

Writer Examines Untold History of 'Adopted' Indians

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Wheeling history buff Alan Fitzpatrick has learned never to say "never."

Article Photos



Photo by Linda Comins

Despite vowing to stop writing books, he completed a new volume, "The White Indians," after learning of a fascinating, but hidden, aspect of the Frontier Wars era.

Fitzpatrick said more than 1,200 white captives never came home after peace was made with Native Americans. In the newly released book, he explores the question of why so many captives remained with the Indians.

For the book's cover, Wheeling artist Cecy Rose created an oil painting depicting Bryce Reagan, a young Wheeling man who remained with his Indian captors.

It was through Rose that Fitzpatrick happened upon the idea for his fourth book. The topic came to him "completely by accident, out of the blue," he said, adding, "I didn't go looking for it."

Julie West, from the tribal headquarters of the Wyandot nation in Oklahoma, contacted Rose about ordering prints of her painting, "Wyandot Woman," to sell at the tribal store. During a conversation, West mentioned that she was part Wyandot and half white, and said an ancestor had been captured in a 1764 raid, adopted into the tribe, married and never went home.

Fitzpatrick thought a couple dozen captives never returned, but West told him that hundreds remained with tribes. He wondered, "How is that possible that history has overlooked this?"

Curious about this topic, Fitzpatrick went back through his research, conducted in the British archives, and found mention of Reagan. He thinks the stories were kept secret because of racial prejudice against the Indians.

As he continued to research the topic, he faced a quandary because written native archives don't exist. Help came from a fellow Fort Henry Days re-enactor, Ohio County Deputy C. Allan Spencer, who has gained national recognition for his books, "They Gave the Scalp Halloo," volumes 1 and 2. Spencer found first-person sources in colonial records. "If it hadn't been for him, I wouldn't have been able to recreate these captives' lives," Fitzpatrick said.

"My point was to attempt to tell their story, which is a true story, through their eyes, because we know so little about native people," he explained. "It's allowed me to tell the story of white captives, bringing in their day-to-day way of life, and how they saw the world. Traditional Native Americans don't see the world the same way we do."

For white captives, "adoption served a lot of purposes. That's one thing that comes out in the book," he said. "The minute you're adopted, you became a member of that tribe."

The author commented, "There's been 300 years of history written by white people that Indians had no way of life that anyone could appreciate. They had a better life than the colonial, 18th-century structured class."

Reagan, the cover subject, was captured as a youth and adopted by the Shawnee. "The root source material on Bryce Reagan comes from the British archives, in which he's mentioned in two letters," Fitzpatrick said.

This project was fast-tracked, with Fitzpatrick spending six months on research and writing. "A lot of the material I already had," he said.

Rose spent about two months working on the oil painting, doing research, depicting authentic clothing and getting the right pose for the figure.

"It's not as detailed as some of my pieces," she said. "I kept it pretty loose. I focused on the face."

Fitzpatrick's previous books include "Wilderness War on the Ohio: The Untold Story of the Savage Battle for British and Indian Control of the Ohio Country During the American Revolution," "In Their Own Words: Native-American Voices from the American Revolution" and "Place of the Skull: The Untold Story of Wheeling's Earliest History."

With "The White Indians" in print, he remarked, "Now I can say I'm done with books."

Although Fitzpatrick contends he's finished writing, he remains busy with speaking engagements and book-signing events to promote "The White Indians."

He will talk about the new book at the Moundsville-Marshall County Public Library, 700 Fifth St., at 6 p.m. Monday. The event is free and open to the public.

On May 25, Fitzpatrick and Rose will visit the Main Street Gallery, located at Hays Landscape Architecture, 425 E. Main St., St. Clairsville. He will present a talk on "The White Indians" at 6:30 p.m. and an art exhibition by Rose will open at 7:30 p.m. Both events are free to the public.

He will conduct a book-signing event at Artworks Around Town in Wheeling's Centre Market from 4-8 p.m. June 3. He also will speak at Lunch With Books at the Ohio County Public Library, 52 16th St., Wheeling, at noon June 21; the program is free and open to the public.