UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

The Memoirs of Lt. Henry Timberlake: The Story of a Soldier, Adventurer, and Emissary to the Cherokees, 1756–1765. Edited by duane H. King.

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1hj537ct

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 32(1)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Denson, Andrew

Publication Date

2008

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

The Memoirs of Lt. Henry Timberlake: The Story of a Soldier, Adventurer, and Emissary to the Cherokees, 1756–1765. Edited by Duane H. King. Cherokee, NC: Museum of the Cherokee Indian Press, 2007. Distributed by the University of North Carolina Press. 176 pages. \$45.00 cloth; \$19.95 paper.

Any scholar whose work deals with Cherokees in the colonial era sooner or later draws on the observations of Henry Timberlake, an Anglo-American army officer sent on a diplomatic mission to the tribe in the early 1760s. Although Timberlake certainly did not understand everything he saw and heard among the Cherokees, his vivid descriptions have won for his memoir a place beside the writings of William Bartram and James Adair among the more valuable early sources on Cherokee life. For many years, however, Timberlake's memoir was out of print and difficult to find, the last version appeared in 1948. It is a great pleasure to witness the lieutenant's return in the form of Duane H. King's new edition.

The Memoirs of Lt. Henry Timberlake accompanies a fine exhibit developed by the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, located in North Carolina on the Eastern Band's reservation. Emissaries of Peace, which in 2007 moved to the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, illustrates Timberlake's visit to the Cherokee Overhill towns (in present-day southeastern Tennessee), along with his subsequent journey with Cherokee leaders to England and the court of King George III. By using the memoir as its principal source, the exhibit illuminates both Cherokee and European experiences of a complex diplomatic episode.

Timberlake arrived in the Cherokee country at a time of conflict and terrible destruction. For much of the first half of the eighteenth century, the Cherokee tribe was Britain's most important Indian ally in the South. The partnership broke down, however, in the context of the Seven Years' War. In 1759, Cherokee warriors returning from raids on French-Indian allies were attacked and killed by English settlers in the Virginia backcountry. Obligated under traditional law to avenge these deaths, the slain men's relatives attacked English settlers in South Carolina. Cherokee leaders feared a general war and sent a peace delegation to Charleston, where colonial officials promptly took the delegates hostage and demanded that the Cherokees produce the men who had killed the settlers. The standoff culminated in the murder of twentytwo Cherokee prisoners, and a full-blown war began. Cherokees defeated one colonial army and reduced a British post, killing most of its garrison; however, a second Carolina force managed to destroy some fifteen Cherokee towns and make refugees of thousands of people. In 1761, as a new army from Virginia approached, Cherokees asked for peace, and a treaty was concluded at Long Island of the Holston in November of that year.

Henry Timberlake, serving in a Virginia regiment, was present at the peace negotiations. After the treaty was signed, Cherokee leaders asked that a British officer return with them to convince their people that the conflict had truly ended, and Timberlake volunteered for the job. The memoir recounts an uncomfortable journey, during which the officer and his party lost their firearms, worried continually about dying at the hands of "northward Indians," and

Reviews 163

were nearly attacked by bears. After he arrived at the Overhill towns, Timberlake experienced Cherokee diplomatic ritual and consensus politics. In the memoir, he describes Chota, the site of many crucial episodes in the tribe's eighteenth-century history. At Chota, Cherokee leader Ostenaco explained the new peace to his people. At Settico, the Cherokees treated Timberlake to elaborate dance and extensive oratory designed to mark the passage from war to peace and to solidify the amity between their people and the British. This dramatic moment yields one of Timberlake's most fascinating descriptions.

After he recounts this welcome to Cherokee country, Timberlake offers the kind of broad portrait of the tribe typical of early American travel narratives. Although some of his observations are highly questionable (such as the statement that the Cherokees threw their dead into rivers rather than bury them), the memoir also contains more reliable information. He witnessed a game of chunkey, for example, and a ritual that involved the Black Drink (*Asi*). His explanations of clothing and adornment are precise. He describes the return of a war party, details the rituals that accompanied such a homecoming, and paraphrases the war leader's account of the expedition. Although sometimes Timberlake apparently wants to pronounce the Cherokees poor, his descriptions of agriculture, hunting and fishing, and the gathering of wild plants suggest a rich and varied Cherokee economy.

After three months in the Overhill towns, Timberlake and a party of Cherokees departed for Williamsburg, where they met with Virginia's governor and where Cherokee leaders requested greater trade with the colony. While in Virginia, Ostenaco asked Timberlake to take him and other leaders to England to meet the king. Timberlake arranged the trip and paid much of the expense out of his own pocket in the hope that his service to British–Indian relations would gain him preferment in London. On arrival in England, the Cherokees became instant celebrities, feted extensively and followed everywhere by the London press. Timberlake's accounts of these exploits are less useful historically than the descriptions of Cherokee life, but certainly they provide engaging reading and an interesting counterpoint to Timberlake's stay in the Cherokee towns. Unfortunately, this visit and a similar journey to London several years later bankrupted Timberlake, who received little in return for his work on behalf of Anglo-Cherokee friendship. He died in poverty in 1765.

Although Timberlake's narrative is impressive on its own, Duane King makes substantial contributions to this volume. His introduction explains the Anglo-Cherokee War and sets the context for the memoir in clear and concise terms. King's notes on Timberlake's text are wonderful. They provide biographical information on a variety of individuals mentioned in the memoir, extensive descriptions of troop movements and British posts during the war, and excerpts from the London press coverage of the Cherokees' visit. Most importantly, the notes expand on Timberlake's observations of Cherokee life and provide cultural information essential in the interpretation of the officer's remarks.

As befits a publication connected to a museum exhibit, the book is extensively illustrated. There are color portraits, photographs of colonial-era materials from the Museum of the Cherokee Indian's collections, and engravings that depict places in England visited by the Cherokees. Particularly impressive are

the maps, a collection that includes Timberlake's map of Cherokee towns in the Little Tennessee River region, along with other colonial representations of the Cherokee country. The map of London with an outline of the Cherokees' tour is a nice touch. In short, King's version of the memoir not only returns Timberlake to wide availability but also improves vastly on the previous editions.

Recent years have witnessed a small boom in new editions of early sources on southeastern Indian history. Kathryn Holland Braund has published new versions of Adair's *History of the American Indians* and Bartram's Indian writings (*William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians*), the latter with Gregory Waselkov. The University of Nebraska Press is said to be working on an edition of the Daniel Butrick–John Howard Payne manuscripts, the publication of which will be a major event. This new edition of Timberlake illustrates brilliantly the value such publications.

Andrew Denson Western Carolina University

Mountain Spirit: The Sheep Eater Indians of Yellowstone. By Lawrence L. Loendorf and Nancy Medaris Stone. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006. 224 pages. \$50.00 cloth; \$19.95 paper.

Archaeologist Lawrence L. Loendorf and editor/writer Nancy Medaris Stone have written a highly accessible and intriguing ethnohistory of the Sheep Eater Indians of the Yellowstone region. Loendorf and Stone rely heavily on ethnographic, historical, and archaeological records to identify, describe, and analyze these important and often misidentified and stereotyped Northern or Mountain Shoshones. *Mountain Spirit: The Sheep Eater Indians of Yellowstone* provides an important synthesis of existing cultural history while it offers new insights into more recent archaeological discoveries.

Locating and identifying the Tukudika or "meat eaters" within the geographical area of Northern Idaho, the Wind River Mountains, and Yellowstone National Park, Loendorf and Stone draw us immediately into an important reconsideration of identity in Native American history. Vine Deloria, in Red Earth, White Lies (1995), stresses that one important aspect of Indian worldview is the primacy of space over time. Quoting Sven Liljeblad (1957), Loendorf and Stone reveal that the identity of Northern Shoshone groups was seasonally variable according to the region and the primary resource being exploited by members of these highly mobile gathering and hunting bands. Therefore, when a Northern Shoshone group subsisted primarily on salmon, they might be referred to as Agaidika, or "salmon eaters," and if they harvested buffalo, they might be referred to as Kukundika, or "buffalo eaters." This primacy of resource consumption as a form of collective identity illustrates a fluidity of human adaptation among the Northern Shoshone that is remarkable and (perhaps) a reason for their misinterpretation by outsiders. Seasonal movement from one resource complex to another—buffalo, mountain sheep, and salmon—placed the members of these bands and their