

## An Indian Ceremony

[Colonel George Davenport was murdered by a band of robbers on July 4, 1845. The following account of a ceremony by the Indians who had known him as a trader and friend for nearly thirty years appeared in the *Davenport Gazette* for July 31, 1845, and presumably was written by the editor, Alfred Sanders.—THE EDITOR]

On last Friday afternoon we were witness to a strange and interesting ceremony performed by the Indians over the remains of Mr. Davenport, who was murdered at his residence on Rock Island on the 4th inst. Upon proceeding to the beautiful spot selected as his last resting place, in the rear of his mansion on Rock Island, we found the War Chief and braves of the band of Fox Indians, then encamped in the vicinity of this place, reclining on the grass around his grave at the head of which was planted a white cedar post some seven or eight feet in height.

The ceremony began by two of the braves rising and walking to the post, upon which with paint they began to inscribe certain characters, while a third brave armed with an emblematic war club, after drinking to the health of the deceased from a cup placed at the base of the post, walked three times around the grave, in an opposite direction to the course of the sun, at each revolution delivering a speech with sundry gestures and emphatic motions in the direction of the north-east. When he had ceased he passed the club to another brave who went



through the same ceremony passing but once around the grave, and so in succession with each one of the braves. This ceremony, doubtless, would appear pantomimic to one unacquainted with the habits or language of the Indians, but after a full interpretation of their proceedings they would be found in character with this traditionary people.

In walking around the grave in a contrary direction to the course of the sun, they wished to convey the idea that the ceremony was an *original* one. In their speeches they informed the Great Spirit that Mr. Davenport was their friend and they wished the Great Spirit to open the door to him and to take charge of him. The enemies whom they had slain they called upon to act in capacity of waiters to Mr. Davenport in the spirit land. They believing that they have unlimited power over the spirits of those whom they have slain in battle. Their gestures towards the north-east were made in allusion to their great enemies, the Sioux, who live in that direction. They recounted their deeds of battle, with the number that they had slain and taken prisoners. Upon the post were painted in hieroglyphics, the number of the enemy that they had slain, those taken prisoners, together with the tribe and station of the brave. For instance, the feats of Wau-co-shaw-she, the Chief, were thus portrayed. Ten headless figures were painted, which signified that he had killed ten men. Four others were then added, one of them smaller than the others, signifying that he had taken



four prisoners, one of whom was a child. A line was then run from one figure to another, terminating in a plume, signifying that all had been accomplished by a chief. A fox was then painted over the plume, which plainly told that the chief was of the Fox tribe of Indians. These characters are so expressive that if an Indian of any tribe whatsoever were to see them, he would at once understand them.

Following the sign of Pau-tau-co-to, who thus proved himself a warrior of high degree, were placed *twenty* headless figures, being the number of the Sioux that *he* had slain.

The ceremony of painting the post was followed by a feast, prepared for the occasion, which by them was certainly deemed the most agreeable part of the proceedings. Meats, vegetables and pies were served up in such profusion that many armsfull of the fragments were carried off—it being a part of the ceremony, which is religiously observed, that all the victuals left upon such an occasion are to be taken to their homes. At a dog feast, which are frequently given by themselves and to which white men are occasionally invited, the guest is either obliged to eat all that is placed before him, or hire some other person to do so, else it is considered a great breach of hospitality.

With the feast terminated the exercises of the afternoon, which were not only interesting but highly instructive to those who witnessed them.