

In the Neutral Ground

The Winnebago were still a powerful tribe when they moved into the Neutral Ground. It was estimated they numbered 3,800 individuals in 1650. Their number was set at 5,800 in 1820 while in 1837 and again in 1843 the figure was placed at 4,500. Although by no means small in number, the Winnebago did not relish serving as a buffer between enemy tribes in the Neutral Ground.

The Neutral Ground

The Neutral Ground dated back to the Great Council of 1825 at Prairie du Chien when a treaty was signed on August 19, between the United States and the assembled representatives of the Chippewa, Sauk, Fox, Menominee, Winnebago, Ottawa, and Potowatomi Indians. No cession of land was involved, the main purpose of the treaty being to allow the United States to draw a line which would limit the respective hunting grounds of two bitter foes, the Sioux on the north and the Sauk and Fox on the south. The boundary line agreed upon ran from the mouth of the Upper Iowa River in a "direct line to the second or upper fork of the Desmoines river."

Five years later, on July 15, 1830, the Sauk and

Fox agreed to surrender a strip twenty miles wide on the south side of the neutral line established by the Treaty of 1825, while the Sioux ceded a similar amount to the north of it. This had created a neutral territory forty miles in width between the Mississippi and the Des Moines River. The Winnebago had been moved into the central portion of this Neutral Ground.

Fort Atkinson

To further allay the fears of the Winnebago, Captain Isaac Lynde with Company F of the Fifth Infantry had crossed the Mississippi with eighty-two officers and men and on May 31, 1840 encamped on the north bank of the Turkey River a few miles above the agency house and mission school. The place was named "Camp Atkinson" in honor of the department commander — Brigadier General Henry Atkinson.

Two days later some fifty mechanics arrived from Prairie du Chien and began erection of the barracks and quarters. On June 24, 1841, Captain Edwin V. Sumner arrived with Company B of the First United States Dragoons, making the garrison about 160 strong. For the next six years Fort Atkinson continued as a two company post.

When Fort Atkinson was completed in 1842, four long rectangular barracks, two of stone and two of logs hewn flat, enclosed a square parade and drill ground of more than an acre. These buildings were two stories high and twenty feet

from the ground to the eaves, each having an upper porch along its entire length. Commissioned officers and their families occupied one of the stone barracks; non-coms and their families lived in one of hewn logs. Private soldiers used the other two barracks. The lower part of their stone building was used as a hospital, while the lower part of the other was divided up into rooms, one of which served as a chapel and school.

As Bruce E. Mahan records:

At one end of the parade ground a tall flag-staff towered above the works. A gunhouse with thick stone walls and peaked roof occupied the southwest corner of the works, which with its counterpart in the northeast corner guarded the approaches to the four sides of the stockade. In the southeast corner stood the stone magazine or powder-house while in the opposite corner was located the quartermaster's store-house adjoined by the sutler's store, with the guardhouse nearby. A picket fence of squared logs twelve feet high with loop holes at intervals of four feet enclosed the buildings and with the two blockhouses made a rectangular fort of formidable appearance.

North of the fort and across a street were located the bakery, the blacksmith shop, and carpenter shops. The stables were some 40 feet wide and 300 feet long running in a north and south direction. Beginning near the powder-house and extending nearly the entire length of one side of the stockade was the sentinel's beat with its platform about three feet below the sharpened tips of the logs. At one end of the beat a small shelter protected the guard during inclement weather.

The construction of Fort Atkinson, and the mil-

itary road connecting it with Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien, cost the government about \$90,000. On February 24, 1849, the War Department ordered Fort Atkinson abandoned. In July, 1853, the government sold the buildings of the Fort at public auction for a paltry \$3,521.

The Winnebago Agency

The Winnebago Agency was located about four miles below Fort Atkinson on the Turkey River. Rev. David Lowry, the sub-agent, reported in September, 1840, that he expected to remove the sub-agency and the Winnebago School on Yellow River to the Turkey River below Fort Atkinson. Arrangements had been made for breaking one thousand acres of land on the Turkey River, two blacksmiths had been sent there, and one to the Red Cedar River. A grist mill was also being erected.

By 1842 Lowry reported most of the Winnebago were settled in the new territory: 873 were living on Sioux lands, 254 on the Upper Iowa River, and 756 near the sub-agency. Temptation, however, had not been left behind. Rev. Lowry declared that thirty-nine Indians had perished in drunken brawls the preceding year and many others were injured. "Unless something more effectual than has yet been tried, can be adopted for the preservation of the Winnebagoes, it is evident they must soon be numbered with nations *that have been.*"

David Lowry continued as sub-agent until July 5, 1844, when he was succeeded by James R. McGregor, who in turn was succeeded by Jonathan E. Fletcher on June 2, 1845. Apparently much of the time of these men was spent in a vain effort to lead the Winnebago to a better way of life. In his report to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in September, 1845, Governor John Chambers declared:

Of the Winnebagoes I regret to have to repeat that they are the most drunken, worthless, and degraded tribe of which I have any knowledge. They have heretofore wasted their annuity provisions in a very short time after receiving them, and the large sum paid them annually in money passes almost immediately into the hands of the traders — so that there is some portion of almost every year in which they suffer for food. An attempt was made last year, under the authority of the department, to guard against this painful state of things, by applying a part of their annuity to the purchase of provisions, but they obstinately protested against it, and the benevolent intention of the department was defeated by the timidity and ignorance of the late sub-agent; and the effect of it would have been intense suffering, but that the same sub-agent, by transcending his powers and applying money put into his hands by the Government for other purposes, to the purchase of provisions, saved them from the consequences of the obstinacy with which they refused to let their own money be supplied.

The habitual drunkenness of this tribe, and their habit of wandering into the settled parts of Wisconsin, and of this Territory, and their obstinate perseverance in establishing themselves in considerable numbers on the Missis-

sippi river, out of their own country, in direct violation of their treaties with us, has made it very desirable to compel them to keep within their own bounds; and on several occasions they have been brought in by military detachments from Fort Atkinson, but they almost immediately wander off again; and it is now estimated by the sub-agent at Turkey river, that about one half of the tribe is in Wisconsin and along the Mississippi.

The Winnebago won no prizes for farming during their brief stay in Iowa. Wheat, corn, potatoes, beans, turnips, buckwheat, and oats were the chief crops. One of the difficulties of the agent was to keep the Indians from eating the seed given them and killing the work oxen. The report of the distribution of work on the farm is enlightening. Of the 296 acres enclosed, 94 acres were cultivated by white laborers, 84 by squaws, 58 by half-breeds, and 24 left uncultivated.

If the conditions of the Winnebago in the Neutral Ground were lamentable, the scoundrels responsible for their plight were not difficult to point out. According to sub-agent Jonathan Fletcher:

It would be a delightful task to lead this people [the Winnebagoes], step by step, in the path of civilization and improvement, if that path were not blockaded at every step by a whiskey keg, and every effort to promote their welfare and happiness thwarted and counteracted by a set of heartless whiskey dealers established along the line of the Indian country, a few feet beyond the jurisdiction of the military officer and sub-agent, for the purpose of plundering these Indians of their money and their goods; to rob them of their food, their clothing, their vir-

tue, and their health: but it is idle to complain; the laws of the Territory are inoperative and impotent to remedy this evil; and the hope, once entertained, that the state of public morals among the hardy settlers of our frontier would become sufficiently elevated and correct to forbid the longer existence of these nuisances, has ceased to exist.

With the removal of the Winnebago to Minnesota Territory, the Winnebago Agency was ordered closed on May 18, 1848. Agent Jonathan Fletcher and his few remaining charges shortly began their long 310-mile trek to their new home on the Watab River in Minnesota.

The Winnebago School

A feature of the Winnebago sojourn in Iowa was the school for Winnebago children. It first was located on the Yellow River, a short distance from Prairie du Chien, but later, when the Winnebago moved into the Neutral Ground, it was transferred to a spot adjoining the Agency a few miles below Fort Atkinson.

Reverend David Lowry, a Presbyterian minister who had been appointed by President Andrew Jackson as a teacher for the Winnebago, arrived in Prairie du Chien late in the fall of 1834. Early in 1835 Lowry opened the school on Yellow River, a short distance above the mouth of that stream. His wife, Mary Ann Lowry, acted as his assistant. When Indian Agent Joseph Street visited the school on April 30, 1835, he found only six pupils attending regularly, but he was cheered

by the fact that more Winnebago were visiting the place daily. Governor Henry Dodge, while visiting the school in February, 1837, expressed delight with its progress. By December, 1837, the enrollment had increased to forty-one pupils.

The year 1839 marked the peak of attainment for the school on Yellow River. A report in December showed an enrollment of 79 pupils — 43 boys and 36 girls. During the year the girls had made two hundred garments — shirts, trousers, dresses, skirts, coats, and aprons — all the clothing needed by the pupils in the school. When J. H. Lockwood and B. W. Brisbois visited the school in August, 1840, they marveled at the progress made by the Winnebago and declared they had never seen a more orderly or ambitious school, even of white children.

But the days of the school on Yellow River were numbered. On October 1, 1840, the teachers were notified that their services were no longer needed, the buildings sold, and a new location on the Turkey below Fort Atkinson selected.

In his *A Glimpse of Iowa in 1846*, John B. Newhall expressed enthusiasm with the Winnebago school in its new location on the Turkey River. Newhall felt that the zeal of the "children of the forest" coupled with the "efforts made in imparting instruction" had been attended with "the happiest results." Between 60 and 120 "scholars" were in daily attendance and their aptness in "ac-

quiring a knowledge of geography, and the various branches of learning," was truly astonishing.

Newhall found Mrs. A. Lockwood, the former "attentive hostess" of the Burlington House in Burlington, Iowa, in charge of the *Domestic Economy* department. According to Newhall:

It is an interesting spectacle to behold, in the midst of the forest, far beyond the confines of civilization, an assemblage of one hundred children of Nature, eschewing the wild excitement of savage life, throwing aside the bow and quiver, and bowing to the shrine of learning.

Although much stress was placed on household affairs, the literary side of the Winnebago children's education was not neglected. Through the kindness of a friend who had visited the school Newhall received a few "fugitive scraps of original composition" from two little Indian girls. The following composition by one, according to Newhall, reveals "the artlessness and simplicity of description which marks the child of Nature."

WINNEBAGO SCHOOL

I like to see another Spring come; I love to see all the beautiful flowers growing. I like to take a walk in the woods, and hear the birds singing upon the trees. In a little while all the Indians will come back, and fix their wigwams with new bark. I like to go and live in a new bark wigwam. When all the children come back from hunting, they are glad to come in school again. A great many school children have died. When any one dies, they paint their face, then put every thing new on; then dress them very fine, and bury them. Then they take goods,

and put it on the grave; and if it is a woman, the women gather then together and play games; if it is a boy, the boys gather themselves, and play ball; and if it is a girl, the girls gather themselves together and play. The Indians have a great many things to do. They say the white people when they die go to one place, and the Indians go to another place. At a medicine feast they have an otter skin, or some other skin, which their medicine is in, and call them medicine bags; they shoot themselves down, and say those that join the feast that God would forgive their sins, and those that stay out are sinners; and they must fix themselves very nice if they go to the feast, if they dont fix themselves God would not like them.

MARGARET PORTER

The land which the Winnebago occupied in the Neutral Ground was, according to Newhall, "one of the most desirable, healthy and picturesque regions of the West." The Turkey River and its tributaries abounded with the most delicious mountain trout. Perennial springs of purest water gushed from every ledge; wild honey could be obtained throughout the forest land. Prairie hens, wild turkeys, rabbits, deer, and other wild game could be found in abundance. Herds of buffalo roamed the prairie a scant two days journey to the west of Fort Atkinson. Unhappily, the Winnebago did not linger long enough to enjoy the beauty and productivity of the Turkey River Valley. As Iowa approached statehood in 1846 steps were already being taken to move the Winnebago from the borders of the Hawkeye State.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN