

Henry Rowe Schoolcraft Biography

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Biography

The American explorer and ethnologist Henry Rowe Schoolcraft (1793-1864) was one of the earliest writers on Native American culture and history.

Henry Schoolcraft was born on March 28, 1793, in Albany County, N.Y. His father was a glassmaker. After attending local schools, Schoolcraft took up glassmaking, which he combined with private study and lectures at Middlebury College.

Between 1810 and 1817 Schoolcraft managed factories in New York, Vermont, and New Hampshire and wrote a treatise on glassmaking. In 1818 he traveled westward to pursue his geological interests. *A View of the Lead Mines of Missouri* (1819) established his scientific reputation and won him a place with an expedition to the copper mines around Lake Superior. He wrote of this adventure in *Narrative Journal of Travels through the Northwestern Regions of the United States ... to the Mississippi River* (1821).

By 1821 Schoolcraft was a well-known geologist, but he had become acquainted with the Native Americans living in the North, and in 1822 he was appointed Indian agent in Sault Ste. Marie, Mich. In 1823 he married Jane Johnston. He pursued Native American studies, carried on negotiations between the Native Americans and the government, and was promoted to superintendent of Indian affairs for Michigan. As Indian superintendent, he negotiated several important Native American treaties transferring land to the state.

Although as Indian agent Schoolcraft deprived the Native Americans of vast tracts of land, he demonstrated a sympathetic, if somewhat paternalistic, concern for their welfare. His treaty of 1836 provided for a system of annuities to be paid individually to the Native Americans rather than in lump sums to tribal chiefs. He supported government schools and mission schools as well, in the belief that it was necessary to "Christianize" Native Americans in order to educate them. He urged the teaching of agriculture to compensate for the loss of their hunting grounds and took a strong stand against alcohol.

Schoolcraft is best remembered as a scholar of Indian ethnology. Among his numerous volumes containing descriptions of Native American life and culture are *Algic Researches* (2 vols., 1839); *Oneóta* (8 vols., 1844-1845); *Notes on the Iroquois* (1847); *Personal Memories ... of Thirty Years with the Indian Tribes* (1851); and *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition, and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States* (6 vols., 1851-1857). These accounts of Native American life and folklore contributed greatly to anthropological science. Schoolcraft died on Dec. 10, 1864.