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INDIANS AND INDIAN LIFE

White Earth Indian Reservation

May-zhuc-ke-ge-shig

William Madison

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Detroit Lakes, Minnesota

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White Earth Indian Reservation
Submitted By: William Madison,
Edited By: Arthur P. Foster
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White Earth Indian Reservation, home of the diminishing full blood Chippewa and his Grand Medicine Lodge rituals, as ageless as the Algonquin Nation, is situated in three northwestern Minnesota counties: Becker, Mahnomen and Clearwater. The Reservation is one of several under the jurisdiction of the Consolidated Chippewa Indians Agency in Cass Lake, Minnesota. A United States Government Field Agent, living in White Earth village, has direct supervision over the local area.

Since the Reservation is about 35 miles square, a central point from which to reach its interesting localities is best designated as Detroit Lakes, I0 miles from its southern boundary and 200 miles northwest of St. Paul and Minneapolis. The main line of the Northern Pacific Railroad and the Winnipeg Branch of the Soo Line (the first and only railroad to run through the Reservation, in I904) converge in this city. Highways leading to Detroit Lakes are: US I0, US 59, TH 34, TH 87 and TH I08.

There are lake resorts and their accommodations available upon the Reservation, which are equal to any to be found near Detroit Lakes. Convenient to all places of interest in the southern half of this district such as the Agency at White Earth, St. Benedict's Mission and Pine Point Mission, the visitor may stop at Bowman's Resort on White Earth Lake, Shady Rest on Round Lake and Vizenor's Cabins on Many Point Lake. For seeing the northern half of the Reservation, Twin Lakes Resort, or Nay-tah-waush, and Roy Lake Cabins (both in Mahnomen County)

are suitable headquarters.

The western third of the Reservation is level prairie. Start- a few miles east of the Soo Line Railroad the district becomes rolling and forested, a region of glacial moraines and lakes. The diversity of topography is similar to that of the "Park Region", or Becker and Otter Tail counties. Buried limestone escarpments cause an altitude of about I,750 feet east of Twin Lakes, near the east central portion of the Reservation, and running southwest to the White Earth Agency. The highest point is just off the southwestern boundary of Itasca State Park and forms parts of the source of the Red River of the North and of the water shed for the source of the Mississippi.

The I50 lakes of the eastern two-thirds of White Earth and their wooded shores are more isolated, that is fewer resorts, than those of the Detroit Lakes and Otter Tail areas. This semi-primitive condition has made for a better small and big game hunting section, where fishing opportunities are equally fine. The principal lakes on the Reservation, including the known areas and Chippewa names, are:

Lower Rice Lake, Mah-no-men, 2,043 ac.s; Twin Lakes (2), 2,030 ac.s; White Earth Lake, Gah-wah-bah-bi-gon-i-kah, 2,007 ac.s; Flat Lake, Gah-boug-quog, I,832 ac.s; Many Point Lake, Gah-mom-mi-nay-wah-mi-wong, I,675 ac.s; Strawberry Lake, Gah-o-da-i-mi-ni-cog, I,5I4 ac.s; Big Rat Lake, Gah-wash-zhuc-ko-cog, I,I06 ac.s; Big Rush Lake, I,047 ac.s, Ge-chi-ga-mi-wash-ko-kong; Big Basswood Lake, or Wi-gob-bin-min-ness, 907 ac.s; Tulaby Lake, O-do-ni-bi-ze-kag-ing, 826 ac.s; Elbow Lake, Gah-o-do-skun-ni-gom-mog, 96I ac.s; Round Lake, Gah-wa-wi-ya-cum-mog, I,062 ac.s; Bad Medicine Lake (Lake of the Valley), Gab-wimb-ba-ji-wa-gom-mag, 795 ac.s; Big Sugar Bush Lake, Ish-ki-gah-miz-zee-gah-sa-ge-e-gon, 53I ac.s; Egg Lake, Gah-ki-chi-wah-won-nok-cog, 5I7 ac.s; Simon (Roy) Lake, 462 ac.s;

Boot Lake, Gah-sha-zoue-wi-gun-mog, 426 ac.s; Juggler Lake, Gah-wi-sa-ko-beke, 384 ac.s; Ice Cracking Lake, Gah-ni-tah-mah-mah-dwa-qua, 290 ac.s; Little Sugar Bush Lake, Gah-gah-gi-waush, 214 ac.s; Little Bemidji Lake, ~~Ba-mi-zee-da-ki-wau-mog~~ Ba-mi-ge-gah-ma-zing, 122 ac.s; and Green Water, 80ac.s These lakes are the more important ones from the standpoint of fishing, wild rice beds and sugar bush locations. The Chippewa names do not represent the English terms excepting in a few cases; for literal translations, read the supplement.

The centers of full blood Chippewa population and activities are scattered, but are in or close to the following inland towns; included also in this information are some of the chief places of interest and their locations: White Earth village, where is to be found the United States Indian Agency; a Grand Medicine lodge is ½ mile east of the school buildings; St. Benedict's Mission and Chief White Cloud's grave (in Calvary Cemetery) are one mile southeast and southwest, respectively; ~~1½~~ 3 miles north of the village is the site of the Old Trading Post, established in 1802 at the intersection of the old Pembina and Red Lakes trails. White Earth Lake is about ~~3½~~ 5 miles northeast of the Agency; Bowman's Lodge, located here, is built where two old Indian trails intersected, named the Ah-way-bi-win, or Resting Place. An Indian cemetery is on an island in this lake. The burial grounds started in 1872, when a small daughter of one of the Otter Tail Pillagers was drowned . The father, wishing to appease the the apparent anger of the Earth Gods (who control the waters), made the offering of his child's body by placing it to rest upon this island. The University of Minnesota operates a boys' summer camp on White Earth Lake under the guidance of coaches.

Pine Point, one mile north of Ponsford, 30 miles northeast of Detroit Lakes, is the heart of Grand Medicine Lodge practices and the site of one of its burial grounds. Pine Point Mission is active here.

Supplement for pages 2 and 3 giving literal translations of the Chippewa names forcthe lakes as listed on those pages:

Lower Rice Lake, Gah mon-no-min-ni-cog, Where there is a large body of rice; White earth Lake, Gah-wah-bah-bi-gon-i-kah, White clay; Flat Lake, Gah-boug-quog, The marshy place; Many Point Lake, Gah-mon-mi-nay-wah-mi-wong, Where there are many necks of land into the water; Strawberry Lake, Gah-o-da-i-mi-ni-cog, Strawberry; Big Rat Lake, Gah-wash-zhuc-ko-cog, Where there are many muskrats; Big Rush Lake, Ge-chi-ga-mi-wash-ko-kong, Where there are a lot of big rushes; Big Basswood Lake, Wi-gob-bin-min-ness, A body of water where there is a basswood-covered island; Tulaby Lake, O-do-ni-bi-ze-kag-ing, Where there are many tulabies; Elbow Lake,Gah-o-skun-ni-gom-mog, Like the elbow of the arm; Round Lake, Gah-wa-wi-ya-cum-mog, Where there is a round body of water; Bad Medicine Lake (Lake ofcthe Valley), Gab-wimb-ba-ji-wa-gom-mag, Body of water set below high hills; Big Sugar Bush Lake, Ish-ki-gah-miz-zee-gah-sa-ge-e-gon, Body of water where sap is boiled down; Egg Lake, Gah-ki-chi-wah-won-nok-cog, Where eggs are found; Boot Lake, Gah-sha-zoue-wi-gun-mog, Body of water that curves; Juggler Lake, Gah-wi-sa-ko-beke, Place where there is bitterwood; Ice Cracking Lake, Gah-ni-tah-mah-mah-dwa-qua, Where the ice is always thundering; Little Sugar Bush Lake, O-gub-bay-gwan-ay-aush, named after Chief Bird with Everlasting Feathers (most popular name); Little Bemidji Lake, Ba-mi-ge-gah-ma-sing, A small, but long narrow body of water, and Twin Lakes, Gah-ni-sho-gum-mog, Where there are two like bodies of water.

Old Round Lake Mission, near that lake, and burial grounds close to Ice Cracking and Green Water lakes are 25 to 30 miles from Detroit lakes off of TH 34, the same road to Ponsford. North, and adjoining Round Lake, is Many Point Lake; a few miles farther on is Elbow Lake, where are full blood settlements, primitive and interesting, and some resort cottages. On the east side of Flat Lake, 20 miles north of Detroit Lakes, are to be found an old Indian village, burial grounds and mounds, supposedly ofca race much larger than the modern tribes.

At the north outlet of Twin Lakes, in Mahnomen County, is an old battle ground near the home of Louis Peabody (a Chippewa); stone axes, war clubs and arrow points are evidence of past warfare. North of these lakes, a distance of 4 miles, is Glimmer Glass Lake; a mile farther is Little Wolf Lake, location of a burial grounds; just west of here is a Grand Medicine lodge.

Another Indian town is Wild Rice River, now Beaulieu, the home of Chief May-zhue-ke-ge-shig, one of the signers of the Treaty of 1867, which established the Reservation. Alexander Ramsey, first territorial governor of Minnesota, gave to this chief, in 1850, official United States governmental recognition of chieftainship. Chief Charles Bender, famous National League baseball pitcher, formerly lived in Beaulieu. T. J. Beaulieu, now living in this town named after his forefathers, came with his father, John Beaulieu, to White Earth in 1873. His father ran a store at the Old Trading Post; later, in 1875, they moved to the new Agency at White Earth village and opened a store. Mr. Beaulieu recalls that annual contracts to supply three tons of Seneca snake root were made with St. Paul drug companies for as high as forty cents a pound; the snake root was later marketed in China. He remembers trading posts established by B. L. Fairbanks in White Earth and Wild Rice River, or Nay-ya-quong (Long Grove), the first Government saw mill, blacksmith shop and other buildings.

n The western third of the Reservation borders on former Lake Agassiz, which has given it an heritage of deep fertile soil. East of here the black loam is underlain with a clay subsoil, hence the name for White Earth, or Gah-wah-bah-bi-gon-i-kah. Added to the rich till is ample precipitation averaging 25.07 inches annually. The region has sufficient natural drainage furnished by the Wild Rice, White Earth, Buffalo and Otter Tail rivers. The average maximum temperature is 50.4 ; the average minimum is -27.I . The highest temperature recorded was I06 , and the lowest, -53 . The growing season totals about II5 days.

At one time the Reservation provided millions of feet of pine. From the overgrowth of cut-over land and matured trees large quantities of cordwood for fuel are obtained as well as material for pulp wood, log cabins and railroad ties. This district is fortunate in having many sugar maples from which Indian sugar is made. "Rice lakes", lakes in which wild rice thrives are numerous. The Indians still have good fishing, hunting and trapping in the greater part of the Reservation. Little use has been made of the clay for the purpose of manufacturing bricks or pottery. The Chippewas are of the lake and forest tribes and not inclined toward such occupations or those pertaining to agriculture as are some other Indians.

Pertinent vital statistics are thoroughly illustrated by those secured from St. Benedict's Mission for a period extending over fifty years. This Catholic mission relates that baptism has been administered to 4,788 people; 787 couples received the Sacrament of Matrimony and I,63I former parishioners were laid to their resting places on Calvalry Cemetery.

The population of the Reservation is about 8,000 for an area of approximately I,I50 square miles. A well equipped hospital at the White Earth Agency supervises the healths of the Indians as efficiently as

possible. However, most of the older Chippewas are too helpless or reluctant to take advantage of this medical service, either due distance of residence from the backwoods to the hospital, or because of a natural pride which preventw their revealing intimate problems to white strangers, preferring instead the administrations of the native medicine men.

All of the Reservation Indians were imported from various parts of northern Minnesota and include three main tribes: The Mississippi Band from Crow Wing and Gull Lake; the Pembina Band from the upper Red River Valley, and the Otter Tail Pillagers from Otter Tail Lake. The three groups of Chippewas are of the same linguistic stock, the Algic. While the mixed-bloods have been multiplying, the full bloods population has decreased alarmingly and with them will disappear the classical Ojibwa civilization with its attendant language, social cultures and traditions.

The Sioux, Dakotas and allied aborigines occupied exclusively the territory including the White Earth Reservation until near the year I490. About that time the Ojibwas (see foot note) commenced their invasion of the headwaters of the Mississippi, the Red Lake River, the valley of the Red River of the North and the Lake of the Woods section. Chippewa and Ojibwa are one and the same people; the word Chippewa originated in a corruption of pronunciation of the term Ojibwa by English-speaking travelers.

Foot note: Ojibwa is the spelling agreed upon by the Bureau of American Ethnology; Objibway was an earlier form, and frequent usage is given to the more recent spelling, Ojibway. Ojibwa, or "to roast until puckered up", implies a method of torturing prisoners of war by fire. The Ojibwas were known as the "Sauteurs" to the first French explorers, meaning leaper or jumper, descriptive of Ojibwa war dancers.

Fortunately, due to William Whipple Warren, one-quarter Chippewa, the intimate history and legends of this tribe are a matter of authentic record. Warren's racial and family connections, environment and education had better fitted him than any person who has ever lived to speak concerning the origin of the Chippewa people. In his History of the Chippewas, written in I850, Warren reiterates that the Ojibwas, or Chippewas, form one of the principal branches of the Algonquin, Algic, stock; that they originated from the Atlantic seacoast, and, at one time, were the most numerous and wide spread of all the Indians Nations of North America. Specific linguistic and Grand Medicine Lodge characteristics similar to those of the Chippewas have been noted by the present writer among the Potawatomies of Wisconsin, and Oklahoma and Kansas; Menomomies of Wisconsin; Miamis of Indiana; Sacs and Foxes of Wisconsin and Oklahoma; Kickapoos of Kansas; Mush-qua-keegs, or Tame Iowa Indians, of Iowa; Crees of North Dakota; Delawares of Oklahoma and Canada and the Ottawas.

French explorers discovered the Chippewas about the year I6I0 in the vicinity of the Island of la Pointe at the head of Lake Superior, where these Indians had resided so many generations that the oldest could not remember any earlier home farther east. In I665, Father Claude Allouez founded a mission in this locality.

Warren wrote of hearing, in I842, an address at an initiation ceremony of the Grand Medicine Lodge. The words were a typical allegorical description of the emigration westward of the Ojibwa from the Atlantic to La Pointe. One Ojibwa branch remained at Sault Ste. Marie. A second group continued on west to La Pointe; the common class, not medicine men, then moving onward to the Mississippi headwaters and southward to the St. Croix and Chippewa rivers. Only from such religious and genuine traditions can most of the facts regarding the emigration of the Ojibwas be ascertained. Today, the older people of

Northern Minnesota know that they originated from No-min-wuna-kaun-ing, or La Pointe.

Acting as an interpreter, during the above-mentioned council meeting in I842, Warren heard a discussion, concerning the claims of the chieftainship of the Ojibwa tribe, between Great Buffalo of the Loon clan and Tug-waug-aun-ay, Crane, head chief of the Crane clan. The latter supported his statements by remarks about a curious family register, which was kept buried in the ground and seldom displayed. Only upon the entreaty of Warren's mother, Chief Tug-waug-aun-ay's niece, was Warren permitted to view this record. It proved to be a circular plate of virgin copper, upon which were rudely marked indentations and hieroglyphics denoting the number ofcgenerations of the family that had passed away since they first pitched lodges at the head of Lake Superior and took possession of the western country. An Indian generation is never counted as having passedcuntil the oldest man in the family has died; therefore, forty years is the accepted period for each generation. T

There were eight indentations upon the copper record; two years after the above incident, I844, old Chief Crane died and a ninth mark was placed upon the plate. The lapse of time since the family had been at the head of Lake Superior and the surrounding country numbered 360 years in the year I844, indicating that the settlement had been made here during I484. A rudely drawn figure ~~of~~ with a hat on its head, a white man, occurred during the third generation, putting the arrival of the white man around I604, which coincides with French explorers' records.

A characteristic of this original village at La Pointe, which should be stressed is: La Pointe remained the headquarters of the Grand Medicine Lodge and of the chiefs, the capital of the tribe, but the common people, not the medicine men, spread westward almost immediately,

and return to La Pointe only in order to arbitrate tribal affairs. This village held that importance even down to I847, until there came from the Mississippi headwaters during July of that year an Indian leader by the name of Chief Hole-in-the-Day, the Younger, to dictate brazenly treaty terms to assembled United States officials and to dominate the old resident chiefs, usurping their power and forever destroying La Pointe's control over the Chippewas in Northern Minnesota.

The Sioux had constantly fought the advance of the Chippewas into this territory. After many generations of warfare the Chippewas, in I680, captured the ancestral home of the Sioux at Mille Lacs; the name of the entire district between the source of the Mississippi and Lake Superior was then known as Mille Lacs (I,000 lakes), the Sioux headquarters were at the single lake called by that name at present.

The Sioux continued to fight, making a last general, or northernwide, attack during I768; part of this conflict was waged at Battle Lake, 50 miles south of Detroit Lakes. A small party of forty-five Chippewas counter-attacked a camp of four hundred Sioux, the larger band being concealed by a grove on the shore of this lake. Although fighting a superior force and losing two-thirds of their warriors, the Chippewas succeeded in killing a far greater number of Sioux.

On August I9th., I825, the United States Government established a dividing line in Minnesota for the respective countries of the warring tribes, which placed the northern half of the state in Chippewax hands. This boundary line started at a point onvthe Saint Croix River a few miles north of Stillwater and extended diagonnally, northwestward, across Minnesota to Otter Tail Lake (50 miles south of the White Earth Agency), then to a mark on the Buffalo River (about halfway between Lake Park and Hawley), followed that stream to the Red River near Moorhead and made that river, the latter, the western boundary. The Government made an official survey of the Sioux-Chippewa line during I835.

In I837,both the Chippewas and the Sioux were persuaded to cede their lands east of the Mississippi to the United States Government. The Government began to survey this region in the '40s, preparing to open the territory to white settlers. Meanwhile the Indian skirmishes continued. During the year I843, a massacre of Chippewa old men,women and children, about forty in all, was committed by marauding Sioux at the Lake of the Dead, or Dead Lake, 25 miles from Detroit Lakes.

To segregate the Indians more thoroughly, the treaty of April 7th I855, was drawned up with the Mississippi, Pillager and Lake Winnebegoshish bands of Chippewas. Within the district ceded by the Indians, nine reservations were eventually created: Sandy Lake, Pokegama, Leech Lake, Cass Lake, Mille Lacs, Gull Lake, Rabbit Lake, Rice Lake and Winnebegoshish. By the treaty of March I8th., I865, all the above reservations, excepting Leech Lake, Cass Lake and Winnebegoshish, were ceded to the United States, further narrowing Indian activities. White Earth Reservation, to be, was part of the cessions of the treaty of I855. By the treaty of I865, the Government ceded a strip of country back to the Chippewas, which included part of White Earth.

The treaty proclaimed April I8th., I867, established the White Earth Reservation of approximately I,200 square miles. The Indians' interests were poorly protected by this treaty, since they ceded a tract of 2,000,000 acres for about thirty-six townships of land (or an estimate of 800,000 acres); most of the former tract the Chippewas had intended to retain, but they were over-reached in the wording of the agreement. The White Earth Lake and Lower Rice Lake areas were never to be open to transfer,to white men, by any tribal or congressional act, not excluding the Clapp Act or any other Act. (Note map of Lower Rice Lake on page II; the original was surveyed by a mixed-blood, Charles E. Leith, first County Surveyor of Mahnomen, and drawn by his son, Joseph C. Leith). This Indian understanding is one of several,which has since been violated.