

THE OTTAWA PEOPLE

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RNS 00547

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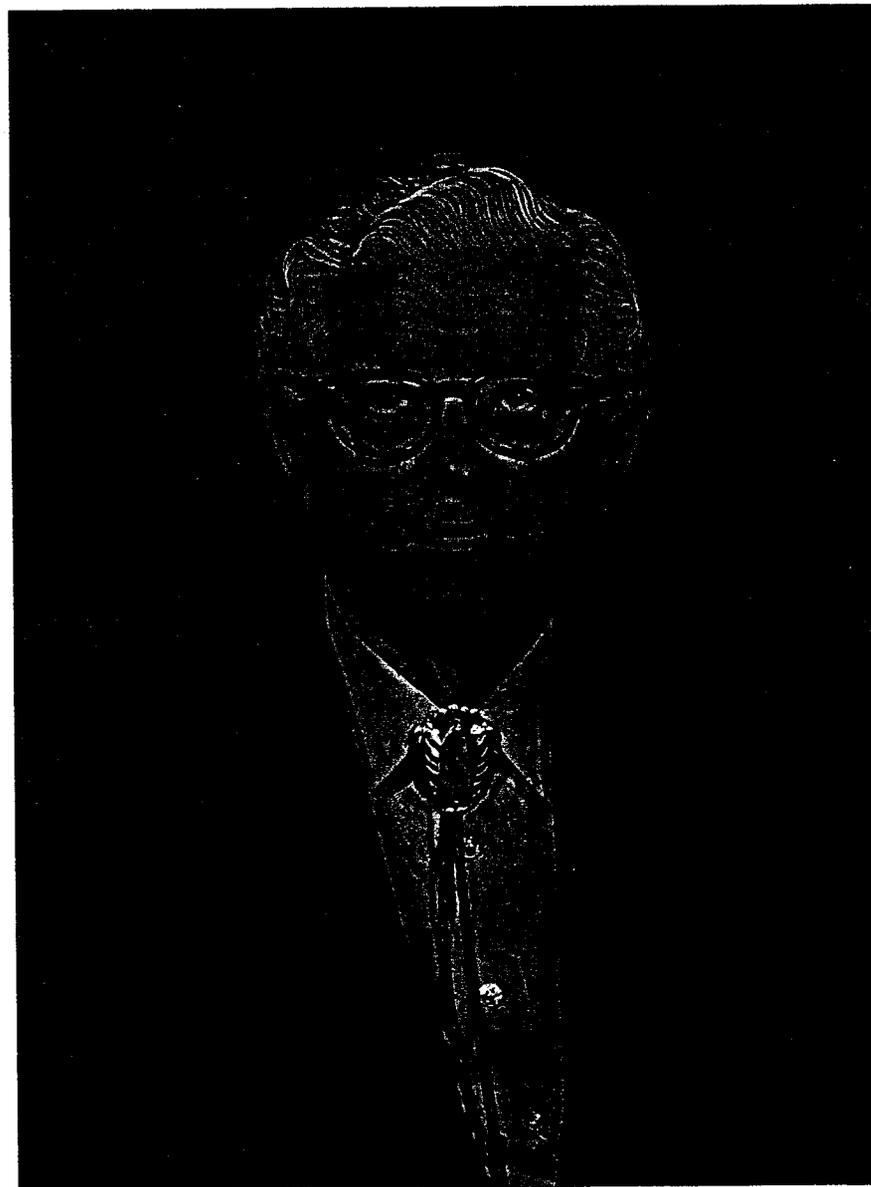
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Photograph by Ed Craig Photography

LEWIS H. BARLOW, Chief of the Ottawa Indian Tribe.

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families. The Winds and Jennisons claim a blood kinship to him, as do the Kings and, through them, the present Chief, Lewis Barlow. Pontiac thus remains fresh in the minds of his people even today, as his name is still one to be reckoned with in Indian history. He was a man of power and of strength who fought when he had to and fought well. He was a man of peace when peace was allowed him and a man of his word at all times.

THE MOVE TO KANSAS

After representatives of both sides met on the Miami River and signed the treaty of August 30, 1831, the U. S. government delayed implementing its part of the bargain. Finally, however, they began to move the Ottawas, 300 mixed blood Shawnees and Senecas, who lived nearby in Ohio, and some 400 Shawnees who were also in the vicinity. The government preferred to move Indians by steamboat, but the Ottawas insisted on going by land and, in this case, by using horses. The Indian Service intended that all of the Ottawas would go at once, but the people refused this and insisted that an exploring party precede them, and then return a messenger with reports about the area and conditions ahead, before the rest would agree to go. On September 19, 1832, the Ottawas left. There were seventy-two men, women, and children who started out for Kansas under the leadership of Ocquanoxcey. When they had originally assembled at Lewiston, Ohio, white men had attempted, with little success, to trade

liquor for the Ottawas' blankets, tents, and rifles. The scene must have been impressive as all the Indians moved out mounted on ponies. Men, women, children — mothers with babies lashed on their backs — all moved on horseback to the West. The Ottawas actually journeyed alone, because the Shawnees and Senecas travelled ahead of them a few miles. On October 29, the Indian groups separated with the Shawnees going one way and the Ottawas another. The Ottawas reached their agency on December 3, 1832. These people who had lived many years at Ocquanoxcey village and Blanchard's Fork, Ohio, were handed over to the agency by Colonel J. J. Albert, who made sure he was given a receipt for them. Within the group of forty-two, there were thirteen males under ten years of age, thirteen from ten to twenty-five, eleven were from twenty-five to fifty, and four were over fifty. Of the females, eight were under ten, eight were from ten to twenty-five, eleven were from twenty-five to fifty, and four were over fifty. These were the original settlers on the agency "near the Kansas," but they would soon be followed by others.

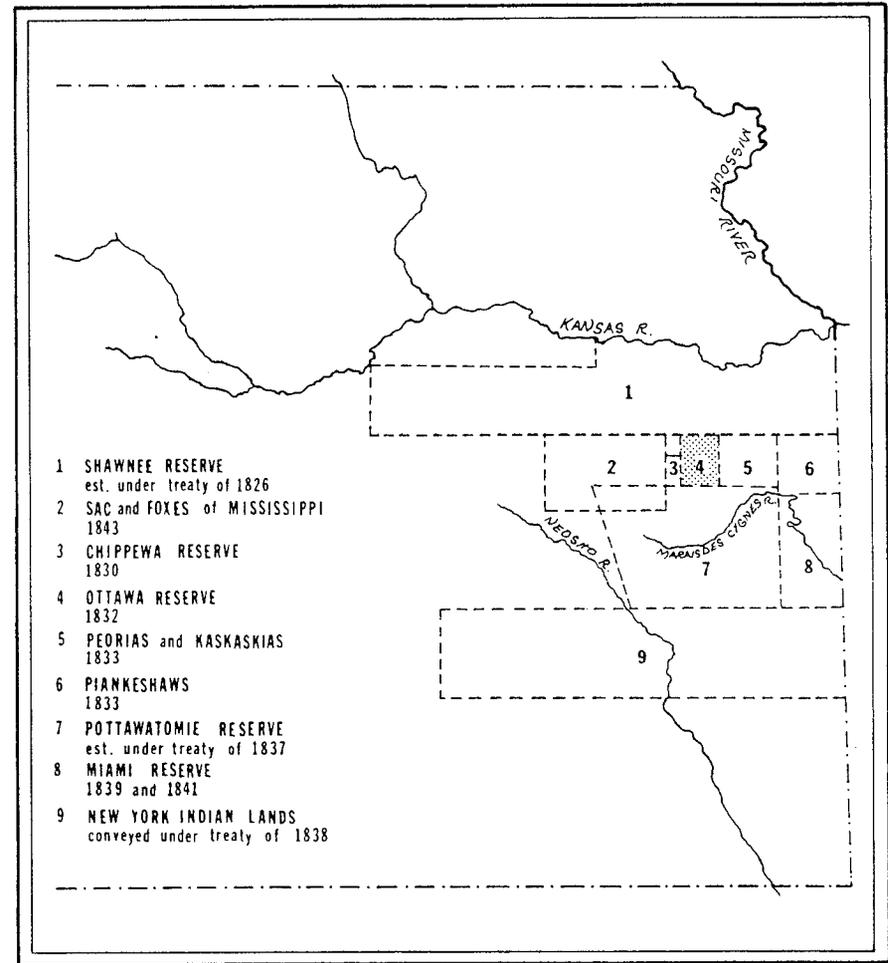
The second group of Ottawas waited five years to move. The land-hungry Ohio settlers also had to wait, because the Ottawas simply refused to go until they received a full report about their new homeland. A great deal more planning went into the second move. The Ottawas agreed that this time the journey should be made by steamer and canal boat and finally by Missouri River steamer. The Missouri steamers

deposited them at Chouteau's landing near Westport, Missouri (present day Kansas City), and an overland trip took them to the Osage River Sub-Agency. This journey was under the direction of the famed Indian scholar and reformer Henry Schoolcraft, who began the trip on August 31, 1837 and delivered his charges on October 11, 1837.

This left some 250 in Ohio yet to be sent to Kansas. The second band was led by Wausionquette and included about the same age proportions as had the previous group: two infants died, as did one woman. The man Pantee left the sojourners on September 4 at Cleveland, Ohio and disappeared. He could probably be likened to a deserter. There is no evidence that he was ever injured or sick.

The third and last group, comprised of 108 Ottawas, left Maumee, Ohio on June 25, 1839. Their head chief was Autokee. There was supposed to be another 125 going with them, but they had been talked out of the move by certain of their relatives from Canada. The travellers arrived in Louisville, Kentucky on August 13, 1839, and completed the journey to Kansas on September 25, 1839. Only one of them died — a girl ten years of age.

The Ottawas who made the move to Kansas were largely young, and very few aged people took part. It is noteworthy that almost all the great families of the Ottawas were represented in the three groups, and that their muster rolls list all their names in the Ottawa language. In another forty years, the use of Ottawa names would be very rare, as they adapted



Map by Karen Lindekugel

MAP 2. TERRITORIAL KANSAS AND CERTAIN INDIAN TERRITORIES, 1846.

very quickly into the white man's world. These were Indian people who made a very difficult transition into their way of life. They moved from a wooded area and a life-style of great familiarity into the open prairie, where life was to be entirely different. They had no preparation for this, and the government, while anxious that the Indians succeed, was in no position to give them much help. The Ottawas were also moving into an area soon to be encompassed by white settlement and then subjected to bloody internecine warfare in the 1850's and 60's. The tribe would face this and cope with it well. They were, after all, a great nation of traders, who had, in their history, already managed to survive many drastic changes of circumstance.

LIFE IN KANSAS AND ANOTHER MOVE

The removal of the three bands of Ottawas, those of Blanchard's Fork, Rochedeboeuf, and Ocquanoxcey's village, took only a percentage of the Ottawas to the West. The majority probably remained in Ohio, Michigan, and Canada where their descendants still live. The trip was, as has been indicated, peaceful and relatively safe compared with the removal of other Indian groups. Yet, there was resistance and tragedy. One of the old village chiefs named Thunderbolt had refused to sign the treaties in Ohio. Unscrupulous white man got him drunk and, when he was in no condition to resist, took him by the wrist, put a pen in his hand, and watched while he signed his name to the document. Thunderbolt was

highly disturbed when he discovered what he had done and denounced the whole thing, refusing to go west. He was then tied hand and foot, thrown into a wagon, and taken all the way to Kansas in bondage. Thunderbolt no longer had the power to resist and was terribly homesick. He no longer raged, but instead brooded over the things that had been done to him and his people, and in a few months, he died.

The rest of the people made the trip in a better state. The land to which they were removed was really quite nice. It was located on the Marais des Cygnes River, and the core of it was on the site where present day Ottawa, Kansas, has been built. The land was upland prairie with wooded valleys, and, in the 1830's, it teemed with game. Deer, prairie chickens, wild turkeys, and quail were everywhere. Buffalo and antelope were also nearby, and there was good fishing in all the rivers. There were even wild horses in the valley of the Neosho, which was only two days' journey to the west. Few Ottawas ever become buffalo hunters, but they traded with the Kaw and other Indians for jerked buffalo meat, which they enjoyed eating. For all the pleasant nature of the land, however, many of them were homesick, unhappy, and physically ill, and many of them died within the first five years.

It was in Kansas that the Ottawas first felt the real impact of Protestant Christianity. They had been exposed to the French Jesuits in years past, but apparently few of the tribe had become Christian. Now, for the first time, they were placed at the tender mer-