ABSTRACT

FROM THE ASHES: ONE STORY OF THE VILLAGE OF PINKWI MIHTOHSEENIAKI

by George Ironstrack

“From the Ashes” explores one chapter in the life of the Miami Indian village of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki, which was located along the banks Great Miami River near the current city of Piqua, Ohio. This thesis attempts to add new depth to our understanding of the village, which was settled in 1747 and purportedly depopulated in 1752, by centering the analysis on the local level. With an intense focus on the cultural and ecological landscapes of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki a more nuanced story surfaces. This one local story has the potential to transform our knowledge of the world of Miami-Illinois speaking peoples and the larger region of the Great Lakes in the eighteenth century.
FROM THE ASHES: ONE STORY OF THE VILLAGE OF *PINKWI MIHTOHSEENIAKI*

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Introduction

“The Ashes Lie in Layers”

Places tell stories. Standing on the ground of the Piqua Historical Area just to the north of Piqua, Ohio that simple yet elegant phrase did not seem to ring true. This part of the Historical Area was once the site of a Miami Indian village during a brief period between 1747-1752. But as I stood on the edge of a farm field overlooking a segment of the Miami-Erie canal and beyond that the Ahseenisiipi (Great Miami River) I did not feel any immediate connection to the place. I had spent a lot of time in the Wabash River Valley (one of the Miami people’s homelands) as a young person, but this site on the Ahseenisiipi felt different somehow and detached from the valley of the Waapahšiki Siipiwi (Wabash River). As the site director, Andy Hite, pointed out to me where he believed the village center was along with the communal longhouse, I still struggled to imagine the village in that particular location. I left that first day feeling well informed and roughly acquainted with the site but largely frustrated in my seeming inability to feel the place and hear the stories the place had to tell. With time, reflection, and more experience this feeling of frustration began to dissipate.

I have always had a special regard for my people’s village sites. Battle sites, cemeteries, and sacred sites are all incredibly important, but for me there is nothing more powerful than the land where my people lived out their daily lives. It is in these villages that Miami people gave birth to the next generation, raised families, tended their crops, held meetings, and conducted ceremonies. Resting for a moment in these places, I know that what lies below the surface of covering vegetation and topsoil are the layers of ashes from my people’s fires and the prints of their wiikiaama (wigwams) and kinoonteewa (longhouses).

The village site, which Andy so very generously shared stories with me about, was vastly altered by the processes of settlement and farming; that altering affected my initial perceptions of the village. It was after much reflection on the stories that Andy shared with me and many more visits and time spent with the place of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki that I believe I began to feel the village’s connections to its surrounding landscape. The first connection that Andy and others

1 The Miami homelands lie in the Wabash River Valley in north central Indiana, in western Kansas, and in northeastern Oklahoma.
pointed me towards was State Route 66, running to the north of the site in the direction of Fort Wayne, Indiana. This two-lane highway probably follows the path of the Piqua Road, the old trail that connected *Pinkwi Mihtohseeeniaki* with another Miami village, *Kiihkayonki* (modern-day Fort Wayne).\(^2\) A line of rocks running high in the normally low waterline of the *Ahsenisiipi* traces the path of an overland trail that linked the village of Chiningué, also known as Logstown, to *Pinkwi Mihtohseeeniaki*. From these connections I began to get a better feel for why a group of Miami people might have moved from their homes to this spot. From this reflective process I began to hear the story of this village, or more correctly of the numerous villages, lying in the layers beneath my feet.

The village that I had gone in search of at the Piqua Historical Area had its beginnings in 1747. In the fall of that year a group of Miami people attacked the French living with them at *Kiihkayonki* (Fort Wayne, Indiana). Following this attack, the group’s purported leader, *Meemeehiikia*, led an emigration from *Kiihkayonki* to the banks of the *Ahsenisiipi* (Great Miami River) near its confluence with Loramie Creek and settled an old village site, abandoned for at least one hundred years. The Miami called the people of this village *Pinkwi Mihtohseeeniaki* (the ash people), but Europeans called this place Pickawillany.\(^3\)

Historians have researched and written about *Pinkwi Mihtohseeeniaki* since the earliest days of the historical discipline in the United States. The village has however never formed the basis of any one text and has only been the direct subject of one journal article. Yet, *Pinkwi Mihtohseeeniaki* receives some notice in almost every great text that discusses the period leading up to the Seven Years’ War. Like historians of every major war many scholars have sought to identify those events that can be seen as precursors to a global conflict. This particular global conflict, the Seven Years’ War, eventually resulted in the destruction of the French empire in North America and a period of supremacy unparalleled up to that point in the history of the British Empire. The conflict between the French and the British over the fate of this village and

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\(^2\) *Kiihkayonki* is the name that Miami people use today for the Miami villages that were located at the confluence of the St. Joseph’s and St. Mary’s Rivers. The name *Kiihkayonki* may not have been used for that place until the 1790s, but this is the only Miami language name that is currently known for this spot. For more on this issue see Albert Gatchet, "Peoria- and Miami-English Dictionary," in *National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution* (Washington: n.d.), 709-10.

\(^3\) Gatschet, “Miami-English Dictionary,” 2012. Hereafter the village will be referred to by the Miami name for its people, *Pinkwi Mihtohseeeniaki*, unless the English name is used within a quote. The Miami may have also called this village by the name of the adjacent river, the *Ahsenisiipi* (The Great Miami River) as this was a common naming practice for Miami villages.
the village’s eventual destruction at the urging of French colonial officers have historically been seen as key “heating up” moments between the two empires. The first shots of the Seven Years’ War were fired in the Ohio valley in 1754 and because of this many scholars have looked at *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* as the first skirmish of a much larger war.

In early works, like George Bancroft’s *History of the United States, Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* is center stage in the conflict over the Ohio River Valley, which would, two years afterward, serve as the proverbial “match” to the aforementioned global conflagration. As with Bancroft, historians Paul A. Wallace and Alfred T. Volwiler, in their representations of British interpreters and negotiators Conrad Weiser and George Croghan, discuss *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* in terms of a growing conflict between the two European empires. In Wallace’s words “everyone could see that France and England were moving toward a showdown in the Ohio Valley.” Wallace continues, “the years of 1752-55 were lived in an atmosphere of uncertainty, hesitation, and suspicion not unlike the years between Hitler’s accession to power in Germany and the outbreak of war in 1939.”

Charles Galbreath replicates this depiction of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* as an initial domino, which set off a chain reaction leading to world war, in his state-centered *History of Ohio*. Galbreath concludes that 1752 attack “kindled the fires of conflict that spread to Europe and brought reinforcements from over the seas to determine whether France or Great Britain should be the dominant power in North America.” From his perspective “[t]he destruction of Pickawillany was the first act in the drama that closed on the Heights of Abraham and gave a continent to Anglo-Saxon supremacy.” By depicting *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* in this manner, Galbreath and others leave little or no room for indigenous actors; they can be only imperial pawns.

The trend among historians to see both the Seven Years’ War as inevitable, like other “famous” wars, and the conflict over the Ohio as between Europeans has continued almost unto the present. Within this dominant perspective the creation and destruction of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* are seen as the result of European machinations. According to this view, British

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trade goods lured these peoples to Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki and French fears of growing British strength in the Ohio Valley necessitated the village’s destruction.\(^7\)

The twin influences of post-modernism and post-colonialism have transformed all areas of American history and they have altered the way accounts of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki and the whole conflict over the Ohio are structured. Francis Jennings, in Empire of Fortune, spends considerable time describing connections between various indigenous groups, placing the Iroquois at the center of many of these networks. Yet he depicted the inter-indigenous alliances manifested at Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki as a brief flirtatious moment spent away from the French fold.\(^8\)

The imperial point of view on Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki is more successfully escaped in works like Fred Anderson’s Crucible of War, Richard White’s The Middle Ground, Andrew Cayton’s Frontier Indiana, and Daniel K. Richter’s Facing East From Indian Country. In these works we are presented with a conflict that extends far beyond the European powers. While most of these historians depict the Ohio River Valley as nearly devoid of indigenous settlements, an issue we will return to later, they all take great pains to articulate the great diversity of indigenous American groups that were vying with Europeans and each other for control of this space.\(^9\) Instead of the typical conflict of empires, these authors present us with a tangled web of internal divisions and external loyalties. Even among the Europeans, it is far from clear that we are dealing with unified and uniform groups. In perhaps the most interesting discussion of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki to date, Richard White describes the village as one of many “republics and rebels.” These terms represent the French perception of the rising pro-British sentiment within different indigenous groups as revolts or rebellions against France. It was these divisions

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\(^7\) This perspective is neatly summarized by the title of Edmunds’ journal article, which remains the single best summary of the history of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki. R. David Edmunds, "Pickawillany: French Military Power Versus British Economics," Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine 58, no. 2 (1975).

\(^8\) Francis Jennings, Empire of Fortune: Crowns, Colonies, and Tribes in the Seven Years War in America (New York: Norton, 1990), 24, 49.

that the French believed lay at the heart of the creation of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki.\(^{10}\) In most of these more recent works, the creation and destruction of the village of the “People of the Ashes” was equally the result of indigenous decision-making and internal politics as it was the result of European machinations.

What is missing from all of these analyses is a deep knowledge of the decision-making and life ways of what Richard White calls “the nonstate world of villages.” White frames his definition of the middle ground as a place in-between the balancing forces of Algonquian villages and the imperial drives of France (and to a certain extent England/Great Britain).\(^ {11}\) Yet, his source material vastly favors only one side of the equation: the imperial. His ethnographic reading of these sources and his ability to invert or subvert these imperial documents to address how the indigenous peoples of what the French called the “up country”, or the pays d’en haut, conceived of these changes remains remarkable, intimidating, and discouraging to those just starting out in the discipline. But White’s analysis is weakened by a lack of other scholarly work to draw on that turns these same well honed skills onto the multitude of local villages that existed in the pays d’en haut.\(^ {12}\)

Region-wide analyses are not absolutely flawed by the paucity of tightly focused village studies. It would quite frankly be impossible to expect regional authors to have highly specific knowledge of more than a small handful of such communities. However, because of the lack of localized studies, these region-wide analyses lack the nuance provided by a comparison with the unique way each individual community dealt with the changes experienced by the whole region. If there were numerous studies of many of the villages in the pays d’en haut one would not expect White’s thesis to be overturned or replaced. Instead these studies would only strengthen his region-wide analysis. Localized studies would add more layers of complexity and further the process of moving the field away from the construction of overly broad generalizations that fail to take into account the diversity that existed (and continues to exist) among the indigenous peoples of the pays d’en haut.

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\(^{10}\) White, Middle Ground, 186-234.

\(^{11}\) White, Middle Ground, x. And for a revisiting of White’s definitive work and his concept of the space between “nonstate” villages and empires see Philip J. Deloria, "What Is the Middle Ground, Anyway?" The William and Mary Quarterly 63, no. 1 (2006). <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/wm/63.1/deloria.html>

\(^{12}\) For a great example of just such a study see Helen Hornbeck Tanner, "The Glaize in 1792: A Composite Indian Community," Ethnohistory 25, no. Winter (1978). Unfortunately not many have followed Tanner’s example and there are not enough of these studies for researchers to draw upon.
A great example of the level of nuance provided by localized studies is Alan Taylor’s *William Cooper’s Town*. Taylor’s story of the settling and expansion of a village, albeit not an indigenous village, allows for an insightful reflection on the height of Federalism and the rise of the Jeffersonian Republicans. Taylor does not overturn the prevailing understanding of this process but he does provide a localized context to understand something that is normally discussed at a national or regional level. *William Cooper’s Town* gives names, faces, and personalities to a large group of local figures that experienced these changes and necessarily adds additional hues to the masterpiece works of the Early American Republic.\(^{13}\)

Like *William Cooper’s Town* this thesis attempts to give a local face to what has been traditionally examined at the regional level. This thesis centers on a seemingly simple question. How did a group of people come to construct their village community and attempt to sustain it? The sensational nature of the demise of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* and the fate of the village’s reputed leader has led interested parties away from questioning the processes that led to the village’s beginnings. I plan to break my answer to this question into two chapters.

The first chapter of the thesis, “The Cultural Landscapes of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki*,” examines the theme of landscape and place. The position of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* within the larger Miami-Illinois speaking people’s landscape (as well as the much larger indigenous American landscape) is central to understanding this village from an internal perspective.\(^{14}\) This chapter discusses in detail the misnomer that the Ohio River Valley was an “empty” place. The Ohio Valley may have been depopulated following the Iroquois Wars of the late seventeenth century, but the land was richly contoured by the cultural maps of the people who called that area home. The 1747 incarnation of the village of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* was not the first to be located on that site and yet the depth of these peoples understanding of this place has been long ignored.

The second chapter, “The Ecological Landscapes of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki*,” attempts to reconstruct the ecological web of connections in which the village was immersed. Relying

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14 The term Miami-Illinois is used to refer to the central Algonquian language spoken by the Miami, Wea, Piankashaw, Peoria, and Illinois groups. There were slight dialectical differences between each group but this was more an issue of accent than intelligibility.
heavily on the work of environmental historians, this chapter is an attempt to focus tightly on how the village fed itself. There has been little if any work done into this area of village life and yet many broad assumptions have been made regarding it. This area of indigenous life surely deserves as much emphasis as the processes of accommodation and cultural creation that *The Middle Ground* spawned.

The conclusion, “Fanning the Flames of Localized Ways of Knowing,” asks a series of questions that attempt to demonstrate the need for more localized representations of indigenous life. There is widespread acknowledgement of the reality that most of the people of the *pays d’en haut* were village-centered people. Yet, there is still little known about how these “nonstate” villages functioned internally. The value of this type of research to the discipline of history is relatively clear. But the conclusion also discusses the value that these kinds of studies have for indigenous peoples today.

In moving through these layers of knowledge and knitting together a local story, this thesis relies on a series of ethnohistorical techniques. These methods were initially developed during the 1940s and 1950s. To seek restitution for treaty violations, tribes brought cases before the Indian Claims Commission, the governmental body assigned responsibility for deciding the merit of Tribal claims. The Commission’s requirement that evidence be scholarly in nature, contributed to a new interdisciplinary methodology as historians and anthropologists conducted research into “official” colonial documents to support Tribal claims. In time, this broad method came to include fields as far ranging as cultural anthropology, ecology, archeology, historical analysis, and linguistic studies.

Many of the sources for any study of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* are either French or British, but the predominance of Euro-American voices does not mean that the indigenous point of view cannot be accessed. In his work *Facing East from Indian Country*, Daniel K. Richter attempts to turn European documents “inside out” in order to discern the perspectives of native peoples.\(^{15}\) By carefully applying this method this researcher attempts to use first-hand European accounts from men like George Croghan, Christopher Gist, William Trent, Pierre Joseph Celeron, and Francois Marie de Ligneris to recreate what was going on within the village from an indigenous perspective.

A second and far less controversial methodological tool used in this thesis is ethno-semantics. Language is one source for understanding the worldviews of a people and is a key tool in understanding Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki from an indigenous point of view. For example, an examination of the way in which Miami-Illinois speaking peoples named the landscape around them would help us better understand how Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki fit into the larger indigenous world. I have been student of the Miami language since 1996, and as my knowledge of my heritage language grows I am increasingly aware of how through the lens of language it is possible to transform our understanding of the past.

The third tool employed in this thesis centers on the existing archaeological studies of the remains at Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki. The Ohio Historical Society as well as amateur archeologists have conducted a series of preliminary surveys the last of which was conducted in 2002. These studies shed new light on the habitation of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki during the years 1747-1752 as well is in the previous era. These preliminary archaeological surveys indicate the presence of structures on site and hint at the location and size of the village’s agricultural fields. Unfortunately, the area was not slated for much more extensive work within the timeframe of this project. In the years to come, more extensive archeological work at Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki will transform our knowledge of the village in an even greater way.

The goal of “From the Ashes” is to demonstrate how a close study of one village, Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki, reveals the unique value of knowing localized contexts better. Developing an understanding of how these villages perceived the land and the people around them, and how they interacted with that land in order to survive is at least as valuable as understanding the broader cross-cultural contacts and constructs created across the whole region. More importantly, localized studies have the potential to demonstrate how the generalizations of region-wide analyses fail to accurately depict the diversity of experiences within a given region. When I stand near to the site of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki, my mind returns to the daily aspects of the villagers’ lives that make that place so special. The region-wide analyses that have long framed the discussion around Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki continue to have value but have been overemphasized to detriment of understanding the local village context that framed the lives of the people who called Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki home.

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Chapter One

“The Cultural Landscapes of Pinkwi Mihthoeeniaki”

On June 21, 1752, an intertribal military force made up of 250 Ottawa and Ojibwa warriors attacked the Miami Indian village of Pinkwi Mihthoeeniaki. The attackers took the village by such complete surprise that many of the residents were caught in the cornfields lying outside the village and fort. The Ottawa and Ojibwa warriors then attacked the British fort into which some of the inhabitants had fled. Following a brief standoff, the defenders of the fort surrendered to their attackers. Despite the agreed-upon terms, the attackers killed a few of the wounded and the village chief, then cooked and ate him in a ritual meant to incorporate his powers into those of the victors.¹ This story and its accompanying violence and cannibalism vividly mark the end of a five-year period of Miami Indian attempts to create an alliance with the British.²

Scholars have traditionally devoted most of their attention on the shocking collapse of Pinkwi Mihthoeeniaki. And this, in turn, has informed the dominant interpretative question they have asked about the history of this place. Put simply: Why did Pinkwi Mihthoeeniaki fail? But as with any good story, the beginning is at least as interesting as its end. The tendency to focus almost exclusively on the demise of Pinkwi Mihthoeeniaki has detracted attention away from its creation and, of equal importance, Miami-Illinois speaking peoples’ rationale and means for sustaining it. Seen from this vantage point, the positioning of the village, both geographically and politically, represented a means for them to access two extensive sets of relationships. The competing European powers were an important part of these interactions but they were not the sole focus of this process. Pinkwi Mihthoeeniaki therefore served as a path to escape dependence on any single group or alliance.

² This was not the only Miami attempt to create an alliance with the British, but the 1752 attack brought this period of alliance building to a close.
This particular story of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* has its beginning in the fall of 1747. That fall, thirty to forty Miami Indian families moved to the confluence of Loramie Creek and the *Ahsenisiipi* (Great Miami River) and established the village of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki*. Members of this group were involved in a direct and violent assault on the French living near to *Kiihkayonki* (modern Fort Wayne, Indiana). During the conflict no Frenchmen were killed, but the attacking Miami confiscated the trade goods contained within the French fort and set a part of the structure afire. Following the violence, this small group of Miami people moved ninety miles to the southeast from *Kiihkayonki* to *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki*. Approximately 100 women, children, and men built their new homes on or near the site of numerous villages of the past. However, humans had not inhabited the location for at least a century, and the establishment of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* must have required much strenuous and difficult labor.³

Numerous external groups watched with great interest as these peoples struggled to re-establish *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki*. Miami people to the west and north, Iroquoian peoples to the east, Ottawa and Ojibwa peoples to the north, French traders and officials to the west and north, Pennsylvanian traders and colonial officials to the east, and Virginian officials to the southeast all paid close attention to what was occurring at *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki*. This internal effort and the external attention devoted to it provide a rare opportunity to reflect on the process through which new village communities were formed in the Great Lakes region of the eighteenth century.⁴

In their efforts to create a new village community, the people of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* built upon a Miami worldview and structured their new community within Miami conceptualizations of place and peoplehood.⁵ Through *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* a window opens into the larger world of the Miami of the eighteenth century. The natal stage of this village provides insight into the way Miami communities of the eighteenth century viewed themselves,

³ By 1749 the village had forty to fifty warriors and total population of approximately 200. It is likely that in 1747 these numbers were smaller by at least half. For numbers of villagers in 1747 see note 88, Lyman Copeland Draper and Reuben Gold Thwaites, eds., *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, vol. 18 (Madison, WI: The Society, 1903), 50.


their relationships with the landscapes, and their connections to the beings with whom they shared these landscapes.

Life for the indigenous peoples of North America was (and still is) defined by relationships. The deep importance of relatedness was taught to most indigenous children through the broad family systems that structured most villages. This family understanding of relatedness was just the first step towards an ever-deeper understanding of the larger world that was based on interconnected webs of alliance, respect, and reciprocity. These connections could be between individuals, between different village groups, between the peoples and the landscape, between the peoples and the other living beings who shared that landscape, or between beings that were other than human. Most of these interconnections were, and still are, defined in terms of kinship, which formed the basis of any Miami alliance. Like any living network, these relationships have never been static; they have changed and evolved over time. It is this deep understanding of the networks of relatedness that governed the initial movement of Miami peoples to Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki.6

One of the key parts of this web of relationships first developed during the Beaver or Fur Wars that took place in the years between 1642 and 1701. The peoples included in these systems have histories and connections to each other that go back far beyond contact with Europeans. Yet, the system of relationships that influenced the development of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki came largely from the Indigenous-European relationships that were both the source of and the solution to the problems produced by the Beaver Wars.7

The Beaver Wars began as the Iroquois, or the Five Nations, pushed into the Ohio, Wabash, and Illinois River Valleys in an attempt to gain access to a greater supply of furs. The people living in these river valleys were mostly speakers of Miami-Illinois and Ojibwa-Potawatomi. Tribal or national identities did not exist at this time; instead these peoples organized themselves along village lines. These village peoples lived in a series of fixed locations, usually at the confluence of streams. The villages were multi-ethnic and multi-lingual, though each village tended to be dominated by one linguistic group. As the Five Nations

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warriors, who were armed with Dutch firearms, advanced into the area south of Lake Erie and into the Wabash and Illinois River Valleys, most of the peoples of those areas fled north to Green Bay. By 1690, Miami, Huron, Illinois, Mesquakie, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Ojibwa, Ottawa, and Winnebago peoples were all living on or around Green Bay. It was these refugee communities that made some of the first contacts with French Jesuit missionaries and traders. Gradually these multi-ethnic and multi-lingual communities recovered from the twin disruptions of war and disease. By 1690, armed by the French and unified in an indigenous-French alliance, these groups pushed back the Five Nations advance and brought the battle to the Iroquois’ homelands. Faced with a losing battle, the Five Nations sued for peace.8

The antagonists achieved peace in Montreal in 1701, but at least five years earlier, the original inhabitants of the Illinois, Wabash, and Ohio River Valleys began to migrate home. These Miami-Illinois speaking peoples returned to the Wabash River Valley and gradually formed three major village communities as well as numerous smaller villages. Kiihkayonki, the first and largest village, was situated at the headwaters of the Maumee River; Waayaahtanonki, the second, at the confluence of Wildcat Creek and the Wabash River; and Peeyankihšionki, the third, at the confluence of the Embarras and Wabash rivers. The British documents of this period often refer to these three villages as separate tribes of the Twightwee Nation.9 These documents usually call the peoples of Kiihkayonki the Miami proper. They refer to those living at Waayaahtanonki as the Wea, and to those dwelling at Peeyankihšionki as the Piankashaw (see Figure 1). The name Twightwee probably came from the Cherokee, and it was used by most of the eastern indigenous peoples to refer to the Miami.10 All three of these major village groups spoke the same language, lived according to nearly the same yearly calendar cycle, and therefore practiced similar cultural habits. Movement of peoples between these

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three villages was fluid, and the relationship between each of the three was one of close kinship. As these Miami-speaking people resettled themselves in the Wabash River Valley, they positioned themselves geographically and politically within a set of relationships that was a continuation of those developed during the Beaver Wars.

The Wabash River Valley and the peoples who positioned themselves there occupied a central role in maintaining the connections developed during the Beaver Wars. In the north, the

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11 For kinship between Miami-Illinois groups of the Wabash River Valley see Trowbridge, Meearmee Traditions, 12.
Wabash connected the St. Joseph’s Potawatomi, the Ottawa, and the French with the Illinois peoples living along the Mississippi to the south. In fact, according to speakers of Miami, the *Waapaahšiki Siipiwi* (Wabash River) ran all the way to the *Mihšisiipi* (Mississippi River). They saw the *Kaanseeseepiipiwi* (Ohio River) as a feeder stream of the *Waapaahšiki Siipiwi*. According to this conceptualization of the landscape, it was the river of the Miami heartlands, the *Waapaahšiki Siipiwi*, that led to the biggest river in North America. The nexus point at the center of this connected landscape was the village of *Kiikhayonki* (see figure 1).

*Kiikhayonki* lay on the major portage between the *Taawaawa Siipiwi* (Maumee River) and the headwaters of the *Neekawikami* (Aboite River), which fed into the Wabash River Valley. In a geographically unique manner, the *Nameewaa Siipiwi* (St. Mary’s River) and the *Kociihsasiipi* (St. Joseph River) combine to form the *Taawaawa Siipiwi* (Maumee River). The *Taawaawa Siipiwi* flows northeast into Lake Erie, while within a few miles of its headwaters is the *Neekawikami*, which joins the *Waapaahšiki Siipiwi* flowing southwest heading towards the Gulf of Mexico. The portage at *Kiikhayonki* was therefore valuable; any group traveling from Detroit or Montreal in the direction of New Orleans was likely to pass through this Miami village. Passage, of course, was dependent on the payment of a toll and the *Kiikhayonki* Miami gained great wealth as a result of their control of this gate. The *Kociihsasiipi* connected the Miami with their elder brothers the Potawatomi who lived along its banks as well as up near the French fort at Detroit. The *Taawaawa Siipiwi* connected the Miami to the people for whom the river was named, the *Taawaawa* (Ottawa) living on the shore of Lake Erie and also at Detroit. The modern name for the *Taawaawa Siipiwi*, the Maumee River, is the result of the Ottawa inversion of this naming process. Most likely, these Ottawa peoples used the river to travel to the Miami living at *Kiikhayonki* and therefore named the river after them. Maumee is the Ottawa pronunciation of Miami.

The French recognized the value of this location and constructed a fort at *Kiikhayonki* by the early 1720s. This fort served as a distribution point for French gifts and for the trade in furs that was the main French economic interest in the Great Lakes. By the 1740s, *Kiikhayonki* was so profitable that other Miami groups began to migrate up the *Waapaahšiki* in order to gain

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12 Brett J. Governanti, "The Myaamia Mapping Project" (Map, GPS, and Riverine, Miami University, 2005). Michael McCafferty first pointed out the Miami conception of the Wabash River running all the way to the Mississippi.  
13 Governanti, “The Myaamia Mapping Project.”  
14 Daryl Baldwin (Director of the Myaamia Project), in discussion with the author, March 16, 2005.
better access to the trade taking place there. Yet, within a few years the Miami desire to be closely tied to the French changed radically. By 1747, the migration to Kiihkayonki reversed as numerous groups, including some Miami, attacked French forts and then fled to new villages that were slightly distant from the alliances constructed during the Beaver Wars. Before the end of 1750, Kiihkayonki lay half empty as a majority of the Miami residents emigrated eighty miles to the southeast, to the newer village of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki.

In the Miami language, this newer village was called Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki (the village of the “People of the Ashes”). Pickawillany, the name that the British used to refer to the village, comes from the Shawnee word pkiwileni. Pkiwileni is the Shawnee word for the Miami as a people but was also used in this period to refer to this individual village. The village of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki lay on the northwest side of the Ahsenisiipi (Great Miami River) around 150 miles from the confluence of the Ahsenisiipi and the Kaanseeseepiwi (Ohio River). The modern name of Ahsenisiipi (Great Miami River) probably indicates that this river led to a trail that ran from Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki to Kiihkayonki and was therefore a way to reach the Miami from the south. A map produced by the British trader John Patten indicates the system of trails and portages that connected Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki with its surroundings. The French captured Patten in 1750 and took him along a series of rivers, trails, and portages from the Ohio Valley to Detroit and later to Montreal. Patten clearly indicated the trail connecting Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki and Kiihkayonki and a long trail that stretches across the Ohio Valley to the British trading center at Logstown. Logstown was a secure link with the larger established cities of Pennsylvania and eastern seaboard of the British colonies. The Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki-Logstown trail and the Ahsenisiipi allowed the Miami living at Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki to develop stronger relationships with the indigenous peoples of the Ohio River Valley (see Figure 2).

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17 The linguist Albert Gatschet reported that this moniker was originally used for a portion of the Delaware Tribe that inhabited the location at some point. Albert Gatschet, "Peoria- and Miami-English Dictionary," in *National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution* (Washington: n.d.), 2012.
18 David Costa (Linguist), in email to the author, June 28, 2006.
19 Darlington, *Journal of Christopher Gist*, 47.
Following the beginning of Miami migration to *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* in 1747, the Miami developed stronger relationships with the Delaware, Shawnee, and Iroquois communities of the Ohio River Valley. The Shawnee and the Delaware had been connected to the Miami in alliances that reached back to a period before the Beaver Wars, but these two were not a part of the system of relationships that were developed during the refugee period of the Beaver Wars. Unlike the Miami’s elder brothers, the Shawnee, and their grandfathers, the Delaware, the Iroquois had been considered historic enemies of the Miami-Illinois speaking peoples of the
Wabash River Valley. This status changed following the peace of 1701, and only minor raiding had taken place between the Miami and the Five Nations as most of the hostilities subsided. When explorer Christopher Gist traveled down the *Kaanseeseepiwi* in 1750, he reported numerous Delaware, Shawnee, and Mingo (Iroquois) villages along the banks of the river.\(^{21}\) One of the advantages of dwelling at *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* was increased access to the indigenous peoples to the east and to the British traders that were becoming more numerous in the 1750s. But those living in the village did not turn their backs on their relatives living to the north and west.

An examination of two maps produced directly by indigenous peoples, or through indigenous-European cooperation, demonstrates the degree to which *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* was at the center of an interconnected landscape. The first map was produced in 1755 shortly after the start of the Seven Years War in North America. As a part of the war effort, British settlers sought to gain as much information as possible about the French and their allies. One such effort produced a map, which combined indigenous drawing with British text (see Figure 3). Jagrea (alternatively spelled Cherigea and Zigerea) was possibly the primary author of this map. Jagrea was the son-in-law of Scaroyady, a prominent Iroquois who served as a “go-between” in the Ohio Country.\(^{22}\) As ambassadors and messengers, such men moved through the Ohio regularly during this period, and they would have been able to provide much of the information required for this map. The fact that Jagrea spent most of his time near the Shawnee villages on the *Kaanseeseepiwi* would also explain the incomplete rendering of the *Waapaahšiki Siipiwi*. Jagrea was in Philadelphia in 1756, and it seems possible that he could have provided the intelligence for this map during that visit. This map was probably not produced by a Miami man, as the historical cartographer Mark Warhus has suggested, but it is still a useful source for examining how the indigenous peoples living in the eastern Ohio River Valley perceived the connections in the landscape.\(^{23}\)

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\(^{21}\) Darlington, *Journal of Christopher Gist*, 33-49.


Jagrea organized the landscape around the central feature of the Kaanseeseepiiwi. This river does not signify a border or a dividing line between two rival spaces. Instead, the river was the major route of travel for all those living within the valley and those living just outside. All along this major travel route were villages of different indigenous peoples, which tended to lie at or near the major confluences. Villages were depicted more densely on the eastern and western edges of the map. This depiction corresponds with the suggestions of scholars, such as Helen Tanner and Richard White, that the Ohio was slowly being repopulated during the eighteenth century.²⁴

Yet, there are reasons why the Ohio River Valley depicted on this map might appear “empty” despite the presence of numerous villages. Jagrea’s British interrogators were not overly concerned with the central Ohio River Valley. They were interested in the locations of

French forts and the numbers and locations of those indigenous peoples allied to the French. The Shawnee, Delaware, and Mingo Iroquois occupying this territory were either neutral or closely allied to the British and therefore not of as great a military concern. Because of this focus, it is possible that they neglected to posit elaborate questions regarding the central valley (the center of the map). By 1755, Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki had sat abandoned for three years. Therefore, it does not appear on this map, but the routes that connected the villages of the Ohio River Valley are depicted.

Jagrea’s map is a testament to the way in which any village near to the Kaanaseeepiwi would easily become connected with both the indigenous peoples of the east and the British. Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki provided the Miami with access to the east in a way that Kiïhkayonki, which was only eighty miles away, could not. Jagrea’s map remains somewhat of a puzzle that will require many more hours of what Helen Tanner calls “meditating over,” but the map is invaluable to the process of understanding how the indigenous peoples of this place and time perceived their interconnected landscape.25 The people of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki recognized the value of the eastward link the Kaanaseeepiwi (Ohio River) provided, but its value did not outweigh the linkage between Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki and Kiïhkayonki, which was the previous home of many of the residents of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki.

The strength of the connection between Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki and Kiïhkayonki was embodied within the eighty-mile trail that connected the villages. A two-day journey by foot was all it took to move between these two villages. This ease of travel makes it easy to see how the bond between these two places would have remained strong despite the increase in connections with those living to the east.26

While a strong linkage remained between Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki and Kiïhkayonki, the increase in the size and importance of former threatened to alter the manner in which outsiders accessed the Miami heartlands of the Wabash River Valley. Kiïhkayonki was historically the largest Miami village and had a longer tradition of attracting the attention of other indigenous peoples, French soldiers, French traders, and even British traders all of whom wanted to portage into the Waapaahšiki Siiipiwi. Yet, Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki lay within easy distance of three

25 Helen Hornbeck Tanner (Senior Research Fellow at the Newberry Library), in conversation with the author, spring 2005.
26 The Piqua Road is clearly depicted by John Patten on his map (see Figure 2) as a trail between the two villages. Brown, Early Maps of the Ohio Valley, 16.
smaller portages that fed into the *Waapaahšiki Siipiïwi*. The growth of this newer village would have allowed for the growth of interconnections between the people Miami heartlands along the *Waapaahšiki Siipiïwi* (southwest of *Kiikhayonki*) and the peoples of the Ohio River Valley. These newer connections did not require that these travelers pass through *Kiikhayonki* and would have marked a major change in the way the Miami heartlands were linked to the east. But how did the Miami-Illinois speaking peoples of this time period perceive of these different pathways to *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* and the east?

In order to examine indigenous perceptions of this landscape we turn to another indigenous map. In 1774, A Wea man, who lived at *Waayahtanonki* along the Wabash River Valley, drew this map of his home valley on deerskin (see Figure 4). Historical cartographer G. Malcom Lewis believes that the dotted lines on the map indicate that a treaty negotiation was taking place for the sale of Wea land. The outbreak of the American Revolution more than likely disrupted this negotiation and sale. From first glance, the differences between this map and Jagrea’s are startling. The map is centered on the Wea man’s homeland, the *Waapaahšiki Siipiïwi*. In fact, the Wea man’s village of almost occupies the center of the hide at the confluence of the Sugar Creek and the *Waapaahšiki Siipiïwi*. Once again, the majority of the villages lie at or near the major confluences, and the connections between villages are multiplied through the depiction of trails. Looking at this map holistically, it appears less disjointed than Jagrea’s map. Rather than pieced together from different reports or different days of dialogue, the Wea man probably drew this map entirely in one sitting. Despite the negotiators’ intentions, the Wea man’s representation of his home river valley was not an attempt to represent geographical place in the European sense. More than likely it was the European negotiators who drew the straight lines on the map to demonstrate the block of land under negotiation, but they fundamentally misunderstood what the Wea man outlined for them on this deerskin. The author of this map drew the *Waapaahšiki* nearly perfectly straight. He depicted the streams feeding into the Wabash River Valley as straight or making a slight bend and then continuing on in a nearly straight course. None of these rivers are even vaguely straight, and even the relative distances

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between confluences are inaccurate. Despite his technical inaccuracies, the Wea man clearly depicted an interconnected landscape.28

For a Miami-Illinois speaking person, this conceptualization of the Wabash River Valley allows one to move between communities along the rivers and paths that connected them. If each confluence is accurately represented, then the exact shape of the land or the precise distances become unnecessary or irrelevant. If the end points of each trail are accurately portrayed then the exact shape or distance of the trail is not required. For the indigenous peoples of the Waapaahšiki, the rivers and trails were their roads and the confluences and villages were their signposts. In order to communicate distances these people probably used time. A journey from one village to another might be marked by the number of days it took to get there. As with Jagrea’s map, Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki is not directly represented in the Wea depiction, but if one “meditates over” this map for a while, the village surfaces.

Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki appears in the Wea man’s representation of the interconnections of his space. The three rivers that connected the Wabash River Valley to the village were the Waapaahšiki Siipiïwi (Wabash), the Oonsaaloomoni Siipiïwi (Salamonie), and the Nimacihsinwi Siipiïwi (Mississinewa). The Wea map does not depict the headwaters of the Waapaahšiki and therefore this connection is missing. The map does include the headwaters of the Oonsaaloomoni and Nimacihsinwi rivers. The map depicts a trail running from the Nimacihsinwi (Mississinewa) to the Ahsenisiipi. The only recorded Miami-speaking village in the vicinity of the Ahsenisiipi was Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki and therefore the most likely destination for this trail was that village. If this analysis of the Wea map is correct, then it appears as though in 1774 a Wea man still recalled trails that connected the Wabash River Valley to Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki as late as 1752.

The analyses of John Patton’s, Jagrea’s, and the Wea man’s maps demonstrate the complex interweaving connections that existed between Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki and the surrounding river valleys, villages, peoples and landscapes. Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki was more accessible to British traders and more closely tied to the indigenous peoples of the east. But the village was not isolated from Kiihkayonki or the French influence there. It was only eighty miles away along a well-established trail. Neither was Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki isolated from the Miami heartlands. In fact, of all three connections, this was perhaps the strongest and yet the least

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28 The British Museum, Native American Art.
noticed or reported on. The connections between Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki and the surrounding landscape were neither happy accidents nor new creations. This village was an intentionally chosen location with a long history as a confluence of importance. Although the Ohio River Valley may have been depopulated during the Beaver Wars, it was not a blank space. The people who once called that space home retained memories of the connections in the landscape and they used them to their advantage as new situations arose. The Miami-Illinois speaking people, led by Meemehšihkia, who moved to Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki, sought out the advantages
provided by its multiple connections. Hand in hand with this strategic geographical positioning came the village leadership’s astute political positioning.

The leaders of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki carefully sought to position themselves politically between the newer eastern alliance and the older alliances developed during the Beaver Wars. Typically, historians have depicted the creation of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki as either a movement towards better British trade or as a rebellion against French influence, and the documentary evidence supports these assertions to a certain extent. But the records of negotiations from this period also suggest that the people involved had a much more complex understanding of what they were doing. By looking at the documents produced by the government of New France and the colonial government of Pennsylvania, it is possible to see how Europeans perceived the creation of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki. Within these colonial documents it is also possible to see a translated version of what the indigenous peoples said was taking place. Finally through the examination of the journal of Christopher Gist, a Virginia trader, it is possible to recreate from a first-hand account what was happening within Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki at its height in 1751.

French officials portrayed the creation of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki as the result of the rising prices of trade goods. During the course of King George’s War (1744-1748), the prices of French goods did rise. The capture of Louisburg, combined with the effective naval blockade of French ports, limited the amount of goods available for distribution as gifts and as compensation in the fur trade. The war allowed the British to trade their goods for as much as fifty percent less than the French. The administrators of New France explained the rising indigenous discontent as the result of anger over higher prices and the machinations of British traders who sought to lure these people into an alliance against the French. From the French perspective, these economic factors led to the “Indian Conspiracy of 1747” and shortly thereafter the creation of the village of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki.

In 1747, Miami-speaking peoples under the leadership of Meemeešihkiia seized the French fort and trading outpost at Kiihkayonki. They destroyed parts of the fort and took all of the trade goods. Later, they returned most of the goods, but this action represented a turning point for Meemeešihkiia and his followers. After the return of the goods, this group began to move to the site of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki. The “uprising” and the resulting move to Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki were the realization of French fears that began to develop as early as June 1745. The Governor of New France, de Beauharnois, reported in 1745 that “even this year the Indians will be disgusted on account of the few goods sent up to Niagara and the other posts, and be thereby induced to take sides with the English.” In October of the same year, Beauharnois reported that British traders were already well entrenched on the Kaaneseesepiwi (Ohio). In his letter of October of that year he also added that in addition to higher prices and fewer goods, there were far fewer traders going out to visit and trade with the indigenous peoples of the Great Lakes. Beauharnois’s letter reveals that the French perceived the threat as early as 1745. But the French governor’s depiction of the rising discontent is incomplete.

In the 1740s, the peoples of the Great Lakes became upset with the French in many ways. They viewed the French Governor of New France as a father figure and believed that the French therefore had certain responsibilities. Kinship was the means through which the indigenous peoples of the pays d’en haut conceived of the web of interconnections that linked different groups to each other. Contained within this system were the notions of respect and responsibility. The role of the French father included mediation, negotiation, and provision for the needs of his children. For their part, the children, the indigenous peoples of the Great Lakes, owed their father respect and regard as well as support when called on. Following the establishment of peace in 1701, the French had not always fulfilled their paternal obligations as defined by the indigenous peoples of the pays d’en haut. In the forty-year period between 1701 and 1744 the French increasingly sought to impose an imperial system in the Great Lakes. They rejected indigenous systems of justice and began to execute individuals convicted of capital crimes. The French organized many of the allied tribes together in an attempt to annihilate the Mesquakie, a group originally a part of the alliance system that stretched back to the 1650s. From the Miami perspective, these were not the actions of a father figure. They increasingly viewed the French father as abusive. During this same forty-year period, a number of epidemics
tore through the Miami communities. These epidemics killed many leaders who were pro-French and provided further ostensible proof of French failures.\textsuperscript{33}

The failure of the French to meet the demands of fatherhood went beyond mere abuse. In their paternal role, the French were responsible for the needs of their Miami-Illinois speaking children. By the 1740s, the Miami people were largely dependent on European trade goods. Metal tools were a necessity of life that could not be produced within these village communities. As fewer trade goods were available and prices increased, the French could not meet these needs. Without a doubt, these economic factors played a role in creating discontent. Of equal or even greater importance was the absence of the French father during this period. As fewer traders went out into the Miami communities the visible presence of the French father disappeared. How would the people of these villages have perceived this change? The decreased availability of trade goods and the presence of disease epidemics, which were often viewed as retribution or punishment for wrongdoing, caused increased hardships for these people. How significant was it that the French father not only could not meet their needs but also appeared not to care? As the epidemics killed leaders who were loyal to the French father and no recognition of loss came from the French, the newer leaders had less reason to believe in or trust the French father.

From this perspective, it might be possible to perceive of \textit{Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki} not so much as a rejection of the French but rather as an attempt to place Miami-Illinois speaking peoples in a position that no longer demanded dependence on an absent and neglectful father. In their negotiations with the British in 1748, the leaders of \textit{Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki} positioned themselves in a manner that would give their people greater independence while not completely severing their ties to the French.\textsuperscript{34}

In 1748, many of the leaders of the indigenous peoples of the Ohio River Valley gathered in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in order to hold negotiations with the British settlers. This treaty was largely a negotiation of the terms of friendship between the Miami people and the British. Included in the discussions were leaders representing the Iroquois, Delaware, Shawnee, and Nanticoke. At Lancaster, the Miami selected Andrew Montour to translate for them. Montour was the son of an Iroquois-speaking mother and a French father. His aunt was married to a

\textsuperscript{33} White, \textit{Middle Ground}, 94-222.

\textsuperscript{34} Richard White addresses this to an extent in his analysis of “Republics and Rebels” but he may be guilty of overemphasizing the village’s break with the French. The French certainly saw the village as a breakaway “republic” but it is possible that this is another “creative misunderstanding.” White, \textit{Middle Ground}, 186-222.
Miami man and lived among his Miami relatives. Montour visited with her on a regular basis and was apparently a fluent speaker of numerous indigenous languages including Iroquois and Miami-Illinois as well as French and English. It is possible that Montour might have distorted or changed the meaning or intent of the Miami representatives, but there is no evidence of this. Montour introduced the Miami as living on the Waapaahšiki Siiipiwi in approximately twenty villages. In referring to the British, Montour used the term “Brethren” and he requested that the Miami be admitted to “the chain of Friendship with the English.” This “chain” included most of the peoples living in the Ohio River Valley, as well as the Iroquois nations, and the British settlers. Significantly, the Miami did not appear to be substituting a British father for a French one. Instead they established a relationship among brothers. From the tone of deference in the speech it might be concluded that the British were the elder brothers in this relationship, but this role did not entail the same levels of responsibility or dependence.

The British appeared to misinterpret the intent of the Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki leaders. At one point during the negotiation, the British requested that the Miami “must no more think of Onontio [the French Governor] and his Children.” The Miami reply to this request, if there was one, was not recorded. But the wording of the official treaty that created this new “chain of Friendship” did not require that the Miami people reject the system of alliances that were constructed during the Beaver Wars. At no point in these negotiations did the British or the other peoples of the Ohio River Valley request that the Miami take part in any military actions against the French or the other peoples of the Great Lakes. This “chain of Friendship” only required that the Miami refuse to participate in any attacks on the British or the other members of the negotiations. Contrary to French fears, there was no military alliance here. Nor was there an attempt to interfere with French traders or prompt the Miami peoples to act in a “rebellious” manner. Of course, the British were seeking an advantage in the Ohio Valley and this did weaken French control over the Miami. Despite the lack of military alliance, the acting French governor, Marquis de Longueuil, believed the Miami to have “openly declared themselves the

sworn enemies of the French.” For by 1752, this was how the French perceived the Miami peoples living at Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki.\footnote{John Romeyn Brodhead, E. B. O’Callaghan, and Berthold Fernow, Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York: Procured in Holland, England and France, 15 vols., vol. 10 (Albany: Weed, Parsons, 1856), 245.}

How did this transition from children of the French father to “sworn enemies” occur? The answer to this question appears to lie in French misperceptions of the internal decisions made by the people of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki. French confusion extended into their understanding of the conversations that took place between the residents of the village and their brethren in web kinship relationships that stretched back to the Beaver Wars. As a firsthand witness to some of the happenings at Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki, the Virginian trader and surveyor Christopher Gist was in an ideal position to observe the decisions and conversations as they occurred. Inverting or turning Gist’s journals inside out can provide a unique opportunity to understand the decisions of the villagers from the inside.

Christopher Gist’s interactions with the village of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki are rooted in a journey that began in late 1750. His visit to Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki was conducted as a part of an assignment given by the newly formed Ohio Company. In general, Gist’s assignment was to make a general survey of the land and people of the Ohio River Valley. The Company officially instructed Gist “to search out and discover the Lands upon the River Ohio, & other adjoining Branches of the Mississippi.” The instructions also state that Gist was to also “observe what Nations of Indians inhabit there, their Strength & Numbers, who they trade with, & in what Comodities they deal.” True to his instructions, Gist kept a detailed account of his journey down the Kaanseeseepiwi, which began on October 31, 1750 in Maryland and concluded on May 18, 1751 in Roanoke, Virginia.\footnote{Darlington, Gist’s Journals, vi, 31, 65-66.} Gist’s instructions did not specifically include Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki but as he traveled down the Kaanseeseepiwi, he heard reports about the village and decided to visit. Gist’s journey reinforces the conclusions drawn from Jagrea’s map. Gist found that the Kaanseeseepiwi and the people living along its banks were well connected with Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki.

The first mention of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki in Gist’s journal appears on January 9, 1750. Gist stated that while resting in Muskingum (an Iroquois village), “this Day came into Town two Traders from among the Pickwaylinees (these are a Tribe of the Twigtwees) and brought news
that another English Trader was taken prisoner by the French, and that three French Soldiers had deserted and come over to the English.” Gist further reported “the Indians would have put them to Death, to revenge their taking our Traders.” The British traders in the village stopped these executions and had the French prisoners sent to Muskingum. From these brief passages it is clear that the conflict over Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki had become quite violent since the Treaty of Lancaster, despite the absence of violent rhetoric during the course of the negotiations.40

Gist reached Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki on February 17, 1750 at an important juncture in the brief history of this village. He described the village as “on the NW side of the Big Miamee River about 150 M from the Mouth thereof; it consists of about 400 families, & daily encreasing, it is accounted one of the strongest Indian Towns upon this Part of the Continent.” While Gist went on to exaggerate the size of the “Twightwee Nation” as a whole, his reports on Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki appear to correlate with other British and French sources.41 The key moment in Gist’s visit to the village occurred seven days after his arrival.

On February 24, 1750, Gist stated that, “four French Indians came into Town.” These Ottawa ambassadors marched into Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki “under French Colours” but were “kindly received by the Town Indians.” The Ottawa were directed to the longhouse and negotiations began. Prior to opening the dialogue, Meemeehšihkia asked that both French and the British flags be displayed in the coming council. After exchanging gifts, the two sides began to negotiate the primary issue of the day: the French demand that the Miami return to Kiihkayonki and abandon Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki. Following the Ottawa delivery of French demands, the tension rose. Gist said that Meemeehšihkia stood and recognized the French as the fathers of the Ottawa but not of the Miami. He replied to the French and Ottawa demands by stating that the Miami “have cleared a Road for our Brothers the English, and your Fathers have made it bad.” Following this statement, Meemeehšihkia turned about quickly and walked out of the council meeting. The French had resorted to threats in order to bring to an end the central positioning developed by the Miami leadership at Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki, and the response from Meemeehšihkia nearly destroyed the careful political positioning that he and his fellow leaders had worked so hard to build. His response was both hastily constructed and brief, which violated the norm of long drawn out metaphoric speech. And his impromptu speech was terminated with

40 Darlington, Gist’s Journals, 40-41.
a display of physical anger: the antithesis of peaceful negotiation according to most indigenous North American conceptions of the treaty process.

Two days later, the Ottawa representatives and the Miami leaders met one final time. This meeting did not begin with the politeness of the first. Instead, the village’s War Chief, or “Captain of the Warriors” as Gist calls him, opened the council. Gist stated that the War Chief “stood up and taking some Strings of black and white Wampum in his Hand he spoke with a fierce Tone and very warlike Air – ‘Brothers the Ottaways, You are always differing with the French Yourselves… but We will let You know by these four Strings of Wampum, that we will not hear any Thing they say to Us, nor do any Thing they bid Us.’” The War Chief followed this statement with the giving of gifts to the Ottawa. He then directed his concluding remarks to the French and stated: “Fathers, you desire that We may speak our Minds from our Hearts, which I am going to do; you have often desired We shoud go Home to You, but I tell You it is not our Home, for We have made a Road as far as the Sea to the Sun-rising, and have been taken by the hand by our Brothers the English, and the six Nations, and the Delawares, Shannoahs and Wyendotts, and we assure you it is the Road We will go.”

The very act of opening a council with a speech by a War Chief symbolized the intent of the group he represented. At the same time, this speech came after a full day of reflection on the part of the village leadership, and therefore the words he chose to use on that last day carried more weight than Meemeeňšihkia’s previously angry and probably hastily prepared speech. The War Chief reversed Meemeeňšihkia’s earlier choice of words and called the French “fathers.” He then carefully pointed out that the relationships the Miami at Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki had established with the eastern peoples would be maintained. These relationships were among brothers, and while there may have been elder and younger brothers in these relationships there was no father figure along this eastern path. Those carefully chosen words demonstrated that the Miami were willing to defend themselves from any attack from the French or their “children,” but that speech also demonstrated that as long as the French father allowed the Miami to continue going down the eastern “road” then there would be no conflict. Even within this “fierce” speech there was a continuance of the careful positioning of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki.

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43 For more on Miami leadership and specifically the demand that Miami leaders maintain an unerring sense of calm see C.C. Trowbridge, *Meearmeear Traditions*, 13-14.
Throughout 1751, the Miami living at Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki rejected French attempts to bring them back to Kiihkayonki, but they did not separate themselves from their relatives at Kiihkayonki or in the Wabash River Valley. Those groups continued to maintain a relationship with the French father and were not viewed as taking part in this rebellion. At that particular point in time, Miami-Illinois speaking peoples could continue to participate in the original alliances created during the Beaver Wars, through Kiihkayonki. Through Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki, Miami-Illinois speaking peoples could also take part in a newer set of alliances with those living in the east. As long as most of the major Miami villages were smoothly connected, the Miami had access to a multitude of options for trade and diplomacy. The maps produced by John Patten and the anonymous Wea man both showed these connections to be well established and maintained. French and British documents also discuss the ease with which Miami-Illinois speaking peoples moved from Kiihkayonki and the Wabash River Valley to Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki. While the records do not address movements from Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki to the Miami heartlands, there is no reason to think that the migrations were not moving in both directions.

From the eastern point of view the conclusion is the same. Both Jagrea’s map and Christopher Gist’s journal demonstrated the web of connections linking the indigenous and British peoples living in the east with Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki. These connections were lengthier than the westward links but were easy enough to allow for the regular presence of other indigenous peoples and British traders in the village. This distance may have been an unspoken advantage as Meemeehihkia and his followers did not appear to want the British to gain the same degree of control as the French previously possessed.

The linguistic, cartographic, and documentary evidence all suggest that the creation of the village of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki represented a way to access two sets of relationships. Through geographical and political positioning it provided potential freedom from an untrustworthy father, the French, without the danger of completely severing the connection to those indigenous groups who had worked together to survive the chaos of the Beaver Wars. Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki also represented the growth of newer relationships. These eastward looking relationships were just as beneficial, but lacked the presence of a strong father figure. The French had fulfilled their fatherly duties for nearly a century, but they had also demonstrated that

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the strong father could not always be trusted. At its height in 1751, *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* was a village at the center of an interconnected landscape. The Miami people who made the village their home perceived these possibilities and sought to benefit from them. Others, like the French and the Ottawa, perceived *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* as a danger to the system of alliances that had existed since the 1650s and therefore sought its destruction.
Chapter Two

“The Ecological Landscapes of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki”

Seventeen fifty-one, the fourth year of this particular incarnation of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki, marked an important turning point for the “People of the Ashes.” Following the visit of Christopher Gist and the Ottawa delegation in the winter of that year, the violence increased. Adding to this human threat were the twin non-human onslaughts of famine and disease. In October 1751, La Jonquiere, the Governor of New France, reported that a small war party, which had gone south to attack the Cherokee or the Chickasaw, found Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki in a terrible state. According to the French Governor, the war party observed “that they had passed by La Demoiselle’s village” and found “that there were only squaws in the fort, that the fort was only half built, that all the warriors were away hunting, and that they were dying of hunger.”¹ This description of starvation is startling, especially because less than one year earlier Christopher Gist described the village as a vibrant community of 400 individuals. At the surface it suggests that the inhabitants of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki experienced a dramatic and precipitous turn for the worse over the course of a mere eight months. The surface, however, is often misleading.

At first glance, the hard times experienced by the “People of the Ashes” appear to fit the larger experience of many communities of the pays d’en haut. By 1752, smallpox and famine had been wreaking havoc across the entire Ohio River Valley for several months. In April of that year, the acting Governor of New France, Charles le Moyne the Baron de Longueuil, reported, “To so many circumstances equally critical, are superadded the scarcity of provisions, and great appearance of famine at our Southern posts.” “The crops have also failed at the Beautiful river [the Ohio River],” he added. “Mr. de Joncaire and the other Frenchmen have been reduced to a couple of handfuls (une jointée) of Indian corn a day.” More ominously, Longueuil added the suggestion that famine and disease had the power to cure French problems as much as

¹ La Jonquiere to Rouille, October 29, 1751, Theodore Calvin Pease and Ernestine Jenison, eds., Illinois on the Eve of the Seven Years' War, 1747-1755, Illinois State Historical Library Collections, Xxix, French Series, Ill (Springfield, IL: 1936). <http://www.gbl.indiana.edu/archives/mamis10/M51_30a.html>. La Demoiselle was the French translation of Meemeehšihkia (dragonfly). The British often referred to Meemeehšihkia as either Old Briton or the Old Piankashaw King.
cause them. “Famine is not the whole scourge we experience; the smallpox commits ravages; it begins to reach Detroit. One woman has died of it at the Huron village. This disease prevails also at the Beautiful river. ‘Twere desirable that it should break out and spread, generally, throughout the localities inhabited by our rebels. It would be fully as good as an army.” Clearly, the people of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki, and the region as a whole, had been enduring the dual attacks of crop failure and smallpox throughout 1751 and 1752.

From these accounts, it would seem as though the ravages of crop failure and smallpox marked the beginning of the village’s downward slide, one that came to a violent conclusion with Charles Langlade’s June 1752 attack. But from a locally-oriented perspective, the ecological and biological constraints of the area surrounding the village may be equally important in explaining its success or lack thereof. If the people of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki could not feed themselves then the intertribal and imperial politics that generated Langlade’s attack may have been unnecessary. Following in this vein, historian Richard White has argued that Meemeeshikia’s “success in increasing the size of [Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki] had made it ecologically precarious in the best of years. Not enough land had been cleared to feed a steadily increasing population, and [the village’s] warriors had to hunt in more and more distant circuits for game.” To White, the Ottawa and Ojibwa attack was merely the final blow for a village that was “precarious” in the best of conditions and “uninhabitable” by June of 1752.2 Unfortunately, he does not develop this provocative argument further. Instead, the remainder of White’s analysis follows a more traditional path and maintains a focus on the political, economic, and militaristic feasibility of the village.

White’s orphaned hypothesis begs a whole host of questions vital to reaching an understanding of the life and death of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki. How does one determine the ecological health of a mid-eighteenth-century village? What factors should be considered in evaluating a village’s ability to feed itself? How would the people of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki have defined a thriving community? The people who came to inhabit Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki moved from their homes because they saw a better future for themselves on the banks of the Ahsenisiipi. Why would they have moved to a place that was at best “precarious” and at worst “uninhabitable?” Answering these questions is vital to understanding more than just the

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village’s violent end. Answers to these questions are what should form the center of any description of the whole of the existence of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki.

Yet, there are no easy answers for these questions. These communities led complex ecological lives, and there have been too few studies that have delved into this complexity. Perhaps because it has been deemed too commonplace, there has been little research into the everyday life of indigenous villages of the Great Lakes region of the eastern woodlands. A quick scan of the secondary literature explains why Richard White may have abandoned his ecological line of argumentation. Few works address the nutritional needs of an average Great Lakes village with any depth. Even scarcer is scholarship portraying a deep understanding of the complex means through which a village in this region met those needs. Without these deep ecological understandings it is difficult to comprehend the processes relocated villages used to adapt to changing ecological circumstances.⁴ There are scant few explanations of village communities’ responses to the depletion of resources. In light of this void, it only makes sense to turn away from the ecological and towards the military, economic, political, and cultural in any effort to explain change over time in the pays d’en haut.⁴

In the daily effort to thrive, meeting the biological needs of a community was at least the equal of military, economic, political, and cultural factors. The village leadership of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki had to think about numerous biological and ecological factors when considering a migration to a new village location. They had to think about access to clean drinking water, farmable land, hunting grounds, as well as the proximity to microenvironments that were beneficial for the gathering of plant foods. These leaders needed to consider issues of trade and

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³ My use of the phrase “deep ecological understandings” is partly informed by the philosophy of Deep Ecology and the perspective that all living things are interconnected in a web-like fashion. This phrase is also intended to simply suggest that analyses of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki have never gone beyond a “surface” level understanding of the village’s ecology. For more on Deep Ecology see Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue, eds., The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995). In pushing for this deeper understanding I was heavily influenced by the summary work of Charles C. Mann, 1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

alliance, but without the ability to meet their village’s biological needs none of these other factors would have mattered. To understand the lives of the “People of the Ashes,” we must grasp the ecological; we must come to understand how the people of this village expected to thrive, not merely survive, in their new location.

When the Miami settled in *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* in 1747, they were moving into somewhat familiar terrain. The traditional Miami heartlands were centered on the Wabash River Valley, which was lined with deciduous oak and hickory forest. *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki*, like most Miami villages, was situated adjacent to a river, the *Ahseenisiipi* (the Great Miami River in western Ohio). This river was not a part of the Wabash’s watershed but it was connected to the Wabash Valley by at least two short overland portages. The first portage, from Loramie Creek (a feeder of the *Ahseenisiipi*) to the *Kociihsasiipi* (St. Marys River), was approximately seven miles long. The second portage, from Loramie Creek to the Auglaize River, was approximately ten miles long. These connections, as well as other probable portages that went unrecorded, indicate that the Miami people who moved to *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* were well connected to and familiar with the landscape of the village.

**Hunting and Gathering in a Beech-Maple Forest**

Despite the proximity of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* to the Miami heartlands in the Wabash River Valley, there were a few key differences between the two locales. First, the newer village was located within a beech and maple forest instead of the hickory and oak of the Wabash Valley. At first glance this change might seem insignificant, but it may have had serious implications on the hunting and gathering practices of the people of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki*. Take, for instance, the absence of acorns, a nut that oak forest ecosystem experts William McShea and William Healy have called “the ecological equivalent of manna from heaven.” Within North American deciduous forests, acorns are the single greatest source of food for forest

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wildlife. At least ninety-six North American vertebrates are known to dine on acorns.\textsuperscript{7} The indigenous peoples of North America also gathered acorns and cooked them in soups or ground them into flour. Nutshell remains indicate that during the Holocene period, acorns were an important source of nutrition for groups living in eastern North America.\textsuperscript{8} Brian Donahue has found that the nutritional value of acorns, hazelnuts, and hickory nuts made these nuts central to the success of native New Englanders.\textsuperscript{9} It is likely that the same was true for Miami-Illinois speaking peoples of the Great Lakes.

When the Meemeehšihkia and his followers moved to Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki they left a major source of nutrient rich acorns and hickory nuts behind. The river bottomland to the south of the village was an oak-maple forest approximately one mile wide and ten miles long.\textsuperscript{10} This small stretch of oak-maple paled in comparison to the oak-hickory forests of the Miami heartlands.\textsuperscript{11} The villagers may have replaced some of the lost acorn and hickory nut calories with maple syrup and sugar. In a reversal of sorts, the people of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki would not have had to seek out stands of sugar maple in order to collect sap during the spring sap runs. In the Miami heartlands villages relocated to sugaring camps in March of each year. The Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki villagers were living in the midst of a beech-maple forest and did not need to relocate to gather the necessary amount of sugar maple sap to produce maple sugar.

By collecting higher quantities of maple sap the “People of the Ashes” could replace their missing acorn and hickory nut calories. However, this benefit would have come with high labor and material costs. Maple sugar production required a whole village to participate in the tapping of trees, the collection of sap, and the long cooking-down process, which transformed the liquid into solid maple sugar. This required specialized equipment included: cast iron pots, specialized elm bark containers, drills, spouts, catch baskets, and storage containers, in addition to the


\textsuperscript{9} Donahue, \textit{The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord}, 38. Marc Abrams states that for the Holocene period the most important nut types were hickory, acorn, and walnut. Abrams, “Postglacial History of Oak Forests,” in \textit{Oak Forest Ecosystems}, 39.

\textsuperscript{10} Flint and Gordon, "Natural Vegetation of Ohio at the Time of the Earliest Land Surveys [Map]." FLINT AND GORDON, "NATURAL VEGETATION OF OHIO AT THE TIME OF THE EARLIEST LAND SURVEYS [MAP]."

\textsuperscript{11} Flint and Gordon, “Natural Vegetation of Ohio [Map].” Beech-nuts are also a valuable source of nutrition but as mast these nuts do not attract as many species for as long a period as acorns. For data on Beech-nuts see A. W. Schorger, \textit{The Passenger Pigeon, Its Natural History and Extinction} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1955), 37. For data on acorns see Roy L. Kirkpatrick and Peter J. Pekins, "Nutritional Value of Acorns for Wildlife," in \textit{Oak Forest Ecosystems}, 173-176.
needed amounts of firewood. The end product of all of these efforts, maple sugar, was a great source of calories and could be stored to last nearly a whole year. But by comparison, the gathering of acorns and hickory nuts required a small fraction of the effort expended on maple sugar production.

Because acorns and other nuts required less labor, mast may have had a higher nutritional value than maple sugar. Acorns and other nuts can be collected over a longer period of time, saved without processing, and eaten after a simple period of boiling. Children could have gathered acorns and nuts with little or no supervision, while the village adults engaged in other activities. In the early years of settlement every calorie spent in labor would have been exceedingly valuable, and acorns and hickory nuts would have yielded a high caloric return for the little caloric investment. Without the usual presence of this plentiful mast, the *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* villagers probably had to invest more labor and more calories into the process of feeding themselves.

Most importantly, the absence of acorns would have negatively impacted the population of larger vertebrates in the forests surrounding the village. When ecologists talk of acorns as “manna from heaven” they usually want to indicate its desirability for vertebrates other than humans. White-tailed deer, black bears, and squirrels all rely on acorns for a large part of their fall diets. White-tailed deer were probably the single largest source of meat for the villagers of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* (although bison were probably a close second), and acorns are the preferred food of white-tailed deer. In his research, conducted 1996, K. C. Steiner found that white-tailed deer consumed 49% of the acorns on the ground in a central Pennsylvania forest. Black bear was another important source of protein for the Miami and they too tended to fatten up in the fall through acorn consumption. There are no modern-day populations of black bear in Ohio or Indiana to study, but research on black bear populations in Pennsylvania show that acorns formed a quarter to two-thirds of the fall diet of black bears.

Many varieties of birds still draw on acorns for a large part of their diets. Turkeys, woodpeckers, ducks, blue jays, and other various birds are all drawn to acorn rich oak stands. Wild turkeys rely heavily on acorns and if available they will consume them during the fall,

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winter, and spring. Researchers working with modern turkey populations have found that acorns form between 20-30 percent of their diet, depending on season. Consumption rates can vary highly depending on location, season, and availability, but turkey populations in Missouri have been known to fill over 73 percent of their diet with acorns.\(^{15}\)

The passenger pigeon, a now extinct species of bird, also consumed large quantities of acorns. Like most of the indigenous peoples of the eastern woodlands, Miami people consumed the passenger pigeon, or *miimia* as it was known in Miami, when available. There are no recorded references to Miami people hunting the passenger pigeon, but the Potawatomi, living just to the north of the Miami heartlands, do have some preserved references. In 1895, Chief Pokagon reported that a nesting of passenger pigeons “was always a great source of revenue to our people. Whole tribes would wigwam in the brooding places. They seldom killed the old birds, but made great preparation to secure their young, out of which the squaws made squab butter and smoked and dried them by thousands for future use.”\(^{16}\) Accounts of Seneca pigeon camps in the east parallel Pokagon’s, and many Jesuit accounts describe pigeon hunts along the Illinois River and near the site of modern-day Chicago.\(^{17}\) With pigeon accounts both to the east and to the west of the Miami heartlands there is ample reason to believe that the Miami behaved in a similar fashion. The massive flocks of passenger pigeons that existed in the eighteenth century were known to nest in large stands of oak trees and gorge themselves on acorns.

Oak-hickory forests were the “staff of life” for a multitude of avian and mammalian species. Outside of the acorns and hickory nuts produced by the dominant tree types, an oak-hickory forest also engendered the highest diversity of understorey plant types of any forest type.\(^{18}\) This plant diversity parallels and perhaps augments the diversity of vertebrates that come to feed in an oak-hickory forest.

Oak-hickory forests were the ideal place to hunt a wide variety of vertebrates, which were large and healthy from a steady diet of acorns and hickory nuts. Miami people living in their Wabash River Valley homeland would have recognized the value of living in close


proximity to such a rich hunting ground, and they would have recognized what it meant to leave such an abundant environment.

How did the move from the recognizably valuable oak-hickory forests of the Miami heartlands to the beech-maple forests surrounding Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki affect the villagers? Perhaps this change did not affect them that much, at least at first. As long as the population of the village stayed small it would seem that they would still be able to hunt effectively in their home forests. The beech-maple forest was not devoid of wildlife; it was still a vibrantly alive ecosystem. Beechnuts are rich in fat and protein and are sometimes referenced as the preferred food of the passenger pigeon.¹⁹

As the village began to grow and its protein requirements increased they may have begun to feel the impact of their change in location. The beech-maple forest may not have possessed the same density in the populations of deer, black bear, and turkey. In addition, those animals that did reside in the beech-maple forest may not have had the same body mass and fat content of animals gorging on acorns and therefore each kill may have been less nutritious. Over time the village’s hunters would have had to go farther and farther from Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki in order to procure the necessary protein for their relatives at home. To find oak-hickory forests they would have journeyed to the north, back to the Miami heartlands, to south across the Kaanseeseepiibi (the Ohio River), or west towards the Scioto River.²⁰ This degree of traveling would have been unnecessary for those living along the Wabash River Valley. For those living in the heartlands, hunting in an oak-hickory forest would have been as easy as walking out the door.

**Hunting on a Small Savannah**

Unfortunately for the inhabitants of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki, the lack of the “manna” of acorns was not the only major landscape difference negatively affecting their existence. A second major difference between the landscape around Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki and that of the Miami heartlands was access to significant areas of savannah. To the west of the Wabash River Valley lay massive savannahs consisting of intermittent patches of oak-hickory forest broken up

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by prairie. These savannahs spread across most of modern-day Illinois and the southern half of Wisconsin. Large savannahs and the large edges that accompanied these savannahs attracted more deer and a larger and meatier species, bison. These savannahs included the grass species big bluestem, little bluestem, switchgrass, and Indian grass, which the bison consumed.\(^{21}\)

When the *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* villagers moved to the south and east of the Miami homelands, they also moved away from the vast savannahs where Miami people often situated their winter hunting camps.\(^{22}\) There was only one small island of savannah located within thirty miles of the village. This irregular patch of savannah was approximately thirty miles in circumference with fifteen to twenty mile long corridors extending off of the central island. It was perhaps some 1,400 square miles in size and contained the same species as its much bigger cousin to the west of the Wabash River Valley. By moving to the west the people of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* may have additionally added to their hunting difficulties.\(^{23}\)

Often overlooked by both historians of the west and the east, bison were a key source of winter meat for Miami people.\(^{24}\) Bison populations in Indiana and Illinois dwindled in the years leading up to the treaty of Greenville in 1795, but in the previous century Miami people often moved from their summer villages in the Miami heartlands to winter hunting camps in the west, where they hunted bison and deer. Early settlers reported the presence of numerous “buffalo traces” (long trails from the west to savannahs in the east), and more than a few “buffalo wallows” (shallow wading and drinking pools created by the rooting of groups of bison) still remain in northern Indiana.\(^{25}\)

Despite the lack of expansive savannahs, bison were reported in the area around *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki*. In 1751, the explorer and surveyor Christopher Gist found that the land around the village was “well watered with a great Number of little Streams or Rivulets, and full of


\(^{22}\) Tanner and Pinther, *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History*, 14-15. Küchler, “Potential Natural Vegetation.” Descriptions of the vegetation zones are contained in the supplemental manual accompanying the Küchler map. Many of the pre-settlement vegetation maps vary the representation of this savannah.


\(^{24}\) Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*. Isenberg makes no reference to the beginnings of this destruction starting in the east despite opening his analysis in 1750. Richard White, in *Middle Ground*, makes only a few passing references to the people of the *pays d’en haut* and their hunting relationship with the bison and these focus mainly on the Illinois people. As with the passenger pigeon, the bison’s presence near the Great Lakes has been neglected.

beautiful natural Meadows, covered with wild Rye, blue Grass and Clover, and abounds with Turkeys, Deer, Elks, and most Sorts of Game particularly Buffaloes, thirty or forty of which are frequently seen feeding in one Meadow” to the east of the village. Gist, who was in the employ of the Ohio Company, did not describe the large grassland that lay to village’s east, but if a small meadow along the river drew thirty to forty bison then the savannah may have drawn many more. The villagers did lack easy access to the expansive savannahs of Illinois and Wisconsin, but in 1751 it appears as though there was enough desirable “edge land,” meadows, and smaller grasslands to attract at least some desirable game.26

The land around Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki would have hardly been devoid of game, but overall the move to the southeast reduced access to game rich territory. This reduction was not necessarily a catastrophic change. The surrounding beech-maple forest would have provided some game and the village’s hunters would have been able to travel to the south and west and find oak-hickory forests much like those of the Wabash River Valley. Similarly, the villagers did not have easy access to the savannahs to the west of the Wabash, but they could have hunted those bison that did move east into the Ohio River Valley. The people of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki had to alter their usual patterns and travel farther from home to find the necessary game, but the village would not have starved.

In fact, one year before the reports of starvation reached the French Governor, Christopher Gist reportedly found a large and vibrant community along the banks of the Ahsenisipi. Christopher Gist’s descriptions of the village and the land to its south do not indicate that Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki was uninhabitable. In February of 1751, Gist claimed that the village “consists of 400 Families, & daily encreasing, it is accounted one of the strongest Indian Towns upon this Part of the Continent.”27 This disparity between Gist’s reports and La Jonquiere’s is partly a result of timing. Gist visited Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki in the winter of 1750-51 and this visit coincided with the high-water mark in immigration to the village. Up to that point the village had not contained 400 families for more than a few months. In the following year the village would also face the aforementioned crop failure and a small pox epidemic. But before we can boldly state that the village could not feed itself, and was therefore untenable, we must better understand the agricultural and gathering practices of Miami people.

27 Darlington, Gist’s Journals, 47-48.
Gathering in the Wetlands of the Great Miami River Valley

Gathered plant calories came from a variety of plant types and microenvironments within the landscapes of Miami-Illinois speaking people, and gathering practices are great example of Miami expertise in using every resource available to them. Miami people, specifically Miami women, gathered blackberries, raspberries, mulberries, milkweed greens, nettle greens, pecans, walnuts, hickory nuts, and acorns at different points throughout the year, and these form just a small cross section of the gathered plants and plant related products.\(^{28}\)

However, prior to the massive loss of lands in the treaty era, the single greatest source calories from gathering came from tuberous plants. Most common among the tuberous plants gathered by the Miami was the wild potato, but there are numerous other tubers that Miami people gathered. The early ethnographer C.C. Trowbridge recorded six types of tubers that the Miami gathered and consumed in the 1830s. Trowbridge stressed that “[t]hese roots are much used by them, particularly in seasons of scarcity.” His advisors found potatoes “in abundance in the wet prairies throughout the country” and they gathered them “in ‘hoeing time’ (June).” Unlike the potato, most tuberous plants store their nutrients within the tuber during the winter and are only nutritious if gathered before the growing season begins or just after the end of a growing season. For example, the tuber of the pond lily was gathered in the early spring and cooked and dried in such a manner that the tubers could be preserved for a whole year before use.\(^{29}\)

Trowbridge recognized the importance of tubers to the Miami diet and the linguistic evidence supports this finding. *Ahpena* is the Miami word for the wild potato and was also used for edible tubers in general. From a linguistic standpoint, this term is significant because it is marked animate. Miami nouns can either be animate or inanimate. The major difference

\(^{28}\) For an in depth description of these gathering practices in the east see Donahue, *The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord*, 24-53. Once again, there are only a few published accounts of gathering practices among the Miami. There are linguistic sources demonstrating that Miami people gathered all of these plant foods and Miami people continue to gather them today. The forthcoming dissertation of Michael P. Gonella an ethnobotanist at Miami University should fill much of this void.

\(^{29}\) Trowbridge went into great detail on the gathering of tuberous plants but neglected to mention the numerous other plants and plant materials that Miami people gathered. This is probably due to his main sources being men, as women were the gatherers among the Miami. C.C. Trowbridge, W. Vernon Kinietz, and Burton Historical Collection., *Meearmear Traditions* (Ann Arbor [Mich.]: University of Michigan Press, 1938), 64-65.
between Miami and English is that Miami often marks objects like the potato as animate even though this would be impossible in English. The concept of animacy in the Miami-Illinois language is difficult to summarize succinctly. The explanation that works best in this context is that Miami people connected animacy to items that were of extremely high use or high importance. If a plant food source was marked animate then it is likely that it was highly drawn on as a source of food or was ceremonial in purpose. Reading Trowbridge’s commentary in light of this data supports the assertion that Miami people relied heavily on tubers as a source of nutrients.  

Given tubers importance to the Miami diet, the microenvironments that supported tubers would have been key features of the ecological landscapes of the Miami. One of the consistencies among the tubers on Trowbridge’s list is that they were found in moist environments like ponds, bogs, swamps, and river bottomland. Consequently, access to wetland environments was key to the success of any Miami community, and Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki was no different. The move to Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki separated the villagers from the vast swamplands, often called the Great Black Swamp, that lay to the west of the headwaters of the Wabash River Valley. Even so, villagers still settled in an area that provided them access to a considerable amount of wetland. The whole length of the Ahsenisipi (Great Miami River) was lined with what Christopher Gist called “the finest Meadows that can be.” These wet bottomlands would have been perfect growing conditions for tuberous plants as well as the grasses that caught Gist’s eye. The Miami at Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki had access to roughly 210 miles of bottomland, sixty of this to the north and 150 to the south of the village. No other village was located on this expanse of the Ahsenisipi and therefore they did not necessarily have to share gathering rights with any other group.

In addition to the moist and productive bottomland, soil surveys indicate that the people of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki had access to at least two other locations that were both damp and significantly large. Soil surveys show that there are two zones of poorly drained and moist soil within two to three miles of the village. These soils, labeled “Crosby-Brookston soils” by the surveyors, can vary from “poorly drained” to “very poorly drained” and from “moderately productive” to “very highly productive.” The smaller of the two Crosby-Brookston soil zones is

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30 Daryl Baldwin (Director, Myaamia Project, Miami University) in discussion with the author, Summer, 2005.
located to the east of the village and is approximately twelve miles long and varies from two to seven miles wide. The larger of the two is located to the south of the village and is approximately twenty miles long and varies from two to five miles wide. With no other competition nearby, the villagers could have drawn on all of the tubers growing within approximately 100 square miles of combined wetland.\textsuperscript{33}

Pre-Euro American settlement vegetation data indicates that there was at least one additional medium sized wetland, and nine smaller wetlands, all within a one to two day walk from \textit{Pinkwi Mihthoseeniaki}. Early settlers reported the existence of a large elm-ash swamp within thirty miles of the village. The exact size of this swamp is unknown, but it was significant enough to find its way into the records. This swamp was a little farther away than the previously mentioned river bottom wetlands, but given the potential that existed in tuberous food sources it would seem likely that the villagers would have made this trip.\textsuperscript{34} For example, gathering a tuber like that of the pond lily, which could grow “as large as a mans wrist and one to two feet long,” would have given a huge return on the investment of two day’s walk.\textsuperscript{35} The tuber’s toughness would have allowed for easy transport back to the village and the cooking and drying process would have ensured that the benefit of this extra labor could have been felt throughout the following year. The nine smaller wetlands were closer and gathering there would have involved less labor, but the smaller acreage would have yielded fewer tubers.

All of this soil and surveyor data tells us that the “People of the Ashes” were able to access numerous small to medium sized wetlands. This territory was largely free from competition with other villages and would have provided the tubers Miami people had relied on for generations. But free from competition or no, these wetlands could not compare to the size of the wetlands in and around the Wabash River Valley. The wetlands near the Miami heartlands really form one continuous and large swampy environment known as the Great Black Swamp.\textsuperscript{36} The volume of tuberous plants would have been higher in the wetlands of the heartland, and the gathering process would not have involved visiting multiple locations. Once

\textsuperscript{33} G. Kenneth Dotson and T.R. Smith, \textit{Our Ohio Soils} (Columbus, OH: Ohio Department of Natural Resources: Division of Lands and Soil, 1958), map, 9-10.
\textsuperscript{34} Flint and Gordon “Natural Vegetation of Ohio [map]”
\textsuperscript{35} Trowbridge, \textit{Meeameear Traditions}, 65.
again the people of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* seem to have been at a slight ecological disadvantage when compared to their relatives to the north.

**Agriculture in the Great Miami River Valley**

Despite the wide variety of animals Miami people hunted and the huge variety of plants that they gathered, the combined efforts of hunting and gathering still did not form the majority of the Miami diet. The largest portion of the Miami diet came from agricultural products, those plants that the Miami intentionally raised and managed in fields adjacent to their villages.

Corn was king for the Miami-Illinois speaking peoples of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The French trader Nicholas Perrot reported that corn, beans, and squash were all vital to Indian agriculture in the Old Northwest, but he emphasized that corn was the most important of the three and was “to [Indians] what bread is to Frenchmen.” Twenty-first century linguists Daryl Baldwin and David Costa parallel Perrot’s emphasis by including twenty-seven corn related listings in their dictionary, which points to the extensive corn vocabulary present in the Miami-Illinois language. By contrast there are only a handful of listings for beans and squash.\(^{37}\) This vocabulary is only representative of what has survived to the modern era and is probably representative of an originally larger pool of linguistic terms referring to corn.\(^{38}\)

Visitors to Miami villages in the heartlands observed the size of Miami cornfields with a sense of admiration. In 1790, Major Ebenezer Denny, a junior officer who participated in General Harmar’s disastrous attack on *Kiikhayonki*, reported finding and destroying 20,000 bushels of corn.\(^{39}\) Just four years later, General Anthony Wayne reported that Miami cornfields ran along the Maumee River from *Kiikhayonki* (Fort Wayne, Indiana) to Lake Erie.\(^{40}\) An awed Wayne wrote that he had never witnessed “such immense fields of corn, in any part of America,

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\(^{38}\) For more information on this topic see Michael Gonella’s chapter on Miami corn in his forthcoming dissertation at Miami University.


\(^{40}\) Hurt, *Indian Agriculture*, 36.
from Canada to Florida.” Even as late as 1815, American troops reported huge fields of corn outside Miami villages.  

From the reports of numerous Euro-American visitors to Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki it is clear that the Miami villagers who moved to Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki brought this tradition of corn agriculture with them to the banks of the Great Miami River. The Miami who settled at Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki probably relied on corn agriculture to the same degree as those living in the Miami heartlands. Christopher Gist visited the village during the winter so he did not witness the village’s agricultural practices firsthand. Yet, he did report that the leaders of the village planned their diplomatic travels based on the planting of corn. William Trent witnessed the end result of these plantings in the summer of 1752. Trent was a Virginian and visited the village less than a month after the Ojibwa and Ottawa attack that killed Meemeehšihkia and scattered the inhabitants of the village. Trent reported that the cornfields were large enough that on the day of the attack the women working in the fields could not cross them easily once the alarm had been sounded. He also reported that “they found where two men, the day before, had been sitting in the cornfields” watching the village.  

Neither of these passages provides a clear-cut reference to the size of the fields. And yet, in spite of this, it is clear that the cornfields had to be more than mere garden plots. More than likely these fields were meant to supply the inhabitants of the village with a secure source of food in the coming year.

The challenge that these villagers faced was that corn required space. Some corn could have been grown in the sediment rich bottomland of the Great Miami River, but that land would not have been sufficient to support the populations of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki. Additionally, the rich bottomland would have been a favored location for the gathering of tubers. It is highly likely that the villagers had to clear substantial amounts of forestland in order to secure enough field space for their corn. There is some evidence that Miami-Illinois speaking people inhabited

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43 In the east (Massachusetts) an average village of one hundred families would have needed one hundred to two hundred acres of corn, Donahue, The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord, 43. For reports of corn fields near Kiihkayonki that were four to five miles long see Susan Sleeper-Smith, Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes (Amherst: Univeristy of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 85. For a superb visual image of the size of the cornfields of the “Maumee Towns” see Denny, Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny, 146.
Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki prior to 1747 and there may have been some pre-cleared land. However, any previous settlement existed prior to the 1650s and the forest would have filled in easily over the course of 100 years. It is likely then that the Miami people who settled Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki were beginning from scratch in terms of clearing farmland.

Clearing forest that was at least 100 years old was likely to be labor intensive and would have required quite an investment of time and effort. Determining exactly how much land they would have cleared is complicated because no studies have been completed connecting Miami agriculture to space and population. Yet, intense studies have been conducted concerning the Huron, a people living just to the northeast of the Miami. The agricultural models developed through studying the Huron are applicable to Miami villages because the Huron had similar agricultural practices to the Miami, and at the most basic level lived off of the same agricultural products. These studies have concluded that a village of one thousand individuals required a minimum of 360 acres of corn.

Because the Huron farmed near to Lake Erie they experienced 180 to 200 frost-free days a year, which is twenty to thirty more frost-free days than experienced by the Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki villagers. Most likely this data indicates that the “People of the Ashes” experienced slightly smaller crop yields than the Huron. Therefore any application of the Huron model to Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki requires an understanding that the total required acreage is a conservative estimate. In 1751, the village was at its apex in terms of population. Over the winter of 1750-51, Christoph Gist reported that the population of the village was four hundred families. The application of a conservative ratio of three individuals per family would produce a population of approximately twelve hundred. According to the Huron model, the village would have required a minimum of 432 acres of corn.

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44 For oral tradition indicating previous settlements see Trowbridge, Meearmear Traditions, 26.
45 Hurt also produces a desired maximum production level. That states with yields of 17 bushels per acre and a demand of 45 bushels per capita; the needed acreage per person was 2.65. Hurt, Indian Agriculture, 34. However, Brian Donahue argues that in the east and on soil considered rocky and less productive than that of the Midwest, the villagers of southern New England produced yields of 40 bushels per acre and required only 8 bushels per capita (40 per family of five). This demand required only 1-2 acres of corn per family. Donahue, The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord, 43. Because the similarity between Hurt’s low estimate and Donahue’s data I decided to use the suggested minimum of 360 acres per 1000 individuals in calculating the needs of the Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki villagers.
46 Ohio Division of Lands and Soil and G. K. Dotson, Our Ohio Soils, 4.
47 Darlington, Gist’s Journal, 47.
Even if the village could have farmed 100 acres of bottomland (1.25 miles long), they still would have had to clear 200-300 acres of the beech-maple forest in order to plant their needed quantities of corn. Clearing hundreds of acres of land would have required years of concerted efforts on the part of the village. But until this land was producing corn, the village could not have put aside the two to four year surplus of corn that the Huron are reported to have generated. Unfortunately, the crop failures described in 1752 came before the desired surplus was generated. With such a surplus in place the village could have easily endured one failed corn crop.

Ecological Conclusions?

Corn may have been the undisputed king of Miami agriculture, but evaluations of the feasibility of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki that center only on corn agriculture fail to take into account the full range of flexible options that were available. Temporary dispersal of a village’s population during lean times was an established pattern for Miami peoples. This movement normally occurred during the winter months but such an attempt to reduce population density and spread risk could have been followed in the summer months too. In contrast to the position of Richard White, it is possible that Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki was habitable. When the Ottawa and Ojibwa attacked in June of 1752 they did hit a village devoid of most of its hunters and their families. Nevertheless, with fields full of an apparently healthy crop of corn it seems likely that most of these families intended to return. If the village had been allowed the time to clear more land and harvest two or three years of successful corn crops then they may have been able to generate the surplus necessary for a village to ride out minor fluctuations in agriculture and hunting.

The problem of hunting may have been more difficult to solve but it seems likely that the village population would have equilibrated to that which the local animal populations could sustain. If the village was moving towards becoming a trading center then some of their protein needs could have also been met through trade. Yet, most of these solutions and possibilities

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48 There are no models for how much land a village could clear in a year and so we do not know how quickly they could have reached this goal. Hurt, Indian Agriculture, 34.

required time that the village did not have. It seems fair to conclude that given its historical context *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* did not possess the ecological attributes necessary to endure the onslaughts of war, disease, and famine. But to claim that the village was uninhabitable is to misrepresent the situation. There were very few villages in the *pays d’en haut* that could endure the combination of these three stressors.\(^5\) If the leaders of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* had maintained good relations with their elder Ojibwa and Ottawa brothers and Langlade’s assault had never occurred, then the village appears to have been well on its way to stabilizing. With more time the villagers could have cleared enough land to decrease the amount of time they spent hunting, and they could have built the agricultural surplus necessary to endure a future period of famine.

Despite the importance of this famine to the village’s history, most studies *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* have maintained a focus on the village’s role within inter-indigenous and Euro-American conflicts. But what filled the majority of the approximately eighteen hundred days of life this village enjoyed? Were these days filled with discussions of the Iroquois, French, Ottawa, Shawnee, Pennsylvanians, and or Ojibwa? Or were most of these days filled with the physically intensive labor and undoubtedly coordinated efforts that came with establishing a relatively new village community? If we want to understand the lives of the “People of the Ashes” better, we must struggle to grasp the complexity of their everyday pursuits.

Foremost among these pursuits would have been the quest to meet the village’s biological needs. And yet, there remains a vast gap in the knowledge that exists concerning the subsistence and agricultural patterns of the indigenous peoples of the eastern woodlands. The subsistence patterns of the Miami were complex, diverse, and flexible, but we currently have only the barest understanding of this intricate web. Colonial historians have neglected developing their knowledge of these systems, but it would appear that issues of subsistence might have been the most important factor determining the feasibility of indigenous villages. If we want to understand the success or failure of various indigenous enterprises of this period we need to deepen our comprehension of indigenous patterns of hunting and gathering and agriculture.

\(^{50}\) Even the largest Miami village, *Kiihkayonki*, required a relocation of a large part of its population following the destruction of the village’s corn storage in the attack by General Harmar in 1790. For more on this strategic relocation see Helen Hornbeck Tanner, “The Glaize in 1792: A Composite Indian Community,” *Ethnohistory* 25, Winter (1978), 16.
Conclusion

“Fanning the Flames of Localized Ways of Knowing”

The story of *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* did not begin with this one specific village. The Adena mound structure, located to the southwest of the 1747 village site, communicates the depth of the layers of habitation along that stretch of the *Ah sensiipi* (Great Miami River). Miami oral tradition also conveys a sense of deep Miami connection to the place, which perhaps reaches back to the middle 1600s. It is likely that Shawnee oral tradition preserves similar stories regarding their villages along the *Ah sensiipi*.

The extent of this village’s history prior to 1747 is one of many mysterious about this village yet to be addressed. But clearly this village’s story does not end with Charles Langlade’s attack in 1752.

After the Ojibwa and Ottawa assault on the village, the Miami people, who called *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* home, tried to gain increased support from their brothers to the east and reinforce their reeling community. This increased help did not arrive and many of these “rebellious” Miami returned to “the hegemony of France.” At least that is the way most historians have concluded their versions of this story.

Accounts of a few stalwart holdouts, who resisted returning to *Kiihkayonki*, belie a deeper continuity in Miami connection to the village of the “People of the Ashes.” In 1755, a Miami war party captured Jane Frazier on the outskirts of an English settlement near the Potomac River in western Maryland close to the modern border with Pennsylvania. Following the capture, this group of Miami men brought Frazier back to their village on the *Ah sensiipi* (Great Miami River) in western Ohio. Frazier does not provide a name for this village in her narrative, but there is no Miami village other than *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* reported to have lain

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2. This phrasing is Blasingham’s but many authors have used variations on this vary theme. Essentializing a return to *Kiihkayonki* (a Miami village) as a return to the French fold. Emily J. Blasingham, “The Miami Prior to the French and Indian War,” *Ethnohistory* 2 (Winter 1955): 6.

on the banks of the Ahsenisiipi. Miami people had spent five years preparing the ground of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki for settlement, and it is highly likely that people would have selected that exact location for a village in 1755. It may also be possible that a small group (50 to 100 individuals) never abandoned the village completely following the 1752 attack. We know the village was small because Frazier reports that following her adoption another war party left the village. This one war party (25-30 men) drained the village of all of its able bodied adult men. This smaller group may have escaped the attention of the French who believed they had forced all of the errant “republicans” home to Kiihkayonki. In addition, the French became fixated on issues of English encroachment in the upper Ohio River Valley and may have overlooked such a small village on the Ahsenisiipi. We do not know when this smaller village ceased to be inhabited by Miami people, but by the 1790s there were no reports of Miami people living along the Ahsenisiipi.5

Lack of residence, however, does not mean that Miami people failed to recognize the importance of this village site. In 1795, the Miami war leader turned civil chief, Mihšihkinaahkwa (Little Turtle), outlined Miami lands to include Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki and the hunting grounds running west up to the Scioto River.6 Mihšihkinaahkwa explicitly mentioned that it was a Miami war leader who supervised the construction of the palisade at Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki and marked that space as important to Miami people.7 Mihšihkinaahkwa was not claiming exclusive Miami rights to that land but merely outlining what Miami people today call myaamiaki eehi mihtohseeniwiči, where the Miami people lived. Euro-Americans looking through the lens of the nation-state did not always grasp the concept of shared space, but it existed none-the-less.

5 Henry Lewis Carter suggests that the village may have not been completely abandoned until 1763 following a battle with the Wyndot. Harvey Lewis Carter, The Life and Times of Little Turtle: First Sagamore of the Wabash (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 36.
7 Because the Mihšihkinaahkwa who spoke at Greeneville shared the same name as the war leader of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki (1747-1752) this passage is often misinterpreted. Some have thought that he was referring to himself as being at Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki others believed that the earlier Mihšihkinaahkwa was his father. However, the sharing of names from father to son (or mother to daughter) was not common and there may have been no biological relationship between these two individuals named Mihšihkinaahkwa. Carter addresses the mistake that these two were the same person and argues that they were really father and son. Carter, Little Turtle, 38-39.
The connection to *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki*, which pointedly surfaced in the speech of *Mihšihkinaahkwat* at Greenville, continued into the 1800s. In 1805, *Eepiikanita*, or William Wells, intentionally chose to settle on land just to the north of the *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* village site. *Mihšihkinaahkwa* mentored *Eepiikanita* and the two worked closely together since the younger man’s capture and adoption, first as warriors and then as diplomats. *Eepiikanita* married the daughter of *Mihšihkinaahkwa* and served as Indian agent for the Miami in the years following the Treaty of Greenville. Henry Lewis Carter interpreted the move of *Eepiikanita* to *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* as a product of a personal attachment to the place on the part of *Mihšihkinaahkwa*. It is just as likely that Miami continued to perceive *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* as an important nexus of connections with the peoples of the east. As the power of the United States continued to surge, *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* could have served as a confluence at which the people of the Wabash River Valley could mediate yet another new relationship. By 1815, however, the era of the middle ground evaporated as the United States possessed enough force to meet their needs with steadily decreasing degrees of compromise with indigenous peoples. It is this change that perhaps marks an end to the desire that lay behind one Miami conception of the Ash People’s village.

Even the end of the middle ground did not bring Miami people’s interest in the place to a complete end. Miami people have continued to visit *Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki* and continue to perceive many of the layers that exist in the history of the place. In addition to all of the previously mentioned features of the Piqua Historical Area, this location was also a point of fortification for General Anthony Wayne as he marched his army north towards *Kiihkayonki*. Wayne eventually defeated the joined American Indian forces of the Old Northwest at the Battle of Fallen Timbers. The Historical Area’s museum is contained within a structure built on the site of Wayne’s blockhouse (Fort Piqua), which was built to secure his advance on the Miami heartlands. Today this museum holds exhibits that recount the stories of the peoples who called and continue to call Ohio home.

The keystone elements of Piqua Historical Area are John Johnston’s homestead and a restored section of the Miami-Erie Canal. Johnston served as Indian agent for the Miami after *Eepiikanita* (William Wells) and assisted in the treaty process that quickly deprived the Miami of huge swaths of their homelands in Ohio and Indiana. Through treaties these leaders isolated indigenous groups within small tracks of land, and they also sought the eventual removal of these
people from the new states of Indiana and Ohio. The Historical Area is further connected to this era of Miami history through its refurbished quarter-mile section of the Miami-Erie Canal. This canal was a part of the route that over 300 Miami people traveled in 1846 as they were forcibly removed from Indiana to Kansas. In an unintended yet still ironic twist, the canal boat that the Area uses to transport visitors on short trips along the canal is named the “General Harrison of Piqua.” These physical features mark this site as layered with additional stories of resistance, military subjugation, and removal, which dominate so much of nineteenth-century Miami Indian history.

Miami connections to Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki continued through the twentieth-century and into the twenty-first century. Currently, Daryl Baldwin, a Miami Indian and a descendent of Mihšihkinaahkwa, sits on the Piqua Historical Area Friends Council. It is from this contemporary connection that Miami people have once again begun to visit the site on a regular basis. This thesis is the product of that contemporary connection. We visitors have found that the layers of stories contained on that site go far beyond the village of 1747, yet that short five-year period still has much to teach us about Miami history, and through comparative analysis the “People of the Ashes” still have much to tell us about the region of the pays d’en haut as a whole.

The 1747 incarnation of Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki tells us much about the web of connections that linked the Miami world of the eighteenth-century. Looking closely at the physical placement of this one village generates new perspectives on the way these people thought of the world around them and how their attempt to settle this village fit within those conceptions. They were not breaking away from their past. Instead, they were building upon the strengths provided by the position of their heartlands in the Wabash River Valley, and they were creating a new series of physical links reaching eastward.

Re-reading the documentary record in light of this cultural geography adds additional nuances to the political, diplomatic, and economic decisions that the village made. This re-reading does not disprove any of the earlier interpretations of the village’s history but adds the additional nuance of a more localized and centralized perception of that history.

By centering the story on Pinkwi Mihtohseeniaki and the Wabash River Valley, the fluidity between the Miami-Illinois speaking communities of the Valley shines forth. The sense of distinct difference between the Peeyankihšia (Piankashaw), Waayaahkanwa (Wea),
Kineepikomeekwa (Eel River), and the “Miami Proper” at Kihkayonki and Kiteepihkwana (Tippecanoe) fades into a greater sense of common understanding that transcends linguistic similarity. Yes, these were self-governing village peoples and not a “nation,” even according to the eighteenth-century understanding of the term. But later divisions between groups like the Waayahtanwa, Peeyankihšia, and the Miami-Illinois speaking peoples living to their north have often led historians to neglect the degree to which these divisions were produced by the conflicts of the treaty era and do not reflect the fluid connections that all of these people shared at one point in their history.

In addition to shared culture and language, all of the Miami-Illinois speaking communities of the Wabash River Valley also shared a similar, although not identical, ecological base. Ecology was as much a part of these communities’ cultural landscapes as any other cultural subset. This study of Pinkwi Mihtoхиseeniaki has opened the door to a new set of questions regarding the means through which villages experienced ecological success. Each village’s ecological practices (hunting, gathering, and agriculture) were highly developed, complex, and contained certain practices unique to each community’s particular location. A better understanding of the ecological world of these communities requires more in depth studies of many more of the villages of the Miami heartlands. What does it say about our collective knowledge of these village-centered people when we know so little about how they fed themselves? Can we understand the middle ground, this shared cultural space between empire and “the nonstate world of villages,” if we do not fully grasp the day-to-day lives of these villages?8 Hopefully this thesis adds a little to our understanding of this one village’s ecology. If not, it at least asks a series of questions that undercut the simplistic and unrefined representations of village ecology in the pays d’en haut.

In everyway possible this thesis has attempted to represent the complexities of life in the village of Pinkwi Mihtoхиseeniaki and for all Miami people in general. Works like Richard White’s The Middle Ground, Stewart Rafert’s The Miami Indians of Indiana, and Harvey Lewis Carter’s The Life and Times of Little Turtle are hardly guilty of over simplifying, but with time and continued research we continue to attain an ever more complex understanding of the life

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ways of our ancestors. This thesis is an attempt to build on the great work of the past and add additional layers of complexity to stories that some may have thought we already knew well.

This complexity is a part of the relevance and importance that I hope this thesis has for Miami people today. A large part of understanding and empowering our present is a collective and uniquely Miami re-examination of our pasts. Through this process Miami people can engage in researching, writing, and speaking to our own people about the diversity of experiences that existed among Miami communities of the past. This research therefore contains an element of activism in that it has the potential to overpower the educational forces of the larger society—forces that still consistently seek to confine indigenous people to specific and narrow appearances and behaviors. This re-examination is not about taking exclusive ownership of these pasts. However, this process is about Miami voices and Miami stories receiving the same degree of attention and respect as other voices and other’s stories about our pasts. By representing our peoples’ lives as equally complex throughout the length and breadth of our history, these stories empower us to see our own experiences with change and continuity within our ancestor’s experiences. As my Miami readers encounter these elements of continuity and change, I hope that they will find power in both.

I hope that those who read this work will also leave with a better understanding of the uniqueness of the village of the “People of the Ashes” and through this the uniqueness each Miami-Illinois speaking community. Ideally, a better understanding of the complexity of the local opens the way for a better understanding of the region of the pays d’en haut, but a better understanding of the local is also an end in and of itself. The ultimate means through which to combat simplistic stereotypes of any group is to develop a better understanding of the local. It is within the local that individuals become undeniably human and perhaps most knowable. I imagine that “downstreaming” has its own presentist risks, but it would seem that a better understanding of the local would be valuable knowledge to have in any situation and in any place in this increasingly global world we all share.

But let us pull back from pretension, come full circle, and sit ourselves where we began. Today the village center and longhouse, where Meemeehšihkia and the other leaders of the village met to discuss the village’s future, is a hay field. The place where more than a few

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Miami people lived out their lives shows little sign that they were ever there. The stories are there, though, just waiting for us to come back, sit, and listen patiently. As Miami people continue to reconnect with this place it could potentially see yet another layer of ash from Miami campfires laid down upon the remnants of all the others that stretch back through our history. And from this new layer could emerge yet another chapter in the Miami story of Pinkwi Mihtoheeniaki.
Bibliography


