Nuggets of History

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IN ALL THINGS THE WINNEBAGO INDIANS RESPECTED NATURE

by Hazel Mortimer Hyde

Winnebago has been said to mean "people of the filthy water," wrote William Kubiak in GREAT LAKES INDIANS. Other names for them were "Otonokah" and "Nipegon". They were known to the Europeans in 1634, when Jean Nicolet, a Frenchman found them on the shores of Green Bay, Wisconsin. There is a possibility that they, along with other Siouan tribes, were forced from an eastern or southern area at an earlier time. Their closest neighbors were the Central Algonquians, whose different tribes surrounded them. They were in constant touch with the Iowa tribe, and closely related to the "Oto" and "Missouri". But their culture and craftsmanship were closely knit with that of the Algonquins. In 1681 JACQUES MARQUETTE'S JOURNAL had a map showing a Winnebago village called "Puans" located close to the North end of Lake Winnebago. Jonathan Carver found them in 1766-1768 on the Fox River. Carver described a village with 200 warriors, about 50 houses, on an island in the river about 35 miles from Green Bay. The Winnebago gave their loyalty to the British. In 1806 Zebulon M. Pike says they lived on the Wisconsin, Rock, and Fox Rivers.

Winnebago Indians are listed in WORLD BOOK as an eastern woodland tribe related to the Sioux. Tribal traditions say that at one time their home was near the Missouri River, but that they were forced east and settled near Green Bay in Wisconsin.

The language of the Winnebago resembled that of the Sioux in many ways. The Sioux called themselves Dakota or Lakota meaning allies. The Sioux had many divisions.

The Winnebagoes hunted buffalo, caught fish, raised corn and squash.

They built long lodges with arched roofs and arbors over the entrances.

Chiefs, who were sometimes women, inherited their rank, according to Wayne C. Temple.

Important tribal ceremonies included a Medicine Dance, organized around a secret society, and the Winter Feast, a war ceremony.

The Winnebago were nearly destroyed by the Illinois sometime before 1670. But small groups continued to live along Lake Winnebago and elsewhere in southern Wisconsin and Northern Illinois. They were friendly to most nearby tribes and to the French.

During the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, the Winnebago sided with Great Britain.

Some Winnebago lived in a village, now called Prophetstown, on the Rock River, in Illinois. The town was named after their leader, Wabokieskiek (White Cloud), who was called the Prophet.

The Winnebago ceded their lands in Wisconsin and

WINNEBAGO WARRIOR

Illinois to the federal government in the 1830's. They were moved to Minnesota, then to South Dakota, and finally to Nebraska. Some refused to leave Wisconsin and Minnesota and still live there.

In 1924, the United States government, with a twinge of conscience, ordered that these first Americans be granted American citizenship. Some may have been grateful, others were not, but most didn't even care.

When thinking of Regional Groupings of Indians, the Winnebago is listed as part of the Northeastern Woodsmen, who lived in the region between the Mississippi River and the Atlantic Ocean and from the Ohio River north to the Canadian border. A further division placed them among those tribes near the Great Lakes which included the Fox, Illinois, Menominee, Miami, Potawatomi, Souk, Shawnee, and the Winnebago.

This group of tribes lived by a combination of farming and hunting. They raised corn, beans and squash and hunted the deer that were plentiful in the area.

The language of the Winnebago is Siouan for this was used not only of the Sioux tribe but by a large superfamily such as the Crow, Mandan, and Osage.

...The greater part of the domain of the Winnebago was in what is now Wisconsin, but a small wedge-shaped portion of it extended into Illinois between the Rock River and the eastern watershed of the Mississippi. Some of the villages of this tribe were located on the Rock River, near present day Rockford and Rockton.

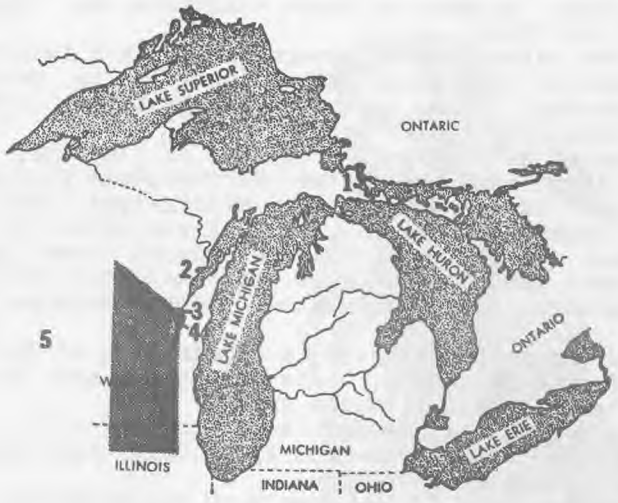
The best available evidence as to the population of the Indian tribes living in Illinois in 1818 is an estimate made by the Secretary of War in 1815... The Winnebago were credited with 2,400 souls but only a few of these lived south of the border.

The Winnebago were of the Dakota stock and spoke the Sioux language. They were people neither of the forest nor the plain, but lived along the water courses and in the groves... Their time was divided about equally between hunting and agricultural life.

The importance of telling a life story of an Indian is that only when no one remembers his story, only when no one is left to tell it at the campfire of winter, would the man be truly gone. As long as one person could still tell the tale, he would live in the rocks and trees that had been his home.

William Least Heat Moon has a book published in 1982 which has been called "a Masterpiece" by Robert Penn Warren and titled Blue Highways, A Journey Into America. This Indian writer of mixed blood delineates the unsung America. His father calls himself Heat Moon and his elder brother is known as Little Heat Moon. Eight generations back a grandfather, one William Trogdon, an immigrant Lancastershire man provided food to rebel patriots and was killed by Tories and thereby got his name in Volume four of Makers of America so William, who has been a professor in a college in Missouri, sometimes uses that family name.

He explains: To Siouan peoples, the Moon of Heat is the seventh month, a time also known as Blood Moon --- perhaps



KEY

1. Possible early location.
2. First known location, 1634.
3. Location as shown on map published with Marquette's Journal, 1681.
4. Island location on "Winnebago Town," 1778.
5. Village location in 1832, La Crosse. Shaded area indicates approximate location of Winnebago holdings on Carver's map, 1766-1767.

because of its dusky midsummer color.

From his book I quote a "Wind Chant Song":

"Then he was told:
Remember what you have seen,
because everything forgotten
returns to the circling winds".

The Indian has a more relaxed attitude toward time. He thinks in terms of the four seasons of the year and measures the days in moons. Winnebago Indians had no equivalent to the clock but could judge how long until dark or any other event by looking at the sun. My own father did not carry a watch but could tell sun-time with a high degree of accuracy. This inner clock and lack of stress concerning time came from the close relationship with nature. Signe Chell in "My Friend, The First American" writes, speaking of her work in Wisconsin, with the Winnebago Indians and others, "To them time was never of any importance as the white man sees it. Instead the Indian had an inherent

time-piece". A moon is a period of time which begins with the new moon. Each moon lasts about twenty-eight days. The choice of a name given during that period was usually based upon the world of nature--animals, birds, plants, weather: Little Frog-Moon, Hoeing Corn Moon, Big Wind Moon, Moon of Strong Cold.

Even on the present day reservation there is seldom a set schedule for meals or work. Clocks are not needed. Moons play an important part. Time is unhurried. Indians move with slow deliberation according to Mrs. Chell. They like to understand before they proceed. They live in the present; planning for the future is a strange idea. Mrs. Chell is speaking from first hand observation living at Wettenberg, Wisconsin near the cranberry bogs.

Cranberries is one of the three fruits native to America, the other two being grapes and blueberries. The Indians used cranberries to treat wounds, dye rugs and blankets into a brilliant red. They were first called bearberries because the bears ate them. Cranberries and dried venison pounded into a pulp, patted into cakes and placed on a rock to bake in the sun made a stape food called Pemmican, which was used on long journies. Cranberries are grown in Wisconsin and tended by Indians. They thrive in bogs built in peat swamps. Nature gives all they need: peat, soli, sand and fresh water.

An old Indian told a young boy how "Medicine" came to be. Nearly all tribes make use of herbs and plants with certain rituals, so this explanation seems to apply to the Winnebago.

The Maker-of-All, the Creator, called one man from each tribe and when he had gathered them he taught the making of medicine. He showed them the proper herbs, leaves, stones, fruits, and internal organs. Then he showed them how these must be collected, preserved, and used. He explained the remedy that would help each different illness, and he told the Indians the mystical words that must often accompany these. Sometimes, He said, certain dances or other traditions must also be observed in conjunction with medicine water or medicine salve.

Now he instructed each in a preparation of a very special mixture to be used only when all else failed, for it was powerful with great magic. Its secret was to be told only to that person who would replace its holder as medicine keeper, upon death. They must never let its secret be lost or all of the medicine used up. On the day that medicine was no more the Indian people would vanish from the earth forever. Each man was to go back to his tribe to be a hereditary medicine man.

Among the Indian bands that traded a high esteem was universally placed upon Sewan, also called wampum. This material, made from beads of shell, was prized by the Iroquois and other tribes who had no easy access to the raw materials. Far inland excavations generally uncover some of these beads.

The Indians explored the land and discovered its important natural resources. They found the easiest trails,

WINNEBAGO BRAVE

frequently animal paths, and the safest places to cross rivers. They located springs and guided the white man to them. They taught white men how to travel by canoe and on snowshoes. The planting of corn was another way the Indian guided the newcomers and they showed him how to cook the corn and other foods.

At a trading post glass beads, cloth, knives, and other articles were sold to the Indians in exchange for furs and hides. Traders along the Rock River would get fresh supplies from Chicago and take the Indian furs there for sale. Small communities sometimes grew up around these posts.

The tomahawk, or war hatchet, was one of the handiest weapons or tools of the North American Indian. The original type had hatchet heads made of flint and tied to wooden handles with animal skin cords. When the white man came he made iron-headed tomahawks to trade with the Indian for furs. Some of these weapons were heirlooms handed down from father to son. Some tomahawks were used for ceremonies being buried when they made peace and dug up when they made war. A common saying is "bury the hatchet".

The arrowhead is the striking end of an arrow. It is usually a seperate piece attached to the front of an arrow shaft. Many Indian arrowheads were made from flint. The maker split off pieces from a large stone, using a heavy rock or boulder as a hammer. Selecting a piece of stone, he grasped it tightly between the plam and finger

tips of one hand, and pressed the upper side of the stone near the edge with an antler or bone tool. This process removed a small chip from the underside of the arrowhead. And he repeated it until the stone took the shape he wanted.

This is the way the old Indian taught a boy the ancient craft. The boy said that while making the arrowhead,

"I got to see the arrowhead pouch and other hereditary things left to him by his father. I had just finished chipping finger grips in a large stone so that it could be used as a hammer for flint. We both looked at the still closed pouch. I, with a kind of awe; and he with a sort of reverence. It was of very old leather, chestnut brown and quite stiff. First he took from it a portion of deer antler with two tines protruding from it which was some sort of tool. The handle was smoothed by many years of use. It was used in flaking the final point and edges of stone tools such as arrowheads, knife blades, and spear points. Then he removed some arrow points he said we would use as models. These were the silent teachings of his ancestors. Making of stone tools had been very important to all braves in the old times. If a man did not become proficient in this skill he would not be able to kill a deer and he was apt to go hungry. No woman or her family would find him suitable for a husband. Young men made a small number of excellent stone tools and put them aside to save. When he found the girl he wanted for his wife, he would present these along with other gifts to her father. These particular tools had been made by his grandfather. They had been presented to his great-grandfather in order that he might smile on the courting of his daughter. After the Europeans came no one tried to make the stone tools. After several failures, the arrowhead began to assume the right shape. Then with the use of the point of the antler tiny flakes were removed bringing the tip to a neat point. As I completed the arrowhead, he extended the pouch and told me the beautiful arrowheads and other tools of his grandfather were mine. These were the stones that connected the life of the old man with those who had gone before him.

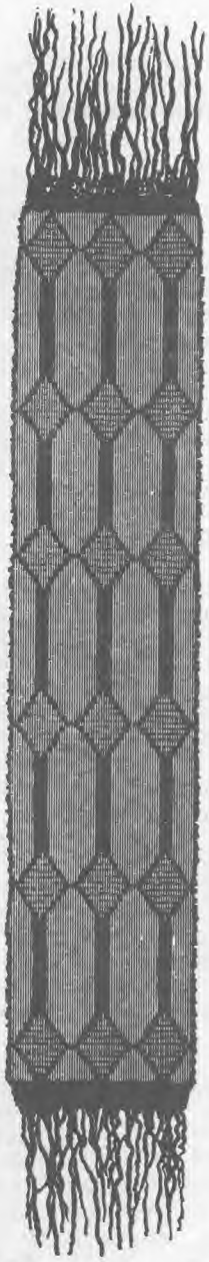
The Bison is the animal that provided food for the Indians between the Appalachian Mountains and the Rockies. When the bison were killed off the Indians suffered greatly. These animals feed on grass and move in large herds. The Indians had devised several ways of securing the buffalo they needed.

Stories told of bison in this area of northern Illinois, especially Winnebago County, are proven by the buffalo wallows still left in many fields. I was shown the near hard-pan ground that had been a favorite place for buffalo in early days. I photographed buffalo in Custer Park, for they are now protected in order that they may not become extinct.

Many Indians made their clothing from animal skins and fur. Buckskin, which is tanned deer skin was one of the most commonly used materials. Buffalo hide, strips of

WINNEBAGO

SIOUAN STOCK



rabbit fur, and bird skin were used. Buffalo robes were used by the white man in early days in northern Illinois. Some men wore only a breechcloth in hot weather. Leggings, shirts, and robes were used in cold weather. Moccasins were the common footwear.

In the Indian family men and women had separate responsibilities. Either group would have felt ashamed to do the work of the other. In the Winnebago tribe men spent time hunting or fighting. The men might help a little in the fields, but the women did most of the work while their husbands hunted. The women took charge of the home, often they even built it. They cooked, cared for the children, and did nearly all the work that could be done near the home.

Buffalo hunting was staged by the Winnebagoes as mass forays into the prairies for a few weeks each summer. The only tribes in the Great Lakes and Northeast region that did not hunt Buffalo were the Potawatomi and Ottawa. They traded for the wild rice with the Menominee, for example. Even the Winnebago was semi-nomadic, wandering within a radius of a hundred miles from their base villages to hunt. Close by the base village were cleared fields where women planted and tended corn, squash, beans and tobacco crops.

Tobacco had profound religious significance. They believed it was a gift from the spirits and to thank them the Winnebago made frequent offerings of tobacco. In addition to ritualistic use, tobacco was important in establishing relations between peoples. Peace treaties between tribes were sealed by communal smoking. A photograph in Readers Digest Book of Indian Heritage shows a 19th Century Winnebago carved columet pipestem reflecting a high degree of craftsmanship.

A photograph of a Mide Bag of otterskin containing medicinal charms, a few shells, and herbs with applicaded bead-work and bells belonged to the Winnebago Midewiwin Society, an organization of healers. This type of Mide Bag is derived from a myth in which four spirit-beings, each carrying a live otter, appeared among the tribesmen and brought back to life a youth who had been dead. A Mide Bag was highly prized by its owner and was buried with him.

A variety of methods of cooking corn was used by the Winnebagoes -- boiled, roasted, dried, and ground into meal-but steamed corn was a favorite. This was prepared in a deep pit, its bottom lined with hot stones. Over this the Indians placed husks then fresh corn, then more husks. Finally a thin layer of dirt. When all was ready, they poured water over the pit. The water seeped through the loosely packed dirt to the stones to create steam and cook the corn.

"Who invented Maple Syrup?" is the beginning of an article in the March 1983 Yankee Magazine. The article by Robin Hansen of Maine, continues: "Chippewa legend says that at the beginning of all things, the maple trees gave finished maple syrup. However, the Great Spirit feared that the people would become lazy if foodstuffs were too easy to get, so he diluted the syrup with water--so much that the Indians like their white descendants in the art of maple sugar gathering, then had to boil down at least

ten gallons of sap to make a quart of syrup or a pint of sugar.

The mystery of how the Indians first discovered the right kind of maple tree, the way to gain the sap without damaging the tree, and the process of boiling it down still remains and perhaps heightens our enjoyment all the more.

The maple is described in World Book as a handsome tree from which we derive maple syrup and valuable wood. More than a hundred species of the maple family exist. They grow throughout the temperate regions of the world. Thirteen species of maple are native to the United States. Those grown in the open have full rounded tops useful for shade. Their leaves are very beautiful and they have winged fruits that sail through the air and carry the seeds far from the tree. These are called keys or key fruits. Squirrels, birds and chipmunks enjoy these seeds. So, again, how did the first users discover which tree was the sugar maple?

Robin Hansen, whose story first appeared in The Times Record, Brunswick, Maine, tells this tale: "One night a giant maple on the edge of our pond crashed and lay sprawled on the ice, a punkerbrush of twigs and branches. My husband, thinking of woodstoves and the beginning of the sugar season, began to butcher it.

"The next noon, the children and I went to view the remains. The trunk and the stumps of the lead branches were a jungle gym inviting the children to climb, and in the warm late February sun, each stump end had dripped an icicle of sap.

"Now, everyone likes a good clean icicle on a warm winter day, so we broke them off and ate them - and they were sweet! As sweet and soft as popsicles. The light breeze had evaporated much of the water from them, leaving a soft, sugary ice.

"So there was the origin of the legend about who discovered maple sugar, and maybe even the source of the idea of maple sugar. The trees do give sweets, but not much unless you work for it."

Where most white men saw leaves dancing in the wind, a path strewn with pine needles and a fringe of wild flowers, the Indians could read tales of the past, present, and future written as clearly as a book. It might tell of a squirrel fighting for its life from a forest predator, told perhaps by a disturbance of foliage, a disarrangement of twigs and a few tracks. A crushed place in the grass might tell of a bear looking for wild strawberries.

Indian women knew hoe to make jerky, to tan hides, and to dry berries. Where reeds and rushes grew near water, they could weave them into mats or rugs and baskets. They were alert to the time when the sweet sap of hard maple was ready to be gathered.

Small bands would migrate from time to time to the traditional fishing and hunting grounds where they could live "before the sun". Before game had diminished the men hunted elk, deer, bear, wolf, and buffalo. Both bear and man enjoyed the wild blackberries. The sugar maple was

tapped in the spring for its sweet juices. Much the same methods were used as those later employed by the white man.

The Algonquin tongue included the Ottawa, Pottawatomie, the Kickapoo, the Chippewa, the Ojibway, and the Illinois. In the aréa were also the Sauk, the Fox, and the Mascouten.

When I first arrived in Illinois, there were many new experiences to try. The first spring we went to buy maple syrup, where it was completely prepared by the owners of a grove of sugar maples. The sap was flowing so we were escorted around to see several trees where the liquid was dripping into buckets. Although that was over forty-five years ago, the memory still remains. A tiny taste of the sap was a new flavor to me. The large tanks of the liquid surprised me. The entire process was explained and finally we took home our pure maple syrup. We still buy pure maple syrup occasionally or the little molded candy of maple sugar.

Several years ago there was a feature article in the Rockford newspaper about a place along Pecatonica River where people could have the fun and learn how maple sap is turned into a taste delight. Even children were encouraged to take part in the activity, emptying the buckets of sap. This is close to the area where there were encampments of Indians many years ago. Local historian Clement Burns frequently pointed out the places frequented by Indians in the local area. His widow, Barbara Burns, was also knowledgeable both about Indians and making of maple syrup. Helen Sarver who has collected much local history in the hope of some day assembling it into a scrapbook, remembers about the sugar maples along Pecatonica River and how children went out, under supervision, and gathered it for several seasons.

An acquaintance in Vermont told that people with groves in sugar maple trees are being required to reduce the liquid much more before selling it to the processors.

Maple-sugar Camp

This makes it much less profitable and more time consuming. Breakfast syrups have less percentage of maple syrup due to increased costs of processing and a decline in production of raw sap from the sugar maples.

Rockford Register Star, November 22, 1983, had an article entitled "County Pupils Tap Sugar Maple Trees". Some people gasped in wonder, thinking the seasons were reversed for the hard maple juices or sap are customarily gathered in the spring! The writer Steve Newton continued "In what may be turning over a new leaf in Winnebago and Boone County history, official trees for those counties will be proclaimed at a ceremony today." This ceremony was held in the Winnebago-Boone Regional Office of Education in the Winnebago County Courthouse. Prior to a vote by elementary school children, a committee of educators and officials from nature areas had prepared a 35-page packet on trees. There were descriptions, natural history stories, tree identification keys, and mapping studies. Blanche Martin said it was designed to put children in touch with the natural world and create an awareness of trees in the local area. In Winnebago County the top three in the vote were Sugar Maple 2,038, Silver Maple 1,854, and Red Oak 1,409. Other trees high on the list were Honey Locust, Black Walnut, Sycamore, Red Cedar, Burr Oak, and Shagbark Hickory. As a result the sugar maple was designated as the official Winnebago County tree. In Boone County the Sycamore became the official county tree.

(Concluded in next issue)

CORRECTION

In NUGGETS OF HISTORY, Volume 21, No. 4, Autumn, 1984, page 3, Dr. Mary V. Braginton was referred to as president of Rockford College. Dr. Braginton was dean of Rockford College, not president. Dr. Mary Ashby Cheek, a frequent visitor at the home of Dr. Frances Johnson, was president of Rockford College. We regret the error. --Hazel M. Hyde.

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