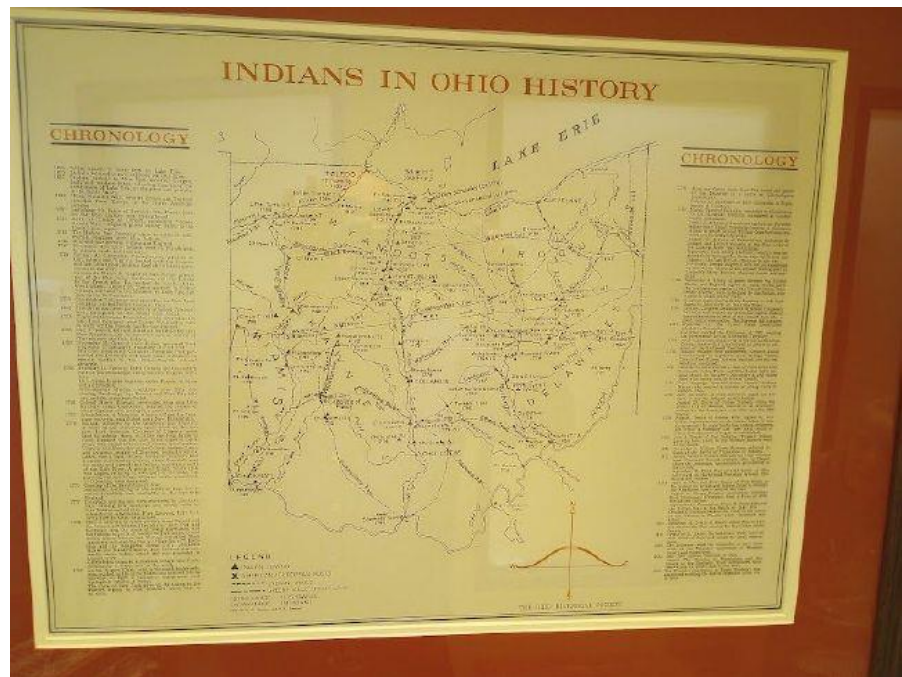


By TOM JACKSON, Sandusky Register, 9-28-26

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## The Wyandot and Sandusky history

Stop at the intersection of Venice Road and Fremont Avenue on U.S. 6 in west Sandusky, and you'll find an historical marker for Fort Sandusky. It briefly mentions that the British established the fort in 1761, before the U.S. became a separate country, and the fort was destroyed in 1763. That destruction came largely at the hands of the Wyandot.



On May 16, 1763, a group of Native Americans, mostly Wyandot, came to the fort to meet with the commander. Suddenly, the group seized the commander and then killed the remaining 15-member garrison. The fort was burned down, and some nearby traders were also killed. The commander was adopted by force into the Ottawa tribe and also was forced to marry an Ottawa widow, apparently as an alternative to being burned at the stake. (Confusingly, there were four Fort Sanduskys in the area, if you count the French Fort Sandoské, but we're talking about the British fort in Erie County.)

The Wyandot sided with the French in the North American wars with the French, and with the British in the American Revolution. They were part of the Native American coalition on the losing side in the Battle of Fallen Timbers, an important U.S. victory near Toledo in 1794.

### **The Wyandot journey**

The Wyandots are a tribe that speaks an Iroquoian language, linguistically similar to the language spoken by the Iroquois and with a similar culture. The Wyandot, like the Iroquois, lived in longhouses. The Wyandot were formed by a merger of three previously separate tribes, including people who were formerly members of the Huron Confederacy. Some of the Wyandot settled near Detroit and some in Ohio, in the Upper Sandusky area. After pressure from white settlers, some Wyandot moved to Kansas and some of those Kansas Wyandot moved to what was then Indian Territory and later became Oklahoma. Today there are three distinct surviving groups of Wyandot. The Wyandotte Nation is a federally recognized tribe in Wyandotte, Oklahoma, in the far northeastern corner of Oklahoma. The tribe uses the French spelling of the tribe's name. There are also two self-identifying Wyandot tribes: The Wyandot Nation of Kansas in Kansas City and the Wyandot of Anderdon Nation.

The Wyandotte Nation recognizes the other two groups as fellow Wyandots and, in fact, Wyandots from Kansas and Michigan recently came to Oklahoma for a cultural gathering, said Billy Friend, chief of the Wyandotte Nation.



There are a few Wyandot legacies in Ohio. The Wyandot Mission Church still exists in Upper Sandusky, Ohio. In 2019, the United Methodist Church gave the church's land back to the Wyandot, Friend said. The tribe also quietly owns a couple of housing lots in Port Clinton, preserving a woodland Indian burial ground, Friend said.

Today in Oklahoma

The Wyandotte Nation has 7,356 enrolled members with about one-quarter living in

Oklahoma. The tribal headquarters is in Wyandotte, Oklahoma, a small town in Ottawa County, Oklahoma.

Like other tribes in Oklahoma, the Wyandotte enjoy sovereignty over many local matters. The tribe issues its own license plates and operates its own tribal police force. The tribe's business enterprises include four tribal casinos, two in Wyandotte, Oklahoma, and two in Kansas. Other businesses include five Turtle Stop convenience stores in northeast Oklahoma and in Missouri. The turtle is an important animal in Wyandot myth.

Visitors who come to the tribal headquarters in Wyandotte can visit a museum to learn more about the tribe's history and culture.



Business operations for the Wyandotte Nation are run largely by Friend. He explained that while he tends to business, the tribe's second chief largely runs the tribal government.



Like the Ottawa County in Ohio, Ottawa County in Oklahoma relies on tourism, Friend explained. Ottawa County has nine different tribes who run 12 casinos a short distance from each other.

Casino customers come from a four-state corner area - Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri and Arkansas - including customers from the city of Fayetteville, Arkansas, which is 45

Joplin in Missouri, a 30-minute drive, and from Fayetteville, Arkansas, which is 45 minutes away, Friend said.

## Many Ohio tribes wound up in Oklahoma



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SANDUSKY - The Wyandot is not alone in winding up in Oklahoma, hundreds of miles from their original tribal homelands. Before Oklahoma finally became a state in 1907, admitted as the 46th state, it was known as Indian Territory, and it was the place where Native Americans were forced to relocate when white settlers wanted their original land. Generally, tribes from the eastern part of the U.S. were moved to what later became eastern Oklahoma. That includes the Five Civilized Tribes from the southeast U.S.: the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Seminole tribes.

### **The tribes relocated from Ohio fit that pattern.**

Ohio tribes who wound up in Oklahoma include the Ottawa, who lived in the Sandusky and Maumee River areas, and who wound up in Ottawa County, Oklahoma, near the Wyandotte Nation.

The Seneca-Cayuga Nation and the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma also originally came from Ohio as did three separate Shawnee tribes in Oklahoma, including two who are also located near the Wyandotte Nation. Meanwhile, tribes from the western U.S. were sent to western Oklahoma. Examples include the Comanches, Kiowas, Apaches, the Cheyenne and the Arapaho. It would be unusual to live in Oklahoma for any length of time and not know any Native Americans.

When I grew up in Tulsa, for example, a city founded by members of the Creek tribe, I knew a Creek woman at school and a young Shawnee woman whose last name was Prophet. She told me she was descended from the Shawnee leader known as the Prophet. When I lived in Lawton, Oklahoma, and worked for the newspaper there, my colleagues at the paper included a former Comanche tribal princess. The arts editor was a Choctaw. One of my editors was married to a Kiowa woman, and I used to get my hair cut by a Comanche barber.

Native Americans influence Oklahoma in many ways. The name of the state comes from Choctaw words meaning "red people." Oklahoma has more than 140 tribal gambling casinos. Many of the tribes issue their own license plates.

Many people in Oklahoma who appear to be white claim to be part Native American. Elizabeth Warren, a Democratic U.S. senator from Massachusetts, grew up in Oklahoma and believed she was a Cherokee Indian. There was plenty of controversy and news coverage over Warren's claim, and we won't get into the details. But national news coverage largely missed the fact that claiming Cherokee ancestry is commonplace in Oklahoma and would have seemed completely normal to anyone who knew Warren as she was growing up.

Once, while I was attending a buffalo burger cookout, a large annual event in Lawton, Oklahoma, that draws a large crowd, I stood in line next to a Comanche Indian. The man joked that he could never understand how the U.S. government had succeeded in forcing the Cherokees to come to Oklahoma. Given that so many people in Oklahoma claimed to have a Cherokee grandmother, the Cherokee tribe must have been enormous, the man told me.