

Wyandot Prepare for Removal from Ohio

Transcribed by Darren English

By Rev. James Wheeler

The following appeared in The Western Christian Advocate, a widely read publication in the 1840's.

"Dear Brother Elliott, - Although my acquaintance with you is somewhat limited, yet, my field of labor for four years past, having been among the Wyandot Indians, where you yourself once lived and labored, and knowing from what I have seen from your own pen that you are somewhat fond of 'reminiscences,' I take the liberty of sending you a few incidents pertaining to the removal of these Indians from the place where they dwelt in the days of your acquaintance with them to their new homes in the West.

You are aware that for years past untiring efforts have been made, from some cause, by the Government of the United States, to extinguish their title to a small piece of land, reserved by them at Upper Sandusky, Ohio. When they were at first visited by the Commissioners appointed by the General Government to treat with them, they met them kindly, but told them frankly that it was not their wish to leave their present dwelling places, and seek for homes in any other place; that the whites had already got all their lands except a little spot, and that they wished to keep, and to keep quietly. They were told that it would be to their interest to sell and go to the West; that there they would have game in plenty; an abundance of land would be secured to them by the Government; and that they would never more be interrupted. Warpole inquired of one of the Commissioners, whether there were not great waters toward the setting sun, as well as toward its rising? The Commissioner replied that there were. 'Well,' said the old chief, 'are there not white folks getting in on that side of us too, as well as on the other?' 'O yes,' was the reply, 'there are a few.' 'Well, now I know,' said the Indian, 'that the disposition of white folks is to crowd; and if we try to get away from them by going where they tell us, they will still crowd up; some will crowd on one side, and some on the other, until they crowd us all out; unless we could fly up and live in the air, and feed on nothing, there would soon be left no place for us.' When the efforts of one Commissioner proved unavailing, another would be sent, and he succeeded by another, and another, until the Indians began to give up the idea of ever living in quiet. At length Warpole himself became an advocate for selling, thinking to get an opportunity of resting for awhile, even if that rest should not be permanent. I do not wish to indulge the thought for a moment, that the Government to which I belong, and feel so warm an attachment, would design to do them wrong; but still I do know that the Indians feel that they have been 'crowded.' In proof of this, at the time the vote was taken, when the treaty was finally agreed to, I noticed that several voted in its favor who had always been on the other side. Among others, I inquired of one how he came to change his mind, and do so differently to what he had always done before. 'Well now,' said he, 'I tell you. Suppose you have horse. Man come: say sell me your horse. You say, no; I like my horse very well: no want to sell him.

Pretty soon he come again: he say, come now, you better sell me your horse. You say, no: go away: I no want to sell my horse at all: I wish you no say any more about it. But he keep coming sixteen year, and you can no make him stop any how you can fix it. You say, Yes, take my horse, and go off, so I be troubled about it no more.' The treaty, however, which has been affected by Colonel John Johnston, in behalf of the United States Government, is undoubtedly the best one for the Indians that has ever been made with them, or any other nation, since the Government began to extinguish Indian titles. Many of the whites seem to feel inclined to find fault that the Indians are to receive forever, or so long as they remain a people, the sum of seventeen thousand, five hundred dollars annually, and five hundred for school purposes. Such persons, however, should remember that the land last sold, if valued at two dollars and fifty cents per acre, would bring all that the Government pays to and for them, and would also leave an amount to produce, at an interest of five percent, more than enough to pay all the annuity created by their last treaty; and for the balance of their annuity, land enough was purchased from them at less than three and a half cents per acre to constitute a principal, the interest of which, at five percent, would pay it. And now if there are any among the fault-finding part of the community who will do better to the Government than the Indians have done, they are greater friends to it than I think they are.

Their principle is that the majority should rule; and when they found that the major part were in favor of a treaty, the remainder submitted in a manner worthy of imitation.

A solicitude on different subjects was manifested by them, and amongst others was a due respect for the remains of their deceased friends. They provided tombstones for their friends and the principal men of their nation, and placed them in the burying ground. Two of the deceased preachers, however, had not been buried there. One of them was Summunduwatt. Now I know that the mere mention of his name thrills through your bosom in a manner not easily described. What a man he was! Though uneducated, he was a philosopher, a statesman, a patriot, and a Christian. He was one of nature's children, cast in her finest mold, and was, moreover, renewed by grace. Bold in appearance, and undaunted in courage, he was uncompromising with everything except what he believed to be exactly right. One instance of his firmness I will give; in it, however, he departed from their accustomed rule of being governed by the majority, and brought upon himself, from many, the charge of obstinacy. How much he may have merited it, I leave for yourself, after hearing the testimony, to make up the verdict. Their old council house had gone to decay; an annuity was to be paid them; the money was on hand, and a place was to be provided where the business could be attended to. This generally occupied from one to two weeks. Application was made to the trustees of the meeting house to know whether it could be procured for that purpose or not, informing them that it should be well taken care of, injured in no way, and left clean and neat, when they had finished their business. The application and promise produced the desired effect on the minds of all the trustees, except Summunduwatt. He told them that he knew enough about payments to be aware that a parcel of traders would be always present; that whiskey peddlers would be swarming around; that many of the people would be drunk; and that it would be

impossible to keep the house and the graveyard from being abused; and, consequently, for his part, he could not give consent for them to have it. They told him he could do as he pleased: they had the consent of the majority; and that was all they asked, 'well,' said he, 'you cannot have it.' 'Now depend on it, for Summun-duwatt says you cannot have it.' Seeing him so determined, an officer went to the missionary and told their wants, and stated that care would be taken of the house. The missionary, being sick at the time, gave his consent. They then told Summunduwatt that it was useless for him to say anymore: the preacher had given consent, and it was folly for him to refuse. He told them they might as well find a place somewhere else first as last, for they should not have it. On Sabbath they had meeting as usual, and on Monday payment was to commence. The traders had already erected their tents, and everything was ready to go into operation in the morning. In the morning, however, when the Government officers came, they found the house was closed, every window fastened down, the doors firmly secured, and Summunduwatt himself within. They demanded entrance, but were told that they had been notified in time that the house could not be had. They got the sheriff to lay his commands on him, and he bade him open the house. But Sum-munduwatt told him he did not know him. He remained in the house from Sabbath until Tuesday, and finally told them if they entered it, they would have to enter over his dead body, and the blood of Summunduwatt would stain the sacred place, to testify in the sight of Heaven that he had withstood its desecration. [The government agents then left the church grounds and found another place for distribution of the annuities!] This undaunted man, who had served as chief to the nation, and as a steward, leader, and preacher in the Church was [later on] inhumanly murdered, butchered by white men, while asleep, merely for the sake of plunder, and body was buried in the woods at a distance from his home. He was too well beloved by his brethren and acquaintances for them to suffer him to remain so far from the graves of his friends, and therefore was removed to the grave yard, which they had secured with a handsome board fence. Over him a neat stone was erected to tell where and how he died. His remains were re-interred, to rest in peace until the trump of Gabriel shall summon him and his murderers to meet at the bar of God. The other was John Steward, their first missionary, well beloved, and long remembered. His remains were likewise removed and on the last Sabbath they spent at Upper Sandusky, and his funeral service was preached again."