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The British Alliance of 1812–14

Chapter Outline

This chapter examines the War of 1812 and, in particular, the role that Tecumseh had in this event.

By the early 1800s, the intentions of the Americans were clear. The Americans were expanding, and it would be to the west where they would seek land. The War of 1812 can be viewed as a continuance of the American War of Independence, as this inconclusive war had left unresolved several important matters, such as those relating to Indigenous Peoples and their lands. In a similar fashion to Obwandiyag, Tecumseh, a part-Shawnee and part-Cree leader, rose to the forefront as an advocate for a pan-Indigenous movement. Like Obwandiyag, Tecumseh was linked to a prophet. Tenskwatawa was known as the Shawnee Prophet and happened to be Tecumseh's brother. Tenskwatawa argued that no particular tribe had the right to give up land as its own. Tecumseh had a particular disdain for Americans as both his father and brother were killed in US frontier wars. He chose to side with the British not because he favoured them but rather because he saw them as the lesser of two evils.

Tecumseh challenged the cessions of lands that the Americans were obtaining, particularly those claimed in Indiana Territory. Throughout 1812 to 1813, Tecumseh led Indigenous forces to victory after victory over the Americans. Tecumseh eventually met his demise at Moraviantown where, unsupported by British troops that had been promised, he was killed in October 1813. The death of Tecumseh had immediate impacts since no leader could fill his role as a catalyst for a pan-Indigenous movement. He had more than thirty Indigenous nations following him. Although many of these nations continued to support the British, they were not as effective after the loss of Tecumseh's leadership. The Americans took advantage of this opportunity and convinced a group of Haudenosaunee, predominately Onondowaga, to fight on the American side. This resulted in Haudenosaunee fighting other Haudenosaunee for the second time, as had happened during the American War of Independence.

The chapter concludes by discussing the impact that the war had on Indigenous populations. In 1814, the Treaty of Ghent was signed, bringing a close to the War of 1812. However, it did not stop the American appropriation of lands as expected by Indigenous Peoples. The conclusion of the war put Canadian Indigenous Peoples at a disadvantage because as long as there had been colonial wars, they could maintain their positions in return for alliance. With that bargaining tool now gone, they were placed in a position of serious disadvantage. The fact that Indigenous Peoples were no longer viewed as allies is reflected in the shifting of Indian administration in 1830 from the military to a civilian arm of British administration.

Learning Objectives

- To understand the short- and long-term causes of the War of 1812
- To gain an understanding of the crucial role that Tecumseh carried out during the War of 1812
- To see the ramifications for Indigenous Peoples in both Canada and the United States as a result of the War of 1812
- To understand the important role of Indigenous spiritual leaders in guiding the involvement of their people in the War of 1812

Key Terms, Figures or Sites

Battle of Beaver Dams Part of the Battle of the War of 1812–14 near Thorold, Ontario, the battle took place on 24 June 1813, in which Kahnawake and other Kanienkehaka warriors ambushed almost 500 American troops (p. 162).

Battle of Fallen Timbers Defeat of the Western Confederacy of Indigenous Peoples by Americans under the command of Major-General “Mad” Anthony Wayne on 20 August 1794. The British refused to open the gates of Fort Miami to the retreating Indigenous warriors, which caused a breach in Indigenous–British relations (p. 157).

Brock, General Issac British general who fought alongside Tecumseh in War of 1812–14; killed in battle at Queenston Heights on 13 October 1812 (p. 159).

gift distributions Custom begun by the Indigenous Peoples and continued, briefly, by the British colonial administration of giving goods to Indigenous Peoples periodically as a way of maintaining agreements and alliances (p. 158).

Harrison, William Henry (1773–1841) Governor of Indiana Territory from 1800 to 1812, later ninth president of the United States. Harrison participated in the Battle of Fallen Timbers (1794) and led his troops in the 1811 Battle of Tippecanoe, and during his governorship promoted new-comer settlement at the expense of Indigenous Peoples (p. 159).

Michilimackinac From the Anishinaabe term Michi Makinong, or Great Turtle, for a French, and then later British, fort located beside the Odaawa village at the Straits of Mackinac connecting Lakes Huron and Michigan (p. 161).

Moraviantown Village established in 1792 in what is now southwestern Ontario by the Moravian Brothers, a Protestant missionary group founded in 1727, for refugee Lenni Lenape people on the Canadian side of the future international border and originally called Fairfield. It was the site of a battle on 5 October 1813, part of the War of 1812–14, in which Tecumseh died (p. 163).

Queenston Heights Site near Niagara Falls, Ontario of a battle in October 1812 that saw invading American forces defeated by British and Haudenosaunee forces led by Teyoninhokarawen and the British General Sir Isaac Brock (p. 161).

Tecumseh (c. 1768–1813) Shaawanwaki chief who fought American settlement in the Ohio area in the 1790s and later transformed a prophetic movement led by his brother, Tenskwatawa, into a movement aimed at retaining Indigenous land. Tecumseh sided, reluctantly, with the British in the War of 1812–14 and died at the Battle of Moraviantown in 1813 (p. 158).

Tenskwatawa (“Open Door,” 1775?–1836) Brother of Tecumseh who, following a series of prophetic visions in 1803, promoted a revival of traditional customs and values. Also known as the Shawnee Prophet (p. 159).

Teyoninhokarawen (Major John Norton, fl 1784–1832) Kanienkehaka chief and army officer who worked as an interpreter and emissary for Thayendanegea in dealing with Haudenosaunee land claims and led Indigenous forces in several important battles of the War of 1812–14 (p. 162).

Treaty of Ghent (1814) Treaty that concluded the War of 1812–14, in which the British tried to negotiate for the establishment of an Indigenous territory but failed (p. 164).

Treaty of Greenville (1795) Treaty of peace between the US government and the Wendat, Lenape, Shaawanwaki, Odaawa, Ojibwa, Boodwaadmii, Myaamiaki, Ugpi’ganjig, Wea, Kickapoo, Piankeshaw, and Kaskaskia involving huge land cessions on the part of the Indigenous Peoples and opening the Ohio Valley to European settlement (p. 157).

War of 1812–14 British interference in US trade during Napoleonic Wars led to conflict in North America, on both land and sea, between US and Britain, with the US seeking to annex British North America. It was the last colonial war in which First Nations people held the balance of power (p. 161).

Study Questions

1. What was significant about the “Tomahawk Speech”? (why was it given and what impact did it have)
2. Why was the Battle of Fallen Timbers (1794) considered a double blow to the pan-Indigenous coalition?
3. After 1807, in spite of the unreliable actions by the British in the past – why did Indigenous peoples decide to ask for and accept the help of the British?
4. Who was Tecumseh and what role did he play in the War of 1812?
5. Who was Tenskwatawa and what was the basis of his doctrine?
6. Why was the fall of Michilimackinac important?
7. What happened at Moraviantown?
8. How did the British attempt to fill the void left by the death of Tecumseh?

9. What is meant by the phrase *status quo ante bellum*?
10. What were the short-term ramifications of the War of 1812 for Indigenous Peoples?
11. What were the long-term ramifications of the War of 1812 for Indigenous Peoples?

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the development of pan-Indigenism and its main proponents.

Pan-Indigenism began with the early confederacies that developed to resist the effects of colonialism. Although Nescambiouit, a Pigwacket chief (p. 76) and Kiala, a Mesquakie war chief (p. 114) had earlier promoted pan-Indigenous movements, it is often attributed to Obwandigag (Pontiac) as one of the first advocates of coalitions and confederacies among Indigenous Peoples. The advantages of alliances were touted later by Indigenous leaders too. Among some of the most important in the War of 1812 were Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa. Tecumseh had considerable success in rallying the support of Boodwaamii, Ojibwa, Odawaak, and many others to resist Americans in the War of 1812 (p. 159).

2. Describe two of the battles in the War of 1812. Include in your discussion who was involved, who won, and its implications.

Choose from any of the following:

- Fall of Michilimackinac (p. 161).
- Queenston Heights (p. 162).
- Battle of Beaver Dams (p. 162).
- Moraviantown (pp. 162-163).

3. What were the repercussions of Tecumseh's death in the War of 1812?

After Tecumseh's death the pan-Indigenous movement lost its momentum. More than thirty different bands and groups fought under his leadership, and after Tecumseh's death, it would become impossible to gather them together in the same way. Although large numbers of warriors continued to fight together, the primary purpose had been lost, and eventually the common vision was lost. Despite concerted efforts by the British to re-ignite the movement begun by Tecumseh, they were not successful (pp. 163-164).

Additional Resources

Further Readings

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Websites

The Canadian Encyclopedia - Tecumseh

- <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/tecumseh>

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada - Indigenous Contributions to the War of 1812

- <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1338906261900/1338906300039>

Bobblehead George – “The Death of Tecumseh”

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbmPSc80QxU>

Access Heritage – R. Taylor – “The War of 1812: an Introduction”

- <http://www.warof1812.ca/intro.html>