

Lands of Pony Creek

By O. J. PRUITT¹

Back in 1847, before the Pottawattamie were moved to Kansas, the Powie brothers, Sam and Page, lived for ten years along Pony Creek. The government had provided log cabins, furnished a farm instructor in a futile try to teach the Indians to be self-supporting. The Indians found the streams teeming with fish. Wild game was plentiful. Wild fowl reared their broods in the ponds and lake of the Missouri river bottom.

From the Pony creek area the distance to Old St. Mary's was exactly six miles over the main axis of the bluffs. To travel the route one goes over Danger hill, down a two mile canyon, thence across the bottoms.

Billy Caldwell (Sagonah) was the chief of these Indians, while Waubonsie governed those in Fremont county and "Big Foot" those along the Nishnabotna river in Cass county.

St. Mary's was the place from which the Indians drew their annuities. The supplies came up the river by boat from St. Louis.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs at Washington, after having ordered the Pottawattamie away from the area of Ft. Dearborn, had eventually ejected them by a long hot dry and dusty march overland to Kansas. Many of the aged and infants died.

The contingent to West Iowa were brought by boat to the Black Snake hills of Missouri; thence marched to Southwest Iowa. These suffered no casualties. After the bitter treatment of the Indians of North Indi-

¹ The author regards "Grandma" Kellogg as an authentic authority upon Pottawattamie Indian lore, having lived right among them many years along Pony creek, now a Mecca for Indian relic collectors and of prehistoric bones and teeth. Mr. Pruitt has spent as many as 80 days in a single season interviewing old timers in the area and collecting artifacts.

ana, the government relented and provided the Southwest Iowa Indians with all needed supplies.

P. J. DeSmet was sent to Council Bluffs to minister to the Indians. DeSmet was known as the Black Robe. There is no record that DeSmet ever visited the Indians along Pony creek, but he often called upon Peter Sarpy, who operated a ferry at Trader's Point,



A Pottawattamie Village

about two miles by river above St. Mary's. Since DeSmet knew the population of the Indians, it is presumed he did visit those along Pony creek.

Mrs. Wilson, the granddaughter of the first white settler, still resides in the valley. She knows the history, that portion which relates to persons rather than statistics, and in particular stories about Indians. It is to her the writer is indebted for this sketch of the Powie brothers.

Mrs. Wilson is one of the best story tellers the writer has ever met. She has a peculiar style all her

own. It is by acting out the details, emphasizing and stressing points and imitating the voices of characters.

Mrs. Wilson is the granddaughter of Mrs. (Grandma) Jim Kellogg. The Kelloggs were the first settlers in the area. Mrs. Kellogg is the heroine of another story in which she gave an Indian the hot foot by defending herself with a kettle of boiling water.

LIQUOR AND LAZINESS RULED

Now, Sam Powie was a very large and tall Indian, while his brother, Page, was short, skinny and rather wiry. Sam was about fifty, fat and lazy. He recently had taken as a wife a squaw about fifteen years younger and generously had given the older squaw to Page. This arrangement was a mutual affair. Both squaws were of the nagging type. They seemed never to be satisfied with their men. They insisted the men should take interest in the farm instructor's activities instead of whiling away their time hunting and fishing and making trips to river towns to get counter-brand fire water. They had swapped about all their possessions for liquor, even to the horses the government had provided for them. The agent had rebuked them, threatened to withdraw the supplies and to prosecute them for selling the horses. As a punishment Sam was given another old horse, told to plow some ground and plant corn, beans, etc.

So, in order to conceive what a punishment it was, let us imagine old Sam or Page leading the horse drawing a plow, held by the squaw. The sun beat down on the hill side of the lands of Pony creek; the temperature is near 100 degrees in the shade; overhead golden-headed eagles are circling, while from afar is heard the whistle of a steamboat.

To get into this sort of a mood, one should traverse the valley, thence the scenic drive atop the bluffs and view the landscape to the west. The Missouri river is a silver ribbon streak, and in the background the verdure bluffs of the Nebraska shore.

All this was one hundred and five years ago. Noth-

ing is in Pony creek district today. No log cabins, no evidence other than Indian artifacts and potsherds. Instead are farm houses, barns and silos and a class of white folk who toil incessantly to make a living from the eroding land. The virgin timber of days of old has been removed and the present growth is of younger age, with here and there an older one spared by axe, such as hangman's tree on the east side of Danger Hill, where two horse thieves swung to eternity.

CUP OF GINGER SAVED SAM

One date in a May, Sam's squaw gathered a mess of wild mustard greens and cooked them with a ham bone. She made some corn pone and placed the meal before Sam, who ate of it greedily and washed the whole down with a quart of fresh buttermilk. Then he lay down to snooze, but the combination of food denied him the pleasure. He was seized with a terrific "tummy ache." He rolled and tossed and in the throes of agony begged the squaw to stab him in the abdomen with a butcher knife. The squaw refused, knowing it meant death and she wanted no part of it. So she ran across the foot-log with a pole hand rail to the Kelloggs' cabin some three hundred yards distant across the creek. In broken English she told how sick Sam was and was given a tablespoon of ginger in a teacup and told to make a tea and dose Sam. It relieved Sam and along toward nightfall he sat up, lit his pipe and declared never again would he indulge in eating mustard greens. The squaw asked him to cut some firewood for the preparing of the morning meal. He refused, "What! after I have been so sick. I don't care if I never eat again. If you have to have wood, cut it yourself." She did and carried it into the cabin.

Let us digress for the moment to prepare the reader for what followed that night about midnight. It had been a trying day of worry and excitement. The run to the Kelloggs and Sam carrying on while in the great

pain brought on the climax told in the last paragraph.

The squaw aroused Sam from his slumber at midnight and sent him hurrying to the Kelloggs for Grandma Kellogg. Mr. Kellogg accompanied her to see that she got across the foot logs safely. Midwife Grandma Kellogg delivered a baby girl of Mrs. Sam Powie. Old Sam, as he was wont to be called by the neighbors, was so elated that he brought out his newest and finest pipe and offered it to Mr. Kellogg, who refused saying, "I want no part of the Devil weed." Mr. Kellogg was a devout Christian and he raised all his children in the good old Baptist belief in the Maker of mankind.

CHILDREN

Now minds run backward to the day
When with the Master gathered round
Were eager ones to hear Him say
Where peace or comfort might be found.

The chosen ones, His faithful few,
Stood closely by. With jealous care
To miss no word, to render true
The service that was theirs to share.

When mothers in their faith profound
Brought babes for Him to touch and bless,
The elders standing close around
Denied them in their eagerness.

But He rebuked them with a smile,
And near to Him the children bade.
As close He held them for the while,
He said: "For of such as these is Heaven made."

Now children of the older years,
Though far from Him their paths have strayed,
With souls contrite through care and fears
Seek comfort in a home so made.

Nor in the fullness of His grace
Will He deny their tears and pleas.
They with the children find a place
For faith and worship at His knees.

—Ernest R. Moore

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