CHAPTER II.

THE EARLY INDIAN INHABITANTS.


The record of the early human occupation of the Red River Valley of the North is very incomplete and imperfect. It seems quite probable that from creation until a few hundred years ago it was not occupied at all by human beings, and its only denizens were the wild birds of the air, the wild beasts of the prairies and scanty forests, and the fishes of the lakes and streams. There are no signs of a remote settlement or other form of ancient civilization in the Valley.

That very ancient and very mysterious race, which, for inability to coin a more suitable name, we call the Mound Builders, and which lived at one period in the southeastern part of the State, never dwelt, for any considerable time in the Red River Valley. At any rate, none of their mounds and tumuli, which invariably denote and prove their former presence, are found here. There are mounds but they were not built by the old Mound Builders. The so-called Red Indians were the first human occupants, but their occupation was fugitive, unstable, and disconnected.

It is true that there are mounds or tumuli within the present boundaries of Polk County, and that some authorities have pronounced these to be the work of the old Mound Builders; of course these authorities are of those that believe the Mound Builders were the immediate ancestors of the Red Indians. The principal mound in the county is now within the limits of Crookston, and only three-fourths of a mile from the center of the city. It is on the south bank of the Red Lake River and 35 feet above the stream.

In about 1890 Prof. Moore, then principal of the Crookston City Schools, and some of his pupils made excavations in this mound and found in it human bones, including skulls. From the reports made to the compiler of this examination it does not seem that any pottery, flint, stone, or copper implements, or any other reliable evidences of Mound Builder work or occupation were found. These evidences certainly would have been unearthed had the old pre-historic race been the builders. Their work and former sites of occupation are almost as readily determined as those of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

In noting the Crookston mound Hon. William Watts plausibly suggests that it marks the site of the cemetery of an old-time Sioux village. This may be a correct theory, although we now know a great deal of the early and very early history of the Sioux, and we do not know that (at least within the proper time when skulls and other human bones would be preserved for a long time in the earth) there was ever a
considerable Indian village at the site of Crookston. If the Sioux had such a village, it must have been of the Sisseton band (Sissetonwans, or People of the Marsh), because the Sissetons were later located not very far to the west or south; we know their early history fairly well, and we have no account of such a village in that part of the country. Possibly the mound may have been the burial place for a village of Cheyenne Indians, for we well know that they were in this quarter for several years before they were driven out by the Sioux and went into various parts of South Dakota and the southeastern part of North Dakota, and mainly upon the river which still bears their name as it is commonly pronounced.

Both the Cheyennes and the Sioux built mounds over their dead; both tribes made and used pottery. But their mounds were simple sepulchres and their pottery was solely for domestic purposes. In 1680 Father Hennepin found the Sioux of Mille Lacs boiling their food in fire-proof earthen pots, which they had made. But neither tribe built large, high mounds, for temples of worship, for observation or watchtowers, and for the burial places of their chiefs or kings, as the Mound Builders always did. Neither tribe made flint and stone implements, either arrow and lance heads or axes, spades, etc., and the Mound Builders constantly made these things. The Sioux, Cheyennes, and other Red Indians picked up the flint arrow points and lance-heads and used them (though many of them had come from quarries as far off as West Virginia), but they could not make them—and none of them ever knew who did!

It is probable that the Crookston mound was made to cover the remains of their warriors slain in some pre-historic battle, in which the Sioux were the victors and had the opportunity of decently interring their dead. The Sioux often, and indeed almost commonly, raised a slight mound of earth over the skeletons of their dead. If not slain in battle, their dead were suspended in trees or placed upon high scaffolds until the flesh was gone, and then the bones were taken down and buried. Sometimes the remains were buried in receptacles made in the banks of streams and coulees, and even in the big mounds made by their predecessors in the country, the Mound Builders. The idea probably was to honor the venerated remains and to preserve them from destruction or desecration. Many a modern Indian's bones have been found in a Mound Builder's sacrificial mound, and thus fairly justifying the belief that the mound itself was the work of modern Indians.

There is a possibility that the great battle between the Sioux and the Chippewas described by Warren as having occurred on Sand Hill River, and mentioned on another page, was really fought on the Red Lake River and that the Crookston mound is the grave of the Sioux warriors killed therein—as suggested on another page. But there is no positive evidence in support of this suggestion, and Warren is clear in his statement that the battle was on the Sand Hill River. There is no mound on the Sand Hill near the supposed site of the battle, although the Sioux held the field and had the opportunity to bury their dead properly according to their custom, with a heap of dirt raised over them.

Prof. Winchell's "Aborigines of Minnesota" mentions (p. 361) the Crookston mound and gives its dimensions, when he surveyed it, in 1880, as "7 feet high and 120 feet in diameter." The location is, however, erroneously given as "about two miles southwest from Crookston."

The "Aborigines" notes (p. 362) another mound in what is now Polk County, and which is described as having a diameter of 58 feet and a height of four and a half feet. Its location is given as in township 148, range 45, not far from Melvin Station.

The Sand Hill River mounds are also noted on page 362 of "Aborigines." These are three small mounds, averaging about four feet high and 55 feet across, which are located in township 147, range 45, west of Fertile. It is difficult to tell without examination by digging into them whether these are natural or artificial. There are numerous erroneous statements in "Aborigines"—typographical errors often—regard-
ing these mounds. One, now in Red Lake County is described (p. 362) as in "section 90," when section 9 is meant.

The absence of dense forests filled with deer and other game, and furnishing fuel and material for habitations, was one reason why the Red Indians avoided the Valley region. There was little other kind of country here save the big prairies, which were almost unsurmountable save by horseback, and these aborigines had no horses, and indeed never saw one; since horses were not original to Minnesota, nor, indeed, indigenous to the United States, but had to be introduced from Europe. The aborigines of the Red River Valley, with their flint arrow heads and lance heads, and traveling altogether on foot, had a difficult job to kill buffalo and deer. Their best and common mode of securing these animals was to creep upon them as they grazed in the high grass of a lowland, near a lake or river, and, suddenly bounding forth, stampede the herd and chase its members into the water, where they often came up with them and speared them to death. Farther westward the tribes were accustomed to chase the buffalos over high precipices.

THE CRES WERE THE FIRST RED INDIANS.

The identified Indians who first visited, and probably lived at intervals, in the section of the Red River Valley now embraced within Polk County were the Creses. There were others before them, of course, but we do not know who they were or what to call them. The Creses were in this region, especially about Pembina, Lake Winnipeg, and the lower Valley, when the first white men came. The Jesuit Fathers mention them, in their "Relations" for the year 1640, as "dwellers on the rivers of the northern sea, [meaning Hudson's Bay] where the Nipissings go to trade with them." Lacome, in his "Dictionary of the Cree Language," says that, according to their traditions, the Creses—i.e., about 1750—"inhabited for a time the region about the Red River, intermingled with the Chippewas and Maskegons," but were attracted to the plains by the buffalo. The Maskegons were practically themselves Creses, being an offshoot of the tribe. They were often called the Swamp Creses, because Maskog (or Muskeg) means a swamp.

Many authorities regard the Creses as Chippewas. Their language is virtually a Chippewa dialect; their manners and customs are much alike; they too were a forest people, and finally they had a tradition that they were descendants of a band that in the long ago seceded from the Chippewas in northern Minnesota and went to dwell on Lake Cree. The Smithsonian Institution "Handbook" (1907) says: "The Creses are closely related, linguistically and otherwise, to the Chippewas. Prof. Hayden regarded them as an offshoot of the latter and believed the Maskecons another division of the same group." Many bands of the Creses were nomads and were generally unsettled, their movements being governed largely by their food supply. In their wanderings they mingled with the Assiniboines, who were offshoots of the Sioux, and intermarried with them and the old Chippewas from whom they had sprung.

Father Belecourt, the good priest of Pembina, who lived so long with them on the Assiniboine, Saskatchewan, and Red Rivers, says the Creses, in 1850, called themselves Ke-nish-ti-nak, meaning held by the winds. They lived long at Lake Winnipeg, whereon, when the winds blew hard, making the waves run high, they were checked by the winds and could not travel in their little frail canoes. Radisson, who, in 1659, either saw them or heard of them, says the Cre canoes were so small that they could not carry more than two persons. The name of the tribe was written by the French as Kri-stin-aux; then it became Christenaux, Kilistinos, Kenistonas, etc., but the chief French form was Chris-ti-naux, which was pronounced Cree-ste-nose; and the French finally contracted the word to Cres, as they contracted Naudowessioux to Sioux.

Now, when the white traders of the Hudson's Bay Company came to the Lake Winnipeg region they found the Creses. The poor savages were overjoyed to meet men who could furnish them steel implements in exchange for (to them) such simple and easily-pro-
cured things as beaver and other skins, buffalo robes, and various other kinds of furs and pelts. Many of them came up the Red River in their little boats, made villages in the groves along the river and its tributaries, and remained in the country a long time engaged in trapping and hunting. The products of their efforts were sent down the river to the Hudson’s Bay fort on Lake Winnipeg, which post was for a long time called Fort Garry. The Hudson’s Bay Fur Company was chartered by King Charles II of England, “the Merry Monarch,” May 2, 1670; but it was not until in 1799 that its agents took possession of the Red River proper and established trading posts in the region.

Prior to the advent of the Hudson’s Bay Company into their region, the Crees were practically savages of a very wild and unenlightened sort. Their slight contact with the French did not improve them. In the Jesuit “Relations” of 1670-71 Father Dablon writes: “Finally the Kelistinos [a name for the Crees] are dispersed through the whole region to the north of this Lake Superior—possessing neither corn, nor fields, nor any fixed abode, but forever wandering through those vast forests and seeking a livelihood there by hunting.” Their condition remained practically unchanged until after the traders came. Then their women married many of the traders and their employees; the families thus created lived after civilized fashion, and in time the missionaries and school teachers came.

The Crees were attacked by smallpox from time to time, and the tribe was greatly reduced by the ravages of this disease. They left Minnesota, as a whole, before 1820 and went up into Manitoba and other Canadian provinces. About 10,000 of them are now in Manitoba and about 5,000 elsewhere in northwestern Canada. They have always been a peaceful tribe, were never at war with their Algonquian neighbors, and left northern Minnesota rather than fight the Chippewas. In 1885, however, the mixed bloods of the tribes rose in rebellion against the Canadian authorities, because it was sought to remove them from their lands on the Saskatchewan to a more inhospitable region to the northward; but in a little time their rebellion was subdued and their leader, Louis Riel, was executed by hanging, November 16, 1885.

It is reasonably certain that, during the period they were in Minnesota, the Crees visited the country now called Polk County, and dwelt there from time to time. To be sure no particulars of their connection with the early history of the county can now be given. We can only assert that, as they were generally north of Minnesota, and especially along the Red River, they must have been at intervals in Polk County.

The Cheyenne Indians have a tradition that at one time they were settled upon Otter Tail Lake and Lake Traverse and were driven out by the Crees into the upper Minnesota River country, below Big Stone Lake. From the Minnesota Valley, fearing trouble with the Sioux, they removed into what is now South Dakota and North Dakota, many locating on the river bearing their name.

THE CHIEF留下了 Crees.

Although the Chippewas and the Crees were kindred people, and of the same blood and lineage, they had separate tribal organizations and are always spoken of and referred to as two different nations or tribes. The word Chippewas is a corruption of Ojibways, by which name these Indians formerly called themselves, and which means “roast till puckered up,” referring to their manner of cooking meat or of torturing their prisoners. They once lived about the Sault Ste. Marie. The early French often called them “Saulteurs,” which is the equivalent, in old French, of Sauteurs in “Francaise moderne,” meaning leapers or jumpers. Sault, which is pronounced soo or soo, is an old French word meaning leap, and is not found in modern French vocabularies. Sault Ste. Marie, therefore, is literally in English, the Leap of Saint Mary. The Sioux called the Chippewas “Hkah-hkah Tonwan,” or Waterfalls People, meaning the
people of the Waterfalls of St. Mary. Hka-hkah meaning waterfalls and Tonwan meaning people.

The Chippewas occupied the Red River country as the result of a war of conquest. About the beginning of the XVIII Century—probably between 1710 and 1736—they drove the Foxes from northern Wisconsin down to Iowa and Illinois and compelled them to confederate with the Sauks (or Sac). Then, some time after 1736, they turned on the Sioux and drove them (first from Lake Superior and then from Northern Minnesota generally) southward and westward down to the Minnesota and across the Mississippi and the Missouri. The Smithsonian Institution’s “Handbook of American Indians” (Vol. 1, p. 278) indicates that after driving away their enemies from northern Minnesota, the Chippewas continued their westward march into North Dakota until they occupied the head waters of the Red River and had a large band as far west as the Turtle Mountains, in the extreme northern section of North Dakota.

It is alleged by the “Handbook” referred to (ibid) that one cause of the dispossession of the Sioux by the Chippewas was to obtain possession of the wild rice tracts about the numerous lakes and streams of northern Minnesota. For a long period the Sioux controlled the wild rice output of Minnesota and would not allow the Chippewas to gather it without a sort of tribute payment, and to this tribute the Chippewas vigorously objected. Warren (History of the Ojibways) and other authorities cite that the French traders of the posts on Lake Superior furnished the Chippewas with fire-arms and then instigated them to attack and drive away the Sioux, because they sold their furs to the English traders of the Hudson’s Bay Company, instead of to the French of the Lakes. It is probable that the real reason of the Chippewa attack was a double one—the instigation of the French and the desire to possess the wild rice beds.

The Chippewas were largely dependent upon the wild rice for food. They called it mahmomen, and revered as a goddess the spirit that controlled it. When the Sioux occupied the Mille Lacs country, in Minnesota, the Chippewas had to travel many miles from their Lake Superior homes, and often to risk their lives, for the wild grain, which was virtually a staff of life for them. They still use large quantities of it. According to the report of the Bureau of American Ethnology for 1900 there were 10,000 Chippewas in the United States using wild rice for food. The Sioux, too, use it when they can get it. The decisive battle between the Sioux and the Chippewas for the ownership of the wild rice beds of Minnesota is believed by many to have occurred on the eastern shores of Mille Lacs, at the supposed Sioux town of Kathio, in about 1750. (See Brower’s “Kathio,” p. 92.) According to the estimate of Warren, himself a half-blood Chippewa, the battle occurred in 1657 (Minn. Hist. Sociy. Collections, Vol. V, p. 157, et seq.), a difference in dates of the two eminent authorities of 100 years. Warren further says, however (p. 162), that, after being defeated at Kathio, the Sioux went down near the mouth of Rum River and did not finally leave the Mille Lacs region until 1770.

SIOUX DRIVEN FROM THIEF RIVER.

Practically ever after their advent into the country, the Chippewas continued to hold northwestern Minnesota, including Polk County, against the Sioux. Warren’s History of the Chippewas (p. 356) relates that, for a number of years after the Chippewa occupation, a camp of ten tepees of Sioux had their camp on the upper Thief River and succeeded in evading and escaping the guns and tomahawks of their hereditary enemies. The surrounding hunting grounds were so rich, and wild rice was so plentiful, that life was easily lived, and they were loth to leave the locality. They built a high embankment of earth around their camp and took every means in their power to conceal themselves from their merciless foes. In hunting they would not discharge their guns, because of the loud noise, but used their bows and arrows in killing game.

At last they were discovered by their relentless enemies. The Crees and Assiniboines of the Pembina and
Devil's Lake regions made a treaty with the Yankton and Sisseton Sioux, and a short term of peace resulted. During the deliberations at this treaty, the Crees learned of the existence of the isolated Sioux band and the locality of its camp. When the peace period closed, some Crees gave the information to their Chippewa relatives, and the latter, from about Red Lake, soon raised a war party and marched upon the hidden Sioux. A total surprise was made, and after a brave but unavailing defense, the ten lodges, and all their inmates, were totally destroyed. The embankment or breastwork of earth which once surrounded the little Sioux village was plain to be seen in 1852. Warren received his information of this affair from Wa-non-je-quon, then chief of Red Lake, whose father helped destroy the Sioux.

From the hiding place and secret occupation of the Sioux on the little river, the Chippewas afterward called it Ke-moja-ke Se-be, or Secret Place River; but the French traders and coureurs pronounced Kemoj a-ke as Ke mod a-ke, which means stealing. Then the stream began to be called Stealing River and Thief River, and by the latter name it is laid down on Nicollet's map of 1842, and is still so called.

**THE INDIANS Battling FOR THE COUNTRY.**

About 1808 (as near as can be conjectured) a band of Sioux defeated a larger band of Chippewas down on Long Prairie River, in Todd County. The Sioux were Sissetons and Wahpetons, from western Minnesota and eastern South Dakota, and had come over to hunt on their former rich game preserve. The Chippewas were on the way to attack the Sioux on Rice River. The fight lasted all day and was very fierce and bloody. At the close only seven unhurt Sioux were left, but they were enough to drive back the Chippewas, because they had guns, furnished them by the Hudson's Bay Company's traders on the Red River. The Chippewas also had some guns, but each party used bows and arrows in addition to their firearms. The Chippewas captured 36 horses (or ponies), but could not learn to manage them, and, after many of them had been crippled by kicks and falls, they finally slaughtered every pony and devoured them. Old Hole-in-the-Day, then a young man, and his elder brother, Strong Ground, were among the leaders of the Chippewas in this battle.

**SIOUX DEFEATED AT PEMBINA.**

The same day on which the battle at Long Prairie was fought a large Sioux war party of Sissetons, Wahpetons, and Yanktons attacked the Chippewa villages near Pembina, whose chief was Little Clam. They were defeated with considerable loss and chased back up the Red River. (Warren, p. 354.) As a result of their defeat on this and other occasions in the same period, the Sioux were forced to retreat to the westward of the Red and Mississippi Rivers and south of the Shayerne. Then, for an indefinitely long period, in order to control the beaver dams and the buffalo preserves of the Red River, there was war between the Chippewas and the Sioux, from the Selkirk Settlement to Big Stone Lake and the headwaters of the Minnesota. The Assiniboines and Crees were allies of the Sioux in this war. It was during the early years when they made the short peace with the Sioux referred to, and upon its termination when they betrayed to the Chippewas the existence and site of the little Sioux band on Thief River.

**TREACHERY AND TREATIES.**

The year after the battle on the Long Prairie River, or about 1819, the Sioux along the whole line of the eastern frontiers became tired of fighting the Chippewas in open field and sought to defeat them by secret action involving the foulest treachery, even from the Indian point of view, which considers everything fair in war. They made an extraordinary and apparently sincere attempt to enter into a general and permanent peace with the Chippewas. Chah-pah (or the Beaver), head chief of the Yankton, or Yanktonnais Sioux, who were then about Lake Traverse, had a Chippewa woman for one of his wives. He put her on a good horse, gave her his peace pipe, and bade
her go to her former people at Pembina and tell them
that, in a week or more, he would come to them with a
large delegation of Sioux and smoke with them the
pipe of profound peace and good will. At the ap­
pointed time the Sioux chief, with a large number of
his people, arrived at Pembina, and the Red River
Chippewas heartily accepted his offers of peace and
friendship.

At the same time the Sisseton, Wahpeton, some
Yanktons, and a large number of Medawakanton
Sioux, met the Mississippi, the Sandy Lake, and the
Mille Laes Chippewas in a treaty on the Platte River,
early its juncton with the Mississippi, and ten miles
south of the present town of Little Falls. The peace
pipe was smoked by these former foes, and games of
various kinds were played by the young men of the
two tribes. For some time all went merrily, friendly,
and well.

But a certain Medawakanton Sioux was one of the
seven survivors that fought off the Chippewas in the
Long Prairie battle. He had not forgotten nor for­
given. He picked a quarrel with a Chippewa warrior
and struck him with a ball stick. The blow was
returned and a general fight would have resulted had
not young Wah-nah-tah (the Charger), a son of
Chief Chah-pah, rushed in, forcibly separated the combat­
ants, and chastised the offending Sioux. He feared
that the Chippewas would become suspicious that the
apparent friendly intentions of the Sioux were not
real, and they certainly were not. The intent was to
cause the Chippewas to be off their guard, and then
the Sioux would fall upon them and either exter­
niate them or drive them from the country. The end
would justify the means.

**FLAT MOUTH THwarts THE BEAVER’S TREACHERY AND
HAS HIM KILLED.**

But while the peace councils were being held above
and below him, Flat Mouth, chief of the Pillager band
of Chippewas, about Leech Lake, did not attend them.
He quietly but industriously hunted beaver on the
Long Prairie River. The peace pipe had been sent
him, but he refused it. He said the Sioux were not in
earnest in their professions of peace so soon after their
bloody battle on the Long Prairie. He said he knew
the Sioux character, and felt sure that they were in­
sincere in their protestations of desire for a future
permanent peace between the two tribes.

Heading twenty or more of his band, Flat Mouth,
in the fall (of 1819†), went to Otter Tail Lake with
his beaver traps and canoes. But he and his men took
their guns with them and kept their powder dry. At
the outlet of Otter Tail Creek, one evening, the chief
became impressed with a sense of danger. He had his
dark canoe (which he had brought up the Crow Wing
to the Otter Tail portage and then across to the lake)
and, fearing to go to sleep on the shore, he embarked
himself and family in the boat and passed the night
on the lake. The next morning he discovered the trail
of a war party of apparently 400 Sioux. They had
been at the site of his camp of the previous evening
and had gone in the direction of Battle Lake. From
a rude drawing on a blazed tree, Flat Mouth deter­
ned that one of the Sioux leaders was Chahpah,
the chief of the Yanktons.

There were no Chippewas at Battle Lake, south of
Otter Tail, but at the Leaf Lakes, to the eastward,
there were quite a number. Working his canoe
through the chain of lakes with their links of streams,
like a great rosary of water, Flat Mouth reached
Leaf Lakes and sounded the alarm. That morning
two of his cousins were killed and their bodies muti­
lated by the Sioux, but in the fight they killed three
of their enemies and wounded many others. The
Sioux soon learned that their plan had failed, because
the Chippewas had discovered it and were fully
roused. At once they hurried southward, back and
away from the Chippewa country, and soon were in
their villages, near the sources of the Minnesota and
Red Rivers.

Flat Mouth repaired to his village and sent his war­
pipe and war club by fleet messengers from band to
band, informing his people that he was going on the
war path against the Sioux and wanted their help. It
was as in the days of Roderick Dhu, when he was wont to send the fiery cross among his clansmen to rouse them to war. The Chippewas were soon ready to march down against the Yanktons at Lake Traverse. But meanwhile Chahpah had reached home, and alarmed at the discovery of his treachery, again sought to make peace with the Chippewas. He induced his white brother-in-law, Col. Robert Dickson, "the red-headed Scotchman," to act as mediator. Col. Dickson's wife was Chahpah's sister.

At the Beaver's request, the Colonel sent a swift courier to Flat Mouth with a message from the Sioux chief denying all participation in the late war party of his people, and especially denying that any of his warriors had killed the two cousins of Flat Mouth. He also invited the Chippewas to meet him in another peace council at Col. Dickson's trading post, which was on the Minnesota side of the Red River, at or near "La Grande Fourche," (the Grand Forks) for the purpose of smoking the peace pipe and re-establishing and strengthening good will between their respective people. Flat Mouth accepted the invitation and, taking 30 of his best warriors with him, set out for the Grand Forks. He arrived in due time at Dickson's trading post, where he found four Frenchmen in charge of the establishment, Col. Dickson being absent. On the next day Chahpah arrived, but with only two of his Yanktonnais as a body guard.

Flat Mouth refused to smoke the peace pipe with Chahpah, and the Sioux chief then realized that his treachery had become fully known and was to be punished. He was undismayed, however, and told his sister, Mrs. Dickson, that if he had to die he would go like a "brave Dakota." That night it rained heavily and the thunder roared, but amid the tumult the Chippewas could hear the death song of Chahpah as he chanted it amid the gloomy surroundings in the trading house of his brother-in-law. The Chippewa warriors wanted to kill him and his companions out of hand, but Flat Mouth forbade them. He said they might kill the Sioux, but must not "shed blood on the steps of these white men, nor in their presence."

Then he added: "You know my heart has been sore since the death of my cousins, but though their murderers deserve death I do not wish to see them killed. Though it is my doing, I shall not be with you."

The next morning early Flat Mouth departed for Gull Lake, and the three Sioux, brave to the last, set out for Lake Traverse, guarded by the Chippewa warriors, who had murder in their hearts and eyes, as an escort. Out on the prairie the escort shot the helpless and helpless chief and his companions, took their scalps, cut off their heads, and ran swiftly with the bloody trophies until they caught up with Chief Flat Mouth. Sha-wa-ke-shig, who was Flat Mouth's head warrior, killed Chahpah and took his scalp. The chief's American medal, which he wore conspicuously on his breast, was taken by Wash-kine-ka, or Crooked Arm, a Red Lake warrior. This incident occurred in Polk County, perhaps a mile below the present site of East Grand Forks.

COL. ROBERT DICKSON, THE TRADER, PROTESTS THE MURDER.

Colonel Dickson was greatly exasperated when he learned of the killing and the mutilation of his Indian brother-in-law. He sent word to Flat Mouth that thenceforth the smoke of a white man's trading house would never more rise toward the sky from the camp of a Pillager band of Chippewas. The Pillager chief laughed at the threats, and afterwards, in relating the story to Warren, he said that the traders continued to visit and trade with him as usual, and that his village continued to grow larger, "notwithstanding the words of the red-headed Scotchman." But these traders were not the agents of Col. Dickson, who refused to trade with the Pillager chief and injured him in every way he could. Perhaps his treatment of the chief in this respect alienated Flat Mouth from the British interest and conduced to strengthen his predilections toward the Americans.

During the War of 1812 Col. Dickson was the principal agent of the British in Minnesota. He recruited scores of Indians from the Sioux and Chippewas and
sent them to fight against the Americans. Some of these red mercenaries served with the British Army as far to the eastward as in northern Ohio. But Chief Flat Mouth remained firm in his friendship toward the Americans, although he knew but little about them; he persistently refused to fight them in aid of the British, and was true to the promises he made Lieutenant Pike in the council of Leech Lake, February 16, 1806. Dickson sent the French Canadian, St. Germain, from Fort William to Leech Lake, and made rich presents to Flat Mouth to induce him to lead the Pillager band into the British camps, but Flat Mouth sent back the wampum belts, etc., with this message: "When I go to war against my enemies, I do not call upon the whites to join my warriors. The white people are quarreling among themselves, and I do not wish to meddle in their quarrels. I do not intend to ever strike a white man or even break a window in his house." (Warren, p. 369.)

THE SIOUX SWEAR VENGEANCE AGAINST THE CHIPPEWAS.

The Yanktonnais received the news of the killing of their chief with horror and indignation, and swore vengeance against every living Chippewa thing. The Beaver (or Chahpah) was succeeded by his son Wah-nah-tah (or the Charger), previously mentioned, and who became one of the most influential and celebrated warriors and chieftains of the great Siouxs nation. He was so celebrated and well known among the whites that his name was given to one of the original counties of Minnesota Territory, in 1849. Wah-nah-tah's band was about 60 miles wide from north to south, and extended from the mouths of the Crow Wing and the Clearwater westward to the Missouri. During his military career the great chief amply revenged the death of his father by repeatedly striking bloody blows upon the Chippewas of the Red River.

After the killing of the Beaver, active warfare was renewed between the Sioux and the Red River Valley Chippewas. Less than a month after the tragedy, Wah-nah-tah started from Lake Traverse, with a large party of Sioux warriors, to go into the Chippewa country at and about Red Lake. At the same time, a body of Chippewas, headed by Chief Wash-ta-do-gaw-wub, started southward to attack the Sioux at Lakes Traverse and Big Stone. They were largely Red Lakers, although Flat Mouth and a detachment of his band were with the party.

Nearly opposite the mouth of Goose River, originally called by the French, "la Riviere Outarde," or the River of the Canada Goose, in what is now the southwest corner of Polk County, a little north of Neillsville, the two armies met. Two of the Chippewa scouts, in advance of the main force, were suddenly fired upon by the Sioux and one of them was killed. The Sioux then rushed forward and a bloody fight ensued. The Chippewas were taken somewhat unaware and the Sioux pushed them back to Sand River, after a series of stubbornly contested encounters. The Chippewas "dug themselves in" at the little river by letting themselves down behind its south bank and by digging rifle-pits and improvised breast-works. The battle lasted till dark, when the Chippewas, believing that they had the worse of the fight, crossed the Sand River to the north and hastened toward their wigwams. They carried their badly wounded along and threw the bodies of their dead into the river, to prevent them from being scalped and otherwise mutilated. One Chippewa warrior, named Black Duck, particularly distinguished himself by

* It is possible that the stream here mentioned as the Sand River should really be called the Red Lake River, and that the battle took place at the present site of the City of Crookston. It may be that the mound on the south bank of the Red Lake, about three-fourths of a mile from the center of the city, marks the site of the burial place of the Sioux that were killed in the action. The bones found by Prof. Moore and his scholars in this mound about 25 years ago may have been those of Wah-nah-tah's slain warriors; they could not have been those of Mound Builders. After the Chippewas retreated the Sioux may have gathered up their dead in a group and heaped the earth over them, as was frequently their custom in finally disposing of their dead.

The data which warrants the assertion that the battle was at Sand River is reasonably clear, but yet there have been no tangible evidences of a deadly conflict there. And if the bones disinterred by Prof. Moore at Crookston were not relics of a battle field, what were they? True, we have no account, and not even a legend, of an Indian battle at the Crookston mound, but many a battle between aboriginal tribes has been unrecorded and its victims gone "unhonored and unsung."—Compiler.
killing and scalping seven Sioux. He was a Red Laker and his name was given to the lake on which he lived, and which is a dozen miles south of Red Lake and is the source of Black Duck River. In recent years a railroad station on the Minnesota & International was established near the lake and a town laid out called Black Duck. The Sioux, too, retreated during the night, and thus there was a military spectacle, often seen where white men’s armies were the actors, of two hostile forces running away from each other after a battle. The Sioux soon returned and cared for their dead and sent scouts after the Chippewas without results.

It would not be practicable to detail all of the battles and other hostile and sanguinary encounters between the Chippewas and the Sioux while they were fighting for the control of the Red River Valley and the rest of the country embraced within the northern part of Minnesota. The narration of these incidents which occurred in other counties belongs in the histories of those counties. Except those here mentioned, it must be said regarding the old Indian fights which took place in what is now Polk County, that no reliable data regarding them can be found by the present writer. Plenty of mention is made of fights and hostile campaigns made in the valley by the two tribes, but no dates can be fixed when they occurred, and no localities determined; nor can it be stated positively and under conviction that these affairs took place within Polk County, and therefore belong solely to this history. Doubtless there was many an Indian fight in Polk County which will never be noted. Yet the history of the county will not suffer by such an omission, for, really, three-fourths of the fights between hostile bands of the Sioux and the Chippewas in Minnesota were inconsequential, and of no more importance than the combats between packs of ravenous wolves on the prairies in the days long gone by. The incidents here narrated are derived, in by far the greater part, from Warren’s History of the Minnesota Chippewas; and Warren’s presentations are based upon the statements made to him by the renowned Chippewa chieftain and warrior, Esh-ke-bug-e-coshe, or Flat Mouth.

AN OLD-TIME INDIAN BATTLE ON RED LAKE.

It may be well, however, to give one tradition of a great Sioux-Chippewa battle which is said to have occurred at some time between 1785 and 1800 on the east side of Upper Red Lake. There is no written record of the affair that the compiler can find; and the only evidence that there was such an affair is the testimony of Indians or mixed bloods long since dead, and such testimony is almost altogether legendary or traditional. And yet this evidence is not to be altogether disregarded or despised, when the character of the testimony and of those delivering it is considered. Writing to the compiler under date of January 8, 1916, Hon. Wm. Watts, than whom there is no one more interested in or a better authority upon early Polk County history, says:

"After being driven from this part of the Red River Valley, the Sioux made several attempts to recover it, until they were finally defeated in a great battle by the Chippewas on the east side of Upper Red Lake. I have never seen a description of that battle. * * *

"I do not think this was a battle identical with that described as taking place on Thief River when the Sioux band hid themselves, etc. Battle River, which flows into Upper Red Lake from the east, is said to get its name from being near or on the site of this battle. I have heard it frequently spoken of, but cannot get anything like a definite description of it.

"According to what I have heard it was fought about 125 years ago, and was the last great battle between the two tribes in northwestern Minnesota. I have heard that Pierre Bottineau frequently told of what he had learned about it from participants. The story is that it was a very bloody battle and that the Chippewas were victorious. I think Paul Beaulieu, of Mahnomen, Minn., would be able to give the traditional account. The father of Moose Dung, the latter a signer of the 'Old Crossing treaty' of 1863, was one of the Chippewa chiefs engaged in the battle, and Moose Dung often told what he had heard about it."

Neither Warren's History of the Chippewas nor Prof. Winchell's "Aborigines of Minnesota," both excellent authorities on the wars and feuds of the two tribes, make any reference whatever to the alleged
old-time battle on the Upper Red Lake. And yet there may have been such a battle, and certain of the mounds found on Red Lake may be the sepulchres of some of the Sioux warriors slain in the conflict.

THE CHIPEWAS FINALLY HOLD THE COUNTRY.

In the end the Chippewas remained in control of the country, although in many instances this control was disputed and disturbed. War parties of Sioux came up into the Chippewa country on forays and warlike excursions, at intervals, until 1863. The Chippewas raided the Sioux during the same period. Detachments from the eastern band at Pokegama and the St. Croix raided Little Crow's band near St. Paul in the spring of 1842, and in April, 1853, attacked and killed fugitive members of the same band fairly in the streets of the Capital City. In May, 1858, Chippewas from the Mille Lacs and Gull Lake bands went down and attacked the Sioux village of Chief Shakopee, on the lower Minnesota, and at the town bearing his name, but were defeated with a loss of 20 killed, and wounded.

THE TWO TRIBES FIGHT UNTIL THE SIOUX OUTBREAK.

August 15, 1862, only a very few days before the great Sioux Outbreak, some Red Lake Chippewas slipped down to near Red Iron's village, on the Minnesota, not far from the Yellow Medicine Agency, and killed a Sioux man and his son and got away with their scalps. The 20th of July a detachment of the same band, presumably, had shot and killed two Sioux within 18 miles of Yellow Medicine; while in May a hunting party of Red Iron's band was attacked on the upper Pomme de Terre by a band of Chippewas (presumably Red Lakers) and chased out of the country, losing two men killed.

The bodies of the Sioux man and his son that were killed in August were taken to their village and exposed in the street and thus lay in state, as it were, for two days. At last a war party of 25 was made up to go northward to the Chippewa country and avenge the killing. All but three of the party (who were Yanktonnais) were of the Wahpeton band of Sioux and the leader was Eta-zha-zha, or Gleaming Face, who, under the Christian name of Lot, died at Sisseton, South Dakota, only a few years since. In 1901, before a commission that was investigating the conduct of the Sisseton Sioux during the great Outbreak, Lot testified to the foregoing facts, and further stated that the Sioux were absent from their villages about two weeks, during which time they were mainly in the Otter Tail Lake region. When they had returned to their own country, they found, to their amazement and distress, that during their absence a great and bloody outbreak had been made against the whites. (Minn. in Three Cents., Vol. 3, p. 288.)

Certain careless or reckless writers on Minnesota history have asserted that the great Sioux Outbreak of 1862 was the effect of a long meditated and carefully planned movement of the Sioux and Chippewas in combination; that Little Crow and other chiefs for the Sioux, and Hole-in-the-Day and other leaders for the Chippewas, had been in constant communication and engaged in preparing for the uprising long before it occurred, etc. These assertions are wholly false. The two tribes hated each other too viciously and implacably ever to found a friendly alliance for any purpose. The tragic incidents mentioned, and others that might be given, show that these long-time foes continued to fight one another up to the very date of the Outbreak and prove the utter falsity of the claim that they ever were engaged as allies in plotting against the whites.