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Indians of Iowa

Beat — beat — and a double beat!
Ashes are the grass of a lodge-pole town.

On a day in a year between 1657 and 1660 some Ottawa and Huron Indians, fleeing before the Iroquois, entered Iowa by way of the Upper Iowa River. It was their hope to find a country in which to dwell; but, although hospitably received by the Siouan tribes along the present Iowa-Minnesota line, they were unable to adapt themselves to a prairie life and soon fell back to the forests.

Then in 1673, as for a long time before that year, some tribes of the Illinois nation hunted and fished in Iowa on the streams now called the Cedar, the Iowa, and the Des Moines. But the Indians so far named, though in the Iowa land, were here not as Indians of Iowa. They were here as wayfarers, or sojourners, merely.

The Indians who, with any precision, may be called Indians of Iowa are those who at various periods between 1825 and 1854 signed treaties yielding, or qualifying, control of Iowa lands in favor of the white race. These Indians for the most part were the Sauks, the Foxes, the Pottawattamies, the Winnebagoes, the Ioways, the Otoes, the Omahas, and the Sioux.

Books and articles upon Iowa have contained much with regard to the Sauks and the Foxes, but the other Iowa tribes have been passed over rather lightly. The Sauks and the Foxes were outstanding in their deeds and in their tribal characteristics. So resolute were they, and so fierce, that, like the Sioux, they seemed to be a kind of Iroquois of the West. Indeed, an attempt has been made to show that the Foxes were actually of Iroquoian stock; but this hypothesis has met with scant favor from ethnologists.

Narrowing somewhat our survey, let us glance for a moment at the Sauks and the Foxes; then at the Ioways; next at the Pottawattamies and the Winnebagoes; and also at a tribe, as yet not mentioned — a peculiar tribe and a tiny one — the Mascoutins. Lastly the Tama Indians should be noted.

The Sauks and the Foxes, both, were excellent warriors; but between them a difference lay. The Sauks had regard for authority. They paid respect to counsel. In short, they were circumspect — looked before they leaped. On the other hand, the Foxes were individualists. To them authority, as such, was abomination. Their practice, if not their rule, was every man for himself. In keeping with this, the Foxes (at least in the early time) did not stand well with the fur traders. When the latter advanced goods to them on credit, they were not inclined to reciprocate by providing the furs wherewith to square the obligation. With the Sauks it was

quite otherwise. Their reputation with the fur men was at all periods that of reliable traders.

In Wisconsin, where the Foxes originally dwelt, there raged between them and the French warfare for fifty years. It was warfare relentless and to the knife. In the same region, during the same period, the Sauks, while at times supporting the Foxes, maintained for the most part an attitude of neutrality — of diplomatic aloofness. That the Sauks and the Foxes were invariably allies is an error as strange as it is of long standing.

It was toward the middle of the eighteenth century that the Foxes entered the Iowa land, and they came as intruders. The actual occupants of Iowa at that period, so far as the land was occupied at all, were the Ioways.

The Ioways are interesting. They possessed marked traits. As warriors they were intrepid, and they made good hunters and trappers. They were endowed with splendid physiques; their shoulders were broad; their breathing was deep. But about the tribe there dwelt ever something of the ludicrous. They affected rings for their noses — noses none too clean, it is said — and their mouths were apt to spread from ear to ear. They fed hugely on meat; so wide mouths perhaps were required. Moreover, they impressed observers as being forlorn, down at heel. The impression was deepened by the circumstance (more notable in their later history) that many of them had but one eye. Still,

they could hardly have been as forlorn as they seemed, for they wore the best of buffalo robes and dictated the output of the Red Pipestone Quarry, just over the line in southwest Minnesota.

Unlike the Ioways, who were Siouan, the Pottawattamies were Algonquin, as were the Sauks and the Foxes. Capable enough as warriors, the Pottawattamies liked better to trade. In fact they were the traders *par excellence* of all the Northwest to the westward of the Ottawas. Their appearance was princely; their manners were excellent; and they drove a bargain with inimitable grace. The distinguished Jesuit, Father P. Jean De Smet, says of them that by comparison the Sauks and the Ioways were "beggars". Unfortunately, the Pottawattamies lent distinction to Iowa for but a very short time.

Coming now to the Winnebagoes, we have another tribe of Siouan origin. They, like the Pottawattamies, dwelt in Iowa briefly; but it was long enough for them to commit bloody depredations, for they were not of the Sioux for nothing. The British trader Thomas G. Anderson calls them the "dirtiest" and at the same time the "bravest" of the Indians he had met.

Perhaps the most enigmatical and elusive of the Iowa tribes were the Mascoutins. As their name indicates, they were a prairie people. It is sometimes said that the Mascoutins were not a tribe separate and distinct, but merely a roving band of the

Pottawattamies. They disappeared toward the end of the eighteenth century, yet to-day, in Kansas, a portion of the Pottawattamies call themselves Mascoutins or Muscadines. In their palmy days, from 1665 to 1735, they were known from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Wisconsin, and from the Ohio to the Great Lakes, and all maps took them into account. Fierce were they, and at the same time crafty. They entered Iowa about 1728 and identified themselves with the Mississippi shore below the mouth of the Iowa River. Shadowy as their Iowa history is, they imparted their name to Muscatine Island — a center from which it has spread to Muscatine County and to the city of Muscatine.

Thus, then, we have them — these six tribes upon whom we have dwelt. None are in Iowa to-day save only a remnant of the Foxes — the Meskwakies. They were removed from the Commonwealth in 1846 by the Federal government; but, homesick for the old places, they drifted back and bought land along the Iowa River in Tama County. But a problem arose: the Indians were not legal persons, and hence could not hold property by deed. What should be done? In 1856 a law was passed by the General Assembly giving the “consent” of the State “that the Indians now residing in Tama county known as a portion of the Sacs and Foxes, be permitted to remain and reside” in Iowa. This was well, but in whom should title to their lands be vested? In whom but the head of the Common-

wealth — the grand sachem — the Governor. And so it befell. From the days of Governor James W. Grimes (1857) until the third of July, 1908, the Governor of Iowa served as trustee for these Indians residing as landholders within the borders of Iowa. Since then their land has been held in trust by the United States government in the name of the Secretary of the Interior.

The Foxes of Tama County possess modern cottages. Do they live in them? In a measure. Behind the cottage you will find invariably a well-constructed wigwam of poles covered with bark or with mats of reeds, and there, if time presses, you would better seek the family. Indians are Indians even yet. An Indian at Tama, smiling and deprecatory, has been known to voice regret for the good old days — the days of the white man's fire-water and of squaws more than one.

IRVING B. RICHMAN