

Indian Chiefs and Pioneers of Northwest

By John Shaw

These reminiscences of Col. Shaw, like his "Personal Narrative," which appeared in the second volume of this series, were dictated by him in 1855—he was then blind—and noted down by the secretary of the Society. Other matters precluded its publication at the time with his Narrative. Col. Shaw passed away, as recorded in our sixth volume, in 1871. He possessed a fine memory of historical events. The Indians conferred on him the name of *Es-sap-pan*, or "The Raccoon"—perhaps expressive of his cunning and sagacity.

L. C. D.

Treaty of Portage des Sioux.—At this treaty, held a little above the mouth of the Missouri, in 1815, the United States, I understood, acquired a title to the lead region. But the Sanks and Foxes generally repudiated the authority of the chiefs and head-men who ceded that territory, as hunting had become so poor, that they relied much on digging lead mineral and smelting it, and selling it to procure such necessaries and comforts as they desired.

Col. Robert Dickson obtained an unbounded influence over the Indians of the Northwest. He established a law, that no Indians should engage in war with each other within twenty-five leagues of *Prairie du Chien*—that wide belt of country should be strictly neutral ground. I think he must have made *Prairie du Chien* his summer home for some thirty years prior to the final pacification in 1815. When peace was proclaimed, he spoke to a large assemblage of his red children, and informed them that the treaty rendered it necessary for him to retire to the Red River of the North, and Hudson's Bay; that it caused the deepest gloom in his mind to be compelled to leave his much-loved children, and that he could never recover from this sorrow. The Indians by their tears and grief for many days evinced their strong attachment for their father and friend.

The Sioux Chief La Feuille, or The Leaf.—About 1818¹ some of the inhabitants of Prairie du Chien were killed by the Winnebagoes. The Sioux were the particular friends of the French, and La Feuille, or "The Leaf," was their head chief of the seventeen bands of the Sioux, residing south of the Minnesotas or St. Peters, some four or five hundred miles from Prairie du Chien as the Indians then estimated distances.

La Feuille, accompanied by about fifty warriors, made his appearance at Prairie du Chien, in response to an invitation from the French people of that place, who received the chief and his party with hearty welcome.

La Feuille was then apparently about twenty-eight years of age,² and very nearly seven feet high of great muscular frame, though not overburdened with flesh; with coarse features and long visage. He was majestic in his appearance, with a firm step, and commanding mien. He called a council of the Winnebagoes, and when assembled in a bowery, in Prairie du Chien, constructed for such purposes, he thus substantially addressed them:

"You Winnebagoes! the enemy of the white man and of all Indians, but too insignificant to be worthy of my notice. Had it not been for the call of my white brethren here, informing me that you had been repeating your murderous deeds by killing some of my esteemed friends, I should not be here in council with you to-day. Upon this call, I could hardly make up my mind to any other course than your total extermination; and you could not have expected any-

¹ It was more likely prior to the establishment of Fort Crawford in 1816. L. C. D.

² Wabashaw, or "The Leaf," the person here referred to, signed the treaty at Prairie du Chien in 1825, and was probably older than Col. Shaw supposed. He had fought for the British during the War of 1812-15, as mentioned in a note on page 194, II, Wis. Hist. Colls., and was perhaps quite young at that time. When there are successive chiefs of the same name, it is sometimes difficult to determine which one is referred to in our vague accounts of Indian history. The "great Wabashaw," who figured during the period of the Revolutionary War, and is briefly noticed in Neill's *Minnesota*, pp. 328-30, was probably the father of this chief of the same name mentioned by Col. Shaw. L. C. D.

thing less, from my declaration on the last occasion when I met you here to chide you for a similar act of perfidy.

"You Winnebagoes! I will now speak to you in words that cannot be misunderstood. If I am ever called upon again to take you to task for killing my white brethren here, I will come down from the interior wilderness with my leaves [warriors], and will annihilate you;" and pulling out a hair from his head, and blowing it from his hand, added: "I will thus blow you away, so you shall never again make water in the streams flowing into the mighty Mississippi. *Do you understand me?*"

The Winnebagoes gave a hideous grunt, acknowledging that they fully comprehended it, and soon sneaked off. But they stealthily kept up their depredations.

About 1822, La Feuille again visited Prairie du Chien, with some five hundred of his people, and in council¹ spoke of his nation having formerly been the fast friends of the French—their first love of white folks; the traditions of which would, he said, be handed down to the latest generations of the Sioux; that their association with the French were more congenial to them than with any other people; but the French as a nation were weak and imbecile. The next friends we had, he said, were the Great Lion, the Sagannah, or English, and being warriors, the alliance was agreeable; and for the British representative, Col. Robert Dickson, with whom they were so long on terms of intimacy, they cherished feelings such as words could never express. Now it was proposed to him and his people to make a treaty of friendship with the Chemuckomins or Long Knives, who had now become their neighbors, and they had considered the matter well. "It is our interest," continued La Feuille, "to form the new association, as our American Father has furnished us with so bountiful a supply of articles that we need—and this is the best evidence we can

¹ The treaty at Prairie du Chien, in 1825, is doubtless referred to, where the name of Wa-bashaw, or "The Leaf," heads the list of signers on the part of the Sioux Indians. He is unquestionably the chief mentioned on page 414, vol. II, *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, who aided in bringing the Sauk War of 1832 to a close.

have why we should form such an alliance. See what a large number of presents our American Father has sent us! See the clothing for ourselves, squaws and children; see the guns and the wampum; and, above all the rest, and what is most conclusive, see *the milk of the nation*, so kindly sent us by our Great Father"—pointing to a row of fifteen barrels of whiskey. A treaty of friendship was formed; and La Feuille continued amicable.

Tomah.—The Menomonee chief Tomah descended the river from Prairie du Chien to St. Louis, in 1817, in company with me. He could speak some words in French, and was quite companionable, frequently indulging in pleasantry and drollery. He was then quite advanced in years, but was very active, and made camp on shore, of nights, for us both.

Red Bird Disturbance, 1827.—Red Bird did not die till after his trial—not, as Gen. Smith states in his *History of Wisconsin*, before his trial. He was tried and convicted, together with Chickhongsie, or "The Little Steer," and Winaga, or "The Sun;" but the sentence was deferred till the last day of that term of the court, and then, from some cause, was not pronounced. During the trial, Red Bird repeatedly protested against the whole proceedings as, in his estimation, cowardly and unworthy a great nation. He was remanded to prison to await his sentence, and there died. He appeared to me to be about fifty years of age, and there was nothing very remarkable in his appearance. His fellow culprits, Little Steer and The Sun, subsequently received their sentence, but were ultimately pardoned by the President. I think there were eight Winnebagoes, instead of six as Gen. Smith states, who voluntarily surrendered themselves as prisoners, in order to relieve their nation from the disastrous effects of a war with the whites. The others were finally discharged without trial.

Black Hawk, 1832.—Not long after Black Hawk's capture I descended the river on a steamboat with him from Galena, and having been a number of years acquainted with him, he appeared glad to see me, and talked freely about the recent war. He said he had been in irons, but he was then

unshackled; several other Indians were also prisoners with him, one of whom was Waupella.¹ Black Hawk had an interpreter present, a Frenchman, so we could converse. He said he was glad to meet with one who could comprehend his grievances, and spoke of the misfortune that resulted from the misapprehension on the part of the white people of the object he had in view. That he had long been in the habit of visiting the British post at Malden, generally yearly, and received with his people liberal presents. That early in 1832, thinking it was a tedious undertaking, to make that long journey so frequently, and that the whites were then over-running and gaining possession by pretended treaties, of all their fine country, and but little game remaining, he started for Canada, with such of his people as might choose to follow him, with the design of remaining there;² that he had been forewarned by Keokuck and other chiefs, that in going in the direct route he proposed through the settled portions of the country, he and his party would be regarded by the inhabitants as making a hostile movement; but that he, Black Hawk, thought it better that his people should keep embodied rather than get scattered. That after they had progressed a few days in upper Illinois, he found he was pursued by the whites. He said he was still in hopes, if he could have an opportunity, to be able to explain satisfactorily the reason of the embodied movement of his people, but, he said, he had been grievously disappointed in the hope of a peaceful retirement to Canada. He was set upon by armed men,³ which he supposed was only the advance detachment, and now concluded that war was inevitable.

Black Hawk related, that he then said to his young men,

¹ Waupella, or "He-Who-is-Painted White," a Fox chief, was signer of the treaties of 1822, 1830, 1832 and 1836. L. C. D.

² This story of Black Hawk's design of retiring to Canada, as related to Col. Shaw, in September, 1832, is singularly at variance with the reasons and purposes of his movements as dictated in his autobiography the following year, and appears not susceptible of reconciliation.

L. C. D.

³ Col. Stillman's pursuit.

L. C. D.

that inasmuch as the whites had commenced making war upon them, they should make the best defense they could. He expressed his surprise that the Americans could, in so brief a period, have assembled so large a force, and still more surprised to find some Indians among them. That he and his party endured great fatigue and suffering in their march, with their women, children and baggage, and discovering that the whites and their Indian associates were steadily gaining on him, he sought an opportunity of speaking with the Indians who were accompanying the Americans; but finding none, he went back some distance, the night after the battle of Wisconsin Heights, and ascended a tree, as near the American encampment as he thought it prudent to venture, and spoke in as loud a voice as he possibly could, desiring the American Indians to inform the whites that he was not for war; that he was only endeavoring to leave the country, and hoped he would be permitted to do so in peace.

But he said, he knew by the renewed pursuit of the whites the next morning, that further conflict was inevitable, and he felt convinced, that in the then enfeebled condition of his people, he had nothing favorable to hope for in the result. He now changed his route, and directed his course towards the Mississippi; and to facilitate the more rapid movements of himself and people, they were compelled to throw away all their heavy and most cumbersome articles. The whites also increased their speed, and he and his jaded followers were overtaken at the Bad Axe River—an indiscriminate massacre took place—many were killed and drowned; and Black Hawk and his people believing that no quarter would be shown them, escaped as best they could, and dispersed. As he spoke of the slaughter of his people at the Bad Axe, in their helpless and forlorn condition, tears coursed down his aged cheeks. The old chief added, that he was soon captured and put in irons; but finding that he would not attempt to escape, the irons were taken off; but he did not know what the Americans would do with him. This is substantially the story Black Hawk related to me. I never saw him afterwards. In conversation with him at

the treaty of Portage des Sioux in 1815, he said that he had seen me on the Missouri frontier many times during the War of 1812-15—I think he said he saw me when I escaped in the canoe at the mouth of Cuivre River.¹ I saw him several times before the Indian troubles of 1832, at Prairie du Chien and elsewhere, and he had stopped at my house and enjoyed my hospitality. He consequently seemed to rehearse to me his griefs and misfortunes with the freedom of an old friend. Of his sons I have no knowledge.

Keokuck.—At the time of which I am now speaking, 1832, there was no settlement at what is now called Keokuck, except Stillwell's cabins. Not long after Black Hawk's descent of the river as a prisoner, the remnant of his band arrived at that point, generally in canoes; warriors, women and children, numbering perhaps two hundred altogether, disembarked, and sat down along the beach. Keokuck, at the head of a few followers, now made his appearance—his first meeting with them since their departure on their adventurous and disastrous hagra. He appeared to be some thirty years of age; and as he approached, and beheld his surviving countrymen and associates, some wounded, and all haggard, and in a most pitiable condition, now returning, and looking to him as the most influential chief of the Sauk and Fox nations, for friendship and protection, he was deeply moved at the sight. He walked along their line forward and backward, for some minutes, the working of the muscles of his face, and even his brawny limbs, evincing the strong agitation of his mind at beholding such a scene. He burst into a flood of tears as he said touchingly:

"My mothers, my sisters, my brothers! I forewarned you of what I believed was inevitable—that should you persist in marching off in a body, your attitude would be regarded as a hostile one, and you would be destroyed. The destruction of that portion of our nation, of which you are the remnant, has been nearly effected. Your leader is gone—he is in the keeping of the whites—we know not what will be his fate. But you must submit to your condi-

¹ Col. Shaw's *Narratives*, ii, *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, pp. 207, 208. L. C. D.

tion, and must now fully identify yourselves with us, the peaceful portion of the nation, and we will, to the utmost of our ability, alleviate your sufferings, and supply your wants. You know me well, and know that I never had a desire to go to war, either against the white or the red man, and always endeavored to inculcate by my own example, that peace was our true policy. Now my advice to you, young men, the remnant of a noble band, is to pursue the game in the forest, and not seek the destruction of your fellowmen, while your women cultivate the soil at some place chosen for the purpose, and there live in peace and harmony with all."

All were deeply affected, and wept like children, and seemed like so many returning prodigals. I was present at this scene, and had my feelings as deeply stirred within me as the rest. Gathering up what little they had, they now followed Keokuck a few miles up the Des Moines, where he and his people resided.

Keokuck was a noble man, and a good friend of the white's. His father's name was also Keokuck, and was the head peace chief of the Sauks and Foxes at their old town, about two miles above the mouth of Rock River, between the Rock and Mississippi, while a small portion were located on the opposite or southern bank of Rock River. There must have been five thousand acres in their fields, and they had every appearance of long occupancy and cultivation, and the soil was exceedingly good. There doubtless young Keokuck was born. His father must have been living at least as late as 1820; I know not when he passed away—but some time between 1820 and 1832.¹

Black Thunder was a noted chief and counsellor, and a very remarkable orator of his day. He was considered the ablest speaker of the Sauks and Foxes of his time. I heard him speak when I went up Fevre River in 1816, and several times afterwards; and can testify to his great ability as an orator. He was of medium size, of strong expressive fea-

¹ Probably prior to 1824, as the name of Keokuck, or "The Watchful Fox" doubtless the son, appears appended to the treaty of that year, as well as to the subsequent treaties of 1825, 1830, 1832, and 1836. L. C. D.

tures, with a brilliant eye, peculiarly piercing when animated with his subject while addressing an audience. His energy was unparalleled, and he took a deep interest in whatever pertained to the welfare of his people. I do not know of his having taken any part in the troubles of 1832, nor what became of him.¹

Of the Prophet, Nahopope, and Wisheet, I know nothing worth communicating.

One-Eyed De-Kaury was, I think, a Sauk, but was always identified with the Winnebagoes, perhaps by marriage; his home was near what is now Portage City. I have seen him at Prairie du Chien. He was called by the French *Le Borgne*, or "The One-Eyed." He was something over the medium size.

Yellow Thunder, a Winnebago chief, whom I frequently met, was a man of great respectability among his people, and an able counsellor in all their public affairs. He was a zealous Catholic. The last time I saw him was at the Indian payment in 1848, at Lake Powakanna, in Winnebago County. His old encampment, called the Yellow Banks, was about five miles below Berlin, on Fox River.²

Dubuque's Tomb.—Julien Dubuque was buried on a very high promontory on the western shore of the Mississippi, at some period prior to 1815, about a mile below the present city of Dubuque. A tomb was erected over the grave, covered with tin, and on a bright day when the sun's rays would reflect from it, it could be seen for a distance of a dozen miles below. So great was the veneration of the Indians for Dubuque's memory, that they constantly kept vigil for years over his tomb, till the whites became quite thickly settled in the country. The tomb has since gone to decay.

The Wisconsin Portage.—I always understood, that when the trade between Mackinaw and the Wisconsin and Upper

¹ Muckkatananamakes, or "Black Thunder," was a Fox chief, and a signer of the treaty at Portage des Sioux, in September, 1815. As his name does not appear to any subsequent treaties, he probably died not very long after Col. Shaw last saw him. L. C. D.

² He was a signer of the treaty of 1829, and his village is mentioned in Col. Charles Whittlesey's "Recollections of Wisconsin in 1822," p. 74, vol. 1, *Wis. Hist. Colls.* L. C. D.

Mississippi had become important, the early French adventurers were induced to make a sort of pole or corduroy road over a marsh, for a mile in length, between the Fox and Wisconsin, and construct a large clumsily formed wagon on which to transport boats across the portage of ten tons burthen. This wagon was fully fifty-eight feet in length. The lading was carried on the backs of the boatmen or Indians, or on the rude carriage. This custom of rolling over the traders' boats was in vogue perhaps some thirty years or more, and ceased upon the erection of Fort Winnebago in 1828. Baptist Roy, lately a citizen of Marquette County, was for many years mainly engaged in this business, as was Pierre Paquette, of the Portage region.

Nicholas Boilvin, a Frenchman, was United States Indian agent at Prairie du Chien in 1816, and subsequently. His wife was formerly a Miss St. Cyr, of St. Louis. He was a faithful public officer, of moderate ability, but never obtained much popularity with the Indians. He left sons and daughters.

John W. Johnson, a native of Maryland, was United States factor at Prairie du Chien, in 1816, and afterwards. In his manners, he was a real gentleman, and a very worthy man; but unfortunately, he was quite deaf. He married a Sauk woman, and raised several children, and educated them; and finally retired to St. Louis, wealthy, where he resided the last I heard of him.

Capt. John Throckmorton and one Shellcross were the first persons who engaged in steamboating on the Upper Mississippi. Throckmorton first brought a small steamer, called the "Red Rover," from the Ohio, about 1820. He afterwards built the steamboat "Warrior," at Pittsburgh, and engaged with it in the Upper Mississippi trade, and had much of the government patronage in transporting troops, supplies and Indian goods for the factory trade. He was in the battle of Bad Axe with his steamer, and played quite a part in that affair. He was, some five years since, still navigating the Upper Mississippi, making St. Louis his home.

September, 1855.