

Winnebago and Pottawattamie

The Indian population of Iowa was considerably increased when the Winnebago were removed from Wisconsin to the Neutral Ground and the Pottawattamie, together with some of their allied kinsmen, the Ottawa and Chippeway, were transferred from Illinois to southwestern Iowa. Although the Winnebago as early as 1832 and the Pottawattamie in 1833 had agreed to give up their old homes and remove to Iowa, it was not until 1837 that the first of the Pottawattamie arrived near the present site of Council Bluffs, and not until 1840 that the Winnebago under military escort crossed the Mississippi to the Neutral Ground.

While the Winnebago were of Siouan stock and the Pottawattamie were Algonkian, their connection with the story of Iowa offers a number of parallels. Both were brought into Iowa more or less against their will. The sojourn of each group in Iowa was of comparatively short duration. Both were apprehensive about attacks from the Sioux; and to reassure them the government sent troops and established military posts — Fort Croghan near the site of Council Bluffs and Fort Winnebago near the present site of the town of the same name. During their residence in Iowa neither group made much progress toward civilization, al-

though a Presbyterian minister, David Lowry, tried to bring the learning and religion of the white man to the Winnebago, and a Catholic priest, Pierre Jean De Smet, attempted to perform a similar service for the Pottawattamie.

Both groups became debauched by whisky vendors and unscrupulous traders during their stay in Iowa, despite the efforts of their agents and the missionaries. The once princely appearance of the Pottawattamie must have suffered from their dissipation. "Detestable traffic," wrote Father De Smet in his diary. "A war of extermination appears preparing around the poor Pottawattamies. Fifty large cannons have been landed, ready charged with the most murderous grape shot, each containing thirty gallons of whisky, brandy, rum, or alcohol."

Although the agent to the Winnebago partially succeeded in preventing the smuggling of liquor into the Neutral Ground, he could not keep his charges from sneaking over the boundary line to illicit establishments for their "fire water." Drunken orgies invariably followed the distribution of annuities at the agency.

The Pottawattamie and Winnebago agreed to give up their Iowa homes in 1846. The removal of the former to Kansas began in the fall of 1847 and was accomplished in a peaceable and orderly manner. But the removal of the Winnebago was a more difficult feat. Two or three months were re-

quired for the soldiers from Fort Atkinson to assemble the scattered Indians at the agency. Finally, on June 8, 1848, the motley concourse moved north from the encampment on Turkey River. Between two and three thousand Indians with sixteen hundred ponies, one hundred and sixty-six army wagons loaded with supplies and movable property of the tribesmen as well as the goods of the agency, a lumbering cannon, and the mounted troops from Fort Atkinson made up a picturesque caravan that slowly crawled across the Iowa prairies toward Minnesota. At Wabasha's Prairie a conspiracy on the part of the Indians to go no farther was frustrated by military reinforcements from Fort Snelling and Fort Crawford.

The temporary residence of the Winnebago and the Pottawattamie in Iowa was ended but their connection with the State has been preserved in the names of counties, towns, and trails — Winnesiek, Decorah, and Waubonsie, for example. And here and there a pioneer in southwestern Iowa may still be found who remembers when Billy Caldwell, Big Foot, and Johnny Green, among others, were leaders of the "Makers of Fire," as the Pottawattamie were called. The Old Military Trail from the Mississippi River to Fort Atkinson and the ruins of the old fort itself are reminders of the time when Dandy, Yellow Thunder, Little Hill, and other Winnebagoes occupied northeastern Iowa.

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