

As the years go by, more and more of our family history is lost or forgotten. Therefore, this is offered as a tribute to our Grandfather, Oghema Niagara.

Grandpa Chief dedicated his entire life to supporting and protecting his people. Many Native Americans considered him a source of help and salvation. Clevelanders considered him a celebrity. The Canadian government considered him a militant and menace. His family knew him as a stern but loving protector. He was all of the above, plus much more.

1865 He was born to Aw Pau Chee Kaw Paw Qua Keokuk (Sac) and Jee Wan Ga (Seneca), in the hut of Two Kettles, at the Tuscarawas Village, Lewistown, New York.

1865 – 1875 Jee Wan Ga, who was a skilled hunter and healer, taught Niagara the fundamentals of herbal medicine. Having family in Iowa, New York and Canada, the family made regular trips, from place to place. Jee Wan Ga supported the family selling furs, herbs and medicines to the whites. Little more is known of Jee Wan Ga, however, Aw Pau Chee Kaw Paw Qua was the daughter of Chief Keokuk.

1875 – 1884 Thunderwater's family was recruited for the nation's centennial celebration. Afterward, his family "stayed on" and traveled the country with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. As a result, Niagara was remembered and respected by Cody and other show members.

1884 – circa 1900 Niagara returned to New York, married Euphrania, a Canadian, and had a son, Louis Keokuk Palmer. During this period he was also made a Chieftain of the Turtle Clan, Seneca, Iroquois, of the Cattaraugus Reservation, New Town, New York.

Having spent most of his life wandering, Niagara was becoming more and more concerned about the plight of "reservation Indians". He was heartbroken that his, once proud, people had seemed to lose all self respect. He saw many who refused to work, had become slovenly and were addicted to alcohol.

Circa 1900-1908 Niagara moved his family to Cleveland Ohio.

He often proclaimed that the “white man only worshiped money” so he set out to get as much as he could. Niagara was president of the Preservative Cleaner Company (making oils and polishes), He also made and sold herbal medicines. Two of the most successful were Thunderwater’s Mohawk Oil and Jee Wan Ga Tea.

With the money he earned, he purchased a large house and opened it as a sanctuary and halfway house for Indians in trouble.

He also opened a camp for Indian children, “Camp Niagara” in Huron Twp, Erie County, Ohio. He was invited to join “The Businessman’s Taft Club” and appeared in a parade honoring the new president.

As the years passed, he traveled to Washington, many times, in support of Indians Rights. Oghema Niagara always maintained an open door policy for his people. His home was always a place of camaraderie and safe haven.

In the same vein, he was always keeping tabs on and supporting any Indians who gained favorable public attention. Some, like Princess Wau Ne Tah, stayed with the Chief until they could establish themselves. The Princess remained a regular visitor and family friend.

Papers in the “Western Reserve Museum” in Cleveland, Ohio proclaim the following titles;

1909 - Named Ambassador and Chieftain – Six Nations, Tonawanda Band, Seneca, NY

1914 - Named Great Sachem, Advisor, Great Counsel – St Regis Band (American and Canadian) given the name Tehotiokwawakon, 1917 – Chieftain, Six Nations, Brantford, Canada, 1917 - Peace Chieftain, Mohawk, Iroquois, at St. Regis named- Day Ho Dew Gwah Wah Guh,

1920 - Full Powered Ambassador, Mohawk, Iroquois, Hastings, Ontario

1927 - Agent and Attorney in Fact , Oglala Sioux, Pine Ridge, South Dakota

A man and his beliefs. Oghema Niagara found his greatest joy and greatest pain by actively standing up for his principals. In a time when his people were actively being converted to Christianity, he remained true to his Monotheistic beliefs.

When Chief Thunderwater appeared on the cover of a Louisville, KY newspaper, he was recognized by several members of the Canadian government. You see, Chief Thunderwater made regular trips into Canada, where he openly preached the value of sobriety, education and cleanliness. For his trouble, he was labeled as an undesirable militant.

The Canadian government launched an all out smear campaign to malign his character. Their false charges ranged from being an Indian impersonator to being a child abuser. In the end he cleared his name but agreed to confine his preaching to the USA. The following links address "The Thunderwater Movement".

- <http://www.carleton.ca/~domarsha/4302/THETHUNDERWATERMOVEMENT.pdf>
- <http://hometown.aol.com/miketben/miktben5.htm>
- <http://www.easterndoor.com/VOL.8/8-47.htm>

Back in Ohio, he did not limit his care to the living. He also protected the grave of Chief, Joc-O-Sot. (Joc-O-Sot died and was buried in Cleveland after completing an important mission for his people.) When the city wanted to turn Joc-O-Sot's burial place into a parking lot, Niagara proclaimed the land sacred ground. He enlisted the help of the Early Settlers Association and won the case.

The cemetery remains untouched and lies directly across the street from Jacobs Field, home of the Cleveland Indians Baseball Park. The fight to save the cemetery was long and greatly publicized

As he aged, and his beloved Indians needed him less, he often appeared as a ceremonial figurehead in Cleveland. In an effort to make sure the Indian was never forgotten, Grandpa Chief would gladly don ceremonial dress and make a public appearance.

Chief Thunderwater only had one child, Louis Keokuk Palmer. Louis married Blanche Beckwith and had 2 daughters, Mohonaell Awpauchekaw Pawqua and Marion Wanda.

Eventually, after serving in the US military, Louis committed bigamy, was banished from the family and divorced by Blanche. Chief Thunderwater took responsibility and helped Blanche raise the girls. While Mona adored the attention, Marion was content to remain in the background.

Oghema Niagara, Chief Thunderwater, suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and died in 1950. While lying in a coma, Chief Thunderwater supposedly wrote a will that left his estate to Dan Sommers of the Early American Settler's Association. Dan, in turn, donated most items to the Western Reserve Historical Society. While

The night the Chief died, the house was locked and authorities would not let the family enter. Mona broke a window to steal photos and several personal items. \

The Chief was an extremely intelligent man, completely self taught, and quite an enigma to the white world. Because of this, one of the Cleveland hospitals requested Chief Thunderwater's brain, for study. To prevent this desecration, his grandchildren and great grand children stood watch over his body throughout the entire cremation.

His grave is in his beloved Erie Street Cemetery in Cleveland, Ohio. It is marked by a boulder purchased by his great and great, great grandchildren. Niagara's papers are still at the museum, but most of his belongings have been auctioned off.

Mona (Mohonaell)

As the first born, Mona was often treated like royalty. Like her Grandfather, Mona was baptized in the waters of Niagara falls. Her baptism / naming ceremony was considered a great event, complete with its' own music.

As a teenager, Mona often rebelled against her Grandfather's strict rule. Therefore it was not surprising that, after getting caught dancing in a speak-easy, she was sentenced to year in reform school.

As an adult, Mona took a continued interest in her Native American culture and often entertained Indians in her home. However,

her “wild streak” also persisted and she married several times. She never truly followed in her grandfather’s footsteps.

To her great honor, as long as she was physically able, Mona returned to the graves of Joc-O-Sot and Oghema Niagara to honor them with a ritual corn ceremony. After her death, the ceremony was continued by her niece and namesake. (Due to a botched abortion, Mona died without issue.)

Marion

Marion was a kind and gentle woman who loved to tell the family stories to her children and grandchildren. Throughout her childhood she was taunted as being a "dirty half breed" but she always held her head high and took pride in her heritage.

Marion Wanda married a wonderful man, Virgil Palmer, and gave birth to four children, Virgene, Beverly, Wayne and Betty Lou.