

THE INDIANS AND THE TRADING POSTS IN THE NORTHWEST
OF BARRY COUNTY, MICHIGAN¹BY CHARLES A. WEISSERT²

For many years it has been believed that Middleville³ stands upon the site of an Indian village. Research among the few sources of history of the aborigines who inhabited the land now included in the northwestern portion of Barry county, adds nothing to support this theory; on the contrary, it proves that the modern village was built not upon the site of an Indian settlement, but upon a spot on the banks of the Thornapple where the red men held councils and powwows. Under the great trees they gathered to deliberate, to perform mystic religious rites, to hold festivities, to try offenders against tribal laws and to consider peace or war, after which they went their various ways by trail or by canoe to meet again at the next call. To this spot, abloom in spring with the thornapple, the red-bud, the wild plum, the wild crab and scores of varieties of flowers; in summer made beautiful by the rich, heavy foliage of gigantic oaks, maples and beeches; and in autumn gorgeous with multitudinous colors, they must have come from times immemorial.

It is not difficult, however, to account for the source of this popular error. West of Middleville lay an extensive oak-opening, which was called a prairie and afterwards named Scales' Prairie.⁴ Over this stretch of land on which burr-oaks occasionally grew not unlike trees in an orchard, passed the deep-worn trail connecting Pockatink,⁵ the Indian village on the site of Grand Rapids and Match-eben-ashe-wish

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²For original information I am indebted to the following pioneers: Joseph Cisler, of Yankee Springs; Charles Williams, John Wickham, William Bennett, John Williams, the late John Fuller, the late Waitstill Hastings Cressey, all of Hastings; the late William Brown, of Prairieville; Cornelius Mason, of Richland; William Burroughs, of Banfield. Historical aids—*Michigan Historical Collections*; D. B. Cook's *Hunting and Fishing in the Wilderness West of Gun Lake in 1839*; *History of Barry and Allegan Counties*; Bartlett's *Tales of Kankakee Land*; *Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties*, Vol. II; Lossing's *Pictorial Field Book of the War of 1812*; Parton's *Life of Andrew Jackson*; Washington Irving's *Life of Washington*; Kelton's *Annals of Fort Mackinac*; J. Fenimore Cooper's *Oak Openings*; Parkman's *Montcalm and Wolf*.

³An incorporated village in the northwest township of Thornapple with a population of 831 in 1904. Its first name was Thornapple. When the postoffice was established with Mr. Dibble as postmaster it was proposed to call it Dibbleville. From its distance to Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids it attained its present name of Middleville.

⁴Named from Robert Scales a pioneer settler. See *supra*.

⁵For illustration see Vol. XXXV, p. 145, this series.

on the site of Kalamazoo. Here, grouped in the vicinity of a block-house erected by French traders, were a few wigwams, which might have been known as the "Middle Village," for this settlement was located about midway between Pockatink and the town with the ponderous name on the Kalamazoo. When eastern speculators platted a forty-acre townsite on Scales' Prairie, they appropriated the white settlers' cognomen of the little group of wigwams huddled about the trading post, and called it "Middleville." These lots were sold in the east. No attempt was ever made to build upon them, and years afterward those who had invested in them, came west to view their property only to find that they had been victimized, like many today who buy in the west land which they have never seen. The investors neglected to pay taxes on these lots, and therefore lost them. Like the townsite of "Trenton," platted three miles south, "Middleville" was forgotten by all except the speculators' victims. When Calvin Hill⁶ and others cleared away the council grove two miles west of the trading-post, the name was revived and given to their settlement, which has developed into one of the principal towns in Barry county.

Of the lives and habits of the Indians who resided in Barry county we know little. The hardy men who first came among them were too busy hewing down the mighty forest to give much attention to the red men, but seldom did they associate with them sufficiently to learn their true values as men and women. Indians were "Injuns." That they hunted, fished, trapped, wandered, were unwholesome in their habits, and stubbornly refused to adopt the white man's manner of living, is common knowledge. Few were deeply interested in their lives, and with several exceptions, of course, there was no attempt to understand them, or to judge them by any standard except the white man's. And because they were not like white men and refused to live like them, in other words, to change their habits at once—something psychologically impossible—they were considered an inferior race, regardless of any virtues they might possess.

Thus has been lost to us material for comprehensive studies of their family and tribal lives, and too little is known of their human attributes to assign them to any absolutely definite position among men. Acquaintance with them was not easy, and their intimate lives were known only to those white men who associated with them. Those who came to know

⁶Calvin G. Hill, familiarly known as Squire Hill was a native of New York state, who came to Michigan in 1834 and purchased 400 acres of land which included the present village of Middleville. He filed at some time nearly all the township offices. His descriptions of surveys are very primitive, like "line running N. to certain plowage and E. to woodpile." His son, Alpheus M., made a plow drawn by six or more yoke of oxen which he used to break up land for the settlers. His son, Albert C., died in the Civil War. Mr. Hill died in 1867. *Hist. Barry Co.*, p. 487.

them best were undoubtedly the sons of pioneers who chose Indian children for their playmates and grew up with them, learning their methods of hunting, fishing, trapping and their home life. These friendships lasted until the red men were moved by the government. With remarkably preserved memories two men, Joseph Cisler,⁷ of Yankee Springs, and Charles Williams,⁸ of Hastings, still give interesting accounts of the Indians of the northwestern part of Barry county. Mr. Cisler, who is in his eighty-seventh year, is the last connecting link of the early days in this county with the present. At the age of ten years he came to Bull's Prairie, in Irving, with his parents, and has ever since resided in Barry county. Mr. Williams, a younger man than Mr. Cisler, was born in this county. He played with the Indians and became as expert as they were in hunting and fishing.

Tribes of Chippewas, Potawatomes and Ottawas of the Algonquin branch of the Indian race occupied this part of the state. The Ottawas were refugees from Canada. The Potawatomes occupied the St. Joseph valley, the Ottawas and Chippewas the northern and eastern portions of the state. In 1707 LaMotte Cadillac, the French governor, urged the concentration of the tribes. For a century and a half afterward the Ottawas and Potawatomes occupied Barry county. During the summer the Ottawas went north, the Potawatomes back to the St. Joseph valley. Occasionally some of them went to Detroit to spend the warm months near the French settlement. These tribes were at war with the eastern tribe of Iroquois, who were under the influence of the English, the rivals of the French for the supremacy of North America. The Indians of Western Michigan assisted the French in defeating General Braddock at Fort Duquesne in Pennsylvania, and in raiding the English settlements as far as the Appalachians. Some of them fought under Montcalm, and later they swarmed to aid Pontiac in his conspiracy. So soon as the French sustained several defeats, they lost the confidence of the red men, who afterward passed under the dominion of the British. Several hundred Michigan Indians fought in Burgoyne's army, and also participated in raids upon the settlements in Kentucky and in Virginia. Many of them were slain in the battle of Fallen Timbers, and the survivors fled before the victorious Americans under "Mad Anthony" Wayne. In 1780, Indians and traders, commanded by British officers, marched to the Mississippi, and captured from the Spanish the important city of St. Louis. A year later these same raiders were astonished when the Spanish, led by Don Francesco Crusat, suddenly appeared in Michigan and destroyed in the heart of the Potawatomie country Fort St. Joseph, which had been in existence since the

⁷Joseph, son of Huston Cisler and Rachel Scott. See *Hist. Barry Co.*, p. 488.

⁸Charles Williams, a pioneer of Hastings.

advent of the first Frenchmen. Leaving their colors flying the Spaniards, satisfied with their retaliation, went southward. In 1789 all of the tribes of Indians met General St. Clair, governor of the Northwest territory, and signed a treaty of peace, but they hated the Americans with a feeling which never abated.

Into the wigwams in the solitudes of Michigan penetrated news of the westward spread of the English colonial settlements. Gradually the country of the red nations was being submerged by the advancing tide of Anglo-Saxons. Afar, and still secure in their ancient haunts, the Michigan Indians had for several generations watched the subjection of their race. The defeat and fate of King Philip, the shattering of the Iroquois confederation, the humiliation of the strong tribes of the south with all of whom they had been at war for centuries, bred among the savages still in possession of their lands, a spirit of impending doom that broke out in fervent oratory at their councils. The French had come among them as missionaries and fur traders. Between the Gallic and Indian temperaments there was a peculiar bond of sympathy which was strengthened when French adventurers married squaws and were frequently adopted into tribes. They acted as mediums of commercial intercourse between the great mercantile establishments of Paris and the suppliers of furs, which were everywhere in demand in the courts of Europe. Half-breed children were reared in customs and traditions of the wigwams. Through the infusion of their blood whatever antipathy the savages felt for the English was strengthened by the enmity which centuries of misunderstanding and strife had bred between the two greatest Latin and Anglo-Saxon nations.

It was not from the Canadian provinces that the red men feared the source of future extermination. On the Plains of Abraham, at Quebec, the Indians had fled with the French when the British and Colonial forces from the Atlantic coast forever ended French dominion in America. Here and in other conflicts they felt the force of a new native power, which was later expressed in the independence of the colonies.

New countries are first inhabited successively by traders, missionaries and soldiers, and often they are havens of refuge for groups of people advocating freak social or religious beliefs which are ridiculed and not tolerated in their native countries. Rather than give up their ideals they go abroad where they may live or worship as they please. The French colonists were traders enslaved in the traditions and religion of their mother country. Broadly viewed, the English who settled on the Atlantic seaboard, came in order to secure independence of thought. With an impetus which gained strength as the settlements grew, this new dynamic social force developed unity of interests and ideals and a spirit of self-reliance, which combined with aggressive unrest of the

Teutonic race, led to alienation and final freedom from the mother country.

The reviving effect upon the savages when several important British posts were destroyed as a result of Pontiac's conspiracy, was merely transitory. The supremacy of Great Britain soon became permanently established. The savages watched the ominous westward advance from the seacoast settlements. They had witnessed the conquest of the French by the English, but now they saw with consternation the forces of the most powerful monarchy on earth overcome by those sturdy men from the settlements which had been pushing them steadily westward. They hated the new government, not because it was American, but because it represented an increasingly centralized system of government that was ultimately to rob them of their subsistence and the lands which the Great Spirit, the Master of Life, had given them so long as the grass grew and the sun shone.

Throughout the new republic, as far west as the Mississippi, the tribes were ready for hostile protest. Alone they could not successfully cope with the strong arm of the young nation. They needed an organizer like Pontiac.

In 1810 and 1811, the Shawnee chief, Tecumseh, began a movement to unite all of the tribes in a confederation with the object of stopping the American advance. When the celebrated chief heard that the United States and Great Britain were likely to engage in war he hastened to offer his services to the Great Father in London. This was accepted, and with arms and supplies furnished by the British, who also offered liberal bounties for American scalps, they took part in the battles of Brownstown, Fort Dearborn, the River Raisin and on the Maumee. At Tippecanoe General Harrison so severely chastized the Indians that they fled back into the Michigan fastnesses. At the Battle of the Thames, in which many of the Barry county Indians participated, Tecumseh was slain, and the power of the savages was forever broken. They signed a treaty with General Harrison a year before the war with England was ended, and the dispersed, dispirited remnants returned to renew their life in this part of the state. They remained sullen, but peaceful, supplying the French and English fur traders until Black Hawk, in 1832, sent runners inviting them to join in his rebellion against the Americans. They painted themselves, held several pow wows and dances, but finally decided that the Wisconsin chieftain must fight his battles without them.

Between the close of the war with Great Britain in 1815 and the beginning of settlement of Barry county in 1830, numerous fur trading posts were established in this part of the state. Some were built and conducted by individual traders and others by the agents of the Ameri-

can Fur Co., of which John Jacob Astor was the head. Louis Campau,⁹ a noted French trader of Detroit, established a post at Green Lake a few miles west of Scales' Prairie in Barry county. Rix Robinson,¹⁰ an employe of the American Fur Company, took charge in 1821, of a post at Ada at the confluence of the Grand and Thornapple Rivers. These streams were then known by their musical Indian names. The Grand was the Owashtenong, or "far distant river." The Thornapple was the Sowanquesake, or "forked river." This post had for a number of years been conducted by Monsieur LaFramboise,¹¹ and after his death by Madame LaFramboise, who was succeeded by Rix Robinson. In 1828, a French trader named Moreau,¹² an employe of Robinson, moved up the Thornapple and erected a trading post in Barry county, a mile east of Irving station.

Though the Indians of this state were no longer under their dominion, the British continued to send them annual gifts for services rendered in the War of 1812. Every June until 1834 the Indians received these annuities at Malden. The Indians were a great source of revenue for fur buyers, who disposed of cheap goods at extravagantly high prices. Mackinaw was the principal point of distribution. Merchandise was conveyed there in sailing vessels, and distributed to traders who carried them in large Mackinaw boats, bark canoes and French bateaux down the coasts of the lakes and thence up the rivers where the Indians were encamped with furs packed ready for barter. Some merchants sent their goods into the interior packed on horses. Marten, beaver, mink, muskrat, otter, racoon and fisher skins were bought in this locality. It is generally conceded that beaver disappeared from this vicinity at about 1830,¹³ but they were not exterminated until later.

After the War of 1812, the Indians lived here in small bands. Their power was thoroughly broken. A number of the old chiefs still held a nominal sway over bands often composed of members of the Ottawas, Potawatomie and Chippewa tribes. In several instances petty chiefs of other tribes commanded them. There was no talk of war because the red man had a difficult enough time to make his living without engaging in hopeless enterprises. He was a catcher of fur and he had to labor harder in later years because he needed funds with which to purchase

⁹Louis Campau, see *ante* p. 65. It is said he papered the cupola with wild cat money returned to him as worthless. See XXX, p. 294, this series.

¹⁰See Vol. IX, pp. 241-3; sketch, XI, pp. 186-200, this series.

¹¹This name is spelled La Flamboise in a sketch given in Vol. XXXII, pp. 176, 177, this series. Mrs. LaFromboise was the first white woman settler on Grand River.

¹²James Moreau established a trading post on Scales Prairie in 1825. His house was often used as a hotel by travelers. In 1837 he sold his place to Robert Scales and moved to Kalamazoo where he died.

¹³In 1780 reports gave the value to Great Britain annually of the fur trade in the Upper Country alone as £200,000 or about \$1,000,000.

from white men commodities which he had learned to find indispensable. Thus contact with the white men increased the Indians' wants and consequently his cost of living.

The names of the first men who penetrated the wilderness of this part of the state are forever lost. French traders and adventurers undoubtedly frequented the streams and penetrated the heavily timbered lands long before the first settlers arrived in the early thirties. At that time there were several settlements of Indians in the northwestern part of Barry county. There was a settlement grouped about Moreau's trading post at Bull's Prairie, a band at Gun lake, and a larger community in a stretch of oak openings south of the Little Thornapple, or about four miles north and one mile east of the village of Middleville. There was also a collection of wigwams on Scales' Prairie. Moreau abandoned his post at Bull's Prairie and removed to Scales' Prairie, where a Frenchman named Charboneau owned a blockhouse in structure similar to those in existence to-day in the isolated parts of Quebec province. When Mr. Cisler arrived at Bull's Prairie in October, 1836, Moreau's post there was still standing. It was a small log building located near the spot where the railroad today crosses the river. In dimensions the building was about sixteen feet long and twelve feet wide. Mr. Cisler is the only man alive who knows where it stood. The building was in ruins when he first saw it. He found buried casks which had contained whiskey. Moreau traded "skit-awa-boo," or fire-water, to the Indians who were always ready to exchange for it furs at very low prices. When Moreau thought his customers had enough whiskey he buried his casks so that he might verify his assertions that he had no more.

When the land upon which Moreau's post stood passed into the possession of A. E. Bull,¹⁴ the trader removed to Charboneau's blockhouse on Scales' Prairie. Who the Frenchmen were that built this house no one knows, for it stood there long before Moreau occupied it. It was one of the most pretentious structures of its kind in western Michigan, and for years it was a great social center. It was built of logs, hewed square, and dovetailed. The lumber was sawed by hand at the Green lake post. This house was designed to resist any attack that might be made upon it. But Mr. Cisler says that never during his long life did he ever hear of a hostile shot being exchanged between the white

¹⁴Albert E. Bull, born in Sheffield, Berkshire Co., Mass., March 4, 1808. His father, William, was an English Quaker. Albert graduated at college, studied law, became a civil engineer, coming to Michigan in 1832, and became a prominent pioneer of Schoolcraft. He came to Barry County early and was an extensive farmer till his death, March, 1865, at Great Barrington, Mass. He married Lydia A. Shaw of Volinia, Cass County, in 1846. In 1866 she married Albert E. Bull, nephew of her first husband. Her last husband died October, 1878. *Hist. Barry Co.*, p. 480.

and red men of Barry county. He accounts for this, by the fact that all of the land was purchased by treaty and paid for by the federal government. The interior was roomy. The lower story was divided into two rooms used as a dining room and a bar room. There was a brick chimney in the center, with fireplaces opening into each room. The guest chambers were upstairs. Bricks for the chimney and fireplaces were conveyed a great distance. Here Moreau traded "notions" for furs which the Indians brought. Moreau was a thick-set, dark-complexioned Frenchman, who originally came from Detroit. With him was Robert Scales, of Kentucky, after whom the prairie was named. These trading posts were the mediums of intercourse between the white men and the Indians.

Occasionally a traveler found his way into the new country; and Moreau, like many modern hotel men who have no competitors, made the most of his monopoly whenever he extended the hospitality of his establishment to anyone desiring shelter and food. The patrons found the accommodations poor and the rates exorbitant. When a traveler objected to paying five dollars for supper the privilege of sleeping on the floor, and breakfast, Moreau politely informed him in broken English that "It ees no sign of a zhentleman to dispute a bill."

The solid old block-house occupied by Moreau and his unknown predecessors, stood until recent years. In it sixteen men cast votes at the first town-meeting held in Thornapple township. After Moreau abandoned it, the venerable structure many times changed ownership; and it is estimated that one hundred families had been domiciled under its roof. The heavy timbers began to decay, the ridge sagged, the expense of more repairing was too great, and a number of thoughtless persons ruthlessly burned this historic building as the easiest way to obtain possession of the few square yards of land it occupied.

The rivers were the great highways of the red men. They migrated where food was the most plentiful. They occupied wigwams made of poles covered with bark, cloth or skins. With the exception of a few who remained in one place longer than others, they were always moving. During the season of huckleberries and cranberries they changed residence to gather crops. They always had plenty of ponies, dogs and canoes. The first thaws of spring found them in the forests making maple sugar. Loading their families into canoes, they passed up the river to Muski-so-wan-que-sake or Thornapple lake, where they fished. During the summer they raised corn on the prairies, and traces of their garden beds were visible until recent years. The autumn found them in localities where game was plentiful, and when weather became colder they trapped with dead falls. It was a precarious life, of course, but the red men were happy and lived comfortably until the white men brought whiskey among them.

Into this part of the State Black Hawk sent runners to invite the Indians to rise against the settlers. When Mr. Cisler arrived at Bull's Prairie the few settlers were just recovering from the fright the Indians had given them during the Black Hawk war. Some of them had become so scared that they returned to "York" state, while others, too poor to get out of the country, were compelled to remain here in terror. This feeling was intensified when Robert Scales and several others, while returning from Chicago with a drove of cattle, met a party of Indians covered with war paint and making hostile demonstrations. They did not declare war, however. Among the well-known Indians was Adoniram Judson,¹⁵ whom General Lewis Cass had educated in an eastern university. After completing his studies he returned to the Thornapple Indians, resumed his blauket and moccasins and resided with his compatriots until he finally froze to death in Wayland township, Allegan County. Mr. Cisler knew him well. One day Mr. Cisler was astonished to see pass a young Indian decorated with red and black paint. Judson laughed and said "He is for war." War never broke out in this vicinity because the older Indians with wisdom bought by dear experience counceiled the hot-headed youths, and reminded them of the terrible rout they had received when Tecumseh was killed. At Monroe, where Mr. Cisler had resided before he came to Barry County, he was acquainted with settlers and others who had participated in the War of 1812. He often mentioned Tecumseh's name to the Indians and they always heard it with great respect.

The Indians, or rather the squaws, engaged crudely in gardening. They were excellent judges of land, and cultivated the prairies or the black soil of the river flats. Bull's Prairie comprised about thirty acres of clear rolling land studded here and there with burr-oak and wild plum trees. Here the Indians cultivated about seven acres, planting their corn not in rows, but hap-hazardly. When Mr. Cisler arrived the stalks were still in the fields. This corn was softer and whiter than that brought by the white men; and in order to preserve it, the Indians smoked it and then buried it in the earth. This was probably the original maize commonly raised by the Indians in this country. To prepare it for food, the squaws pounded the kernels in a mortar made by burning a bowl in the end of a log. They often made soup of it, or cooked it in sheet iron kettles with venison or other meat. They preserved meat by smoking it. Often when not properly cured, it became decomposed, but this made no difference to the red men, who ate Mr. Cisler says, whatever a dog or wolf would devour. They liked to vary their bill of fare whenever they had an opportunity, and almost

¹⁵Named from a missionary of that name whose descendants lived in Allegan County.

anything seemed to appeal to their palates. When a horse belonging to a settler who crossed Bull's Prairie died the Indians immediately took possession of it, cut it up and distributed the meat, and a great feast followed. This they ate when they might easily have killed a deer, or other game.

That white men had been in this vicinity many years previous to the arrival of the first settlers is proved by the fact that apple trees¹⁶ had been set out on Seales' Prairie. When the Frenchman Charbonneau, who owned the blockhouse found these few apple trees, he took them up and carried them all the way to Grand Rapids where he planted them.

Into the wilderness had penetrated the Canadian voyageurs and coureurs du bois, who brought from the station at Mackinac goods which they bartered for furs. Prepared with an outfit and provisions to last them many months, they coasted down Lake Michigan until they sighted among the sand dunes of the desolate shore clefts which marked the debouchure of the river up which they were to work their ways to Indian encampments. There was something in the buoyant spirits of these Frenchmen, which enabled them to fraternize readily with the Indians. They found life in the wigwams congenial, and the wilderness harbored no perils which daunted them. The strongest always go to prepare the way for the weak; they are the first to blaze the trails and to conquer resistance for those conservative ones who await safety for themselves and their property before leaving the security of the old settlements.

Who were these Frenchmen? Why had they penetrated hundreds of miles west of the lonely St. Lawrence settlements to bury themselves in a forbidding wilderness that they might engage in a traffic in which profit was small compared with the risks involved? What amazing affinity was there between these Gallic men, many of them trained in the courts of Europe, and the red savages who needed only slight provocation to slay them? Why had they left the sunny plains of Languedoc to wander in an unknown land, braving the additional hardships of the severest winters? Unlike the Spaniards they were not seeking for gold; unlike the solemn-faced Puritans, who "fell upon their knees and then upon the aborigines," they had not come to exploit a religious propaganda. They were loyal to the faith of Rome, but the social conditions of France were such that strong men of independent minds preferred the freedom of the wilderness to submission to the tyranny of a monarch who was adding poison to the national decadence that ultimately found eruption in the Revolution. Among them, of course, were criminals and scoundrels of various kinds—fugitives from justice like those who used

¹⁶Near Saugatuck the American Fur Co. had a post called Peach Orchard, from trees of that name planted by the Indians. *Hist. of Barry County*, p. 29.

to find refuge in our own wild west. Some returned across the Atlantic, but most of them, like the "Lotus Eaters," were ensnared by the lure of a happy-go-lucky life; they remained with the Indians, married their women, raised families of dusky children, and passed with them into oblivion. If we knew the facts about the planting of those apple trees on Scales' Prairie, the remotest history of white men in Barry county would be bared.

From its confluence with the Grand to its headwaters in what is now Eaton county, the Thornapple flowed through the vast silent wilderness, breaking into silvery rapids at shallow places, or stopping in deep pools in which the tired waters seemed to collect for meditation. With banks hidden by dense overhanging branches, the island sat upon the water like great masses of foliage ready to detach themselves and float away. The banks, high on one side and low on the other, were lined with immense trees that darkened the waters with their shade. Far over the current leaned the silvery trunks of sycamores, equalled in height only by elms that overtopped the surrounding forest. Beneath the taller trees, cedars darkened the gloom of the woods. Scattered along the banks were pines, which seemed to realize that they were not natives and were in strange company, for they grew in groups with branches fraternally interlaced. Deer wandered into the water in droves to drink, the stags being ready to "whistle" an alarm at the first scent of danger. Springs poured their pure waters in babbling runs into the river. Here and there the sound of falling waters betrayed the presence of beaver dams across tributary streams. On the steep banks were "slides" worn smooth by the otter.

The sounds of Nature's children alone awakened echoes in the eternal silence of these fastnesses. With a roar like thunder, vast flights of pigeons shut out the sun as they passed over in their migrations. With almost human cries, bears called to each other; wild turkeys gobbled on the oak ridges, while occasional swarms of wild bees went buzzing in black clouds through the tree tops. In those days the robin and quail—birds which followed in the wake of the settler—had not yet arrived. The pigeons and turkeys have passed away, and the cock-of-the-woods, a gigantic woodpecker once very plentiful here, now makes his home in the north woods. Sturgeon, often weighing seventy pounds, and muscalonge and bass so large as those dreamed of by the most imaginative piscatorial fakirs of today, were captured with astonishing ease.

The forests were like great parks, for the Indians each year burned away the underbrush so that game might be discerned at considerable distance. Up this stream the Indians pushed, making portages whenever they encountered shallow rapids, until they reached Muski-sowan-que-sake, or Thornapple lake. The red men had no means of communication

except by signal fires, and thin columns of blue smoke threading upward were often seen on the shores of this lake, which was a favorite haunt of the Ottawas, Chippewas and Potawatomies.

Into the east end of this lovely sheet of water flows the Thornapple and the Nagwahtick, or Mud creek, as it is now called. These streams gave easy access to great hunting grounds east and northeast of the lake. In addition, the Thornapple was part of the water route across the peninsula. The Nagwahtick has its headwaters in a chain of lakes that lie along the boundary of Barry and Eaton counties. It is a slow, sluggish stream, still overarched in many places with ash, elm, sycamore, walnut and butternut trees which were part of the primitive forest. At its mouth squaws gathered rushes from which they made matting. Up and down its dead waters glided the canoes of Chief Sobby¹⁷ and his band, who frequented the lake district; and years afterwards the light craft of Sundago and Askasaw and other red men who were the last to leave the ancient hunting grounds.

Scales' Prairie was a beautiful stretch of country about sixty acres in extent, surrounded like the banks of a lake with a high forest and dotted with occasional islands of burr oak trees which rose above grass six feet tall that undulated in long billows before the breeze. Into this stretch of open land deer and bear often wandered, and thousands of flowers attracted swarms of wild bees. At Bull's Prairie there were a few prairie hens which had so little fear of man that they often roosted upon the roofs of the first cabins. There were none at Scales' Prairie. At Bull's Prairie the few Indians lived in wigwams made of poles covered with cloth and peeled bark. They had frequented Scales' Prairie for many years, and some of their habitations took the more permanent form of log huts, though many of them lived in wigwams made of cotton or other cloth.

These settlements were picturesque, indeed. Some of the squaws wore brightly colored broadcloth skirts, and were often loaded down with numerous trinkets. The men wore white blankets, and breech clouts, to which they often added leggings of deer skin. In summer they were clad in hardly anything. All wore leather moccasins decorated with beads, and clusters of wild turkey feathers in their hair. In their belts they carried tomahawks while butcher knives replaced the former scalping knives. They were armed with flint-lock muskets.

The assertion in history that the British with Malden as a distributing point continued to make annual gifts in June to the Indians after the close of the War of 1812, is verified by Mr. Cisler's statement that all of the guns, tomahawks, knives, and a specially made hoe, known as the "squaw hoe," all bore the mark of the British crown. The red men

¹⁷Perhaps a corruption of the word Macksawbee, a Chippewa war chief well known to the whites of this region.

and women wore thin silver brooches and other ornaments. Some of the men varied the fashion by wearing brooches in their noses. They also decorated their faces and bodies with red, green and black pigments.

The Indians liked animals, and their villages and encampments swarmed with mongrel dogs, tame wolves and foxes. They also kept ponies.¹⁸ At night the wolves in the forests established communication with their relatives in the camps, and the voices from the timber sounded like distant locomotive whistles. Instead of tethering their ponies, the Indians placed hobbles of deer hide upon the fore feet, and the horses moved about by hopping. These ponies foraged for a living, often pawing to a depth of two feet in the snow to reach dead grass and leaves, or standing upon their hind legs to browse on branches eight feet above ground.

As it is well known the squaws did all of the hard work, while the men hunted and fished. They also tanned the deer skins which could be purchased at very low prices. They carried their babies strapped to boards upon their backs. The vices of the white man had already been introduced among them. The men drank whiskey whenever they could get it. They also loafed a great deal about the camp playing "old sledge," a game similar to "seven up." They were enthusiastic hunters, however, and provided all the necessary game. The fawns arrived in May and June, and the Indians hunted the deer before sunrise and before sunset. With rude dead-falls they captured all kinds of fur-bearing animals. Mr. Cisler saw a beaver caught in Duncan Lake, and describes it as a beautiful animal with fur like silk. During the winter the Indians hunted and visited their traps on snowshoes, their feet being covered with blanket cloth which was always wet.

In the spring fur traders arrived. Among them was Louis Campan, a picturesque figure whose costume included a blanket and moccasins. While "Yankee Bill"¹⁹ Lewis, the famous landlord of the tavern at Yankee Springs, was attending a session of the state legislature in Detroit—for he had been elected representative from Barry county—Mr. Campan's nephew, Edward, courted and finally married Lewis' daughter, Phoebe, much to the indignation of "Yankee Bill" when he returned and found a son-in-law had been added to the family.

A glimpse of the character of the red men is shown by two incidents related by Mr. Cisler. Cattle and sheep were very scarce and valuable, and were driven from Ohio to the settlements. The Cislers owned two

¹⁸Mrs. H. Amelia Webb of Williamston, Mich., in a paper speaks of the wonderful endurance and strength of these Indian ponies. She says Miles Carr told her he carried on one pony one box of seven by nine glass, one pail, one iron kettle, ten pounds coffee, one pound of tea, one axe, ten pounds of nails, four window sash, six splint bottom chairs, one tin reflector oven and sat in the midst of the load.

¹⁹See *Mich. Pion. and Hist. Colls.*, Vol. XXX, pp. 289-302.

sheep. One day an Indian's dog worried the sheep and Mr. Cisler's brother shot it. A month later the Cisler brothers saw a light up the river and went to investigate. They found encamped an Indian and his squaw. When the Indian saw Mr. Cisler's brother he seized a tomahawk and ran at him shouting "Kittapoo motchie!" meaning "You killed my dog." The squaw rushed upon her husband and grasped the tomahawk just in time to stop the attack. A. E. Bull, a Massachusetts man, who settled at the prairie named after him, kept a number of horses which were running in the woods. They were frequently worried by a pony belonging to the Indians. One day, Mr. Bull shot this horse, and the Indians afterwards found it dead. They learned who had killed it and threatened to waylay and kill Mr. Bull while he was traveling through the woods. In order to purchase immunity, Mr. Bull paid to Leonard Slater²⁰ the missionary of Prairieville, \$25 and this sum was given to the owner of the horse. Though they were naturally vindictive, the Indians never forgot favors. If they were kept all night in a settler's home, or permitted to sharpen their knives, fish spears and hatchets upon Mr. Cisler's grindstone, a choice piece of venison expressed their gratitude.

Mr. Cisler says that the Indians were excellent doctors. They knew the medicinal values of all kinds of herbs. One day when his little sister was seriously burned an Indian appeared, obtained some bass-wood leaves, wilted them in hot water and bound them on the wounds stating that in "three sleeps" the girl would be better. And this proved true. In after years a squaw doctor cured Mr. Cisler of a disease which white doctors with the best medical education were unable to conquer.

Though there was no village on the site of Middleville, the red men held mysterious powwows and councils there. To attend these gatherings they came in scores from all over the country. In order to summon them the Indians who had the ceremony in charge stretched a deer skin over a log which had been hollowed by fire. Then they made a flute of a species of reed which grew along the river. For a week or two the hollow and monotonous booming of this drum was heard through the forest, and word spread that a great council was being called. The noise of this orchestra, if it may be so called, was continuous. Soon the red men began following the trails which led to the council place, until the necessary number for deliberation were gathered. Mr. Cisler remembers watching with awe a noble-looking old chief deliver a speech which lasted half a day. He spoke as fast as he could in the Indian language but his interested white listener was unable to understand a word. While the aged man was talking the drum was beaten, the flute

²⁰See *Mich. Pion. and Hist. Colls.*, Vol. XXXV, pp. 142-155.

played, and young men and squaws danced before him in circles chanting monotonously and rhythmically—

"Ana—he—ana —hi—ana— ho—ho—ho."

What the occasion of this meeting was Mr. Cisler never knew.

Ada, which had been laid out as a French town, and which had long been a rendezvous of the fur traders, was also a great gathering place for the Indians, for it was situated at the confluence of two rivers that gave access to one of the most prolific fur-producing countries in the middle west. In canoes they came up the river from "Pockatink," or Grand Rapids. Some of them pushed on up the Owashtenong to the interior of the state. Others came up the Sowanquesake to "Skin-Wigwam," as they called Moreau's post on Scales' Prairie. Others went overland to "Shampatang," or Gull Prairie, not far from the first important water highway of the south, the "Kekalamazoo" river, "the bright bubbling or sparkling water," beyond which led the trail to the St. Joseph valley, the haunts of the Miamis and Potawatomes. These were the ancient highways of the red men.

Through the gloom of the great forest led trails deeply worn by moccasined feet. Along these sinuous paths the red men found their ways through the wilderness which covered the Michigan peninsula. There was a thin net-work of trails in Barry county. Over one of them, called the "Canada trail," the feather-crested warriors filed when they visited Fort Pontchartrain, or crossed the Detroit river to visit tribesmen in Canada, or to receive the annual tribute from the British at Malden. Another, traversing the western part of the county from north to south, connected the village of Match-eben-ashe-wish on the site of Kalamazoo with the village at the Rapids of the Grand, now Grand Rapids. Those who followed this trail forded the Thornapple near Middleville. Short trails connected the principal ones. One of them crossed the Yankee Springs sand hills to Penasee, or Gun Lake, from which the canoes went down the Gun river, flowing through a country still noted for its good hunting, to the Kekalamazoo river. From the south bank of this beautiful stream started a trail which passed over the watershed to the St. Joseph river, thence over the next watershed to the Kankakee. Many modern highways are laid wholly or in part along these ancient pathways. Nearly obliterated by shrubbery, the lingering traces of some of them may be discerned in the primitive forest still standing.

In connection with the water-ways, these trails formed a complete system of communication. The Indians covered so much of their journeys as they could by water. Drawing their canoes upon land, they secreted them in hollow logs, or hid them so skillfully with shrubbery that discovery was difficult. Following one another with a steady swinging stride, or "lopec," they quickly crossed the intervening land to the

river or lake which was the next water-link in their journey. If the distance was not too great, they made a portage and carried their canoes and goods with them. Thus from times immemorial their warriors and hunters traveled eastward and southward into the countries of the Iroquois or of the Shawnees, or they followed round the foot of Lake Michigan the Sauk Trail which took them among the tribes of Illinois and Wisconsin and beyond to the Mississippi. By these same routes the Michigan peninsula was accessible to marauding bands from surrounding territory.

These migrations were made in pirogues or dug-out canoes, or large birch bark boats. The dug-outs were made with great labor from white-wood logs. They were very narrow, and one inexperienced in handling them was sure to be capsized. As there were few canoe, or silver birches in this vicinity materials for bark canoes were obtained in the north. These canoes were built of strips of bark sewed together and made water-tight with pitch. On wide and deep rivers, like the Grand, the Indians hoisted sails of bark or cloth. The squaw always sat in the stern dutifully paddling, while her husband stood in the bow with a two-tined spear waiting for fish. The migrating Indians frequently came to Scales' Prairie, but they did not like the tavern, and could not be persuaded to sleep in it. On one occasion a squaw slumbered in the front yard in a snow storm rather than go into the house.

Burial customs of the Indians varied. Those who frequented this part of the state buried their dead in the ground. For a long time a conspicuous mark on Bull's Prairie was a post painted red which showed the last resting place of a chief. When Mr. Cisler arrived he heard Robert Scales relate a story about a murder among the Indians long before the white men arrived. According to the Indian custom, the relatives of a murdered man had a right to put to death the murderer. While looking for a stray cow years afterwards, Mr. Cisler found the grave of the victims of this tragedy. Chopping into a mound covered so skillfully with poles that it was water-tight, he unearthed the skeletons of two men facing each other in sitting postures. Between them was a kettle, bow and arrow. Here were the remains of the murderer and his victim facing each other until the elements should disintegrate their bones.

According to provisions of treaties with the Indians they were to abandon Western Michigan. The Pottowattomies were to receive full pay. Some of the Ottawas or "Tawas," as they were often known, were unwilling to leave hunting grounds which their tribe had so long possessed. In order to expedite their departure the government sent troops to gather them together for removal. Mr. Cisler was always a good friend of the Indians. One day when a dragoon in full uniform, armed with rifle, pistol and sword, rode up and asked him whether he had

seen any Ottawas, he replied that he did not know an Ottawa from any other kind of an Indian. According to another provision of the treaty, the government was to pay certain sums of money to the Indians. The specie, which consisted of a wagon load of half dollars, was brought over-land from Detroit under an escort of troops. When the Indians went to Grand Rapids for the first payment the river presented an unusual and barbaric sight for it was covered with a procession of canoes passing down the swift current. When they returned the squaws possessed the half dollars. As soon as they began to circulate this money, white men made counterfeit coins of iron coated with silver.

All of the Indians in this vicinity were nominally subjects of Newegun (Geezig, or Noondag,²¹ the chief of the Ottawas, who lived at Grand Rapids, and afterwards moved with Missionary Slater to Prairieville. Noondag was an associate of Tecumseh and helped carry that chief's body off the field after he was killed in the battle of the Thames in Ontario. Among the lesser chiefs in the northwestern part of the county were Chippewa, Kennebec, Iokanaboo, and Muckatawagoosh, or "Black Fox."

Chippewa and Kennebec were leaders of the small band of Chippewas who lived in an oak opening south of the Little Thornapple, four miles north and one mile east of Middleville. For knowledge of them, I am indebted to Charles Williams, of Hastings, who played with the Indian boys of this village. The Indians in this band numbered between two and three hundred. When Mr. Williams knew them they were somewhat above the low state of savagery. Chippewa, the chief, Mr. Williams describes as one of the handsomest men he has ever seen. He was tall, fleshy, well-built, good-natured, and his whole presence expressed nobility of character. His features were like those of an American. He resided in a log house, the only one in the village, and spoke good English. Kennebec, an older Indian supposed to be the chief of an extinct band, also lived in this village. In character he was the opposite of Chippewa. He was very large and raw-boned. Deep-set and treacherous eyes added to the sinister aspect of ugly features. He had been through many adventures, and often boasted of scalp he had taken in wars with the whites. Mr. Custer also knew Kennebec, and his description corresponds with that of Mr. Williams. If Chippewa had taken scalp, he never said so. The difference in the characters of these two chiefs is further illustrated by the fact that while Chippewa dressed like white men, Kennebec retained the Indian garb and wore feathers in his hair. These men seldom carried weapons. The wigwams in this village were placed regardless of regularity, and were rude affairs similar to those already described. The women were better looking than

²¹For sketches, see Vol. X, p. 61, this series.

the squaws of other tribes. The village was infested with curs of all kinds. Though the Indians never got drunk in camp, they frequently became intoxicated after visiting Ingraham's tavern on the Grand Rapids stage road. The squaws cooked their victuals in kettles or on sticks. Coon and woodchuck were suspended over the fires, and the squaws sat turning them. These Indians were great fishermen and owned many dug-outs from which they threw spears with remarkable accuracy. Standing with their feet on the narrow gunwales they balanced themselves on their light arrowy craft and many of them were able to throw a spear across the river and transfix the quickest moving fish. They preserved the fish by drying them over a fire made of decayed wood. The women were expert in tanning deer skin. They smoked it, grained it and worked it in a solution made of water and deer brains. Just when these Indians left this county Mr. Williams does not know. But it was some time before the war of the rebellion.

Mr. Williams was privileged to see one of the first murder trials in this county. While drunk an Indian slew another member of his party, and fully 500 Indians assembled at the council grove at Middleville to decide his fate. They gathered in groups to deliberate. The murderer, however, was able to furnish his multitude of jurors with a liberal supply of whiskey and tobacco, and they finally decided not to punish him.

Mr. Williams knew the Indians intimately enough to have a very high opinion of their integrity and honesty. For a playmate he had Kelsey, Chippewa's son, with whom he used to have trials of marksmanship with the bow and arrow. The burial ground of these Chippewa Indians is located on the south bank of the Thornapple about a mile west of Irving station in what the first settlers called "Wild Goose Bend," because wild geese during their migrations halted in the deep waters. With the bodies were buried heads, arms and cooking utensils, which the red men believed would be of use in the Happy Hunting Grounds. Somewhere among them rest the bones of the old warrior, Chief Kennebec. Chippewa and his band moved northwards, and nothing was afterwards heard of them, though Mr. Williams has often longed to see again his playmate, Kelsey.

There were tragedies among the Indians, for there was nothing in their manner of living that restrained their primitive passions. While John Williams of Hastings, was a youth, he resided not far from Gun lake, a favorite haunt of the Indians. One day Mr. Williams heard sounds of a fearful turmoil and went to the lake to discover the cause. The savages were gathered about the headless body of one their members. He learned that the man had become involved in a quarrel with a young squaw, who declared that he "was no good," seized a knife and cut off his head. During the excitement she rushed to the tethered horses, cut

the rope which held one of the animals, and was off on the Canada Trail before her companions knew what had happened. Their pursuit was too late to catch her, and the body was buried on the shore of the lake.

The red men have left no permanent monuments behind them as have the nations who built solid habitations. They have passed away like the game which was once so plentiful in this country. A memory which is gradually fading is their only memorial. In days to come what little we know about them may be lost. Among future generations some will be interested in the aborigines and the early settlements of this county. A costly monument has been placed at Ada to commemorate Rix Robinson and his trading post. Historic places in this, and in many of the eastern states have been marked. There are few localities in Michigan which possess so many historic spots as Barry county. We ought to be proud of this heritage. Why should we not provide modest but appropriate markers for the trading posts, Yankee Springs tavern, the Indian villages, and the Slater Mission Indians?

STORY OF EARLY DAY LIFE IN MICHIGAN

BY MARGARET LAFEVER

Mr. McQueen¹ came to my father in the town of Murray, Orleans Co. N. Y. and in glowing terms gave a description of Michigan. This was in 1836. My father got the western fever and sold his nice farm, for the man said there was plenty of good land near his place that could be had of the government, for the asking. He and his family had been neighbors of ours in "York State" and my mother gave her consent to come. So after I had been duly christened and could stand the sunlight a little, my mother and father took their six children, and started for Michigan. We had two covered wagons, well stocked with provisions, bedding, clothing and cooking utensils also mother's little linen spinning wheel, which she said had once belonged to her mother, and which she would not trust to come with the other goods later on. We had two strong teams of horses, one cow and a nanny goat, the latter to supply us with milk at all times of day. Father was advised to buy a large quantity of dry goods, boots and shoes and provisions and ship them across the lake on a line boat, as the freighters were called. He did so and that was the last he ever saw of them. From Detroit to Dexter and

¹In 1836 J. McQueen entered 160 acres in section 32 and 160 acres in section 33, Eaton County.