

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

The Washakie Letters of Willie Ottogary, Northwestern Shoshone Journalist and Leader, 1906-1929. Edited by Matthew E. Kreitzer.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/71x7f4m4>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 26(3)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Fowler, Catherine S.

Publication Date

2002-06-01

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/>

farming tradition with substantial housing and a complex account of genesis only added to their ire. One showdown came in Indiana, during the time of Tecumtha and his brother the Shawnee Prophet. Others, hastening the end, came in Oklahoma and Ontario. The core of these accounts, however, is drawn from well-informed and involved Native leaders working with recorders, often professional anthropologists, to leave behind an adequate description of what they cherished. These recorders included Lewis Henry Morgan, Mark Harrington, and Frank Speck—shining lights for East Coast ethnography. In addition, several Delawares, particularly Richard C Adams and Lula Mae Gibson Gilliland, have themselves penned versions of the rite. That their reports come across as educated and Christian clearly show that cultural bias is not unique to Europe. As corrective, the last section includes the reminiscences (1972-1994) of elders in eastern Oklahoma who attended the last Gamwings as children. Foremost among them were Nora Thompson Dean and Lucy Blalock, my own teachers and clan mother, who devoted their later years to making every effort to set straight a very uneven record of traditional Lenape beliefs and worship. Two appendices list the Delaware and English names of the many people mentioned in all these sources, and provide a glossary of Native terms in varied transcription.

Photographs of key elders, useful maps tracing Delaware migration, and diagrams of the Big House environs help situate the reader. In all, this volume is a useful and timely compendium of the many varied, and sometime conflicting, reports about the single most important ceremony for Lenape survival to the present day, as well as a major ritual in the study of comparative religion. Though it presents only the accounts, devoid of any analysis, deconstruction, or contextualization, the bibliography can lead interested readers in these directions. The support and collaboration of members from many of the modern Delaware communities makes this effort especially worthwhile.

Jay Miller

Tuxwsit Clan

The Washakie Letters of Willie Ottogary, Northwestern Shoshone Journalist and Leader, 1906–1929. Edited by Matthew E. Kreitzer. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2000. 331 pages. \$49.95 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

This very interesting and important volume brings together the newspaper columns written between 1906 and 1929 by Willie Ottogary, a Northwestern Shoshone man living in northern Utah, about his home community and other activities. The columns appeared frequently, but on an irregular basis, in at least five small regional non-Indian newspapers (in Logan, Brigham City and Tremonton, Utah; Malad, Idaho), and were apparently solicited by the editors as part of the process of gathering social information and local news from various communities. Although Ottogary's columns were short in the beginning (roughly 300 words), they became longer and incorporated more topics with time (1,000 to 2,000 words) and his output became more frequent.

During his writing career, he produced roughly 450 columns, some of which were modified for the different papers to which he contributed, but the majority written and published only once. Although little is known of his actual writing procedures (none of the originals for his columns has survived), taken as a whole they are a remarkable set of documents. The columns are at once a chronicle of everyday life by a person living and sharing that life; but they are also a social commentary as to the achievements, failures, needs, and wants of a small group of Indian people by a participant and keen observer who also saw that there were important issues at stake and that writing about them might in some way help.

Mr. Ottogary's columns are organized by Kreitzer into seven chronological sections, each titled with a line or quote from one of the pieces: "I Will Write a Few Lines," 1906-1910"; "Willie Ottogary Breaks Silence," 1911-1913"; "I Am Going Tell Some News," 1914-1920"; "I Will Start on My Stories," 1921-1922"; "We Expect Get Some Land from Our Big White Pop in Future Time," 1923-1934"; "You People May Read My Writing Long as I Work," 1925-1926"; and "Our People Haven't Got Any Land for Their Own," 1927-1929." Kreitzer provides an excellent introduction that summarizes the themes of the columns, and attempts to place Willie Ottogary and his work in a historical context. He also provides a commentary on his editorial method (for example, columns included versus omitted, and the maintenance of Mr. Ottogary's writing style and voice) and a conclusion in which he attempts to pull together some of the strands of Mr. Ottogary's life and writings into a larger context. There are eight appendices, including one on some of the Shoshone Treaties of 1863 (not all are included), a sample column by a non-Indian about his/her community for comparison, an itinerary of Mr. Ottogary's travels, and items concerning the agricultural successes of the Washakie Shoshone community, to name a few. A very useful biographical register and index to all the persons mentioned in the columns is also provided, as is a subject index. The book is illustrated with number of photographs and other items, many of the former from the private collection of Mae Timbimboo Parry, a community descendant.

But the real joy of the volume is in the letters themselves, and what they have to say about a person who likely did not fully realize that he was chronicling his people's history. Much of their content is about everyday life in a small, rural, agricultural community—the comings and goings of visitors and residents; the births, marriages, and deaths of community members; the agricultural cycles and crop conditions; the vagaries of the weather; social and religious gatherings; and much more. Although Mr. Ottogary tells much from his personal perspective, he is also a faithful community chronicler. He also speaks freely about injustices that occurred locally or regionally, especially land transactions in which locals attempted to cheat people out of their land or property. Although Mr. Ottogary was a member of the Mormon faith, he does not use his columns to proselytize. In fact, there is little mention of religion beyond the social aspects of church attendance and other activities that affected community life. Rather, Mr. Ottogary is faithful to his post as a reporter covering community happenings.

As the years passed, Mr. Ottogary became more active in political affairs, gaining the respect of his community. He went to Washington, D.C., on several occasions from 1917 through the 1920s to make federal officials aware of Shoshone grievances, especially those involving treaty rights and responsibilities, citizenship issues, and more. He continually requested lands for his community, most of which grew through homesteading. He expected reparations based on the 1863 Box Elder Treaty, although his continual reminders fell largely on deaf ears. He joined forces with other Western Shoshone leaders such as Annies Tommey of Deep Creek to protest the draft of Shoshone men for World War I, and was actually arrested as a protester (p. 7). But in all, it was attachment to land and treaty rights that were his consistent passion. He almost realized his dream of land for his community one week before he died, when a letter arrived from Washington suggesting that there would be land (p. 239). The bill that was ultimately signed did not contain this important provision.

Mr. Ottogary also chronicles many activities that show cultural change as well as persistence over his twenty-five-year writing career. He wrote of visiting patterns, Sun Dances and other ceremonies attended, older marriage patterns and child rearing, older subsistence activities such as rabbit hunting (also removal of rabbits from agricultural fields) and pine nut collecting, and much more. He was not given to lengthy descriptions of events, but his mentions of them provide many clues to what was happening on the local level. New forms of athletic competition are mentioned, such as boxing and baseball. He speaks of viewing his first moving picture show, riding on the train, and much more. Changes in land use involved in farming and the seemingly endless cycle of planting and harvesting receive considerable attention. Crops and animals make it through marginal winters, and sometimes not. Mr. Ottogary was above all a farmer who had to feed his family, and who worried considerably about how that would be accomplished given the vagaries of the northern Utah weather.

Willie Ottogary's columns are well worth reading, not only for the actual data they contain, but also as a profile of a Shoshone man adjusting to a new cultural framework while salvaging tradition and dignity. There are data contained therein that contribute details of the broader struggle concerning Western Shoshone land rights which are still at issue. But mostly his story is about life and how it was lived in the early part of the twentieth century in a small, rural, agricultural Indian community.

Catherine S. Fowler

University of Nevada, Reno

Where 'Indians' Fear to Tread? A Postmodern Reading of Louise Erdrich's North Dakota Quartet. By Fabienne C. Quennet. Hamburg, Germany: Lit Verlag, 2001. 241 pages.

German scholar Fabienne Quennet stays true to the subtitle of this in-depth discussion of Louise Erdrich's North Dakota quartet—*Love Medicine* (1984),