

## Meskwaki History

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## Book Reviews and Notices

*Meskwaki History*, by Mary Bennett, Johnathan Lantz Buffalo, and Dawn Suzanne Wanatee. Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 2006. CD. \$19.95.

Reviewer William Green is director of the Logan Museum of Anthropology, Beloit College. He was the State Archaeologist of Iowa from 1988 to 2001.

Electronic media play an ever-growing role in education. Although printed material is still important, digital resources can enhance learning in both formal (classroom) and informal (home or museum) settings. Electronic media allow interactive access to audiovisual resources as well as written material, including archival records, previously published material, and newly created texts. Well-designed digital media supply innovative tools as well as useful content and allow easy navigation to promote exploration and discovery.

The *Meskwaki History* CD does what digital history resources should do. It contains a trove of information in various formats about the Meskwaki Indians from a wide variety of sources, many of them Meskwaki. It also links those materials in ways that encourage further investigation, and it is suited to both formal and informal learning. This CD—a collaborative project of the State Historical Society of Iowa and the Meskwaki Nation—is an authoritative and comprehensive educational and research resource that will be useful to everyone interested in the history and culture of Indians in Iowa and nearby areas.

The Meskwaki, also known as the Fox Indians and federally recognized as the Sac and Fox Indians of the Mississippi in Iowa, have lived in Iowa for more than 200 years. In earlier centuries they resided in Illinois, Wisconsin, and elsewhere in the Great Lakes region. The Meskwaki language belongs to the Algonkian family of languages and is similar to the languages spoken by other Central Algonkian groups with Great Lakes origins such as the Sauk and Kickapoo.

*Meskwaki History* reflects the importance of language to Meskwaki identity and culture. Audio files add a dimension of engagement not possible with written materials alone. Users of the CD can listen to Meskwaki language presentations, learn the proper pronunciation of some Meskwaki words, and read texts in Meskwaki and in English translation.

Video files also provide insightful perspectives on several dimensions of Meskwaki life and culture. Among the most notable resources

on the CD are rare color films from the 1940s that show Meskwaki powwow dances, games, and frybread making. More recent clips from television newscasts are valuable because they reveal as much about outsiders' views of Indians as they do about the Meskwaki themselves.

In addition to the sound files and movies, *Meskwaki History* contains many visual and written resources that are difficult or impossible to find elsewhere. Users can access more than 1,200 pages of material about Meskwaki history and culture. For material that is not on the CD in scanned or transcribed form, the CD supplies complete references, allowing easy access via your local library.

One fascinating section contains a chronologically ordered compilation of outsiders' observations about the Meskwaki and tribal members' own statements as recorded in a wide variety of documents reaching back to the seventeenth century. This is history from the viewpoint of contemporary participants and observers. Other primary source material includes eight censuses of the tribe from 1840 to 1937 as well as a multitude of treaties and historical maps. Consistent with the educational focus of the CD, a detailed lesson plan on the use of primary source documents supplies teachers and students (grades 3–8) with tools to investigate these resources and to develop skills and knowledge that tie into Iowa state standards in history and geography. Educators elsewhere likely will find these lessons relevant to their own state standards. The CD contains ten other useful lesson plans that use various images, documents, media files, and other resources.

Regarding material culture, the CD contains images and descriptions of many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Meskwaki artifacts, most of which are in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa. Notable objects include Wacochachi's 1830s–1840s pictograph drawing (along with scans of articles about the pictograph) and a beautiful wooden spoon from around 1830, depicted via a short movie. The lesson plan that focuses on Wacochachi's drawing is especially well designed and thorough.

The Meskwaki have been the subject of anthropological attention for more than a hundred years. Among the earliest and most influential studies were the *Fox Texts* and other ethnographic writings of William Jones. A student of Franz Boas and the first Native American to earn a Ph.D. in anthropology, Jones was of Sac and Fox ancestry. A paper in this CD by Sophilia Keahna assesses Jones's work and calls attention to its problematic ethics, substance, and implications.

One of the principal values of *Meskwaki History* is that its sections are attributed to specific authors rather than appearing anonymously. Many electronic resources do not name their authors, yet attribution is

important in any serious learning tool. While “wiki”-type online resources have their place, creators of putatively authoritative works must be identified so users can determine the reliability of the product, whether written or digital. Authors Johnathan L. Buffalo, Mary Bennett, and Dawn Suzanne Wanatee (along with Lynn M. Alex, who wrote many of the lesson plans) are knowledgeable and experienced in Meskwaki and Iowa history and are well qualified and trustworthy. Their background does not guarantee that everything in the CD is accurate and complete, but it does make *Meskwaki History* a much more useful resource than many electronic (especially online) resources.

As an assiduous reviewer often does, I searched for problematic parts of the CD. In terms of content and structure I found very few. My interest in ethnobotany led me to look in some depth at the “Meskwaki Use of Plants for Food” section. The informative text and photos cover cultivated plants (corn, beans, squash) and a wide variety of wild plants. The only content-related problem I found in the CD occurred in this section. The text for hazelnut (filbert) lists the genus and species as “*Filia americana* L.,” but the correct name is *Corylus americana*. The incorrect name may stem from use of an accompanying illustration of basswood or linden rather than American hazel. Basswood’s genus and species is *Tilia americana*, and the handwritten tag on the illustration (a herbarium specimen collected by Bohumil Shimek in 1894) was misread as “*Filia americana*.” A clear photo of an American hazel (*C. americana*) shrub and nuts should replace the photo of the basswood leaves and flowers.

The CD is fairly easy to navigate using standard web browsers. Bars and tabs allow direct access to the key sections, which open in new tabs on the browser. Arrows move the user to the next or previous page. A site map outlines the complete CD and supplies direct access to every page. I found no universal search capability or index, however, so it is not possible to locate or access every occurrence of, say, “spoon” or “necklace.” The ability to enter such search terms and view their occurrences would be a nice addition to the resource. I have used the CD on Mac (OS 10.4.11) and PC platforms (Windows XP Professional) and encountered no compatibility problems or crashes.

In summary, *Meskwaki History* is an electronic treasure trove, a digital gold mine of information about the Meskwaki people past and present. Reflecting a cooperative effort among state and tribal historians, it conveys both insiders’ and outsiders’ viewpoints on the Meskwaki. The prevailing point of view, though, is Meskwaki. Tribal members—past and present—speak for themselves. Their perspectives and the copious amount of documentation this CD contains ensure that *Mes-*

*kwaki History* will serve not only as a standard, authoritative resource on the tribe but also as a model for collaborative historical documentation projects. National recognition of this achievement already has come through the American Association for State and Local History's naming of the State Historical Society of Iowa and the Meskwaki Nation Historical Preservation Office as recipients of its 2007 Award of Merit for Leadership in History. Buy this CD and use it.

*Lewis and Clark and the Indian Country: The Native American Perspective*, edited by Frederick E. Hoxie and Jay T. Nelson. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007. vi, 366 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, references, index. \$70.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

Reviewer John P. Bowes is assistant professor of history at Eastern Kentucky University. He is the author of *Black Hawk and the War of 1832: Removal in the North* (2007) and *Exiles and Pioneers: Eastern Indians in the Trans-Mississippi West* (2007).

This book is clearly not the first to discuss the Lewis and Clark expedition. Nor is it the first to examine the Corps of Discovery from a Native perspective. However, *Lewis and Clark and the Indian Country* makes a strong case for being the first to present a comprehensive analysis of the expedition and its impact from the time prior to the expedition to the present day. And although it is principally a collection of primary source documents, it presents a complex and critical perspective on Lewis and Clark that provides thoughtful conclusions even as it leaves room for readers to make inferences of their own.

*Lewis and Clark and the Indian Country* is an edited volume that contains a vast array of sources, many of which come from a Newberry Library exhibit showcasing new scholarship on the expedition and Indian Country. Excerpts from the Corps of Discovery journals appear next to previously published essays, interviews with Native peoples, and government documents. All of this is put together with a stated purpose of tackling head-on the legend constructed over the course of two centuries—the legend of Lewis and Clark and their courageous expedition successfully overcoming both wilderness and hostile Native tribes to open the West to their fellow Americans. In collaboration with five Native consultants, Fred Hoxie and Jay Nelson have put together a volume that pointedly illustrates the ways in which the Lewis and Clark expedition was not such a singular event but a “part of a historical process that was ongoing and whose effects could be witnessed” in present-day Indian Country (11).