

Indian Writes of Early History

Great Grandson of Chief Big Foot, Now at Century of Progress, Writes of Early Lake Geneva.

Of interest to readers who like to delve into the history of this portion of the country may be in a letter received by this writer from an Indian who he met while visiting the Century of Progress in Chicago. The Indian dressed in native costume, held forth in the store at old Fort Dearborn. From his conversations with other visitors we learned that he was a Potawatomi and we asked him if he or his family were connected with the band of Chief Big Foot which lived before the white men came on the present site of the village of Fontana, on Lake Geneva.

It developed that he was the great grandson of this chief, although he is not a pure blooded Potawatomi, but part Ottawa as well.

Although he has never seen Lake Geneva, Mr. Clearwater was well acquainted with its early history, which had been handed down in the Indian manner. The Lake he said was called "Big Foot Lake" after the chief by the Indians and the early white settlers. The name "Lake Geneva", he stated was given by a government surveyor, who named it for his hometown in New York State.

The Letter

"I received the papers you sent me (Referring to a copy of the Lake Geneva paper covering the centennial observation at Fontana some years ago). I found them very interesting. The centennial celebration must have been very interesting.

I am sending the photos of myself that I promised. These are the pictures I was ordered not to sell by the superintendent of the fort."

Short History

"Referring to the short history I told you, I will repeat it again and if you think it is interesting to the readers of the Lake Geneva News-Tribune, you may send it in if you wish. I would like to see it. They might be interested to know why Lake Geneva was called Big Foot Lake.

Chief Big Foot must have been a hard character to deal with, as extracts of history indicate. He was in favor of Black Hawk in the Black Hawk War. As Mrs. Kinzie described him, 'The chief was a large, raw-boned, ugly Indian, with a countenance bloated by intemperance, and with a sinister, unpleasant expression.'

Big Foot was a nickname given him by his associates early in his life. They were celebrating over a victory, and they were dancing, and he probably made himself more conspicuous than the rest. He was dancing in the clay. The wet clay stuck to his moccasins, which appeared to increase their size. The other men called him big feet, and from that time he was called Big Foot. He carried that name and used it as legal afterwards. It was probably easier to pronounce, and shorter than his right name

which was *Maumksuck*." (Clearwater explained that a free translation of this name into English would mean 'He-who-draws-the-long-stick' the Indians having a game where one long stick and a number of short ones were concealed in the hand, the visible ends being even and the players attempting to draw the long stick.)

Took Part in Massacre

"I do not deny or doubt that he and his band took part in the Fort Dearborn Massacre. The history tells us that the Lake Geneva Indians lingered around after getting their annuities from the Indian agent. Their suspicious behavior alarmed the Fort Dearborn residents.

Big Foot's wife died around 1808 or 1809, leaving four children two boys and two little girls. Knowing the two girls were too small for him to take care of, he gave them to his mother-in-law. He hunted up his in-laws in Canada, left the two little girls there and returned to Wisconsin with the boys. One of the two little girls that he left in (the) charge of his mother-in-law was my grandmother (Kitchi-gray) Big Woman. I saw my grandmother 18 years ago and she was then 114 years old. She died shortly after that.

As for me I am still at the fort dispensing information of early Chicago. I have a collection of nonsense questions that might fit some comic section. I am enclosing several.

My best wishes to you all.

R. Clearwater."

Are We Dumb?

The nonsense questions enclosed in the letter are given below. They illustrate perfectly the amount of knowledge most of us have of the manners and customs of the American Indian. This writer has not the least doubt of their authenticity, since while sitting in the old fort store in Fort Dearborn he noticed a young man escorting his lady fair through the store. *"Look at that fine buffalo hide," said the young fellow pointing out a skin on the wall to his companion. It was the skin of a black bear.*

Visitor: "Do you speak American?"

Clearwater: "That's the only language I speak properly. I speak two other American languages. I also speak English."

Visitor: "Is this pig-bacon?"

Clearwater: "I presume so. What else could it be?"

Visitor: "Well, I thought it might be hog-bacon."

After Clearwater explained the Potawatomi Indians.

Visitor: "Why were they called Potawatomis? Did they manufacture pottery?"

Clearwater was explaining the Indian corn that grows and matures in various colors, which was the principal food of the Indians.

Visitor: "Is that the reason the Indian is so dark?"

A visitor pointing to a bundle of tobacco leaves, "What is that dark thing hanging up there, is them Indian scalps?"

This was overheard at the Indian ceremonial. A visitor, pointing to a singer with feather head dress: "There is the chief of the lumbagos." (Winnebagos).

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