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Battleford Hangings

SASKATCHEWAN INDIAN JULY 1972 v03 n07 p05

After the rebellion in 1885 those taking part were brought to trial. Some, such as Poundmaker and Big Bear, were sent to jail. Eight were hung.

The day the hangings took place all the Indian students at the Battleford Industrial School were taken out to witness the event. The reason for this was to remind them what would happen if one made trouble with the crown and to provide a lasting reminder of the white man's power and authority.

After the hangings the bodies were placed in a mass grave and buried. The grave remained hidden for years until recently some students, following old plans of the fort, located the grave site.

After the uprising in 1885 the guard room at Fort Battleford became quite inadequate to accommodate the large number of prisoners arrested. As a result a new stable was converted into a temporary prison. Among those confined were 54 persons brought to trial of which 7 received prison terms and 8 were sentenced to hang. 6 of those to be hanged were Indians of Big Bear's Band, who had taken part in the Frog Lake Massacre. They are:

1. Kah - Paypamahchukways (Wandering Spirit) for the murder of T. T. Quinn, Indian Agent.
2. Pah Pah-Me-Kee-Sick (Walking the Sky) for the murder of Pere Fafard, OMT, RC Priest who had fathered the boy as a youth.
3. Manchoose (Bad Arrow) for the murder of Charles Govin, Quinn's interpreter.
4. Kit-Ahwah-Ke-Ni (Miserable Man) for the murder of Govin.
5. Nahpase (Iron Body) for the murder of George Dill, Free Trader.
6. A-Pis-Chas-Koos (Little Bear) for the murder of Dill.
7. Itka (Crooked Leg) for the murder of Payne, Farm Instructor of the Stoney Reserve south of Battleford.
8. Waywahnitch (Man Without Blood) for the murder of Tremont, Rancher out of Battleford.

In September and October the accused were tried by C. B. Rouleau, Resident Stipendiary Magistrate of Battleford. The hangings took place November 27, 1885.

The scaffold stood in the barrack square. The platform, 20 feet by 8 feet, 10 feet above the ground with railing enclosing the trap was reached by a stairway. From the beam hung 8 hempen ropes in readiness for the grim task.

It was 8 o'clock in the morning, silence suddenly fell on the whispering groups of civilians. The death chant from the doomed Indians ceased abruptly as a squad of N.W.M.P. rifles at support, marched up to form a cordon about the foot of the scaffold. Then came Sheriff Forget dressed in black, followed by the clergymen. Hodson, the executioner preceded the prisoners. There they came, hands tied behind their backs, with a policeman before, behind, and on either side of each. The only sound was the measured steps of the sombre procession. Sheriff, Clergymen, Interpreter, and hangmen mounted the scaffold. At the foot of the stairs the escort stepped aside and the prisoners ascended to the platform through a gate in the railing. The gate was closed and the prisoners took their



places. While Hodson strapped ankles, the doomed were granted 10 minutes in which to speak if they wished, all doing so but Wandering Spirit.

Then all was ready. Black hoods were lowered; ropes adjusted, a deadly silence fell as Hodson stepped behind the line. The grating of iron; 8 bodies shot through the trap; and all was over. Some of the prairie's greatest braves had passed to the land of their fathers.

Mr. P. G. Laurie as coroner examined the bodies. They were dropped into rough boxes and buried in a grave on the hillside facing the Saskatchewan river not far from the N.W.M.P. barracks.

APISCHASKOOS SPEECH BEFORE DIEING

"I wish to say Good-bye to you all," he began; "officers as well as men. You have been good to me; better than I deserved. What I have done that was bad. My punishment is no worse than I could expect. But let me tell you that I never thought to lift my hand against a white man. Years ago, when we lived on the plains and hunted the buffalo, I was a head warrior of the Crees in battle with the Blackfoot Indians. I liked to fight. I took many scalps. But after you, the redcoats, came and the Treaty was made with the white man, war was no more. I had never fought a white man. But lately, we received bad advice of what good is it to speak of that now? I am sorry when it is too late. In only want to thank you, redcoats, and the sheriff for your kindness. I am not afraid to die. I may not be able in the morning, so now I say again to you all - good-bye! How! Aquisanee!"

Indian History

This story and others serve to illustrate the repression of Indian culture and history.

Our ancestors were stripped of their rights and Canadian history has written the Indian facts as little more than a footnote.

These hangings are a shame for all Canadians, not only for how they were carried out, but also for the shameful events that led up to the rebellion.

Historians don't record the starvation and disease that plagued our people a century ago.

As Indian people we must seek to restore our lost history and honour those who fought for their peoples rights and pride. The white society has national historic sites and museums glorifying their past and so it should be with us.

It's time we restored our past and culture to the honour and position deserving it.