

THE INDIANS OF IOWA IN 1842

[Beginning with the year 1837 the Yearly Meetings of Friends of New England and New York became very much interested in "the numerous tribes, and parts of tribes of Indians, formerly located in various parts of the United States, east of the Mississippi, but which, through the agency of the general government, have been induced of latter time, reluctantly to abandon their ancient cherished homes, and suffered themselves to be removed to the wild lands west of that river." Consequently, in September, 1842, two Friends set out to visit some of the tribes in question, and upon their return they made a report, portions of which were published in the Quaker publication known as *The Friend*, from which those parts relating to the Indian tribes then living in the Iowa country are reprinted below. No attempt has been made to verify the statements of the two visitors, but it is believed that they present a reasonably truthful picture of life and conditions in the tribes.

The account of the visit to the Winnebagoes in northeastern Iowa is taken from *The Friend*, December 23, 1843. In a future number of THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS there will appear an article by Mr. Jacob Van der Zee, containing a detailed history of the Neutral Ground, where the two Friends visited the Winnebagoes.— DAN E. CLARK.]

Having completed our arrangements for the journey, we took leave of the committee and many other Friends, and pursued our way to the Ohio Yearly Meeting. We there met with the committee on the concern for the Indians, of that Yearly Meeting, heard their report respecting the Shawnee school, and made such inquiries as seemed proper respecting the best mode of getting to the Mississippi river. Having a special desire to commence our journey as far north as the Winnebago tribe of Indians — and fearing that the boats would be impeded, on account of the low stage of the water in the Ohio river, it seemed most advisable to take the northern route. We accordingly travelled by land to Cleveland, thence by steam-boat to Detroit, and by land across the State of Michigan to the Mouth of St. Joseph's river. Here we took steam-boat over Lake Michigan sixty

miles to Chicago. After waiting one day in this place, we departed by stage for Galena and Dubuque, crossing the State of Illinois, a distance of one hundred and eighty miles. We arrived at Dubuque early on First-day morning, the 25th of Ninth month; and the following evening procured a conveyance to the Winnebago Indians.

On the 29th of the month, we reached the mission for the Winnebago tribe of Indians, and took lodgings with the sub-agent David Lowry, where we were kindly entertained by him and his family, and every facility in their power afforded us for conferring with the Indians, as well as a readiness evinced to furnish such information as was desired.

This tribe is located north-west from Iowa Territory, and west of Prairie du Chien, on lands called the Neutral Ground. They are located in different parts of this land in settlements called villages. Their principal one, called the School Band, is near the sub-agency of David Lowry, on Turkey river, about one hundred miles north-west from Dubuque, and within four or five miles of Fort Atkinson. They numbered altogether about two thousand. These Indians live in rude lodges, or wigwams, as they are sometimes called, built in the usual Indian style, by forcing forked sticks into the ground for posts, into the forks of which they lay poles for plates and ribs, preparatory to covering them with oak bark. The sides are either made of bark, mats made of flags, or skins fastened to the plates, and extending to the ground. These wigwams are from ten to twenty-five feet in length, and about ten feet wide. The inside of the building is fitted up with a sort of frame-work on each side, made of poles about two feet high, and three feet wide, intended as a sort of bedstead, on which they fasten skins or mats, where they lounge and sleep, leaving space through the centre four feet wide. At each end there is an aperture or door. The fire is built in the centre, the smoke escaping through a hole in the top.

There are not unfrequently as many as three or four families, amounting to twenty persons or more, occupying one of these miserable hovels. When about their homes, they live principally upon soups, made of wild fowl and venison, turnips and potatoes. They also eat an abundance of boiled corn. Some corn-bread, and a very little wheat flour are used by them.

There is no regular order as to the time or manner of taking their meals. Some are seen eating their soups outside of their wigwams, some are eating while sitting on their beds; while others are engaged in different pursuits; and should any person of another family happen to come into the lodge when he needed food, he would as freely partake, without invitation, as he would of his own.

The dress of the men consists mainly of blankets; all of them wear the waistcloth; some wear moccasins and leggins, and a few wear a calico frock or shirt. The head is generally uncovered; a few, however, use a turban. The dress of the women consists of a broad cloth skirt and blanket. Some of them wear moccasins and leggins; the head is entirely uncovered, except that the blanket is sometimes thrown over it for a covering, but they use no other. The dress of the large children is similar to that of the grown persons of the same sex. Most of the small children go naked during the warm seasons; but those that attend school are clothed similarly to the white children on the frontier settlements. The greater part of the men and women wear ornaments, such as wampum, beads, bells, and jewelry. Most of the men paint their faces on special occasions; some part of the face is painted red and some black.

The principal employment of the men consists of hunting at certain seasons of the year; and when not thus engaged, they do but very little labour of any kind, it being considered disgraceful both by men and women for the man to be

seen at work. Much of their time is spent in riding, of which they are exceedingly fond. They likewise spend a portion of it in ball-playing and other sports, and a considerable time is spent in lounging about in idleness. The women are generally industrious, performing the greater part of the manual labour both in the camp and on the land. They look dejected, and appear more like slaves than otherwise. Many of the women and children receive very severe treatment from the men in their drunken revels; from which cause some of them are maimed.

The Winnebagoes have but one school, and that is supported by the general government, and is under the immediate superintendence of the sub-agent. There have been, the past year, about ninety children at the school, some of whom have made pretty good proficiency in learning. The school was vacated while we were there. We were informed that there was much difficulty in getting a portion of the children to attend constantly, in consequence of an undue influence exercised over them by interested men. This school may be considered as rather an interesting institution; and, from what we could gather from the teachers, the children are as susceptible of instruction as the whites. They are taught in the English language altogether.

This tribe is governed by chiefs, who sometimes receive the office by hereditary descent; and at others, by a choice of the people; and sometimes they are appointed by the agents of the general government. They have some vague notions of the Deity, or Great Spirit, as he is more generally called by them. They also believe in a state of future rewards and punishments, and talk about a bad spirit. Very few, if any, have embraced Christianity.

The Winnebagoes this year raised about 2500 bushels of Indian corn, besides a pretty large supply of potatoes and other vegetables, on grounds prepared by the agent of the

government near his location, by the band called the School Band. The annuity paid to this tribe amounts to nearly ninety thousand dollars in money, goods and appropriations for different purposes. Previously to their receiving it, the sub-agent collects the whole tribe, and pays over to the head of each family the amount due them. Notwithstanding the large sum which they receive they are still in a deplorable and suffering condition, and fast wasting away. Much of their misery may be traced to the treatment of some of the white people towards them. But leaving the past, and looking only to the present conduct of the white man, it is evident that unless something more effectual is done to break up the corrupt and iniquitous traffic in whiskey, as well as the fraudulent trade carried on among the Indians by some of those persons licensed by the government, the Winnebagoes will, in a few years, be numbered with the tribes that are not.* We were credibly informed, that in defiance of the present rigid laws, immediately after the payment of 1841, there was sold to this tribe two hundred barrels of whiskey, and at the time of our being there in 1842, the whiskey sellers had increased in number one-third. These whiskey dealers and licensed traders find a strong inducement to follow up the poor Indian, from the fact that he receives so large a payment at one time.

The Indian, as a general thing, is improvident to the last degree, and but poorly calculated to keep any amount of surplus property; so that within four or five days the whiskey seller residing on the frontier, and the licensed trader, who is permitted to vend his goods among them, get nearly all the money. The licensed traders are numerous,

*We were informed by the agent that he had registered the names of thirty-nine Indians, who had been butchered in their drunken revels among themselves, within the space of fourteen months; and he did not doubt, but that there were others who had been killed in this way, whose names had not come to his knowledge.

and generally plant themselves at the time the money is paid over, in the immediate vicinity of the place where the payment is made. They sell the Indians the most trifling and worthless articles for an enormous profit; the Indian is tempted often times to buy these articles from their gaudy appearance. After he has parted with his last dollar in money to the whiskey seller, or licensed trader, in payment of old debts for whiskey, or for some of the above mentioned articles, (and the Indian is always largely indebted to these dealers,) he then takes the articles he has purchased of the licensed trader to the whiskey shop, and sells them for a much less price than he gave, and takes his pay in whiskey, at ten or even twenty times the actual cost to the settler. It is no uncommon thing for an Indian, after he has parted with all his money, and many other necessary articles, to barter away his gun, horse, and even his blanket for a few bottles of whiskey. We were credibly informed, that these whiskey shops not unfrequently have large piles of blankets, and large stacks of guns, that have been taken from the poor natives for a little whiskey.

Thus we see that the policy of the government, and the benevolent efforts of those who are honestly labouring among them for their good, are almost wholly defeated by the avarice of those lawless men.

On Sixth-day of the week, and the first of Tenth month, agreeably to previous arrangement, we met about thirty of their chiefs and principal men in council at the agent's house. Our object in calling them together, was explained by David Lowry, the sub-agent; and then our certificates from our friends, and the letters and talk from the Secretary of War, addressed to the Indians, were severally read and explained to them. We then felt constrained to make a few remarks, and to extend such advice as seemed proper; after which, Little Hill, one of the chiefs replied,

That what he had heard was very good, and that they had heard a number of talks from their great father, the President; and he had promised to help them, and keep off the whiskey sellers, but he had not done it, and now it was too late. He supposed he had tried, but could not; that he had such great matters to attend to, that he could not see to their small concerns; and now it was too late to help them.

We then told them we did not believe it was too late for them to refrain from drinking whiskey. We told them, that much that they complained of, we believed to be true, and that the white man had wronged them; but that we wished them to understand that they yet had good friends among the whites, who were grieved with the conduct of bad white men towards them; we hoped they would not be discouraged, but try to do better themselves; and that we and our brothers at home were disposed to do all in our power to help them. And after making, on our part, some other remarks relative to their condition, they expressed their satisfaction. Little Hill spoke to some of the elder chiefs, and, as we understood, requested them to reply to us, as he was young, and wanted some of his elder friends to make a speech. They severally said, they were well pleased with our talk, but had nothing further to say. Little Hill then rose and shook hands with us, and then commenced speaking with us through the interpreter, young Lowry. Referring to their former condition, previous to their intercourse with the whites, he said: "The Great Spirit had made us all, but he had made us different. Some men he made white, some he made red, and placed them at a distance one from the other." They, the red men, lived happy, and he supposed the white man lived happy too. They then had no sickness nor deaths amongst them, except from old age; all their people lived to be old and white-

headed. But when the white man came among them, they then became sick, and died young. The white man brought fire-water amongst them; they supposed the white man got the whiskey from the bad spirit, for surely they never got it from the Good Spirit. They began to sell it to the Indians, and then their miseries commenced; and they had become reduced, and could not refrain from drinking, so long as the white man sold it to them; and now they despaired of ever being any better, and the only way for them to be made better was to keep the whiskey away. The white man did not know what it was to go hungry and cold; but the poor Indian did; he believed that we pitied them, and talked to them for their good, and he thanked us for it, and said he would tell it to his people, and hoped they would mind our talk; to which they all assented. He then said, Brothers I have nothing more to say, and shaking hands with us again, sat down.

[The following account of the visit at the Sac and Fox Agency (now Agency City) is copied from *The Friend*, December 30, 1843. The treaty referred to is the treaty of October 11, 1842, by which the Sac and Fox Indians ceded to the United States government the last of their land within the present boundaries of Iowa.]

After gathering the foregoing facts and observations respecting the Winnebagoes, we took leave of our friend Lowry and family, as well as the other white inhabitants connected with them at the establishment, and returned to Dubuque, on the Mississippi. We then took steam-boat down the river, about two hundred miles to Burlington: thence we took stage and private conveyance by way of Mount Pleasant and Salem, Iowa, to the Sacs and Fox agency, distant about eighty miles. We reached this place the eighth of Tenth month, about one o'clock P. M. The tribes were, at the time, assembled for the purpose of negotiating a treaty with the general government, through

Governor John Chambers, the negotiator. The whole Sac and Fox nation were in the neighborhood, but the men only attended the council. Just as we reached the council, the chiefs commenced speaking, and spoke with much animation. One of the Fox chiefs spoke first, and then a Sac, and so alternately, till four had spoken, the last being Kekuk, their principal chief, a celebrated orator. The purport of their talk was about the same, and resulted in an agreement to sell all their lands to the United States for the sum of one million and fifty-five thousand dollars. Eight hundred thousand of this sum was to be put at interest at five per cent., and the remainder to be appropriated to the payment of their debts. They were also to be provided with lands to settle on, south-west of the Missouri river, where they were to remove within three years.

After the adjournment of the council at that time, we went to the agent's house, where the governor put up during his stay at this place. He received us kindly, and entered into conversation very freely, respecting the condition of these tribes of Indians. He remarked, that unless something was done to better their condition, and that soon, they must in a very few years all be wasted away, in consequence of the wickedness and treachery of the whiskey sellers, and other traders, who are taking advantage of these poor ignorant natives, by obtaining their money and other valuable articles in exchange for whiskey, and trifling commodities of no real value to the Indians. These articles, he remarked, are frequently sold to them for ten or twenty, and, in some instances, for a hundred times their real cost; and, in a very short time, these unprincipled traders manage to obtain the last dollar the Indian has. And he further said, that some of the accounts brought in against the Indians stagger credulity; in one instance, one of these accounts was exhibited for settlement, amount-

ing to sixteen thousand dollars, which he had ascertained to have grown out of the remnants of an old stock of goods not worth five hundred dollars. He remarked that whiskey was, no doubt, in many instances, sold to the Indians and charged as corn, blankets, or other articles which the licensed traders have a right to sell to the Indians, while it is unlawful to sell them whiskey. He said also, that the advice of the whiskey sellers and other traders was unbounded in its influence upon the Indian, and that he had found much difficulty in treating with them on that account, as these traders were constantly hanging about them, and advising them against adopting such a course as would be for their good, and cautioning them not to leave the chase, nor lay down the gun or the blanket, nor to have schools established among them, and, in fine, against civilization in any way. What we saw and heard during our stay at the Council Ground, fully confirmed the statements of the governor. While we were there, we met with men of influential character, some of whom it is known have been long engaged in a trade with the Indians, by which they have amassed great wealth. These men used their utmost skill to make us believe that the Indians were a happy people; that there was no necessity for any benevolent exertions on their behalf, and that they were now trying to live very comfortably. An Indian, say they, was made to hunt, not to work; and they are so very happy in keeping to their old habits of living, that any attempts to induce a change only serve to make them unhappy. They argued against educating the Indians, altogether, either within or without their borders; saying, they have as much knowledge as it is necessary for an Indian to possess.

There were also other men associated with these traders, either by friendship or otherwise, men of high standing in the community, who were forward in sustaining them in

their selfish and erroneous statements. And what is most to be deplored is, that the Indians will more readily listen to the counsel of these men, than to those who are disinterestedly engaged for their good. We can but hope, however, that when they shall be removed to their new homes, all intercourse with their old advisers may be broken off, and they be left to receive better counsel from men who are not so intently bent on their own aggrandizement at the expense of the life and happiness of the Indian.

These tribes number in all about two thousand two hundred. They are a large stately race, particularly the men. None of these Indians, to our knowledge, cultivate the soil; but they are, in general, hunters. They have, however, a large pattern farm carried on for their benefit, by a government farmer. Their annuity, at this time, is about half the amount of that of the Winnebagoes. They live in wigwams, or lodges, similar to those of all the uncivilized Indians. They have no schools, nor any civil or religious institutions among them; but in other respects, their manners and customs are about the same as those of the Winnebagoes. A few of their children have received some instruction at the Choctaw Academy in Kentucky; but for the want of a suitable opportunity to apply what little learning they may have obtained, and in consequence of the jealousy and prejudice of their own nation against civilization, soon after their return, they fell into the habits of their uncivilized brethren. There was little opportunity, while there, of conversing with them, owing to their engagements in making their treaty. We visited most of their tents, and took a view of them as they were encamped on the open prairie.

After collecting what facts we could in relation to these tribes, we returned to Salem, a distance of about fifty miles, where we staid two or three days with Friends, and then returned to the Mississippi, where we took stage at Fort

Madison for Keokuk, and from thence by steamboat went to St. Louis. While there we called on D. D. Mitchell, superintendent of Indian affairs. He received us kindly. We presented him with our documents from the government, as well as our certificates from our friends at home. He gave us a passport to travel through all the tribes within his superintendence.

[The brief account of the visit to the Pottawattamies which follows is copied from *The Friend*, January 20, 1844. It is to be noted that the Indians visited by the two travelers were living in Kansas, but since other members of the same tribe had their homes in western Iowa at the same time, the account has been included.]

After collecting the foregoing account respecting these small tribes, we left for the Potowatomie nation, situated on Potowatomie creek, about sixty miles from the Shawnee school, and eighteen miles from A. L. Davis's agency. We arrived at the house of a man named Simmerwell, a smith employed by the general government in repairing the Indian guns, &c. The day being too far spent for a council with them that evening, we thought it most advisable to have notice given for a meeting with them in the morning. The smith has been for many years engaged among the Indians in repairing their guns, and otherwise assisting them; we believe him sincerely devoted to their welfare. He lamented their deplorable condition; and, from his own personal knowledge of the facts, attributed most of their misery to the avarice and wickedness of the traders, and other corrupt white men, who, ever since his acquaintance, have been prowling about them, like the beast for his prey. Agreeably to our previous appointment, we met a number of the chiefs and headmen of the nation, at the house of the blacksmith. We endeavoured to impress upon their minds the importance of a change in all their habits and modes of living, and to adopt the manners and habits of good white

men. They listened attentively to what was communicated to them, and expressed their gratitude towards the Society of Friends, that they had thought so much of them as to send persons so far to look into their condition. One of their chiefs remarked, that their great father, the president, had promised to send them many things; but, said he, they have not yet got along.

The person that interpreted for us is a full blood Indian, educated at Hamilton school in the State of New York, and speaks and writes the English language well. He also converses freely in the Potawatamie tongue, and may be reckoned among the most intelligent Indians of the west. He is married to a half breed woman, and possessed very considerable property. The Potawatamies are divided into three bands, viz., Potawatamies of St. Josephs, Potowatomies of the Wabash, and Potowatomies of the Prairie. The St. Joseph's band formerly received some assistance from the Baptist missionaries while they were located on the St. Joseph's river. This band live principally by cultivating the soil, and what they receive from the government by way of annuities. They are poor, and making very little advancement in civilization. They have no school nor missionary, and some of them live in poor log-cabins, others in wigwams. Most of them keep cattle, horses, and hogs; nearly all of them drink whiskey, and pass much of their time in idleness and dissipation. They spend their annuities soon after receiving them, for whiskey, and articles of no real value to them. The manners, dress and general appearance of these Indians, do not materially differ from those small tribes located near them. They wear the blanket as the principal article of dress, and hunt some on their own lands, and in the adjacent state of Missouri, but do not go on the long hunt to the west.

Our next visit was to the Wabash band, located about

twelve miles from the gunsmith's. There are about six hundred of this tribe, comprising about one-third of the nation, and are principally settled in one neighbourhood. They are under the direction and control of the Roman Catholics, and have three Jesuit priests amongst them, who are educating forty or fifty Indian children. Their school is divided into two departments; one for boys, and the other for girls. The one for girls is said to be doing some good, the other is in a languishing state. This band are building comfortable log-houses, and cultivating the land, keeping some cattle, horses, hogs, &c.; but their location is said to be unhealthy, and they are addicted to all the vices and immoralities common to the Indians, and are fast wasting away. Their numbers have greatly diminished within the last few years.

The Prairie band is interspersed among the other two bands, and live much after the same manner. The whiskey sellers, and other traders, practice the same impositions upon these Indians that they do upon all the other tribes within their reach.