

BLACK HAWK

SOME ACCOUNT OF HIS LIFE, DEATH AND RESURRECTION

From Gregg's Dollar Monthly and Old Settlers' Memorial,
Vol. I, No. 1, pp. 8-9, 1873

The name of Black Hawk is indelibly written upon the history of the country. Any statement of the settlement of the great West and the trials and sacrifices of those hardy adventurers, who, taking their lives in their hands, pioneered the way into the wilderness and prairies of the states of the Mississippi Valley, would be incomplete if it did not record the struggle with this noted chieftain and his followers.

That he was a man of genius and bravery cannot be denied; and had the other chiefs of the Sacs and Foxes embraced and acted upon his policy, the Black Hawk War might have been of far longer duration, and a much fiercer and more sanguinary one. He claimed for himself and people the right to occupy and possess the country upon which the whites were continually encroaching. The buffalo and deer that roamed over the wilderness and prairies he claimed as theirs by right; and he acted upon his convictions.

But there was disagreement in the tribes. Keokuk, a talented and wily chieftain, with others of less influence, seduced by the oily tongues of agents and commissioners, who flattered and cajoled, and made promises that were never fulfilled, refused to join in the fight. The result is easily guessed. After an arduous struggle of two campaigns, the battle of Bad Axe was fought about August first, 1832, Black Hawk was taken prisoner, and his power completely broken. He was afterwards carried a prisoner to Washington, making a tour through the eastern states, and returned to his tribe beyond the Mississippi, with presents and an admonition.

It was on his return from his tour in the East, a prisoner of war, that I first saw Black Hawk. Afterwards in 1837, at Fort Des Moines (now Montrose, Iowa), I met him frequently, and had the honor of seating him and Mrs. Black Hawk on several occasions at my own table. Of course, I could gain little knowledge

of his character from these interviews, as his language was "Greek" to me and mine to him, and our interpreter was but little better posted. His deportment was always quiet and resigned. He acted as a deposed chieftain might be presumed to act, whose spirit was broken, and whose will had ceased to be law with his people.

The tribes were then settled up the Des Moines River, and it was only occasionally, for hunting and trapping purposes, and once or twice to receive the annuities due from the government, that they appeared on the Mississippi.

But the old Chieftain's career was soon to close. He, whose scalping knife had gleamed in the face of many a foe; whose war whoop had awakened the echoes of the night from the Des Moines to the Rock River and the Wisconsin and whose martial shout had sent threat and defiance across the Father of Waters, was about to yield to inexorable fate, and take his departure for the far-off Hunting Grounds prepared for brave warriors by the great Manitou. He died near the banks of the Des Moines River, in what is now the county of Davis, Iowa, on the — day of September in the year 1838.

At this day, and among a people familiar with him and his career, it will be hard to assign him his true place in history. His abilities as a commander and a ruler of his people were certainly inferior to those of Philip, of Pokonoket, or Powhatan; his talent for strategy and his energy of purpose were no doubt excelled by those of Tecumseh; his oratory, of which little has been handed down to us, fell short of that of Logan, but his name in history will be likely to stand along with these and serve in the distant future along with theirs, to "point a moral and adorn a tale."

Of late, so many contradictory statements have appeared in the newspapers in regard to the life and death of this chief, and the subsequent resurrection of his body, that I have taken some pains to arrive at the facts. One writer even calls him a Sioux chief—a tribe of Indians inhabiting the far regions of Minnesota. He was a chief of the Sacs, one of the double tribe of Sacs and Foxes; or to use their own vernacular, the Sawkees and Musquakees. A year or two after his death, the tribes were removed to and assigned lands in the Indian Territory in Kansas, where, it is

presumed they are fast going the way of all the aboriginal people of North America.¹

I have been unable to fix to a certainty the period of Black Hawk's death, or his age at the time. Governor Ford, in his history of Illinois, gives his age at eighty, and places his death on the third of October, 1840 (See Hist. of Ill., page 165). I should not have called him more than sixty-five or seventy. He is said to have been an aid-de-camp to Tecumseh, in the war of 1812-15.

A correspondent of the *Keosauqua Republican*, a short time since, stated his death to have occurred in 1837. Mr. William Garrett, an old resident of Burlington, to whom I am indebted for some interesting facts, places it in 1838 or 1839, while Mr. Jordan, named below, fixes it in September, 1838. Although the date named by Governor Ford more nearly agrees with my own recollection, I prefer taking that of Mr. Jordan as more likely to be the correct one.²

The story of the old Chief's illness and death, and the stealing of his body, is told with such particularity as to carry conviction of its truth. So I make no apology for copying the following letter entire from D. C. Beaman,³ Esq., of Van Buren County, Iowa.

Hickory, Iowa, Feb. 18, 1873.

Th. Gregg—Dear Sir: Yours of the 9th inst. duly received. In reply I have to say, that in compliance with your request, I called upon Mr. James H. Jordan, one of the oldest settlers in this county, who owns the land on which Black Hawk lived and died, and who resided within a few rods of the place of his death, and still resides there, and was personally acquainted with Black Hawk, his family and his tribe, Mr. Jordan having been an Indian trader, at that time owning a trading post at Iowaville.

Mr. J. seems to have a perfect recollection and knowledge of all the circumstances, so far as the same came under his personal

1 In 1859 and 1860, the Sacs and Foxes having disposed of their lands in the West to the government, 317 of them returned to a reservation in Tama County, Iowa, where they and their descendants still live. This removal was thirteen years prior to the publication of this article by Mr. Gregg.—Editor.

2 The date of Black Hawk's death is fixed as October 3, 1838, by "Life and Adventures of Black Hawk, p. 246, Applegate & Co., Cincinnati, 1854, and by other writers. See ANNALS, Vol. IV. p. 67.—Editor.

3 D. C. Beaman was station agent of C., R. I. & P. R. R. at Selma, Iowa, later a noted member of the Iowa and Colorado bar and founder of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Co.

notice. All of the events herein stated as having transpired up to the removal of Black Hawk's remains, he claims to know of his own personal knowledge.

Mr. J. states that a few hours before his death, Black Hawk sent for him to come to see him; that the Indian doctors had exhausted their skill upon him without success, and unless he could obtain a white doctor there was no hope for him. No white doctor was in that section of country, and about 12 (at noon) of the — day of September, 1838, Black Hawk died, at his lodge, about ten rods from Jordan's house, and about one mile above Iowaville, on the northeast side of the Des Moines River, on Lot 4, in Sec. 2, T. 70, R. 12, in Davis County, Iowa. Disease, fever.

Prior to his death he expressed a desire to be buried on the spot where he had held his last council with the Iowas, which was on the northeast corner of the lot above named, and his request was complied with.

The manner of his burial was as follows: He was rigged out in a full suit of regimentals; frock coat with gold epaulettes, worth several hundred dollars; a cocked hat; sword and belt and spear cane; and fastened about him were three medals, each near the size of a dinner plate—one presented to him by General Jackson, one by President Madison, and one by the British Government. They were valuable, but whether of silver or gold I have forgotten, although Mr. Jordan stated the kind of metal to me. The sword and cane came into Mr. Jordan's hands, and the sword was by him presented to the Masonic Lodge at Keosauqua, in whose possession it now is. The sword was also a present from General Jackson.⁴

A puncheon wide and long was placed at an angle of about thirty or forty degrees, one end resting in a place hollowed out in the ground, and the other upon a fork two or three feet high, and the chief's body lay on its back upon the puncheon. Over all was a covering made by puncheons, with the bottoms on the ground and the tops coming together like a house roof, the ends being closed in like manner, and the whole covered with soil.

⁴ This sword burned in the lodge building, the blade was recovered and returned to Capt. Jordan and by his grandson deposited in the Historical Department of Iowa.—Editor.

Around the grave, if grave it can be called, was a strong palisade of posts, six or eight inches in diameter, set in the ground four feet, and above it eight or ten feet, standing within a few inches of each other.

During the winter of 1838 the head dropped off and fell into his lap. In the spring of 1839, one Dr. Elbert came with two men whom he hired for the purpose, to carry off the body, and stopped at Jordan's house in the evening. The doctor accepted an invitation to remain all night in the house, but the men declined, saying they would stay in their wagon. This aroused Mr. Jordan's suspicion of the object of the visit, and of their intention to steal the body. He immediately informed some of the Indians, and when the two men, as expected, undertook to get the body, they were driven off by the Indians.

Other attempts were made during the spring and summer to obtain the body, but without success, until the night of July 3, 1839, one Dr. Turner, of Lexington,⁵ succeeded in getting the head, and during the following winter also got the body and the medals, and took the body to Alton, Illinois, for the purpose of having the bones wired together.

The loss of the body caused the widow and sons of the chief to grieve, and they made application to Governor Lucas to try and recover it, but its whereabouts could not then be ascertained.

However, the man who wired the skeleton fell out with Turner about the price, and wrote to Governor Lucas that he had the skeleton. The Governor sent and recovered it, and wrote to Jordan that he had it. Jordan informed the family, and they went to Burlington to get it. But as the tribe was about to remove west, and the bones were in safe keeping, they concluded to leave them with the Governor until the tribe became permanently located, and then send for them. The bones were deposited in the Museum of the Historical Society at Burlington, and were destroyed with it by fire soon after.

The burial place of Black Hawk is still plainly distinguishable by a slight mound, and a number of stones lying upon the ground;

⁵ An extinct town in Van Buren County.—Editor.

and is about one-fourth of a mile northwest of Mr. Jordan's present residence, and two and a quarter from this place.

Yours truly,

D. C. BEAMAN.

Whether the bones of Black Hawk ever went to Alton to be wired I cannot say, but there is indisputable evidence that they were in the office of Dr. Hollowbush, a dentist of Quincy, and were taken thence by the agent of the governor of Iowa.

So, even his bones could not be permitted to rest in peace where the hands of friends and relatives had laid them. Such is the fate of the savage on this North American continent! Driven from his hunting grounds, step by step, towards the ever receding West, by the overpowering march of civilization, he falls by the wayside, and his grave is overrun and ruthlessly desecrated! "Who is there to mourn for Logan? Not one."—G.

WINE CELLAR OPENED

The subscriber gives notice that he has this day opened a wine cellar next above the Bunch of Grapes, in King Street, where he has to sell the best old Sterling Madeira by the gross, dozen or single bottle, and all other wines by the quarter cask, or less quantity, even to a single quart. The gentlemen of the town, and all masters of vessels and passengers who will favor him with their custom, may depend on having their wines in their original purity, and very cheap for cash only.

JOSEPH INGERSOL.

N. B. Said Ingersol will be obliged to those gentlemen who purchase wine of him by the bottle, that they would send him empty bottles, for which proper allowance will be made.—*The Boston Chronicle*, January 11, 1763. (In the newspaper collection of the Historical Department of Iowa.)

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.