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Creating Delaware Homelands in the Ohio Country

DAWN MARSH

On June 24, 1729, Checochinican made a final appeal to Patrick Gordon, the governor of the Pennsylvania province, to protect and preserve the homeland of the Brandywine band of the Delaware Indians. He reminded the governor that this parcel of land was “greatly reduced” relative to the original compact they made with William Penn, the Quaker founder of the colony. In this final appeal for justice, Checochinican reminded Governor Gordon that the Delawares continued to honor Penn’s desire for “peace and love” but that local Quaker residents of Chester County were not honoring the borders agreed on by the Pennsylvania assembly. While this Delaware leader reminded the governor of these details, he put greater emphasis on their increasing inability to live in their homeland.

“We have been forbid the use of timber growing thereon . . . for making cabins.” He explained that the building of mills and dams ruined the river and prevented the seasonal spawning of fish, a vital source of their food.¹ Checochinican carefully clarified what would satisfy the needs of his people and what had been guaranteed to them by William Penn and his agents. He explained that the small size of the parcel did not matter as long as they had access to the forests for timber, the fertile bottomlands for their gardens,

The author would like to thank colleagues Daniel Richter, Alyssa Mt. Pleasant, Lisa Brooks, Kathleen DuVal, Rob Harper, and Mark Nicholas for their insightful comments and encouragement during the writing of this essay.

1. Samuel Hazard, ed., *Pennsylvania Archives: First Series: Selected and Arranged from Original Documents in the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: J. Severns, 1852).

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and an unencumbered river for fish. Checochinican's complaints about encroachment were acknowledged as valid in Philadelphia, but no one did anything to stop local landowners from parceling, selling, and occupying lands belonging to the Brandywine Lenape.²

Not long after his appeal, the majority of Checochinican's band of Delawares abandoned their home on the Brandywine River and relocated on lands to the north and west. They departed eastern Pennsylvania as a community because the lands they lived on for centuries became inhospitable and they were unable to live according to the Lenape way. This was one of many relocations taking place throughout Delaware communities in the early eighteenth century. No one could have predicted this move would mark the beginning of a Delaware diaspora that would continue for two more centuries.³ That story is remarkable because the Delawares, their culture, and their unique identity and sovereignty as a people continue to thrive in the United States and Canada. This essay examines only one aspect of that greater story.

In each move the Delaware communities made, generation to generation, from Pennsylvania to Ohio, Canada, Indiana, Kansas, Missouri, Texas, and Oklahoma, each time they reestablished what they hoped would be a permanent place, they consciously and unconsciously constructed a new Delaware homeland. There were visible and invisible elements they added to these landscapes to create familiarity and stability. Externally and internally, at each place of relocation, the Delaware people intended to make the new land their home. The forced and voluntary relocations, often in quick succession, might have destroyed another culture. As one Delaware elder recently stated, "For a long time the Delaware knew they would not die where they were born."⁴

Identifying, marking, and bonding with a geographic landscape is only one way in which a culture establishes a homeland. It was equally important that the Delaware people were recognized by non-Delawares as a unique and separate people. The political and economic forces that shaped United States Indian policies through the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries sought to immerse indigenous identities under geographic regions to expedite their colonization of Indian lands.⁵ Representatives of the new United States acknowledged and rewarded singular leaders of mixed ethnic identities

2. Donald H. Kent, ed., *Pennsylvania and Delaware Treaties, 1629–1737*, vol. 1, *Early American Documents: Treaties and Laws, 1607–1789* (Washington, D.C.: University Publications of America, 1979), 324–25.

3. C. A. Weslager, *The Delaware Indian Westward Migration: With the Texts of Two Manuscripts, 1821–22, Responding to General Lewis Cass's Inquiries About Lenape Culture and Language* (Wallingford, Pa.: Middle Atlantic Press, 1978).

4. Personal communication, Michael Pace (Delaware), Sept. 2007.

as representatives of whole cultures. Alliances were always a cultural attribute of the Delawares, but the federal goal of assimilation and the end of Delaware identity was not. As the Delawares left their ancestral homeland east of Appalachia, their cultural and political identity and autonomy faced its greatest threat. The Delawares responded by asserting a new cohesiveness and tribal unity exhibited in their political and military strength as well as their desire to live closer together in larger communities, often multiethnic, but clearly Delaware, towns.⁶ Therefore, while alliances with other Indian communities continued as they always had, the Delawares persisted in protecting and transmitting their unique social, political, religious, and cultural identity generation after generation, relocation after relocation.

Recent studies on the idea of homeland stand in juxtaposition to group identities based on nation-state constructions. Cultural geographers are taking the lead by proposing theoretical models that offer homeland theory as a holistic land-based framework to understand American character and the development of the American West.⁷ Following that reasoning, the research in this essay applies this holistic, land-based framework to Native American homelands and considers how the Delawares created their homeland, wherever they moved. What elements of Delaware culture contributed to their success relative to other less successful struggles to maintain cultural identity?

Homelands are places where people, a community, bond with a physical landscape in an uncommon manner.⁸ Like ethnicity, homelands are socially constructed. There are numerous approaches to understanding how a given community identifies a homeland. A self-defined group needs to live in a place long enough to adjust to the natural environment and to leave their mark on the landscape. How they leave that mark is visible evidence of establishing the groups' bond with the land. But beyond the physical and visible aspects of homeland identification, a community of people like the Delawares

5. For federal Indian policy during the removal era, see Ronald N. Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2002); David E. Wilkins and K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *Uneven Ground: American Indian Sovereignty and Federal Law* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2001).

6. Michael N. McConnell, *A Country Between: The Upper Ohio Valley and Its Peoples, 1724–1774* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1992), 225; Amy C. Schutt, *Peoples of the River Valleys: The Odyssey of the Delaware Indians, Early American Studies* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 129.

7. Richard L. Nostrand, Lawrence E. Estaville, and Richard L. Nostrand, eds., *Homelands: A Geography of Culture and Place across America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001), xiv–xv.

8. Douglas A. Hurt, "Defining American Homelands: A Creek Nation Example, 1828–1907," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 21, no. 1 (2003): 19–21; Richard Pillsbury, "The Pennsylvania Homeland," in Lawrence E. Estaville and Richard L. Nostrand, eds., *Homelands: A Geography of Culture and Place across America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001), 24, 39.

relies on the invisible aspects of identifying homeland. They create and recognize an unseen layer of usage, memory, and significance.⁹ Stories, family histories, and spiritual worldview imbue the homeland with life and allow the Delawares to take their place on that landscape. By examining the Delawares' worldview and their own history, we can start to understand why they were successful in their multiple relocations. This essay will also consider the physical elements and locations of the new Delaware towns that emerged in the Ohio territory and what qualities identified them to Europeans and Native Americans as Delawares. Finally, I will try to understand what invisible qualities they imbued their new lands with in order to call them home.

ORIGINS, HISTORY, AND SPIRITUAL WORLDVIEW

The history of the Delaware people is a story of migration and relocation deeply rooted in their identity as a people. The Delaware genesis is a story of relocation and a search for a homeland. Their own history as a people, before and after European contact, is a story of negotiating their sovereignty and their homeland throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Their spiritual worldview allowed them to adapt and often thrive in a rapidly changing political, economic, and social landscape that tore other peoples apart and caused irreparable and unrecoverable damage to other communities.

The Delaware spiritual world has much in common with other Algonquian peoples. Life begins when the creator forms the earth out of the mud on a turtle's back. This omnipotent creator is also responsible for giving life to other divine entities, all members of a sacred family. The sun and thunder are the elder brothers, corn is the mother, three of the four directions are grandfathers, and the south is grandmother. A spiritual force infuses all life on Turtle Island—animals, astronomical phenomena, even weather. The creator is consciousness and dreams or thinks the world and its inhabitants into being. According to these traditions, life, from birth to death, is a journey to immortality or a reuniting with the creator and is obtained by living a right life. Heeding the guidance of spiritual helpers and the faithful practice of ceremonies and rituals to honor the creator and all living things is fundamental to successfully completing this journey. The ethical underpinnings of this spiritual worldview depend on reciprocity, balance, and peaceful co-existence in the world, and they gave shape to Lenape spiritual life as well as their social, political, and economic practices.¹⁰

9. Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1996), 5–8; Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination* (Vancouver/Seattle: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 2005), 3–11.

10. For sources on Delaware cosmology see John Bierhorst, *Mythology of the Lenape*:

The eighteenth-century diaspora of the Lenape people out of their homelands in eastern Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York, and New Jersey was not the first relocation in their history as a people.¹¹ Their own history, passed on from generation to generation, teaches that they once lived far to the west across a great river or sea. Because of internal divisions in this ancient homeland, most of the Delawares initiated a journey to find a new land. At some point in this distant past, the people became divided and a faction of the larger population was left behind on the western side of this great water. The remainder of the people found a land to settle in. Some traditions recount that the Lenape had to fight the ancestors of the Iroquois for this new land, beginning a tradition of animosity that would continue into modern times. Eventually they settled along the rivers and tributaries of the mid-Atlantic coast and prospered until European encroachment and dispossession once again prompted their search for a new home. A history of relocation and a worldview that presented all of Turtle Island as a sacred space infused Delaware culture with an intrinsically adaptable framework for identifying and bonding with their homeland, wherever that might be. The Delaware heart is where their home is.

The Delaware tenet that the Earth rests on the turtle's back, together with the belief that one geographic location does not take precedence over another, is critical to understanding how they identified and transformed their landscape into a home. While other Northeastern Woodlands tribes share the archetype of Turtle Island and its sacredness, the Delaware people assign additional qualities to the turtle, such as perseverance, loyalty, and longevity that make their cosmological interpretation unique.¹²

In comparison, other indigenous communities have very fixed geographic ideas about what defines their homeland. Four sacred mountains enclose Dinétah, the Navajo homeland. While all of the earth is sacred, this particular location is “the world, exclusively for the Diné.” Removal from this very specific geographically and spiritually designated space caused

Guide and Texts (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1995); Daniel G. Brinton, *The Lenape and Their Legends* (Philadelphia, 1885); Jasper Danckaerts, Bartlett Burleigh James, and J. Franklin Jameson, *Journal of Jasper Danckaerts, 1679–1680, Original Narratives of Early American History*, vol. 16 (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1952); John Gottlieb Ernestus Heckewelder, *History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations: Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1876); Jay Miller, “Why the World Is on the Turtle’s Back,” *Man* 9, no. 2 (1974); William Wilmon Newcomb, *The Culture and Acculturation of the Delaware Indians* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan, 1956); Gladys Tantaquidgeon, *Folk Medicine of the Delaware and Related Algonkian Indians* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1972).

11. Brinton, *The Lenape and Their Legends*, 130–43; Heckewelder, *History, Manners, and Customs*, 47–52; Guy Soulliard Klett, ed., *Journals of Charles Beatty, 1762–1769* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ., 1962), 53.

12. Miller, “Why the World Is on the Turtle’s Back,” 306.

harm to the Navajo people.¹³ While the Navajo and Delaware share a migration story as part of their defining history, unlike the Delaware, the Navajo story has an endpoint, divinely named and enclosed. They were traveling to Dinétah, a sacred, final destination.

Similarly, the Kiowa also share a history that includes their journey out of the northern Rocky Mountains to Rainy Mountain in the Wichita Mountains.¹⁴ N. Scott Momaday memorialized and honored this story in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and acknowledged the importance of this particular place to the Kiowa people. The journey was a tale of coming out of darkness, of going east to the dawn. It signaled the beginning of a golden age for the Kiowa people, and they were transformed by their journey east and south. Rainy Mountain marks the end of that journey and another transformation of the Kiowa people.¹⁵ Ultimately the Delawares do not have a predestined or divinely appointed physical place on Turtle Island. Unlike the Navajo and the Kiowa, the journey of the Delawares from the distant past to the present was not limited or enhanced by a definite place on the Earth. At each relocation, the Delaware people settled on new lands hoping it would be a settled home for generations.

CONSOLIDATING DELAWARE IDENTITY

The movement of Delaware people across the Appalachian Mountains into western Pennsylvania and Ohio was the first major relocation of the Delaware people in centuries. This large-scale migration under duress produced some fundamental changes in the way they organized their new communities. The years between 1765 and 1795 proved to be an ordeal from which the Delawares emerged a changed but strengthened people.¹⁶ The Ohio country, which they believed would be a new homeland for generations to come, lasted little more than a generation or two for most. This crucible of the old northwest inspired changes for the Delawares that proved to be critical to their national success, despite their failure to defend and remain in this new

13. Stephen C. Jett, "The Navajo Homeland," in Estaville and Nostrand, eds., *Homelands*, 176–77.

14. Steven M. Schnell, "The Kiowa Homeland in Oklahoma," *Geographical Review* 90, no. 2 (2000): 169.

15. N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, 1st ed. (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1969), 5–7.

16. For an overview of this period see R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest, 1720–1830: A History of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1996); Michael N. McConnell, *A Country Between: The Upper Ohio Valley and Its Peoples, 1724–1774* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1992); Weslager, *The Delaware Indian Westward Migration*.

land. The French and Indian War, Pontiac's War, and the American Revolution divided and united Delawares across new and complex lines of alliance. During this period the Delawares expressed a new national identity not seen before. Chiefs and their places of residence illustrate the complex nature of these new expressions of political organization. Leaders of the Wolf, Turkey, and Turtle clans located the seats of their authority at specific settlements, which were generally larger than the typical Lenape village along the Delaware or Susquehanna rivers. Kuskuskies (New Castle, Pennsylvania) was the home of Wolf clan leaders. The Turkey chief established his authority at Kittanning (near Pittsburgh) and later at Tuscarawas in Ohio. The Turtle chief Netawatwees (Newcomer) lived at Saukunk in Pennsylvania and later at Gekelemukpechink (Newcomerstown) in Ohio. Goschocking (Coshocton), a former Wyandot town, became the seat of authority for Delaware leader White Eyes, a strong supporter of the revolutionary American colonists.¹⁷

This new centralized organization rested on singular clan leaders, "a chief above chiefs," who expedited political and economic negotiations in a time of increasingly rapid and complex change. Empirical maneuvers between the French and English, complicated by colonial land grabs and an aggressive swarm of new European settlers, pushed the Delawares and other indigenous communities to experiment with new forms of political organization and representation. These rapid changes also forced a very real restructuring of settlement organization. Multiethnic Indian settlements were not new to the Eastern Woodlands peoples, but the rapidness with which these settlements ascended and diminished in importance placed great pressure on all the indigenous residents who were in the path of European colonial ambitions. The times demanded they strengthen their sovereign and cultural identity or stand to lose it to the coming empirical firestorm. The one experience many of these native communities shared was dispossession. And the one thing they all wanted was to live as free and sovereign peoples on their own lands.

VISIBLE ASPECTS OF DELAWARE TOWNS

Like Checochinichan and their other ancestors in the east, the Delawares in the Ohio country settled on fertile bottomlands that were generally well drained. The Delawares were farmers from their earliest days and continued to rely on corn as their single most important commodity for subsistence and trade. Corn grew well on these new lands, as did their other crops, and the

17. Duane Champagne, "The Delaware Revitalization Movement of the Early 1760s: A Suggested Reinterpretation," *American Indian Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1988): 108–9; Newcomb, *The Culture and Acculturation of the Delaware Indians*, 50–53, 125, 75; Weslager, *The Delaware Indian Westward Migration*, 27.

river tributaries provided access to fish as well. Homelands in the east became inhospitable because “they were no longer allowed to plant their gardens,” and the dams built by the colonists destroyed their access to fish downstream. The town locations were also important because they were aligned with major crossroads of news and trade.¹⁸ But the Delawares did not survive on food and trade alone. Access to timber for building cabins and providing fuel for cooking and heat through the cold months was of equal importance in satisfying the basic needs of Delaware communities. As the Delaware people moved farther west into the rolling flatlands of western Ohio and Indiana, this resource was a chief concern. The Delawares who moved west in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were culturally and psychologically equipped to respond to the new demands placed on them. They knew what they needed to begin, yet again, to create a permanent homeland: timber, good soil, and water. Their hard work and fundamental beliefs in who they were as a people turned this new land into their homeland.

The most important structural aspect of Delaware communities that carried over across generations and locations was the organization of their communities as towns and not the smaller scattered settlements of earlier generations. Whether these towns were the small, clustered villages lining the drainages of the Delaware River valley or the larger, multiethnic towns organized along the rivers and drainages of the Ohio country, the Delaware people enjoyed living in close proximity to their neighbors, who were most often members of an extended family network. Most Delaware communities east of the Appalachian Mountains were generally locally dispersed but relatively unconsolidated.¹⁹ While there were some well-known towns with larger populations, like Shamokin and Passayunk, most Delaware villages, before this major diaspora, contained four to twelve homes. These small settlements were often located only several miles apart from other small settlements and were scattered along tributary systems. They were often shared hunting, fishing, and ceremonial resources. In the Ohio country larger towns that contained hundreds of families and occupied larger tracts of land replaced these dispersed small settlements.

Netawatwees (Newcomer) leadership shaped the destiny of the two most important Delaware towns in Ohio territory: Gekelemukpechink (Newcomerstown) and Goschocking (Coshocton). A short geographic distance separated the two towns, but both the indigenous and European settler populations understood the distinctive importance of each town. Netawatwees

18. Helen Hornbeck Tanner and Miklos Pinther, *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History*, The Civilization of the American Indian Series, vol. 174 (Norman: Published for the Newberry Library by the Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 75, 80, 85, 88.

19. Heckewelder, *History, Manners, and Customs*, 52; Jay Miller, “Old Religion among the Delawares,” *Ethnohistory* 47, no. 1 (1997): 114; Schutt, *Peoples of the River Valleys*, 127.

wanted to protect the cultural, political, and economic independence of the Delaware people from invading colonial settlements and the ongoing intertribal and colonial hostilities. He did this by identifying a suitable environment that would support their way of life: farming, trade, fishing, and hunting. Once the site was identified, he and his councilors put out a call to gather their dispersed people into these new locations and took the necessary political steps to protect their new homeland.²⁰

Gekelemukpechink, founded in the 1750s, was the largest settlement of non-Christian Delawares at that time. Netawatwees, recognized as a “great man of the Unami,” founded this Delaware “capital” along the Tuscarawas River in Ohio. This was not his first effort to settle a permanent home for his people. Little is known about Netawatwees’s earliest years.²² There is some suggestion that he may have witnessed the infamous Walking Purchase in 1737, experiencing firsthand the colonists unfettered hunger for land. Delaware leaders were quick to recognize when their towns were no longer safe. From the earliest contacts between indigenous Americans and European and African immigrants, disease, food shortages, and death invaded many Indian towns and villages long before the first sightings of the new arrivals. The Delawares in western Pennsylvania and Ohio territory, like their grandparents and great-grandparents, experienced depletion in game and other resources before the full onslaught of the newest wave of encroachment. Disease traveled Indian paths and trade routes faster than the European settlers could build their squatter cabins and make independent claims to lands no legal documents conferred. In 1758, at a Delaware town near Fort Duquesne, Thomas Kinton watched the indigenous residents kill a rat. A daily event for Kinton, but the Delawares reaction to the rat was extraordinary. The rodent was a portent of the coming ecological, political, and economic maelstrom attending colonial settlement. They remembered the experience of their ancestors and knew the arrival of rats and English “flies” (bees) preceded the loss of lands for their grandmothers and grandfathers. This time, they warned Kinton, they would not be driven from their lands along the Allegheny.²²

Hoping to find peace for his people, Netawatwees moved west and settled briefly at the falls of the Cuyahoga River. Delaware leaders extended an invitation for their scattered people to settle at the site they described as “a large plain, where many Indians can live.”²³ This site quickly proved to be unsatisfactory, and Netawatwees and his settlement relocated farther west

20. McConnell, *A Country Between*, 225; Schutt, *Peoples of the River Valleys*, 158.

21. Schutt, *Peoples of the River Valleys*, 104; Tanner and Pinther, *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History*, 81.

22. Daniel P. Barr, *The Boundaries between Us: Natives and Newcomers Along the Frontiers of the Old Northwest Territory, 1750–1850* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 2006), 25.

23. Schutt, *Peoples of the River Valleys*, 131–34.

along the Tuscarawas River at the present site of Newcomerstown, Ohio. The Delawares brought “their wives and children from Lockstown, Sackum [Saukunk], Schomingo [Shenango], Mamalty, Kaschkasching [Kuskuskies], and other places” to eventually settle along the Tuscarawas, which would become the center of the Delaware life until after 1775, when the great council collectively decided to make Goschocking its new capital.²⁴ After Pontiac’s War, Netawatwees, along with Quequedegatha (White Eyes), organized an effort to convince their people still living in the east to move to Ohio. He extended his call to those Delawares living in New Jersey and along the Susquehanna and Beaver rivers in Pennsylvania to join him in Gekelemukpechink. His invitation also went out to Moravian-associated Delawares and other Indian people, because as a Delaware he understood and honored the importance of alliances. Through his planning, Netawatwees’s westward move to the Ohio territory was the culmination of a “conscious design,” and the organized relocation “reflected the continued integrity of native communities rather than their social decay or collapse.”²⁵

Gekelemukpechink was a well-planned community that satisfied, for a time, the needs of the Delaware people. The Tuscarawas River is a tributary of the larger Muskingum River watershed. It was covered with deciduous forest, including the maple, oak, and elm trees the Delawares used for centuries to build their homes and provide the necessities of life. The land was well-suited for intensive agriculture and provided the fish and game necessary to supplement their traditional needs.²⁶ The lands they occupied in Ohio were not ecologically unfamiliar and provided the separation from Anglo-European settlements Delaware leaders knew was vital to their own cultural success and independence. Netawatwees promised those who followed him that the town was situated on “a large, beautiful, piece of land.” The Delaware population from Lake Erie to the Ohio River at this time was conservatively estimated at approximately 4,000 people,²⁷ and most of them settled very close to major Delaware centers like Netawatwees’s Gekelemukpechink.

Many travelers, traders, soldiers, and missionaries passed through Gekelemukpechink. It was remembered as being a well-ordered community with more than 100 houses and stretching about a mile and a half along the south side of the river. The dwellings in the town included simple cabins, not unlike those the Lenape built in eastern Pennsylvania: basic log cabins (round logs) and wood-planked (framed) homes that were no different from those built by Anglo-European settlers. Netawatwees’s house reflected his status.

24. McConnell, *A Country Between*, 208; Tanner and Pinther, *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History*, 81; Weslager, *The Delaware Indian Westward Migration*, 295.

25. McConnell, *A Country Between*, 209.

26. Tanner and Pinther, *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History*, 14–15, 21–22.

27. McConnell, *A Country Between*, 411.

It was a wood-planked, two-story home with a shingled roof with an exceptional range of amenities, including a cellar, wood floors, staircase, stone chimney, and glass windows. The cabins themselves were not uniquely Delaware in design; but compared to other Indian towns in the Ohio country, the Delaware towns were recognized for their relative modernity and similarity to colonial settlements.²⁸ The Delaware transition from old-style, traditional bark houses to the modern European-influenced wood and log houses was evident at Gekelemukpechink. Along with this modernization of Delaware homes went the acquisition of new skills, tools, and materials to build these homes. The interior of Delaware houses went through a more selective alteration during this period. Some modern frame and log houses still held traditional raised platforms for sleeping and sitting, while bark covered houses contained iron bed frames and other moveable furniture.²⁹

Despite Netawatwees's vision, internal political problems left Gekelemukpechink a divided community. This once-thriving Delaware capital was deserted by 1776. While the political factions that divided many Indian communities during this period are not the subjects of this essay, suffice it to say that lines were drawn between British and American alliances, and further fault lines erupted along nativist and accommodationist agendas. Further ally and enemy lines were drawn between those Delawares who converted to Christianity and those who did not. Indian families, clans, and individuals made choices that led them to follow and settle close to others who shared their particular political, cultural, and spiritual vision of this changing landscape. Leaders like Netawatwees, who early on advocated a nativist strategy, became more convinced that an alignment with the new Americans was in the best interest of his people if their goal was to retain their lands in the Ohio territory.

Many Delawares living in Gekelemukpechink felt threatened by the Moravian missionaries and chose to put distance between them and the mission towns. Some even advocated hostile actions against the Delaware Christian converts. Netawatwees, Quequedegatha, and Killbuck aligned themselves with Americans to varying degrees. Netawatwees eventually advocated moving to the new community of Goschocking because of these divisions. He believed that the proximity of Moravian missions provided access to trade, technology, and friendship. In the process, Netawatwees did not intend to

28. Weslager, *The Delaware Indian Westward Migration*, 290–93; David Zeisberger, Hermann Wellenreuther, and Carola Wessel, eds., *The Moravian Mission Diaries of David Zeisberger, 1772–1781*, Max Kade German-American Research Institute Series (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2005), 88–89.

29. Ives Goddard, "Delaware," in *Handbook of North American Indians: Northeast*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 229–30; Klett, ed., *Journals of Charles Beatty*, 60–61.

sacrifice Delaware independence.³⁰ His choices were meant to protect it. Politics and family relations always played a part in the development of Goschocking because it allowed Delaware families, converted Christians or not, to stay together. Netawatwees never converted to Christianity, but he was sympathetic to those Delawares who chose this path and considered them all under his protection. He understood that an alliance with the Moravian missionaries was important and went to great efforts to convince them to build a mission close to Goschocking.

Netawatwees's dream of a permanent homeland for his people was never realized in Ohio territory. Goschocking is most often remembered because General George Washington ordered its destruction in 1781. Washington's scorched earth policy in Indian country granted Col. Daniel Broadhead blanket authority to initiate one of the first brutal acts of genocide by the new American government against Indian people.³¹ Neither the political alliances with Moravians and Americans nor the leadership of Netawatwees and his successor, Quequedegatha, could explain away the brutality of Washington's policy nor the self-evident disregard for Indian sovereignty in the Ohio country and beyond. The meteoric rise and fall of this Delaware city illustrates how quickly the Delaware people went about constructing a new homeland and developing a strong bond with the land.

Goschocking was a planned community. Moravian missionary David Zeisberger traveled to Goschocking in September 1775 and found the location along the east side of the Muskingum River a very suitable spot for a town. He described it as large and rambling but noted that there were stakes marking the location of future streets. Netawatwees's house was larger than the rest and was the site of meetings between the visiting Moravian representatives and the Delawares who came to visit them during their stay.³² Zeisberger's experience in the newly founded town was pleasant and ultimately a success for the missionaries. Netawatwees invited Zeisberger to found another mission town just down the river at a site that the Delaware leader offered to give to the Moravians. Zeisberger eventually founded Lichtenau at the site chosen by Netawatwees. In a short time Goschocking grew and became the most important Delaware town in the area.³³ Americans recognized its strategic importance and attempted more than once to found

30. Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745–1815* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992), 68–69.

31. Barbara Alice Mann, *George Washington's War on Native America* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2005), 44.

32. Zeisberger, Wellenreuther, and Wessel, eds., *The Diaries of David Zeisberger*, 284–85, 88, 300.

33. Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance*, 71–83; Weslager, *The Delaware Indian Westward Migration*, 295–300.

a fort there. At the time of its destruction in 1781, the town boasted tilled fields, fenced cattle, pigs, and chickens, a council house, and sweathouses. In less than a decade, the Delawares had come together and constructed a community that contained all the requisite visible elements of home. But a community and homeland are not created by physical structures alone. The Delaware people imbued the landscape with their history, their family stories, and their spiritual worldview. Both Gekelemukpechink and Goschocking were Delaware homelands for all too brief a time, and yet both showed signs that the Delaware residents had created an exceptional bond with their new homes. The embodiment of both the visible and invisible qualities of Delaware homelands rested in the council house.

INVISIBLE QUALITIES OF DELAWARE TOWNS

The Delaware council house was the center of any Delaware community, and its form and function changed little over generations. Its most important function was as a site for rituals that sustained the Delaware people throughout their history. The council house, as a physical site for rituals, eventually evolved into a religion practiced by the Delawares into the twentieth century.³⁴ The Delaware Big House religion can trace its origins to the founding days of Delaware culture. Though the specifics of the rituals and the physical structure were reinvented many times, the religion remained fundamental to Delaware society and was an essential part of the reconstruction of the culture when they were dispossessed and forced to relocate.³⁵

The council house brought together the sacred and secular worlds of the Delaware people. The construction of the council house provided a visible, physical structure that identified the town and its surrounding communities as Delawares. Its construction also fulfilled their sacred responsibilities to the divine powers of the manitous. When the council house was reconstructed in Gekelemukpechink and Goschocking, it represented the reconstitution of the Delaware people in their new home. When the Delaware people were dispossessed and forced to relocate in western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and all points north and west, the reconstruction of this building represented

34. Brinton, *The Lenape and Their Legends*, 48; Debra Cottrell, *The Semiotics of Conception, Construction and Use in the Delaware Indians Big House* (2007), available from www.connerprairie.org/HistoryOnline/bighouse.html (accessed Dec. 2, 2008); Miller, "Why the World Is on the Turtle's Back"; Weslager, *The Delaware Indian Westward Migration*, 293; Zeisberger, Wellenreuther, and Wessel, eds., *The Diaries of David Zeisberger*, 20.

35. Miller, "Why the World Is on the Turtle's Back," 307; Newcomb, *The Culture and Acculturation of the Delaware Indians*; Frank Gouldsmith Speck, Witapanâoxwe, and Pennsylvania Historical Commission, *A Study of the Delaware Indian Big House Ceremony*, in *Native Text Dictated by Witapanâoxwe* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical Commission, 1931), 22.

their cultural and spiritual survival. It provided the people an opportunity to make the world right and protect themselves from future catastrophe.

The council house was where the spiritual, political, and social worlds of the Delawares met in a single space. The transmission of knowledge that taught the Delawares how to build the house, how to perform the rituals that kept them in balance with their creators, and the history of their people strengthened their bonds with their manitous, their relationships to one another, and their relationship with the place they chose to live. The continuity of rituals, the transmission of history and knowledge about themselves, and their relationship to place were crucial to their continued success as an independent and unique people.³⁶

The Delaware people relocated to a series of new homelands that were not foreign landscapes. When they moved west, eventually crossing the Mississippi River, it was more a return to places they had lived before and remembered through their own history. As mentioned above, they originally came from lands in the west. The ecological elements of their new homes in western Pennsylvania and Ohio were familiar enough to reestablish farming, hunting, and fishing techniques they used for generations. They also acquired new knowledge along the way and selectively adapted to their new homes. What the Delawares did not have during this period was time. In order for a community to embrace a new landscape in a deep and meaningful way they need to have time to know the land and observe its appearance and what happens in it. Seasonal changes, weather patterns, and length of day are just a few of the plethora of details Delaware communities experienced as they moved west. Women had to learn where to gather medicinal plants, locate springs, and map out a new plan for subsistence. All of this new knowledge eventually shaped how they used, modified, and communicated about the land when they were finally settled in a place for longer than one generation. Because they were dispossessed so frequently in such a short time, it is doubtful the Delawares had the opportunity to create a deep bond to their lands in Ohio. They strengthened their identity as Delawares and adapted to this chaotic period by the transmission of their own history and the continuity of spiritual identity in the reconstruction of the council house. The Delawares assumed that each location would be their last and that their new home was permanent.³⁷

The construction of the big house was based on an origin story that explained its purpose, ornamentation, and appropriate use.³⁸ The story told of

36. Schutt, *Peoples of the River Valleys*, 30.

37. Miller, "Old Religion among the Delawares," 115.

38. Cottrell, *The Semiotics of Conception, Construction and Use in the Delaware Indians Big House*; Elisabeth Tooker, *Native North American Spirituality of the Eastern Woodlands: Sacred Myths, Dreams, Visions, Speeches, Healing Formulas, Rituals, and Ceremonials* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 104–24.

a time when the Earth was split open by a destructive quake. Smoke, fire, and black fluid came out of the Earth that the Delawares knew to be the mother's body. Their ancestors gathered together in a council and concluded that the chaos was due to their neglect of their relationship with the Great Manitou. They prayed, asking for guidance, and the Great Manitou appeared to them in dreams and visions. They were instructed to build a house that would represent the Delaware universe. Within this sacred structure they had the power to practice rituals and ceremonies that would give their people the power to sustain their world. The interior of the building was conceived to represent all aspects of their spiritual world. Symbolically, the Delawares could make right what they had made wrong and protect themselves from destruction. The ceremonies, dances, and meetings restored balance and created stability. The knowledge of the construction of the building, the ceremonies, and the history of the people were shared strategically over time and dispersed to different members of the community. No single elder transmitted this divine knowledge, and no single recipient carried it forward. As with all things Delaware, the importance of the community and shared responsibilities governed their way of life. The construction of the big house, the sacred wisdom of their manitous and elders, and the recitation of their history of their people allowed the Delawares to find a new homeland by the reconstruction of the symbolic universe on an unfamiliar landscape.

Recent scholarship suggests that the creation of homelands is a universal human experience. How we enter a new physical space and make it familiar involves a diverse set of interactions with the environment we intend to call home. On the most intimate level it is in the act of creating memories that involve the new space and mixing the temporal with the geographical. On a community level, it is about recreating the familiar by marking the new landscape with structures that proclaim one's cultural identity. The Delaware people understood the importance of renewing those acts initiated in the recreation of their home. The building of the council house helped them to revive and also revise their memories and histories. The building and the ceremonies embodied their local and historic knowledge that reminded them who they were and where they had been. In remembering and imagining their creation, migration, and their stories, the Delawares continued to be a vibrant and unique culture that stood apart from those around them.