

INDIANS IN KALAMAZOO COUNTY.

The following letter from A. H. Scott, dated St. Joseph, Mich., Jan. 9, is to Mr. Henry Bishop, and is in answer to questions touching the Indians in this county at an early day. It will be found of great interest to many of our readers to whom the aborigines of this section were unknown:

"Your letter, dated Dec. 25, came to hand and I have felt it a duty to give the information desired in regard to the Indians of Kalamazoo county during the years of its first settlement by the whites as far as my memory will serve me. I came to Kalamazoo county early in June, 1833, as a member of the family of James Smith, in company with his brother Addison; Hosea B. Huston and E. Laken Brown, carried on the merchandising business under the name of Smith, Huston & Co., and had two stores, one at Schoolcraft, and the other at Kalamazoo (or rather at Bronson, as it was then called). I soon picked up enough of the Indian language to enable me to trade with them. They then owned a reservation of land ten miles square, which took

in the eastern part of Gourdneck prairie, and had a small village or collection of wigwams in the grove just east of the prairie on the farm now owned by James N. Neasmith, Esq. The wigwams were all built with a frame of poles, covered with elm bark, with the exception of the wigwam of the chief (Sag-a-maw), which was built for him by his friends, the early white settlers, of logs and covered with oak shakes. You wish me to inform you how they received the first settlers, how they lived and how they mingled with and how they traded with the white man.

1st. I think as a class they received the early settlers very kindly and were inclined to live peaceably with them.

2d. How they lived? Deer were plenty in those early days, and as they were good hunters they had no difficulty the greater part of the year in supplying themselves with meat. They also used the flesh of raccoons, muskrats, etc., for food. Fish were plenty in the rivers and lakes. They understood how to catch them both with spear and hook. They raised some corn on land that some of the early settlers plowed and fenced for them. In their season wild fruits, such as blueberries, blackberries, etc., were obtained by them for food, and also to "swap" with the white man for flour, salt, sugar, etc.

3d. How much they mingled with the white man? In our stores and in the dwellings and cabins of their acquaintances they made themselves very much at home. The squaws and papposes would come in in crowds and sit down on the floor (never taking a chair) till they were so thick that you could hardly find a place to put your foot. They turned out *en masse* on all public days and at horse races and shows. They were greatly delighted with circuses. Shooting matches and foot races they took a great interest in.

4th. How they traded with the white man? The trade with the Indian at that early day was mainly an exchange (or, as they called it, "swap") of their furs, venison, dressed deer skins, moccasins, blueberries, blackberries, cranberries, etc., for flour, salt, tobacco, powder, lead, sugar and all the articles that the Indians use to clothe themselves. I never knew an Indian to offer to sell to white people any part of the carcass of a deer except the ham. The price for a ham of venison was always two shillings; no more, no less, no matter how small or large it was. Whenever we sold a squaw any goods that had to be made up into any of their garments a needle and thread for each garment must be given; only the goods for one garment would be bought or swapped for at a time. It required a good knowledge of their ways and much patience to be a successful dealer with the Indians. We frequently sold them goods on credit and found them about the same kind of paymasters as the ordinary white man; some paid promptly, some after a

long time, and some never paid. They would have been splendid customers if they had been blessed with plenty of money; but they were poor and thriftless, and I may with truth say a "vagabond race" and consequently their trade was of no great value. They received an annual payment from government, which was mainly in necessary goods for their use and comfort, and a small amount of silver money. The money was very soon gone and in most cases did them no good, but the goods furnished them by government were just what they needed, and added greatly to their comfort.

In regard to personal characteristics of any noted Indian, etc., I would say that the best specimen of an Indian that I ever saw in those early days was Sag-a-maw, the chief of all the Pottawattomies in and about Kalamazoo county. He was a man of great good sense, of noble bearing, of great integrity, and in every way a dignified gentleman. He was called a great orator among his people. He was a true friend to the whites. I have heard him make speeches to his people, and although I could not understand him, his manner and voice were very interesting, and the effect of his speech on his people was very great. He was the only Indian I ever saw who was polite and attentive to his squaw. When they came to the store at Schoolcraft to do their trading he would help her off her pony, and when they were ready to return he would place his hand on the ground by the side of her pony and she would place one foot in it and he would lift her with apparently great ease into her saddle, and no white man could have shown more respect and politeness. If he wished for any credit at the store he had it and paid promptly. Any Indian that he told us it was safe to trust was sure to pay us. He always told us never to trust his son Cha-na-ba, who was a very worthless fellow. * * *

In regard to the number of the Indians that lived in Kalamazoo county and vicinity in that early day, I can make no estimate that would be of any value. They were continually coming and going and scattered about in little squads. In regard to the effect it had on the character of the Indian in his contact with the white race I have no doubt but it was bad.

He seems (as many writers have said) to take in all the vices of the white man and reject all his virtues. Whisky (the great demoralizer of the white man) was and is the principal factor in the destruction of all that is good in the Indian character when he comes in contact with the white race. The longer the Indians remained here among the whites the more worthless they became. Game became scarce, they were too indolent to work, and they became drunkards and beggars. The great end and aim of the most of them was to get whisky to get drunk with, and as its cost was only about twenty five cents per gallon they generally got all that they wanted. When they purchased

whisky they usually announced that they were going to get "squibby" (drunk). The quality of the whisky sold to the Indians was very bad, having been first watered and drugged for their especial use. I recollect in 1833 that some Indians came to Schoolcraft from Kalamazoo and made bitter complaint to Addison Smith about H. B. Huston. They said that he put so much "bish" (water) in his whisky that it made them sick before they could get "squibby" (drunk). As to myself I sold no whisky to Indians except during the first two or three years after my arrival in Schoolcraft. What I have said about the Indians has been mainly about those whose headquarters were near Schoolcraft. If you can glean any item out of this disjointed and lengthy letter that will aid in making up a true history of the early settlement of Kalamazoo county I shall feel well paid for what little trouble I have had in writing it. But I very much doubt if you can, as there are other persons still living in Kalamazoo county who were familiar with all the facts that I have attempted to set forth.

E. Lakin Brown came to Schoolcraft two years before I came, and is very well posted in all the ways of the Indians of those early days, Mrs. Thaddeus Smith came to Schoolcraft in 1830 I believe, and could speak the Indian language better than any white person that I knew when I came there. She was a great favorite with the Indians, and any day that they were in town you would usually find her sitting room filled with squaws and pap-poeses. Thanking you for your kind Christmas greeting, I must close by subscribing myself your old friend."—*A. H. Scott, in Kalamazoo Telegraph.*