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Indians of Nebraska and South Dakota

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

MARCH 27, 1896.—Referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs and ordered to be printed.

Mr. ALLEN presented the following:

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SANTEE SIOUX INDIANS OF NEBRASKA AND THE FLANDREAU SIOUX INDIANS OF SOUTH DAKOTA, BY REV. JAMES GARVIE.

The Santee Sioux Indians of Nebraska and the Flandreau Sioux of South Dakota were formerly known as the Medawakanton and Wahpakoota, or Sioux of the Mississippi. These Indians inhabited a wide tract of land lying along the western boundary of Wisconsin, the northwestern part of Illinois, the northern part of Missouri, the whole of the State of Iowa, the eastern part of North and South Dakota, and the southern part of Minnesota. Their permanent home, when they first came in contact with the white man, was on both sides of the Mississippi River, between La Crosse, Wis., and St. Paul, Minn., and also along the Minnesota River. They have made various treaties with the United States under various names. (See Revision of Indian Treaties, pp. 634, 780, 869, 870, 876, 882, 885.) The name Medawakanton means "sacred lake," or "spirit lake village," and Wahpakoota means "leaf shooters," and thus some of their treaties are entered into under the name of "Sioux of the Leaf" and "Sioux of the Mississippi" or "Sioux of the Lake," etc.

Until the year 1837 the Medawakantons were composed of seven bands, numbering about 1,700, and they entered into a treaty with the United States, dated September 29, 1837, which was ratified June 15, 1838 (7 Stat. L., 538). It will be observed that the Medawakantons were the only Indian parties to this said treaty.

About this time the Medawakantons inhabited both sides of the Mississippi River at the place heretofore described. According to the above-mentioned treaty, the Medawakantons relinquished their title to all land lying on the west side of Wisconsin along the Mississippi River for the small sum of \$300,000, to draw 5 per cent interest forever, and other articles named for different periods of time.

After the treaty of 1837 the Medawakantons had their permanent home on the west side of the Mississippi River. The places where they made their homes afterwards became town sites, namely, Wabasha, Red Wing, Mendota, and other places.

It would seem from the records of legislation that the name "Sioux of the Mississippi" was used in making appropriations for the Medawakantons, the treaty of 1837 being made with them exclusively.

The Indian Bureau and the Interior Department are also of the opinion that the Sioux of the Mississippi means the Medawakantons, Wahpakoota, Sissetons, and Wahpetons; but this opinion is incorrect, for the old men of the Sisseton and Wahpeton tribes acknowledge that they were without rations or annuity goods up to that time, unless the good-hearted Medawakantons extended to them part of their annual allowance from the United States; and the Sissetons and Wahpetons made no treaties with the United States until after one was made exclusively by them at Traverse des Sioux, July 23, 1851 (10 Stat. L., 949).

On August 5, 1851, the Medawakantons made another treaty with the United States at Mendota, under which a small roaming band of about three or four hundred Indians was admitted as a part of the confederacy of the Medawakantons. They were known as the Wahpakoota band, and have been connected as legal members of the Medawakanton Sioux band since then.

Under the treaty of 1851 the Medawakantons and Wahpakootas agreed to be removed to certain reservations set aside for their permanent home. (See Articles III and IV of the treaty of 1851, 10 Stat. L., p. 954.) The Sissetons and Wahpetons also agreed to be removed to their permanent reservation set apart for their home under the agreement of 1851. (See Articles II and III, treaty of 1851, Vol. 10 Stat. L., p. 949.)

Prior to these two treaties the Medawakantons and Wahpakootas were occupying territory all along the Mississippi and mouth of the Minnesota River, or in the east central part of the country now known as the State of Minnesota, and the Sissetons and Wahpetons were occupying the west central part of Minnesota, or the region lying along the source of the Minnesota River, Big Stone Lake and Traverse Lake. The distance between the two bands or parties was something over 200 miles. The distance was not so great but that they could visit, as they speak the same language, though they recognize each other as distinct bands or nations.

Not until the two treaties named did the Government fulfill its agreement under the articles named, to bring the four bands together at their proposed permanent homes on the Minnesota River, immediately west of New Ulm.

According to the description of the treaties named, these four bands were to occupy a tract of land 10 miles wide on either side of the Minnesota River, beginning on the east at a small creek called Rock Creek, extending to the west about 140 miles, touching on the north side of the Minnesota River the counties of Chippewa, Renville, Sibley, and Nicollet, and on the south Brown, Redwood, Yellow Medicine, and Lac qui Parle counties.

When these four bands of Indians were brought together at their new agencies they were recognized by their respective positions, and the Medawakantons and Wahpakootas were known as "Lower Sioux," or Redwood Agency Indians, because they occupied the lower part of the Minnesota River, and the Sissetons and Wahpetons were known as "Upper Sioux," or Yellow Medicine Agency Indians. It was while they were here that the outbreak occurred, under a severe strain produced by intruding whites of all classes and ranks.

The general story seems to be that these four bands of Indians had adopted civilization to a certain extent and depended upon farming and rations of the Government, and on their credit with the traders. The war of the rebellion broke out and appropriations were behind time,

and some of the white men who pretended to be friends of the Indians alleged that the annuities were not to be paid, for the Government was carrying on a great war that would use up all the money. Traders refused to credit the Indians any longer. The agent also refused to aid them with rations, while in the warerooms there was plenty. Unfortunately, the year before the outbreak of 1862 a drought had prevailed all over the territory occupied by the Indians, and as they could no longer depend on hunting, but were trying to support themselves on farming, they had a hard time during the winter of 1862, and with money and annuity goods behind time. Some of the Sissetons and Wahpetons who came down to draw their annuity goods and money payments were disappointed and broke into the warehouse to help themselves, for which they were threatened by the United States troops; but wise counsel and cool management brought matters to a peaceable conclusion.

About this time many of the Indians went off to hunt and to find something to eat. One of the parties who went away committed a depredation upon some white farmers, which is set out in the affidavit of Robert Hakewaste in Senate Document No. 85, Fifty-fourth Congress, first session.

It is not my intention to go into the details of the outbreak of 1862, but to use it in connecting the events of history.

Many of the Indians at this time, who had become Christianized by missionary workers among them, and many of the old chiefs, were actuated with a purpose to live like white people, and educate their children, but, like other people, they had some bad, restless, discontented, warlike persons among them, who provoked trouble and compelled the better element to join them by threats of death. I was told by one of the old men, who was in the midst of the outbreak, that he saw with his own eyes Chief Wabashaw caught by his arms and dragged to the front of the trouble, and he tried to keep away from the trouble and take no part in it, and as he could not get himself loose from them, he sobbed like a child; that all of the chiefs of the Medawakantons and Wahpakootas were opposed to an outbreak except one, Little Crow, so often named in history, and his followers.

This statement can be confirmed by consulting the Commissioner's report of 1862 (p. 314), where a statistical report will be found, made by one of the army officers, showing that over three-fourths of the Medawakantons and Wahpakootas, with their chiefs, voluntarily gave themselves up to General Sibley. Out of that number there were only 300 Sissetons. These people stopped, though they knew the troops were after them, and concluded to make peace, which was accomplished by a letter found by some of the members of the Medawakanton and Sisseton bands who went to the camp of General Sibley near Yellow Medicine. This party who went out to investigate matters in the rear of the place of the trouble found a letter in a deserted camp containing these words:

All those who want peace must make a camp by themselves away from the hostile Indians and put up a sign of the white flag. By so doing no one will be harmed, and they who do so must keep their post. If you want to make peace, send someone immediately with a white flag, and no one will harm him, and he shall return to your camp safely. If you want to follow this plan, it will be well for you to do so right away. Those who wish to be friendly we do not desire to harm, but we will fight those who wish to fight us, and those only.

Gen. H. H. SIBLEY.

This note was read in camp at Yellow Medicine Creek, where the Medawakantons and the other three bands were camped for the purpose of considering which was the best way to make peace. When the letter quoted was brought to the camp, they immediately held a council and selected two mixed-bloods of Medawakanton descent, who were called Thomas Robinson and Thomas A. Robertson, to go to General Sibley's camp and make peace with him for those who desired to make peace. They could have gotten away from General Sibley if they had chosen to do so, but they preferred peace. After peace was accepted General Sibley's troops came to the camp and peace was acknowledged between them, and the Indians delivered up over 250 white captives, including women and children.

From this camp the Indians were invited to come to Yellow Medicine Agency, which was in ruins, except a few of the houses, which were in proper shape to be used as guardhouses. In a stealthy way groups of men were called together at the agency buildings, for what no one seemed to know; but soon the white men, who wished to make peace, were discovered holding a court-martial, and the work of disarming was in progress, and as a man was disarmed he passed into one of the empty agency buildings bound hand and foot, mostly by twos. Soon the work was completed, and the families of the prisoners were taken to Fort Snelling, near the mouth of the Minnesota River, and the male prisoners were taken to Mankato, Minn., where a further investigation was to be had. This occurred in the winter of 1863.

A military court was created, before which seven-eighths of these men were brought to prove their innocence or be condemned as guilty. Of those who were thus brought to trial, about 50 were acquitted, 303 were condemned to be hanged, and 20 were condemned to be imprisoned for from one to five years.

In looking back upon the work of condemnation accomplished by that court, two things are very apparent: First, in the majority of instances the trial was so brief and hurried that the facts could not possibly be ascertained. It is to be remembered that forty cases were finished in one day, and there were other days when over thirty cases were disposed of. Second, the principle that all participation in the outbreak was punishable by death, acted upon by the court, was a very wrong one. In many cases persons acknowledged that they had been present at some battle, as at Fort Ridgely, New Ulm, Birch Coolie, or Woodlake, and if a man was present at one of these places with a gun and ammunition, and had fired off that gun, there was one law of condemnation for him. In addition to this, it was held that a half-breed might be forced to go into these battles, but not a pure Indian.

In considering this action of the military court, as it has now become a matter of history, it is necessary to remark that the action and the principles on which it was based were the result of the highly exasperated state of feeling which existed in the minds of all white people on the border against all Indians. "They are Indians" was regarded as sufficient justification for hasty and superficial trials. Six months afterwards, when men came to discriminate, the same court would have conducted the trials more properly, and the majority of the findings would have been quite different.

The report of the military court was transmitted to the President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln. Thirty-eight of these prisoners were hanged, and the remainder of the three hundred were imprisoned at Mankota for the winter. As soon as the river was navigable the prisoners were transported to Davenport, Iowa, while their

families, who were quartered at Fort Snelling for the winter, were also transported on a steamer by way of St. Louis, and were taken to Crow Creek or Fort Thompson.

These poor women and children had to remain there for two years, fatherless, with scanty rations and fruitless toil in gardens, owing to the fact that it was exceedingly dry during those two years and nothing was produced.

After two years of fruitless experiences in trying to raise crops to make a living, they were once more removed to the mouth of the Niobrara River, in the then Territory (now State) of Nebraska. Under an act of February 3, 1863, Congress, after abrogating all the treaty stipulations, provided for 80 acres of good agricultural lands outside of the limits of Minnesota for the use of each. For once the Government authorities tried to fulfill one of its obligations, as these people, who were placed on a desert, or nearly a desert, were removed to fertile land at the mouth of the Niobrara River. But, alas! the whites were there before the Indians, and some measures had to be taken to put the Indians away from the white community. Although the President of the United States, Andrew Johnson, ordered that certain tracts of land should be held for these homeless people, still the white people first and the Indians last was the rule of the Government who promised to care for the latter.

So these people must move farther east, toward the roughest of the Missouri bluffs, and here they remain to this day, under difficult circumstances—a place where the experienced white farmers have hard work to make both ends meet. Still, this is the place where the Government expects the Indians to be self-supporting and good, respectable citizens!

It is at this place where a sudden change of name from the Medawakanton and Wahpakoota to the Santee Sioux took place. The Indians themselves do not know how it came about, but it is supposed that this name was applied to them by those who were west of the Missouri River, who were known to call all Indians east of the Missouri River Santee Indians.