

## HISTORY This Week EP 401: Two Shawnee Brothers Hold Their Ground

### EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

*NOTE: This transcript may contain errors.*

**Sally Helm:** HISTORY This Week. November 7, 1811. I'm Sally Helm.

These prairies are no stranger to fire.

Grasses and wildflowers flourish here. But in the summer months, they dry out quick. Lightning strikes cause fires that burn the plants...and release nutrients. Over time, that's helped keep the soil rich in this region, near the spot where the Wabash and Tippecanoe rivers meet. Native American tribes in the area also sometimes burned the prairies to clear the land for hunting. Europeans found the rich soil good for growing crops.

And those forces...have helped lead us here.

To a chilly night in a forested spot where a group of soldiers has lit a fire. A bonfire, to dry their wet clothes and their boots. These men are led by the white governor of the Indiana territory, William Henry Harrison. Harrison's been told to try and keep the peace. But he wants land. And he's come here to try and take it.

Less than a mile away, is a flourishing Native American settlement called Prophetstown. It's led by two brothers: Tecumseh, known for his skill as both a warrior and a diplomat. And Tenskwatawa, a religious leader whose teachings have brought Native people from far and wide to this spot by the Wabash river.

When Harrison arrived yesterday, unexpectedly, Tecumseh wasn't in Prophetstown. But some of its Native American leaders rode out to meet the white governor. They all agreed to a council. To be held the following morning. To try and avoid bloodshed. So at this moment, in the middle of the night, on this spot of prairie by the banks of the Wabash river, all is briefly calm.

But by the time dawn breaks... these two sides will be in a battle. It ends with one of their settlements burned to the ground.

Today: the battle of Tippecanoe. How did a future president exploit this conflict to catapult himself all the way to the White House? And how did Prophetstown become the most powerful alliance of Native American military, spiritual, and social forces to ever take on the US government?

[AD BREAK]

**Sally Helm:** 1791. Twenty years before the Battle of Tippecanoe. The American colonists have won the revolution, which means that they're now in control of the Eastern seaboard of the land we call the United States. But their adversary in that war, Great Britain, is still lurking nearby. The British rule key parts of the land that now makes up Canada, to the North. And out West, the Spanish control a vast empire stretching from what is now California to the bottom of South America. And all the while, living all across these lands, are indigenous people. People whose fathers and whose fathers' fathers were born and raised here.

**Chief Barnes:** If we were to try to put a pin on the map of where the core Shawnee homelands are, it would be that Ohio River Valley.

**Sally Helm:** This is Chief Ben Barnes. The current elected leader of the Shawnee people.

**Chief Barnes:** I've been chief of the Shawnee for exactly one global pandemic.

**Sally Helm:** Chief Barnes told us, up until the 1800s, the Shawnee people were spread out over land that now makes up over two dozen states. But the core of the community was in what we call the Midwest. After the Revolutionary War, Americans see that as their new frontier. And they begin to push west, bearing down on those who already live in these lands.

**Chief Barnes:** So, this would've been time of a lot of warfare.

**Sally Helm:** By the 1790s, there's a powerful group of indigenous warriors fighting to protect their lands. They're allied with the British to the North—the United States is their common enemy.

The Shawnee Chief Blue Jacket and Miami Chief Little Turtle form an intertribal alliance to push back against American encroachment. White Americans call it the "Northwestern Confederacy." Though again they're located in what we call the *Midwest*. And in 1791:

**Chief Barnes:** This confederacy launched a sophisticated encirclement maneuver around the United States continental army. And they truly decimated that army.

**Sally Helm:** In just one battle, some estimates say that half the entire army of the newly formed United States is killed or wounded. This is remembered as "St. Clair's Defeat" after the US army officer who led it and lost. The news returns to the Eastern seaboard. And the young country is shaken.

**Chief Barnes:** The newspapers were clutching at their pearls and wondering what's next? Are they gonna push us into the ocean?

**Sally Helm:** This is the world in which two Shawnee brothers are growing up. A world marked by violence, and displacement, yes. But also suffused with a sense of an indigenous resistance. Inter-tribal alliances. Power.

The brothers' names are Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa.

**Peter Cozzens:** Tecumseh was a very private man. He was an outstanding hunter. He liked to be by himself, to hunt alone by himself when he could.

**Sally Helm:** That's Peter Cozzens, a historian and author of a book about the brothers.

**Peter Cozzens:** But at the same time, he was charismatic, he was a, a natural leader of men. He had been, since he was a boy.

**Sally Helm:** His early years are full of violence. His family is repeatedly forced to move. His father, a war chief, is killed in battle with the Americans when Tecumseh is still a child.

**Peter Cozzens:** And when Tenskwatawa was still in his mother's womb.

**Sally Helm:** Tenskwatawa, or Tenskwatawa, is Tecumseh's younger brother. The two spend their formative years in what was then known as the Northwest Territory. And in 1794, just a few years after St. Clair's defeat, Tecumseh puts his skills as a warrior to use. Against U.S. Army troops sent to Ohio. The troops are there ...

**Peter Cozzens:** To seize as much of Ohio as possible, break up the pan Indian alliance that then existed so that better part of Ohio and Kentucky would be safe for American settlement and secured from Indian threats, so to speak.

**Sally Helm:** One of the young American officers sent to this region is William Henry Harrison. He'd once dreamed of becoming a doctor.

**Peter Cozzens:** But there just weren't the funds for it in the family. And so, he decided to seek his fortune on the frontier as a young army officer.

**Sally Helm:** Harrison's family *had* been wealthy. He's the son of a Virginia planter who'd lost his fortune during the Revolution, when his plantation burned to the ground. At the hands of the British. So, Harrison comes West under a cloud of grievances.

**Peter Cozzens:** In his early twenties, he was already virulently anti-British and he always saw the, the Indians as British lackies. He could never separate legitimate grievances that the Indians had about loss of land, about white encroachment on Indian lands, he could never separate that from the British.

**Sally Helm:** That's what brings Harrison to Ohio in 1794, to what will become known as the Battle of Fallen Timbers. Fighting against the indigenous Northwestern Confederacy, and their longtime British allies. It's the first time that Harrison and Tecumseh will meet. The encounter will set the tone for a lifetime of conflict. Tecumseh is leading a contingent of Shawnee warriors on the front lines. He's one of the first to fire his musket as the US army approaches.

The Native American warriors are on foot, fighting in the thick woods against soldiers on horseback. Including Harrison. And...it doesn't go well for the Northwestern Confederacy. They're outnumbered more than three to one. Tecumseh tries to hold his own on the battlefield, but many other Shawnee warriors are scattering.

**Peter Cozzens:** He tried to rally a couple of other groups of Indians to continue fighting but was unsuccessful and eventually joined the Indian retreat from the battlefield.

**Sally Helm:** They head for the safety of a nearby British fort. Only to find...they can't get in.

**Peter Cozzens:** The British closed the gates to the fort to the Indians because they did not want to provoke a fight with the Americans.

**Sally Helm:** Wow so they kind of betray their allies.

**Peter Cozzens:** Yeah. Literally locked the gates of Fort Miami against the Indians.

**Sally Helm:** Tecumseh and his remaining warriors end up escaping. But in the wake of this loss in battle—and this betrayal by the British—the Northwestern Confederacy falls apart. 99 tribal leaders are forced to sign an expansive treaty. The Treaty of Greenville. It gives up a good chunk of their Ohio land to the Americans and lets the US government build trading posts on the lands the tribes *do* maintain. In exchange, the Native Americans get...some money. Not that that's much consolation. This is a devastating loss. The treaty will alter the way of life they'd known for generations. Because without enough land for hunting, many are pushed into farming.

**Chief Barnes:** Could you imagine the frustration?

**Sally Helm:** Chief Ben Barnes.

**Chief Barnes:** And I cannot imagine Tecumseh not conferring with his brother, saying in the forefront of their conversations is how do we protect a way of life that's under threat?

**Sally Helm:** Tecumseh decides: the best way to do that is to step away from the community where he's grown up. And form his own community, away from the grasp of these white American settlers.

So, he refuses to sign the Treaty of Greenville. He rallies a group of other disillusioned young men, including his brother Tenskwatawa. It's about a tenth of the Shawnee community. And together, they retreat to the woods. Peter Cozzens told us; they build their own village in a place called Deer Creek.

**Peter Cozzens:** It would've been, you know, pretty bucolic setting. A clear stream running by the village, a mix of traditional wigwams, which were, semicircular shaped earthen structures and log cabins. Lots of forest, tall prairie grass, and cultivated fields.

**Sally Helm:** Meanwhile, 100 miles to the east, in the Shawnee community the brothers had left behind, things are changing quick. White Americans are steadily implementing those assimilationist policies after the Treaty of Greenville.

**Peter Cozzens:** Men were beginning to assume a role in agriculture, you were beginning to use American farm implements, wearing, clothing. Very similar to Americans on their frontier using American implements to cook, for housework.

**Sally Helm:** All this change is carefully calculated. In part by William Henry Harrison.

He'd become governor of what was then called the Indiana Territory.

**Peter Cozzens:** All of Indiana, Wisconsin, better part of Illinois.

**Sally Helm:** Harrison is getting his orders from the very top—from President Thomas Jefferson himself.

**Peter Cozzens:** Thomas Jefferson, as president, he has his vision of, an empire of liberty as he called it, and he, believed the only way that the American democracy could thrive is if United States was able to gain control from the Indians of the entirety of the Midwest and also of the American South.

**Sally Helm:** Jefferson writes Harrison a confidential letter. He says: *I have a plan.*

**Peter Cozzens:** He wanted to try to gain as much Indian land as they could by treaty without provoking war.

**Sally Helm:** To do that, Jefferson plans to make the tribes dependent on American trade...and then drive them into debt. He writes: "We shall push our trading houses and be *glad* to see the good & influential individuals among them run in debt.... When these debts get beyond what the individuals can pay, they become willing to lop them off by a cession of lands." In other words, the United States will use the debt as leverage against the Native Americans.

**Peter Cozzens:** And at the same time, gently coerce them into becoming small farmers give up the hunt so they would need less land.

**Sally Helm:** Jefferson writes: "When they withdraw themselves to the culture of a small piece of land, they will perceive how useless to them are their extensive forests and will be willing to pare them off from time to time."

**Peter Cozzens:** And gradually pry away as much land as they, as he could.

**Sally Helm:** Wow. So he is, it's so he's sort of laying out a whole almost, I don't know, tricky strategy

**Peter Cozzens:** It was a strategy of peaceable conquest.

**Sally Helm:** Meanwhile, Tecumseh and his Deer Creek village are essentially living off the grid. Not antagonizing white American settlers. Just keeping their distance.

The winter of 1804 hits the village hard. There's a flu epidemic, and many fall ill. And this is when Tecumseh's younger brother, Tenskwatawa, becomes a key part of our story. Because he has a religious awakening.

Tenskwatawa is a tricky character to understand. Many people will go on to write about him. But the details of his early life and personality are fuzzy at best.

**Steve Warren:** To be honest with you, I, I don't think that we can say for certain what he was like.

**Sally Helm:** Professor Stephen Warren wrote a book, *The Shawnees and Their Neighbors*. He said, you can't take the sources we have at face value.

**Steve Warren:** At the time of Tenskwatawa's life, a minority of Americans were literate. And those who were literate, tended to be proponents of removal.

**Sally Helm:** People like William Henry Harrison. US army officers. Government officials. Missionaries sent to convert indigenous tribes.

**Steve Warren:** When we say that, you know, this is a one-sided story, it, it literally is because, it's very difficult to find sources from native people themselves.

**Sally Helm:** Warren told us, the sources we have about Tenskwatawa largely paint him in comparison to his brother Tecumseh. And they frame his early years as a pretty much total failure.

**Steve Warren:** The majoritarian view is that he was a failed hunter, and alcoholic, an abuser and a philander, and, reached kind of the, the depths of his own depravity and had a conversion experience. But this arc of his life and career is shaped by the desire for Indian removal.

**Sally Helm:** It lines up with stereotypes that people later use to justify that removal. Warren and some other scholars doubt this negative portrait of Tenskwatawa. Warren says, what is known for sure is that, around this time, Tenskwatawa has a series of spiritual awakenings that change his life.

He conceives a new vision for his people. In 1805, he launches a movement that rejects American influence and turns back to the traditional ways of Shawnee life. Here's Shawnee Chief Ben Barnes.

**Chief Barnes:** He was, asking people to return to their traditional religions, that the ideas and things that had came over from Europe to this country were foreign and anathema to traditional communities in the adoption of some of those customs were destroying the fabric that made up traditional communities. That the things that they had been given had been good enough for them for thousands of years and by returning to those things, they would find strength.

**Sally Helm:** Tenskwatawa founds a new community in Greenville. And asks people to join him. They'll live communally on the land. Hunt only with bows and arrows.

**Chief Barnes:** He's telling indigenous people to kill their hogs. Hogs are not part of our traditional food system, that hogs are destroying the landscape. Get rid of the alcohol, stop doing this and, you know, return to your traditional ways.

**Sally Helm:** Tenskwatawa says, just hunt as much game as we need to survive—no point killing extra to trade. In other words, he's promoting self-reliance. Which is a good way to resist the snares of Jefferson's plan for 'peaceable conquest' through debt.

**Chief Barnes:** He was urging those peoples to not be so reliant upon flaky and unreliable European allies.

**Sally Helm:** And does that message resonate with other Shawnee people?

**Chief Barnes:** I think it resonates with a lot of indigenous peoples. And tribes start arriving from all over the Eastern United States in Canada that wanted to be a part of this return to the ways of their grandparents.

**Sally Helm:** It recalls the days of St. Clair's defeat, when a group of tribes came together to make common cause. Though, Chief Barnes says, it wasn't like all the distinctions melted away.

**Chief Barnes:** They wouldn't have this idea of, "oh, a Pan Indian revolution," you know? That wasn't the thinking. The thinking was, you know, we're gonna come together and maintain these distinct identities.

**Sally Helm:** Can you gimme a sense of like, what would've been difficult or impressive about the fact that they were able to create this alliance?

**Chief Barnes:** The one that surprises me the most is the distance. We all take it for granted that we can get across the United States lickity-split. Can you imagine? How do you get from Alabama to Detroit in a time before rail, in a time before steamboat, time before airplane? And yet, here's this guy, building up this giant alliance.

**Sally Helm:** White Americans nearby are taking notice. They start referring to Tenskwatawa as "the Prophet." They can see what a stir he's causing—all this movement and migration. In northern Michigan, one U.S. Army captain remarks: "there appears to be an extensive movement among the savages of this quarter...belts of wampum are rapidly circulating from one tribe to another."

William Henry Harrison is watching all this unfold from his estate in the territorial capital. And he isn't too worried at first. It seems to him this is mostly a religious movement. And they're self-reliant, keeping to themselves. Although...the community at Greenville is itself something of a provocation. Because it's on the American side of the line established by the *treaty* of Greenville. The one that grabbed large swaths of Indian land, and that Tecumseh refused to sign.

In September of 1807, a group of US frontiersmen goes there to poke around. They ask Tenskwatawa, what are your intentions? Why'd you set up your village across treaty lines? Are you trying to pick a fight? And he reassures them: we're not looking for trouble. In fact, we'll move our settlement across the Wabash River. Farther away from American settlements, and on the other side of the treaty line.

In the spring of 1808, they do just that. They call their new community: Prophetstown.

**Sally Helm:** Are there ways that you would've felt in Prophetstown the influence of Tenskwatawa's teachings, would those have somehow made the town feel different from other Shawnee communities that were not run by Tenskwatawa?

**Chief Barnes:** I don't know if I would call it run by Tenskwatawa, probably was be more like Burning Man. You have people speaking different languages. You got people just showing up,

**right? Staking out a space for themselves. There'd have been that quality to it that'd been like, oh, this feels a little bit like a commune.**

**Sally Helm:** Tecumseh has an important role in this community, too. He's still a diplomat. An alliance builder. He's helping to bring people to Prophetstown. Chief Barnes said, that may actually be how he got his name.

**Chief Barnes:** The name, Tecumseh, I almost think that's a title. Not his real given name by his parents. Tee-com-tee, the one who flies from this place to the next. So, he's crossing these voids of geography, you know, jumping from one place to another. But it's not just him, it's the word of Tenskwatawa. The word of Tenskwatawa is also traveling.

**Sally Helm:** The religious movement is intimately tied up with the politics. The alliance building. Peter Cozzens told us; William Henry Harrison starts to realize that.

**Peter Cozzens:** He senses this growing emphasis on, well, we're, you know, we're gonna not just unite spiritually, but we're, you know, we're gonna hold onto what lands we have and you're not gonna get any more land Governor Harrison from us. No more divide and conquer.

**Sally Helm:** This is a problem for Harrison. He has his own ambitions. And he's worried the brothers might derail them.

Harrison is still governor of the Indiana *territory*. But that territory has been shrinking. Michigan and Illinois, which had been part of Indiana when Harrison first took over, have since broken off to become independent territories of their own. So, being governor of the Indiana territory doesn't mean all that it once did. Peter Cozzens told us: Harrison wants more.

**Peter Cozzens:** He has visions of being a state governor. And to be governor of a state, you've gotta have more land and you gotta have more people.

**Sally Helm:** To turn Indiana into a full state of its own...he's going to need to step on the brothers' toes. But he starts by talking to *other* indigenous leaders.

**Peter Cozzens:** in 1809, just to test the waters he negotiates what's called a Treaty of Fort Wayne with a, number of malleable chiefs who he literally, uh, lubricates for the proceedings with alcohol and bribes, and gets them to sign away another larger strip of, of land in Indiana that comes dangerously close to Prophetstown.

**Sally Helm:** Tecumseh hadn't been happy with the treaty of Greenville in the first place. And with this new treaty of Fort Wayne, Harrison is violating even that treaty. Taking MORE land. This is after the brothers have already moved their community to the other side of the treaty line.

**Peter Cozzens:** He's kind of throwing down the gauntlet to Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh

**Sally Helm:** The brothers now have a decision to make: do we fight?

[AD BREAK]

**Sally Helm:** In May of 1810, Tenskwatawa hosts a conference of several hundred western Indians in Prophetstown, to discuss the outrageous new treaty. And people like Harrison begin to realize: if the brothers can rally enough support among other indigenous tribes, they might really be able to take on the US army again... and win.

**Chief Barnes:** What was threatening cause they remember that's just where St. Clair's defeat is really important.

**Sally Helm:** Chief Ben Barnes.

**Chief Barnes:** They don't want that to happen again. They don't wanna see a pan Indian alliance that's going to crush the continental army. So, they're going to need to do something.

**Sally Helm:** Harrison, in fact, is freaking out. In June of 1810, he tells a group of territorial officials and prominent citizens that Tenskwatawa is plotting an attack on his estate. That attack never comes. Still, he sends an interpreter to Prophetstown to threaten the tribes.

"I know your warriors are brave; ours are not less so," he says. "Our bluecoats are more numerous than you can count, and our hunting shirts are like the leaves of the forests or the grains of sands on the Wabash."

The brothers tell them, Tecumseh will be going to William Henry Harrison's estate, to "hold an interview with the governor," face to face. It's a tense, ten-day-long meeting. There's one story about a meeting like this that Chief Barnes likes—whether it really happened or not.

**Chief Barnes:** where they're sitting on a bench and Tecumseh keeps scooting closer and closer and closer along the bench. Until finally, William Henry Harrison has to get up from the bench or be driven off the bench by Tecumseh, and he makes a comment about that's what it feels like to be Shawnee, is that you keep scooting and scooting and scooting and scooting until we have no more space. I'm sure that's apocryphal and it's probably not true, but I love that story.

**Sally Helm:** Harrison later tells a story about one moment where the hostility nearly bubbles over.

**Peter Cozzens:** Harrison is, sitting on the front steps of his home, and Tecumseh says, sitting on the ground in front of him with his delegation.

**Sally Helm:** Tecumseh is saying: you know that this Fort Wayne treaty crosses a line.

**Peter Cozzens:** Look, we are not gonna yield up another inch of Indian ground to you. You know, you've gone as far as you're going to go.

**Sally Helm:** Harrison says he won't return the land. And he defends the Americans' actions. Before his interpreter has the chance to translate:

**Peter Cozzens:** Tecumseh understands English. I think unbeknownst that Harrison perhaps. And he loses his temper, and he gets up and, reaches for his hatchet, Harrison reaches for his saber. The militia draw their weapons, and it almost comes to blows.

**Sally Helm:** Everyone's on their feet, weapons drawn.

**Peter Cozzens:** But fortunately, cooler heads prevail. And that conference ends clearly on a sour note. I mean, Harrison's, I'm not giving up that ground, you can't expect me to, it's up to the great father, the President. Tecumseh saying, well, if the great father will not do this, then to paraphrase Tecumseh, he can sit in Washington and drink his fine wine while you and I battle it out here on the ground.

**Sally Helm:** Tecumseh leaves knowing that war is inevitable. He has to make sure he's ready to put up a fight. And by the following summer, he has a plan.

First: he re-establishes the alliance with Great Britain, which is feuding with the U.S, mostly over territory and trade. Now the British start supplying the Shawnee brothers with weapons. They want their indigenous allied armed in case the conflict with the U.S. comes to blows.

Tecumseh makes a parallel calculation. If he combines these British weapons with a much larger allied indigenous force...that might be enough to keep the Americans at bay. So, he decides it's time to make a big move. Take this alliance to the next level.

**Peter Cozzens:** So, in the summer of 1811, Tecumseh decides that he needs to expand the alliance south of the Ohio River, that he needs to go and talk to the Choctaw, the Cherokee, the Creek, and the Chickasaw. These are tribes numbering in like 20 to 25,000 each and they hold the entire deep south.

**Sally Helm:** Makes sense. Their support could tip the scales.

**Peter Cozzens:** But Tecumseh makes what I consider to be a huge strategic error.

**Sally Helm:** Inexplicably, he reveals his plans to his enemy.

**Peter Cozzens:** Tecumseh tells Harrison that I'm going to rise south of the Ohio River, I'm gonna go among my Indian brethren, in the Cherokee and Creek, in Chickasaw Cha Todd country, to make common cause to protect what we have.

**Sally Helm:** Harrison hears this... and sees an opening.

**Peter Cozzens:** Harrison realizes that Tecumseh really is the military, political, heart and soul of this alliance. So, Harrison figures. Okay, now is a time for me to strike.

**Sally Helm:** Tecumseh leaves Prophetstown for his big recruitment drive. And Harrison writes to Washington.

**Peter Cozzens:** Essentially cooks up a non-existent Indian threat. And he sells the War Department and the Madison administration on the need to preemptively attack Prophetstown.

**Sally Helm:** Harrison tells the secretary of war; *I'll try to preserve the peace*. Then, with over a thousand men behind him, he marches toward Prophetstown.

**Peter Cozzens:** Suddenly William Henry Harrison appears literally on the doorstep of Prophetstown, he catches Tenskwatawa and the other Indians completely unaware. Tenskwatawa sends out a courier asks that, the Americans stop where they are, on the bank of, a creek that, that empties into Tippecanoe—

**Sally Helm:** Because they're not supposed to be there.

**Peter Cozzens:** They're not supposed to be there. This is Indian land.

**Sally Helm:** Sources disagree on whether Tenskwatawa ordered his forces to attack. Before Tecumseh left town, he'd asked his brother to keep things from coming to blows. But that's not what happens. Shooting breaks out and a battle begins.

At first, things are going well for Tenskwatawa's warriors.

**Peter Cozzens:** Harrison's men had established these big bonfires all around the periphery of their camp that literally, blinded them to the Indians, but conversely silhouetted them, to the Indian. Plus, it was raining cats and dogs. So, the Indians were able to come up very close to the whites with a matter of a few yards' unseen by the soldiers.

**Sally Helm:** But things quickly begin to devolve. There's a group of warriors tasked with capturing Harrison himself, but they're thrown for a loop.

**Peter Cozzens:** Harrison got on a different horse than his own. They were supposed to be looking for a guy in a white horse. He got on a different horse so they couldn't find him.

**Sally Helm:** Tenskwatawa's warriors are running out of ammunition.

**Peter Cozzens:** So, they break off the fight. Harrison pursues and the Indians abandon Prophetstown.

**Sally Helm:** Then... Harrison and his forces burn Prophetstown to the ground.

**Peter Cozzens:** He goes home, and he sends this, you know, this bombastic message: I have defeated the Shawnee brother's alliance aren't I great? You know that that alliance is broken for good.

**Sally Helm:** It's a great sell to the folks in Washington. But, Cozzens says, all this bragging turns out to be premature.

**Peter Cozzens:** The most important fallout is that more Indians rally to Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa's cause, that within a few months, by the following spring, by the spring of 1812, they have more followers than they did before Harrison launched his attack because Harrison's attack convinced a lot of wavering Indians who were still well removed from the area of conflict who were living in Wisconsin or in northern Illinois, geez, the Americans were actually gonna come on to Indian land and attack us on our own land. They attacked Tenskwatawa on his own ground and so, it drew more adherence to their cause and, and it strengthened greatly.

**Sally Helm:** That summer, those squabbles between the British and the Americans break out into all-out war. The War of 1812. President James Madison justifies that war, in part, by pointing to the Shawnee brothers.

**Peter Cozzens:** As Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa rebuilt their alliance, you know, there were these, these revenge raids that occurred, and the Madison administration, used them as, as evidence that the British are, you know, stirring up trouble and instigating Indians to violence.

**Sally Helm:** Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa and their alliance fight alongside the British in the War of 1812. At its apex, they have more than six thousand warriors in battle. People that flocked to the cause after Harrison's attack near the Tippecanoe River.

**Peter Cozzens:** Tecumseh, he's instrumental in helping the British, capture Detroit from the Americans and capture the entire American army in the Midwest, and hold Michigan, for almost a year.

**Sally Helm:** For a time, it's looking like Tecumseh and the British may even be able to force the Americans out of part of Ohio. That might mean that the brothers could reclaim the Ohio River Valley as the homeland they've been dreaming of.

But then things start to fall apart. The Americans, led by William Henry Harrison, force the fighting North, to Ontario. And Tecumseh's alliance starts to crumble. Within a matter of weeks, he goes from six thousand warriors to six hundred because war in Canada—that's not what's motivating the indigenous warriors.

**Peter Cozzens:** Remember, they're fighting with the British because they want British help in establishing and maintaining a homeland and they had no desire to fight strictly for the British in Canada.

**Sally Helm:** Finally, in a fateful battle up in Ontario, in October of 1813, Tecumseh is killed. Harrison would later write that he himself volunteered to examine the body to confirm his enemy's death. It's a tragic end to a defiant life.

But Professor Stephen Warren believes...it's really Tenskwatawa, the surviving brother, who suffers most. Not Tecumseh.

**Steve Warren:** He had the great good fortune of dying on the battlefield. That was not the case for the Shawnee prophet. He had to live through defeat.

**Sally Helm:** When the British lose the War of 1812, Tenskwatawa is pushed into exile. Over a decade later, he tries negotiating with the governor of the Michigan territory, who says, sure you can come back. But only if you get the rest of the Shawnee to leave their homeland in Ohio and move west of the Mississippi.

**Steve Warren:** And so, here this opponent of American expansion who leads this incredible revitalization movement, faces an impossible decision, remain in exile in Canada, or contribute to the exile of his own people from Ohio. And so, he chooses the latter. He had to build a new way of life for his people on terms established by the United States. And so that affected the way we remember him.

**Sally Helm:** Meanwhile, his brother increasingly becomes a symbol of his own.

**Steve Warren:** After Tecumseh's death, people who fought against him literally used Tecumseh as a means of defining their own greatness. Here I'm thinking about people like William Henry Harrison, who, ran his campaign of 1840, with the slogan Tippecanoe and Tyler too. Demonstrating his ability against the ultimate warrior Tecumseh.

**Sally Helm:** “Tippecanoe and Tyler, too” – a slogan so catchy that it persists to this day. It becomes one of the main ways that Americans remember the Battle of Tippecanoe, and by extension, these two Shawnee brothers. But historians like Peter Cozzens agree: their lives represent something much bigger.

**Sally Helm:** Given that the movement does ultimately crumble, why is it still important?

**Peter Cozzens:** Tecumseh was the most important successful Indian political and military leader in American Indian history. Tenskwatawa was the most important Indian prophet in American Indian History, and together they were one of the most important siblings in American history, writ large. And they very well could have achieved their goal, of an Indian homeland. had things gone differently in the war of 1812. It was far from preordained.

**Sally Helm:** They fought long odds, and nearly prevailed.

**Peter Cozzens:** It shows, the power that, a religious, social revivalist movement can have among was really, you know, a disparate people, and then how they can unite under a charismatic leader to fight for a homeland and come very, very close to achieving it.

**Sally Helm:** Shawnee people celebrate Tecumseh Memorial Day every October as a day of service. And Tenskwatawa's call to return to tradition—Chief Barnes says that’s still felt, too.

**Chief Barnes:** Because of Tenskwatawa, Shawnee people promise to uphold the traditions of our ancestors, to uphold the language of our ancestors, to continue to practice that religion. It is no accident that we still have those things today. We have a thriving language program. So, it's very, it's something I'm very proud of.

**Sally Helm:** And Chief Barnes is emulating the brothers in another way.

**Chief Barnes:** The metaphor of two brothers working together is not lost on me. I am the elected chief of this tribe, and my younger brother is speaker for our ceremonial grounds where we worship at. So, there's this living metaphor that I have between me and my brother, I am working the diplomacy and he works the cultural and language and religious preservation side. I hope it doesn't end as badly for me and Joel. But I'm very much cognizant of the legacy of those two brothers.

[CREDITS]

**Sally Helm:** Thanks for listening to History This Week. For more moments throughout history that are also worth watching, check your local TV listings to find out what's on the History Channel today.

If you want to get in touch, please shoot us an email at our email address, [HistoryThisWeek@History.com](mailto:HistoryThisWeek@History.com), or you can leave us a voicemail: 212-351-0410.

Thanks to our guests, Chief Ben Barnes, Peter Cozzens, author of *Tecumseh and the Prophet: The Heroic Struggle for America's Heartland*, and professor Stephen Warren, author of *The Shawnees and Their Neighbors, 1795-1870*. Chief Barnes and Stephen Warren are co-editors of the book, *Replanting Cultures: Community-Engaged Scholarship in Indian Country*. And, look out for Cozzens' forthcoming book, *A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South*.

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This episode was produced by Julia Press. It was story edited by Jim O'Grady and sound designed by Dan Rosato and Brian Flood. HISTORY This Week is also produced by Morgan Givens, Rebecca Nolan, and me, Sally Helm. Our associate producer is Emma Fredericks. Our senior producer is Ben Dickstein. Our supervising producer is McCamey Lynn and our executive producer is Jessie Katz.

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