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Father William Hamilton on Traditional Origin of Omahas and Other Tribes

William Hamilton

Robert Furnas

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marriages and two births, but did not inform me as to what were their name or even the sex.

After Omaha had become a village of some importance, a young gentleman informed me that he was born at Fort Atkinson and was the first white child born in Nebraska.

Mr. Allison, who came to Bellevue in 1834 as a teacher and missionary, informed me that a Mr. Rentz, a blacksmith and married man, resided there, to whom was born the first male child of that agency, and that his, Mr. Allison's, daughter, afterward Mrs. Captain Holland, our former city marshal, was the first female born at that mission.

Fort Calhoun was abandoned and the troops sent to Fort Leavenworth about 1827. If the young man above referred to was born even up to the year of evacuation, he was ahead of Mr. Harnois. But we have at least two others. Mr. Rentz's son born at Bellevue previous to 1834, and Mrs. Holland, daughter of Mr. Allison, born at that mission in 1834, and others a few years later, were all older than Mr. Harnois.

ALF. D. JONES,

Secretary O. S. A.

The following letter is from Rev. Wm. Hamilton, who was a Presbyterian missionary among the north-western Indians, commencing in what is now Kansas, in 1837:

OMAHA MISSION, March 4, 1868.

A. D. Jones, Esq.:

DEAR SIR—Yours of February 22d is received. I would have replied at once, but thought I would enquire of Le Fleche, to see if the traditions of the Omahas was the same as that of the Iowas, from whom I first received the traditions. It is as follows:

A long time ago the Iowas (they call themselves Pa-ho-cha or Pa-hu-cha), Otoes, Omahas, and Missourians (called Ne-yu-ta-ca) were one people, and in their traveling they encamped in four bands on the river (perhaps the Missouri or Mississippi). The Iowas encamped on a sand-bar, and the dust blew in their faces, and they received the name of Pa-hu-cha, or "Dusty Men." They are called Iowas only by other tribes and the whites. Long, in his "Expedition," interprets it "Gray Snow." "Pa," or "pah," is used for the nose of the

human face, or for the head of an animal, but not for the human head. "Ho-cha" is "dusty," hence of a dirty gray color. "Pa," scarcely distinguishable from "pah," the nose, is the name for snow; hence Long's mistake, being ignorant of their traditions. Ne-u-tach, the Missourians, encamped at the mouth of a stream, "Ne-u-cha-ta," hence they were Ne-u-cha-ta—"at the mouth." But Le Fleche says the same men were in a canoe, and were drowned, "ne," "water," "o-cha-tan-ye," "died in;" ne-o-cha-ta, "drowned," or "died in water." The Omahas encamped above, on the stream "E-ro-ma-ha," contracted into "O-ma-ha," which means "above," with reference to a stream, or "above, on a stream." To understand the word, I must add that they have three words translated "above." "Mang-gre," with reference to height, "air;" "o-me-re-ta," with reference to a country, "bordering on" or "near a stream;" "e-ro-ma-ha," with reference to the stream where your position is. Literally, Omaha is "e-ro-ma-ha," with reference to Bellevue, but "u-re-ka-re-ta," with reference to this point. Le Fleche gives the same meaning to the word that the Iowas do. The way the Otoes get their name is hardly fit to be named. Otoes, Iowas, and Missourians speak the same language. Omahas, Poncas, Osages, and Thonges speak a kindred language, but far more guttural, the two last named especially so. Hoping the above may prove satisfactory, I remain,

yours truly,

WM. HAMILTON.

In connection with the letter of Father Hamilton, I desire to add the following facts:

During my term of four years as agent for the Omaha Indians, I took pains to learn all possible as to the origin, meaning of name, etc. From the oldest chief, Noise, or Muttering Thunder, I learned this tradition, and which I give as near in his own language as possible:

"A long time ago" (that is about as definite as time can be obtained from an Indian) "our fathers came from where the sun wakes up" (far east). "They were looking for a new home, where the sun goes to sleep" (in the far west). "They crossed the Ne-shu-da" (Missouri) "river way down below here, and out onto the sea land"

(meaning the western prairies). To abbreviate the interview, the chief proceeded to relate that, after wandering on the prairies for a long time, they became discouraged. Dissensions and differences of opinion prevailed, but all agreed to go back to the Ne-shu-da river. The tribe divided into four bands, as indicated by Father Hamilton, and started eastward to the river. What is now the Omaha tribe—their band reached the river farther north than either of the other three bands and for this reason were called the Ma-has. The interpretation of the word “Ma-ha,” given me by Noise, was “farthest up the river,” “up yonder,” “up above the others.”

As proof of the original name, “Ma-ha,” I have now in my possession original documents, credentials of chiefship, given to the “Ma-ha Indians;” one, in Spanish, given in 1794 to “Wa-ging-a-sa-by, head chief nation Ma-has;” two given by “James Wilkinson, Commander-in-chief of the Army of the U. S., and Governor of the Territory of Louisiana, and Supt. Indian affairs,” given on July, 1806, to Wa-ga-sa-by; one to Wash-co-ma-ni, chief of the Ma-has; and one to Wa-ho-ra-ka, a soldier of the Ma-ha nation.

Lewis and Clarke, in the narrative of their expedition in 1804–5–6, speak of the “Ma-ha nation” and “Ma-ha village.”

ROBT. W. FURNAS.

SOME HISTORICAL DATA ABOUT WASHINGTON COUNTY.

W. H. Woods, of Fort Calhoun, Washington county, furnishes me with following data:

Hon. R. W. Furnas, President Nebraska Historical Society:

DEAR SIR—Agreeable to our promise to continue our investigations, we, last Tuesday, visited the site of the old village mentioned in Bell's History of Washington County, page 39, as the site of an old Mormon settlement of 1845; but thought by Mr. Grenell and others to have been of much older date, and probably a farm station or outpost of either Fort Atkinson, which lay about one mile east, or Fort Calhoun, four miles south.

The location is but a few rods north of the present De Soto P. O.,