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BEAVER ISLAND AND ITS MORMON KINGDOM

BY CHAS. J. STRANG, ONE OF "KING" STRANG'S SONS

BEAVER ISLAND, the largest in Lake Michigan, lies about thirty miles northwest of Little Traverse Bay. From 1850 to 1856 this island was the headquarters of a band of people who assumed for themselves rights and prerogatives contrary to the spirit of our constitution and laws, and whose acts made a considerable portion of the history of the Traverse region for that decade. The rise and fall of the "kingdom" which then flourished there will always be a prolific subject for writers who visit this northern country.

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JAMES J. STRANG

(FROM THE ONLY PHOTOGRAPH OF HIM KNOWN TO BE IN EXISTENCE)

.... THE INDIAN COMPANY

ONE of the interesting features of the late Civil War was a company of Indian soldiers who fought under Grant from the battle of the Wilderness until the surrender of the Confederates at Appomattox Court House.

“Company K, First Michigan Sharpshooters,” was composed almost entirely of Indians from the Little Traverse Region. Of the 100 men who left to fight for their country, scarcely half that number returned. The company was organized at Little Traverse in 1863 by Lieut. G. A. Graveraet, a gallant young soldier, who fell mortally wounded in the battle before Petersburg, after digging a grave for his father who fell by his side.

Letters received home from superior officers stated that the Indians were among the best soldiers in the service. They entered each battle with vim and vigor and fought as gallantly for that same country under the stars and stripes as their ancestors did when they defended it from the whites under the feathers of the wild American Eagle.

WEOSMA: A TALE OF THE OTTAWAS

IN READMOND township, 'neath the wide spreading boughs of a large oak, is a mound which marks the last resting place of one of the noble red men of the forest.

Having heard that there was a story connected with the one whose remains were interred beneath the sod, the writer asked an old native who resided near by if he could inform him of the circumstances of the case. "Bad story; me tell you," replied the old Indian, and as he lighted his pipe I sat down on a log beside him while he related the following sad tale:

During the palmiest days of the Ottawa Indians, when their arrows brought the crimson blood spouting forth from many a wild deer and their war-whoops sent terror to the hearts of the braves of contemporary tribes, Weosma, a brave

known as Mormons. Their leader was James J. Strang, who called himself a "king," and assumed many of the prerogatives of a monarch.

Mr. Strang was born in Scipio, N. Y., March 21, 1813, but grew to manhood in Chautauqua County. His education was obtained in the public schools of the county, closing with a course in the Fredonia Academy. He studied law, and was admitted to the bar. In 1843 he settled in Burlington, Wis., and some time before the death of Joseph Smith, in 1844, he visited Nauvoo and became a Mormon. After Smith's death, Strang disputed with Brigham Young the right to lead the church, and succeeded in gathering quite a large following at his "stake of Zion" in Wisconsin. In 1847 he visited Beaver Island, and decided to establish his people there, founding the village of St. James, which was named in honor of himself. On July 8, 1850, he reorganized his church and established the "kingdom," and from that day he was known as "King Strang." His authority was respected and obeyed by the "Saints," and as cheerfully hated and opposed by the "Gentiles." He controlled the Mormon vote, and was elected to the Legislature of 1853, and again in 1855.

The practice of "consecration" led to many conflicts between the Mor-

mons and Gentile fishermen in that vicinity. Such expressions as "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof," and, "We are the Lord's chosen people," stilled the consciences and justified the use of property lawfully owned by others, yet it is undoubtedly true that many depredations were committed by irresponsible persons and deliberately charged to the Mormons.

Mr. Strang had frequent collisions with the authorities at Mackinac, but with his knowledge of the law, and his readiness in debate, he cleared himself from every charge. At one time the Sheriff of Mackinac County hunted him three days in the wilds of the island with a posse of ten whites and thirty Indians, and offered a reward of \$300 for his body, dead or alive, but Mr. Strang eluded them and avoided arrest.

In the spring of 1856 matters reached a crisis. A resident of the island, Mr. Thomas Bedford, had been publicly flogged by Mr. Strang's authority, and he determined to have revenge. He enlisted the support of a few others, among them Mr. Alex. Wentworth, and they decided to kill Mr. Strang. The opportunity came on June 20, when the U. S. steamer Michigan was in the harbor at St. James, Strang was fatally shot, after which Bedford, Wentworth, and some



RESIDENCE OF JAMES J. STRANG ON BEAVER ISLAND FROM 1850 TO 1856

others were taken to Mackinac, "tried," and acquitted. After the acquittal, Bedford and his friends organized a company at Mackinac and other points near the islands, and returned to St. James and drove from their homes every Mormon except a very few who were willing to renounce their religion. Strang's house and printing office were ransacked and robbed of everything of value; the tabernacle was destroyed, and the property of the Mormons confiscated and divided among the raiders. Warning was served on the Mormons to leave the island within a specified time. The warning was heeded, a few going to the mainland near Charlevoix, but the main body proceeded to Milwaukee and Chicago. Mr. Strang was removed to Wisconsin, where he died July 9, 1856.

Strang's house, which has been raised by recent writers to the dignity of a "royal palace," was substantially built of hewn logs, and after the dispersion of the Mormons it became the mecca of relic hunters, and so continued until 1892, when it was destroyed by fire.

Of the present residents of the village of St. James, the majority are Irish Catholics, many of them having gone there directly from Ireland. The principal occupation of the people is fishing, and they live happy and contented in their island home.

... AN INDIAN LAWSUIT

SOMETIME during the year 1830, Dun-a-age-ee, an Indian, killed his niece, a beautiful girl of sixteen summers, near Seven Mile Point.

The Indians knew that Dun-a-age-ee had committed a terrible crime, and the friends of the young girl wished to punish him as the white people did their criminals, but as they had no method in their native customs of disposing of such cases, except by barbaric forms, they went for advice to Col. Boyd, a white haired veteran of the war of the revolution, who resided at Mackinac Island, and who had much influence among them. Mr. Boyd, fearing to make enemies of Dun-a-age-ee's friends, told the Indians he would have nothing to do with the matter and advised them to mete out to the prisoner whatever punishment they found he deserved by some proceedings of their own.

After much consultation, the chiefs decided to hold a lawsuit. So a large

wigwam was built on the bluff near Seven Mile Point and all the relatives of the murderer and his victim assembled and also a number of onlookers.

On either side of the tent were long benches, the relatives of Dun-a-age-ee on one side, and those of the murdered girl on the other, the oldest member of the family being seated at the head and so on down.

At the head of the tent on an elevated platform, sat A-pock-o-ze-gun, the great chief of the Ottawas, his person ornamented with feathers and beads and wearing his beautifully embroidered blanket, as was customary at great events. In the center of the tent were great piles of furs, blankets, butts of tobacco, guns, ammunition, etc. Outside were horses, cattle, in fact, everything that the Indians considered wealth, brought there by the relatives of Dun-a-age-ee to buy their kinsman's liberty.

When the time for the trial arrived Chief A-pock-o-ze-gun arose and made a short, eloquent speech in his native tongue. He said they were not gathered to avenge the murdered girl, as their priest told them God would do that; but they were there for the purpose of making peace between the estranged kinsmen.

He then produced a caluma (long pipe), from one of the medicine men pre-

sent, and, filling it with tobacco lit it by a flint and steel. After he had taken a long puff he presented it to the first of Dun-a-age-ee's relatives, his father, who smoked it as a token of peace.

The chief said, "Me-sa-gwa-uck," which means "that's right," and passed it to the next man, who likewise took a puff, and so on, to the end of that row.

The chief then passed the pipe to the first one on the other side, a girl, who, after some hesitation, took it and smoked. All followed her example, down to the first of two of the girl's brothers, who sat at the upper end. The brother shook his head and said "kaw" (no).

The chief muttered "too bad," and taking the pipe, emptied it of its contents. Then he refilled it, and lighting it, handed it to the last brother.

"Kaw! kaw!" he said, indignantly, and turning to his other brothers and sisters, who had smoked the pipe of peace, he rebuked them fiercely, saying that for those few articles they were willing to sacrifice their sister's life, but that he would not rest till he had killed the villain.

The friends of Dun-a-age-ee advised him to fly lest the brother kill him, and he accordingly left for the Saginaws, where he remained until the man who had sworn the vendetta was dead.

THE SEA SERPENT

BESIDES its natural beauties and historical interest, Little Traverse Bay presents another attraction of a peculiar nature which in late years has caused much interest throughout the country. We have reference to the famous sea serpent. The Indians have always claimed that some great marine monster inhabited the bay, but, of course, as these people are very superstitious, their belief should be given little credence. Yet the appearance of some strange creature in the waters of the bay may have had something to do with the origin of their legend.

Several times in late years different persons claim to have seen while in a boat and oftentimes from the shore a great monster in the bay.

On one occasion while a steamer was carrying a crowd of pleasure seekers from Petoskey to Charlevoix, a large number of the excursionists viewed together what appeared to be a long serpent making its way at a rapid rate through the water.

Many people, however, disclaim the stories and say it is all imagination. But if people are subject to optical illusions, the camera is not. The accompanying picture of the serpent was taken from the steam ferry "Adrienne" while crossing the bay from Petoskey to Harbor Springs in June, 1895. That it was not a log is vouchsafed for by the fact that it disappeared from view as the boat approached it. Whether the object was a living thing or not remains a mystery.



Some of the people residing upon the bay, whose enthusiasm got the better of their judgment, obtained a distorted log and tried to palm it off as the sea serpent, but the object seen so many times in the waters of Little Traverse Bay, is something of a far different nature than an ordinary log.

No doubt imagination has had much to do with this sea serpent, but it would not be very surprising if a marine monster of some description had taken a particular fancy to the surroundings of the bay and had made it his home, allowing himself to be seen just often enough to arouse the curiosity of the people.

warrior and hunter, whose aim was perfect and whose foot was as light as a fleeting deer's, resided with his aged mother among a peaceful clan of these Indians who had pitched their tents where Cross Village now stands.

All the young maidens of the village vied with each other in trying to win this brave young hunter's hand, but he was heedless to their attentions and lived happily in the company of his mother. But as Cupid was not absent, only sleeping, the wanting one at last appeared and awoke the nymph of love to his highest pitch, and Weosma was a victim as helpless as any ever was before.

His enamorate was Enewah, the bewitching daughter of a great chief who ruled over the tribe in the region of Little Traverse. Weosma had first met her while on a hunting expedition and ever after that eventful day his life was not the same; he was unhappy when out of her company and he exerted himself in performing brave deeds that he might be worthy of Enewah's love. Enewah in turn looked with favor upon his attentions and their wedding day was fixed, and all looked bright and promising for the future life of the happy couple. But like the adder that stingeth in the dark, an evil one appeared upon the



scene, who by the fertility of a revengeful brain, forever blighted their happy life.

Amo, a rejected suitor of Enewah's, had sworn revenge upon the fair young maiden, and now came a glorious opportunity to carry out his vendetta.

Great preparations had been made for the wedding day. As Weosma was a very popular young man, all the chiefs and medicine men of the tribe were to hold a great feast in honor of his success. The evening previous to the great occasion Amo arrived at Enewah's wigwam in breathless haste and warned the girl not to marry a young man who was already betrothed to a woman of another tribe, which, to the Ottawas, was a great crime. Enewah only laughed in scorn at Amo's scheme and turned away, saying that Weosma was too good a man to do anything of that sort. Then Amo told the story to her father, the great chief, who thinking him his friend, forbid his daughter marrying such a scoundrel as Weosma was proven to be.

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