

# "The Musquakas of Tama County" Essay from The Annals of Iowa, 1870

*The Musquakas of Tama County*

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I thought it might be well to sketch a few incidents in the early history of Tama county.

On the south bank of the Iowa river, near the western border of the county, where bluff, bottom, river, and timberland all blend into a beautiful landscape, is now the somewhat dilapidated village of Indiantown. Here, upon the interval near the bank of the river, was a settlement or colony of Musquakas, that gave name to this settlement of the white man. These Indians, according to certain treaty stipulations, were required to leave for the more distant west, and to enforce their removal, a company of United States troops were sent out, who, on arriving at the place, planted their cannon on a neighboring bluff, ready to enforce their order.

Here was real trouble for the poor Indians. It was true, such a treaty had been gotten up, somehow, but they did not consider themselves a party to the contract. They were innocently there, where game and fish were plenty, where springs of pure water flowed from the sides of the bluffs, where the tortuous Iowa ran silently by their cabins, where a broad belt of timber furnished poles and bark for their wigwams, and fuel for their fires, and where were a healthful climate, fertile soil, and a variegated landscape scarcely surpassed in the west. On the north side of the river was an opening in the timber, where the squaws had raised several acres of excellent corn, which was now in the milk, ready to be gathered and dried for winter's use. It was sad to leave all these, but a power greater than they compelled submission.

A few white men settled in that vicinity about the time the Indians left, and the writer has heard them say, that, although it was for their interest to have them go, yet they could not help pitying them as they went. The corn-field they so reluctantly left, became the great rendezvous of game the following winter, and it was there the settler bagged many a wild turkey with which he supplied his otherwise scanty table.

In September, 1855, the writer first visited this settlement. The Indians had returned, and for some time had been occupying their old camp-ground on the banks of the river; while the whites had commenced their town at the foot of the adjacent bluffs. Here the two races were living in peace, and while the white man seemed to be a protection to the Musquaka against his inveterate enemy, the Sioux, the Indian afforded some variety to the incidents in the life of the few pioneers.

Sometimes the Indians would be greatly alarmed at the supposed approach of the Sioux. An instance of this kind occurred in the fall of 1854. Hon. P. Helm, the hotel-keeper of the settlement, was awakened in the small hours of the night by his old friend Pat-a-ka-too, who whispered to him that the Sioux were coming, and requested him to explain matters to his comrades, so that they need not be

alarmed should they hear discharges of musketry; intending by this to assure the whites of their friendship, and the danger threatened both parties by their common enemy. In his true Indian manner, he had entered the house, climbed a ladder to the chamber, whose floor was loose boards, and delivered his message without awakening anyone but Mr. Helm, though many travelers were lying on the floor promiscuously, as was usual in the early days of immigration. On the next day, a few whites and many Indians, all mounted and armed, set out in search of the formidable Sioux, and after scouring the prairie for some thirty miles around, and finding no foe, they returned to the settlement, led by the redoubtable T. D. H. Wilcoxon, Esq., resolving that they "would have peace." From that time forward, so far as I can recollect, peace reigned within their borders.

In those days, the majority of the Musquakas living on their reservation in Kansas, received the annuities awarded to their tribe by the government, while those living in Tama county received nothing, but in their yearly visits to and from Kansas, they are said to receive many valuable presents from their Kansas brethren.

Though the Sioux were a source of great fear to them, as previously stated, yet they really did not disturb their colony, so far as I know; while their friends the Winnebagoes, from the north, would occasionally visit them, express much friendly feeling, and then steal many of their ponies as they left.

About the year 1859, the Indians purchased eighty acres of land lying on the Iowa river, about five miles below their old ground. To this place they removed, built their village of bark cabins, and make it, to this day, their summer residence, while the winter is chiefly spent on the Cedar river. They have recently had an agent appointed by government, which, I suppose, entitles them to annuities, so long and so much needed. They are fast passing away; the braves that Black Hawk led on to battle have disappeared, and the whole tribe will soon be extinct. Their number has diminished more than half in the last fifteen years; and I am pleased to see that my friend J. A. Wetherby, artist, at Iowa City, has commemorated on canvas. Tama (Tahoma), Appanoosa, and others. But of all their braves, Pat-a-kattoo was the most to be admired — noble in action, strong in his influence for peace and temperance, he gained friends wherever he was known.

Mr. Wheaton Chase,\* who was Black Hawk's interpreter when he went to Washington, is now living in Tama county, I suppose, and is better informed respecting the history of this remnant of a tribe than any other person.

I will finish this sketch by a few words respecting their manner of burying the dead. Sometimes, in their haste, they would hang the body high up in a tree, and there leave it to decay; but generally they buried them with some funeral ceremony. The writer has often looked from his house, situated on one bluff, to an Indian burying ground on another bluff, some half mile distant, to see the squaws perform their rites over the graves of their friends, at their annual visitations.

After fitting up the graves and shaping the turf, they would place some little memorial on the mound, and then sit down with their heads bowed, like the captive women of Judea, and remain in this position for an hour or more.

What could be the thoughts of such a rude daughter of nature, as she sat there? She could see that the last resting place of her deceased friend was in the corner of a white man's plow-field; that all the country around was fast filling up with strangers, and that soon there would be no place left for her and her people; and then her thoughts would wander naturally away to the hunting grounds of the dimly-distant spirit land, and as she recalled the memory of her friends that had gone before, she

would pray that she, too, might soon be there, where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.