Chapter VIII

THE "OLD CROSSING" WAYSIDE MEMORIAL PARK

It seems difficult for those of us living in Polk County in 1958 to understand why the early settlers living near the "Old Crossing" in Polk and Red Lake counties did not appreciate the significance and historic importance of the "Old Crossing" on the Red Lake River. Perhaps the county separation battle, which ended in 1896 with the formation of Red Lake County out of the north central part of Polk County, diverted interest from this historic spot. Two famous pioneers, who participated indirectly in the signing of the "Old Crossing" Treaty, resided in Polk County until their lands became a part of the new county, Red Lake. The most famous and honored of the two pioneers was Pierre Bottineau, who was a noted scout and guide for the area and served as an interpreter for the Chippewa Indians at the signing of the treaty. Pierre Bottineau lived on his farm west of Red Lake Falls until his death on July 26, 1895. He was buried in a nearby cemetery. The other pioneer was Benjamin Dalbec, an escort at the treaty, who lived in that county until his passing in 1928.

While many people in the two counties had a passive interest in the "Old Crossing", yet it remained for John Saugstad of Crookston to take the leadership in the recognition of this historic spot. As state senator in 1913, he was responsible for having a marker placed at the "Old Crossing." Governor A. O. Eberhard took part in the ceremonies of this first historic recognition of the site. From that early date, John Saugstad was the torch bearer for those interested in the regional significance of this historic crossing on the Pembina Trail.

In the late twenties, a number of business leaders from the Red Lake Falls and Crookston area became interested in developing a park at the treaty site. Congressman C. G. Selvig, former Superintendent of the Northwest School and Experiment Station, his successor, Dr. A. A. Dowell, together with Sam Hunt and V. M. Higginbotham, and others from Red Lake Falls, gave added enthusiasm to the park project. Congressman C. G. Selvig introduced and secured the passage of H. R. 5271 in April, 1930, for an appropriation of $5,000 for the erection of a suitable memorial at the "Old Crossing." The Board of County Commissioners of Red Lake County purchased the 8.8 acres at the west bank of the "Old Crossing" from the Huot family. The Red River Valley Development Association pledged care and maintenance of the memorial site until its status as a state park was established. Farmers of the community, businessmen from Red Lake Falls, and committees from the Kiwanis and Rotary Service clubs of Crookston worked under the direction of the writer in cleaning up the dead trees and brush and the restoration of the "Old Trail" through the park. The memorial decided upon was the bronze life size figure of a Chippewa Indian holding the pipe of peace.