a native Hoosier, has a keen grasp of Indiana politics and its relation to the national scene.

Homer Capehart was an archetypical Midwest conservative as well as being a self-made man. He became a millionaire in the 1930s as a seller of automatic phonographs. His efforts made Wurlitzer the leader in the jukebox industry. Capehart’s entrepreneurial ingenuity led him to found his own successful company and later to engage in profitable commercial farming.

Capehart won his seat in the U.S. Senate without ever having held prior elective office. He defeated former Secretary of Agriculture Claude Wickard. After being twice reelected, Capehart was narrowly defeated in 1962 by Birch Bayh.

The author portrays Capehart as a pragmatic conservative who was basically a protectionist and a nationalist (really a euphemism for