Ohio and the World, 1753-2053

Parker, Geoffrey, Sisson, Richard, Coil, William Russell

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The idea of a series of lectures in honor of Ohio's bicentennial came to Geoffrey Parker, a history professor at The Ohio State University, while driving from Ada to Columbus in April 2001. He had given a lecture at Ohio Northern University and, afterward, conversation turned to the Bicentennial Barns going up in each county across the state. Had he seen one on the way up? No? His hosts provided meticulous directions for seeing two on the way back.

He admired the barns while driving back on that brilliant spring day, and wondered how OSU could best celebrate Ohio's last two hundred years in 2003. After all, a Bicentennial is all about history, and the OSU History Department should have something interesting to say on the subject. Perhaps, he thought, a series of lectures could examine Ohio's changing place in the world, and the changing impact of the world on Ohio, over time. His colleague Richard Sisson (Trustees Professor of Political Science, former Provost, and a native of Gallipolis, Ohio) showed great enthusiasm and they decided to devise a scheme together.

With the aid of an “advisory committee,” Parker and Sisson decided on a sequence of lectures presenting a snapshot of “Ohio and the World” at a particular era: “Circa 1753,” because Ohio's history did not start with the state, still less with the beginning of White settlement; “Circa 1803,” with the winning of statehood; “Circa 1853,” dealing with slavery, social conflict, and the Civil War; “Circa 1903,” with industrialization, invention, suffrage; “Circa 1953,” covering Ohio society through wars, protest movements, and economic transformations; and “Circa 2003,” the impact of the new world economy, energy, globalization, and the environment. We also decided to add a finale—“Circa 2053”—which would look back on our collective history, consider the “roads not taken” in Ohio’s history, and assess future trends and needs for the state.

The series featured distinguished scholars from around the nation who delivered their lectures once in Columbus, and again in another appropriate venue elsewhere in the state, in April and May 2003. They also met with students from the Columbus public schools as well as with interested
faculty and students. Interested readers may also view the lectures on which these essays are based by visiting www.osu.edu/bicentennial. Each lecture delivered at The Ohio State University in spring 2003 is followed by a question-and-answer session, plus a slide show with images from Ohio's past. In addition, there is an introductory address by New York Times Associate Editor and native Ohioan R. W. "Johnny" Apple.

Now, assisted by William Russell Coil (also of the Ohio State History Department), we present expanded versions of the lectures in print and hope that they will encourage a shared examination of our collective past and purposeful reflection about our collective future. If so, those handsome bicentennial barns of Ohio will reach out to an even wider audience.

Geoffrey Parker
Richard Sisson
William Russell Coil