Brooklyn Public Library

The Brooklyn Daily Eagle (Brooklyn, New York) · Sun, Feb 16, 1902 · Page 45

Downloaded on Feb 26, 2015

U. S. BUREAU OF ETHNOLOGY TO STUDY LONG ISLAND INDIANS.

Continued From Page 1.

ling a more promising conversation a newspaper clipping was shown to her in which it was stated that the government intended to send Professor McGee to learn something about the tribal customs and tongue of the Montauk Indians. The woman took the clipping—and held it upside down. For three or four minutes she studied it intently, making no remark and only betraying by her motionless eyes and the position of the paper that she was not reading it.

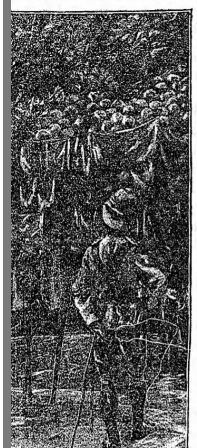
"If your sight is not good," suggested her visitor, politely, "I'll read that to you."

The woman handed over the paper with evident relief. "I can't make naffin out of it," she giggled.

"Don't ask me. I don't know," with another giggle, was her comment after the reading of the slip.

Presently the "King," driving a scraggy horse hitched to a wagon loaded with wood, drove up. He descended from the wagon in leisurely state and greeted the driver, whom he knew. The King, at close range, is not an impressive figure. He appears to suffer from some malformation of the hips which gives him a peculiar look of breadth at that point. His body seems to be poorly developed and the general effect is that of the trunk of a boy on the long but weedy legs of a man. The same peculiarity of the hips gives the King a swaying walk, as though his legs were hinged directly to the sides of his body.

Facially the King of the Montauks is more satisfactory. He has a long, narrow head, with a high, fairly prominent and rounded forehead. The nose is long and straight, with nothing of the African about it; the nostrils are thick but sensitive. The ears are small, well shaped and set close to the head. He wears a thin, weedy moustache, resembling the celebrated "three-hairs-and-a-bristle" of Thomas B. Reed. His hair is the straight, wiry, coarse black hair of the Indian or Malay. He wears it trimmed in the American fashion. The eyes are large, brown and thoughtful, with a tinge of melancholy that saves the face from being ordinary. It is the eyes, too, which overshadow and make one oblivious to a peculiar



COVERED BY THE ARO EXPEDITION.

A shaded gorge in the midst of thick bush. The island, on which was an altar of rough logs, whale ribs lay on a rock, and the arrows hung on left of the entrance. The rocky sides of the gorge. Behind the guns and skulls stood a wooden altar

look of craft, of cunning, of feebness, which is the first prevailing impression. The other day the King wore a battered soft hat, with a narrow brim, a well worn overcoat and trousers supported by a belt that shrieked its work. If the King's ancestry showed anywhere it was in his walk, which resembled in some measure the pigeon-toed "hitchy" walk of the Western redman.

"Why do they call you the 'King'?" the Montauk chief was asked.

"'Cause I am the King, I s'pose!" replied Wyandank, as he methodically stacked his pile of firewood.

"How long have the Montauks had a king? Most tribes have a chief, have they not?"

"I d'know," replied the King of the Montauks. "They've called 'em kings as long as I can remember. It's about the same thing as chief, I guess."

"Are you the hereditary chief or the elected chief?"

"See here, now," said the King, leaning against his firewood, "I ain't agoin' to talk about all this fer nuthin'. I ain't goin' to put money in nobody's pocket less'n I gets some of it for myself. So now, 'fore we go on, what do I get out of this?"

It turned out that for the sum of $2, cash in hand, the King of the Montauks would consent to talk about the troubles of his tribe and would pose for one photograph. Additional pictures of the royal family would be extra.

There followed a long conversation concerning the claim of the Indians to the lands comprising Montauk Point. This claim will be discussed subsequently. It developed that the Indians hold that their claim is good upon the land as long as the tribe exists as such; that is to say, as long as the tribal customs, government and organization continue. From that point the following conversation occurred.

"How many of the old Indian customs do you keep up, Wyandank? Do you have any special ceremonies when a child is born?"

"No," replied the King. "Nothing special. We just have it registered down to the town. They's a law if you don't."

"What happens when a man is married? Do you have any sort of an Indian wedding?"

"No," said Wyandank Pharaoh, "we gets a preacher up for the house, or else goes down t'church, an' that's all that's to it."

"No Indian ceremonies, then?"

"No."

"And how about your burials? When a big man dies, what do you do? Is there any old custom you follow out?"

"It's just 'bout like anybody else's funeral," said Wyandank. "We don't do different from other folks; jus' buy a cawf'n an' the minister says a piece. It's just a burryin'."

"Have you got a special cemetery—a burying ground?"

"Oh, yes, we've got one. It's just down there a piece."

"How do you mark the graves? Any special Indian way?"

"All depends." Replied the King. "If a man's folks is fixed right he gets a stone, an' no end. Otherways he gets a board, or a shingle, or sumdin like that."

"Then you don't keep up any of the old Indian customs, do you, Wyandank?"

"Oh, sure we do," answered the King, cheerfully. "We has all the Indin ways still."

"How do you mean? You have no Indian ceremonies for births, or deaths, or marriages. What do you do?"

"Well," said the King, volubly, "we have our tribal meetin's and then we makes sort of laws for ourselves—bylaws dey calls 'em."

"Do any of your people speak the Indian language?"

"No, none of 'em. We all talks just like now; no diff'ent."

"Do you still use the Indian words for anything; any of the things you use?"

"No."

"Don't you know the Indian words for anything around here?"

"Lots o' 'em! No," chuckled the King. "I don't know any of that old time stuff."

"Didn't you ever hear your father, or your grandfather use any of the old Indian words? Didn't they speak the language?"

"No, sir," said the King, with emphasis. "Never did none of those things. Didn't know how!"

Further conversation with the King of the Montauks elicited the statements that he had never heard a word of the Indian language in his life; that none of his people had and that he did not think any of their relations ever had. Aside from the so called "tribal meetings" none of the aboriginal customs were preserved in the tribe. The King wore no distinctive dress and exercised no particular authority over his people. None of the Indian ceremonies or peculiarities had been preserved and he said he did not positively know that any full blooded descendant of the original tribe still lived.

Concerning the "tribal meetings" there seemed to be equal uncertainty. First Wyandank said that they were held at regular intervals; then that they were held "when they felt like it." He professed not to remember when the last meeting was held, and, although he said he made laws for his people, he said he could not recall the provisions of any of the measures he had instituted. Later he said the "laws" were made at the "tribal meetings," but he could not remember them. Wyandank said that he had been elected King of the Montauks, but afterward claimed to be the hereditary ruler of the tribe and said that the Montauks could not meet and choose another leader.

In fact, the only points upon which Wyandank Pharaoh, "King of the Montauks," seemed to be at all clear were those relating to the tribal lawsuit. He knew the names of the lawyers concerned and was in the full swing of his eloquence concerning it when the door opened and an elderly woman, short and stout, but very erect and alert, entered the room. The "King" looked sheepish.

"This is my mother, Mis' Banks," said Wyandank Pharaoh.

The old woman, her eyes as bright as those of a bird, took not the slightest notice of the greetings of her son's visitors. She looked at her son.

"You, Dank," said she, "I want to use that horse an' wagin, don't you know that? Now, you git right out an' see I git it."

"Yes'm," said the King, meekly, and disappeared.

"We should very much like to have a photograph of you, Mrs. Banks," began one of the King's visitors, "and if——"

"Well, you won't get it," snapped the Queen Dowager, seizing the poker and committing assault and battery upon the stove. "I don't want you here, either, an' the quicker you both git out the better I shall be pleased."

"We'd make the photograph a very pretty one," said the photographer, insinuatingly.

"Yes, I dessay," sneered the old woman. "I've heerd that before. They was a magazine promised just that same thing, an' made me look just as ugly as they could, with long hair hangin' all around my face an' all sorts of dirty-lookin' things. I won't have no more of it, an' no more won't 'Dank."

The King, meanwhile, was making "sign talk" from the background, the signs, being interpreted, meaning, "Come outside away from the Queen Dowager." These signs being obeyed, the King murmured:

"Now, what's that two dollars?"

When the money was produced the King pocketed it hastily, remarking as he did so that "it wasn't much," and then posed himself hastily against the woodpile, out of sight of the Queen Dowager, he thought. It was not to be, however. Hardly had the focus been adjusted when the Queen Dowager appeared in the doorway with an ax. The ax may have been either accidental or intentional, but it led to quick action with the camera.

"Now, I don't want you 'round here no mo," said the Queen Dowager, firmly, "an I'll thank you to git out."

Which thing was accomplished.

The land surrounding the shacks and huts of the Indians is good, rich soil, upon which either garden stuff or crops could be raised. Barely an acre of it is under cultivation, however, the population of Freetown apparently preferring to get a hand-to-mouth living from the white residents rather than to grow any vegetables or crops either for market or their own consumption. Among the other Indian characteristics that have been transmitted through the devious paths of intermarriage the ancient objection to work seems to be the most prominent. The average Indian house could be erected for $100. A white man—and a good many negroes—would be ashamed to live in such a comfortless, dirty and shiftless way, but this band seems to be content to freeze in winter and fry in summer rather than make a determined effort for better things. Even the meeting place in which the "Tribal Meetings" are held—or are supposed to be held—is a shack that is hardly good enough for a mule stable. To make up for its constructive shortcomings, however, it bears an absurdly pretentious sign, describing the shanty as "The Union League Club of East Hampton." Liquor is forbidden upon Indian reservations, but perhaps mixed blood counters immunity, for the most prominent features of the landscape in Freetown were the heaps of broken whisky bottles and liquor flasks lying near most of the shanties.

In striking comtrast to the condition of affairs at Easthampton was that seen at the Shinnecock Reservation, near Southampton, L. I. There seemed to be no more pure-blooded Indians at Shinnecock than at Easthampton, but the entire standard was higher. The people were neither servile nor aggressively independent. The children were clean and well dressed. More than sixty of them attended school and were taught by a thoughtful, educated and observant teacher—a Virginian—who was alive to the possibilities of his pupils, and who, both as pastor of the church on the reservation and as the school teacher had striven with might and brain to inculcate thrifty and modern methods and to raise the standard of his charges. It does not seem to be too much to say that most of the difference existing between the conditions on the Freetown and on the Shinnecock Indian reservations is due to the work of this man and to the intelligent support which has been given to him by the leaders of the people of the reservation.

The Shinnecock reservation lies two miles from Southampton and about ten from Good Ground, L. I. It is mainly of land that is nearly flat, destitute of timber, sandy in places, but in the main good land upon which crops and vegetables could be raised by intelligent effort. The reservation contains an amount of land variously stated at 200, 600 and 800 acres. There seems to be some doubt about the exact area, but the matter is in the Southampton authorities.

The land is divided into tracts of land, sometimes at long intervals and sometimes close together, are the houses of the Shinnecock tribe. Some of them are cheap little shacks—although the worst among them are better than the best Freetown can show—but the majority are neat, comfortable little frame structures, showing signs of taste both in exterior decoration and in the arrangements of the little garden or door yards about them. Several of the houses were entered upon invitation and were found to be as different as possible from those of Easthampton. All were comfortably furnished; many even showed an approach to the minor luxuries of life.

In one house on the Shinnecock reservation there were found three of the most intelligent and interesting people of the tribe—Charles Eleazer, his wife, and Wallace Coffee. Mrs. Eleazer is the daughter of the last full blood Indian chief of the Shinnecocks, her husband is related to many of the best descendants of the tribe, while Wallace Coffee is a descendant in the direct line of that "Chief Coffee" who was also a preacher of the gospel, an active missionary to his tribe and a most progressive man. The old chief was buried with all honors by the Church Missionary Society. His grave, which is now one far in the Indian country, is now almost grazed by the Long Island Railroad trains as they leave Good Ground. A marble headstone recounts the virtues of the old chief; the grave, and a tree which shades it, being inclosed in a stone white fence.

Of all the people on the Shinnecock reservation these three people seemed to be the best informed concerning the tribal traditions and history. Eleazer, a tall, stalwart, well educated man, did the honors of his house with a natural dignity and courtesy that could not have been excelled. He says frankly that he is not perfectly sure of the record of his ancestors at some points, but the tribal lists show him to be of Indian descent. Facially he is an interesting example of the result of much intermarriage with races distinct from the Indian. He has the straight, black hair of his Indian relatives, but it seems to be inserted in the scalp in such fashion that no two patches of hair lie in the same direction. The effect is to give a matted and rough appearance to the man's hair, so that the observer is reminded of the Japanese race. Once on that track it is easy enough to recognize other characteristics of the Mongolian race, and especially of the Japanese. As far as Eleazer knows there is no Japanese admixture, yet he has the high cheek bones and the peculiar membrane across the inner canthus of the eye which produces the familiar "almond eye." The man works as a mason, yet his hands are long and slender and his nails fine and narrow. He has very little hair on his face.

Mrs. Eleazer is one of the best looking women in the tribe. She is of medium stature, with a splendid figure. Her hair is long, black, straight and abundant, but it is much finer and more silky than her husband's. Her complexion is of a rich, red-brown, through which the flush shows as readily as in a white woman. Her eyebrows are finely arched, her nose is straight and perfectly shaped and her mouth is just sufficiently full tipped to be in accord with the rest of the face. The entire countenance is an oval, which is assisted by the pleasing but unassuming way in which she dresses her hair. In short, Mrs. Eleazer is a good example of an Indian beauty of good family.

The fact is that all these Indians, and especially the tribe, or part of a tribe, which made its home on the site of the present Shinnecock reservation, were seafaring Indians. Old records show that many of them made long voyages, sometimes as hired sailors and sometimes in their own little vessels. There is evidence, too, that many of the men lived wives in foreign parts and that some of the women, sailing with relatives, found husbands among strange peoples and brought them back to the reservation to live.

It was to a shipwreck, in fact, that the practical extinction of the pure blooded Shinnecock Indians was due. In December, 1876, the ship Circassian went ashore near the Shinnecock reservation. The Indians went to the aid of the crew and rescued them. Subsequently a number of the Indians came under David Walker, their chief, were engaged to help float and navigate the ship. While they were working upon her a leak sprang up and on December 29, 1876, the Circassian went down with all hands. None of the Indians were rescued, the tribe losing its chief and twenty-one other members of its tribe. The bodies were subsequently recovered and buried in a separate grave-yard, but it remained for an old Virginia negro, not an Indian, to mark the graves with boards on which he wrote the names of the dead.

From this calamity the tribe never really recovered. With the death of Chief Walker it was claimed by many that the last Indian of pure blood disappeared, although there seems to be evidence that in the veins of Mrs. Eleazer, the daughter of Chief Walker, there still flows the pure Indian blood.

Nearly thirty miles away, and two miles from the village of Mastic, L. I., is the Poosepatuck reservation. This is second in squalor and misery only to the Montauks. From a point of Easthampton. There are but a few dozen of Indians on the Poosepatuck reservation, and there are only two decent houses on the tract. Both of these are owned by tribal leaders. The late king—or chief—who was known variously as Walker, Hero and Delaware, lived in the worst chicken coop on the reservation. Besides a shack fifteen feet square, thirty feet high, with shingled roof and both ends open, the tribe owned a log house for entertainment and vehicles, and a shed for the "palace" of the late "King." Furnish this picture with a dozen ragged, hideously deformed children and you have the king by character. Add a few goats and several hundred fleas, chicken lice and flies, and you have the palace complete.

As far as society is concerned the Poosepatuck have the best reservation of all the Long Island Indians. It is on the edge of a forest and is reached by the full length of a wide and beautifully wooded strip of land which is water on both sides. Fish are plentiful and the Indians live on them almost entirely. There are few dwellings on the strip which has a church, a school and a burying ground. The latter is located in a thicket which the residents have not even taken the trouble to clear.

At the time the reservation was visited the creek was frozen over and about eighteen children were sliding and sliding on the ice. No sooner did the car containing the visitors come in sight of the children than a peculiar cry was given. Instantly every child and some of them seemed to be fifteen years old—stopped dead. For a moment the blood and speed and the next instant scattered like frightened wild fowl. They almost fell in their haste to reach the bank, where, as soon as they arrived, they dived headforemost the sheltering brushwood. Each clump of rushes or bit of brushwood hid a child peering out from shelter exactly like a wild beast. No Indian agents would make them come forward, forsake their shelter or show themselves. At every attempt to approach they ran like so many rabbits. It was a most unpleasant sight. Many of the other people showed similar dread and on all the reservation only two men could be found who could be approached for conversation. Neither of those two men claimed to possess much Indian blood, but both were intelligent, and by the holding of an occasional tribal meeting there was not found any evidence of a form of tribal government of an organization.

The claim of the Montauk Indians, to which reference has been made originated in 1792, at which time an agreement was made between the whites and the Indians relative to the land on and about Montauk Point. In 1859 a commission reported that there were only 135 Montauk Indians then living. In 1885 there died "Stephen, the king or sachem of the Montauk Indians, who was buried to a combination. This king was only distinguished from others of his tribe by wearing a hat with a yellow ribbon on it." In 1870 the Sag Harbor newspaper records the death of Elizabeth Job, queen of the Indians, "leaving but two females of her tribe, both stricken in years." Finally, it seems, there remained but one old woman of all the Montauk Indians. She was induced to sign away her rights for a pittance. As the land was put up for sale and was bought by Robert W. Grinnell, who afterward disposed of it to Austin Corbin. From Mr. Corbin it passed into the possession of the Long Island Railroad.

At that time it was believed that the Indian rights had been extinguished, but there has since been some doubt of the matter. The discovery of the lineage of the Wyandank Pharaoh gave the descendants of the Indians a fighting chance, and a lawsuit has commenced to recover the land. Several times the case has been decided against the Indians, but these decisions have been reversed and a new trial is now ordered. The contention of the railroad is that the Montauk tribe, as an organization, has disappeared. The Indians deny. Upon the proof of the extinction or existence of the Indian rests the case.

Baroness von Hutten, Ex-Ist Burgess, Countess Lovatt de Chavanne, R. R. Shankey, Mrs. Russell Sage, Duffield Osborne, Josephine D. Schain, Among these are many who are well known to you; some of them will be found in every number of this magazine, the production of one of which has caused the publishing world to acclaim it supreme.

Katrina Trask, Mrs. Fletcher Vane, Rose Cecil O'Neill, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Edward S. Van Zile, Brand Whitlock, Frances Aymar Mathews, Ford Madox Hueffer, Paul Laurence Dunbar, John R. Tabb, Grace Ellery Channing, Lloyd Mifflin, Julia Ellsworth Ford, Charles Stokes Wayne.

A MARVEL.

LAST AND BEST—Number of readers entertained, delighted, charmed, satisfied—devoted friends—all over the world where English is read.

Tell your newsman always to reserve a copy for you, or ask him to forward to you your annual subscription, which is still about due. We make NO special offers. Price 50c. cash.

Each number of *The Smart Set* is worth double the price—25 cents.

If you have read it you know this—if not, you should.

If you have not read it, buy a number and you will know it to be true.

THE MARCH NUMBER, OUT TO-DAY,

CONTAINS:

ARABY (Leading Novelette). . . By Baroness von Hutten
THE GAIETIES OF PARIS, . . . By Edgar Saltus
THE PENANCE OF REDWIG, . . . By Lillian Bell
WHEN WHIG MET TORY LONG AGO, . By Alfred Henry Lewis
THE MAN, . . . By Justus Miles Forman
A LITTLE SUPPER IN SAN FRANCISCO, By Gelett Burgess
DAPHNE, . . . By Bliss Carman
A WOMAN OF IDEALS, . . . By Kate Jordan
AND FORTY-ONE OTHER SIGNED CONTRIBUTIONS

Send NOW your subscription for one year, $3.00. Remit in cheque, post-office or express money-order or registered letter addressed to

ESS ESS PUBLISHING CO., 1135 Broadway, New York.

Clipped By:

admin510
Thu, Feb 26, 2015

Copyright © 2015 Newspapers.com. All Rights Reserved.