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# A History of Jonathan Alder: His Captivity and Life with the Indians

Henry Clay Alder

Larry Nelson

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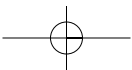
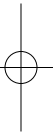
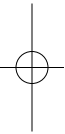
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A HISTORY  
*of*  
JONATHAN  
ALDER





A HISTORY  
— of —  
JONATHAN  
ALDER

*His Captivity and Life  
with the Indians*

BY HENRY CLAY ALDER

*Transcribed and with a foreword by Doyle H. Davison*

*Compiled, annotated, edited, and with an  
introduction by Larry L. Nelson*



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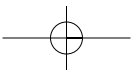
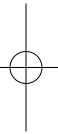
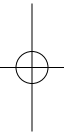
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# Foreword



Out of the dim past comes the romantic story of Jonathan Alder, so engrossing, so improbable as viewed from our twentieth-century standpoint, that we may be prone to feel that the narrator has drawn upon his imagination in dealing with the life of this remarkable man, or that possibly, he has selected him as a romantic figure around which to build a colorful story of the pioneer days of Madison County. But in refutation of any such theory, and disclaiming any desire to add unearned luster to the memory of Jonathan Alder, the writer points to the old "round log" cabin on Big Darby in which he dwelt with his Indian wife, and the hewed log cabin adjoining it to which he took a charming bride in the person of Mary Blont, still standing at this late date, one hundred and twenty-four years afterwards, as mute evidence of the truth. Add to these the old moss-covered slab in the Foster Cemetery lying broken on the ground, having been replaced in the year 1916 by a fine granite stone with suitable inscription by the children of Henry Clay Alder as a tribute to their father.

In 1927, the old log cabin was torn down and moved to the Alder Chapel Churchyard by all the great-grandchildren of Jonathan Alder, as it was his wish that the old cabin be preserved, and here it is hoped it will stand for another one hundred years.

In 1928, a flagpole and flag was placed by the cabin, the gift of a great-grandson, James W. Alder of Chicago.

In 1922, a chapter was formed by the women of Madison County and named the Jonathan Alder Chapter, Daughters of 1812, which has met once a month ever since. Each year on September 17th, his birthday, this chapter, with relatives and friends from the surround-



ing country, meet at his last resting place and cover his grave with a blanket of flowers.

In addition to these visible relics of the past, there is Jonathan Alder's own story of his life as told to his son Henry nearly one hundred years ago, and written down by the latter. This story, which covered over one hundred pages of manuscript, was loaned to Henry Howe in the preparation of *Howe's Historical Sketches*, but it afterwards was lost for a long time. Howe did not print it in its entirety but took only the main facts and, therefore, much was lost.

The following manuscript, a copy of which is the one that was lost for more than eighty years, was accidentally found by a grandson, Henry Betts, with the aid of Henry Alder, a great-grandson—so we herewith present it to you.

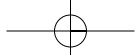
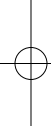
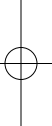
*Doyle H. Davison*  
(1935)

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*Larry L. Nelson*



# Introduction



On a brilliant spring morning in May 1782, nine-year-old Jonathan Alder and his older brother David set out to find a mare that had wandered from their isolated cabin in southwest Virginia and into the rugged mountains and dense forests of the surrounding countryside. Later in the day, the boys found their horse, but as they struggled to lead the reluctant animal home, they were attacked by a party of Indians from Ohio. David was killed and Jonathan taken prisoner. His captors brought Alder back to Ohio, where he was adopted by a Mingo warrior and his Shawnee wife. Here he spent the next thirteen years. During that time, Alder lived fully as an Indian. He learned their language and observed their customs. He hunted, traded, and fought at their side. In 1795, after the death of his adoptive parents, Alder left the Indians and eventually settled in Pleasant Valley, near present-day Plain City in central Ohio. At the urging of an acquaintance, he traveled to Virginia in 1805, where he had the extraordinary good fortune to find his mother and remaining siblings still living in the neighborhood where he had been captured as a youth. After his reunion, he married a woman from Virginia, returned to Pleasant Valley, and became something of a local celebrity as a result of his childhood adventures. In the late 1830s or early 1840s, probably at the insistence of his family and friends, Alder composed his memoirs, in which he recounted his life with the Ohio Indians and his experiences as one of the area's earliest pioneers.

Captivity narratives from the Ohio frontier have excited the imaginations of readers from the colonial era to the present day. The best of these narratives evoke a sense of high adventure and romance

that, to many, define the frontier era. Within their pages, one encounters thrilling tales of border warfare, Indian raids, hairbreadth escapes, and daring rescues. They depict episodes of the most heart-wrenching tragedy and abject cruelty as well as those of remarkable courage and endurance. Moreover, they provide what at times is an unparalleled view into the world of the Ohio Country Indian nations.

The Alder captivity narrative is particularly important because Alder continued his tale to include his experiences long after he left the Indians. The account chronicles Alder's life from his captivity in the late eighteenth century to the early 1830s. The narrative, therefore, provides a unique perspective on the Old Northwest, its transformation from wilderness to statehood, and the evolving relationship between Ohio's Indians and whites from the Revolutionary War era to a time when many of the state's native peoples had been removed.

Alder's captivity narrative is one of the most extensive personal accounts to survive from Ohio's frontier and early settlement eras. His reminiscence spans half a century, beginning with his capture in 1782, when Ohio had no permanent European settlement and was still the exclusive domain of the Ohio Indian nations, to 1832, when the state was emerging as an industrial power and canals and the National Road (which passed only a few miles from Alder's Pleasant Valley home) linked Ohioans and Ohio products to the East and markets throughout the world. Alder's recollection provides an exceptional look at early Ohio. His portrait of his captors is revealing, complex, and sympathetic. The latter part of his narrative, in which he relates his experiences in Pleasant Valley, is an extraordinarily rich account of the tribulations of pioneer society and the continuing tensions that existed among the region's early European settlers and between whites and the area's native residents long after the Indian wars era had ended.

Alder was fortunate in that he encountered many of the persons and took part or knew about many of the events that have become touchstones in Ohio's frontier history. He knew Simon Girty and

held him in high esteem. Later, he became a close friend of Simon Kenton, and Alder's extended interview with the famed frontiersman near the end of his narrative constitutes an important addition to the literature dealing with pioneer era Ohio. Alder comments on the burning of Colonel Crawford, on Benjamin Logan's 1786 raid against the Mad River Indian settlements, and on the death of Chief Leather Lips. He participated in the Battle of Fort Recovery and describes in detail the Battle of Fallen Timbers. His recollections are among the few extant accounts of these actions told from a Native American perspective. Further, during his time with the Ohio Indians, Alder came into contact with other captives. He tells their stories as well, nested within his reminiscences like Russian dolls.

The Alder family was part of an increasingly insistent migration that flowed into Virginia's Shenandoah Valley beginning at the conclusion of the French and Indian War. Two great tides formed this migration. Palatinate Germans came to the region in large numbers, traveling in families and settling at first between Winchester and Staunton and then gradually pushing westward into present-day Smyth, Bland, Washington, and Wythe Counties. A second wave of migration originated in north Britain, northern Ireland, and Scotland. Like the Palatinates, these north Britain borderers came in families. Unlike their German neighbors, many of these immigrants were poor and some nearly destitute. Most moved quickly to the southwesternmost end of the Shenandoah Valley, where they settled among the region's rugged backcountry highlands. The Alder family belonged to this second wave of migration. Jonathan Alder's father, Bartholomew, was born in Long Sutton, Lincolnshire County, England, in February 1734. He came to America sometime before 1766, the year that he married Jonathan's mother, Hanna Worthington, in Gloucester, New Jersey. The Alders stayed in Gloucester until 1775, when they migrated to western Virginia.<sup>1</sup>

The Germans living in the valley were wiser and more honest than their neighbors, claimed J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, who traveled through the region in the late eighteenth century. "They launch forth," he noted, "and by dint of sobriety, rigid parsimony, and

the most persevering industry, they commonly succeed.” Likewise, he believed that the Scots were “frugal” and “industrious.” The Irish, though, did “not prosper so well; they love to drink and to quarrel.” “They are litigious,” he said, and when they had an opportunity, they abandoned their farms to hunt game for a living, “which is the ruin of everything.” But Philip Vickers Fithian, a Presbyterian missionary who came to the area the same year as the Alders, claimed that the backcountry Irish were among the most generous people that he had ever encountered. The very air of Virginia, he claimed, seemed to “inspire all the Inhabitants with hospitality.”

Every thing they possess is as free to a stranger as the *Water* or the *Air*. Living, to be sure, is not amongst these frugal Irish so fantastical and costly as with native Virginians. But they have in very great abundance the leading supports to human Subsistence. And by these, and their healthy Situation among the Mountains and pure waters, through God’s Blessing, they raise a Brood of Youth, young men and young women, for size, activity, and Com- plection, such as I have seen in no Place before.<sup>2</sup>

The Alders undoubtedly reached their new home by traveling along the Great Wagon Road. The Great Wagon Road had been built upon an ancient path stretching nearly eight hundred miles from New York to Georgia, used by the northern Iroquois to make war on their enemies in the Carolinas. Virginia acquired use of the trail in 1744. By the third quarter of the century, the path had become the principal thoroughfare to the colony’s backcountry settlements. Originating in Philadelphia, the route moved westward to Lancaster, York, and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, before veering to the southwest via Hagerstown, Maryland, and then through Winchester and Staunton, Virginia, to Roanoke. At Roanoke, the road divided into two parts. One leg continued to the south, through the Moravian settlements at Wachovia on the North Carolina Piedmont, and beyond to the road’s terminus at Augusta, South Carolina. The second leg from Roanoke carried travelers nearly due west to the road’s western limit at Fort Chiswell (near present-day Max Meadows, Virginia), only a few miles from the Alder homestead. In 1775, the year

that the Alder family moved to the area, Daniel Boone extended the reach of the Great Wagon Road by blazing a trail from the vicinity of Fort Chiswell westward through the Cumberland Gap and into Kentucky. This path, when widened to accommodate wagons in 1796, would become the Wilderness Road.<sup>3</sup>

Those who migrated into the region did so at great peril. Throughout the late eighteenth century, the region was a favorite target for Indian raiding parties that originated west of the mountains. "All of the People in these back Settlements are very taleful of the Indian Wars," remembered Philip Fithian. "Deeply have they suffered from Savage Cruelty." Those whom he met spoke almost obsessively about their encounters with the Indians. "Their stories are moving," he claimed, "and force the attention. They fill me with melancholy Meditations." At one cabin he met a widow "thirteen years with the Indians. . . . She gave me a long & moving Narration of their Usage of her." At another, he spoke with a woman whose husband had been killed at the Battle of Point Pleasant. Since his death, she had told her family many times that it was her "wish and steady Purpose, to die with unabated Lamentation." "The Tumult of Mind with which she was constantly exercised brought upon her repeatedly violent convulsions," said Fithian. "Those however now are moderated into casual Hystericks." At another time he spoke with Colonel John Dickinson, "an able, long-experienced Soldier in the Indian Service." Dickinson was riddled with wounds and spent the afternoon showing Fithian scars in his hands, back, and legs and telling the traveler the story behind each one. "Now he is in Health," remarked Fithian. "I view this Gentleman with great Veneration." "It is not a Wonder that these Inhabitants are filled with high Indignation against those savage Heathen."<sup>4</sup>

Among these Indians were many from north of the Ohio River. Native Americans had lived for nearly thirteen thousand years in the area that would eventually become Ohio. Prehistoric Paleo-Indians had entered the region at the end of the Wisconsin Ice Age and had hunted big game in the shadow of the glaciers that then covered much of the area. As the climate warmed nearly eight thousand years



ago, these early people were replaced by others who, over time, invented the bow and arrow, learned to farm, created majestic earthworks of amazing scale and sophistication, fashioned jewelry and other objects of astounding beauty, and carved enigmatic petroglyphs whose meanings remain a mystery to this day.<sup>5</sup>

In 1500, the start of the historic era, many different Indian cultures occupied the region that would become Ohio. Most lived in small hamlets or villages, but others lived in larger communities, and some lived in large fortified towns occupied by several hundred individuals. Nearly all were farmers who added to their diet by fishing, gathering wild plants, and hunting game such as deer, bear, and raccoon. Archaeological evidence suggests that European trade goods began to find their way into the region as early as 1550, over one hundred years before the first European explorers entered the area. Many historians suspect that European diseases also entered the region during the 1500s.

Among the first Europeans to write about the Indians living in what is now Ohio were Jesuit missionaries living in Canada in the early and mid-1600s. Early Jesuit writings and French maps from the era speak of several Indian nations living in the region, including the Assistaeronons, Ontarraronons, and Squenquioronons. By the middle of the 1600s, many of these tribes were involved in the fur trade, trading pelts taken in the Great Lakes region for trade goods manufactured in Europe. By the 1640s, beaver had been trapped nearly to extinction in the Northeast. In 1649, the Onondagas, members of the Iroquois Confederacy, a powerful league of five tribes living in upstate New York, attempted to acquire more productive lands for trapping by declaring war on the tribes living to their west. The Onondagas began the war in March 1649 by attacking and defeating their western neighbors the Hurons. Continuing the offensive, the Onondaga and their Iroquois allies vanquished the Tobacco Nation in December 1649 and the Neutral Nation in 1651. In 1654 an Iroquois army numbering between 1,200 and 2,000 warriors invaded present-day northwestern Pennsylvania along the southern shore of Lake Erie, the home of the Eries, or Cat Nation. The assault was

swift and brutal. The Eries, unprepared for an attack of this magnitude, attempted to defend themselves in a crude stockade made of tree trunks, but were eventually overpowered. With the Eries defeated, the Iroquois continued to push westward. Eventually, the Onondagas either destroyed all of the other Indian nations living in their path or forced them to flee. The Iroquois wanted territory in the area only for hunting and did not settle the area after their conquest. Therefore, by the mid-1660s, what is presently Ohio was uninhabited and entered only occasionally by roving hunting bands and war parties.<sup>6</sup>

Indians began to move back into what is now Ohio in the early 1700s. Among the first to resettle within the area were the Wyandots. Wyandots were remnants of the Hurons who were dispersed at the beginning of the Beaver Wars. They had originally lived in what is today southern Ontario, but had scattered as far away as the region near present-day southern Wisconsin, in the face of Iroquois aggression. Later, they had moved near the French trading centers at Michilimackinac and, after its founding in 1701, Detroit. Friction with the French caused some of the Detroit Wyandots to leave for present-day Ohio in the 1730s. One group under the leadership of Orontony (Nicholas) established a settlement and trading post along Sandusky Bay in 1739. Later, other groups migrated to the Cuyahoga and Muskingum River valleys.<sup>7</sup>

Like the Wyandots, the Ottawas were pushed into what is now present-day Wisconsin by the Iroquois and eventually resettled near Detroit after 1701. The nation slowly moved into the Ohio country beginning in the 1750s, establishing homes on the lower Maumee River and along Maumee Bay.<sup>8</sup>

The Miami Indians also entered present-day Ohio at about the same time. The Miamis migrated into the state during the 1740s from the Wabash and Maumee River valleys in eastern Indiana. By 1747, they had established settlements along the Great and Little Miami River valleys in what is now southwestern Ohio and had opened trade with the British at Pickawillany, a trading post near present-day Piqua.<sup>9</sup>

The Shawnee Indians also returned to the region in the 1730s and 1740s. Iroquois violence had greatly fragmented the Shawnee nation, and the Beaver Wars had pushed the remnants of the tribe into what is now southern Illinois, Kentucky, and perhaps as far south as Georgia and Alabama. During the early 1700s, many Shawnees migrated back to eastern Pennsylvania and Maryland. European settlement in the area drove the tribe westward, and by the 1730s and early 1740s, the Shawnees had established settlements along the Ohio River and the lower Scioto valley.<sup>10</sup>

Mingos entered the region in the mid-1740s, settling near the Cuyahoga River valley. Mingos were members of the Iroquois Confederacy who had voluntarily left their traditional lands in New York and moved to the Ohio country. Most Ohio Mingos were either Senecas or Caughnawagas (French Catholic Mohawks), but many Cayugas, Onondagas, Oneidas, and Tuscaroras also lived within the region.<sup>11</sup>

Lastly, many Delawares, or Lenni Lenapes, also entered present-day Ohio with the Shawnee from Pennsylvania. Originally from the Delaware River Valley, the nation also moved west in response to European settlement along the East Coast. The Delaware entered the area following the Seven Years (French and Indian) War. Many moved into the region from western Pennsylvania with Moravian missionaries who established mission towns along the Tuscarawas and Muskingum River valleys in the 1770s.<sup>12</sup>

Although the Ohio Indians were from two distinct linguistic groups, the Iroquoian and the Algonquian, they shared the same broad Eastern Woodland culture. All were part of a “tribe” or nation that linked its members to one another through shared language, social customs, and religious beliefs. These nations, like the nations of Europe, were politically sovereign and acted independently and in their own self-interest. Each tribe occupied a territory whose boundaries were recognized and respected by other nations within the region. Within each nation’s territory, its members lived in bands of varying sizes which, like the nation they were part of, were also independent and autonomous. The bands lived in semipermanent vil-

lages located near a source of firewood, water, and land suitable for farming. They were hunters and agriculturalists who cultivated corn, beans, and squash and also, as the historic era progressed, an ever-widening variety of crops from both Europe and Africa. Some tended orchards, and a few watched over livestock. Women looked after their children and their fields; the men hunted, traded, conducted diplomacy, and made war on their enemies. Both men and women actively took part in the governance of their village.

Indian men plucked the hair from their bodies except for a scalp lock grown in the crown of their head. Many also slit their ear lobes and distended the fleshy protuberances so that they brushed the tops of their shoulders. Men decorated themselves with tattoos, and both men and women adorned themselves with paint. But by the time of Alder's captivity, the influence of European culture could be seen in every Indian village in Ohio. Men and women alike wore clothes made from European fabrics; cooked in iron kettles and tin pots manufactured in Europe; slept wrapped in European blankets; decorated themselves with beads, silver, and jewelry fashioned in Europe; hunted with European firearms; ate from European china; and used European tools to clear their fields and cultivate their crops. Many lived in log cabins, and some professed Christianity. Contact with Europeans had undoubtedly increased the material comforts of native society. But it had also brought liquor and with it, drunkenness and a particularly vicious, self-destructive sort of violence unseen in times of sobriety that threatened to undermine the stability of Indian society. Trade with the whites was also slowly eroding the traditional sense of self-sufficiency that undergirded native material and political life.<sup>13</sup>

The cycle of the seasons regulated life among the Ohio Indians. In the winter, each village would disperse into small hunting camps made up of only a family or two. These small groups would subsist until spring, living on stockpiled food reserves and what game they could harvest from the forest. In the spring, the village would re-assemble to clear fields, plant crops, and rebuild their homes. In late fall, the cycle would repeat again.

Eastern Woodland people embraced a core set of religious beliefs that were sophisticated and complex. Indians inhabited a world filled with spirits. Most Indians believed in a powerful “Great Spirit,” or Manitou, who had created the world, but they also recognized a host of other lesser entities. Some were personal protectors, while others were associated with a particular animal species or place. Some were good and some were evil. Some would intercede only for men, others only for women. Seers, shamans, prophetesses, and arcane rites could open the path between this world and into the spiritual realm. Indians punctuated the annual cycle with a series of rituals and celebrations held throughout the year that gave thanks to the Manitou, acknowledged the spirit world, honored ancestors, comforted the grieving, healed the sick, permitted communication with the animal kingdom, and explained the deepest mysteries of the cosmos.<sup>14</sup>

Although spiritual in focus, these celebrations were also occasions for athletic contests, dancing, and other forms of community entertainment. Indians were fond of games, and men and women both gambled. Men engaged in footraces and played lacrosse. Members of both sexes sometimes played in a rough-and-tumble form of football, men against the women. Feasts and dances could be social or religious in character and could be used to cement diplomatic alliances, prepare for war, invoke the spirit world, honor guests, or for simple social diversion.<sup>15</sup>

When Alder was captured in 1782, Indians in Ohio had been at war for over a generation with Europeans who were pushing their way slowly across the Appalachian Mountains. Violent conflict between Europeans and Ohio’s native peoples raged intermittently throughout the region from about 1750 to the conclusion of the War of 1812. Indians and Europeans went to war for many of the same reasons: to advance or protect their nation’s diplomatic and economic interests, to punish their enemies, to seek revenge, to acquire honor and esteem, to obtain plunder, and to defend their homes. But many Indian raiding parties also set out with the explicit goal of taking captives. European armies frequently took Indian captives, and Indians, like Europeans, desired captives to be held for ransom, to be

exchanged for family or friends, and as sources of information about their foes. Those captured by the Indians faced an uncertain future. It was not uncommon for captives to be executed or abused as they were led back to their captors' homes. And tales that spoke of torture so hideous as to defy description, while undoubtedly exaggerated, were based enough on fact to elicit very real concern. But motives other than military expediency or a desire for retribution also guided Indian actions. Indians also sought captives to adopt into their nation.<sup>16</sup>

Violence and disease had depleted native populations considerably by the mid-eighteenth century. Indians attempted to compensate for these losses by replacing the deceased with newcomers, particularly adolescents and young adults. Native peoples were extraordinarily successful in acculturating captives into their new circumstances. Like Alder, many fortunate captives found themselves placed in the homes of genuinely loving Indian families. In 1755, eighteen-year-old James Smith was taken prisoner in western Pennsylvania and brought back to Ohio, where he was adopted by the Caughnawagas. At his adoption ceremony, Smith was told that his new Indian family was "now under the same obligations to love, support, and defend you that we are to love and to defend one another." Smith at first doubted the truth of what he had been told, but later recollected that "from that day I never knew them to make any distinction between me and themselves in any respect whatever." When Henry Bouquet entered the Ohio Country in 1764 to retrieve captives taken during the French and Indian War, he observed that the Indians were "cruel and unmerciful by habit and long example." "Yet whenever they come to give way to the native dictates of humanity, they exercise virtues which Christians need not blush to imitate. No child is otherwise treated by the persons adopting it than the children of their own body. The perpetual slavery of those captivated in war is a notion which even their barbarity has not yet suggested to them. Every captive whom their affection, their caprice, or whatever else, leads them to save, is soon incorporated with them, and fares alike with themselves."<sup>17</sup>

The affection that Indians felt for their adopted family was clearly reciprocated by many captives. Although most captivity narratives were written by those who later escaped, were rescued, or who voluntarily elected to return to their original homes, the literature of the period is filled with episodes in which captives, when given the opportunity, refused to leave their adoptive families or, if forced to do so, did so only after vigorous protest and the demonstration of genuine grief and sorrow. When Henry Bouquet gathered his returned captives in 1764, he noted that “among the children who had been carried off young and had long lived with the Indians, it is not to be expected that any marks of joy would appear on being restored to their parents or relatives.”

Having been accustomed to look upon the Indians as the only connections they had, having been tenderly treated by them, and speaking their language, it is no wonder that they considered their new state [i.e. their return to the English] in the light of a captivity and parted from the savages with tears.

But it must not be denied that there were even some grown persons who showed an unwillingness to return. The Shawnee were obliged to bind several of their prisoners and force them along to the camp; and some women who had been delivered up afterwards found means to escape and run back to the Indian towns. Some who could not make their escape clung to their savage acquaintance at parting and continued many days in bitter lamentations, even refusing sustenance.<sup>18</sup>

The Treaty of Paris, signed in September 1783, ended the Revolutionary War, but not the decades-long conflict along the Ohio Valley. In the agreement, Great Britain ceded the land north and west of the Ohio River to the United States, which then claimed the region “by right of conquest.” But Indians living within the region were outraged by the treaty. England had not consulted its native allies as it had negotiated the pact, did not inform them of the agreement’s terms before it was ratified, nor did it own the territory that it had given to the new American republic. Further, most of the Indians living in Ohio had allied themselves with the British during the war and had fought ably during the contest. They knew they had not lost the war and they certainly had not given up possession of their homes. In

the years following, the Ohio nations continued the fight and waged a protracted, determined resistance against white expansion into the region.<sup>19</sup>

In response, the United States attempted to negotiate with the warring nations. But Kentucky, impatient with the pace of diplomacy and angered at the ferociousness of the attacks directed in large measure against its citizens, launched a series of raids conducted by backwoods irregulars against Indian settlements in Ohio (including one against the town in which Alder was living in 1786). Indians responded by abandoning much of southern and eastern Ohio and relocating along the Maumee River all the way from its headwaters at present-day Fort Wayne, Indiana, to Lake Erie's western basin. Here, shielded on the south by the Great Black Swamp and near a source of ammunition, supplies, and provisions at British-controlled Detroit, they renewed their incursions into Kentucky. These raids, in turn, prompted further retaliation from south of the Ohio River. By 1790, the cycle of violence was inextricably entrenched, and negotiation had proven fruitless. The United States, therefore, declared war on the Ohio nations. Indians under the leadership of Blue Jacket, Little Turtle, Egushaway, and Buckongahelas soundly defeated two American expeditions in 1790 and 1791. But disease, dislocation, and political, economic, and cultural disruption, all the inevitable consequences of a lifetime of warfare, had taken their toll. Indians could neither sustain the means nor the will to continue the conflict. Anthony Wayne's victory over the confederated Indian nations at Fallen Timbers in 1794 and the subsequent Treaty of Greenville in the following year ended the conflict and imposed a fifteen-year period of peace along the Ohio frontier. The Ohio nations were drawn into war once again in 1812 under the leadership of Tecumseh and his brother, the charismatic mystic, Tenskwatawa, The Prophet. But the results were the same. When Tecumseh was killed at the Battle of the Thames in 1813, the Indian resistance collapsed. The Treaty of Ghent, signed in 1814, marked the end of the War of 1812 and the conclusion of the Indian wars in Ohio. From that time forward, the Ohio nations were a defeated and subjugated people.<sup>20</sup>



The years following the Indian wars era were difficult ones for the Ohio Indian nations as they struggled to adjust to their new status and to form new relationships with Euro-Americans who now were rushing into the state. Some sought accommodation with the federal government and their new American neighbors, while others looked for new homes beyond the Mississippi River. Alder's life during this period also reflects a great deal of cultural and emotional ambiguity. While he lived with the Indians, his adoptive father woke him one winter night to tell him that he had had a dream in which a white bear had attacked and then eaten Alder. Believing the dream to be an omen, his father directed Alder to bathe in the river that flowed by their camp in order to remove himself from danger. Alder did so, and his father was satisfied that his son was no longer in peril. But eventually, Alder's father's worst fears were realized. Nothing within his power could stop the white bear from devouring his son. After 1795, Alder left the Indians and began a slow return to white society.

Following the Treaty of Greenville, Alder moved to Darby Creek in central Ohio, apart from the Indians with whom he had grown up. Central Ohio was clearly an area that would be open to white settlement, and Alder's decision to live there reflected, perhaps, a growing psychological as well as physical distance from his Indian community. His marriage to an Indian woman during this time also ended in failure, in part because she grew "cross and peevish" whenever white people came to their home. Alder's increasing contact with white settlers as they came to Darby Creek allowed him the opportunity to build friendships and to provide useful services for his new neighbors. Slowly, and at times awkwardly, Alder forged a new identity as a Euro-American. When he was first adopted by the Indians, the ceremony concluded when he was dressed in a new suit of Indian clothes. In 1804, as he prepared to travel back to Virginia to contact his original family, Alder went to Franklinton (present-day Columbus) and purchased enough cloth to make three suits so that he could be "dressed up in the order of the whites" during his journey. "I dropped the Indian costume that I had been accustomed to for the last twenty

years entirely,” he observed, and from that time forward, it is clear that he no longer thought of himself as an Indian.

Indians living on Ohio’s reservations, though, could not accomplish the transformation that Alder had performed successfully. Even those Indians who had accepted reservation life, adopted European-style agriculture, converted to Christianity, and assisted the United States during the War of 1812 were eventually forced to cede their Ohio homes.<sup>21</sup> Indians began voluntarily to leave the state soon after the 1795 Treaty of Greenville, some going to Canada and others traveling to Spanish-controlled territory west of the Mississippi River. What had begun informally as an Indian initiative in the late eighteenth century became an official policy of the United States government following the War of 1812. After the conflict, the Indians who remained in Ohio lived on numerous reservations scattered throughout the state’s northern tier and northwest corner. Beginning in 1817, state and federal authorities worked energetically to remove the Ohio nations from their homes. Government officials entered into a series of agreements with the state’s tribes that extinguished their title to lands in Ohio in exchange for farming implements, annuities, and land in the trans-Mississippi West. After the tribes with whom Alder had lived migrated westward in 1832, only small remnants of the Ottawas along the Maumee River and a large population of Wyandots at Upper Sandusky remained within the state. The Ottawas emigrated in 1837 and 1839, the Wyandots in 1843.<sup>22</sup>

When Alder left the Indians in 1795 and settled in Pleasant Valley, he was one of only a few whites who were living permanently in the state. In 1800, Ohio had barely 42,000 European residents within its boundaries, nearly all of whom were living in settlements that stretched along the Ohio River or probed tentatively northward along the Miami, Scioto, and Muskingum River valleys. Beech or mixed oak forests covered much of the state with the exception of small pockets of prairie grasslands, bottomland forests, oak savannas, bogs, or swamps. Wildlife abounded within the region. Travelers often encountered raccoons, ducks, geese, and white-tailed deer as well as such long-extirpated species as the mountain lion, bobcat, bison,

Canadian lynx, and American elk. Passenger pigeons flocked together in nearly incomprehensible numbers. “The air is darkened by their flight,” reported the Moravian missionary David Zeisberger in 1777. The noise they made while gathered together, he claimed, was such “that it is difficult for people near them to hear or understand each other.”<sup>23</sup>

Settlers who came to Ohio generally did so by drifting down the Ohio River to their destinations in flatboats acquired in Pittsburgh. These awkward, stern-sweep craft were about fifteen feet wide, anywhere from forty to one hundred feet in length, and could carry from twenty to seventy tons of cargo. Some were “large and roomy, and have comfortable and separate apartments fitted up with chairs, beds, tables, and stoves,” claimed Timothy Flint, a longtime observer of immigrants making their way to the western country. “It is not an uncommon spectacle to see a large family, old and young, servants, cattle, hogs, sheep, fowls, and animals of all kinds . . . all embarked and floating down on the same bottom.”<sup>24</sup>

But once away from river towns and waterways, travel overland could be extremely difficult. Few roads existed, and those were barely worthy of the name. Zane’s Trace, in actuality little more than a blazed path, opened in 1797. The route formed a graceful arc as it traversed southern Ohio from Wheeling, West Virginia, to Limestone (Maysville), Kentucky, by way of Zanesville and Chillicothe. In addition, a second route formed by Anthony Wayne as he battled the northwestern tribes connected Fort Washington in present-day Cincinnati with the Maumee River by traveling nearly due north up the Miami River valley. It too was little more than an overgrown, unimproved track marked by downed trees and rapidly fading wagon ruts. Beyond these, travelers had few options other than the Indian trails that penetrated the state’s interior.<sup>25</sup>

Alder noted that it was only a short time after the 1795 Treaty of Greenville until “white people began to make their appearance amongst us.” Wayne’s victory had demolished the last great barrier to settlement in Ohio. By 1810, the state’s population tallied nearly 231,000 souls. In 1820, over 581,000 citizens called the Buckeye

State home. The next decade saw Ohio's population grow by an astonishing 61.3 percent, nearly twice as fast as the nation as a whole. In 1830, at about the time that Alder concluded his narrative, Ohio could boast that its nearly 938,000 residents made it the fourth most populous state in the Union, bested only by Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York.<sup>26</sup>

Immigrants settled nearly every corner of the state. New Englanders made their way to the Western Reserve along Lake Erie's shore, southerners from Virginia and Kentucky made new homes in southern Ohio, and migrants from the Middle Atlantic states, particularly Pennsylvania, moved eastward across the central portion of the state. By 1850, about the time that Jonathan Alder died, "Ohio Fever" had run its course and the state began losing more migrants than it gained. But the rush into Ohio had brought enormous change in its wake. Travel was infinitely easier and more convenient than it had been in the state's early years. Steamboats traveled both the Ohio and the Muskingum Rivers as well as the length of Lake Erie. The National Road proceeded nearly due east and west through the center of the state, linking Wheeling, West Virginia, Columbus, and Springfield. Travelers using the route in the 1830s and 1840s enjoyed one of the finest roads in America. In addition, turnpikes and other roadways provided access to much of the remainder of the state. Miles of canals connected Ohio's major metropolises with one another, Lake Erie, and the Ohio River. Passengers, produce, industrial products, raw materials, and finished goods found their way to Ohio consumers and distant markets alike. Further, by the early 1850s, steam-powered rail lines served nearly all of Ohio's largest cities, and a network of rail tracks wove its way across the state in a broad corridor extending from Cincinnati in the southwest to Cleveland in the northeast. Ohio was still rural and still agricultural, but industry and commerce were contributing to urban growth and the state's emergence as one of the most economically vigorous regions in the Union.<sup>27</sup>

Population and prosperity brought about other changes as well. Ohioans were no longer the rough and unsophisticated pioneers of

bygone years. By midcentury, colleges and universities dotted the state's landscape. Painters, sculptors, poets, and essayists found employment in Cincinnati and other metropolitan areas. And writers like Caleb Atwater, Henry Howe, and Jacob Burnett were setting about to document the history of Ohio's frontier era, an age that they understood had already been gone for nearly a generation.<sup>28</sup>

Jonathan Alder had lived through an extraordinary period in Ohio's history. He had known Ohio's native peoples intimately and witnessed their ultimate defeat and removal, and he had been able to watch as an increasing population, agriculture, and industry brought about economic growth, prosperity, and cultural attainment to those who then settled the area. He had observed the transformation of Ohio from an undeveloped wilderness to a vibrant and energetic state, eager to take its place as an economic and political leader of national consequence.

Historians labor under the knowledge that their understandings of the past will always be incomplete. First-person accounts and other types of documentation provide the lens through which we can examine historic activities. But these accounts, no matter how honestly or conscientiously created, also contain filters that subtly shape or distort our view.

*The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, published in 1682 and describing the experiences of Mary Rowlandson after her capture during King Philip's War in 1676, was the first book-length Indian captivity narrative to find its way into print. Since then, these accounts have remained an enduring and popular American literary genre. These memoirs, like other types of historical documentation, were molded, in part, by the cultural currents and societal needs of the communities in which they were first written. Historians recognize that captivity narratives have passed through several distinctive stylistic and thematic phases. Early works created in New England during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, for example, were shaped strongly by Puritan theology. These narratives understood that Indian captivity was an affliction sent by God, that it was a just consequence stemming from the sins of individual captives or the

community from which they had been taken, and that the experience proved that unwavering faith in the face of tribulation could bring about deliverance and salvation.<sup>29</sup>

By the mid-eighteenth century, Puritan theology had lost much of its previous influence. As a result, other themes also began to shape captivity narratives. At the onset of the long series of colonial wars that began in the 1750s and continued throughout the War of 1812, captivity accounts took on a propaganda-like quality that served national aims. They depicted Indians along with their French and British allies in lurid detail as they perpetrated unspeakable violence against defenseless frontier inhabitants.

By the mid-nineteenth century, when the Alder narrative was created, Ohioans were some thirty years removed from the Indian wars era. And when the Alder account was substantially edited and republished in the 1880s, Indians had been removed from the state for nearly two generations. Ohioans could allow themselves to see Indians as humans rather than bloodthirsty savages. The Alder narrative is sentimentalized, and native peoples are depicted in rich, often effusive emotional terms. “The Indians would generally collect at our camp in the evenings to talk over their hunting expeditions,” claimed Alder. “I would sit up to listen to their stories and frequently fall asleep just where I was sitting. After they left, Mary [Alder’s adoptive sister] would fix my bed, and with Col. Lewis [his adoptive brother-in-law] would carefully take me up and carry me to it. On these occasions, they would often say—supposing me to be asleep—‘Poor fellow! We have sat up too late for him and he has fallen asleep on the cold ground,’ and then how softly would they lay me down and cover me up. Oh! Never have I, nor can I, express the affection I had for these two persons.”

In addition to the evolving stylistic framework common to all captivity narratives, the Alder account in particular presents other problems. For example, the narrative, like many other captivity accounts, was created many years after the events that it purports to describe. Therefore, its reliability as an accurate witness to those events perhaps may be diminished.

Other difficulties are unique to this narrative. Henry Howe, Ohio's first great popular historian, used the Alder narrative, which he described as containing about one hundred handwritten pages and comprising a sketch of Alder's life while with the Indians, "together with a relation of many of their customs, and incidents that came under his observation," in his *Historical Collections of Ohio*, first published in 1847. Although the Howe account makes some direct quotes from the original manuscript, it is mostly paraphrased and heavily abridged. Shortly thereafter, the original manuscript prepared by Jonathan Alder was lost.<sup>30</sup>

Alder died in January 1849. Soon after his death, his son, Henry Clay Alder, recreated his father's narrative from memory. This manuscript, also containing about one hundred pages, disappeared in the 1850s. In 1882, Dr. George W. Hill, a physician and antiquarian with an interest in Ohio's historic and prehistoric Indians, published a serialized account entitled "The Shawnees and the Capture of Jonathan Alder from the Alder Manuscript" in the Ashland, Ohio, *Press*. Although Hill did not say where his documentation came from, the account, which appeared in weekly installments from January 26 through April 6, was far more complete than that which had in appeared in Howe's *Historical Collections*. Nonetheless, this version also showed the signs of heavy editing. Much of the narrative is presented in the third person and that which purports to be Alder's own words is written with the florid vocabulary and high emotionalism consistent with the Victorian literary taste of the late nineteenth century.

Far more worrisome, Hill seemed to be as interested in telling his readers about the central Ohio Shawnees as he was in relating Alder's tale. As a consequence, Hill's account is interspersed with a variety of ethnographical and historical information about the tribe that clearly was not derived from the Alder narrative. Further, Hill stops his account following the Treaty of Greenville in 1795, even though the original narrative continues until 1832. In 1965, Orley E. Brown, Jonathan Alder's great-grandson, surmising that Hill had come into possession of the original manuscript created by Jonathan Alder and loaned to Henry Howe, republished the Hill account mi-

nus its historical and ethnographical interpolations. But despite Brown's assertion concerning the account's origins, many of the direct quotes found in the Howe account do not appear in the Hill version. Hill, therefore, must have derived his narrative from some other source.<sup>31</sup>

In 1883, W. H. Beers prepared a history of Madison County, Ohio, in which he included a fifth version of the Alder narrative. Beers claimed to have used the account written by Henry Clay Alder as his main source. He also consulted the Howe account and augmented both versions by obtaining additional facts from Alder's descendants and "old settlers who knew him well." Although much more extensive than the Howe account, this version is also somewhat abridged and paraphrased.<sup>32</sup>

In the 1930s, one of Jonathan Alder's grandsons, Henry Betts, and a great-grandson, Henry Alder, rediscovered Henry Clay Alder's manuscript. In 1935, Doyle Davison, another descendent, made a typewritten copy of the document, added a brief forward, and deposited the transcript with the Ohio Historical Society in Columbus, Ohio. After examining these various versions, I believe that George Hill, like Beers, used the Henry Clay Alder manuscript to create his account and, like Beers, also interviewed living Alder relatives and friends to supplement the story.<sup>33</sup>

The present location of the manuscript created by Henry Clay Alder is unknown. Indeed, after checking the inventories of likely historical societies, libraries, and archives; searching with appropriate computer-based search engines; and making inquiries on both genealogical and historical Internet lists, I can't even say with certainty that it still exists. A story currently circulating through the Alder family claims that many years ago, during the course of a family feud, a disaffected descendent placed the document in a trunk, where it eventually disintegrated. If the manuscript does exist, it is likely in a private collection or housed in a small library or historical society whose collection inventories are not yet on-line.

After I submitted my manuscript to the University of Akron Press, I was asked bluntly by one member of the editorial staff how,



given the absence of the Henry Clay Alder manuscript, I knew that the entire narrative as presented in the Davison transcript was not a fabrication. I think that we know in several ways. One is its close resemblance and obvious relation to the version published by Henry Howe in 1847. Secondly, the versions produced by Hill and Beers both appear to be based upon a document consistent with the one purportedly transcribed by Davison. Thirdly, the Hill and Beers accounts are more elaborate than the version found in the Davison transcript, indicating that they were derived from the Henry Clay Alder manuscript, not it from them. More importantly, when both Hill and Beers edited the account in the 1880s, they both consulted Jonathan Alder's family and friends, people who collectively, I believe, would have objected strenuously to the publication of a wildly fictitious account of Alder's life. That type of negative comment does not exist, originating either before or after these later versions were published. I believe that the people who cooperated with Hill and Beers understood that the account that these later editors used when they prepared their own versions of Alder's life, namely the Henry Clay Alder manuscript, was in fact a substantially accurate portrayal of Alder's life. Furthermore, I believe that the Davison transcript is a faithful reflection of the original manuscript.

The real problem, it seems, is determining what sort of document the tale's various contributors thought they were creating. Some of this account was certainly created by Jonathan Alder himself. His early voice remains strong throughout the various versions. But some of the story undoubtedly originated also with Henry Clay Alder. Still other material was added by Alder's late-nineteenth century redactors and more still by kith and kin long after Jonathan had died. The problem of authorship is, therefore, complex. But the question of attribution goes to the heart of the Alder account. The Alder narrative was, in part, an attempt to provide an accurate historical account of the events in Jonathan Alder's life. But that account was also shaped in large measure by Jonathan's personal memories and then by those of his son. Later, the account was shaped once more by the designs and the agendas of the narrative's various editors and by the com-

bined recollection of the informants used by Beers and Hill as they created their own versions of the story. Therefore, this narrative, like all history, is an amalgam of objective description, personal reminiscence, and collective memory.<sup>34</sup>

The version within these pages is the Doyle Davison transcript of the Henry Clay Alder manuscript held by the Ohio Historical Society, including the foreword added by Davison in 1935. The Ohio Historical Society document suffers from infrequent misspellings, some typographical errors, and a few obvious omissions. Further, it is occasionally repetitive. The narrative is not a strict chronological retelling of Alder's story, but rather a series of anecdotes told at times in a rather haphazard fashion. Indeed, the Henry Clay Alder, Hill, and Beers accounts all have the feel of oral history rather than written documentation. I have retained the original format of the narrative and have edited the account as lightly as possible so as to preserve the feel and charm of the original manuscript. Where the Howe, Hill, or Beers accounts add to or materially differ from this version, I have inserted these details in italics and noted the source.<sup>35</sup>

Although the Alder narrative presented here cannot strictly be considered a primary source, that is, an account created by someone who has firsthand knowledge of the events that are being described, it nonetheless provides a useful window into Alder's life and times. The account recreated by Henry Clay Alder is the story that Jonathan Alder told publicly about his experiences with the Indians. As we read through it today, we get a sense that the reminiscence is romanticized, and that the tragedy connected with his capture and the hardships associated with his life with Indians have been glossed over, perhaps because in Alder's memory, they were emotionally overshadowed and eventually replaced by the genuine love and affection that he developed for his adoptive parents.

The Hill and Beers versions of Alder's narrative, derived from the recollections of Alder's family and closest associates, represent the story that Alder was willing to tell only privately. Within these accounts, a more emotionally deep and complex Jonathan Alder reveals himself. For example, Alder claims that when he was sixteen

years old, “the Indians made up a party to go over into Kentucky in the spring to steal some horse from the whites. They coaxed me to go along, flattering me and by saying that I could get a horse. I had never owned a horse and thought that I would like to have one, and would also like the trip.” In the later versions of this incident, we learn that this expedition took place following a series of raids from Kentucky against the village in which Alder and his family had been living. When Beers retold this tale, he stated that in the spring of 1790 Alder went with a party of Indians into Kentucky to steal horses “in retaliation for the destruction of our town and property.” In the Hill version, Alder adds “I had never owned a horse but was very desirous of doing so, and did not reflect upon the mode proposed to obtain them. To me, nothing seemed wrong so far as the whites were concerned. We had suffered so much at their hands that all seemed to be fair. I was assured the whites would steal our horses, or anything we had, if they had a chance to do so. They had several times taken or destroyed all we had, whereby we were almost reduced to a state of starvation. Hence, I felt somewhat like retaliating if I should have the opportunity.” The subsequent accounts, therefore, supply an emotional dimension that adds depth to the historical context and enhances our understanding of Alder and his actions.

The Jonathan Alder that emerges from his narrative was honest, caring, and genuinely concerned that both his Indian and white neighbors resolve their differences fairly and honorably. Beers describes Alder as “a little over six feet in height, and straight as an arrow,” and adds that “his hair and eyebrows were black as coal, his complexion dark and swarthy, his face large and well-formed, denoting strength of character and firmness of purpose; his eyes were bright and piercing, while his whole appearance, gait, and actions were characteristic of the Indians. Old settlers who knew him tell us that Jonathan Alder was as honest as the sun and his whole life, while living in this county, was characterized by the most rigid uprightness and straight-forward dealings toward his fellow men.”

At his death, Alder was buried in the Foster Chapel Cemetery. The cemetery is located on West Jefferson–Plain City Road, a short

distance north of exit 85 on Interstate 70, just west of Columbus. His log home, originally built about a mile north of Foster Chapel on Lucas Road, was moved to a plot adjacent to the cemetery in 1927 and remained there until 1986. It is now located at the Madison County Historical Society on State Route 142, London, Ohio.