

SHABBONA AND THE PART HE PLAYED IN THE PIONEER HISTORY OF THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY

BY B. L. WICK

There has never been much, if anything, written about Shabbona in the histories of Iowa. Still, while Shabbona belongs to Illinois, he crossed Iowa several times, and the stand he took on behalf of the whites no doubt affected the history of Iowa. As is well known, Shabbona and the tribe with which he was connected openly opposed the Black Hawk War, and no doubt brought this war to an end much sooner than it would otherwise have occurred.

The story of the life of Chief Shabbona is a story of one of the most remarkable Indians who lived in the state of Illinois during the pioneer years. His name is variously written by the Ethnology Department of the government as "Shabonee" and "Shabona," but in the archives of the state of Illinois it is spelled "Shabbona." The name is supposed to be the name of one, Captain de Chambly, a French-Canadian army officer; by others it is an Indian name meaning "built like a bear," which would perhaps correctly describe this noted red man.

Shabbona was born on the banks of the Maumee River, which flows into Lake Erie, in about 1775, and died near Morris, Illinois, on July 17, 1859, at the advanced age of eighty-four years. He was a member of the Ottawa tribe. His father, being related to Pontiac, the great Indian leader, had fought by the leader's side in many an Indian outbreak.

Shabbona, as a young man, wandered, with the members of his tribe, into the forests of Michigan. Later he was found by the side of Tecumseh, on the side of the British, in the battle of the Thames. He used to say in his old age, "I fought till Tecumseh fell; I saw the British run; then the Indians ran, and then I ran." He used to add with a chuckle, "If I had not run, I might be there yet."

He married into the Pottawattamic tribe and from this time he became known as a member of that tribe. He was elected as peace chieftain, and became their spokesman at many Indian

councils later. He seems to have been a man of sound judgment and good sense. During the year preceding the Black Hawk War, the War Chief of the Sacs and the Foxes visited Shabbona twice at least, trying to persuade him to join in the common cause of exterminating the white settlers who were gradually encroaching on the Indian hunting grounds. To such a proposal Shabbona refused to take part, or to accept the offers made by the wiley Black Hawk.

Shabbona was present at the Council of the allied tribes held in February, 1832, and the deliberations of this council has always been a puzzling question to the students of Indian history. Here as before Shabbona publicly opposed the attack upon the white settlers, not because he felt that the whites had not encroached upon their hunting grounds and were not continually driving the Indians away from their old homes, but because he felt that the whites held the whip hand, and because he saw no use in killing a few white people for the sake of revenge, or in attempting a futile war with a country the size of the United States as it was at that time. These were the arguments of Shabbona, and he told the Indians that they would lose and be much worse after such an attack than they were then.

When all arguments failed and the Indians deliberated on exterminating the whites in the scattered settlements, Shabbona and his son, in order to save these white settlers from such cruel attacks, started on horseback to notify the settlers of the proposed outbreak. On this trip it is said that Shabbona killed several ponies with his fast riding, and the white settlers supplied him with fresh horses along the way. On this eventful journey Shabbona rode as far as Chicago notifying the whites that they must prepare to defend themselves against the Indians. The Sacs and Foxes, under the magnetic spell of Black Hawk, sought to kill Shabbona for his so-called treachery, and later, they did kill his son and his nephew for their friendliness to the white people.

Shabbona was more than an ordinary peace chieftain. This is proved by the fact that Shabbona's name is affixed to the treaty signed at Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, August 19, 1825; also to the treaty signed at Camp Tippecanoe, Indiana, July 29,

1829, and to the treaty signed at Chicago on September 26, 1833. He was also one of the committee that went to Washington demanding certain rights on behalf of their tribe. All this demonstrates that regardless of his association with the white people, he was the leader of his own people.

In 1836, by the treaty with the Pottawattamies, Shabbona and his family migrated west of the Mississippi River, but the various Indian tribes showed a marked hostility. He lived in constant fear of the hostile tribes, and returned with his family to Illinois. Here he secured two sections of land near the village of Paw Paw Grove, in DeKalb County, Illinois, where the government set aside two sections of land in payment for effecting the treaties of July 29, 1829, and October 20, 1832. He also obtained a pension of \$200.00 a year for his services in the Black Hawk War.

Some time later he again joined his tribe west of the Mississippi River, but returned once more in 1855, and found that his land had been sold for taxes to greedy speculators. He was about to seek a home among the tribes who despised him. The people of Ottawa, and surrounding country, headed by J. D. Caton and others, came to his rescue and purchased for him and his family a tract of land south of the Illinois River a short distance east of Seneca, where he lived the rest of his life.

Shabbona was married to one Spotka, a Pottawattamie woman, whose father owned a village on Fox River. At the death of his father-in-law Shabbona was elected peace chief of the tribe, which showed in what esteem he was held by the tribe.

Shabbona's widow and granddaughter were drowned in Grundy County, Illinois, in October, 1864, and are buried at Morris. The remainder of his family then emigrated to Kansas. His son, Pypete, spoke English, and sought to marry a white woman, but in this effort he failed to succeed. He was killed in Kansas in 1857 by the Sacs and Foxes, the old time enemies of the members of the Shabbona family. A second son known as "Smoke" died in 1847, while returning from Kansas. Another son by the name of "Mamas" also emigrated to Kansas, and became a confirmed drunkard. One daughter, Baubin, married a Frenchman and lived in Chicago. Shabbona encouraged his daughters to

marry white men. He told them that the white race would soon absorb the land in the West. His family in Illinois consisted of thirty-seven persons. Once in a while he would take this large family to church and try to keep them all quiet during the services. His nephew, known as D. G. Foster, had a college training and became a Methodist Episcopal preacher, and lived in Allegan County, Michigan. Col. J. N. Bourras, another nephew, lived in Kansas. Both of these men were highly respected.

In appearance Shabbona was a large, bulky man, fine looking, and possessed many social qualities. He spoke but little English, and never felt that he wanted to make himself known in that language. He said, "The Indian speech is good enough for me." He was proud, self-reliant and a person of highest integrity, strictly sober, and was known as a man of his word. He would frequently ride horseback through the Norwegian settlement in LaSalle County, and he was always a welcome guest. While these settlers did not come until after the close of the Black Hawk War, they soon became attached to Shabbona and his family. At Fourth of July and other celebrations, the Shabbona family would appear in public, and it was one of the attractions to go to these celebrations in order to see and converse with the Indian who had helped save the lives of many people in these scattered communities. Holderman's Grove, near Newark, was always a stopping place when Shabbona rode from his home up to Shabbona Grove and to the Indian settlements. Here he would spend a day or two feasting with his old friend, Holderman, who had given him a horse on the night of his famous ride towards Chicago warning the settlers of the Indian outbreak.

Shabbona was a man above reproach who didn't care for any fame for himself or fortune for his family. He was illtreated by the government as well as by the state of Illinois. People seemed to have forgotten the services rendered by Shabbona when he saved the pioneer settlers from Rock River to Chicago from death and disaster.

It is well known that Shabbona and a hundred braves offered to fight against Black Hawk and were accepted. It has been stated many times in Indian history that there never lived a more devoted and a more upright Indian than Shabbona, and all

he obtained was a paltry sum of \$200.00 a year for his services in the Black Hawk War, and the use of a small tract of land purchased by devoted friends near Seneca, where he lived until his death. He was an Indian in his makeup, and life, and couldn't see any good in wanting more land than he could use, in wanting more ponies than he could ride, or wanting more cows than he could easily take care of. For him it was enough for today, tomorrow will take care of itself. Characters like this are easy to describe but hard to define.

Shabbona has scarcely been mentioned in connection with the Indians of Iowa. His services rendered in behalf of the whites changed the outcome of the Black Hawk War. The crushing defeat at Battle Axe ended the war of extermination as purposed by Black Hawk. The country was then quickly opened to the settlers who flocked into Iowa by the thousands and hastened the white occupancy of Iowa. While Shabbona emigrated west of the Mississippi, he longed for the shady groves and the placid streams of his old home in Illinois where he found his grave.

At Morris there was dedicated a granite boulder on October 23, 1903, to the memory of Shabbona, friend of the white man, the savior of hundreds of families from death by the tomahawk, a notable red man with a character without a stain, a man who hastened the white occupancy of Iowa fully a decade.

ABUSING EDITOR BABBITT

Lysander W. Babbitt gently hints to patrons of his paper, the *Bugle*, that he designs to write his valedictory unless he receives better support. The people out at Council Bluffs can give no better evidence of their loyalty than to afford Mr. Babbitt every facility for writing his threatened valedictory at his earliest convenience. We take it that the citizens of western Iowa have had about enough of Babbitt's Politics and Babbitt's defalcations. Lysander is either a practical Secessionist or he takes great pains to make people believe that he is one.—*Daily State Register*, Des Moines, Iowa, May 3, 1862. (In the Newspaper Division of the Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa.)

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