

MUD TURTLE'S LAST HUNT

THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF CHIEF MUD TURTLE

A WINNEBAGO INDIAN

By O. J. Pruitt, Curator, Pottawattamie County Historical Society

The late George Morrison, pioneer, prominent farmer and large land owner told the writer the following story :

When the Winnebagos were removed from the vicinity of Crescent, Iowa, to the reservation almost directly across the Missouri river on the Nebraska side, Chief Mud Turtle, his squaw and two daughters, Mary and Tillie, remained and pitched their nearly worn out tepee on land along Honey Creek lake owned by the senior Morrison. It was just a few years after the Civil war. The last bear had been slain near Onawa and Cole Fisher had shot the last wild turkey on Potato creek. One James Shannahan of Sandy Point had killed the last roving buffalo bull some twelve miles below Council Bluffs. About the only wild game left was the prairie chicken, rabbits, squirrels and occasionally a stray deer.

Mud Turtle was considered a mighty hunter of both game and strong drink. George Morrison was then a lad some sixteen years and Mary, his Indian sweetheart, the same age.

Mud Turtle owned an old roan mare that he led with him wherever he went, lest the squaw and girls would make a travis, load on their earthly belongings, including the leather tepee, and strike out for the ferry that led to the reservation. Mud Turtle was absent almost daily in the pursuit of either game or liquor. Young George spent much of his time at the chief's tepee, courting Mary. To find favor he provided many a bottle of whiskey and donated more than one dog, for the chief was constantly losing some dogs from lack of food.

Morrison's father's land laid west of Honey Creek lake on what is known as Dutrow's Island, formed by changes of the course of the Boyer river. Mud Turtle

was given privilege by the senior Morrison to pitch his tepee on the west side of the lake and Mud Turtle chose a spot in a cottonwood grove.

When the wild game had almost vanished, Mud Turtle devoted his time to trapping muskrats, mink and skunk. The odor of skunk hides; on boards hung on trees, perfumed the air and was borne away with the breezes for great distances. The barking of half-starved dogs warned the occupants when strangers or neighbors came. The tepee was patched in many places, some of the handy-work of the squaw and some of that of young George. To the white man the tepee offered a poor excuse as a dwelling place.

GAME HUNTING WITH MUD TURTLE

It was late in November 1872, said Mr. Morrison, that he accompanied Mud Turtle on a hunting trip into the Honey Creek hills and beyond. Mud Turtle said he must get meat for the squaw and girls. The sky was overcast, threatening rain. They crossed the lake in a dugout and shot some rabbits and squirrels in the woods, then crossed over the hills to a cabin abandoned years before by Bibi, whose camp in 1850 was along the North Pigeon creek, where thirteen other cabins were homes of pioneers.

They had besides their fire arms, a half gallon of not too good whiskey. They took one long snort before heading into the prairie along Pigeon creek, and cached the jug overhead on a wide board across the ceiling sleepers in the cabin. A drizzling rain was now falling. They had not gone far when both were thoroughly soaked. The wind changed to the north and grew colder. The drizzle became sleet and made traveling slow through the long slough grass so they took to the hills on the way back to the Bibi log cabin. George had to aid the chief as he slipped and slid to climb the hills. After a tedious trip they reached the cabin and built a fire to dry out. They finished the jug and when dry continued their way homeward.

When they had reached the bluff of the main axis along the Missouri river they looked back to see the cabin ablaze. They had left too much wood on the fire place. They now came to the lake. Ice was forming at the banks and out in the waters slushy formation of ice impeded the rowing. Mud Turtle, very tired, lay back as best he could in the cramped space, while the crossing was accomplished by George. When they entered the tepee Mud Turtle lay down near the fire and soon slumbered, so they thought. In the meantime the squaw helped to dress the rabbits and squirrels ready for the evening meal.

When the squaw tried to arouse the chief it was found that he had died, no doubt due to exhaustion and bad whiskey. The women immediately began to wail and rave. Young George took to the food like a duck does to water, regardless of its cleanliness. When he had satisfied his hunger he hung a blanket across a part of the tepee and placed the chief on a wide cotton wood board, lately taken from a saw mill nearby. A real Iowa blizzard broke just at dark, threatening to destroy the tepee. It was an eerie place, with the howl of the wind and the wail of the squaws. George, with all his efforts, could not quiet Mary. Even the dogs set up an almost continuous howl.

Outside the wind ceased somewhat, and the snow became very deep. By daylight the next morning the snow ceased and the temperature dropped to twenty below zero. A hard crust formed atop the snow, and was strong enough to support a team and sled. One could drive straight across the field and roads in a straight line to an objective point.

PREPARATIONS FOR BURIAL

During the night George heated water and scrubbed the corpse, almost succeeding in removing the skunk odor. At daylight he went home and procured an old civil war uniform, property of Senior Morrison, cotton socks and shirt. The old chief in death resembled a human being dressed in the clothes thus provided.

The body of the corpse had frozen and there was a faint parting of the lips just like George had seen many times when the Indian anticipated a drink of liquor. "Oh, no," thought George, "you've taken your last snort."

Out in the cottonwood grove George shoveled away the snow and with pick and shovel dug a shallow grave. Then he made a trip with a team of horses and sled to Missouri Valley for a casket and rough box. Once in town he got several drinks to warm up. He miscalculated his capacity for drink and his ability to retain his normal senses.

Twice on the way back he upset the sled, spilling out the contents and self. The last time the wagon box turned upside down pinning George, casket and a few groceries beneath. He was found not three hundred yards from home, but very drunk. Another day came before George was in shape to complete the burial. The day was almost spent before the task was finished, amid the wailing of the women and the howling of the dogs.

The sequence of this story is that George lost his Indian sweetheart, as well as the companionship of the Chief. In midwinter, during a brief modulation of weather, the squaw and girls with the old roan horse and travis, all their belongings, including the old delapidated leather tepee, were seen heading toward the ferry. The squaw was leading the roan nag and the girls and six dogs were trailing behind her.

FOUNDATION OF OUR INSTITUTIONS

Gov. Henry Dodge: The elective franchise of the people is the sacred palladium of our rights, the shield and helmet of our liberties, and the foundation upon which our republican institutions must exist; all should equally participate in the advantage of representation, according to numbers.—Special Session Message, Wisconsin Territorial Assembly, June 11, 1838.

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