

book of Genesis starts out with "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." There is no date given. Nothing is said about how many years ago this happened. But the written history of the Europeans is quite concerned with time and dates. Almost all the written history accounts we read are laid against a background of years and dates.

Limitations of History and Objectives of this Class

The Indian history which will be presented here in this class will be partly information from written history--information obtained from articles and books that have been published. But it is hoped that this can be rounded out with some oral history--the Indians' own kind of history. I will do what I can to find what has been written about the Shawnees and bring this information to you. I will also, from time to time, try to have some Indian stories to tell. Perhaps you can improve on the history presented here by adding what you know to it. You may be able to show where some things have been written down incorrectly, or fill in some of the gaps with stories you have heard from your elders. |

Perhaps this is a good place to point out some of the limitations of history--both oral and written. As we said before, history is an interpretation of the past. We can never know for sure what actually happened, as we cannot relive the past. All we can know is what is reported about the past. This means that there may be different versions of what has happened, and different points of view, depending on who is doing the reporting. Suppose, for example, that a member of the Absentee Shawnees and a member of the Sportsman's Club of the City of Norman were to each give their version of the building of Lake Thunderbird. How do you think these versions would compare? They would probably agree only in the fact that the lake was built. Which version is right? Probably most of you have pretty definite ideas about that.

The important point for our purposes is to remember that the accounts of Indian history we shall be talking about and studying are really just versions of events of the past. We may think that some versions are more accurate or more probable than others. Sometimes we may find versions that contradict each other, and reflect entirely different points of view. Then we may be faced with the problem of which version is right. Perhaps both versions may be useful in understanding and interpreting the past. On the other hand, some versions may not be useful at all.

This matter is brought up here because we may encounter different versions of events of Shawnee history, and we may encounter some versions which are puzzling or do not seem right. Most of the things which have been written about the Shawnees have been written down by white men, though Indians have sometimes provided the basic information. But what is conspicuously lacking in this written history, is the Indian version, or the Shawnee point of view.

I hope you will feel free to criticize any of the materials brought out in this class that do not seem right to you, or that you do not agree with. Perhaps we can make some corrections and even some additions to Shawnee written history as we go along. But as far as the materials presented on the very early history of the Shawnees is concerned, we should consider this as a reconstruction of what might have happened, and not as a complete picture of what actually happened. We do not have to accept the versions of history which have been written down as accurate or useful.