

PAPER BY O. A. JENISON, LANSING.

Read February 5th, 1879.

Officers and Members of the Pioneer Society of the State of Michigan:

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—In making this, my second annual bow to your society, I congratulate you on its now permanent organization, and assure you that I take great pleasure in being able to add my mite which helps to swell the great, interesting, and valuable collection of relics and historical facts pertaining to our State; and on this occasion, present you with the following articles, viz.:

First, An ambrotype of the old Lansing House, erected by Henry Jipson. This picture was taken expressly for me in 1857, from the cupola of the old capitol, and there is not, nor ever was, its like in existence. In front of the main entrance on Washington avenue can be seen the old time honored sign-post; as we cast our eyes to the right, a small building with a wooden awning in front can be seen, which at that time was used and occupied as the great stage office between Lansing and Jackson; the next building to the right was used in part as the Lansing postoffice; and still further to the right is the Edgar House as it appeared in those days; at the left of the Lansing House, barns, sheds, etc., can be plainly seen. (The Lansing House was destroyed by fire on Sunday night, June 2, 1861.) One peculiar feature of this interesting picture is the fact that it was taken on a bright, sun-shining afternoon, and not a human being or animal of any name or nature was seen upon the streets. Such was Lansing in 1857. In making this declaration, I assure you that we old settlers who fought the mosquitoes and entertained the Indians, now rejoice in the present growth, prosperity, and beautiful appearance of our city.

Second, I have to present you with one of the first posters ever issued from the printing press in Lansing. My friend John J. Adam will undoubtedly recognize it as an official document, showing the necessity of the times. When the First Presbyterian Church was erected in this city, doors were attached to all the pews, and after serving their purpose for a few years, they were finally discarded; and from one of these doors was made the frame which now surrounds the document in question; two backs are attached to the frame, the inside one being manufactured from a clapboard taken from the first printing office erected in Lansing, and the outside one from a clapboard taken from one of the first dwelling houses erected in Lansing; the glass is one of the original full size 8x10 taken from the front window of the first dry goods store in Lansing, owned by Bush & Thomas.

Third, I present you with a piece of iron punched from one of the plates of the original Monitor, built at Freeport, opposite New York, under the supervision of and commanded by Commander Worden; this was presented to me by J. T. Whiting, Esq., of Detroit, who saw it punched and secured it at the time.

Fourth, I present you with a full set of posters put out by the Central Michigan Agricultural Society from 1866 to 1878, both inclusive; and I venture to say that another similar set cannot be produced in the country, as I am well informed that the officers of the society never have taken the trouble to save them.

Fifth, I present you with another scrap-book as a companion to the one presented to you by me one year ago. This book contains the charter of two different temperance societies that once had an existence in this city, and by the precept and example of its members restrained many a man from continuing in the downward path, and for a while fought manfully for the right; but adverse winds finally drove them to the beach and their frail bark was stranded—let their charters be preserved and their names remembered for their many good deeds. It also contains a list of all the voters of Lansing for 1875-6-7-8. The Governor's Thanksgiving Proclamation for the four last years. A stage ticket from Lansing to Jackson, by Dan Hibbard's line of stages. A bill of goods, probably the first ever brought to Lansing, the owner living in the back part of his store and selling from a small room in front. Also the original draft of the First Presbyterian Church of this city. A rough draft of this city in 1849, showing the location of all the important buildings at that time; but aside from the four corners of Michigan and Washington avenues, and thence south to the Lansing House, our draughtsman says, "woods, forests, woods." In this book are also many bills of the early wild-cat banks of Michigan, the original yeas and nays or vote of the Legislature of this State which placed Mr. Christiancy in the United States Senate. The Lansing Republican for 1875-6-7-8 containing a lengthy notice of the meetings of this society for those years, and hundreds of bills, posters, programmes, etc., put out by our business men and different city societies.

Finally, I present you with an ambrotype likeness of the old Indian Chief Okemos, in doing which, I wish to say that I know it to be genuine; it is not a copy, neither does it come to you second-handed. Okemos sat for this very picture, to my certain knowledge, in 1857, and it has never been out of my possession from that day to this.

Within the last year, since having concluded to present you with this likeness,

I have thought it not inappropriate to compile and rewrite a few incidents in his life, in the undertaking of which I was not unmindful of the fact that sketches of his life had already been written by much abler biographers than myself, and to them I am somewhat indebted for portions of the life and character of this noted Indian Chief; but the principal part of this biography I obtained from gentlemen who were personally acquainted with him, could speak the Indian tongue, and who traded and bought furs of the tribe for many years. The date of the birth of Okemos is shrouded in mystery, but our researches disclose the fact that he was born at or near Knaggs Station, on the Shiawassee river, where the Port Huron and Lansing Railroad now crosses said river.

I wish to say right here, that in writing up the biography of this man, I have carefully read his history as portrayed by Campbell in his Political History of Michigan, Tuttle's History of Michigan, F. J. Littlejohn's Legends of "Michigan and the old Northwest," together with many newspaper accounts of his heroism and bravery.

From all this information I might have lengthened this article to an almost unlimited extent, but have chosen rather to give such facts as I have been able to obtain, and although some portions of my remarks may not be new, still they throw new light on an old story. The great event in the life of Okemos was his battle at Sandusky, in regard to which I think I have secured facts that were never before committed to paper.

Okemos, at the time of his death, was said to be a centenarian, but a century contains a number of years that but few out of the many are permitted to see. In a sketch of his life given in the Lansing Republican under date of April 6, 1871, it is said he *probably* took the war path in 1791; this is the earliest account I find of him in any written history. Judge Littlejohn in his Legends of "Michigan and the old Northwest" introduces him to the reader in 1803, and expressly says, "In our data, local delineations, and topographical outlines, the reader may trust to our general accuracy."

The battle of Sandusky, in which Okemos took such an active part, was the great event of his life, and this it was that gave him his chieftainship and caused him to be revered by his tribe; for a detailed description of that memorable and bloody fight, I am indebted to B. O. Williams, Esq., of Owosso, who for many years was an Indian trader, spoke the Indian language and received the story direct from the lips of the old chief. In relating the story, Okemos says, "Myself and cousin Man-a-to-corb-way with sixteen other braves enlisted under the British flag, formed a scouting or war party, and leaving the upper Raisin made our rendezvous at Sandusky, where, one morning while lying in ambush near a road lately cut for the passage of the American army and supply wagons, we observed twenty cavalymen approaching us. Our ambush was located on a slight ridge with brush directly in our front. We immediately decided to attack the Americans although outnumbered by two, concluding that we could effectually cripple them at the first fire, which followed by a dash with the tomahawk would accomplish our design; accordingly we waited until they had approached so near that we could count the buttons on their coats, when firing commenced at close quarters." The cavalymen with drawn sabres immediately charged upon Okemos and his followers, and then commenced the bloodiest and most decisive battle in which Okemos was ever engaged. In fact, from all that I can learn, it was his last battle. Okemos says that he and his cousin fought side by side through this

conflict, and their experience was about the same throughout the engagement; each one firing from two to three times while dodging from one cover to another. But to return to the beginning of the fight. In less than ten minutes after the first fire of the Indians, the sound of a bugle was heard, and casting their eyes in the direction of the sound they saw the road and woods filled with cavalry, in describing which, Okemos says, "The plumes on their hats looked like a flock of thousands of pigeons just hovering for a flight."

The small party of Indians were immediately surrounded and cut down to a man: not one escaped the sabres of this dashing charge, and all were left for dead on the field. Okemos and his cousin each had their skulls cloven and their bodies gashed in a fearful manner; and as a finale, in order to be sure that life was extinct upon leaving the field, the cavalymen would lean forward from their horses and with their sabres pierce the chests of the Indians, even into their lungs; thus they were left prostrate upon their backs, entirely unconscious from the first heavy blows that crushed through their skulls. The last that Okemos remembered was after emptying one saddle and springing toward another with clubbed rifle raised in the act of striking, his head felt as if being pierced with a red hot iron, and he went down from a heavy sabre cut. All knowledge ceased from this time until many moons afterward, when he found himself being nursed by squaws of their friends, who with others had found them some two or three days after the battle.

The squaws thought all were dead, but upon being moved signs of life were discovered in Okemos and his cousin, who were at once taken on litters to a place of safety, and by careful and untiring nursing finally restored to partial health. The cousin always remained a cripple, his sufferings having induced chronic rheumatism which distorted the joints of his hands and feet. The iron constitution with which Okemos was endowed by nature restored him to comparative health; but he never took an active part in another battle, this last one having satisfied him that "white man was a heap powerful," and shortly afterward he solicited Colonel Godfroy to intercede with General Cass, and he, with other chiefs, executed a treaty with the Americans which was faithfully adhered to the remainder of their days.

Okemos did not obtain his chieftainship by hereditary descent, but this honor was conferred upon him after having passed through the battle just described—for his bravery and endurance his tribe considered him a favorite of the Great Spirit who had preserved his life through such a terrible and trying ordeal.

The next we hear of Okemos, he had settled with his tribe on the banks of the Shiawasse, near the place of his birth, where for many years, up to 1837-8, he was engaged in the peaceful avocation of hunting, fishing, and trading with the white men. About this time the small-pox broke out in his tribe, which, together with the influx of white settlers, destroyed their hunting grounds and scattered the bands.

The plaintive, soft notes of the wooing young hunter's flute, made of red alder wood, and the sound of the tom-tom at council fires and village feasts was heard no more along the banks of our inland streams; for years before, the tomahawk had been effectually buried, and upon the final breaking up and scattering of the bands, Okemos became a mendicant, and many a hearty meal has the old man received from the old settlers of Lansing with a grateful heart. In his palmy days, I should think his greatest height never exceeded five feet four inches; he was lithe, wiry, active, intelligent, and possessed of undoubted

bravery; he was not however, an eloquent speaker, either in council or private conversation, always mumbling his words and speaking with some hesitation. Previous to the breaking up of his band in 1837-8, his usual dress consisted of a blanket coat with belt, steel pipe hatchet or tomahawk, and heavy long English hunting or scalping knife stuck in his belt in front with large bone handle prominent outside the sheath, his face painted with vermilion, on his cheeks and forehead and over his eyes, a shawl wound around his head turban fashion, together with the leggins usually worn by Indians, completed his outfit, which during his lifetime he never discarded.

None of his biographers have ever attempted to fix the date of his birth, contenting themselves with the general conviction that he was an hundred years old. In this respect I most respectfully beg leave to differ from them, for the following reasons, viz.: Physically endowed with a strong constitution, naturally brave and impetuous, and inured to the hardships of an Indian life, we are led to believe that he took the war path early in life, and his first introduction to our notice is in 1791. I reason from this, that he was born about the year 1775, in which case, he lived about eighty-three years; again, the old settlers of Lansing well remember that up to the latest period of his having been seen on our streets, his step was short, quick, and elastic, to a degree that is seldom enjoyed by men of that age. He died at his wigwam a few miles from this city, and was buried December 5, 1858, at Shimnicon, an Indian settlement in Ionia county; his coffin was rude in the extreme, and in it were placed a pipe, tobacco, hunting knife, birds' wings, provisions, etc. He surrendered his chieftainship a few years previous to his death to his son John, but he never forgot that he was Okemos, once the chief of a powerful tribe of the Chippewas, and nephew of Pontiac.