

The Long, Cold Winter

An Ojibwe leader makes a plea for payment on behalf of his people

Na-naw-on-ga-be, chief of the Rice Lake Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa (Ojibwe), delivered this speech at an 1855 council at La Pointe. The council was called by Commissioner of Indian Affairs George W. Manypenny, whom Na-naw-on-ga-be calls "my father" in the speech. Manypenny's main goal in calling the council was probably to explain the implications of the 1854 treaty between the U.S. government and the Ojibwe establishing permanent reservations.*

Each of the land cession treaties between the Ojibwe and the U.S. government obligated the United States to make annual payments or annuities, debts which the government honored sporadically if at all. With neither their land to provide for themselves nor the money and goods owed them in hand, the Ojibwe suffered great privations.

My father, we are very happy to see you. We have reasons for not coming immediately after we heard your voice echoing through the wilderness. We were all roused by the sound of your voice. It created glad feelings and rejoicings among all my people. I lost no time to give orders to all my young men to collect before me. I then informed them that your words

had reached me, desiring us to come immediately to you.

I took the second thought, and concluded it would not be proper to advise my young men to leave immediately, while we were all busily engaged in collecting wild rice, to provide for my people against hunger and famine. After making all haste to do this, and provide for our sick old women and children, with four of my best warriors to defend them from my troublesome and dangerous neighbors, the Sioux, I and my people with me, hastened upon the pathway to the shores of the Chippewa Lake [Lake Superior]. I have obeyed your call — I am now before you.

You say, my father, you are sorry to see us in our state of poverty. No wonder, my father, you see us in poverty and showing so much of our nakedness. Five long winters have passed since I have received as much as a blanket for one of my children. My father, what has become of your promise? You probably have sent what you promised to us, but where it has gone, is more than I am able to say. Perhaps it has sunk in the deep waters of the lake, or it may have evaporated in the heavens, like the rising of the mist — or perhaps it has blown over our heads, and gone towards the setting sun.

Last year I visited our father [Indian Agent Henry C. Gilbert] who came here, and gave goods to a portion of his red children. But I could not get here in time — I got nothing. I turned round to some of

our traders, no doubt who are now standing among us here, and asked them for some clothing to take to my poor children, but they refused me. Therefore I had to retrace my foot-steps over a long road, with empty hands, to my home in the woods just as I had come.

In your words to me, you ask me not to use the firewater; and after my traders refusing me, as I said before, I do not intend to accept their firewater in case they offer it to me. I returned to my home. I endured the severity of the long, cold winter with what nature had provided for me — relieved only by the skins I had taken from the beasts of the forest. I had to sit nearer to my little fire for want of what I did not get of my father, and could not get of my traders; I requested my father the next year to bring me what I needed very much.

I am not like your red child that lives on the borders of the Chippewa Lake — he desired you to bring him the irons to spear the fish, and small twine he uses in dropping his hook into the water. I told you, my father, I live principally in traveling through my home in the forest, by carrying the iron on my shoulder — that whenever I aim at the wild animal, he falls before me. I have come with my young men, and we have brought most of our families on the strength of your promise last year, that you would give us good portions for our wants this year. And like all your children, my father, after a hard

*Chippewa is an English-language interpretation of Ojibwe or Ojibwa. The Ojibwe are the third largest group of Native Americans in the U.S. (after the Cherokee and Navaho). They belong to the Algonquian linguistic group, which also includes the Cree, Fox, Shawnee, Menominee, Mohican, Potawatomi, Cheyenne, Blackfeet, Sauk, and Mi'kmaq.

day's labor, or walk, I am hungry — my people need something to give them strength and comfort. It is so long since a gun was given us — we have only a few stubs, bound together by leather strings, with which to kill our game, and to defend ourselves against our enemies.

My father, look around you upon the faces of my poor people; sickness and hunger, whiskey and war are killing us fast. We are dying and fading away; we drop to the ground like the trees before the axe of the white man; we are weak — you are strong. We are but foolish Indians — you have knowledge and wisdom in your head; we want your help and protection. We have no homes — no cattle, no lands, and we will not long need them. A few short winters, my people will be no more. The winds shall soon moan around the last lodge of your red children. I grieve; but cannot turn our fate away. The sun — the moon — the rivers — the forest we love so well, we must leave. We shall soon sleep in the ground — we will not awake again. I have no more to say to you, my father.

— taken from *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Volume III, pp. 341-343.

It is certain that Na-naw-on-ga-be lived very few more winters. Along with several members of his party, he was ambushed and killed by Dakota (Sioux)* in the 1850s, probably on the banks of the Hay River at the north edge of newly formed Dunn County.

As many as a half-dozen differing accounts chronicle the

attack. One of those is in the form of a letter from Henry E. Knapp of Menomonee to *The Wisconsin Archeologist* published in December 1918, and based on information from, among others, John H. Knapp (Henry Knapp's father), Capt. Andrew Tainter, and Robert

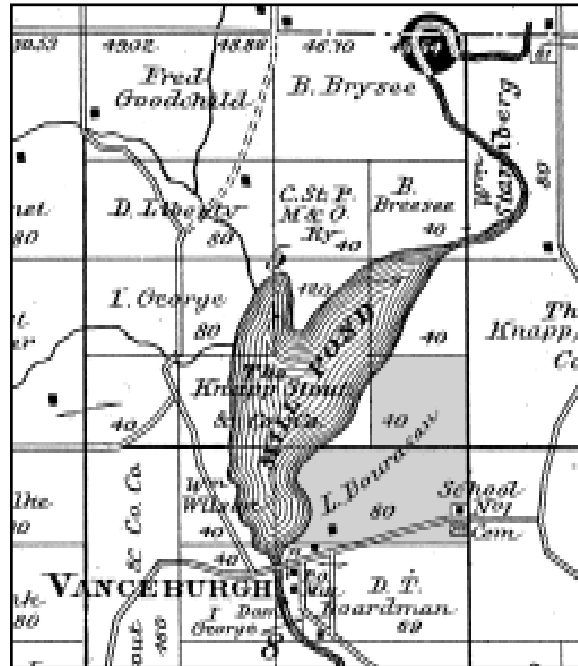
saw them then but did not attack them, not knowing how many there were nor how near the main Chippewa camp was. The Chippewas, after finishing their work, came to the trading post of Levi Vance at what is now Vance, and traded their furs for provi-

sion. They stayed there overnight and continued their journey homeward the next morning. The Sioux had followed them, and during the night had crossed Hay River and finding that the main Chippewa camp was not there, hid themselves to wait for the Chippewas.

“That morning Mr. Louis Bourasau was building on a fence ... when the eight Chippewas came along with their packs. As they were crossing the fence the Sioux, about ninety in number, sprang up and began firing on them. The Chippewas dropped their packs and started toward the Sioux although greatly outnumbered. Four of the

Chippewas, including Na-naw-on-ga-be, were killed, the other four escaping. One account states that Na-naw-on-ga-be snatched a tomahawk from a Sioux and killed a number of them before he was dispatched.

“That afternoon Mr. Bourasau picked up the mutilated bodies of the 4 Chippewas and buried them on the bank of the river on what is now part of William Bourasau's farm.... The next morning the



In the 1880s, Louis Bourasau owned the farm in gray on the plat-map detail above. Na-naw-on-ga-be's party may have been attacked here by a Lakota (Sioux) party. However, other tradition suggests he may have been ambushed on the banks of the Hay River (just south of Prairie Farm) in the area reversed out into a black dot at the top of this map detail. Notice Vanceburgh just to the south.

Hickey, the son-in-law of Louis Bourasau who witnessed the event. From Knapp's letter:

“[Na-naw-on-ga-be] and his tribe were as usual camped near our logging camp near Prairie Farm, Barron Co., in the fall of 1857 or 59. Eight Chippewas, including Na-naw-on-ga-be, went to the South Fork of the Hay River on a hunting and trapping trip.

“During their stay there the Sioux came from Minnesota and

*The name Sioux was created by the French, who abbreviated the Algonquin compound, nadowe (“snake”) plus siu (“little”), spelled Nadouéssioux, by which the Ojibwe referred to the Dakota.

This term was meant as an insult, but today the U.S. Government has applied the name “Sioux” to represent the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota — the three dialects of this group of seven tribes.

Chippewas, now on the war path, followed the Sioux as far as the St. Croix, and then returned home.”

An 1891 account, *Early Life Among the Indians* by B.G. Armstrong and T.P. Wentworth, claims Na-naw-on-ga-be was killed as he returned from the La Point council, and that after he fell his daughter picked up his rifle and shot his killer, a Dakota warrior.

More than 130 years later, in 1991, Dakota and Ojibwe gathered to smoke

sacred pipes on the banks of the Hay River at a spot thought likely to be site of the ambush.

The immediate area is also the site of the first European settle-

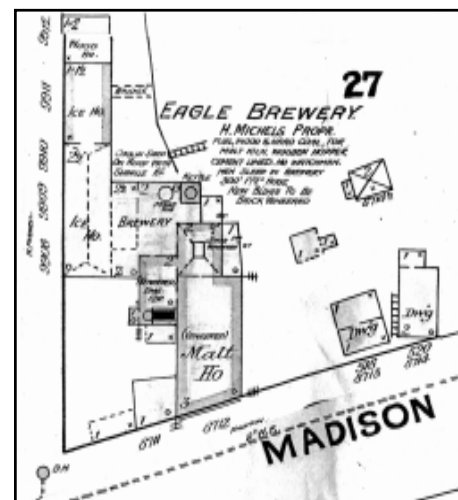
ment in Barron County. The families of Levi Vance, whose trading post Na-naw-on-ga-be frequented, and Louis Bourasau, who witnessed the ambush, were the first two white families in the area, according to Mrs. Louis Bourasau’s *Early History of Vanceburg, Dunn Co., Wis.*

Visitors can learn more about the Ojibwe, including their treaties with the government, in CVM’s exhibit *Paths of the People*, and in the many resources of CVM’s Glenn Curtis Smoot Library and Archives.



An illustration from *Early Life Among the Indians* by B.G. Armstrong and T.P. Wentworth. Na-naw-on-ga-be, leader of the Rice Lake Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa lies dead on the ground, while his daughter picks up his gun and shoots his attacker.

THE BACK STORY



The “other” Leinenkugel brewery: This set of buildings, which stood at the northeast corner of Farwell and Madison Streets in Eau Claire barely a stone’s throw from the former Walter’s–Hibernia plant, housed a brewery for nearly half a century.

In 1845, German brewmeister

Matthias Leinenkugel, his wife and five sons immigrated to Sauk City, Wisconsin, where Matthias opened a brewery with his eldest son Henry. In 1866, Matthias’ second son, Joseph, opened this brewery in Eau Claire. (The next year, third-son Jacob founded the Spring Brewery in nearby Chippewa Falls, which has since gained a measure of fame.)

Joseph’s brewery ran under various names, including Eagle, Eagle & Dells, Eagle & Empire, and Eau Claire Eagle. Henry Michels took over the operation about 1888 and ran it until about 1914. The photograph above, and detail of an 1889 Sanborn map of Eau Claire, both date from the period Michels owned it.