Bicentennial Scrapbook

Kind Treatment Kept Indians Friendly With The Settlers

No. 137
By Walter S. Ratliff

It is not definitely known, but it is generally believed that when Moses Kelley first entered the tract of land of a quarter section, that became the homestead of the Ratliff family for more than 100 years. Northwest of Richmond, it included the habitation of a little band of Indians.

There were members of the Shawnee and the Potawatomi tribes that were quite numerous throughout the Whitewater Valley at that time, as well as for several years afterward.

Editor's Note — This is one of a series of articles by the late Walter Ratliff, descendant of one of the pioneer families, in which he presents information about the Indians who lived in the Whitewater Valley when the whites first came here.

The village contained about a dozen wigwams or lodges, covered chiefly with long broad sheets of bark taken mostly from the elm and the cottonwood trees. These lodges were grouped upon the hill at the sharpest bend of the river and near one of the coldest and strongest running springs of water that could be found on the entire farm. A well-trodden path connected the site of the cold spring with the little village camp, while Indian trails angled both up and down the river along its banks.

Upon the arrival of Cornelius Ratliff (1756-1832) at his new home in the western country, the Indian chief who was present at that time was no doubt an interesting sight for the family. It is said that the chief resolutely stood with his tomahawk carelessly resting on his arm with his bow and arrows sticking in the belt that girdled his body. He wore a long headdress reaching almost to the ground behind him, thickly studded with showy feathers, evidently obtained from the wild turkey. His features were stained with paints of many colors.

With his friends, David Hoover and William Bulla, while in quest of land, Cornelius had observed some of the traits of the Indians, but he was much concerned, however, when the chieftain suddenly shifted his wigwam to other quarters. This was attributed to the fact that the Ratliff family used water from the spring that issued from the side of the hill near where his lodge was pitched.

Bartering

The broad beaver hat and the plain clothes, with the kind dispositions of Cornelius and his wife, Elizabeth, soon assured these wigwam dwellers of their friendship, and it was not long before they came to barter for corn and salt. When the Indians wanted to trade for corn Ratliff would measure the corn in a basket, then empty the corn and give the willow basket to the Indians to be filled. With one of their blankets spread upon the ground, the Indians would collect about it.

After shelling the corn, the grain was divided among the Indians before they left. Some of the warriors offered in exchange the pelts of bears, wolves, wildcats and other wild animals, but Cornelius, not caring to deal in them, directed that they be taken to the little settlement of Richmond.

Occasionally, the squaws, usually three in number, would enter the Ratliff cabin unannounced to sit down at once upon the floor, generally in the middle of one of the two little rooms. Elizabeth often had her patience sorely tried by their visits and through their persistent begging of everything in sight.

She took a rather novel way of riding herself of their presence. With her closed hand, she advanced to one of the sitting squaws and gave her a jab on the shoulder. The Indian woman readily realized from the firmness with which the blow was given that it was a strong hint to depart. She arose and quietly left the cabin followed by the other two.

Indians Go West

At the outbreak of the Indian war of 1812, two years after the arrival of the Ratliff family, these Redmen left for the West, removing their villages. They remained away until the close of hostilities, when the little band returned to relocate on their old village site and to remain for an additional period of two years.

It is a well-known fact that when the white settlers sought safety in the blockhouses or went to Miami Valley for protection during the War of 1812, the families of David Hoover, William Bulla and Cornelius Ratliff remained on their farms. Not in a single instance were they molested.

The Indians continued to be on friendly terms with the settlers, especially so to those who treated them with fairness or had shown them kindnesses. Cornelius Ratliff enjoyed giving to his copper colored friends, when they called at his cabin home, apples, pears and maple sugar. Although they were always accepted without word or gesture, Cornelius could plainly observe in their countenances an expression that was evidence of their appreciation.

(To Be Continued)

Servicemen's News

Senior Airman Kirk E. Crank, son of Mr. and Mrs. Ted Dis- exter, Sgt. Crank, of Richmond, Ind., was promoted to the rank of Staff Sergeant on Nov. 10, 1976. He is a 1973 graduate of Shenandoah Valley High School, and is serving with the Marine Aviation Operations Group in Quantico, Va. Airman Patrick S. Chapman, son of Mr. and Mrs. W. L. Chapman of Richmond, Ind., was promoted to the rank of Airman First Class on Nov. 10, 1976. He is a 1973 graduate of Southmont High School, and is serving with the Marine Aviation Operations Group in Quantico, Va.