

## JOHN S. HOOKER OF LOWELL

(From Grand Rapids paper, Nov. 10, 1906.)

John S. Hooker was born August 29, 1830. Seven years later his father, Cyporean S. Hooker with the family settled at the trading post that has since claimed the French name of Saranac. It was July 2, 1837, when the Hookers took up their abode at Saranac and there was far too much work to be done that year to permit of a Fourth of July celebration. The elder Hooker was a builder. It was Cyporean Hooker who designed and threw one of the first bridges over Grand River. This structure was put up at Portland.

At Saranac Young Hooker met Che-na-go, son of Wab-she-gun, a young Indian with a heart as white as it was brave. Friendship between the white and Indian boy ripened and Mr. Hooker still cherishes the memory of Che-na-go as one of the brightest spots in a long and not unpleasant life.

<sup>1</sup>On March 27, 1839, there was buried in Detroit, a child, aged five years, daughter of Daniel Marsac and an Indian woman.—*St. Anne's Church Records, Detroit.*

<sup>2</sup>Daniel Marsac was married to Colette Beaufait, December 28, 1835, by Bishop Resé.—*St. Anne's Church Records, Detroit.*

In 1846 the Hooker family moved to Lowell, then a mere trading post with only one other white settler. Before this, John S. Hooker, because of his sharp voice had been named Cap-squa-itt by his Indian friends and the name stuck to him wherever he went among the red men. It was because of his universal popularity among the Indians and their evident faith in his fairness that as a mere boy he was employed as an interpreter for Alfred A. Dwight who opened the first store in what is now Lowell. Young Hooker made the first sale out of a real store in the shape of a pound of raisins to John Robinson.

The boy was next employed as manager of a store owned by Daniel Marsac, who went away soon after employing the young man and left him in sole charge for more than a year. Here he traded extensively with the Indians taking furs and rawhide in change for his goods. Mr. Hooker then employed two Indian families to tan and cure the rawhide into buckskin. Among those who tanned and cured for Cap-squa-itt was Negonc (bright), granddaughter of the great Ottawa chieftain Cob-moosa. Negonc was the prettiest, brightest and most intelligent Indian girl Mr. Hooker ever knew. She was a veritable infant prodigy at needle and bead work and was born on the site now occupied by Lowell's latest and finest business block, "The Negonce," which was christened by Mr. Hooker at the suggestion of its owners, on the occasion of the laying of the cornerstone something more than a year ago.

After his early experience in the Indian trading stores, Mr. Hooker became an itinerant trader, during the bitter cold winters. During the winter months the tribes separated, two or three, or possibly half a dozen families, camping together in some sugar bush on the bank of a small creek for the winter. Here they trapped and hunted, collecting furs until the sap began to run, when they devoted themselves to the making of maple sugar. Hooker with his pack horses rode throughout the watershed of the Flat and Grand rivers trading with the Indians. He went alone. He stopped at any wigwam, a welcome guest wherever night found him.

In all his years of lonely packing in the country of the red man he never had a moment's difficulty or angry word with an Indian. He came to know every brave and squaw and papoose in the land of the Ottawas. In time he came to keep a record of them, the first and probably the only directory of those days.

The government came to rely upon Cap-squa-itt's directory. It called upon him for a census of the Ottawas when "payment" time came round each year. Mr. Hooker then consulted his directory. Made a hurried trip through the land of the Ottawas, checking up the number of papooses that had arrived since the interval of his last trading trip and sent his lists to Washington. The allotment of treaty money for lands north

of Grand River ceded to the government by the Ottawa Nation, was based on his report. The Indians drew eight dollars per head for young or old, and "payment" was a season of rejoicing and recourse to the "fire water" and other evils introduced among the tribes by the white brother. It is a strange thing that the Indian language does not include an oath. Swear words like fire water were importations of the white man's.

John S. Hooker has only pleasant memories of the Indians. His only trouble was with a drunken, crippled brave who insisted on interfering with a Fourth of July celebration years ago when Mr. Hooker was village marshal at Lowell. The brave attempted to stab Mr. Hooker in the back but a friend gave a warning cry and the marshal wheeled in time to disarm his would-be assailant.

On the other hand his life with the Indians was full of incidents of kindness. The Indian was imbued with the spirit of nature. Whatever he did was done on a broad, free scale. He hated mightily and never forgot a friendship.

Mr. Hooker tells of the murder of a white woman and child while he was still at Saranac. It was said the murder was committed by the Indians. The whole country was up in arms, Indian and white man joining in the search for the murderer. Mr. Hooker's father and hired man joined the search. The mother, fearful now of every Indian, and the small boy who could see nothing in an Indian to promote other than friendship, were left alone in the little home in the wilderness. After a day Wab-sha-gun and his son Che-na-go suddenly appeared. The Indian and his son beached their canoe and approached the house. Mrs. Hooker was terribly afraid. Her son, wondering at his mother's fear, greeted the Indians. The mother had counseled the boy not to tell of the absence of father and hired man, but Wab-sha-gun divined it. He questioned the boy who told the truth. Wab-sha-gun turned to his son. He directed him to go to the canoe and get his blanket. Che-na-go returned. The stalwart Indian pointed to the floor before the door of the homestead. "Che-na-go stay there," he said. "At night he sleep at door. If come, Che-na-go say, 'I am here, Che-na-go, son of Wab-sha-gun.'"

The young Indian never left the door at night. Before the portal stretched his protecting body. Not even when the men returned did he forsake the post. There he slept, refusing a trundle-bed, and there he lay rolled up in his blanket when his father came at night to the door of the Hooker home.

The murder was not the work of Indians. Wab-sha-gun, most skilled of all Indian trappers, in ten minutes showed his white brothers where the murderer had stepped, where the twigs were broken short by the sole of a heavy boot. "Not moccasin," said the Indian. "Moccasin break this way," and with his own foot he broke twigs and held up the curved, multi-broken twigs. The murder was doubtless the work of the father

and husband, who was years after said to be in hiding in California.

Mr. Hooker wonders, and not unnaturally, that no one in Grand Rapids has ever used the Indian name by which the town was known. When there have been contests for names he has been tempted to send the word Bock-we-ting, meaning rapids, for this is the Indian name of Grand Rapids. Years after the Indians had gone the old settlers in and about Lowell when starting upon a trip to Grand Rapids spoke of "going to Bock-ting." The word was shortened by the settlers. And it was to Bock-ting Hooker and the other young men came at payment time to be employed as interpreters in the Grand Rapids stores.

Wash-te-nong was Grand river, meaning longest river. Shaoshkometick was pine woods; Sogetah (mouth) was Grand Haven's Indian name; wawa was goose; wawashcash, a deer; mingun, wolf; omeme, pigeon; pena, partridge; washtena, pretty; nemoose, puppy; namocoche, dog; kewon, your wife; wewon, my wife; mozhick, much; chicke-Rimewun, rain. • These were some of the common Indian names. Mr. Hooker knew and still knows the language of the Ojibwas as he knows the English. He was in later years Indian court interpreter, acting in many important cases. He points to one peculiarity of the Indian tongue. In it nowhere is there is a sound calling for the use of an "r."