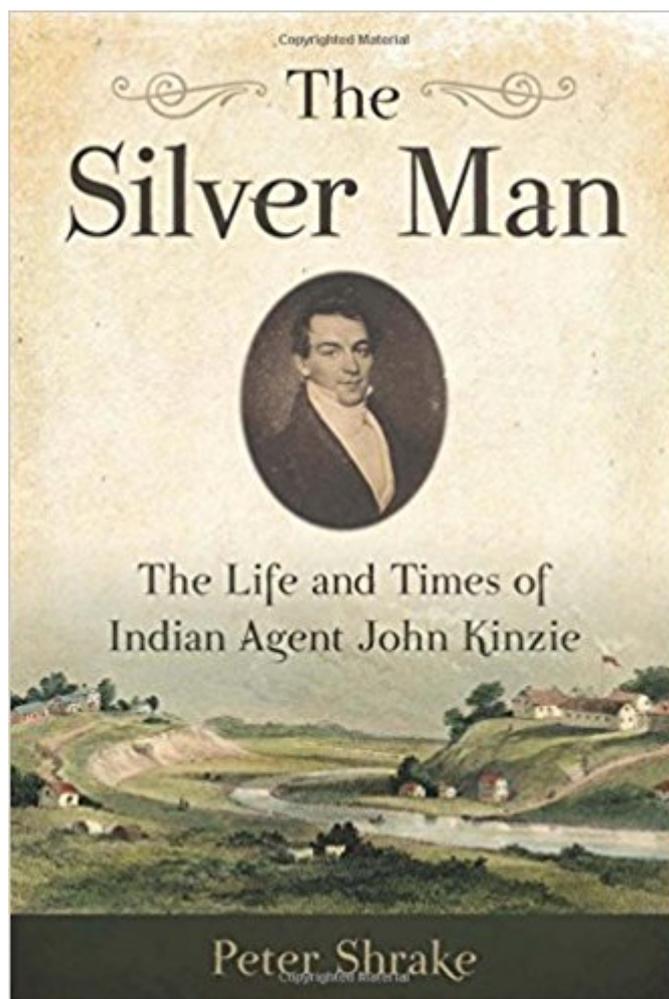


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# The Silver Man: The Life And Times Of Indian Agent John Kinzie



## Synopsis

In *The Silver Man: The Life and Times of John Kinzie*, readers witness the dramatic changes that swept the Wisconsin frontier in the early and mid-1800s, through the life of Indian agent John Harris Kinzie. From the War of 1812 and the monopoly of the American Fur Company, to the Black Hawk War and the forced removal of thousands of Ho-Chunk people from their native lands—John Kinzie's experience gives us a front-row seat to a pivotal time in the history of the American Midwest. As an Indian agent at Fort Winnebago—in what is now Portage, Wisconsin—John Kinzie served the Ho-Chunk people during a time of turbulent change, as the tribe faced increasing attacks on its cultural existence and very sovereignty, and struggled to come to terms with American advancement into the upper Midwest. The story of the Ho-Chunk Nation continues today, as the tribe continues to rebuild its cultural presence in its native homeland. Through John Kinzie's story, we gain a broader view of the world in which he lived—a world that, in no small part, forms a foundation for the world in which we live today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

American-Indian interaction did not begin with John Wayne at Fort Apache or a struggle over gold. Before that the cultures had met thousands of times in hundreds of places. "The Silver Man: The Life and Times of Indian Agent John Kinzie" is a look into the saga that played out in Southern and Central Wisconsin in the early Nineteenth Century. Though billed as a biography, this work is really the chronicle of the meeting of cultures during a period of great change...History is not all presidents and generals. It includes the men and women who settled the land, negotiated the peace and paved

the way for change. John Kinzie was one such man. Meet him on the pages of "The Silver Man: The Life and Times of Indian Agent John Kinzie." (Jim Gallen, Reviewer, June 2016)

Peter Shrake holds a masters degree from UW-Eau Claire focusing on Indian/White relations in Wisconsin. The subject of his thesis was the Menominee Treaty of 1831. He also earned a masters of library and information studies from the University of Wisconsin. Shrake has worked in the museum field in one form or another for over 14 years. He was the executive director of the Sauk County Historical Museum for eight years. For three years he worked for the Library/Archives Division of the Wisconsin Historical Society as a reference archivist. Currently he is the archivist at Circus World Museum. Shrake has spent nearly 20 years studying early 19th century Indian affairs and Indian agents in Wisconsin. He has published three articles relating to the early 19th century Wisconsin. His first article 'Justice or Revenge' was published in *Voyageur: Northeast Wisconsin's Historical Review* and related the history of the Menominee Indians in the Black Hawk War. His second article, 'Chasing and Elusive War' about the Illinois Militia in the Winnebago War of 1827 was published in the *Journal of Illinois History*. Most recently Shrake wrote 'The Silver Man' an article on the life of John H. Kinzie published in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History*.

Peter Shrake's *THE SILVER MAN: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF INDIAN AGENT JOHN KINZIE* is a biography of John Harris Kinzie (1803-1865) that focuses on his time as an Indian sub-agent to the Ho-Chunk at Fort Winnebago near present-day Portage, Wisconsin from December of 1828 to July of 1833. Kinzie, born into a prominent Chicago family, began his career as a clerk working for the John Astor's American Fur Company first at Mackinac Island, Michigan and later at Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. In 1826 he became a secretary to Michigan Territorial Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs Lewis Cass before being appointed Indian sub-agent and interpreter at Fort Winnebago two years later. After serving for four and a half years at the sub-agency, Kinzie retired his position and returned to Chicago where he speculated in real-estate and later served as a paymaster for the Union Army during the Civil War before his death in 1865. Shrake admits that Kinzie proved an elusive historical character as his personal journal and papers are lost to us "most likely destroyed, Shrake surmises, in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. *THE SILVER MAN*, then relies on a smattering of newspaper articles, Indian Office correspondence, and some more substantial writings authored by Kinzie's wife, Juliette Magill Kinzie, who left us a memoir of her time at the Portage along with a short biological sketch of her husband. But even Juliette's writings do not reveal the level of detail into

Kinzie's professional life Shrake had hoped to uncover. After all, Shrake admits "How many people can really describe, in detail, the professional lives of their spouse?" (3) While offering some concluding thoughts, Shrake again laments that much of Kinzie's perspective is lost to history, commenting "It's a shame that we have so little evidence of his point of view. If only we had his journal, if only his letters to and from Juliette had survived." (130) Regardless of the scant historical record, Kinzie played an interesting role, at an interesting place at an interesting time. Shrake does a masterful job of explaining context and using what sources are available to him to guide his readers through "dramatic changes that swept the Wisconsin frontier in the early and mid-1800s" (jacket) as encountered by Kinzie. Not only do we learn about the devastating pressure put on the Ho Chunk (and other American Indian nations) as they were pushed into conflict and then beyond the boundaries of what would become the state of Wisconsin, but we get to see the haphazard development of the Indian service and the inter-agency squabbling that defined the era. We also learn a great deal about the responsibilities and challenges faced by agents and sub-agents deployed to administer federal Indian policy along the frontier. Shrake convincingly makes a case that "A biography of John Harris Kinzie must be a history of the times in which he lived." (4) It is precisely for this reason that *THE SILVER MAN* an excellent account of a turbulent time in Midwestern history. Kurt Korten  
Saint Paul College

American-Indian interaction did not begin with John Wayne at Fort Apache or a struggle over gold. Before that the cultures had met thousands of times in hundreds of places. "The Silver Man: The Life and Times of Indian Agent John Kinzie" is a look into the saga that played out in Southern and Central Wisconsin in the early Nineteenth Century. John Kinzie, Jr. was a cog in the great system through which the government talked the Indians out of their land and distributed the payments due under treaties. John's facility for native languages made him an indispensable man for commercial and government agencies negotiating with the Indians. He accompanied a delegation of Ho-Chunk to meet their Great White Father at the White House in 1828 and was a sub-agent to the Ho-Chunk at Fort Winnebago, now Portage, Wisconsin from 1828 to 1833 before settling in Chicago. He concluded his career as a paymaster with the rank of major during the Civil War. Though billed as a biography, this work is really the chronicle of the meeting of cultures during a period of great change. The War of 1812 removed the British presence from the Upper Midwest and the Black Hawk War of 1832 rebuffed the Indians' attempt to relocate to their homelands in Wisconsin. Americans sought Ho-Chunk land for lead deposits found beneath it. The

storyline is familiar. The American are flooding into an area, something valuable is found, agents, such as Kinzie are commissioned to get the Indians to sell their lands, the Indians do not really understand what is happening but, after the pressure is applied and assurances given, are moved west until their whites want their new reservations. I found this to be very interesting from many angles. The close up view of White-Red relations in times of general tranquility makes for a fascinating study. The glimpse at other figures of history such as Lewis Cass and William Clark provide perspectives not seen in other histories. Wisconsin Indians of the day are introduced as vital players in the drama. After reading this I have a better understanding of the War of 1812 in the West and the Black Hawk War. It enticed me to take another look at *Indian Nations of Wisconsin* by Patty Loew (see my review) to review how the events of *The Silver Man* are recorded in Loew's chapter on the Ho-Chunk. It also encouraged me to revisit *Life, Death, and Archaeology at Fort Blue Mounds: A Settlers' Fortification of the Black Hawk War* by Robert Birmingham (also see my review) for a reminder of the Black Hawk War as seen through the settlers' eyes. History is not all presidents and generals. It includes the men and women who settled the land, negotiated the peace and paved the way for change. John Kinzie was one such man. Meet him on the pages of *The Silver Man*. I did receive a free copy of this book to read and review.

An excellent history of relations between Europeans and Native Americans. Specifically the American government of the 19th century and their treatment of Indians. John Kinzie was a man of many facets as described by his wife, whose memoirs provided much of the background for this book. Of course, many other records were also used when available. Together the information provides a compelling history of a man who had the best interests his fellow man at heart. Not without flaws, but still a man to be respected. The book focuses not only on Kinzie, but also covers the mid-19th century culture of the Northwest territory which this history covers.

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