

## A Winnebago Encampment

*Although the Winnebago Indians were removed from the Neutral Ground in 1848, wandering bands often returned to their former hunting grounds. In the spring of 1858 the editor of the Republican Intelligencer visited an encampment near St. Charles, now Charles City, and reported the incident in his paper. — The Editor*

A ride of fifteen minutes, the other day, brought us to an encampment of the Winnebago Indians. It occupies a retired and protected spot in the timber on the Cedar River, about one mile north of town. The band, numbering thirty-two, all told, are a part of the once powerful tribe of Winnebagoes, and are on a visit to their hunting grounds. As we neared their encampment, and saw the smoke curling from their wigwams, we thought of the time when beautiful Iowa was one vast wilderness — unadorned by art and unadmired by eye of white man — when the Indian hunter's shout only awoke the solitude. We saw him return to his lodge loaded with the spoils of the chase, to lie down to rest. We saw him awake from sleep and gird about his loins the cruel tomahawk and scalping-knife, while piercing war-whoops rang from



dell to dell. We heard the red man's cry of death — the white man's shout of victory.

Again we looked, and the colossal wheel was set in motion whose accelerated revolutions were to keep time with the pulsations of a new State's ambitious heart and hurry forward the multitudinous throng that were to people Iowa's vast domains, develop her resources, and build up her cities — landmarks of her liberation from the darkness of barbarism.

Applying for admission at the most conspicuous of the tents, we were given to understand that we were welcome. The Indians were variously engaged — making fishing tackle, dressing game, cleaning guns, and arranging their toilette. Wapinicon, or "Captain Jim", as he is familiarly called by the whites, whose acquaintance we made some two years ago, coming in and recognizing us, invited us to take a seat by his side and smoke with him the "pipe of peace". This served to make us socially inclined, so with Captain Jim's English and our knowledge of the Indian vernacular, we whiled away an hour in agreeable conversation.

From him we learned that the Winnebago tribe were now reduced to about 2000. The majority of them are on the Indian reservation in Minnesota. Two or three of their most noted braves are now at Washington. There are nineteen chiefs in the



tribe, each of whom is in the habit of visiting the white settlements on a trading and begging tour, three or four times a year. During these expeditions they seldom if ever commit depredations of any kind, which fact secures to them many favors from the whites.

Their tents are constructed by enclosing with poles set in the ground a room fifteen to twenty feet in diameter. The tops of the poles are tied together and then the sides covered with canvas, skins, or mats made of bark. A hole is left at the top for the smoke to escape. Their fires are on the ground in the center of the tent and are kept burning day and night. Over the fires are hung large wooden hooks on which they boil their samp, roast and smoke their venison, &c. They sleep on blankets spread on the ground, with but little other protection from the cold. In the winter they are rather filthy in their habits; in the summer they pay more regard to cleanliness.

Playing cards is a favorite pastime with the Indians, and it frequently affords them much profit. They are generally more skilled in the use of the "primmers" than the whites. The chief of the band was absent, hunting, much to our regret. He is called Bradford by the whites — his Indian name we did not learn. He speaks English quite fluently, and can read and write.



Noticing a very aged squaw, we made inquiries concerning her and learned that she was the medicine woman attached to the band. In her deportment she differed from the others, as she took no notice of what transpired around her.

Thanking Captain Jim for his attention, and shaking his hand we bade him good bye, and left; our mind being filled with reflections upon the mighty change a few years have wrought in the condition of the red man, and in the character and aspect of this country.

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