THE WINNEBAGO VISIT TO WASHINGTON IN 1828

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Governor Lewis Cass of Michigan Territory was a man of ideas and resource. Moreover he was profoundly interested in the Indian race and sympathetic with the troubles caused by encroaching frontiersmen. In 1827 had occurred the so-called Winnebago war, which might have proved disastrous for the Northwest frontier had not Cass by rapid movements and wise councils prevented serious bloodshed. The occasion of the outbreak was a false rumor that two Winnebago prisoners had been done to death by the garrison at Fort Snelling on the upper Mississippi. The real cause was the invasion of Winnebago lands between the Mississippi and Rock rivers by lead miners, who overran their territory, drove off the game, and made free with all the Indians considered their own. An even deeper cause was the hatred of the tribe for Americans, to whose occupation of the region they had never become reconciled.

The Winnebago were an eastern offshoot of the Siouan race, which in the dawn of history occupied most of the southern portion of what we now call Wisconsin. During the wars of the French régime, they became weakened in numbers, but not less proud, intractable, and aloof in spirit. They were among the most active associates of Tecumseh and the Shawnee Prophet in their rebellion against the might of the United States. They fiercely resented the coming of American troops in 1816 and were subdued only by fear of the cannon that were placed upon the forts, and the bayonets of the soldiers that mounted guard. When Fort Howard was built at one end of the Fox-Wisconsin waterway and Fort Crawford at the other, they withdrew to their villages on the upper Rock and upper Fox and in sullen silence watched suspiciously the movements of the white men.

After Red Bird, their guilty chief, had surrendered in 1827 at the Portage, and Governor Cass and General Atkinson had put down the incipient rebellion, Cass, in the summer of 1828, called the Winnebago chiefs to a council at Green Bay. Before the council met he wrote to the commissioner of Indian Affairs recommending that a party of their chiefs “be permitted to
visit our cities to impress them with our power; it may tend to quiet their restlessness and tame their ferocity." The Commissioner favored the plan as a manner of conquering more merciful than with cannon and bayonets. The War Department approved, and gave orders that fifteen chiefs be invited to visit Washington and that John H. Kinzie accompany them.¹

Meanwhile their beloved chief Red Bird had died in prison at Prairie du Chien; the government had ordered a fort built at the Portage—in the heart of Winnebago land—and Cass and Pierre Ménard of Illinois had met the chiefs in council at Green Bay. At that conference Cass invited the chiefs to pay a visit to their Great Father, the President of the United States.² There was much discussion at the council concerning the personnel of the delegation. The two principal families among the tribe were the Decorah and the Caramanuee, rivals for the headship. The leaders of the Washington delegation were the Caramanuee. Their village was first on Green Lake of Fox River, but after this visit to Washington and the treaty of 1829, the Caramanuee removed to the Baraboo River. The elder Caramanuee, known as Naw-kaw or Wood was at this time the principal chief of the nation. He had been Tecumseh's adviser and was present at his death at the Battle of the Thames. Mrs. Kinzie describes him in 1830 as "a stalwart Indian, with a broad, pleasant countenance, the great peculiarity of which was an immense under lip, hanging nearly to his chin.³

Caramanuee's kinsman, Hoo-wau-nee-kah or Little Elk was the orator of the group. When Henry Clay visited the Winnebago in Washington "after carefully looking at the countenances and bearing of all the members of the deputation, [he] had indicated him [Little Elk] as the one possessing the greatest talent; and he was greatly pleased when informed that he was the principal orator of the nation, and decidedly superior in abilities to any other individual of the tribe."⁴

The Decorah family had a tincture of white blood, being descendants of the famous chieftess, Glory-of-the-Morning and her French consort, Sabrevoir de Caris. The head chief of this family was the White War Eagle or Konokah Decorah, grand-

¹ Indian Office Files, Jan. 24, 1828.
⁴ Ibid., 65.
son of the chieftess. Mrs. Kinzie says of him, he was “the most noble, dignified, and venerable of his own or any other tribe. His fine Roman countenance, rendered still more striking by his bald head, with one solitary tuft of long silvery hair neatly tied and falling back on his shoulders; his perfectly neat, appropriate dress, almost without ornament, and his courteous demeanor, never laid aside under any circumstances, all combined to give him the highest place in the consideration of all who knew him.”5 This fine old chief did not go with the party on this journey as his age forbade. His son, Spoon Decorah, was a somewhat inconspicuous member of the deputation.

The more prominent Decorah that took the journey was a nephew of the old chief, whose village was on the upper Mississippi near La Crosse. His Indian name was Wau-kon-haw-kaw, or Snake Skin, and he usually wore the skin of a rattlesnake woven about his head as a turban. After this journey he was universally known as Washington Decorah. He was a large, handsome man six feet three inches tall and quite an orator, spokesman for his tribe at the Treaty of 1829 at Prairie du Chien. At that treaty he said: “Fifteen of us went last year to see our Great Father; when we shook hands with our Great Father we did not think him a man like ourselves; we thought him the Great Spirit—his house was so grand and everything around him so splendid; but when we heard him speak we found him a man.”6

The chief who guarded the entrance to Lake Winnebago, with a village on what was later Doty’s Island, was Hootschope or Four Legs (really Four who Stand). He was a wise old chief whose wife was a Fox woman. She had been in her youth as far as New York, and knowing the power of the whites she had during the Winnebago War pled successfully with her band not to attack the whites.7 This family was represented by the nephew of the old chief, whom the whites called Dandy, because of his fondness for dress.8 He was also called the Little Soldier on the trip, because he bore the hardships well.

The Rock River band was represented by Kaw-ray-kaw-saw, or White Crow, whose village was on Lake Koshkonong. White

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5 Ibid., 63.
Crow was accompanied by his young daughter, eighteen years old and said to be beautiful. She married, soon after her return, another member of the party, Yellow Thunder. She was always called the Washington Woman by her people and Mrs. Kinzie describes the airs she assumed. "She had a pleasant, old-acquaintance sort of air in greeting me, as much as to say, 'You and I have seen the world.'"  

Other members of the delegation were "Talk English, a remarkably handsome, powerful young Indian," who received his name on the trip, because of his reiteration of that expression;¹⁰ Tshi-zun-haw-kaw, "who united the characters of a conjurer or medicine man, with that of a brave,"¹¹ had a most pleasing countenance and was accounted the most intelligent and progressive observer of the party. We have not the names of the other six members of the deputation, but all the chief bands were represented. Their conductors were Robert Forsyth, secretary of Governor Cass, and John H. Kinzie, recently appointed Indian agent at Fort Winnebago. The interpreter was Pierre Pauquette, the half breed Winnebago who had charge of the transfers at the Portage and was much beloved by all the tribe. Moreover he was the only really competent interpreter of the Winnebago language and spoke also both French and English, although he could neither read nor write.

The deputation of fifteen Indian chiefs, one woman, and three conductors left Green Bay with Governor Cass, after he had finished the council negotiations. The steamboat Henry Clay conveyed them to Detroit where they arrived about the first of September.¹² They remained a month at Detroit, waiting Governor Cass's convenience and left there Oct. 6 on the Niagara for Buffalo. At Buffalo they were conveyed by stage across New York state while Governor Cass traveled on to Washington by a shorter route. The Indians passed through Utica, Schenectady, and Albany, and thence took a river steamer to New York City where they arrived on October 19.¹³

If only some of the chiefs could have kept diaries how amusing and interesting their impressions would have been. They

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¹⁰ Ibid., 75-77.
¹¹ Ibid., 64-65.
¹² McKenney and Hall, Indian Tribes (Phila. 1854), 1, 215.
¹³ Detroit Gazette, Sept. 4, 1828.
¹⁴ Expense account in Congressional Documents, Serial 186, No. 129.
hitherto had believed themselves braver and more virtuous than the whites and equal in number to them. What must have been their amazement at the numbers of "children of the Great Father," whom they met on their journey. Agent Kinzie tells of their shrewdness when passing by stagecoach through the country. The driver connived with the tavern keepers to sound the horn just as the Indians were seated at table for a meal.

"Do you pay for all these provisions that are set before us at the hotels?" one asked their conductor.

"Yes. Why do you ask."

"Nothing. I thought you paid for just what we ate."

At the next stopping place a fine breakfast was set upon the table of which they partook plentifully. As the horn sounded for the stagecoach, each chief sprang to his feet. One seized the plate of biscuits and poured them into the corner of his blanket; another the remains of a pair of chickens; a third emptied the sugar bowls; each laid hold of what was nearest him, and in a trice nothing was left upon the table but empty plates and dishes. The landlord and waiters, meanwhile, stood laughing and enjoying the trick.

In New York the Winnebago created a sensation. None of their people had ever been seen there, and their barbarous costumes, their singular manners attracted much attention. Proprietors of theatres sent them complimentary tickets and then advertised that the Indians would be present, and their houses were thronged. At the Bowery theatre one of the chiefs was so pleased with the singing of the cantatrice, that he stripped an eagle's feather from his costume and sent it by the boxkeeper to the "singing squaw." October 27 they visited Peale's Museum and enjoyed the experiments, such as the air pump. Nawkaw gravely thanked Mr. Peale with the remark that he could not understand what was done, it must come from the Great Spirit. The next day they went to a balloon ascension at the Battery, and even Kinzie expected they would be impressed with the daring of the aeronauts; but the leading chief thought them unwise to trifle with their lives in that way. "What good does it do?" he asked. Another chief said when asked what he

14 *Niles Register,* xxxv, 101.
15 *Mrs. Kinzie, Wau-Bun,* 78.
17 *McKenney & Hall, Indian Tribes,* i, 317.
thought of it, "Think nothing of it. Americans foolish."\textsuperscript{18} Nor could the chiefs be made to express their wonder at so many people. Naw-kaw boasted when his attention was called to a great crowd, "We have more in our smallest villages."

New York's enthusiastic adulation was rebuked by Washington journalists to whom Indian visitors were less of a novelty. Indians are intelligent men and should be so treated, wrote a correspondent.\textsuperscript{19} Philadelphia however showed an interested curiosity in the chiefs' visit. Arriving there the last of October they made an unexpected appearance at the French opera and excited a lively sensation as they filed into the stage box, in all their savage finery. They stayed at Mr. Wade's hotel on North Third Street,\textsuperscript{20} but soon passed on to Washington where they arrived the last day of October and were domiciled at Tennison's Hotel.

Their stay in Washington lasted for six weeks for which the innkeeper charged $1,700.00 including $250.00 for "damages done the house." For the entertainment of the citizens the Winnebago staged a war dance on the common between the White House and the river, for which a dollar's admission was charged. Postponed because of bad weather it finally took place the last of November. The Marine Band played and the chiefs gave the Discovery Dance, a mock battle, and the Rejoice Dance. "The movements of the Indians would not offend the most rigid and fastidious delicacy," wrote an attendant journalist.\textsuperscript{21}

One of the amusements then claiming the patronage of Washingtonians was an exhibition at Carusi's Assembly Rooms of trained animals—birds and dogs. When the Winnebago chiefs visited this entertainment they were much delighted. A canary named "Fairy" was supposed to play dominoes and one of the dogs was similarly accomplished. Two of the chiefs challenged these learned animals to a contest. This created a considerable excitement in Washington, all the newspapers carrying an account of the "Challenge Extraordinary." The result of the play was not reported. One day the local militia company, known as the Washington Guards marched in a body to Tennison's Hotel.
and their band serenaded the chiefs, after which their orator gave thanks in a grandiloquent speech. 22

The principal purpose of the trip, however, was for the chiefs to have an interview with the President, their Great Father. The President at this time was John Quincy Adams, who was more familiar with deputations from Europe than from the Indian tribes. He received the Winnebago with considerable pomp, surrounded by members of his cabinet and certain invited diplomats. Naw-kaw presented him with a peace pipe and Little Elk declaimed a sonorous oration, translated by Pauquetté, in which he assured the Great Father that the tribe would maintain perpetual peace. 23 On December 2 the President received the delegation once more, and gave them a document as follows:

This certifies that Tshi-zhunk-kau-kaw, a Winnebago Chief, in company with fourteen other chiefs and Warriors of that nation, has visited the seat of Government of the United States, and held friendly councils and smoked the pipe of peace with me in my house. Having full confidence in the declarations freely and solemnly made by him and his associates, of their determination to maintain perpetual peace and friendship with the United States, I recommend him to the favorable notice and consideration of all my white and red children. [Signed] John Quincy Adams, President of the United States. 24

The visit, however delightful, must come to an end. Kinzie prepared for their return journey and had the tribesmen fitted out with clothes by a fashionable tailor, who made them fifteen blue frock coats, as many pair of leggings to match, sixteen blue cloth caps (perhaps one for Pauquetté), cloth and ribbon for the squaw, three dozen pair of stockings and twelve pairs of shoes. They traveled across country by stage to Detroit, where they arrived the last of the year. Horses, saddles, and bridles were there bought for them, and they journeyed homeward to their separate Wisconsin villages, with many gifts to testify to the welcome they had received.

23 Naw-kaw's portrait was painted in the act of presenting the pipe. A reproduction is in McKenney & Hall, Indian Tribes, 1, 72. For Little Elk see Ibid., ii, 289. McKenney requested an appropriation for the portraits of all the chiefs at $20 apiece. The originals are not now in Washington.
24 The original of this document was presented in 1930 to the Museum of Luther College, Decorah, Iowa. It had been preserved by a missionary at Wittenberg, Wis. to whom it had been given by a Winnebago many years ago.
The visit of the chiefs was justified by its results. The expense of $10,272.05 to the government was less than a war would have been. The Winnebago never again attempted a revolt against government authority, and four years later, when the Sauk under Black Hawk went on the warpath, the Winnebago were restrained from joining them by the knowledge that their chiefs had of the might and power of the United States. Especially friendly to the whites were the chiefs of the delegation. White Crow rescued the captive girls from Black Hawk, acted as guide to General Dodge and served with the whites in the battle of Wisconsin Heights. Little Elk kept Kinzie informed of the movements of the hostiles, and a brother of Washington Decorah brought the defeated Black Hawk as prisoner to Prairie du Chien. Certainly the trip to Washington of the Winnebago chiefs proved a good investment for the future welfare of Wisconsin.