



## Diary of the Moravian White River Mission (1805-1806)

*In 1805, a Shawnee prophet named Tenskwatawa launched a revitalization movement that, over the next several years, attracted thousands of followers among indigenous nations in what the US government called the Indiana Territory. Tenskwatawa preached that indigenous people should reject white culture and revive ways of life predating European colonization. He also instigated witch hunts that targeted indigenous Christians and indigenous leaders who advocated accommodation of white settlers. Groups of Tenskwatawa's followers settled, first, near Greenville, Ohio, and later founded a large community in present-day Indiana called Prophetstown. The movement went into sharp decline after the US military destroyed Prophetstown in the Battle of Tippecanoe, in 1811.*

*The excerpts below describe the upheaval that Tenskwatawa's movement created within indigenous communities, told from the perspective of white Moravian missionaries, of German ancestry, who were living amid Lenape villages along the White River in present-day Indiana. The three missionaries had settled on the White River in 1801, accompanied by a dozen indigenous Moravians, most of whom were Lenapes. In these excerpts from the mission diary (originally written in German), the Lenapes are called "Delawares," and the Shawnees "Schawanos." The excerpted diary entries span December 1805 to March 1806; a few months later, with the Christian Lenapes having all either left the mission or died, the white missionaries abandoned the area.*

*[December 3]*

We heard that a Schawano Indian had arisen among the heathen as teacher, and that a large number of Delawares and Schawanos had come together in Woapicamikunk to hear what this heathen teacher had to say. As usual, his teaching consists of all sorts of ancient heathenism. In addition, he forbids all coarse sins and insists that parents should not strike their children. He also urges most strongly that the Indians should sacrifice; that they should do away with their cattle and keep horses only; that the heathen should shave their heads and live as did the Indians in olden days. He assured the Indians that God had shown him the deer were half a tree's length under the ground, and that these would soon appear again on earth if the Indians did what he told them to do, and then there would be an abundance of deer once more. He also related, in an address, that God had shown him a crab whose claws were quite full of seaweeds; that the spirit had told him, "Look! This crab is from Boston and has brought with it something of the land there. If you Indians will do everything I tell you, I will turn over the land so that the white people are covered, and you alone shall possess the land." The Schawanos are gathering together and, upon the advice of their teacher, plan to build a large town, not far from Greenville, that is to remain a hundred years. To this project they have also invited the Delawares. These, however, are divided in their opinions: some want to go with the Schawanos, others desire to move to the Mississippi. [...]

*[January 25]*

The wicked enemy is very busy again among the savages. His instruments, the heathen teachers, have come to the front with might again and say that they have again had visions from God. The Schawanos made the beginning, and sacrificed day and night at the direction of their teacher, in

connection with which their teachers assured them that God would hear their prayer and that they would live 200 years more. Later, all Schawanos are to assemble near Greenville, and there build a town, and drink no more whisky. The best of all of these teachings is that they prohibit the drinking of whisky. If only the Indians would follow this injunction! Soon after, the Delawares also had visions. The Schawano prophet described God as having a head half gray and half white, for the remaining part being like an Indian. The teachers of the Delawares said that God had white hands, but otherwise he had the form of an Indian. Their teaching consists chiefly of this: they are to sacrifice diligently, then God may hear them. On the contrary, however, if they would not, they would all be destroyed within a month by a whirlwind. [...]

The Indians flocked through our village on their way to the appointed house of sacrifice and spoke with the greatest wonder and respect about these lies. They also promised to drink no more whisky. [...]

*[February 17]*

Hannah, the woman baptized on Christmas Day, came to Br. and Sr. Kluge and said that she had heard that her brother was very sick in the Indian town ten miles from here, where he lives, and that she would like to go and visit him; that she would return in two days. All this she knew how to say in a very earnest manner, assuring us that she had no other object in view than that of visiting her sick brother. [...] But unfortunately, to our great sorrow, we learned after several days that this recently baptized woman had already gone the way of hypocrites. Instead of visiting her brother, as she pretended, out of fear she went straight to Woapicamikunk, to the heathen assembled there, in order to listen to the foolish teaching of the lying prophet and to take part in their heathenish practices. [...]

*[March 10]*

On the afternoon of this day, seven wild Indians, with faces painted black, came to us and took our last remaining brother, Joshua, away by force. The reason for this, according to them, was this: The Indians had resolved to abolish poison and all sorcery among them [...] To this end, the young people had banded together, deposed their chiefs, and, at the instigation of the heathen teacher, guarded those who had come together as captives, especially the older people, and appointed a great day on which to sit in judgment upon all who were suspected of dealing out poison. These suspects were to be brought to confess through fire. Old Chief Tedpachsit was the first one whom they accused of having poison with which he had brought about the death of many Indians. When the poor old man would not confess, they bound him to stakes and actually began to burn him. In his distress, he said he had stored poison in our Indian Br. Joshua's house. This was what they desired to hear, for it gave them a pretext to draw our poor Joshua into their terrible upheaval. They had called him a number of times before this, but he had not gone, answering that he was a believer and had nothing to do with their matter [...] In our trouble, we prayed to God our Savior that He should have mercy upon us and upon our poor Joshua, who was in the hands of the wild ones. [...]

*continued →*

*[March 15]*

At last, an Indian from Woapicamikunk came and told us that when Joshua was led before the old chief and declared to him that his statement had been false, the old chief confessed that he had lied from fear, in order to quiet somewhat the wrought-up savages; that he knew well enough that he had nothing of the kind, and much less had he anything stored in Joshua's house. Joshua was then declared free of the charge, but they would not allow him to return home on the ground that he had to wait until their prophet, the Schawano, had arrived. [...]

Imagine our horror when we heard that the expected Schawano had come to the assembled Indians [...]. All Indians, of both sexes, formed a circle about this miscreant, so that he might point out those who had poison or other supernatural gifts which relate to their superstition. After a great many ceremonies, he accused a number of having poison with which they brought about the death of Indians in all sorts of ways. The two old chiefs, Tedpachsit and Hackingpomska, were accused of having poison, the first named being especially charged with the death of a large number of Indians. When they asked him about our Joshua, plainly showing him their suspicion, this instrument of the Devil said that Joshua had no poison, that was certain, but that he had an evil spirit in him, by means of which he could bring about the death of Indians. Now they had heard what they desired. The wild young people took all these unjustly condemned captives and guarded them closely. We also heard that the raging savages had burned alive an old woman named Caritas, who had been baptized by the Brethren in olden times, and that our poor Joshua was likewise a captive. [...]

*[March 17]*

Our worry and perplexity over the fate of our Joshua increased. We were overcome with terror and fright when, all of a sudden, we saw ten Indians with their faces painted black, some on foot, others on horseback, coming into our village with old Chief Tedpachsit. Soon after, these barbarians built a large fire near our place, struck the old chief on the head with the hatchet, and threw him, half alive, into the fire. Meanwhile they stood near and rejoiced over the pitiful cries and movements of the unfortunate one. [...] Our feelings under this trial cannot be described. [...]

After the murder, the monsters, quite wild, came into the house [...] and demanded something to eat and tobacco to smoke. We gladly gave them both, so as to get rid of them. We summoned up courage as well as we could and asked what had become of our Joshua. They immediately began to accuse him of their abominable superstition and said that it was not for nothing that he was a prisoner; that they knew full well that he was familiar with the black art and could destroy the lives of Indians or cause them to become lame; that he merely pretended to be a believer of our teaching, etc. We did our best to show them that their charge was groundless, [...] saying that Joshua was an old believer and had nothing to do with the things they accused him of, for he belonged to God and had nothing to do with the works of the Devil; that in addition to this, he was a Mohican and, as they well knew, had come with us as our interpreter; that we requested, therefore, that they should release him at once, for what they did to him they might consider as being done to us, etc. [...]

Our hope was that we might do something toward having Joshua released or, if that were

impossible, at least talk with him once more. This we were ready to do even though we should have to suffer for it. Since it was impossible for us to leave Sr. Kluge all alone with the children<sup>a</sup> under such circumstances, Br. Luckenbach felt it his duty to go alone. [...]

*[March 18]*

With high courage, [Br. Luckenbach] left here early in the morning. He had hardly gone halfway when he was met by an Indian who gave him the terrible news that, on the day before, our poor Joshua had become a victim of their cruelty. They likewise had struck the hatchet into his head, two times, and then burned him. With this terrible news, Br. Luckenbach came back in the afternoon. [...] After several days, we heard that Joshua had said a great deal at the place of murder that the savages could not understand. It is quite likely that he prayed to the Savior in German [...]

*[March 23]*

A French trader sent a man to us to inform us that the Indians had told him to tell us that they would not hurt us, but that we should go away from here as soon as possible. This report frightened us not a little at first; at the same time, we did not feel like leaving our post in such haste, without having heard direct from the Indians themselves.

[...] Br. Luckenbach rode away on the 25th to learn what the savages had to say. They did not want to admit that they had tried to send us away; at the same time, they said, "You can go whenever you please; we do not need you here. In olden times, the Indians did not know how to live aright; but now we ourselves know how to live and need no one to teach us. None of us will come to hear your Word, for you are white people, and we are Indians. You have another color than we, also another teaching; your teaching is good for white people but not for us. But if you want to remain anyway, you may do so. We will not tell you to go away, neither will we ask you to remain. You can do as you please, and we will do as we please." With this answer, Br. Luckenbach returned on the 26th. From this, we could see clearly that they were setting us aside entirely and that we could expect no protection from them.

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<sup>a</sup> *Missionary couple Anna Marie and John Peter Kluge had produced three children during their five-year stay on the White River.*

**Source:** Lawrence Henry Gipson, ed., *The Moravian Indian Mission on White River: Diaries and Letters, May 5, 1799, to November 12, 1806*, trans. Harry E. Stocker, Herman T. Frueauff, and Samuel C. Zeller (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1938), 392, 402-403, 407, 412-419, <https://indianamemory.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16066coll98/id/1739/rec/1>. Courtesy the Indiana Historical Bureau. In copyright – Educational use permitted.

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