ABSTRACT

“MY GREAT TERROR, THE BLACK SWAMP”
NORTHWEST OHIO’S ENVIRONMENTAL BORDERLAND

by Dana Bogart

From the 1790s to 1880s, the wetland environment of Northwest Ohio prevented the expansion of American political control and settlement. The Ohio borderlands witnessed several struggles for control of the land through military action. However, the largest (and oldest) force acting against American dominance in this region proved to be the Great Black Swamp. The United States government recognized that the existence of Native American cultures within the corner of the state threatened its claims to the land. Federal officials enacted land-use policies for native reservations to erase native peoples’ existence environmentally and encourage the spread of white settlement. Following these actions, the state government enforced several public works projects throughout the region to promote travel and settlement in Northwest Ohio to citizens. After decades of political action and funding, the state drained the swamp and transformed the wetlands into an agricultural environment suited for Euro-American settlement and economic expansion.
“MY GREAT TERROR, THE BLACK SWAMP”
NORTHWEST OHIO’S ENVIRONMENTAL BORDERLAND

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Introduction

Throughout the nineteenth century, the United States and Ohio governments viewed Northwest Ohio’s Great Black Swamp as a force acting against American expansion. The swamp played decisive roles in military campaigns, native relations, and land policies; it forced the federal and state governments to negotiate means of “conquering” the environment. This thesis observes how the wetland environment of Northwest Ohio prevented Euro-American expansion, and how Americans fought against this nonhuman force. The region’s landscape extended the borderland era in Ohio through much of the nineteenth century. While borderlands studies define a borderland as a contested space between human forces, the environment, especially Northwest Ohio’s wetlands, also fought against imposing peoples. The different levels of the American government established environmental policies that altered the area’s landscape to suit a Euro-American economy, influence the emigration of people, and expand political control. These political actions removed the wetlands that contributed to the prolonged borderland in the northwest corner of the state. How did the federal and state governments extinguish the borderland in Northwest Ohio through environmental means to obtain political control of the region?

Previous historians of the Great Lakes Region depict the area’s cultures and politics, up to the early nineteenth century, as that of a borderland rather than a frontier. This distinction recognizes the existence of multiple forces with competing territorial claims that required mutual accommodation and negotiation between peoples. The borderland prevented steady American settlement and political expansion. These historians, however, only view these borderland forces as competing imperial and human entities, and mark the end of the region’s borderland in 1815 with the close of the War of 1812.

This thesis seeks to examine how the environmental changes through agriculture, transportation, and drainage developments in Northwest Ohio’s Black Swamp during the nineteenth century reflected the American government’s (and its citizens’) expansionist goals. In the first chapter, I demonstrate the physical, cultural, and political settings of Ohio in the early nineteenth century. This chapter’s purpose is to show the many environmentally related obstacles to American expansion into Northwest Ohio at the time other historians have declared the borderland closed and the American border secured. The second chapter investigates the
government’s actions to extinguish Native American cultures in the region through land use policies, government-funded transportation systems, and property sales. In the third chapter, I look at state internal improvement projects that altered and removed the Black Swamp to expand white settlement and Ohio’s political influence within the state’s geopolitical boundaries. These chapters seek to answer questions surrounding the influence of the environment on the political capacities of an expanding empire. How did the wetland environment affect peoples’ relationship with the land? How did Native Americans use the land to negotiate remaining claims in Ohio until the Jackson administration? Why did white settlement take so long to establish itself in Northwest Ohio, compared to the surrounding areas? How did the federal and state governments use their powers to influence the movement of peoples?

Several historical approaches shaped my answers to these questions. Some of these methodologies include borderland and frontier studies, Native American history, and environmental history. As defined by Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron in their article “From Borderlands to Borders,” a borderland operates under the premise of shared spaces of “contested boundaries between colonial forces.”¹ They reserve the term “frontier” for a “borderless lands” that appears before the formation of a borderland. These definitions conform to Herbert Eugene Bolton’s ideas on expansion, territorial power, and imperial forces. In relation to Northwest Ohio, although arbitrarily contained within the geopolitical boundaries of the United States and Ohio, the land remained disputed between America and Great Britain until the close of the War of 1812 and claimed as native territory for several more years. The border of the Black Swamp also remained an ambiguous perimeter because of its reliance on environmental contingencies, such as seasonal rainfalls. In my thesis, I place the environment in the borderland discussion as a force that needed to be “conquered” by the United States to ensure uncontested political expansion.

Richard White expanded the vocabulary for borderland studies in The Middle Ground. White examined the interactions in the Great Lakes region between different native nations and Europeans. He argued that the many groups of people who lived and traded in this region did not assimilate to one culture, but formed new methods of communication for the sake of finding

a common (mis)understanding for mutual benefit. White theorized about a “world system in which minor agents, allies, and even subjects at the periphery often guide the course of empires.” Although these historians and others focus on how cultural adaptations developed because of political and economic needs, this thesis questions how environmental adaptations arose from political intervention.

Native American histories share similar qualities of borderland histories, including political and economic influences. However, scholarship concerning Native Americans in the Old Northwest Territory generally marks the end of Native American history in the region with the death of Tecumseh in 1813 and the end of the War of 1812 in 1815. These works ignore the negotiation, accommodation, and existence of native villages in Ohio from the end of violent conflict to national native removal efforts in the 1830s. Angie Debo wrote one of the first chronological histories of the United States from the Native American perspective in her book A History of the Indians of the United States. In this work, she examined Native American forces as powerful agents of change in United States history. In general, however, she stated that “The history of any tribe of the Old Northwest is a dreary record of encroachment and a more or less voluntary removal to the West.” While these tribes did experience encroachment and, eventually, removal, she ignored their environmental and cultural accommodation efforts as powerful forms of negotiation. Kathleen DuVal also dismissed the efforts of Great Lakes native peoples during an era of land cessions and treaty negotiations in her book The Native Ground. However, overall this work reevaluated the native power during the expansionist period. She argued that when in the dominant position, Native Americans were less likely to create a middle ground with settlers, but this circumstance did not apply to Northwest Ohio.

Historians gave little attention to native influences in Ohio following the Indian wars in the late eighteenth century and the War of 1812 until their removal. Although, in the case of Ohio and many other Midwest states, native tribes were major components to state settlements and land disputes long after their violent resistance efforts until their removal in the mid-nineteenth century. White’s studies in Roots of Dependency informed my research on this process of native-white relations during state expansion. In answering the question of how the

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introduction of Euro-American culture affected native nations, White relies heavily on the use of shared spaces. He argued that the introduction of an economy based on the commodification of the environment by Europeans changed all aspects of life for native peoples. White’s examination of three different native nations served as a model for studying how changes to the environment affected native culture, politics, and economy.

Environmental histories also contributed to this research through their recognition of environmental and non-human actors as agents of change. Similar to White’s *Roots of Dependency*, William Cronon examined the effects of competing cultures within a shared space. In his work, *Changes in the Land*, he argued that the expansion of colonial agricultural practices left the environment incapable of sustaining Native American lifestyles. According to Cronon, an environment cannot support two different, competing forms of cultural land uses. Following this premise, Virginia Anderson also investigated the way colonists expanded environmentally in New England. Anderson argued in her book, *Creatures of Empire*, that white settlement moved further into native territory through non-human actions. As livestock and fields expanded beyond the fringe of white settlements, the land could not support the cohabitation of these different peoples. Accommodation efforts made between these groups often served as a source of tension. Both Cronon and Anderson accounted environmental change to the expansion of settlers, followed by the growth of the political forces. In Northwest Ohio, however, settlement appeared sparingly until political intervention transformed the physical and cultural landscape of the region.

By combining these different approaches to historical research, this thesis places the environment at the center of political struggle for dominion over land already within their geopolitical boundaries. While many works using borderlands theory concentrate on cultural and political relationships between different groups of *people*, this work seeks to give the environment agency in these borderland discussions. In an article written for the *Journal of American History*, Linda Nash examined the state of environmental history as a growing field of research. Nash states that the field’s next focus should be the “insistence that the world is natural and social” and “lies in showing that all history is environmental.”

of the United States and Ohio to “conquer” the region through non-military means, creating a landscape suitable for Euro-Americans and influencing the movements of a population.

5 “Forrest Woods Nature Preserve,” Black Swamp Conservancy, Cecil, Ohio, photographed April 11, 2015. This nature preserve is supposed the most accurate representation of the historical Black Swamp.
Chapter One: Forming the Environmental Borderland

“No one knows the origin of the name ‘Black Swamp.’ Nineteenth-century land speculators claimed that it referred to the rich black soil, but it seems just as likely that early travelers were thinking about the forest’s gloom and its feeling of ominous remoteness.” — Carolyn Patt

In 1815, Northwest Ohio’s environmental, cultural, and political histories defined the area’s relations with the national and state governments throughout the nineteenth century. The land’s complex pasts formed unique physical and political environments. These situations required several decades for the government to influence the movement of a homogenous population that closed the region’s cultural borderland and transformed the landscape to be suited to a Euro-American economy. Northwest Ohio’s landscape formed over several geologic periods of climate change, producing a region uninhabitable by Euro-American settlements, as perceived by most Americans in the early nineteenth century. As a result, the northwest quarter of Ohio remained within Native American territory, despite several eras of contested claims by opposing empires, especially in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Conflict in the region during this time reflected the enforcement of America’s expansionist policies against Great Britain and several Native American nations. Although the land seemed undesirable to American settlers, the federal and state governments saw benefits in controlling the Maumee River Valley as a highway into the Northwest Territory’s (1787) interior. However, the U.S. and Ohio governments failed to secure this goal by the end of the War of 1812, even though many historians agree on this point as the close of the region’s borderland. This chapter demonstrates that the region’s wetland environment, which favored Native American cultures over white settlements, presented obstacles to the expansion of American political control.

In order to explain the landscape in Northwest Ohio during the early nineteenth century and the kind of obstacles that the American government faced in exerting political control over the wetlands, it is necessary to explore how the swamp developed. The former Great Black Swamp developed within an ancient shifting glacial field dating back 700,000 years ago. The definition of a glacier is a “mass of ice and snow that shows evidence of either present or former

movement.” The Ice Age that caused these glaciers and ice caps to form began 1.8 million years ago. However, the Ice Age did not cause a consistent sheet of solid ice, but rather consisted of several stages of warming between periods of glaciation, called interglacials. During these interglacial periods, the glaciers retreated as far north as the center of origin. The advancement of each new glacier erased evidence of previous ice advances. Only those glaciers that spread farther than the new advances left traces of their formations.

Geological records show that three glacial stages formed Ohio’s landscapes: the Kansan, Illinoian, and, the most recent, Wisconsin. With each of these movements, the glaciers displaced and replaced soil and landscapes repeatedly, carving out the Great Lakes Basin and flattening western Ohio. As the ice slowed and retreated with the changing climates, the glacier left behind its accumulations of soil and debris from its formerly advancing front in elongated mounds, called moraines. These geological formations became important features in the early exploration and settlement of Northwest Ohio. The last glacial stage, the Wisconsin, began to advance about 40,000 years ago and took 12,000 years to reach its farthest point into Ohio, moving at an estimated average speed of 160-220 feet per year. This stage had the greatest effect on the landscape of Ohio. With its advancement, the Wisconsin glacier created a level terrain in Northwest Ohio with some of the lowest elevation in the state.

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3 Ibid., 13.
Ohio Department of Natural Resources, *Shaded Elevation Map of Ohio* (Columbus: Division of Geological Survey, 2002). This elevation map demonstrates the impact glaciation had on region’s landscape. The low lying land in Western Ohio coordinate with the glacial advances.
As the final glacial stage ended, the melting ice formed a large lake in the almost perfectly level land in Northwest Ohio, which reached as far south as the St. Mary moraines and included present-day Lake Erie. Geological and topological surveys show that this large glacial lake was “230 feet higher than modern Lake Erie” and extended itself through Northwest Ohio and in to the northeastern corner of Indiana. This lake, commonly referred to as Ancient Lake Maumee and Maumee Glacial Lake, resided in the lowest surface relief of the area, carved out by the centuries of retreating and expanding glaciers. The lake’s water outlets consisted of the Scioto River, St. Mary’s River, and Wabash River, which flowed southwest away from the lake. As the shoreline retreated, the rivers followed the disappearing lake. This shift caused a continental river drainage divide. Rivers north of this divide, such as those in Northwest Ohio, flow northward into Lake Erie, rather than those in the rest of the state that flow towards the Ohio River. The directional shift of the rivers and the declining lake level also resulted in the development of the Maumee River and left behind saturated land with poorly developed drainage along its almost perfectly level landscape. These geological events evolved into wet prairies, swamp forests, and breech forests that characterized the land in recent centuries. Found in Ohio throughout recorded history, these landscapes “corresponds exactly with the limit of glaciation.”


6 Ohio Division of Geological Survey.

These forests and prairies in the Lake Plains of Ohio composed much of the area’s environment, dictated by region’s vegetation and flooding. The wet prairies, as described in wetland studies, consisted of “large tracts of tall grasslands rooted in stiff, impervious mineral soils, situated on flat upland till plains.” In the case of Northwest Ohio, “In the catchment area of the Great Lakes, in lands drained by the Maumee...the gradient from upland to floodplain is

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perceptible and wetland once stretched without interruption from one to the other.”9 The land’s treeless, upland wet prairies consisted of grass that grew up to eight feet high and remained dry during the summer months. According to one traveler from the 1790s, he stated that “during the vernal floods, the north branch of the Great Miami mixes its waters with the southern branch of the Miami of the Lake [Maumee River]…[the land] disappears beneath the flood, and we can pass canoes from the Ohio to Lake Erie.”10 This account demonstrates the effects of excess water on terrain susceptible to flooding and swamps.

These wet prairies laid primarily on the (slightly) higher ground of the sand ridges and moraines of the former glacial fronts. Around the prairies, the swamp forests presented themselves as dark and mysterious to Euro-American travelers and settlers. Much of this space was “heavily timbered, of which the growth is sugar maple, black and white walnut, various species of oaks, black and white mulberry, beech, buckeye, box elder, elm, sassafras, crab apple, pawpaw, lynn, sycamore, cotton wood, and some other kinds.”11 Waterlogged soil and plant material from the former lake bottoms provided the conditions that promoted the growth and development of these heavily wooded lands. Many soldiers during the War of 1812 noted the unfavorable circumstances that Northwest Ohio presented. In 1812, General William Hull and the Army of the Northwest, during their travels from “Urbanna to the Rapids of Miami [Maumee]”, found themselves in a “thick and almost trackless forest…The soil of the land was moist, being in many places a perfect swamp…man and horse had to travel mid leg deep in mud.”12 While the core of the swamp existed immediately south of the Maumee River, a definitive boundary of the swamp was difficult to distinguish because it often “varied seasonally as well as annually with changes in precipitation.” The wetlands in this region flooded or consisted of standing water for a majority of the year because “their drainage pattern [was] poorly developed.”13 The region also contained beech forests, generally found “on poorly

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9 Prince, Wetlands of the American Midwest, 50.
11 Edmund P. Dana, Geographical Sketches on the Western Country: Designed for Emigrants and Settlers (Cincinnati: Looker, Reynolds & Co. Printers, 1819), 84.
12 Samuel R. Brown, Views of the Campaigns of the North-Western Army (Troy: F. Adancourt, 1814), 8.
drained flatlands.” While excessive ground water remained in the swamp forests for most of the year, the beech forests only experienced occasional seasonal standing water.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{A regional history of the Maumee River Valley from the early twentieth century noted that “The early tillers of the soil found it very wet. The clay and solid subsoil, which abound in many parts, retained the water without ditches and in forest shadows a long time, often throughout the year. On this account much of this Basin was termed the Black Swamp.”\textsuperscript{17}

Several soil surveys of different counties in the area from recent decades demonstrate what many

\textsuperscript{14} Robert Gordon, \textit{Natural Vegetation of Ohio at the Time of the Earliest Land Surveys} (Columbus: The Ohio Biological Survey and The Natural Resources Institute, 1961).
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. The yellow signifies wet prairies, the purple represents swamp forests, and the green denotes beech forests (which extend as far as glaciation). This map was constructed in the 1960s using notes from the region’s first surveyors. Some limitations exist with this map. The surveyors did not have a uniform system of describing the land, possibly resulting in a discrepancy in vocabulary. The map also only depicts what the vegetation looked like before white expansion and development, and does not take into account native influences.
\textsuperscript{17} Slocum, \textit{History of the Maumee River Basin}, 2.
early settlers observed; much of Northwest Ohio soil consists of black silt loams and silty clay loams and contains fertile, organic matter (due to the region’s history as a lake bed) conducive to agriculture. The fine-grained textures of these soils create a slow drainage process. In Wood County alone, soils classified as having limitations in draining excess water are present in 357,615 acres, 92.6% of the county. 18 Although Wood County was the center of the former Great Black Swamp, it demonstrates the impact of its earlier geological formations on the land’s environment and characteristics, which continue to be noted in recent soil surveys. The area’s flat terrain also led also contributed to the region’s wetlands.

The topology of this corner of the state was greatly affected by the glacial stages. Many of the county soil surveys take note of the slope percentage of the studied area, and the level ground does not always mean or necessarily indicate an area of poor drainage, it is an obvious contributor when paired with other factors. Henry County’s 1974 soil survey notes the impact elevation had on drainage. The soil that was found to be poorly drained “are nearly level or depressional…The well drained and moderately well drained soils…have short slopes where surface runoff is rapid.” 19 A travel account of the area from 1804 noted the region’s terrain, which was “so slightly inclined, that the rivers descend slowly and circuitously, and frequently stagnate into swamps.” 20 The lack of elevation resulted in poor drainage and frequent flooding of the region because precipitation, without manmade drainage systems, had nowhere to run off. The swamp and wetland ecosystem in Northwest Ohio caused by the effects of glaciation created obstacles to white settlement and expansion. Once the Ohio government implemented manmade engineering projects, the land became some of the most agriculturally fertile and productive in the country. 21

20 Volney and Brown, A View of the Soil and Climate, 23.
Native Americans living in the Ohio country mostly avoided the swamp, using the dark forests for hunting, but settling along the higher fringes and moraines of the wetland.22 The native groups confined to Northwest Ohio during the reservation years (1817-1830s) consisted of the Wyandot, Ottawa, Shawnee, and Seneca tribes.23 However, prior to the nineteenth century, the Ohio country was a hub of international native trade and diplomacy. Many villages contained diverse populations.24

These Native Americans altered and manipulated the land before European contact, affecting what white travelers witnessed and recorded. By modifying vegetation populations and influencing the spread of animal herds, native peoples shaped the landscapes in every region to best suit their cultural and habitation needs. They continued to make environmental changes following the influences of European culture, especially with the introduction of environmental commodification. Native nations across the North American continent held a diverse variety of land practices, some localized to certain regions and others, “such as burning, were in use across the continent.”25 Unlike the common stereotype, native peoples were not conservationists and did not aim to protect the land for the sake of preserving the environment, which is how early studies perceived indigenous populations.

Recent historians discredited this general cultural assumption about Native Americans. White and Cronon explain, “The notion that Indians passively ‘adapted’ to their regional environments must be avoided.”26 While the environment limited some uses of the land, “if

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23 Wyandot were known as Huron in the seventeenth century. After a blowing defeat by the Five Nations, some segments of the nation reorganized as the Wyandot and were absorbed in to both Algonquin and Iroquois language groups. Wendat is also a commonly seen spelling for this group. The Seneca were a part of the original Five Nations, which I will refer to when discussing their role in regional conflict and land cessions. There is a significant amount of scholarship on the Shawnee, but the Shawnee in Ohio following the War of 1812 did not adhere to Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa’s ideas of further military action and a pan-Indian confederacy. The Ottawa developed from multiple Algonquin groups and received their name from the French term for “trade”. They are believed to be closely related to the Potawatomi and Chippewa. Odawa is a commonly seen spelling for this group. When researching these nations, I often accept the behaviors of the large language group societies to impact their actions. The Ottawa and Shawnee recognize themselves to a part of the Algonquin society. The Wyandot and Seneca largely refer themselves as belonging to the Iroquoian language group.
26 Ibid., 417.
regional environments were diverse, Indian uses of them were even more diverse.”

Individual native cultures and economic needs dictated their changes and relationships to the land. Native peoples impacted the environment to meet their needs as much as their depleting populations could sustain. They constructed many landscapes that white settlers recognized as “natural.” By generalizing Native Americans as a singular group of people who lived off of the natural, unchanging wilderness, native peoples are dehumanized and perceived as uncivilized and simplistic. Their complex understandings of diverse ecosystems and the roles these ecosystems played in to their culture and society demonstrate the opposite of simplistic. Native American land usage transformed the environment into how the land was first observed by European travelers and traders. Recent scholarship recognizes the role indigenous people played in the “transformative action in ecosystems they knew intimately.”

Native peoples practiced “ecological knowledge”, which was “systematic, relational, and interactional” with their surroundings. These relationships with the environment utilized expertise on the seasonal changes in the environment. This kind of knowledge was especially vital in Northwest Ohio’s wetland ecosystem because of the recurrent wet and dry periods. Native American concepts of property and utilization of the environment transformed the land, but also asserted dominion over contested territory with European, and later American, claims.

Cronon reconstructs native concepts of property, ownership, and communalism in relation to their environments from colonial records. He states that native political communities defined their ideas of property rights, ownership, and sovereignty. In many native cultures, communities recognized territorial claims of individuals, other villages, and kin networks. Territorial rights reflected the collective rights of a community to use the land. In treaty negotiations, Shawnee Chief Red Pole alluded to these native concepts of property: “The Great Spirit gave us this land in common. He has not given the right to any one nation, to say to another, this land is not yours, it belongs to me.”

Because native peoples’ definitions of ownership differed from Euro-Americans’ definition, imperial governments experienced pushback from native nations as the government and speculation companies attempted to survey

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27 Ibid., 417.
29 Ibid., 117.
and plot the land in Indian Territory to sell exclusive rights to settlers. Native Americans relied on the collective right to large spans of territory because their lifestyles required varying degrees of movement and flexibility with the seasons, causing confusion and misunderstanding on the behalf of Euro-Americans.\textsuperscript{31}

Many native environmental practices challenged Euro-American understandings of the land. Native American widespread use of fire threatened the Euro-American concepts of property since fire cannot be kept within the confines of individual plots. Col. James Smith, a British soldier held captive by Ohio Delawares in the 1750s, witnessed the use of fire by Delaware and Ottawa tribes along the Sandusky River. He wrote that these tribes collaborated to take part in a “ring hunt” where “we waited until we expected rain was near falling to extinguish the fire, and then we kindled a large circle in the prairie.”\textsuperscript{32} In a “Pioneer Scrapbook” of Wood County, a later account depicts a Wood County farmer in 1832 who witnessed his crops go “up in smoke in a big prairie fire late in the fall, started likely by Indians on their hunting excursions.”\textsuperscript{33} While different native nations held diverse relationships with the land, many scholars agree that the practice of burning prairies and forests was a cross cultural exercise. Archeologists found evidence of these burning practices in the Northeast and Upper Great Lakes Region, the homelands of the Algonquian and Iroquoian language groups.\textsuperscript{34}

The diverse groups who used this practice had many reasons behind it: clearing, cultivating, and hunting. Burning the land was essential to the maintenance of the wet prairies and “oak openings” found in Northwest Ohio by clearing trees and encouraging the growth of grasses.\textsuperscript{35} These oak openings appeared to early Euro-Americans as “thin groves…[with] patches of blueberry, aromatic wintergreen, [and] wild strawberry” within the thick forests of the region.\textsuperscript{36} Iroquois men used fire to burn off thick brush in order to clear soil so women could


\textsuperscript{32} James Smith, \textit{An Account of the Remarkable Occurrences in the Life and Travels of Col. James Smith: During His Captivity with the Indians} (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co, 1870), 85.


\textsuperscript{34} The tribes who lived in Northwest Ohio reservations belonged to these larger identification groups, often sharing cultural customs of other nations within the same group.

\textsuperscript{35} Prince, \textit{Wetlands of the American Midwest}, 60.

\textsuperscript{36} Robert Gordon, \textit{Natural Vegetation of Ohio at the Time of the Earliest Land Surveys}. 
cultivate the land. Native peoples also burned off undergrowth to “increase the production of berries, seeds, nuts, and other gathered foods” by removing the dead and overgrown vegetation and improve the ability to travel across the land. Scholars also speculate that fire was used as a method for hunting across the continent, both to stir herds out of dense grasslands and improve grazing conditions to encourage wildlife population growth. Indigenous peoples used fire in almost every aspect to sustain their lifestyles.

In addition to burning, most native nations also used a combination of hunting and horticulture to provide for their populations through the seasonal changes. According to archeological evidence, the Iroquoian nations shifted to a primarily agricultural society and sedentary lifestyle during the Middle Woodland Period (1-500 CE). This shift most likely occurred due to the stress on the wildlife population because of the growing hunting culture of the Algonquians during this era. The Iroquoian relied on subsistence agriculture to account for seventy-five percent of food products for their peoples, primarily consisting of corn, bean, squash, and sunflowers. However, this more permanent lifestyle of agriculture did not result in multigenerational durations of settlements. Environmental depletions often forced occasional migrations of villages and seasonal changes necessitated the new food sources. These groups used excess crops to trade with their hunter neighbors, the Algonquians, to the north to supplement their meat sources. The Algonquian-Iroquoian networks developed trade and diplomat skills between these different language groups, preparing native peoples for the introduction of Euro-American economy and the construction of the “Middle Ground.” Another aspect of Iroquoian horticulture was the role of women. Women cultivated the fields while men hunted game, traded with neighboring peoples, and fought warring nations. Euro-American settlers and governments viewed the matricentrist cultures of the Iroquoian nations as an obstacle to their assimilation efforts since European agricultural practices was the responsibility of male

head of the household. Native peoples often met these efforts to change their gender roles and agriculture with much resistance.

Of all native environmental practices, European contact most heavily influenced Native Americans’ concepts and motives of hunting. Preceding European contact, each native group, “in its own way made the environment and its relationships cultural.”43 They used traditional beliefs to explain occurrences in their ecosystems and dictate interactions with the environment. Northern Algonquian culture dictated that “animals made themselves available to hunters who treated them properly but did not give themselves up to hunters who treated them poorly by breaking…certain rules.”44 According to Huron mythology, morality required recognizing animals as a vital part of human existence. As a means of survival, “Animals must be continually thanked, and pleasing offerings constantly given to animal spirits.”45 These beliefs directed the ways different native groups interacted with their environment and treated wildlife populations.

The introduction of the fur trade affected every aspect of Native American life in the Great Lakes Region. Their economic, social, and political structures changed, as well as their cultural relationships with the environment, all of which were connected and affected by each other. The fur trade allowed Native Americans to become a part of a globalizing economy. This economy, fueled by European traders, provided native peoples with new materials and understandings of their surroundings. The commodification of the environment forced indigenous peoples to view furs as having a monetary or trade value. As Richard White points out, “the Algonquians…began to treat furs differently from other products of the hunt. [I]f a hunter did not have hunting rights in a territory, he was obliged to give the furs of the animals he killed to those who did.”46 Scholars disagree whether native territorial claims arose from the fur trade or if they previously existed between native groups for diplomatic purposes. Either way, territories and land claims became much more important to native nations and imperial forces because of the economic opportunities within given spaces.47 Algonquian and Iroquoian groups both exhausted the animal populations, especially beaver, with the use of European goods and

43 Krech, The Ecological Indian, 212.
44 Ibid., 201.
45 Sioui, Huron-Wendat, 38.
47 Krech, The Ecological Indian, 178.
the incentive of trade. Although the fur trade gave native peoples power within the trade networks of the Great Lakes middle ground, the European goods and debt they accumulated from traders resulted in a crippling native dependency on Euro-American culture.\textsuperscript{48}

These Native American environmental practices used by Algonquian and Iroquoian groups demonstrate the impact native peoples exerted over the land, including Northwest Ohio, and the obstacles they posed to European efforts to dominate the region culturally, politically, and economically. Before European contact and expansion, native peoples culturally constructed the “natural state,” which was later mistaken as virgin wilderness, seemingly available to Europeans who wanted to mold the land into being “productive.” As these practices contradicted European concepts of land usage, the federal government viewed the extermination of these cultures as necessary to exercise control over the land.

These cultural understandings of the environment demonstrated how different native groups, Algonquin and Iroquois, interacted with their ecosystems and exerted dominion over the land. These groups, and their European allies and enemies, recognized the importance of cultural land use in territorial claims. With the expansion of European influence, the environment became a growing symbol of control and conquest. The fur trade and territorial claims became the center of multi-empire power struggles that centered on the Ohio Country for several centuries.

The United States began with unstable native relations and ambiguous boundaries in the west. Following the United States’ War for Independence (1776-1783), the Americans turned their focus to imperial territorial expansion west of the Alleghany Mountains. Secretary of War, Henry Knox, believed that “Indians being the prior occupants, possess the right of the soil. It cannot be taken from them unless by their free consent, or by the right of conquest in case of a just war.”\textsuperscript{49} The federal government negotiated several land cession treaties with the Iroquois in the early 1780s to obtain their “right of the soil.” However, the Algonquians living in the Northwest Territory failed to acknowledge these treaties that removed their claim to the land.\textsuperscript{50}


\textsuperscript{50} White, \textit{The Middle Ground}, 417; Treaty of Fort Stanwix of 1784, Treaty of Fort McIntosh, and one at the mouth of the Great Miami River in 1786 – Iroquois gave land cessions to the United States that belonged to the Algonquians.
The Algonquian tribes living in the region did not have a central authority, an army, or a treasury to fund a war. In an effort to combine their resources and resist U.S. expansion, Native Americans in the Great Lakes Region formed a loose confederacy, referred to as the Western Confederacy, changing the borderland dynamics between native nations, as well as the borderland between Native Americans and the United States.

With the demands of the new native confederacy, and Knox’s approach to native relations and land acquisitions, Congress allotted funds to purchase the same land cessions made earlier in the decade in a new treaty.\textsuperscript{51} Arthur St. Clair, governor of the Northwest Territory, met with Wyandot, Ottawa, Delaware, Chippewa, Sac, and “Pattawatima” tribes at Fort Harmar in the winter of 1788-1789. The federal government outlined St. Clair’s goals for the treaty as:

“removing all causes of controversy, so that peace and harmony may continue between the United States and the Indian tribes, the regulating trade, and settling boundaries. […] Although the purchase of the Indian right of soil is not a primary object of holding this treaty, yet you will not neglect any opportunity that may offer, of extinguishing the Indian rights to the westward, as far as the river Mississippi. […] Every exertion must be made to defeat all confederations and combinations among the tribes, and to conciliate the white people inhabiting the frontiers, towards them.”\textsuperscript{52}

While Knox preached the right of soil to Congress, the federal government’s end goal was still the appropriation of massive land cessions from Native Americans, and removal if possible. St. Clair’s instructions and his lack of authority to change the predetermined boundaries led to the unpopularity of another treaty.

In the wake of the Fort Harmar treaty, a significant number of white settlers began to settle north of the Ohio River. This migration initiated responsive attacks by Native Americans who disagreed with the outcomes of the most recent treaty. St. Clair reported to George Washington in September of 1789 that “those savages” were attacking settlers and settlers were

\textsuperscript{51} “The Secretary of War to the President of the United States,” 9 January 1789, \textit{American State Papers: Indian Affairs} 1:7-8.
\textsuperscript{52} “Instructions to the Governor of the Territory of the United States Northwest of the River Ohio, Relative to an Indian Treaty in the Northern Department,” 26 October 1787 \textit{American State Papers: Indian Affairs} 1:9.
“in the habits of retaliation” and requested the aid of a militia, which Washington relayed to Congress just days later.\textsuperscript{53} Congress permitted an army to be sent to the Northwest Territory to defend the settlers and the nation’s claim to the land. The years that followed contained many military clashes between the United States and Native Americans in the Ohio Country.

In 1793, a council of several tribes from the Western Confederacy met with the United States government to appeal to officials for their rights to the land, as outlined in previous treaties. In an effort to end the conflict, the leaders pleaded that their “only demand is the peaceable possession of a small part of our once great country.”\textsuperscript{54} After General Josiah Harmar and General Arthur St. Clair lost their campaigns to push native forces from the Ohio Country, General Anthony Wayne defeated the Native American confederacy at the Battle of Fallen Timbers. Wayne’s victory resulted in the Treaty of Greenville (1795) allowed for the largest, agreed upon, land cession in Ohio. This treaty displaced the tribes living throughout the Ohio Country in to what would become Northwest Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan, with the exception of some reserves along the Maumee River meant for the establishment of white trading posts with the Native Americans. The Treaty of Greenville caused social, political, economic, and environmental transformations to the region unseen since the Beaver Wars.\textsuperscript{55} According to nineteenth-century geographer Henry Schoolcraft, “both parties [US and Native Americans] regarded this peace [Treaty of Greenville] as a final conclusion of the aboriginal war.”\textsuperscript{56} In reality, “both parties” continued military preparation against the other.

\textsuperscript{53} “Communicated to the Senate,” 16 September 1789 American State Papers: Indian Affairs 5:57-58.
\textsuperscript{55} White, The Middle Ground, 413-425; The Beaver Wars were a series of wars during the seventeenth century between the Iroquois and Algonquin nations for control of the fur trade with the colonial governments. As a result, the Iroquois displaced many other native peoples from the Great Lakes Region.
Following the Treaty of Greenville, presidential administrations focused on imperial territorial expansion. President Thomas Jefferson (1800-1809) doubled the size of the nation with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 from the French. Jefferson concentrated on “acts of benevolence” to obtain native territory and refrained from organized military conflict over territorial claims in the Northwest Territory. However, during Jefferson’s presidential terms, Shawnee leader and prophet, Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa, began a religious, pan-Indian revival at Tippecanoe against expanding American influence. When Jefferson left the presidency, Tecumseh was preparing to expand his growing confederacy to southern native nations in efforts to take back their land and cultures from the US.  

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President James Madison was inaugurated in 1809 under growing territorial pressure from both natives and the British. In his first inaugural address, Madison preached continued “benevolent plans which have been so meritoriously applied to the conversion of our aboriginal neighbors.” At the same time, Tecumseh and his nativism movement grew in popularity, separate from a different confederation forming among the Chippewa, Potawatomie, northern Ottawa in Michigan and Wisconsin. Reports of increasing attacks on white settlers in the Ohio and Wabash Valleys began to flood in to the nation’s capital. In November of 1811, Harrison and a militia marched on Tippecanoe. The Native Americans residing at the village surprise attacked the American forces, but with their military leader, Tecumseh, absent, the confederacy town experienced a blowing loss. In order to maintain power and momentum, the movement entered, begrudgingly, into an alliance with the British.

Some groups, however, did not support a pact with British troops, who persisted in maintaining forts in the Northwest. During the Battle of Fallen Timbers, British troops refused to aid Native American forces and many regional chiefs did not trust Great Britain because of those actions. However, Tecumseh and other warriors leading the militaristic nativist movements knew their only chances at suppressing American expansion was an alliance with British forces. The pan-Indian movement and the alliance with Great Britain pitted Native Americans against each other. These divisions existed not only because of intertribal ideologies, but also because of competing intratribal visions of relations with the United States. Shawnee brothers, Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa, led a group of natives who associated with their movement, including roughly half of the remaining Shawnee east of the Mississippi River. Shawnee chief Black Hoof led another group devoted to pacifist relations with the United States federal government and white settlers. The Wyandot along the Sandusky River also experienced internal divisions. Wyandot chief, Tarhe (the Crane) sought accommodation with the United States and urged his people to honor their treaties with Americans. However, many young warriors from his tribe aligned and

61 Several accounts and complaints about Native American attacks from Ohio Valley settlers in “Extracts of Letters Addressed to the War Department,” American State Papers: Indian Affairs 1:798-802.
fought with the British under Tecumseh. Some of the Wyandot chiefs reached out to the American government for protection from their own people, stating that “some of our own people have taken up the Tomahawk against us, & are murdering us day by day.”

The British saw their new Native American allies as partners in a symbiotic relationship. While Native Americans were creating movements to forcibly take back control over the land, British forces prepared for a war in the Northwest with the same agenda. The Treaty of Paris of 1783 stated that Great Britain had to leave their fortifications on the soil they ceded to Americans. However, as could be seen through glimpses of U.S.-Native relations, they remained in the Northwest providing ammunitions and supplies to Native Americans willing to fight against the United States’ expanding control of the region. As the U.S. engaged in armed conflict with their British neighbors to the north, the military pan-native movements of Tecumseh became absorbed in to a Euro-American imperial battle over land and power. Tecumseh died in battle in 1813 and his followers quickly dispersed from their cause and realigned with the United States. As many historians point out, this moment marked the change in native resistance and relations with the U.S. that characterized the end of the Northwest Territory middle ground.

In 1814, the United States government signed the Treaty of Ghent with Great Britain, which restored the American-Canadian border, possessions, and treaties between these two state powers. In 1815, the United States signed a separate treaty with the Northwest native nations restoring peace and confirming the “possessions, rights, and privileges, which they enjoyed, and were entitled to, in the year one thousand eight hundred and eleven, prior to the commencement of the late war with Great Britain.” Decades of military conflict and contested treaties defined United States-Indian relations in the years before 1815. Following the war, the failed military actions of pan-Indian movements led to the accommodation efforts of removal resistance that persisted through Ohio’s reservation years in upcoming decades. From the viewpoint of the

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64 Alan Taylor, *Civil War of 1812*, 246; Richard White, *The Middle Ground*, 517.

Americans, they partially lost the war because they did not gain any more land or territories from the British. However, in another light, Americans saw the war as a victory because of the extinguished British influence on their frontier, and the subdued violent resistance of Native Americans.66

These instances of military conflict, among others, demonstrated the tensions over territorial control of the Ohio Country and Great Lakes Region that arose between Euro-American empires and Native American nations. Territorial conflict between these groups of peoples defined the area through its many military actions and struggles to control the borderland and establish political control, trade monopolies, and cultural dominance. These battles for territorial control demonstrated the importance of the region and its resources to these groups’ understanding of power. While the War of 1812 and the death of Tecumseh ended military conflict over the Ohio Country and British claim to the region, the U.S. continued to struggle to create a cohesive Native American policy to answer the “Indian Question.” Native nations still inhabited most the land west of the Treaty of Greenville line and culturally controlled the areas not heavily settled by Americans.

The physical developments, cultural practices, and imperial clashes in this chapter set the scene for the years of Native American reservations and environmental transformation in Northwest Ohio during the nineteenth century. By demonstrating the creation of the environment, Native American uses of land, and military conflict over the land, I introduced the some of the forces the United States’ faced in establishing political control over the Ohio Country and closing the borderland. Several political and cultural groups possessed the desire to control the region throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. These disputed claims over the land resulted in several armed and violent conflicts. However, the Black Swamp required the United States’ conquest of Ohio to be completed through means other than military action. How did the United States government enact cultural and environmental changes to assert control? How would changing the environment demonstrate sovereignty over the region? How did Native Americans use these cultural pressures to their advantage?

66 Alan Taylor, Civil War of 1812, 428.
Chapter Two: Erasing Other Cultures Through Environmental Means

“In the immense woods and prairies of that boundless Country [Northwest Ohio] they [Native Americans] may hope to preserve for a long succession of years their manners and customs, their wild independence and their ferocious spirit. I am firmly persuaded, the moment the aboriginal inhabitants of our Country are divested of these characteristic features…they will gradually decline…and that if these moral or political restraints are continued, this gradual declension will, at no distant day, be followed by utter extinction.” –Lewis Cass, Territorial Governor of Michigan

Victory over Great Britain in 1815 meant a shift in U.S. control over the Great Lakes Region. The Americans intended to use the land for further settlement and political expansion. However, Native Americans still inhabited much of the land where the War of 1812 had taken place and the U.S. hoped to secure from instability. The U.S. government used internal improvements projects, agricultural practices, and property sales to extinguish other cultures environmentally rather than militarily. Federal and state governments used these environmental changes and policies to encourage the removal of Native American cultures through assimilation and displacement. Previous historical scholarship depicts the expansion of settlers as the factor that brought about environment changes, Native Americans displacement westward, and the growth of American political domain. However, in Northwest Ohio, the state and federal governments enacted environmental “improvements” to create a landscape best suited for Euro-American culture, influencing the migration of these peoples.

In 1815, the U.S. and Great Britain signed the Treaty of Ghent. Article IX of this treaty provided for the American government to end all “hostilities with all the tribes or nations of Indians” and restore to them “all the possessions, rights, and privileges which they may have enjoyed…in one thousand eight hundred and eleven.” Despite this provision, the government sought to claim Native Americans’ rights to the land. Interim Secretary of War, George Graham, wrote to Michigan Territorial Governor Lewis Cass in 1817 about entering in to “negociation with those tribes of Indians who claim lands within the boundaries of the State of Ohio, with the

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1 Lewis Cass to John Johnston, January 30, 1818, John Johnston Papers, MIC 125, Ohio History Connection, Columbus.
view of extinguishing their claim to the whole or any part of these lands.”3 The U.S. government viewed the close of the borderland that existed in the region between the Americans and native populations as a top priority for the advancement of the country. Graham stated that “The removal of the Indians, generally, from the vicinity of Lake Erie, and the advantages that would be derived from connecting the population of the State of Ohio with that of the Michigan Territory gives to the acquisition of this Country a political importance.”4

During the early nineteenth century, American settlers sparsely populated Northwest Ohio “in part because of the challenges associated with draining the swampy and wooded lands south of Lake Erie along the Maumee River and its tributaries.”5 In order to accomplish the task of connecting the white settlements of Ohio and Michigan, the government planned further land cessions from native territory and environmental changes that would encourage Euro-American agricultural practices.

Graham granted Governor Lewis Cass and General Duncan McArthur to be commissioners of a treaty to cede this territory from the Native Americans. The War Department dictated that the preferred outcome of such treaty would be complete removal of the Native Americans to lands west of the Mississippi River. However, discussions between these men prior to meeting with tribal officials indicated that “Should you find…that it will be impossible to make an attempt to procure all the country claimed, you will then direct your efforts to induce them to enter into negociation for the relinquishment of their title to a portion of the land.”6 Many government officials, especially Cass, doubted the native leaders’ willingness to remove their peoples and were “inclined to think that they will reject any propositions connected with the subject.”7

In September of 1817 along the Maumee River, Cass and McArthur negotiated the cessions for most of the native territory in Northwest Ohio with the Treaty of Fort Meigs:

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3 George Graham to Lewis Cass, May 19, 1817, Johnston and Jones Family Papers, MSS 1054:1, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati.
4 Ibid.
6 George Graham to Lewis Cass, March 24, 1817, Johnston and Jones Family Papers, MSS 1054:1, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati.
7 Lewis Cass to William Clark, July 24, 1818, John Johnston Papers, MIC 125, Ohio History Connection, Columbus.
roughly four and half million acres. What remained of native claims were separate, small reservations based on tribal lines and identification. The size of the reservations ranged from three square miles at the smallest to forty-eight square miles at the largest and were located at the corresponding tribes’ summer villages, where most of their seasonal horticulture activities took place. Several reasons motivated Cass and McArthur on the locations and nature of these reservations. By separating native peoples based on tribes, the government took precautions to avoid another military pan-Indian movement like the ones in previous decades. In addition, by centralizing the power structures of tribes to singular chiefs, the U.S. hoped for easier negotiations of “civilization” and removal in the future. The Treaty of St. Mary’s in the following year amended several articles of the previous treaty based on grievances by native leaders. While ceding land from tribes in Indiana, the St. Mary’s treaty also granted Ohio Indians larger payments for the lands they ceded in 1817 and extended the Wyandot and Shawnee reservations in order to better sustain their populations. All other articles of the Treaty of Fort Meigs remained intact.

Cass and McArthur also included in these treaties promises for annual annuities and goods from the U.S. government to be distributed by each reservations’ acting chief, and the “right to the Indians to hunt upon the land hereby ceded, while it continues the property of the United States.” Until the land surrounding the reservations sold to the public, the Native Americans could hunt off their reservations on the land they ceded when necessary. Cass suspected that once “our settlements gradually surround them, their minds will be better prepared to receive this proposition [removal], and we do not doubt, but that a few years will accomplish, what could not now be accomplished.” He believed that by limiting native access to land as white settlements established themselves in Northwest Ohio and “demand[ing] an absolute

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10 Ibid.
13 Lewis Cass and Duncan McArthur to John C. Calhoun, September 18, 1818, University of Wisconsin Digital Collections, [http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/History/History-idx?type=turn&entity=History.IT1818no97.p0003&id=History.IT1818no97&isize=M](http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/History/History-idx?type=turn&entity=History.IT1818no97.p0003&id=History.IT1818no97&isize=M).
relinquishment of everything which gives zest to savage life…they [Native Americans] will cease to be hunters and will we trust become farmers.” In addition to restricting native peoples to their summer villages and discouraging seasonal migrations for hunting and fishing, the U.S. government imposed upon the Ottawa, Wyandot, Shawnee, and Seneca tribes in Ohio Euro-American farming and livestock practices.

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14 Lewis Cass and Duncan McArthur to George Graham, September 30, 1817, Michigan Collection, M-1265:2, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.
As these land cession plans and negotiations demonstrated, the U.S. government saw the removal of Native Americans, or at least their cultural practices, as necessary. The Native Americans in Ohio experienced efforts by U.S. officials to “civilize” and assimilate native peoples to Euro-American lifestyles. President Thomas Jefferson (1800-1808) first established policies and ideas about Native American assimilation that directly affected Northwest Ohio. During the years following the Treaty of Greenville, Jefferson established a system of assimilation of Native Americans into American culture. He believed that by native peoples assimilating to Anglo-American lifestyles, the United States would be able to purchase their lands effortlessly and force them to farm small tracts of land, opening the land for the expansion of white settlement. Jefferson viewed his ideas on assimilation as acts of benevolence, allowing Native Americans to denounce their “savage” lives and become civilized individuals of American society.\(^{16}\) However, the true goal for his policies was to gain control of native territory. Jefferson and the U.S. government felt that the existence of other cultures in North America negated American dominance over the continent and most likely feared further military conflict over land cessions and disputes.

One method of assimilation encouraged “them [Native Americans] to abandon hunting, to apply to the raising stock, to agriculture, and domestic manufacture, and thereby prove to themselves that less land and labor will maintain them in this better than in their former mode of living.”\(^ {17}\) In his Second Inaugural Address, Jefferson pleaded to the public “to teach them agriculture and the domestic arts.”\(^ {18}\) This idea led to education programs, mostly implemented by missionaries, to teach Native Americans willing to learn about American agricultural practices. For example, the Shawnee village, Wapakoneta, in Northwest Ohio began to shift to an intensive agricultural economy and concentration on livestock in the early nineteenth century. Chief Black Hoof’s village of Wapakoneta “improved” over five hundred acres for corn, beans, and squash,


\(^ {17}\) Thomas Jefferson, “Confidential Message to Congress Concerning Western Exploration and Relations with Native Americans” 18 January 1803, Records of the United States House of Representatives, Record Group 233, National Archives, http://www.humanitiestexas.org/archives/digital-repository/jefferson-confidential-message-congress-concerning-western-exploration; The phrase “abandon hunting” appears in several letters between other government officials in the 1810s-1820s. While Jefferson may not have been the first to think that the abandonment of hunting practices would lead to the “civilization” of Native Americans, he was most likely influential to future government officials and their relations with native nations.

as well as constructed several buildings, including a sawmill, fences, and cabins after the arrival of Quaker missionary, William Kirk, in 1807.\(^\text{19}\) Black Hoof and his followers believed in a path of acculturating to U.S. expansion to preserve their rights to the land peacefully. By proving they could cultivate fields, many native chiefs believed the U.S. government would cease land cession requests and their tribesmen “would become independent.”\(^\text{20}\)

Following this model of assimilation, Congress passed the Civilization Fund Act (CFA) in 1819. This legislation placed emphasis on the education and acculturation of Native Americans to Euro-American ways of life. To accomplish these goals, the CFA provided funds and government support for “benevolent societies” and missionaries to establish schools, farms, and churches within and near Indian reservations.\(^\text{21}\) The federal government provided the Quaker missionary at Wapakoneta with funds and tools earlier in the century, but this act stimulated their efforts of “civilization.” Essentially, the government used missionaries as agents to enforce assimilation among native peoples.

In addition to the Quakers at Black Hoof’s village, Reverend Isaac Van Tassel established a Presbyterian mission among the Ottawa tribe along the Maumee River in 1822. This mission, however, was significantly less “successful” than its Wapakoneta counterparts. From 1822 to its abandonment in 1834, the missionary educated an estimated ninety Ottawa Indians, less than half of their remaining population at the time of their removal.\(^\text{22}\) Methodist Reverend James Finley placed a mission at the Wyandot’s largest reservation, the Grand Reserve, in 1820. Wyandot Chief Tarhe, like Black Hoof, believed acculturation was the only method of retaining land rights.\(^\text{23}\) With Wyandot cooperation, Finley and his mission sponsored


\(^{20}\) Shawnee Chiefs to James Madison, April 10, 1809, Madison Papers, National Archives, [http://founders.archives.gov/?q=%22black%20hoof%22&s=1111311111&sa=&r=7&sr.](http://founders.archives.gov/?q=%22black%20hoof%22&s=1111311111&sa=&r=7&sr.)


\(^{22}\) American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, *The Missionary Herald* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1833) vol. 29, 469, [http://books.google.com/books?id=0Fc4AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA469&dq=isaac+van+tassel+mission&hl=en&sa=X&ei=0a05U9amGYWiqwH8nHoCw&ved=0CDQQ6AEwAigK#v=onepage&q=isaac%20van%20tassel%20mission&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=0Fc4AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA469&dq=isaac+van+tassel+mission&hl=en&sa=X&ei=0a05U9amGYWiqwH8nHoCw&ved=0CDQQ6AEwAigK#v=onepage&q=isaac%20van%20tassel%20mission&f=false)

many “improvement” and farming projects. These missionaries, along with others, felt drawn to “civilizing” the tribes residing within Ohio’s geopolitical boundaries.

These missions encouraged “an entire change in your manner of living, and a steady and industrious attention to your farms.” Most missions contained a farm where they taught native peoples how to cultivate grains, raise livestock, and use Euro-American farming tools. Cultivating the land and using the environment “productively”, as defined by the US, visually represented the acculturation and accommodation efforts of the Northwest Ohio tribes trying to hold on to their territories in the Ohio country. By dictating the ways these peoples used the land, the government changed their economy, environmental interactions, as well as deep rooted societal structures, such as gender roles.

Richard White demonstrated in *Roots of Dependency* that changing physical environments and commodifying natural resources forced several cyclical reactions within

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different Native American cultures and societies. For Algonquian nations especially, American farming practices shifted traditional gender roles during the process of accommodating to American culture. In the example of the Shawnee and Wyandot, women traditionally farmed tribal-owned fields while men hunted game for food source and fur pelts. The Quaker missionaries at the Ohio Shawnee villages “used gendered understandings of work on the Midwestern frontier as their template for the cultural transformation of Indian societies.” These missionaries, along with their Presbyterian and Methodist counterparts, emphasized a discontinuation of the use of communal fields in exchange for family-run plots worked by the male head of household. These agents of assimilation also moved Indian women out of the fields and in to homemaking productions. Mrs. Lucia Van Tassel stated in an interview several decades after the close of the reservations that her duty within the mission was to teach native children English and native women domesticity. Her husband visited the different Ottawa villages along the Maumee River and “urged [the Native Americans] to adopt habits of industry, and a better style of living.” In a letter to Cass, Finley wrote that the Wyandot “prospect of civilization is very promising; and little doubt can be entertained by, in a short time, these people will be well prepared to be admitted as citizens of the state of Ohio.” The land use policies pushed by the government and enforced by missionaries promoted Ohio’s shift to an acculturated environment that promoted white settlement.

Farming and land use policies served important roles to the U.S. government in regard to Native American civilization plans and white settlement expansion. A region with Native Americans assimilated to Euro-American ways of life also made the land easier to sell to white settlers during this era. Finley, who resided with the Wyandot tribe, observed that “white settlers on the frontiers had great objections to the Indians hunting and killing the game in their vicinity.” With the massive land cessions in 1817, selling the land became a primary goal of the U.S. Land sales to settlers provided the U.S. with additional revenue and established legitimacy to U.S. political control. In a letter from Cass to Graham immediately following his negotiations

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at the Treaty of Fort Meigs, he stated that concerning the newly obtained property from the
native nations in Ohio “Every consideration either of a fiscal or political nature demands the
immediate sale and settlement of this land.” Increased land sales to settlers also held the
promise of drastic changes to the landscape. Cass hoped that changes to the “wilderness” would
lead to the extinction of Native Americans.

To continue the encouragement of white settlement and the assimilation of Native
Americans in Northwest Ohio, the government’s next step involved changing the landscape to
make the region accessible by Euro-American standards. Following the establishment of
reservations, the state government funded “internal improvement” projects, such as roads and
canals, through Northwest Ohio for economic and political expansion. Americans viewed these
public transportation projects to be improvements to the country by spreading capitalism and
“civilization,” and removing the “wilderness.” During the Madison administration, the U.S.
government turned its attention from wartime policies to aiding the postwar economy. In his
1815 message to Congress, Madison request Congressional consideration for the establishment
“throughout our country the roads and canals which can best be executed, under the national
authority.” However, in 1817, Madison vetoed the Bonus Bill, which would have appropriated
funds for federal public works projects, under the argument that the action would
unconstitutionally break the division of the federal and state political powers. The debate
continued to divide politicians in to Monroe’s presidency.

In the wake of these debates, many state governments developed plans to fund their own
internal improvements. Ohio became one of the most active states to pursue these projects. Ohio
Governor Ethan Allen Brown (1818-1822) most notably supported these government-funded
transportation networks through the appropriation of land sales to support Ohio’s plans for canals

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32 Lewis Cass and Duncan McArthur to George Graham, November 29, 1817, Michigan Collection, MS 1054:2,
William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.
33 “In the immense woods and prairies of that boundless Country they [Native Americans] may hope to preserve for
a long succession of years their manners and customs, their wild independence and their ferocious spirit. I am firmly
persuaded, the moment the aboriginal inhabitants of our Country are divested of these characteristic features…they
will gradually decline…and that if these moral or political restraints are continued, this gradual declension will, at
no distant day, be followed by utter extinction.” Cass to Johnston, January 30, 1818, John Johnston Papers.
34 James Madison, speaking to the Senate and House of Representatives, on December 8, 1815, 14th Congress, 1st
session. Proceeding and Debates of The Senate of the United States, 16.
http://memory.loc.gov.proxy.lib.miamioh.edu/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llac&fileName=029/llac029.db&recNum=5.
and the creation of the Ohio Canal Commission in 1822. Governor Brown stated in a message early in his administration that “Roads and canals are veins and arteries to the body politic.”

The state government favored the expensive public works projects because they would potentially extend political control, expand settlement in to more remote areas of the state, and promote economic prosperity for white settlers.

During the 1817 land cession negotiations, Cass argued for a road through the swamp in order to connect Ohio to the rest of the region and facilitate the sales of the newly acquired lands. Cass wrote that “It is well known that along the Southern margin of this part of Lake Erie is a tract of wet land, which always presents serious difficulties to the traveler.” To help combat these difficulties, Cass requested “the opening of a leading road. In any Country this would be important. In this Country it is absolutely necessary. Sales will only be made with a view to settlements, and settlements will be aided and encouraged by making roads, where the population of the Country will long be unable to make them.” Cass and other government officials recognized the need for government-funded means of transportation through the unnavigable wetland terrain. Because of these concerns, the 1817 and 1818 treaties that ceded native territory and established reservations included an article that granted the right of the United States to build roads, taverns, and ferries through any lands reserved to the native tribes in said documents for the use of travelers.

Shortly following these treaties, the state made plans to fund and build a road “from the foot of the Rapids of the Miami of the Lake, passing through the Reserve (so called) at Lower Sandusky [Fremont], to the western line of the Connecticut Reserve.” The government appropriated for such a road in the Treaty of Brownstown in 1808; surveyors plotted the road. 

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37 Cass and McArthur to Graham, Nov. 29, 1817, Michigan Collection.

but construction did not take place until the state revisited the proposition in the 1820s.\textsuperscript{39} However, the Seneca, whose reservation the road was projected to pass through, protested its development. According to Indian agent John Johnston, War Pole, a Wyandot leader, made a speech at a shared Wyandot and Seneca council in Upper Sandusky. He relayed the worries of the leaders of these tribes in relation to the proposed road. As the road would run through native territory, many Indian leaders suspected the plans for the road “to proceed from a dissention to injure us and reduce us to poverty as soon as possible…and we protest against it.”\textsuperscript{40}

Despite these objections, Congress passed a bill that permitted the public highway, and the construction on the Maumee-Western Reserve Road began in 1824.\textsuperscript{41} Completed in 1827, its construction consisted of raised soil about forty feet wide with ditches on both sides of the path. After only a few years of use, the road gained the reputation of being “the worst road on the continent.” The dirt road often flooded beyond use, since it ran from east to west, and the natural drainage of the area moved south to north. Inns lined the road at every mile and pulling travelers out of mud holes became steady employment.\textsuperscript{42}

Following the construction of the Maumee-Western Reserve Road, the Ohio government focused on additional environmental changes in Northwest Ohio, such as canals, that altered the region’s landscape. Governor Brown established the Canal Commission, which hired engineers to survey land best suited for canal routes running north and south through the state in order to connect Lake Erie and the Ohio River. The Commission board selected the sites and approved construction in 1825. The board originally planned the Miami and Erie Canal to go from Cincinnati to Dayton, but in 1830, the state legislature earmarked and approved funds for the extension of this canal up to Lake Erie through Northwest Ohio. In 1828, the federal government granted congressional land in Northwest Ohio for the use of the state government’s internal improvement projects. The government designated this land grant, totaling over one million

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{39} Estwick Evans, \textit{Evan’s Pedestrious Tour of Four Thousand Miles} (Concord: Joseph C. Spear, 1819), 190.
\textsuperscript{40} War Pole’s speech in relation to the Road for Senecas and Wyandots in Council at Upper Sandusky enclosed in letter from John Johnston to Governor Ethan Allen Brown, September 8, 1820, John Johnston Papers, MIC 125, Ohio History Connection.
\textsuperscript{41} “A Bill For laying out, and making, a road, from the lower Rapids of the Miami of Lake Erie to the western boundary of the Connecticut Western Reserve, in the state of Ohio, agreeable to the provisions of the treaty of Brownstown,” H.R. 112, 17\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 1\textsuperscript{st} session, \textit{Bills and Resolutions} (March 8, 1822), \url{http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llhb&fileName=048/llhb048.db&recNum=289}.
\end{footnotesize}
acres, for the use of raising money to pay for the northward expansion of the Miami Canal.\footnote{George W. Knepper, \textit{The Official Ohio Lands Book} (Columbus: Auditor of State, 2002), 61-62.} Using this land grant, the state government surveyed and sold plots to the public, and placed the profits in the canal budget. White settler and state political expansion began to seep in to the northwest corner of the state. Several Ohio governors and legislatures dedicated millions of dollars and over a decade of construction to Ohio’s canal era. Expanding the canal system in to Northwest Ohio influenced the migration of white settlement by making cheap land more accessible with greater investment potential.

The increased white population in Northwest Ohio due to these government-funded projects corresponded directly to the altered landscapes, diffusion of American culture, and shifting native policies. The land that the government previously saw as an impediment to political control along the American frontier became valuable opportunities for financial growth. Changing the environment with internal improvements allowed the state government to sell parts of the land ceded by the 1817 treaty to settlers and speculators. Although the government did not enact state internal improvement projects specifically to encroach on native reservations, the effects these projects had on the landscape, settlers’ views of the region, and native resistance to removal are undeniable. The spread of white settlements in the region led to the establishment of commercial farms and pressure for a homogenized culture of Euro-American religion, economy, and politics. According the state and federal governments, the Shawnee, Wyandot, Seneca, and Ottawa tribes in Ohio posed an impediment to Ohio “improvements” and “civilization,” despite their efforts of acculturation. Settlers in the area viewed the “improvements” these tribes made on their reservations as “rude, irregular, and unfit adaptations.”\footnote{“Wyandot Lands,” H.R. No. 587, 29th Congress, 1st session, \textit{House and Senate Reports; Reports on Public Bill} (May 4, 1846), Congressional Proquest, HTTP://congressional.proquest.com.proxy.lib.miamioh.edu/congressional/docview/t47.d48.490_h.rp.587?accountid=12434.} As officials in the region revisited the possibilities of native removal, the federal government shifted the nature of US-native relations.

Since the enactment of the Civilization Fund Act, the federal government discussed Native American removal on a national scale for the sake of Indian “welfare and happiness” in
the face of state demands for native territory. In 1828, at the height of Ohio’s canal fever, the country elected Andrew Jackson as president on his platform of Native American removal, state sovereignty, and territorial expansion. The federal government, essentially, succeeded in their plan of “civilizing” nations who lived east of the Mississippi River, most notably being the Cherokee in the American Southeast. Although natives occasionally demonstrated opposition to squatters and unwanted internal improvements, the success of missionary farms and schools alluded to tribes that their continued existence in Ohio was safe. From the time of their land cessions until their removal, Native Americans collectively possessed the largest landholdings in the state of Ohio, which often caused jealousy among settlers. As the region became more susceptible to white settlement and farmland slowly spread in to Northwest Ohio, Americans became increasingly uneasy at the prospect of American Indian citizenship and assimilation in to their communities.

Many Native Americans did not want assimilation and citizenship, but rather to be an autonomous entity within U.S. geopolitical borders (including the relatively small tribes in Ohio). Jackson’s first message to Congress addressed the States’ claims to native territory and the attempts by Native Americans to establish their own States. He stated, “Could the Indians establish a separate republic on each of their reservations in Ohio? And if they were so disposed would it be the duty of this government to protect them in the attempt? If the principle involved in the obvious answer to these questions be abandoned, it will follow that the objects of this government are reversed, and that it has become a part of its duty to aid in destroying the states which it was established to protect.”

Jackson then suggested Congress remove all indigenous peoples to unorganized land west of the Mississippi River in order to protect States’ rights and open new territory for settlers. He claimed these policies were in the interest of Native American rights so they could live the way they wished.

46 “You told us if we would cultivate the Land with him that we would become independent.” Shawnee Chiefs to James Madison, April 10, 1809, Madison Papers.
47 Warren, The Shawnee and Their Neighbors, 58.
48 White, Roots of Dependency, 126.
Indian removal represented a top priority in the Jackson administration’s plan for national development. His agenda sparked fierce debates divided along political party lines, but in 1830, Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act. This act gave the President the power to remove native nations from reservations and territories in the east in exchange for lands in the west. While previous treaties with Ohio natives aimed at land cessions that may encourage their voluntary removal, the federal government could now actively pursue it. Lewis Cass, who still held the position of the Territorial Governor of Michigan, supported Jackson’s Native American removal policy. In an article submitted to the *North American Review*, Cass wrote “We believe, if the Indians do not emigrate…they must perish.” As being a commissioner on several treaties and a governor of a territory, Cass knew the existence of native peoples in the east prevented the expansion of white settlement. The lack of white settlement slowed Michigan’s route to statehood. For Ohio, it prevented the sale of lands, the transformation of the Black Swamp, and the solidification of state political control within Ohio’s geopolitical borders.

With the new federal native policy, the U.S. government appointed a commissioner, James Gardiner, to Ohio for the specific purpose of obtaining removal treaties from the remaining Shawnee, Wyandot, Seneca, and Ottawa villages in Northwest Ohio. With pressure from the federal government, racism from settlers, and the want for land from the state government, many natives agreed to appropriations for removal in the 1830s, despite the cultural and societal changes they made to accommodate to the expanding imperial nation. The four hundred Seneca remaining along the Sandusky River asked for removal to “live well and be out of the way of bad white men.” The Seneca ceded their territory first under the Indian Removal Act. This tribe protested the building of a road through their territory years earlier and suffered from the loss of resources due to the increase of settlers. In 1831, the Sandusky River Seneca exchanged their forty thousand acres for sixty-seven thousand acres west of the Mississippi River.

50 “An Act to provide for an exchange of lands with the Indians residing in any of the states or territories, and for their removal west of the river Mississippi,” May 28, 1830, ch. 148, *Statutes at Large 1*, Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=004/llsl004.db&recNum=459>.  
The next couple of years saw treaties for the removal of the Lewistown Seneca, and the Lewistown, Wapakoneta, and Hogs Creek Shawnees to present day Oklahoma. For the Shawnee, the death of their leader Black Hoof only a few months before treaty negotiations began dampened their collective force against pressuring government officials. The removal of the Maumee, Roche de Boeuf, Wolf Rapids, Oquanoxa’s Village, Blanchard Fork, Great AuGlaize, and Little Auglaize Ottawa natives to present day Kansas took place over a course of several years: 1833, 1837, and 1839. Federal officers negotiating the Ottawa removal from the Maumee River Valley discovered that they were “determined to retain their reserves and remain in Ohio.” However, as white settlers and the state government purchased federal lands surrounding the reservations, the native peoples lost the ability to travel and hunt outside of their reservations because of the article that Cass included in the 1817 treaty. Competition for local resources grew as their access to land decreased and many natives chose to leave simply because they could not survive on their Ohio reservations any longer. Growing settlements along the Maumee River also brought diseases, such as small pox, whooping cough, and syphilis, to the Ottawa natives, which had debilitating effects on the villages and their survival. In 1833, Ottawa villages experienced a small pox epidemic that encouraged the removal process.

The smaller Wyandot reservation of Big Springs sold their land in 1832 back to the U.S. and joined with the main village at the Grand Reserve. Using the money obtained from these sales and other small piecemeal purchases by the state government, their chief, William Walker, built further “improvements” as way to show their interest in staying Ohio. However, not all natives wanted to remain in Ohio. The issue of removal divided the Wyandot tribe along lines of ideology. Despite growing government pressure and intertribal disputes, Walker avoided removal until Congress threatened removal by force in 1838. After several expedition parties to

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find an appropriate reservation west of the Mississippi River, the Wyandot signed their removal from Ohio in 1841 and left in 1843.\textsuperscript{56}

As a whole, the Ohio native population was almost four thousand individuals in a census conducted in 1825, far more than the white population residing in Northwest Ohio.\textsuperscript{57} However, between this census and official removal, many natives left their Ohio reservations for other villages in Indiana, Canada, and the territories of Michigan and Missouri. Death from disease and starvation also plagued these villages and pressured their removal during the late 1820s. With the removal of the final Wyandot members from Ohio in 1843, autonomous tribal reservations in Ohio ceased to exist. The few dozen Native Americans who chose to stay in Ohio did so on individual properties granted to them by the removal treaties. In the U.S. and Ohio governments’ efforts to expand their political control and close the borderland, the removal of native reservations from Ohio eliminated a culture of people that they viewed as a threat to the advancement of the country. The remaining obstacles to advancement proved to be interstate competition and the Black Swamp landscape.

Many historians state that all native resistance in Ohio ended following the War of 1812 and that these tribes “gave up,” allowing for easy expansion of Euro-American culture in to their territories. I believe that following Tecumseh’s defeat, Native Americans who wished to remain in the Great Lakes Region switched from an aggressive strategy of handling encroachment to one of accommodation and acculturation. Over several decades of fighting frontiersmen and the U.S. military, native nations lost the forces and resources to support a violent resistance. Susan Gray, studies the “cross native” attempt of Great Lakes Indians to root themselves to the land during this era of expansion and removal. In her forthcoming book, she examines the Ottawa tribes of the Michigan peninsula and their efforts to protect their autonomy during the mid-nineteenth century. She argues that “indigenous peoples have their own agendas.”\textsuperscript{58} Like the tribes found in Ohio, the native tribes in Michigan used “civilization” efforts to resist removal. Many tribes believed that by adjusting to American ideas of property and land owning, they protected themselves from permanent displacement. The Ohio Shawnee believed that their support to the

\textsuperscript{57} Stother and Tucker, The Fry Site, 52.
\textsuperscript{58} Susan Gray, “Both Sides Now: Looking North from the American Midwest (lecture, Miami University, September 29, 2014).
Americans during the War of 1812 and their diplomacy of accommodation reserved their right to be an autonomous minority population with a “future in Ohio.”59 Addressing the Miami nation who lived in Indiana following the 1817 and 1818 land cession treaties, Melissa Rinehart stated that Miami acculturation during the Indiana canal era “operated from self-interest premised upon maintaining an ancestral land base.”60 Ohio natives agreed to demands to adjust their ways of life to protect their claims to the land. Ohio Wyandot leaders viewed their participation in the cultural conversion as a way to prevent further pressures from the American government to abandon their land. Many native peoples did this to protect a part of their heritage, while others held on to their Ohio lands because they suspected that removal west of the Mississippi River would not be their last relocation. Reverend James Finley recorded a Wyandot chief who responded to an American agent’s request for removal. His answer reflected the concerns across many tribes around the Great Lakes. While the agent told the unnamed chief that his people would own the land out west “forever,” the chief replied,

“He promised the same thing to us at our last treaty; that if we would sell all but this reservation, he would protect us from the encroachments of the whites, and keep us in peace, and never ask us to sell another foot of our land. This was not ten years ago; and now you are at your old trade of trying to drive us away again. Besides, it would be no better if we were yonder; for there is no land or swamp so poor, but white men will want it; and if the President did not fulfill his word here, will he do it yonder? No! You white men never will be satisfied till the blue water of the great lakes, in which the sun sets, has drank the last drop of Indian blood. Here are our homes; and we are now beginning to live comfortably…Here, too, are the graves and bones of our fathers, our wives, and our children.”61

The environmental changes and land use stipulations placed on Ohio tribes by the federal and state governments challenged inter-native relations in addition to defining the native policies of the period.

61 James B. Finley, Life among the Indians, or, Personal reminiscences and historical incidents illustrative of Indian life and character (Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1857), 365.
Historians often examine the end military conflict in 1815 as a turning point in American political control in the Old Northwest Territory. In some regions, however, obstacles other than military forces prevented U.S. expansion. Northwest Ohio’s native reservations and landscape posed difficulties to Euro-American settlement unable to be solved with an army. To achieve a U.S. dominated society in Northwest Ohio, the American government sought the removal of these obstacles through environmental means. Their motivations included closing the Ohio’s borderland for greater political and economic control of the region. By dictating the ways native peoples could use the land, the U.S. worked to eliminate cultural “threats” to American settlements and farms. According to Cronon, a given space can only support one cultural use of its landscape. The U.S. saw removing Native Americans as a necessity to change the landscape and ensure the growth of a commercial farming economy. Although the tribes residing in Ohio following the War of 1812 changed their policy with the United States to accommodation from the previously used military attacks, racism prevented white settlers from living alongside native peoples despite their efforts in acculturating to frontier farm life. The state-initiated internal improvement projects attempted to enable settlers to traverse and settle the northwest quarter of the state, while pressuring Native Americans for their removal west of the Mississippi River. The Native Americans, white settlers, and political entities in Ohio during the first half of the nineteenth-century each used Northwest Ohio’s environment for self-interested goals of retaining ancestral lands, obtaining farmland, or expanding political power.
Chapter Three: Conquering the Environment

“It is by this system that the Black Swamp and other low wet lands of the Northwest are becoming the garden of Ohio. The people no longer shake with the chills and fever, the snakes have wriggled away, and big crops, sunshine and gladness have come over the land.” – Henry Howe

Through the mid-nineteenth century, Ohio’s government created environmental policies to influence the movement of white settlement into Northwest Ohio and establish a secure state border. The years following the relocation of the last Ohio tribes witnessed a spike in population growth in Northwest Ohio, but the area’s wetland prevented the establishment of large settlements. The state government issued government-funded public works projects to create a more favorable landscape to suit the needs of Euro-American settlers, such as roads, canals, and drainage systems. As the state boundary became more secure, the state continued to influence the spread of settlement in to the region through laws that permanently transformed the land. These efforts encouraged white settlement in Northwest Ohio, aided Ohio’s claim as one of the most populous states in the Union by the late nineteenth century. The state’s environmental changes also boosted the region’s agricultural and industrial production due to the area’s unique natural resources left behind from glacial till, ancient lake beds, and an expansive swamp. Northwest Ohio’s physical environment served as a force that prevented settlement and extended the borderland because of the necessary political intervention required to negotiate the establishment of a substantial population of American citizens.

Immediately following the War of 1812, American settlers viewed the Black Swamp as an area to avoid during the country’s expansion into the newly secured territory of the Old Northwest. Although the limits of the swamp varied from season to season, nineteenth century author Henry Howe estimated that its limits reached one hundred and twenty miles wide with an average breadth of forty miles: roughly the size of Connecticut. At the time of Ohio statehood, the region belonged to the federal government and reserved for Indian Territory, as outlined by the Treaty of Greenville. Land cessions after the war from Native Americans gradually opened

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1 Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio* (Cincinnati: E. Morgan & Co., 1852), 881. “This system” refers to uniformed drainage enterprises that occurred in the last half of the nineteenth century.
2 Ibid., 245.
the region to travelers and settlers looking to traverse Northwest Ohio during their movements westward. However, the Black Swamp’s environment made the crossing nearly impossible. Few wanted to travel through the region, and even fewer wanted to settle in it. The fine-grained soil and level landscape flooded for several months of the year and froze during the winter. Travelers wrote that the mosquitoes were unbearable, the mud was sometimes waist-deep, and the land “would never be used for farming.” The only occupations white settlers held in the region consisted of traders with Native Americans and innkeepers to those making the slow traverse of land. Many white settlers traveling through and living near the swamp suffered “ague,” also commonly referred to as swamp fever, caused by the stagnant water and mosquitoes. This illness caused fevers, shakes, and oftentimes death. Most likely malaria, the swamp fever was not the only aspect of the environment that caused settlers to avoid the region.

Recording his journey through Northwest Ohio in 1818, traveler Estwick Evans described the difficulty of traveling through the swamp during the winter. He claimed that the land was in its “worst state”: the “brushes thick, and the surface of the earth frozen and full of holes.” He stated that his trip required “great exertions” only to walk a few miles. The dark, overgrown nature of the forests in and around the Black Swamp seemed ominous to many travelers. Even as late as 1835, one traveler noted the “dark eternal forest” that lay before them in their journey down the Maumee River from Lake Erie to Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Despite these difficulties to overland travel, the government surveyed and plotted a section of land for the villages of Maumee and Perrysburg in 1817, following the large land cession by Native Americans. Only a few hundred families lived in these villages, located along the Maumee River, until the canal and drainage systems lured more families to the region in later decades. Completed in 1820, the federal government surveyed the four million acres ceded by the Native Americans at Fort Meigs into counties. Survey parties who worked in the wetlands around the Great Lakes suffered from mosquito bites, which made them “weak from loss of

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5 Estwick Evans, *Evan’s Pedestrious Tour of Four Thousand Miles* (Concord: Joseph C. Spear, 1819), 201, [https://archive.org/stream/e00vanspedestriouevanrich#page/200/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/e00vanspedestriouevanrich#page/200/mode/2up).
6 William C. Holgate Diaries, frame 155, MS 0335mf roll 1, Bowling Green State University Center for Archival Collections.
blood”, and built “campfires on scaffolds of logs.” Surveyors found the wetlands to be an unforgiving environment and many of the newly formed counties remained unpopulated for several years. John Riley, one of the federal land surveyors, suggested the best approach to settlement in the difficult terrain was through the extensive tributary network of the Maumee River Valley.  

In addition to county surveys in 1820, the U.S. government enacted a law that encouraged the purchase of federal lands. The Land Act of 1820 changed several purchasing mandates concerning the Congress Lands in Northwest Ohio. This law reduced the number of acres required to be purchased at a given time, as well as the set price per acre. A previous land act in 1804 set the minimum purchasing amount at one hundred and sixty acres at $2.00 per acre. In 1820, Congress changed these requirements to a minimum purchase of eighty acre tracts at $1.25 per acre. Because of the lack of internal improvements in the region and the Panic of 1819 federal financial crisis, the federal government hoped that the new required amount of $100 (as compared to the previous $320) would provide settlers with an incentive to purchase land in Northwest Ohio. However, with the lack of access to the land, settlement populations in these newly surveyed counties remained low. The few villages that developed around water accesses in Northwest Ohio witnessed slow growth during the 1820s and the area’s internal land remained largely uninhabited until the 1830s. Early settlers attempted to construct local primitive roadways through the flooded plains around the Maumee Valley. One early resident in his quest to clear a path remarked that “We read that God divided the land from the water, but here is a place He forgot.”

The state’s construction of the Maumee-Western Reserve road in the 1820s provided little aid to travelers because of its continual flooding and haphazard construction. Early road construction before mass drainage projects primarily consisted of a “corduroy” design. Settlers assembled these roads “by throwing trunks of trees into a marsh, and leaving them to settle

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7 Prince, *Wetlands*, 141. Prince cited these experiences from reminiscences of a Michigan surveying party.
8 Ibid.
11 As quoted in Louis A. Simonis, *Maumee River, 1835 : with the William C. Holgate journal* (Defiance County Historical Society, 1979), 34.
there.” Sometimes several layers of logs needed to be stacked before they stopped sinking in to the swamp. Travelling from Columbus to Sandusky, English novelist Charles Dickens remarked that while on these roads “the slightest jolts with which the ponderous carriage fell from log to log, was enough, it seemed, to have dislocated all the bones in the human body.”12 Commenting on this same roadway, Ohioan Caleb Atwater suggested “The United States ought to make a road from Lower Sandusky to Detroit. The one which they pretended to make is of little value.”13 By Euro-American means of civilization and improvement, Northwest Ohio remained largely unpopular to white settlers until the flooded plains became reachable by travel and tillable by plows. The disagreeable landscape and Native American reservations prevented many perspective farmers from purchasing land in the area, most of whom traveled around the wetlands and settled in southern Michigan and Indiana. The growing population of the Michigan Territory directly affected the Ohio government’s relationship with the northwest quarter of its state and its sparsely populated landscape.

Despite many Americans’ unwillingness to live in, or even travel through, Northwest Ohio, the state government realized that encouraging settlers to expand into the region was necessary to ensure a beneficial state border. The memory of the swamp’s role in the War of 1812 remained a recent memory in the minds of the state and federal government officials. Soldiers experienced obstacles in traveling, transporting supplies, and even remaining healthy in Northwest Ohio. Following the war, the Black Swamp remained a weakness in military defense and political control. This weakness became apparent in 1835, when the Territory of Michigan petitioned the federal government for statehood. Due to unclear legislation and incorrect maps in the Northwest Ordinance and Ohio’s constitution, a strip along the northwest boundary of Ohio five to eight miles wide became disputed territory between the state of Ohio and the territory of Michigan. The “Toledo Strip” totaled four hundred and sixty eight square miles. The state government once again became concerned about its accessibility to reach and control the land within its declared geopolitical boundaries from outside forces. With a lack of transportation and settlements through the Black Swamp, the environment proved to be a force against Ohio political control.

13 Caleb Atwater, History of the State of Ohio, Natural and Civil (Cincinnati: Glezen & Shepard, 1838), 284.
The origins of the dispute, colloquially called the Toledo War, began with the Northwest Ordinance’s reliance on the Mitchell Map. This map, created by cartographer John Mitchell was an official, albeit inaccurate, portrayal of the colonies and the land that became the Northwest Territory. The ordinance outlined the Ohio territory’s northwest border as being directly across from the southern tip of Lake Michigan. The Mitchell Map displayed this landmark north of the Maumee River’s mouth. However, in truth, the location of the Lake Michigan’s southern tip rests south of Maumee Bay. Ohio’s territorial officials feared the inaccuracy might eventually resolve itself by moving the geopolitical boundary to match the language of the Northwest Ordinance rather than the map that gave Ohio Maumee Bay. To lay claim to the river access, Ohio’s state constitution placed its northern boundary as “extend[ing] to a direct line running from the southern extremity of Lake Michigan to the most northerly cape of the Miami Bay,” guaranteeing the placement of the river’s source to the lake within Ohio’s control.14 Michigan followed the Northwest Ordinance’s language in its drafted state constitution: a southern boundary defined by a straight line running east from the southern tip of Lake Michigan.

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14 Ohio Constitution, art. 7.5 sec. 6, 1802; At the time of the draft of Ohio’s constitution, the Maumee River was still called Miami of the Lake.
John Mitchell, *The Mitchell Map* (1755), Library of Congress, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/gmd:@field(NUMBER+@band(g3300+ar004000)). This map was used in the Treaty of Paris in 1783 and remained the official map of North America until the mid-nineteenth century. Above is an excerpt of the disputed region.
For many years, the Territory of Michigan established townships within this strip of land because the Black Swamp posed a physical obstacle to Ohio enforcing their political authority over the region. Many Michigan officials also viewed the Black Swamp as a natural boundary between the two geopolitical entities. This assumption placed Northwest Ohio’s drier prairies along the northern boundary of the swamp within Michigan’s perceived control. In 1817, the same year as the native land cession, the state of Ohio commissioned surveyor William Harris from Tiffin, Ohio to survey the Ohio boundary, which followed the border placed by Ohio’s state constitution. The following year in 1818, the Territory of Michigan responded with their own survey by John Fulton, which declared the boundary between Ohio and Michigan to be south of the Maumee Bay. The discrepancy resulted from the language used in the previously stated documents and each governments’ wish to benefit economically from controlling a vital river port. Each of these states considered their surveys the official boundary line.  

16 Sidney E Morse, *An atlas of the United States, on an improved plan: consisting of ten maps, with a complete index to each, and a general map of the whole country* (New-Haven, 1823), 25. This map shows the Northwest border of Ohio south of Maumee Bay.

In response to Michigan’s claim of the land in their petition for statehood, Ohio Governor Robert Lucas and the Ohio Legislature passed state laws concerning the governmental structures of the townships affected by the disputes. These laws extended the jurisdictions of Wood, Henry, and Williams counties to Harris’s survey line and declared the townships within the disputed territory to be under the authority of those same counties. Lucas stated that Ohio needed to “complete the civil organization of that part of the State claimed by Michigan” by holding elections under supervision of the state government. Lucas meant to extinguish Michigan’s entitlement to the land by claiming control over villages within the disputed region. Ohio desperately needed the residents of the area to identify with the state. In 1834, the citizens of the newly founded Toledo held a meeting to discuss their position in the disagreement. With the potential of a public canal, most Toledo residents favored jurisdiction from Ohio. Michigan’s territorial governor, Stevens Mason, presented President Andrew Jackson with a statement from Michigan’s legislative body about Ohio’s recent laws in light of the dispute. This group of men explained to Jackson that Ohio took “forcible possession of a district of country within our boundaries, as established by various acts of Congress, and over which we have always exercised undisputed jurisdiction.”

As political leaders turned to the federal government for an answer, Ohio became increasingly concerned about the settlement and defense of Northwest Ohio, despite the physical obstacles of the swamp. On April 1, 1835, Michigan held township elections in the disputed area. The next day, Lucas arrived in Perrysburg. He brought a small militia and federal surveyors ordered by Jackson to mark the boundary along the Harris line temporarily until Congress made a final decision. The Ohio militia crossed the swamp to reach Perrysburg and “had been shaken to pieces by the Fever and Ague in the Black Swamp.” Later that same week, Lucas supervised Ohio’s own local elections in the disputed townships. Governor Lucas and Governor Mason continued to enforce opposing legal actions within the disputed territory for several months.

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20 Detroit Free Press, May 18, 1835, as quoted in The Toledo War, pg. 70.
including Ohio’s establishment of Lucas County with Toledo as its county seat in June of 1835.\(^{21}\) By the following year, Jackson and the U.S. government ruled in the favor of Ohio, but the situation brought the state’s attention once again to its northwest corner, wetland environment, and economic potential.

The “Toledo War” demonstrated that Ohio still did not completely control the land within their perceived geopolitical boundaries in the early nineteenth century due to environmental factors. With native removal and the state’s canal projects in the 1830s, Northwest Ohio became more desirable, but the swamp remained an obstacle in political control, settlement, and defense. Despite the federal government’s ruling, which secured the land in Ohio’s name, the state continued the process of transforming Northwest Ohio from an isolated region surrounded by “civilization” to an agricultural powerhouse and an active lake port.

After the failure of the construction and maintenance of the Maumee-Western Reserve Road, the Ohio government decided to include its northwest corner in to the state’s new public works project. When the state government expressed interest in the expansion of the Miami Canal to Lake Erie, the U.S. government granted federal lands in Northwest Ohio to the state for the construction of the canal along the Maumee River in 1828. Congress granted the land to be used for the canal provided “That said canal, when completed, shall be, and forever remain, a public highway, for the use of the government of the United States.” In the same act, Congress also granted land “for the purpose of aiding the state of Ohio in the payment of the debt…contracted by said state, in the construction of the canals.”\(^{22}\) This section of the act allowed the state to sell federal land to settlers in order to raise funds for the state’s canal projects.

With an exact path for the canal to be determined by a state committee, many villages in the Maumee River Valley became fierce rivals as to who would directly benefit from a canal terminus within their limits. The small towns along the Maumee knew a canal extension would promote trade and settlement in the sparsely populated area. The few families in the area would be able to sell their surplus crops at larger, previously unavailable markets, including Cincinnati.

\(^{21}\) Faber, The Toledo War, 70-71, 95; Winter, History of Northwest Ohio, 231-232.
\(^{22}\) “An Act to aid the state of Ohio in extending the Miami Canal from Dayton to Lake Erie, and to grant a quantity of land to said state to aid in the construction of the canals authorized by law…” 20th Congress Session 1, Statutes at Large, 305-306, http://legisworks.org/sal/4/stats/STATUTE-4-Pg305a.pdf.
This access would also encourage the growth of farms from substance to commercial farming along the higher moraines in the area. Additionally, the chosen villages would see an increase in travelers, providing a new market for local inns and taverns. With increased access to the region, potential settlers and land speculators no longer viewed the villages as isolated communities but as budding trade hubs. In 1831, the state canal board agreed upon the finalized path of the Miami-Erie extension, earmarked funds for the project, and placed the federally granted lands on the market to the public. Congress also granted Ohio lands to Indiana for a canal connecting the Wabash River to Lake Erie. While this plan caused interstate tension at first, state officials negotiated plans in 1833 to converge the Wabash-Erie Canal with the Miami-Erie extension and pay for its portion, noting the additional benefits to Ohio’s “wilderness” another canal route would provide.

The state government expected that the land grant from Congress in 1828 and the approved paths of the Miami-Erie and Wabash-Erie canals through Northwest Ohio (over an alternative proposal through Central Ohio) would provide the “sparse settlement in northwest Ohio [with]…improved transportation…, immigration in the region…, and commercialization of agriculture.” In Atwater’s history of Ohio, he stated, in reference to the upcoming canal channels through Northwest Ohio, that “At no distant day, the Maumee valley will be thickly settled, and will be improved; and, this canal will be studded with flourishing villages, towns and cities.” The promise of a potential canal increased the population steadily in the area, but these settlers did not experience the economic and transportation benefits of a water highway system for several years.

The canal projects in Northwest Ohio took over a decade to complete. Construction for the Miami-Erie Canal extension to the Maumee River broke ground in 1833 and completed in 1845, almost twice as long as the building of the Ohio-Erie Canal. Many factors, including environmental, political, and financial, contributed to the projects’ prolonged timeline. Digging large trenches through a swamp with many areas of shallow bedrock proved to be a challenging task. Because of the lack of local residents available to recruit, the state government needed to

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bring in more laborers to fulfill the demand of digging the canal paths and constructing the locks. A larger travelling workforce resulted in numerous, overcrowded labor camps consisting of tents pitched in saturated soil and standing water. The poor sanitation and wetland landscape in these sites resulted in breakouts of ague, cholera, and typhoid.

Politics also dictated the progress of the project. During the territorial dispute with Michigan, Governor Lucas postponed planning and construction of both canals until Ohio’s title to the land was secured. Lucas wanted to guarantee that Ohio controlled the economic benefits of a canal along the Maumee River to Lake Erie. With termini planned along the north side of the river up to Maumee Bay, Michigan’s claim to the land threatened the state’s several million-dollar internal improvement project. Construction continued as planned after a few months of interstate conflict, but in the financial crisis of 1837 caused another delay to the canal’s completion. Land sales and speculations plummeted, creating a lack of funds for the state. Settlement and construction continued through the depression, but at a significantly slower pace. Finally completed in 1843 and 1845, the canals provided outlets for trade to new settlers in Northwest Ohio that was cheaper and more reliable than the flooded plank and corduroy roads.

The Ohio government and the Canal Commission chose to expand internal improvements in the northwest quarter of the state to provide economic opportunities that initiated “the process of development in a wilderness country.” After the extension’s completion, the state canal board observed that the former “wilderness district” increased its grain exports to over $400,000 through Toledo’s outlet. Canals also offered opportunities for lumber and grain mills along their reliable water sources. Both state and federal officials noted the benefits to settlement expansion by providing public transportation to this isolated portion of the state.

The previous chapter discussed how the canal and its associated land grants allowed the state to advertise settlement in Northwest Ohio and sell plots to citizens, contributing to the pressure for the removal of Native American tribes. Additionally, land sales and new methods of transportation provided by the state through the Black Swamp and its surrounding areas provided incentives for white settlers to move to the region. Despite the difficulties to Euro-American

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26 Scheiber, Ohio Canal Era, 220.
settlement posed by the physical environment, the cheap land and promise of new transportation routes contained the potential for Northwest Ohio to become a lucrative investment. The state saw these same opportunities as a way to close the “frontier”, remove Native Americans, increase white settlement, and extend their political claim to its geopolitical borders. Ohio’s state-funded canal projects, while expensive and time-consuming feats, provided the state government with a unique way to increase their political control through the promotion of new settlements and “civilization” in Northwest Ohio.

Even with these long-term public works projects, settlers in the area during the canal construction became disillusioned with the laborious state projects. They demanded the government to address immediate issues of flooding and drainage. In a public statement made in the Maumee Express to the Ohio legislatures, residents in Northwest Ohio pleaded “Will ye never stoop from your lofty speculations, upon canals…[and] attend to a matter which has in it less of glory by more of usefulness?...Improve the Black Swamp. We humbly pray; and if you do not, we humbly pray that ye, one and all, may be dragged from Lower Sandusky to Perrysburg.”27 The increased settlement from state and federal land sales in a wetland environment resulted in poor, localized drainage methods and increased cases of water borne diseases. The state turned its attention to land drainage for the sake of increasing the population, furthering the agricultural economy, and aiding public health issues.

Some parts of Northwest Ohio continued to be uninhabited, despite local county populations doubling, even tripling, between 1820 and 1830. The completion of the canal and the speculation of land value resulted in this spike of local residents. However, actual numbers remained low.28

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Dana Bogart, “Northwest Ohio 1820 Population,” United States 1820 Census. I made these maps using ArcMap software and data from the U.S. Census Bureau. I understand that these are not the original boundaries of the counties portrayed, but I wanted to give a general representation of the area’s population growth.
The standing water of the Black Swamp led many potential Northwest Ohio farmers to believe that the land was unhealthy and unsuitable for farming. Those settlers who purchased land in Northwest Ohio from the state and federal governments experienced health and farming difficulties.

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difficulties due to the excess groundwater. The sparse villages witnessed cholera, typhoid, and “swamp fever” epidemics because of the lack of clean water supplies in the wetlands. During August of 1852, the settlement of Gilboa in Putnam County experienced a small cholera epidemic and most of the town fled from the village.31 A medical physician in the region noted from personal experience that “Ague...and the severer remittent fevers, were quite general and severe until the year 1875 in most parts of the Basin.”32 The standing water also affected livelihoods. Those settlers who tried to farm in undrained soils experienced weak seedlings whose roots never penetrated beyond the raised water table. As the water table lowered through the summer, the plants with shallow roots remained in the dried top soil and did not produce substantial crops.33

A few observers of the landscape, however, noted that the soil lying beneath the swamp waters contained potential for productive farming. The federal surveyors who surveyed most of

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the northwest counties in 1819 and 1820 mentioned in their notes that draining the region would leave behind fertile soil. The Ohio Gazetteer in 1837 stated that the land within the Black Swamp, when dry, “proves to be fine tillable land, easily drained and very productive.”

The Perrysburg Journal predicted in 1853 that “the wet and overflowed lands of Wood County will be drained and eventually become the garden spot of Ohio.”

Early farmers attempted to drain the area, but these efforts remained at individual levels and many farms merely drained their excess water in to neighboring fields. Beginning in the late 1840s, the state passed a series of laws that permitted landowners to seek “improvements” through their county officials in order to aid settlement, cultivate farmland, and reduce public health risks. The first of these laws in 1847 allowed anyone in possession of “low lands, lakes, [or] swamps…[that] can not be approached, worked, drained, or used in the ordinary manner” to petition their county commissioners for an authorization of “roads, drains, ditches, railways, or tunnels” to make their land more accessible. Shortly following this first state drainage law, the U.S. government granted several states federally owned wetlands with the purpose that the money made through the land sales would fund state drainage and “reclamation” projects. The Swamp Land Act of 1850, however, only approved roughly 26,000 acres of swamplands to Ohio. Ohio accepted this offer in 1853, but many of Ohio’s state officials disagreed with the amount granted to them by the federal government. The 1854 annual report of Ohio’s State Commissioner of Common Schools commented that if the federal government only considered 26,000 acres in need of draining, then the “designation of ‘swamp lands’ has not been applied with much precision, or governed by an uniform rule.”

Ohio Governor Salmon P. Chase (1856-1860) stated all public lands within Ohio’s boundaries should be considered swamplands and given to the state for improvement. The lack of federal assistance to Ohio’s wetland settlement

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35 Kaatz, “The Black Swamp,” 22; Warren Jenkins, The Ohio Gazetteer, and Traveler's Guide; Containing a Description of the Several Towns, Townships and Counties, with Their Water Courses, Roads, Improvements, Mineral Productions (Columbus: Isaac N. Whiting, 1837), 368.

36 Perrysburg Journal, 19 December 1853 (as quoted in Kaatz, “The Black Swamp,” 23.)


39 Ohio Department of Public Instruction, Annual Report of the State Commissioner of Common Schools to the Governor of the State of Ohio for the Year 1854 (Columbus: Statesman Steam Press, 1855), 42, https://books.google.com/books?id=cnhCAQAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false; any residual income from these land sales left after draining the swamp lands went to school funds.

40 Klippart, The Principles and Practice of Land Drainage, 182.
efforts led to decades of state level statutes authorizing county officials within the rest of the public lands to regulate drainage projects.

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the legislature contributed additional laws and amendments that aided wetland drainage. These laws permitted county and township commissioners to construct unified drainage systems, request bonds, and levy taxes to pay for these projects. Lawmakers also adjusted the language of new legislation as new methods emerged. For example, the ditching acts of 1854 and 1859 provided for the implementation of open drains and clay tiles as new machinery became available. However, county and township officials could only appraise land for “improvements” only after requested by one or more property owners of the affected lands. All settlers within the area needed to be convinced to apply for these ditch systems through their county commissioners in order to prevent haphazard drainage and maximize the available land for incoming settlers. The state government issued reports, essays, and publications explaining the methods and benefits to draining saturated land for the purpose of agricultural cultivation. In one publication, The Ohio Department of Agriculture defined farm drainage as “being a process by which wet and unhealthy soils may be rendered arable and healthy.” They also stated that land drainage projects were seen as improvements on the land. New methods, such as underground clay tiles, while expensive, promised longer lasting results. John Klippart, Secretary of the Ohio State Board of Agriculture in the late nineteenth century, published a list of benefits derived from land drainage; draining “lengthens the seasons”, “deepens the soil”, “warms the undersoil”, and “improves the quality and quantity of crops.” Many of these forms of propaganda exaggerated the dangers of undrained soil, but continued to campaign the advantages of labor-intensive drainage methods. Through these publications, these state agencies increased the awareness of the area’s “necessity of systematic drainage.”

44 Ibid., 42.
Wood County contained both federally recognized swampland and uncategorized wetlands, and witnessed the extensive changes brought about by these state drainage laws. A few decades of settlers in this area witnessed state and county initiated drainage and saw a dramatic transformation of the environment. One man from Perrysburg, Ohio wrote:

“It will be remembered by the older classes of citizens that the conditions in nearly three-fourths of the area of Wood county was literally, during a considerable portion of the year, either wholly or partially covered by water. To all intents and purposes it was a ‘black swamp.’ The change in its physical conditions have been almost phenomenal in their results. There are now 664 public highways intersecting the 389,600 acres which compromises the county of Wood. In collateral line with these roads are ditches which in most instances are of large capacity and carry off large bodies of water to their outlet in the river.”

Once an area largely avoided and sparsely populated because of its central location within the Black Swamp, Wood County experienced a population boom in the last half of the nineteenth century as drainage enterprises gridded the county. New ditch laws, in addition with better transportation systems and land sales by speculators, led to an increase in population density, crop production, and industry all across Northwest Ohio.

Following the establishment of the state’s ditch laws, which continued to be revised in to the twentieth century, the state government essentially managed the entirety of Northwest Ohio’s settlement. Its counties became some of the most agriculturally and industrially beneficial in the state and nation. In 1870, after only twenty years of state drainage initiatives, only half of the region’s natural environment remained. By 1880, Northwest Ohio became one of the leading sectors in wheat and corn production in the country. These counties experienced the “greatest increases”, some reaching yields of over one million bushels of wheat. However, the same counties (Hancock, Seneca, and Sandusky) spent the smallest amounts on fertilizer in the same census year, attesting to the richness of the soil. Northwest Ohio also became the eastern edge of the nation’s Corn Belt by 1880. The Corn Belt, determined by the statistical yields of corn and

46 Quoted in Michael A. Leeson, *Commemorative, Historical and Biographical Record of Wood County, Ohio* (Chicago: J.H. Beers & Co, 1897), 2.
corn-fed animals, began further south in Ohio along the Miami Valley in the 1820s. However, the drainage of federal and state wetlands in several Midwestern states left behind fertile soil on flat, tillable plains. This rural transformation in the second half of the nineteenth century resulted in the shift of the Corn Belt from Southcentral Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois to Northwest Ohio through Northern Iowa.

Ohio’s government instigated environmental changes also brought about new industries in Northwest Ohio. The development of tile drainage methods led to the new growth in business of foundries. Settlers used the clay soil commonly found throughout the region to make clay tiles for the purpose of underground drainage and culverts. By the 1880s, over two hundred tile factories resided within Ohio, the majority of which in Northwest Ohio.49 In his 1885 State of the State Address, Ohio Governor George Hoadly exclaimed that “The changes caused by ditching and draining have been so great in the last thirty-four years as to hide all present evidence of the original character of the lands.”50

50 George Hoadly, State of the State Address, June 1, 1885, Ohio Governors Collections, Ohio History Connection, http://www.ohiomemory.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection_addresses/id/304/rec/1.
Clearing the land for settlement presented other industry opportunities. Lumber became a common independent venture for many farmers in the area and the canals and railroads made transporting the large material relatively efficient. Settlers in the region often made just as much money clearing the land of timber as they did from their crop harvests. Many villages developed around lumber related businesses, such as barrel and axe handle factories. Another lucrative, yet short-lived, industry appeared in the area in the 1880s. Oil and gas fields in Wood and Hancock counties gave rise to an intense urban population growth, but rural lifestyles remained predominant in Northwest Ohio. While exhausted by the turn of the century, these gas and oil sources led to the development of regional cities, such as Findlay, Ohio. The growth of industries in Northwest Ohio during the late nineteenth century cemented the region’s transformation from an environmental borderland to an economic and political asset to the state and federal governments.


The removal of the Black Swamp signified the end of the borderland and frontier era for Ohio. The wetland landscape prevented the spread of white settlement, Euro-American culture, and state political control. The state and federal governments influenced the movement of settlers into the region by providing land sales, transportation, and drainage opportunities to anyone willing to clear and “improve” the land for crop cultivation and industrial production. Many historians depict the spread of American authority and culture through the expansion of settlers and the completion of these actions in Ohio achieved through military means. Northwest Ohio’s wetland environment, however, did not experience growth in population until the government intervened through laws and public works projects that established a landscape more accessible to Euro-American settlers. The political entities in Ohio during the nineteenth century conquered the nonhuman obstacles of the swamp through their environmental-minded legislation. These government efforts transformed the Great Black Swamp from a borderland region to a place defined by commercial agricultural production.

Conclusion

The closing of Ohio’s borderland did not occur immediately following the War of 1812, but rather in a long process of cultural and political expansion facilitated by the government’s environmental policies. The War of 1812 represented an undeniable turning point for the state’s role in the region, but did not prompt an instantaneous change. Following the war, British influence no longer threatened American authority in the Great Lakes. However, Northwest Ohio’s environment played a crucial role in the U.S. governance and settlement of the area. Many historians ignored the continued conflict that occurred in Northwest Ohio to obtain unobstructed control, politically and physically, of the region. Unlike previous scholarship, this research showed a complex narrative that developed during this postwar period in mid-nineteenth century Ohio between American political entities, Native Americans, settlers, and the environment. The environment of the Great Black Swamp in Northwest Ohio prevented U.S. expansion into a quarter of the state until the mid-nineteenth century, creating a borderland atmosphere. This borderland could not be removed militarily, but rather through changing the landscape to suite U.S. cultural and economic needs.

Northwest Ohio’s wetlands extended the borderland mentality of negotiation and lack of control. Because of the Black Swamp’s natural incompatibility with mass Euro-American settlement, the federal government established Ohio’s last native reservations in areas unappealing to American citizens. The government used missionaries to implement Euro-American agricultural practices among native peoples in Northwest Ohio. As the state established publicly funded methods of transportation, settlement along the region’s rivers seemed more plausible. This development in state projects along with growing tensions between native peoples and settlers resulted in negotiations for native removal. However, once the native villages ceded their claim to the land, the flooded plains still prevented extensive population growth in the area. Ohio’s legislatures spent several decades passing laws that extended the state’s political authority in to sparsely populated counties to ensure a systematic conversion of the land in to an agricultural and industrial powerhouse. The process of transforming the political atmosphere of the region persisted until the federal and state governments removed competing cultural usage of the land and permanently changed the physical environment. This thesis combined examples of state power, internal improvements, environmental changes, and native
relations in this historical inquiry to understand the Northwest Ohio’s seldom explored complex history following the War of 1812.
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