

KIN-NE-QUAY

by Her Grand-daughter, Etta S. Wilson {1857-1936}

{Undated source document at The Holland Museum Archives and Research Library, Holland, Michigan}

When Kin-ne-quay {born approximately 1790}, hereditary princess of the Ottawas was about 44 years old, a childless widow, she married Mi-in-gun, a young chief half her age and became the mother of a son. This son, whose English name was Payson Wolfe, married Mary Jane Smith, daughter of the Rev. George Nelson Smith and his wife Arvilla Almira Powers Smith, and they became the parents of 13 children. The Smiths were of English-Irish-Welsh descent, were of Revolutionary stock and came to Michigan from Vermont in 1833.

Kin-ne-quay was a "medicine woman". Born on the ancestral acres in Canada she had been tutored in the arts of simple herb medicines and the sorcery in which her family and her tribe had implicit faith. Her healing powers were wonderful. She was said to be able to cure cancer, scrofula and other dread diseases; and she was believed to be able to bring pestilence and death to an enemy tribe which threatened her own even when they were at a distance.

But with all her so-called powers over life and death she could not save her own family when an epidemic of small-pox swept over the land. She and her father and brothers survived but her husband and six children died. Childless, with middle age passing, the chiefs and headmen of the tribe held council and agreed that Kin-ne-quay must marry with the hope of bearing a child. She refused. Then they demanded that she marry. Still she refused. She said that there was not a chief in all the tribe of sufficiently high standing for a Wauk-a-zoo to marry and being a daughter of that noble family she would not wed one unworthy.

Conferences among the headmen and the chiefs continued for some time while the qualifications of all available chiefs were considered. Finally her father came to her and said there was one chief whose standing for bravery and honesty, strength and health were equal to her own. He was Nayan Mi-in-gun, son of Old Mi-in-gun, and like his father bore the name because he had the strength and courage to capture a wolf and strangle it with his bare hands. "I cannot marry him," said Kin-ne-quay, "He is but a boy. As a child he played with my children."

Nevertheless said her father (Wakazoo), "You must marry him and if possible raise a son or a daughter to whom will descend your powers of healing." Arguments continued for many days and finally Kin-ne-quay consented.

The two were married in the fall of 1830. The next summer (1833) they went southward with other members of the tribe and in August they stopped to gather blackberries on Grand Manitoulin island and there a son was born to Kin-ne-quay. When the child was (Payson) three days old the Journey southward was resumed.

The Wauk-a-zoo family of which Kin-ne-quay was a member were Ottawas, whose people who considered themselves far above the average Indian tribes, their very name, O-taw-Wa, meaning trader or merchant. They dealt largely with one of the great fur-trading companies of the northland being the intermediary between the fur gatherers and the fur buyers.

The Wauk-a-zoos had extensive holdings in the vicinity of Lake Winnipeg, Canada. Tradition or legend passed from parents to children related that the original grant from the Canadian government to this tribe comprised all the area within a square outlined by a day's journey of a horse to the north another day's trip to the east, a third day's travel to the mouth and the fourth or final day's pace westward to the point of beginning. Within these lines the tribe lived many years, gradually, however, extending their interests to the south. When the spring thaws came and the water again ran in the ice-locked rivers and creeks; when the winds and the waves of the changing season broke up, dispersed and melted the ice on Lake Superior, these Indians left their homes traveled southward by the waterway, portaging their birch bark canoes from stream to stream, and finally reached the shore of the Great Lake. There they launched their frail crafts laden with their families and their personal possessions including their food stuff, their tepee poles and the rush mats to cover them, their copper and brass kettles and their dogs, chickens and pigs. The dogs were willing passengers but the chickens and pigs had to be shackled securely. The return trip in fall was made in the same manner.

The trip, except the long run directly across the lake, was a somewhat leisurely one. Having safely accomplished the laborious and dangerous journey from the north to the south shore of Lake Superior, the travelers proceeded slowly with frequent stops, fishing, picking berries and otherwise passing the time pleasantly and profitably. Eventually in the manner of the true pioneer the Wauk-a-zoos and the Mi-in-guns with others crossed from the Upper to the Lower Peninsula of Michigan and found life there agreeable and less arduous. The winters were shorter, there was the same abundance of game and fish, and the soil was fruitful for the corn and simple vegetables which filled their needs. Furs could be sold to the great Astor company at Fort Mackinac. Moreover the inhabitants were of their own kind, Ottawas, speaking the same language, and Chippewas with a similar idiom, all with similar manners and habits of living.

Settlement was made at L'Arbre Croche (Cross Village), Middlevillage (Harbor Springs), and Little Traverse (Petoskey).

Pagan as they had been before this migration now they fell under the tutelage of the Jesuits. At L'Arbre Croche Pere Marquette had established a mission and in this outpost and contiguous territory the teachings of the Catholic church continued. But disaffection crept in. Many of these savages criticized the doctrines and conduct of the church of Rome and remained aloof from Christian teaching.

Then came word of a new religion. Indians passing up and down the coast told of a young and eloquent white preacher, a Rev. Geo. Nelson Smith who had established a mission at Richland, Kalamazoo county, and was preaching the gospel as interpreted by the Protestant faith. So eager were the redmen to have the best that could be obtained in religion that they sent emissaries (sic) down to interview the new preacher.

In the fall of 1837 a company of Indians led by Chief Wauk-a-zoo and Chief Shin-ne-kos-che came down from Emmet county (L'Arbre Croche), met with the Rev. Mr. Smith and others and an impassioned appeal for the light of religion made by Chief Wauk-a-zoo and interpreted by James R. Prickett, government interpreter, so affected Mr. Smith that from that moment he dedicated every effort of his life to the spiritual and temporal welfare of the Indians. He devoted himself to the study of their language and became so proficient that his sermons were soon delivered to them in their own tongue without the assistance of an interpreter.

The following year (1846) a colony of about 30 Indian families settled in the vicinity of what is now the town of Allegan to form a permanent village under the teachings of the new religion.

Among those who joined the little band was "Old" Chief Wauk-a-zoo and wife, their son Joseph and family, another son, Peter, with his family and Kin-ne-quay, the only daughter with her husband and son. With the exception of Kin-ne-quay, all these individuals embraced Protestantism. Surrounded on every side by converts she positively refused to accept the new doctrine. The Wauk-a-zoos and Min-in-guns were among the most ardent of the new converts but Kin-ne-quay remained loyal to Catholicism. In her youth she had been a pagan. Then she came in contact with the Jesuits and she accepted the supremacy of the Pope. She learned to read her prayer book and rosary. She was baptized "Charlotte" by the priest.

The ritual of the church with the intoned prayers, incense burning, visible cross, the pictures of the saints and the elegance of the priestly garments appealed to her conception of the majesty and power of the Living God. When Protestantism was explained to her and she realized that the most humble sinner could appeal directly to God from his closet, from the fields or from the woods she would have none of it. She had no use for a god whom anyone could approach so easily. She believed that a god should be of such ineffable majesty and aloofness that a specially trained intermediary would be necessary to present the sinner for absolution. She remained a catholic throughout her entire life although yielding to family pressure when it was decided to join the Protestant circle in southern Michigan.

When Mrs. Smith opened a school for the women and girls of the mission Kin-ne-quay became a member for a time. She avoided the religious teaching but looked with interest at the lessons in sewing, cooking and homemaking. Habitually sitting on the floor, also sleeping there with blankets and quilts at night, it troubled her to have to sit in a chair. And she continued to cook her meals in the manner in which she had always been accustomed, using her smaller brass and copper kettles for the dom-in-a-boo, a sort of soup made from green corn in summer or hulled corn in winter, flavored with a piece of venison, bear meat, beaver tail, rabbit, pigeon or partridge. When wild meat was not available she used pork sparingly since she could not endure the taste of salt and never used a particle of it in her life aside from the mere trace coming from the salt pork. Fish and potatoes were often boiled together when in season and summer squash boiled down with a little fat and maple sugar formed a delicious dish not unlike the "candied sweet potatoes" of the south. Meals were served from one large wooden bowl the entire family sitting around it and partaking each in turn from the one wooden ladle which was passed from hand to hand.

Few of the white man's vegetables appealed to her. She considered onions unspeakable and later, having acquired a white daughter-in-law she used to say to her "You can eat leaves", alluding to the lettuce and "greens" so dear to the palate of the Vermont yankee.

At that time the staple Indian food was green and dried corn, dry beans and dried venison when fresh meat was not available. Instead of lard, venison fat was "tried" out and made into cakes, small ones on which the children might nibble when hungry and larger ones to be used in cooking. Venison fat was easily handled being hard and firm like mutton suet.

Sweets were obtained from the forest. The maple groves yielding delicious products. {sic} Sugar was made by boiling down the sap then stirring it rapidly and continuously when it reached the proper consistency, until a smooth, soft semi-granulated sugar not unlike the present day brown sugar, resulted. It was stored in large "mo-kuks", birch bark receptacles about the size and shape of a modern family wash boiler. "First run" sap made the whitest and best sugar. The sap which came after the buds were starting on the trees at the approach of spring was slightly bitter when made into sugar, a taste which was not perceptible when made into wax, a sweetie for the children. Great quantities of the latter were made every spring and like the sugar was stored in big "mo-kuks". The wax was boiled down so thick that considerable effort was necessary to insert a small stick and draw out an "all day sucker."

When flour was available at the white man's store bread was a simple combination of flour and water beaten on a board until smooth and velvety, then molded into an oval shape and baked in the hot ashes of the campfire. Strange as it may seem every particle of dirt could be brushed off when the bread was cooked. Potatoes were often roasted in this way.

Wild berries of all the edible varieties were gathered and dried for winter use. Some apples were grown but these were the natural, i.e., the ungrafted stock and were small and of poor flavor.

Although living in the mission colony Kin-ne-quay continued to practice her healing art. Her huge brass and copper kettles were seething day and night with decoctions of roots, herbs and leaves, "boiling down" into medicines. A special decoction in which hemlock boughs seemed to

be the main ingredient made a very effective cough syrup. It was of such pleasant taste and consistency that it had to be hidden from the children lest they devour it. Like maple wax it was stored in "mo-kuks" of varying sizes thus adding to its resemblance to that sweet. Other formulas were used as specifics for other diseases.

Her cures were wonderful. In the pursuit of her profession she was faithful and tireless giving her services in unstinted measure entirely without charge. It was the custom, however, for a patient or family to make her a handsome present after she had served long and well. She had a keen sense of humor and delighted in recalling one case on which she worked long and faithfully. The illness was cancer of the face and the patient came to her after she had become resident in Northport, Michigan. To obtain the essential herbs and roots from which to compound the medicine she had to go to Michigan City, Ind., for in that vicinity only did these rare herbs grow. In those days there were no railroads, no stage routes, no transportation of any kind and the entire Journey had to be made on foot relieved only by the occasional offer of a ride by a farmer passing with his team. So strong was her sense of duty that this old woman, carrying her pack on her back, made the entire trip of over 300 miles afoot, securing the plants she needed and returning over the same toilsome route. In the course of time the cure followed and was permanent and for this service the patient, Mrs. "Capt." Nelson whose descendents by a former marriage still live in Northport, paid Kin-ne-quay twenty-five cents. But other patients were grateful and generous. Kin-ne-quay was respected, her healing powers were recognized and she prospered.

In June, 1849, Mr. Smith and Indians of his mission moved by boat to northern Michigan and settled on the site of the town of Northport, which at first was named Wauk-a-zoo-ville and later changed to Northport, {sic} The old geographies gave the name "Smith's Bay" to the harbor and this was later changed to Northport Bay. This move to the north was necessitated by the constant friction between the Indians and Hollanders a large colony of whom had come over from Europe and settled near the mission. In fact the first
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spent February of 1847, their beginning in America, in the home of the Rev. Mr. Smith, taxing the capacity of the small house to its fullest extent yet being welcome guests.

At this time Kin-ne-quay was again a widow her husband having been killed in a hunting accident. When her father and brothers joined the migrating colony she with her young son, Payson, cast their lot with them and on arrival in Leelanau county she purchased a small plot near the acreage selected by the Rev. Mr. Smith, on which she erected a small but comfortable home, and also 44 acres of good hardwood land about a mile away to be cleared into farmland. All these purchases were made of the U.S. Government at the uniform price of \$1.25 per acre. Deeds were recorded in Ionia, Mich., the nearest land office.

Close and continuous contact with the white people, a number of such families having settled in the lake port town, did not increase Kin-ne-quay's respect for them. From her point of view they might be fine christians but she could see almost unpardonable faults in them; not, perhaps, as individuals, but as a class. In time she came to hold them in contempt and deplored the fact that as playmates her son preferred the company of the white children of the village to the members of his own race. Imagine her horror, then, when she discovered that a love affair existed between her only son and Mary, the eldest daughter of the missionary. She had brought him up to be a worthy successor to his father as chief of the Ottawas and to this end had in mind a suitable marriage for him among his own people.

When news of the affair reached her she dropped the task which occupied her and in a furious rage hurried down to the home of the missionary and shouted at him, "I will not let my son marry a white woman and learn to be a white woman's man, to lie, to steal, to cheat, to swear, to go out and get drunk and come home with strange diseases." Then she went on to relate the circumstances which compelled her to marry Payson's father, many years her junior, how for generations no Wauk-a-zoo had ever been allowed to marry into the families of the ordinary chiefs; that marriage was permitted them only when a chief or princess of extraordinary character or attainments was found, that decedents might continue to be healthy, honest, brave and honorable. Then she added with biting scorn, "Before the white man came when we went on a long journey we never used to lock our doors. We never knew what whiskey was nor how to swear. We did not steal or cheat or lie and we always kept our word. But after you and the white people came we had to lock our doors for our own safety and gather our crops before we went on even a short journey or lose them. Always we had to watch with the eye of an eagle or a hawk to keep from being robbed.

"In the old days we used to say to our neighbor, 'Our land ends right here at this stone or this tree where yours begins' and our word was good. But when we said that to you, you moved the stone or cut down the tree always moving your lines toward our holdings that you might rob us of more and more land," and she continued to rave telling the preacher many things he had never expected to hear particularly from the lips of a child of nature.

And Mr. Smith almost speechless with amazement at this tirade was equally determined that his daughter should not marry the young redman, honorable as he might be. The parents were in accord but as time went on they discovered that opposition merely made the fires of love burn brighter and after days of argument and prayer the scruples of the proud princess and the conscientious preacher were overcome. Mary's mother ever opposed the match bitterly and never became reconciled to it.

With Mr. Smith it was a matter of conscience. He also realized that if he continued to oppose the union his usefulness as a minister of God to these people was ended; for, although Kin-ne-quay was opposed to the marriage the chiefs and influential members of the tribe were not. Mr. Smith had taught them that the God of his ancestors loved all humanity alike. It made no difference whether their skins were red or white, all were the children of God and equal in his sight. Of such stern stuff was this Vermont man made that he would have cut off his right hand had

he been convinced that it would redound to the honor and glory of the Lord.

When the supreme test came he met it in the only possible way for one of his character and training. He married his daughter to an Indian.

Kin-ne-quay had continued to oppose the union but finally on the grounds that Mary was the daughter of the minister and therefore of better lineage than the average white girl she gave her consent. The young couple were married in the home of the bride July 29, 1851, the ceremony being performed by her father in the presence of all the white people in the village. Kin-ne-quay did not attend.

In Mr. Smith's diary now in the Congressional Library in Washington, D.C., after describing the event he added these words, "The occasion was pleasant."

So Kin-ne-quay with a hatred for the white people which she took no pains to conceal saw her only descendent marry into a white family. In time her bitterness ebbed and as the years passed she welcomed and loved every one of the 13 children which were born of this union, her greatest pleasure being to assist materially in their support. In those days and in such an isolated settlement opportunities {sic} for employment were few. Kin-ne-quay developed her farm and her son also had a small farm and the diversified crops from these fields, formed a substantial base for the family maintenance. Kin-ne-quay continued her medical practice and often made long journeys returning with her hemlock bark sack carried on her back and held in place by a broad leather strap passed over her forehead, filled with calicoes and other materials to be made into clothing for her beloved grandchildren.

Mr. Wolfe was industrious also. Game and fish were plentiful in the immedia {sic} vicinity and he was expert in taking both. He served with honor as a sharpshooter in the Civil War and on his return he conceived the idea of buying old, wornout horses from the Chicago street railway lines, and bringing them to Northport by lake boats where they were pastured, rested and fed until they again became strong and useful when he sold them at a profit.

Kin-ne-quay was a beautiful woman with regular features and a fine dark complexion. Not tall but with an erect carriage and dignity which enhanced her stature she was a conspicuous figure among those people whose physical characteristic is an erect posture. Her eyes were black and her abundant, coal black hair bordered her high broad brow in beautiful waves and when it was uncoiled lay in soft ringlets about her shoulders, no doubt its beauty being a natal inheritance from her grandmother, a lovely French captive, whose grace and charm were well remembered by her descendant.

Her clothing was of the same general style worn in her youth, although the fine soft doe-skin, increasingly difficult to obtain, was replaced by modern textiles. "Short-gown and petticoat", leggings and moccasins, or "shoe-pacs" winter, all made by her own hands were habitually worn. The "short-gown", a garment not unlike a pajama coat was usually made of dark-colored calico, the lower part being gathered on to a yoke. The "petticoat" was really a dress skirt, invariably made of the finest and best wool broadcloth, English goods imported by the great fur companies and offered in exchange for furs, always black or dark blue in color its lower edge being heavily embroidered with brightly colored beads and ribbons to a depth of a foot or more. Leggings of the same material and deer-skin moccasins, were also beautifully ornamented with beads and ribbons. The winter "Shoe-pacs" were made of cow-hide or pig-skin and were not ornamented. Her outer garment was a shawl, a "single" light weight for summer and a "double blanket shawl" for winter, {sic} She never wore a hat but when protection was needed drew up a part of her shawl over her head. Throughout the seasons she wore the same kind of underwear, a chemise and a short skirt of unbleached muslin.

Kin-ne-quay never learned to speak English. Constant association with English speaking people familiarized her with the language and it was apparent that she followed understandingly the conversation about her, yet she never used one word of that language. Even when talking to her grandchildren, not one of whom had been permitted to learn her tribal tongue, she always spoke in Indian and the conversation was interpreted by the young mother to whom the language of the Ottawas was as her own {sic}

A daughter of the woods, a mystic, a scientist, Kin-ne-quay, descendent of a proud and once mighty people.during {sic} the short span of one life stepped from paganism to modern civilization without sacrificing one iota of her pride or self-respect, always adapting her conduct with such understanding and flexibility that she was able to meet and fulfill every duty and obligation, her skillful hands and active brain thus adding much to the sum total of human comfort and happiness.

She lived to a great age retaining all her faculties and many of her activities to the last, modified however by the blindness which shrouded her vision. All that was mortal of this great woman lie in a grave in the old catholic cemetery at Cross Village where the voices of the birds and the beating of the waves of the lake shore unite in a perpetual requiem. {sic}