

DEATH AND BURIAL OF "INJUN JIM." AN INCIDENT IN THE  
LIVES OF TWO ALPENA COUNTY PIONEERS.

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Many incidents in the lives of pioneers, well worthy of preserving, are forgotten for lack of a pen to record them. It should be, and often is, a delightful task to write up items of early local history and thus rescue them from oblivion. To me it is regrettable that so many events in the lives of the pioneers are carelessly permitted to pass from remembrance. The State Pioneer and Historical Society is laboring with commendable zeal to gather up interesting incidents in the lives of our early settlers; and these are being recorded by hands that love their work in imperishable records. But he who would engage in such "labor of love" is often doomed to disappointment. Too often he finds that death has forever sealed the lips that might have imparted such information as would have made such "labor of love" possible.

Not so in regard to the incident I am about to relate, for one of the chief actors is not only living, but is also possessed of an excellent memory. From her I obtained the facts in relation to a most interesting event in her pioneer life.

It happened in 1862 or 1863. On this point Mrs. Oliver is not entirely clear. The incident occurred at Ossineke, or Devil river, as it was then called. Communication with Alpena in those days was mostly by water, though occasionally some one came overland, but such visits were of rare occurrence.

"Injun Jim" they called him. He had been at Devil river in days gone by and was not entirely unknown to the people living there. He was a quiet sort of man with the taciturn ways of his race. One day he appeared in the place again. He was sick; said he had been taken sick at Bay City. The civil war was raging and Injun Jim had gone to Bay City with the intention of "joining the army," but whether he had enlisted or not, Mrs. Oliver could not say. He had made his way back to Alpena and from there had gone to Devil river by boat with Gus Michiloski.

The latter will be remembered by old citizens as the owner of a little black sailboat, the capsizing of which afterwards sent poor Gus and a number of others to their death. His mother, familiarly known as "Auntie" Michiloski, a refined and educated lady, was a friend and companion of Mrs. Oliver. The tragic death of her son cast a shadow over her life, in which dear "Auntie" walked until her sweet, sad life came to an end. I have digressed a little to pay a tribute of respect to this dear woman, but I am sure that such of my readers as knew her will pardon the digression.

Mrs. Oliver was alone except for her children and "Auntie." Mr. Oliver was absent on a land-looking trip and was likely to be away for some time, but Mrs. Oliver was not the woman to turn a sick and homeless creature from her door; so Injun Jim was taken in and treated with all kindness. Physician there was none; but such simple remedies as were at hand were administered to the sick man and it was hoped that these, together with watchful care and good nursing, would soon restore him to health. But, as the days went by, he grew steadily worse. In vain the women increased their efforts. Weary days and still more weary nights came and went, bringing changes, and always for the worse. At last it became plainly apparent that the spirit of "Injun Jim" was soon to pass to the "happy hunting grounds." Toward the end he fell into a strange condition. He neither spoke nor moved, but lay

staring with wide, open eyes into vacancy. Four days he lay in this way and then died. He seemed, during these four days, to be in an unconscious condition, but may it not have been otherwise? May not the dying Indian have caught glimpses of the Spirit Land and of the dusky shades of his kindred beckoning him away? Who shall say?

Well, "Injun Jim" was dead; and now a new problem presented itself for solution, the disposal of the body. This was not easy for two lone women to solve. Mr. Oliver had not returned, and Gus came only after long absences. Then it occurred to them that they must meet the emergency, that they must be the undertakers, coffin-makers, grave-diggers and pall-bearers. They hesitated when they thought of all this, but not for long. Hesitation soon gave way to resolute action and, after a short consultation, they fell to work.

At the now idle mill they found a wide draughting board and a pair of saw-horses, placing the board on the saw-horses, they lifted the limp body from the bed, placed it on the board, and decently composed it for burial. Lumber and nails, saws and hammers were at hand, and they "set to" in such an earnest way that at sundown they had a coffin made, a grave dug and all other arrangements for the burial completed.

The coffin was not a very elaborate affair. It was probably a little "off" on shape, and certainly not at all profusely trimmed, but it was strongly made and of ample dimensions. Poor Jim wouldn't be cramped in it. He could turn over and stretch himself, if he cared to.

All this time the children had been looking with wondering eyes on the unusual proceedings. Something, to them incomprehensible, had interrupted the joyous flow of their lives. The Angel of Death had spread his sombre wings over the place; the children felt his presence and their voices were hushed to low whispers.

The burial had to be put off until the next day. The women were too tired to undertake that part of their heavy task sooner, and would have preferred it otherwise. The presence of the dead man lying there under the white cloth cast a gloom over things not easily dispelled. As the shade of evening fell, the weary watchers drew close together, not from superstitious fears, however—these two were not of the kind that "see things."

Early the next morning the body was placed in the coffin, the sheet in which it was wrapped thoroughly saturated with spirits of camphor, the lid nailed on, and all was ready. It required quite an effort to remove the body thus prepared from the house. Once there, it was placed on a dog train (a dog sledge such as was used by the French and Indian

mail carriers). The women were sufficiently acquainted with mechanical devices to know that rollers placed under the train would greatly facilitate the work of getting the body to the place of burial.

At last all was ready; and then, one pushing, the other pulling, the children silently following, this strange procession started for the grave. The route lay over rough ground, the way was long, and progress slow. Frequent halts had to be made to rest and to adjust the rollers. A hot summer sun, its rays unmitigated by not so much as a passing cloud, beat down upon their heads. All these things so retarded progress that it was noon when they reached the place of burial.

Some one had dug a cellar near the river bank intending to build a house there, but had abandoned the project. This spot was selected as the burial place. The cellar had partially caved in and, where this had occurred, a shallow grave was scooped out and into it, with a crowning effort, the coffin containing the mortal part of Injun Jim was lowered. After a short rest they filled up the grave and heaped the earth above him.

It was a quiet day in June. No sounds were heard, save the gentle murmurings of the zephyr winds among the pines, mingled with the voice of the little river; together singing, as it might be, a requiem for the soul of Poor Jim; and now, their labor finished, the women devoted the remaining hours of the day to needed rest.

A few days later, "His bones from insult to protect," they enclosed the grave with rude pickets and planted a few flowers there; but of these not a vestige remains.

Forty years have come and gone since this happened. Indian Jim in his grave beside the little river with its pebbly shores and rose-crowned banks has mouldered to dust. His grave unmarked, his merits unknown, his name and memory will soon have passed into oblivion.

But to the women, both the living and the dead, whose deed I have recorded, and to both of whom may justly be ascribed the womanly quality of gentleness, who yet in an emergency exhibited the sterner qualities of our nature, to them be praise. Of them and of their dead it may be said, "He was a stranger and they took him in;" kindly ministered to his wants while living, and then, when the end came, fashioned with unskilled but willing hands his coffin, dug his grave and gave him decent burial. Faithful disciples who heeded that saying of the Master, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these ye have done it unto me," to them be honor and lasting remembrance.

Thanks to them for the proof they have given us of the kind of stuff the pioneer women of Alpena county were made of.