

HISTORY OF GRAND RAPIDS.

CHAPTER I.

INDIAN VILLAGES OF THE OWASTENONG—THEIR APPEARANCE AND CONDITION IN 1760—A GRAND WAR COUNCIL—SPEECH OF PONTIAC—DEPARTURE OF THE WARRIORS FOR THE SEIGE OF DETROIT.

OWASHTENONG, or the rapids of the Grand River, was, for many years, the center of savage intercourse in north-western Michigan. A densely populated village of the Ottawas was located on the west side of the river, about a quarter of a mile below the rapids, and is spoken of in various works on the Indian tribes of the Northwest, as having reached its greatest strength and influence about the year 1760. At this period the settlement is said to have been the home of some three thousands souls, although it is not probable that so large a number resided there permanently.

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At a later period there were several Indian villages in the vicinity of the rapids—one of the Chippewas, one of the Pottawattamies, and another of a mixed population of various tribes. The Chippewas who came to settle here were of that portion of this nation who became, at this period, a part of the great Indian confederation organized under the influence of Pontiac, the Ottawa chief.

It is not our purpose here to enter into a complete detail of the important events in the history of these Indian villages, but the reader will, no doubt, be entertained with a brief notice of their condition and customs at that period at which our narrative commences.

The life of the Indians in this vicinity, though utterly void of those many phases which vary the routine of civilized existence, was one of considerable excitement. The chase, the war path, the dance, the festival, the game of hazard, the race of political ambition, all had their votaries. When the assembled sachems had resolved on assisting the great Pontiac in the siege of Detroit, in 1761, and when, from their great council-house of bark in the Valley of the Owashtenong, their

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deputies had gone forth to invite other warriors to arms, then all along the banks of the Grand River, a thousand war-like hearts caught up the summons with savage enthusiasm.

With feasting and praying, and consulting dreams and omens; with invoking the war-god, and dancing the frantic war dance, the warriors sought to insure the triumph of their arms in the contest to which they had been summoned.

We will stop here to look in upon the great war council held in the valley of the Grand River, at the village of the Ottawas, in the spring of 1761, at which Pontiac himself was present. The great Ottawa chief came with his squaws and children, and was received by the sachems with tokens of their greatest reverence for this powerful warrior. Band after band came straggling in from every side, until the valley for nearly a mile was dotted with their slender wigwams. Here were idle warriors, smoking and laughing in groups, or beguiling the lazy hours with gambling, with feasting, or with doubtful stories of their own exploits. Here and there could be seen youthful gallants, brilliant with all the foppery of beads, feathers and hawks' bills, but held, as yet, in light esteem, since they had slain no enemy, and taken no scalp; young damsels, radiant with bear's oil and vermilion, and accomplished in all the arts of forest coquetry. The scene was also enlivened by troops of children, with small, black, mischevous eyes, roaming along the outskirts of the woods.

The council took place early in April. On that morning, several old men, known as the heralds of the camp, passed to and fro among the lodges calling the warriors,

in a loud voice. In accordance with this summons they came forth from their cabins—the Ottawas, wrapped in their gaudy blankets; the Chippewas, fluttering in painted shirts, with their heads adorned with feathers. All were soon seated in a wide circle upon the grass, row inside of row, a sober, silent assembly. “Each savage countenance,” says the historian, “seemed carved in wood, and none could have detected the deep and fiery passions hidden beneath that immovable exterior. Pipes, with ornamented stems, were lighted, and passed from hand to hand.”

Then Pontiac rose and walked to the center of the ring. After taking a careful survey of his savage auditors, he began to speak. He opened his address by setting forth the arrogance, rapacity and injustice of the English, and contrasted their deeds with those of the French. He declared that the British commandant at Detroit had treated him with neglect and contempt; that the soldiers of that garrison had abused the Indians, and if left alone, would soon come to drive his peaceful hearers from their homes around this beautiful *Owashtenong*.

He fully set forth the danger that would arise to his people should the English gain supremacy. They had expelled the French, and would soon turn upon the Indians. He then displayed a broad belt of wampum, stating that he had received it from their great father, the King of France, who would soon come to their assistance.

After rousing in his listeners their native thirst for blood and vengeance, he next addressed himself to their superstitions. Here he related a curious tale, which had

formed the conclusion of many former speeches delivered by this wonderful Indian for the purpose of gaining the friendship and support of savage warriors.

Many other speeches were, doubtless, made in the same council but no record of them has been preserved. All present were eager to march to Detroit and attack the garrison. The assembly now dissolved, and all the evening the women were busily engaged loading the canoes, which were drawn up on the bank of the river just below the rapids. At an early hour the following morning the encampment broke up, and when the sun arose, more than fifty canoes, filled with warriors, could be seen floating slowly down the river toward the lake. They were following their gallant Ottawa leader to the siege of Detroit.

CHAPTER II.

ANNUAL GATHERINGS IN THE VALLEY OF THE GRAND

Tuttle, Charles R. History of Grand Rapids: with biographical sketches. Tuttle & Cooney, 1874.