

ANNALS OF IOWA

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

HISTORICAL RESOURCES OF THE HISTORICAL DEPARTMENT OF IOWA

In the preparation of an inventory of the public property in the hands of the Curator of the Historical Department of Iowa, in compliance with Chapter 177, Acts of the Thirty-ninth General Assembly, the staff of the Department has many times brought out from the different divisions contributions toward complete information upon single objects, often surprising, always interesting. An instance is herewith presented from the actual experience of the Curator's office with respect to one of our historical portraits most familiar to the eye of the visitor.

KEOKUK

(An editorial in *Iowa State Register*, April 19, 1883, from newspaper files in Historical Department.)

Fifty years ago this spring, except for the mining camp at the mouth of the Catfish, where Dubuque now stands, the soil of Iowa was occupied by Sacs, Foxes, Winnebagoes and Sioux. Theirs was the control of the buffalo that fed upon the prairies, and theirs the deer that took covert under the maples of the Turkey, the oaks of the Maquoketa, the cedars of the Cedar, and the butternuts of the Des Moines, and honey was stored in every wikeup.

Keokuk, the Sac, was the principal ruler of Iowa fifty years ago. This man deserves more prominence in Iowa history than has been popularly accorded him. Born in 1780 on Rock River, he seems to have been of equal rank with Black Hawk in the allied tribes of the Sacs and Foxes. But when Black Hawk allied his band with the British in the War of 1812 Keokuk kept his people neutral, and later when that turbulent warrior defeated Stillman and courted his own ruin by the campaign that followed, Keokuk, by the exercise of his wonderful oratory, kept the Iowa people quiet. And it is a remarkable fact that the bands ruled by Keokuk, Appanoose, Wapello and Kishkekosh, preserved an unbroken peace with the whites from the treaty with Lieutenant Pike early in the century up to 1845, when they withdrew to Kansas to make room in Iowa for two millions of people. Hardly a murder oc-

curred during this long contact with the advance guard of the white army of civilization.

Keokuk could be brave on occasion, as was more than once realized by the Sioux, but his bent of mind preferred the council pipe to the tomahawk, and he would have been glad to end his days on his chosen farm at Agency, but the needs of his people constrained him to accompany them to the new home in Kansas. Tradition has it that he became too fond of whisky in his new home and died from its effects. But when it is remembered that hundreds of the allied Pottawattamies became homesick for the shade-fringed streams of Central Iowa, we should forgive the aged Keokuk, the orator, the prudent ruler, the respecter of treaties, for seeking to bolster up his breaking stoicism with potations that served to shorten the Kansas prairie horizon to his eyes. Let us accept him as a historic character in Iowa, and if any picture or bust of him can be procured, let us perpetuate his lineaments in the new Capitol, as the face of an Indian who loved peace rather than war, and who comprehended too well that his people were not only to give way before the white covered wagons of emigration, but disappear from the race of men.

AS TO KEOKUK'S PORTRAIT

(From *Iowa State Register*, April 21, 1883, from newspaper files in Historical Department.)

Ed. Register: Your suggestions as to the preservation of the memory of that noble chief Keokuk were timely and deserve attention. It is not generally known that Catlin, the celebrated painter, who was present when the treaty was made with the Indians, so admired the noble physique of Keokuk that he painted his portrait in full life size, the chief being seated on a horse, and it was pronounced one of the best portraits painted by that artist. This portrait should become the property of the state of Iowa. It is probably now in Europe, among his art collection. In 1876 a royal octavo edition of finely executed colored plates, *facsimiles* of his portraits, was published in London, which were sold at ten dollars a volume. At least three of Catlin's works contain much valuable history of the Indians who inhabited Iowa, for he came here and lived with them to get his facts. Singularly enough, none of these publications are in the State Library. Mr. Catlin died at an advanced age in Jersey City, in December, 1872.

LEX.

KEOKUK'S PORTRAIT

(From *Iowa State Register*, April 22, 1883, from newspaper files in Historical Department.)

Yesterday Mrs. Maxwell called the Register reporter's attention to the well-intended communication from "Lex," and said the article did the State Library an' injustice. She then called the scribe's attention

to an alcove half filled with books dealing on the multiform topics of American archeology. She next produced a copy of Catlin's "North American Indians," edition of 1876, an old work in folio and a folio of lithographs selected from Catlin's works. The reporter then gave the volumes a half hour's examination. The second volume of Catlin's works revealed not only a portrait of Keokuk himself, but also of his favorite wife (honored among seven) and her young son. Page 210 Mr. Catlin says:

"Kee-o-kuk (the running fox) is the present chief of the tribe, a dignified and proud man, with a good share of talent, and vanity enough to force into action all the wit and judgment he possesses, in order to command the attention and respect of the world. At the close of the Black Hawk War in 1833, which had been waged with disastrous effects along the frontier by a Sac chief of that name, Kee-o-kuk was acknowledged chief of the Sacs and Foxes by General Scott, who held a treaty with them at Rock Island. His appointment of chief was a consequence of the friendly position he had taken during the war, holding two-thirds of the warriors neutral, which was no doubt the cause of the sudden and successful termination of the war, and the means of saving much bloodshed. Black Hawk and his two sons, as well as his advisers and warriors, were brought into St. Louis in chains, and Kee-o-kuk appointed chief with the assent of the tribe. In his portrait I have represented him in the costume precisely in which he was dressed when he stood for it, with his shield on his arm, and his staff (insignia of office) in his left hand. There is no Indian chief on the frontier better known at this time, or more highly appreciated for his eloquence as a public speaker than Kee-o-kuk, as he has repeatedly visited Washington and others of our Atlantic towns, and made his speeches before thousands when he has been contending for his peoples' rights in their stipulations with the United States government for the sale of their lands."

The portrait above referred to appears to have been dropped from the edition at the State Library, but on page 212 the author says:

"After I had painted the portrait of this vain man at full length, and which I have already introduced, he had the vanity to say to me that he made a fine appearance on horseback, and that he wished me to paint him thus. So I prepared my canvass in the door of the hospital which I occupied in the dragoon cantonment, and he flourished about for a considerable part of the day in front of me until the picture was completed. The horse that he rode was the best animal on the frontier, a fine blooded horse for which he gave the price of \$300, a thing he was quite able to do, who had the distribution of \$50,000 annuities annually amongst his people. He made a great display on this day, and hundreds of the dragoons and officers were about him and looking on during the operation. His horse was beautifully caparisoned and his scalp was carried attached to the bridle-bits."

The above picture was painted while one of the later treaties with the Sacs and Foxes was being arranged, and probably at Agency. Old settlers will probably be able to settle this point. The picture is a wonderfully spirited one, showing an imposing looking man on a magnificent horse. The author says in a note that one of his audiences in New York afterward disputed the appearance of the horse, but both Keokuk and Antoine LeClaire, who were present, certified that the picture of the horse was very faithful.

But the old book in the State Library is a treasury of Iowa chiefs. These faces, which are larger than panel photographs and lithographed with considerable skill, should also be transferred to the walls of the new Capitol. Mr. Catlin's book contains portraits of Black Hawk, Pashipapa and some others, all in miniature, but the old folio has Naw-Kaw, the predecessor of Wadena, chief of the Winnebagoes; Appanoose, of the Sacs and Foxes; Mahaska (father and son), of the Iowas; Wapello, another distinguished Indian of that day; Kishkekosh, head of the Pottawattamies, and known to many old settlers hereabouts; and a Musquakie chief who was murdered by a small band of Illinois Indians while going on a visit to Prairie du Chien.

Thus it will be seen that the labor of Catlin in Iowa has preserved the lineaments of the representative Indians occupying Iowa at the time when "Manifest Destiny" required this fair land for white settlement.

With such excellent and authentic material at their hands, the Capitol commissioners need not look farther for appropriate mural decorations for some one of the larger rooms yet to be embellished, and thus preserve to the future Iowa of five million people the semblance of a people now almost extinct.

KEOKUK AND CATLIN

(From *Keokuk Gate City*, April 26, 1883, from newspaper files in Historical Department.)

The collection and preservation of all manner of historical facts connected with the early settlement of Iowa has been undertaken by the state librarian at Des Moines. Thus far many persons throughout the state have responded with contributions of books, original manuscripts, etc., and a recent writer in the *Des Moines Register* advocated the purchase of an oil painting of the Indian chief Keokuk, which is now thought to be in England. There is talk of embellishing one of the larger rooms of the Capitol Building with the portraits of the great Indian chiefs and this discussion has called to memory of old settlers incidents occurring at the time Keokuk's portrait was painted in oil by Catlin. In 1834 the First United States Dragoons—Colonel Henry Dodge—went on an expedition to the Rocky Mountains. The campaign was specially conducted against the Pawnees, Comanches, Kiowas and Tawas. It appears that these tribes had taken prisoner a son of Judge Martin, of Arkansas, and the principal object was to secure his release. This was successfully accomplished at the Pawnee village at the foot of the mountains in the valley of the Red River, by exchanging the

daughters of two chiefs of the Pawnees, who were purchased of the Osages and held as hostages for this boy. The dragoons left St. Louis in April of that year, and Companies B, H, and I arrived at Fort Des Moines in the following September on their return from the mountains. The Indians at that time, were not sufficiently civilized to adopt the deadly firearms of the whites, but still went to war with the bow and arrow and tomahawk. No fighting occurred. Colonel J. C. Parrott, of this city, was first sergeant of Company I and accompanied the dragoons on this campaign. He remembers Catlin very well, and witnessed the painting of the portrait of Keokuk at Montrose, then called Fort Des Moines. In 1834 Catlin was financially a bankrupt. He did not have a cent in ready cash, but was a fine artist. The officers of the First Dragoons took a fancy to him, and by special invitation he accompanied them to the mountains, and lived upon the charity of the officers, eating at their tables, etc. Catlin had a perilous adventure with a wounded bull buffalo while on the plains. The officers were on a hunt and Catlin was in full pursuit of a wounded bull, which, when hard pressed, wheeled and rushed at him. Catlin attempted to use his double-barrelled shot gun, and had just raised it to fire, when the buffalo's neck collided with the end of the barrels with such force as to snap the gun in twain at the breech. The enraged animal gored the horse which Catlin was riding in the flank, but the artist succeeded in getting out of the way unhurt. Catlin spent some time in the vicinity of Fort Snelling, and in 1836 came down the river in a steamer. He desired to stop at Fort Des Moines—Montrose—but the captain would not land. Catlin had a birch canoe on board, and finally persuaded the captain to slow up and put him and his baggage afloat in the canoe. He was an expert with the brush but out of his element when navigating the Father of Waters, as the disastrous result of his temerity conclusively demonstrated. The canoe upset and Catlin reached the shore but lost a prized pair of pistols and some light baggage. The portrait of Keokuk was painted at Fort Des Moines subsequent to Catlin's canoe experience. The canvas was about 3x4 feet. Keokuk was mounted on a fine black mare, gaily caparisoned and was bedecked himself in barbaric splendor. He rode up and down the parade ground in fine spirits until the portrait was completed. Catlin desired to make a copy of it for Keokuk, but he would not consent to that proposition. Keokuk claimed that if he took the portrait and hung it up in his wigwam he would not be able to sleep by reason of being mounted. Keokuk took great pride in fine horses and Colonel Parrott says if the mare referred to above only cost \$300 she was cheap, as Keokuk would pay \$1,000 for a horse that suited him.

Catlin went to England shortly after painting Keokuk's portrait where he amassed a fortune in selling portraits of Indian chiefs and western landscape scenes. He died in this country and left a valuable estate.

In 1886 Governor Larrabee received the oil painting of "Keokuk on Horseback" which for twenty years has been among our historical paintings. The story of its acquisition and attendant facts of much interest are disclosed in the letters herewith of James S. Clarkson and Thomas Donaldson, the originals of which are in our Public Archives Division.

Iowa State Register
Des Moines.

July 21, 1886.

Mr. F. W. Hossfeld,
Executive office, Des Moines.

Dear Sir:

The address of the Hon. Thomas Donaldson who presented this State with a picture of Keokuk, is number 326 No. 40th St., Philadelphia, Penn. Agreeable with Mr. Donaldson's request I enclose herewith for you to present to the Governor, the letter which he sent with the picture, and which he desires to have placed in the records of the state. It was miscarried in reaching me, and meantime he wrote me a letter, which was printed in the *Register* of the 21st inst.

As you will see there is very little difference in the two letters.

I would thank you for an acknowledgment of the letter and the picture, that I may send it to Mr. Donaldson to show him that my errand has been performed.

Yours truly,

J. S. CLARKSON.

No. 326 N. 40th Street,
Philadelphia, Pa.,
April 8, 1886.

My dear Mr. Clarkson:

Recalling a conversation with you two years ago in relation to the Indians of Iowa, and the efforts of your state to get portraits of leading ones, I sent you yesterday a copy of George Catlin's "Keokuk on Horseback" for presentation to the proper person for the state of Iowa.

This copy was made from the original by George W. Nicholson, Esq., of this city, an artist of repute and standing. Mr. J. A. C. Dickson, artist, also aided.

Mr. James E. McClees, Jr., of McClees Art Galleries, also of Philadelphia, kindly took charge of the framing, etc.

The original of this picture, in General Catlin's Indian Gallery, was presented to the United States by Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., of this city, in May, 1879.

Her husband, Joseph Harrison, Jr., purchased it along with the entire Catlin Indian Gallery from George Catlin in London, England, in 1862.

The Catlin Gallery, or collection, so purchased, was shipped by Mr. Harrison from London in 1865 to Philadelphia and stored in warehouses until May, 1879. During the year 1878 I ascertained the fact of this original Catlin Collection being in Philadelphia and at once negotiations were opened with the Harrison estate for its transfer to the Smithsonian Institution at Washington. It was valued at \$65,000. In May, 1879, it was presented by Mrs. Harrison to the nation. Mr. Catlin was probably the first artist who visited the Indians in the interior of the present state of Iowa, during the years from 1831 to 1838, so that his work has an especial interest to the people of your state. Permit me to suggest that the state of Iowa as well as other northwestern states can have copied at a nominal cost the series of Indian paintings by Mr. Catlin, now in the National Museum. The results would be gratifying. I have no doubt that almost all of the Indians of note from 1800 to 1838, of the northwest, can be found in this collection, Sioux, Chippewa, Winnebago, etc. I append a list of the pictures in the collection relating to the Sac and Fox alone.

In this way by copying them a splendid series of portraits of your original inhabitants can be had for your state.

Now as to the copy of "Keokuk on Horseback" sent you. Some four years ago I read in the *State Register* a letter from some person describing how George Catlin painted the original "Keokuk on Horseback" in 1834, on the Des Moines River. He was present, and gave many interesting details. The communication also stated that the picture, he understood, had been sent to London and there destroyed. As at that time I had but recently obtained, packed, and shipped the original Catlin Collection to the Smithsonian Institution, including the identical picture, I knew it had not been destroyed, and so have had it copied and sent to you for your state.

By the way, cannot some of your citizens who knew or saw Mr. Catlin in Iowa or in the west send me some recollections of him?

Now as to the painting of this particular picture and of the other portrait of Keokuk by Mr. Catlin. Mr. Catlin visited Camp Des Moines in the fall of 1834. Here he met Colonel S. W. Kearney, who was in command with three companies of the U. S. Dragoons. Mr. Catlin descended the rapids in a boat with his wife, and after placing her on a steamboat for St. Louis, returned to Camp Des Moines. He then went with General J. M. Street, the Indian agent, to Keokuk's village. Colonel Kearney furnished them with an escort of eight dragoons, and also with a camping outfit. They reached Keokuk's village about sixty miles up the Des Moines River in two days. Mr. Catlin describes his visit as follows:

"The whole country that we passed over was like a garden, wanting only cultivation, being mostly prairie, and we found their (Sac and

Fox) village beautifully situated on a large prairie on the banks of the Des Moines River. They seemed to be well supplied with the necessities of life and with some of its luxuries. I found Keokuk to be a chief of fine and portly figure, with a good countenance, and great dignity and grace in his manners.

"General Street had some documents from Washington to read to him, which he and his chiefs listened to with great patience, after which he placed before us good brandy and good wine, and invited us to drink and to lodge with him. He then called up five of his runners or criers, communicated to them in a low but emphatic tone the substance of the talk from the agent, and of the letters read to him, and they started at full gallop, one of them proclaiming it through his village, and the others sent express to other villages comprising the whole nation.

"Keokuk came in with us with about twenty of his principal men, and brought in all his costly wardrobe that I might select for his portrait such as suited me best, but at once named of his own accord the one that was purely Indian. In that he paraded for several days, and in it I painted him at full length."

His full length is now picture No. 1, in the Catlin Collection, at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., and is Plate No. 280, page 210, Vol. II, "Catlin's Manual, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians, London, 1848."

Mr. Catlin continues:

"I painted his favorite wife, his favorite boy (now Rev. George Keokuk of Indian Territory), and eight or ten of his principal men and women, after which he and all his men shook hands with me, wishing me well, and leaving as a token of regard the most valued article of his dress, and a beautiful string of wampum which he took from his wife's neck. They then departed for their village in good spirits to prepare for their fall hunt."

Mr. Catlin also painted the "Keokuk on Horseback" at this same visit. The "Keokuk on Horseback" was not numbered in the original Catlin's Indian Gallery. It was carried around and exhibited on an easel. The original sketch from which this picture was painted is now in my possession. Mr. Catlin, after exhibiting his gallery in the United States in 1837 to 1839, removed it to Europe in 1839 where it remained until 1862 on exhibition.

"Keokuk on Horseback" can be found in "Catlin's Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians." It is Plate No. 290, Page 212, Vol. II. It is now in the National Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, numbered 1 A following the standing figure of "Keokuk" first described herein, and No. 1 of the collection.

The incidents of painting this picture in 1836 on the Des Moines River are given by Mr. Catlin:

"Keokuk is a man of a great deal of pride and makes truly a splendid appearance on his black horse. He owns the finest horse in the

country, and is excessively vain of his appearance when mounted and arrayed, himself and horse, in all their gear and trappings. He expressed a wish to see himself represented on horseback, and I painted him in that plight. He rode and nettled his prancing steed in front of my door until its sides were in a gore of blood."

Again Mr. Catlin refers to this painting, Plate No. 290, Page 212, Vol. II, "Catlin's Eight Years," "Keokuck [Keokuk] on Horseback":

"After I had painted the portrait of Keokuk at full length (No. 1 of the Catlin Collection now in the Smithsonian Institution and Plate No. 280 above cited), he had the vanity to say to me that he made a fine appearance on horseback, and that he wished me to paint him thus, so I prepared my canvass * * * and he flourished about for a considerable part of the day in front of me until the picture was completed. The horse that he rode was the best animal on the frontier, a fine blooded horse for which he gave the price of three hundred dollars. He made a great display on this day and hundreds of the dragoons and officers were about him, and looking on during the operation. His horse was beautifully caparisoned, and his scalps were carried attached to his bridle bits."

Mr. Catlin's Museum was on exhibition in New York City in 1838 when Keokuk and his warriors were in that city. He describes their visit as follows:

"While I was giving lectures on the customs of the Indians in the Stuyvesant Institute in New York in the fall of 1838, Keokuk and his wife and son with twenty more of the chiefs and warriors of his tribe, visited the city of New York on their way to Washington City, and were present one evening at my lecture, amidst an audience of 1500 persons. During the lecture I placed a succession of portraits on my easel before the audience and they were successively recognized by the Indians as they were shown, and at last I placed this portrait, "Keokuk on Horseback," before them, when they all sprang up and hailed it with a piercing yell. After the noise had subsided Keokuk arose and addressed the audience in these words: 'My friends, I hope you will pardon my men for making so much noise, as they were very much excited by seeing me on my favorite war horse, which they all recognized in a moment.' I had the satisfaction then of saying to the audience that this was very gratifying to me, inasmuch as many persons had questioned the correctness of the picture of the horse, and some had said in my exhibition rooms that it was an imposition—that no Indian on the frontier rode so good a horse. This was explained to Keokuk by the interpreter, when he arose again, quite indignant at the thought that anyone should doubt its correctness, and assured the audience that his men, a number of whom never had heard that the picture was painted, knew the horse the moment it was presented; and further, he wished 'to know why Keokuk could not ride as good a horse as any white man?' He here received a round of applause, and the interpreter, Mr. LeClair, rose and stated to the audience that he recognized the horse the moment

it was shown, and that it was a faithful portrait of the horse that he sold to Keokuk for three hundred dollars, and that it was the finest horse on the frontier belonging either to red or white men."

Mr. Catlin was many years in early Iowa, and I am surprised to find but little mention of him in the works on early Iowa.

In A. R. Fulton's clever work, "The Red Men of Iowa," I cannot even find his name mentioned, at least not in the index. His several works abound with descriptions of Iowa and her Indians.

He was a spectator of the treaty with the Sac and Fox nation, on the site of the present city of Davenport, in September, 1836. He accompanied General Street to the treaty grounds where he met General Dodge, Keokuk, Black Hawk and others. He remained several weeks with the Sac and Fox and painted many scenes of the life, customs, and games. The pictures that he painted at that time now form a portion of the Catlin Gallery now in the National Museum, Smithsonian Institution, viz.:

- No. 439. Begging Dance, Sac and Fox.
- No. 442. Dance to the Berdash.
- No. 444. Dance to the Medicine, Bag of the Braves.
- No. 448. Discovery Dance (of game or an enemy).
- No. 450. Slave Dance.
- No. 463. Smoking Horses.

The following list of portraits of Sac and Fox Indians, by George Catlin, are also in the same collection in the National Museum. The numbering is Mr. Catlin's as well as the spelling of the tribal and proper names. Some of them are incorrect according to modern usage, but they can all be easily identified. Mr. Catlin prepared this data in 1834-8 and 1862.

SAC AND FOX INDIAN PORTRAITS

BY GEORGE CATLIN

Sacs (Sáu-kies)

A tribe of Indians residing on the upper Mississippi and Des Moines rivers. Present number (in 1840) about 5000. The smallpox carried off half their population a few years since, and a considerable number were destroyed in the Black Hawk War in 1832-3.

This tribe shave the head, leaving only a small tuft of hair on the top which they call "scalplock."

[The acute accent is used in the spelling of the Indian names merely to denote the emphasis.]

1. Kee-o-kúk, The Running Fox, present chief of the tribe. Shield on his arm and staff of office (scepter) in his hand; necklace of grizzly bear's claws over the skin of a white wolf, on his neck. This man during the Black Hawk War, kept two-thirds of the warriors of the tribe neutral, and was therefore appointed chief by General Scott, in treaty, with the consent of the nation.

No. 1 A, "Keokuk on Horseback," painted in 1834. (Copy sent Iowa by Thomas Donaldson.)

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.