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The Newark Earthworks

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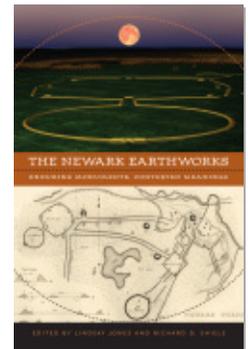
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FOREWORD

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Glenna J. Wallace

Chief, Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma

I discovered the Newark Earthworks just a few years ago when I traveled to Ohio to attend a lecture by British historian John Sugden. Ohio is the ancestral home of the Shawnee people, and I am the chief of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma.

I have visited many impressive sites around the world, having traveled to more than seventy countries. Part of my responsibilities as a faculty member at Crowder College was to organize international travel opportunities for our students. Twice a year I led students and community residents to significant cultural and historical sites throughout the world. In that capacity I researched and visited many of the most famous and most impressive sites: the Great Wall of China, the Pyramids in Egypt, Stonehenge in the United Kingdom, the Coliseum in Rome, the Acropolis and ruins in Greece, Mount Uluru in Australia, the Vatican and the Sistine Chapel, as well as many others. I continue to travel a great deal since retiring from Crowder College and becoming chief of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma.

One of my great interests is learning the history of the Shawnee people in Ohio. We were the first tribe to be forcibly removed from our homeland as part of the federal government's policy of Indian removal in the days of Andrew Jackson. Our people walked from Ohio to Missouri and Oklahoma, hundreds of miles, and large numbers of them died on the way. We had our own Trail of Tears. We had not always been in Ohio, and we were not the builders of Ohio's earthworks, but we had been there since the eighteenth century, and we had cared for the earthworks.

I want to learn about our history in Ohio, and I want my people to learn about it. For that purpose I have brought large numbers of Shawnee people to visit Ohio, not once but four times since I became the chief in 2006. And I have read the literature, of course, including biographies of Tecumseh and Blue Jacket written by John Sugden.

In the spring of 2007 I learned that John Sugden was coming to The Ohio State University to give a lecture, and I traveled to Ohio with three of my staff to attend that lecture.

Ohio State is in Columbus, of course. However, Ohio State has a regional campus in Newark, Ohio, which is also the site of incredible earthen enclosures called the Newark Earthworks. I went to Sugden's lecture in Columbus and traveled to Newark the next day simply because the Ohio State faculty who hosted the lecture were taking Sugden to Newark to tour the earthworks. I wanted to spend more time with this author, who was most knowledgeable about two of the most important leaders in my tribe's history. Sugden was my interest.

Try to imagine the shock and total disbelief I experienced when I stepped out of the car and looked out at this intricate array of earthen walls and landscapes where my people, my ancestors had lived more than three hundred years ago. It was surreal. I had spent at least thirty years researching cultures and histories of civilizations throughout the world. I had read everything I could about my Shawnee tribe: all the places they lived, wars they fought, how they dressed, how they worked, how they ate, what they built, how they believed, what they valued, and how they worshipped. I knew about Serpent Mound, but I had never heard of the Newark Earthworks. I had never even heard of Newark, Ohio. I was stunned at what I saw. I was in a state of disbelief.

There before me lay an extensive series of hills or walls—in short, earthworks built by Native Americans nearly two thousand years ago, built with earth carried one basket at a time. They appear so simplistic, yet they contain a mathematical complexity that is mind boggling. How these Native Americans who have commonly been depicted as savages could conceive and construct this massive earthen architecture is as phenomenal as Egyptian slaves constructing the Pyramids.

The Newark Earthworks are beautiful and massive. That day we visited one part of the complex, the Octagon Earthworks: earthen walls that enclose an octagon that covers fifty acres connected to a perfect circle that encloses another twenty acres. I forgot all about John Sugden.

The Newark Earthworks are owned by the Ohio Historical Society, and the Octagon is leased to a private country club and covered by a golf course. It was a warm sunny spring day, and there were many golfers. When we tried to walk to where we could view the Earthworks, we were not made to feel

welcome. Quite the contrary, everyone seemed to resent our presence. “Get back,” cart drivers kept shouting rather gruffly. “Get back, you are in the way.”

I could not believe it. My people, my ancestors treasured these mounds. Perhaps they did not build them, but they loved them, protected them, revered them. They knew their importance, and these earthworks were sacred to them. So I experienced the beauty, the awe inspired by these beautiful ancient earthworks, but I was not permitted to walk on the sacred grounds of my people. I could not even approach, much less touch or feel these precious earthworks. Instead I as a Shawnee citizen and tribal chief could only experience the rude resentment of golfers who have somehow taken over the site.

My reaction at first was both amazement and awe. I have experienced the Pyramids, the catacombs, the Great Wall, Stonehenge. The Newark Earthworks are every bit as impressive as all of these. And they are in Ohio, where my people lived before removal. And they were built by ancestors of American Indians. How could I not have known about them? I know so much about so many of the world’s great sites. How could I not have known about Newark? Are they written about? Are they talked about? Are they appreciated? The answer was no.

Then my reaction turned to anger. Who are these people telling me to get back? How can it be that they are playing golf on this sacred site? And then I thought of a biblical scripture, “Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do.”

I continue to be amazed, awe stricken, disappointed, and, yes, angry.

That day I met a group of people who live in Ohio and feel much as I do. These are people who also find the current situation unacceptable, even as they appreciate the fact that the Newark Earthworks have been preserved when so many other earthworks have been destroyed. These people are associated with Ohio State’s Newark Earthworks Center. These are the people who hosted a scholarly symposium that produced the essays in this book.

That day I made a commitment—to learn all I could about the Newark Earthworks, to teach others about them, and to preserve them. I have returned repeatedly to visit these people and to visit the site, and several of these people have visited me in Oklahoma. I have joined them in the effort to preserve the site and win the recognition that it deserves by winning inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

I continue to be amazed, awe stricken, disappointed, and angry. But now I also feel hopeful.

THE NEWARK EARTHWORKS



