

INDIANS OF BARRY COUNTY.

BY HENRY A. GOODYEAR.¹

My recollections of the band of Indians who made their home on the banks of the Thornapple near this place date back to 1840, when I first settled in the little hamlet of Hastings. This was a small band compared with those farther north.

The Ottawas and the Potawatomes (close friends and allies) occupied the middle and lower portion of the State. These tribes belonged to one family, the Algonquin. The Potawatomes ranged over the southern tier of counties, and part of Indiana.

I remember going to the eastern part of Baltimore township in the spring of 1841, with a view of trading for furs, where the Indians were engaged in making maple sugar. On my way there I came across an old Indian cornfield of the Potawatomes, as I was informed by my Indian guide, thus showing conclusively that this tribe must have occupied at least the southern part of Barry county. The Potawatomes were removed by the government to a reservation beyond the Mississippi river in 1837-8.

Each band of the Ottawa tribe, and there were many of them, had their own separate chief. The name of the chief of the Hastings' band

¹ This article was written by Mr. Henry A. Goodyear, and read before the Pioneer society of Barry county. Mr. Goodyear came to Hastings in August, 1840, and was the pioneer banker and merchant of the town. He identified himself prominently with all the varied interests of the county, occupied many positions of trust and responsibility. He was the first president of the village, and first mayor of the city after it was organized as such. He was twice chosen representative, and once elected to the State senate. He discharged the duties of these different offices with fidelity, showing ever a hearty interest in everything that would benefit his town and county—such were the pioneers.

was Pecitiae, than whom no nobler looking Indian could be imagined. He was perfect physically, and the grandeur of his carriage and demeanor could not but make a deep impression upon the most careless beholder. Fully six feet tall, very erect, he showed the type of the ideal Indian we read about. I never saw him in public without a band across his forehead, and from the upper part of his nose reaching to his eyes, ornamented with bright buttons. This was worn by him, I supposed at the time, as an insignia of his office. This chief was remarkable for his integrity and trustworthiness, and the uniformity of his urbanity and good habits. He enjoyed the respect and confidence of his subordinates and followers, as well as the white people who knew him. This band was regarded by some outsiders as the scalawag band of the tribe, but why it was so regarded I never could discover, nor in any way comprehend. It certainly was not justly entitled to that ignoble distinction. It is true, there were a few bad Indians in the band, and I presume that was the case in all other bands; but this being a small band the few bad members might have had the effect on outsiders of smirching its character in this way, or it might have been caused by their unwillingness to submit to the restraints of the missions in Prairieville, Barry and Allegan counties. I cannot account for this false and unfounded stigma in any other way. The overwhelming number of the band was what we then esteemed as good, straightforward, honest Indians, as a rule worthy of credit and the confidence of the white people. A remarkably good test of their integrity, not only of the band but the whole tribe, was the prominent act of theirs, adopted at a general council held in Grand Rapids in the fifties whereby they agreed to pay the debts of all dead Indians. As a result of this action about one thousand dollars came to the traders of Hastings. In order to have a better understanding of this action, I would state that heretofore all the debts were considered closed and liquidated by death. Here we see a nice sense of honor on their part that goes to show that the Indian, when well treated, is not the treacherous savage the public, as a rule, are made to believe.

Several of the Indians of this band were polygamists, notably the Chippewas, whose home was on the little Thornapple and Sambie domiciled on Sambie lake, one of a chain of lakes that constitutes the head of Mud creek. Each of these had two wives, and both men were called well off as far as Indian wealth was estimated. They were good hunters and trappers, hence their ability to indulge in a plurality of wives. As it is today with white people, there was then a certain

element among the Indians, those who were shiftless—too lazy to hunt or trap—consequently were always poor, dirty and squalid, without credit and respect from either white people or members of their tribe. Many of this band run accounts with the traders, in some cases, up to fifty dollars at a time, and generally managed to pay them. They, however, had to be reminded of their debts, dunned as we call it nowadays, and when government pay day came around, traders had to be on hand to secure part of the annuities to apply on accounts. I attended them for that purpose for many years. Grand Rapids was generally the place for making these payments. Brady was designated once or twice for the payment of the Hastings and Brady Indians. They, however, did not like the plan and asked to have the place of meeting changed to Grand Rapids. All annuities were the same per capita, hence the larger the family the more money the head of it would draw.

Indian women were exceedingly fond of dress, and whenever they could afford it, arrayed themselves in rich-looking blankets and fine broadcloth skirts, and jackets made of calico: these were trimmed with taffeta ribbons of various colors. They had many strings of beads to adorn their necks, and frequently had finger rings, earrings and many other ornaments. Some of the maidens were extremely good looking, and showed good taste in the arrangement of their hair and garments. Among strangers, especially before the whites, these maidens were shy and retiring, and in many ways showed the same signs of modesty characteristic of the young girls in civilized life.

Pow-wows were held by the Indians generally once a year. I remember some of them when held here. The usual place for these gatherings was immediately north of the iron bridge on Creek street. Here also was one of their cemeteries. These pow-wows were held soon after the maple sugar season. Some one may raise the query—What is a pow-wow? My answer is, it was a conference for business ending in a carnival of drunkenness, debauchery and savage excesses of all kinds. The Indians were not accustomed to restraint and under the influence of fire-water, brawls and fights, even to the death, were indulged in—squaws at such times formed themselves in a body of peacemakers, and anticipating the dethronement of reason in their lords and masters would secrete every instrument of carnage they could find, and throughout the carnival would constitute themselves a guard of protection. The only time I ever saw the squaws the worse for liquor were on the government pay days; they might have indulged at other times for aught I know, but not to my knowledge. It was very rarely that an Indian

would betray an act of viciousness towards the white people. In one instance, however, Saint Domino attempted it with Mrs. Cooley of Rutland. Mr. Cooley was obliged to go out into the world, as it was called, to procure eatables for his empty larder; Mrs. Cooley, not feeling safe to stay alone, invited Mrs. Hayes, who then was a young wife, to stay with her. One morning Saint Domino called at the house and demanded a breakfast, knowing that Mr. Cooley was away. The frightened woman put before him what she had, but he was not satisfied and insisted upon a hot meal. He became violent, and Mrs. Hayes hearing the racket promptly appeared upon the scene wielding an ax handle. That, with a very vigorous protest and the determined mien of Mrs. Hayes, succeeded in quieting the savage and driving him from the house. Although appearing so brave Mrs. Hayes was really very much frightened, and while she unwittingly enacted the role of the heroine in this case, the Indian on the other hand showed himself the coward and villain that he was. This Indian never forgave Mrs. Hayes for this treatment. He frequently expressed his dislike by denouncing her as "cowin-nees-been Jim-na-tow squaw," meaning "no good Hayes squaw."

Another instance vividly in my mind was this: After a prolonged orgie at one of their pow-wows some of the viciously inclined Indians moved toward the corner of State and Creek streets, then the business center of the little village, and attempted to create a disturbance, giving their war-whoop and shooting off their guns promiscuously. Then it was they made my store their target, but fortunately no damage was done save a few bullet holes in the building. The effect of the liquor soon disappeared and then they became quiet, peaceable Indians once more. The prominent Indians in the Hastings band who gave character and stability to it were Pec-i-tiac, the chief, Kish-wa-bah, As-qui-ab-a-noo, Ka-ka-coose, As-quei-sa-ke, Lund-a-go, Mish-wa-gen, alias Chunk, Saint Domino, Cou-de-cau, alias John Jones, Chick-ak-quo, Mag-quah, and many others whom I cannot now recall. Chippewa, who was classed with this band, did not make his home on their grounds. It was the same with Sambie. Pomebego divided his time with this band and the Slater Indians. Pomebego was a very old man when I first became acquainted with him. He was one of Tecumseh's veterans and accompanied him in all his battles. He often said that when he was a boy the big marsh in Hope township was then a lake. He also stated that the Indians planted corn where the poor farm is now, which possibly accounts for it having been a prairie in the thirties and forties.

It was a general custom of the Indians to give the white settlers

names taken from their own language; for instance, A. C. Parmelee, who was very blond, was named Kes-see, meaning god or sun. William Hayes, Jim-na-tow, meaning devil—this name was given him on account of his long, heavy beard, which imparted to him a stern, determined look. The rest of the whites being closely shaved. H. J. Kenfield, Jr., Wap-a-kee-sick, red fox, from the color of his hair. Heman Knappen-Schneep, meaning sleep-nap-napping. It would seem from this that they understood the definition of the word napping. Mr. Turner was called Skee-to-bon, thunder. De-up-john-skikee, medicine man. Daniel McLellan, a very old man, was called Mo-ka-mish, grandfather. There were quite a number of the McLellan family, and each member had a name given by the Indians, suggestive of some personal trait. I had the name of Mo-quah, this means black bear, and was given to me because of my heavy, dark, curly hair. The Indians, after having christened me with the name of their choosing, always after this accosted me by it; I suppose this was their usual custom. In after years in coming across Indians elsewhere, by announcing my Indian name, they recognized me at once by greeting me in their usual way, Bush-ue Ma-quah, and if the whole family were present the refrain, Bush-ue Ma-quah would be carried on by squaw and children in succession.

Another peculiar custom of theirs was this, they never knocked at the door for admission; the first intimation of their presence would usually be a copper-colored face pressed closely to the window, which in many cases frightened the women and children, until they became accustomed to the Indian customs and found out there was no harm intended. Their mission generally was to trade or "swap" as they termed it.

These Indians domiciled themselves in rude and primitive huts or wigwams as they were called. In winter these were made of bark of several thicknesses, with an opening at the top for the escape of the smoke. Their fires were built on the ground in the middle of the wigwam. Here the cooking was done in the winter, other seasons, when the weather permitted, this was done outside. They slept upon mats placed upon the ground, the family arranging themselves in a circle, their feet to the fire and their heads to the walls of the tent or wigwam—these were always built round, the better for sleeping purposes.

The Indians, in the division of labor, imposed upon the squaws the major share. It was theirs to plant, afterward harvest the corn, erect the wigwams, with the assistance of the bucks at rare intervals. They had the cooking to do; they cared for the children, the little babies being strapped to their backs and carried from place to place, as hunt-

ing and trapping required—the men did the hunting and trapping, and the rest of their time was divided between lolling around and eating the savory stews that the squaws provided. The squaws also tanned the skins of the animals, made the moccasins, leggings, and in fact all the clothing for their families. The squaws' work was never done, while the bucks were at leisure as soon as the game was brought home. They all, however, had their time of play and frolic. The little Indian boys with their bows and arrows, tiny girls playing in the sand, making images of dolls, the squaws gossiping and indulging themselves in the ringing laugh peculiar to the race, and the men bragging over some huge fish story or hunting expedition, just as white folks do now, and so their time went on.

Their boats were what we call dugouts or canoes. These generally were made of white wood. Logs of the desired length and thickness were shaved to a point at both ends, the body part cut or scraped out to correspond with the size of the log. With these they floated on the waters of the lakes and rivers while trapping and fishing, and used them for the transportation of their families and household goods whenever it was possible to do so. The propelling power was a paddle in the hands of a buck or squaw; either could manage it with deftness and safety.

Today gorged with plenty, tomorrow nothing in store for hungry stomachs. Such was Indian life in the early days. They were like children, and never gave a thought for future needs, and why should they? The woods abounded with game, and in their seasons, the hillsides were red with strawberries, and other berries grew in profusion along the wayside. Never was a State more favored by nature than this one—for the lakes surrounding it are filled with fish, and I doubt whether there is a locality anywhere more thickly inhabited with wild animals; even in 1840 it was in verity the Elysium for hunters. Those good old times are now with the past. The mission of the Indian is ended; his happy hunting grounds are supplanted by the white man's fields. Henceforth, the future welfare of the few remaining Indians must depend upon their assimilation of the manners and customs of the white. He, too, "by the sweat of his brow" must earn his bread.

I presume there are some, I know there are, who will cherish and hold with me sympathetic remembrances of the red men and women who trod these grounds long before the sturdy pioneers came to drive them from their homes and lands.

Where is now the noble Pee-i-ti-ae gone? Where are his faithful fol-

lowers and associates? All gone. Some of them died in the fullness of years, but the mass of them in the prime of life. They quickly faded away as they came in touch with civilized life. Their simple natures, only too rapidly, took up the vices and ignored the virtues of the white man. And the one great source of evil, the demon, Scatawaabeo—fire-water—why was it brought into contact with them to debauch and hurry them to untimely graves? Lo! the poor Indian.