

THE PALIMPSEST

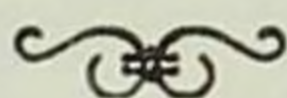
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VOL. XXXVIII

ISSUED IN AUGUST 1957

No. 8

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The Tama Indians

[This reprint of the February, 1926, issue of THE PALIMPSEST appears with editorial revisions on the occasion of the Centennial of the return of the Tama Indians to Iowa and their purchase of the first eighty acres of their present holdings on July 13, 1857. — THE EDITOR]

As the summer of 1845 merged into autumn there was great excitement and activity around the Indian Agency at the forks of the Racoon and Des Moines rivers and at Fort Des Moines near by, where a detachment of soldiers was quartered. Government annuities were being distributed to the Sauk and Fox Indians amid the usual scenes of drunkenness, and the traders were reaping a rich harvest as the Indians settled their accounts.

This occasion — usually one of joy to the Indians — was saddened for them, however, by the knowledge that this was a farewell gift. Before the annuities were again distributed, they would be many miles away from their beloved Iowa. According to a treaty signed by their chiefs in 1842, these Indians were to surrender their rights to all land in Iowa by October 11, 1845. In return they were to receive certain additional annuities and

new lands across the Missouri River in what is now the State of Kansas.

There was some fear that the Sauk and Fox would refuse to go peaceably, for they had signed the treaty very unwillingly and were reluctant to leave the prairies and streams of Iowa; but even before the date set Keokuk and his band of Sauk took up the march to the southwest. Gradually the other bands of red men with their families, dogs, and horses trailed slowly across the prairie, crossed the Missouri River, and took up their abode on the reservation provided for them by the government. Close on their heels came the white settlers with their wagons, plows, and oxen, and log cabins were built beside the streams where the wickiups had stood.

But while the white settlements prospered in Iowa, the exiled Sauk and Fox in Kansas were homesick. The climate was unhealthful, especially for their children, and the new reservation was an unsatisfactory substitute for the flower-decked, grassy prairies and the tree-bordered streams of Iowa. Before long hunting parties were trickling back across the prairies and squaws and children sometimes accompanied them. The lesson of the Black Hawk War had taught them the futility of defying the white men, but some of the Indians lingered, asking only for the privilege of living on the lands not used by the whites.

There appears to have been little or no opposi-

tion to the presence of these few Indians on the part of the Iowans. Indeed, the homesick red men received considerable assistance from their white neighbors, and in January, 1856, the General Assembly of Iowa passed a law permitting the Indians then residing in Tama County to remain in the state and urging the United States government to pay them their share of the annuities stipulated in the treaties. The Sheriff was ordered to take a census of the Indians then in Tama County, and it was specifically stated that the privileges granted by the law applied only to those on his list. No report of the enumeration, however, has been found.

The Indian Office at Washington, however, was more hard hearted than the Iowa legislators, and refused to pay any annuities to the truant Indians unless they returned to their appointed reservation in Kansas. This the little group of red men — chiefly Fox Indians — steadfastly refused to do, preferring to eke out a precarious existence in Iowa by hunting, fishing, and begging. Their number varied as little groups came and went. During the winter of 1856-1857 eight wickiups were reported on the Iowa River and four on the Cedar, sheltering some eighty of the natives.

The Indians had not been back in Iowa long before they began to realize that if they were to remain here they must secure some land for a permanent home, for the settlers were rapidly taking

possession of the wild land and the Indians would soon have no place to hunt or even to pitch their wickiups. They had learned that white men secured the rights to tracts of land by certain legal formalities and the payment of money. Just how this was done was not entirely clear to them and besides, they had no money, for the government was not paying them their share of the tribal annuities.

In the fall of 1856, however, some of their influential men came back from Kansas with about \$700 which they had saved from their government allowance. At the prices for land then prevailing, this was sufficient to buy at least a small tract of the beloved soil of Iowa and the Indians began a search for a new home. But here they met a new obstacle. They were living in the tribal relation and desired that the property belong to the group rather than to the individuals. To remove this difficulty, Governor James W. Grimes consented to act as trustee, and on July 13, 1857, five Indians, on behalf of those then in Iowa, secured their first eighty acres. This was in Tama County and the price was one thousand dollars. The deed was made out to James W. Grimes, Governor of the State of Iowa, and his successors in office in trust for the five Indians and their heirs.

The good news was carried back to Kansas where the proposal to allot the tribal lands to individual Indians was causing dissension. Gradually

other Indians made their way back to the new home in Iowa. The Indian Office, however, was slow to approve this new step of the Indians and it was not until 1866 that the government at Washington recognized the needs of the Iowa band and appointed Leander Clark special agent at a salary of \$1,500 a year. He began his work on July 1, 1866, and a year later Congress provided that the Sauk and Fox Indians in Tama County be paid their pro-rata share of the \$51,000 a year due to the combined tribes. The census taken for the distribution of this money showed two hundred and sixty-four Indians in the band, and the amount received at the first payment was a little over \$5,500. Two thousand dollars was set aside for the purchase of an additional eighty acres of land. Their personal property, according to Mr. Clark, consisted of some three hundred ponies with an average valuation of about forty dollars a head.

Since that time other purchases of land have been made until the Meskwaki, as the Fox prefer to be called, now own over three thousand acres along the Iowa River in Tama County. This has been purchased under the white man's law for varying sums, the total exceeding \$85,000, though its present valuation is, of course, much greater.

The Governor of Iowa was usually made trustee in these purchases, though the name of Leander Clark, the agent appears on three deeds. To simplify the transaction of business relating to

these Indians, however, a change was later made. On February 14, 1896, the Iowa legislature authorized the transfer of the trusteeship over the Indians' lands to the Secretary of the Interior and this was approved by Congress on June 10th, but the actual transfer of the deeds was not completed until 1908.

Because the Indians occupy this land in common and the trusteeship is vested in the Secretary of the Interior, this tract is commonly called the Tama Indian Reservation; though, strictly speaking, it is not a reservation at all, for it was not set apart from the public domain for the Indians by the government, but was purchased by them from private owners.

When the state of Iowa authorized the transfer of the trusteeship over the Indians' land to the Secretary of the Interior, the right of eminent domain, taxation, and judicial administration was retained, but the land owned by the Indians was exempted from certain taxes, such as those for schools and poor relief, thereby reducing the Indians' tax bill from \$554 in 1896 to \$286 in 1897. Their property is listed for taxation by the regular assessors.

The specific mention of taxation was probably included in this law because there seems to have been more than the usual reluctance on the part of these Indians to the payment of taxes during the earlier years of their ownership of the land. Com-

ing from a government reservation where there had been no taxes, the Indians found it difficult to understand why they must pay money to the state of Iowa, and for a time they refused to do so. The agent reported in 1882 that their land had been sold for taxes and the period of redemption was soon to expire. This delinquency, however, was partly due to the lack of funds. The government was withholding their annuities because the Indians refused to furnish the names of the individual members of their families. When this was settled and the annuities paid, the Indians paid their taxes.

Within the group, the Indians retain an informal government of their own. From 1859 until 1881 Maminwanika was the head chief recognized by the Indians, though he had been deposed from his chieftainship in Kansas because of his refusal to accept the allotment of certain lands. Maminwanika was an advocate of peace with the whites, but he steadfastly opposed the adoption of white men's customs, dress, or education. It was under his direction that the Indians in Iowa refused for several years to give the names of the members of their families for the annuity rolls.

At his death on July 3, 1881, there seem to have been several aspirants for the position of head chief. Among the influential leaders were Matawikwa, the war chief, and Pushetonikwa, a nephew of the old chief, Poweshiek. Pushetonikwa,

however, soon acquired a position of influence among the Meskwaki and retained this position of supremacy until his death on November 6, 1919. In 1900 Congress granted him an allotment or pension of five hundred dollars a year for the remainder of his life. This grant was in accordance with a provision in the treaty of 1842 that the Sauk and Fox chiefs should receive annually the sum of five hundred dollars each. Pushetonikwa is the only chief of the Indians who returned to Iowa who has been so recognized.

The old chief was buried on a hill overlooking the Iowa River. The body was placed in a sitting position in a shallow grave, facing north, though the Indians usually place their dead with their faces toward the west. And so the spirit of the dead chief broods over the reservation, where no successor has yet been selected to take his place.

Since 1867 the Indian Office has tried to educate the Meskwaki according to the white man's standards, but with only indifferent success. A boarding school, costing \$35,000, was opened near the reservation in 1899; in 1900 Congress appropriated \$14,025 for this school, but many of the Indians flatly refused to permit their children to attend, even refusing for a time to receive their annuities because they had been told that the payment of this money gave the government the right to compel the children to attend the school. One old chief declared: "You may come and kill us,

but we will not give you our children." A decision of the United States District Court at Dubuque that these Indian children could not be compelled to attend the government school practically ended its usefulness as a training school, and in 1912 the building was remodelled to serve as a sanatorium for tubercular Indians.

One day school is now maintained at government expense with free lunches for the children but the Meskwaki have never favored the education of their children according to white man's standards. Instruction in these schools is in English, and during the year 1956-1957 ninety-seven were enrolled in grades one through six. In addition, fifty-two attended Tama public high school and eleven were going to college. A Presbyterian missionary furnishes such religious instruction as the Indians will permit.

Under the law passed by Congress in June, 1924, conferring citizenship upon all Indians within the United States, these Indians became voters; seventy-seven of them cast their ballots at the election in November, 1924. For whom they voted is, of course, not recorded. It would be interesting to know what interest in persons or in public affairs led these red men, who have resisted the white man's civilization, to struggle with the baffling Australian ballot or the complicated voting machine.

Nearly all of the Indian families now have

frame houses, though the native wickiups may still be seen, and the Meskwaki housewife has a few pieces of furniture like those in the modest homes of her white neighbors. Their clothing is usually the kind worn by white people, but selected and modified to suit the Indian taste. Many possess automobiles. It is doubtful whether the "fire wagons" will prove as deadly to the red men as the "fire water," though they may prove equally expensive.

According to the report submitted to the Indian Office on June 30, 1925, there were three hundred and sixty-three Indians living on the so-called Tama reservation, consisting of 3,200 acres of land, which they farm to some extent. Each member of the group receives a yearly cash annuity from the government in semi-annual installments.

Thus it happens that the tourist traveling westward on the Lincoln Highway from Tama, Iowa, finds red men dwelling in peace among the white. Annually the members of the tribe hold a powwow at which the costumes, dances, games, and some of the ceremonies of the Indians are presented, but the boy or girl who peers about in fascinated horror for the historic tomahawk or listens for the blood-curdling war whoop will be disappointed. The groves along the Iowa River reveal only peaceful scenes of every-day existence. The sounds heard are the guttural conversation of the

men either in English or in their native tongue, the higher tones of the women as they gossip with each other, the voices of the children, and the barking of the dogs. It is a cramped existence and sometimes hard, compared with the old free life when they hunted and fished over Iowa — like that of an eagle sitting dejectedly in a cage — but to these Indians, Iowa is home.

RUTH A. GALLAHER