

1-1-1926

Indian Jim

O A. Garretson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest>

Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Garretson, O A. "Indian Jim." *The Palimpsest* 7 (1926), 11-14.
Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol7/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Palimpsest by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

Indian Jim

The region of the lower Skunk River and its tributaries, so scientists say, offers one of the most fertile fields in Iowa for archeological research. Evidence of the occupation by prehistoric man may be found everywhere. Both upon the hilltops, which afford an unobstructed view, and on the stream terraces, mounds give eloquent testimony of the character and customs of men who lived there long ago. Stone implements of various forms and uses are to be found in abundance, all clearly explaining the life and activities of the primitive people who possessed the land before the incursion of the whites began.

In the early historic period the tribe of Ioways, with their principal village a few miles to the southwest on the Des Moines River, roamed over these choice hunting grounds. After them came the Sacs and Foxes, whose attachment to this beautiful country led to the Black Hawk War.

It is not strange that tribes living in a land so favorable for the existence of primitive man should leave it only under the stress of dire compulsion; nor is it strange that here and there an individual of the ejected tribe should, as has frequently happened in the history of Iowa, linger among the old haunts and the scenes of his ancestors, for a lifetime per-

haps, an anomaly among a people who have displaced his race.

When James Box settled in Henry County in 1834 about three hundred Sac and Fox Indians were living in the southeast corner. Their village was located on the north side of the river in a sheltered nook about one mile above the present town of Lowell.

Black Hawk was a familiar figure. He and his son were well known to the early pioneers. When the tribe was moved from the Black Hawk Purchase farther toward the interior of the State, a lone Indian known as Indian Jim remained behind among the pioneers of Lowell. Just why he absented himself from his tribe to live with the whites is not known. He built his cabin on the south side of the river one and one-half miles above the town of Lowell on the southeast quarter of section twenty, afterwards owned by William Archibald. There he lived by hunting, trapping, pearl fishing, and selling lead ore. Interest in Indian Jim centered in his lead ore traffic.

He claimed to know, and many pioneers believed he knew, the location of a lead mine near the hamlet of Lowell. He was always supplied with a quantity of ore of excellent quality which he traded to settlers for fire water and other things that he deemed necessary for his comfort. When his supply of ore was exhausted he would absent himself and in a few hours would return with a new supply. He stoutly

maintained that there was a "mine" near by, but he never would reveal the location.

It became the ambition of every pioneer to discover the location of the Indian's lead deposit, for they all believed the alleged mine to be a fact. Diligent search was made through all the hills and vales near Lowell, but to no effect. Watching parties were organized to follow the movements of Indian Jim, but the red man was too wary for them all. On one occasion the watchers found him on his return with a fresh supply of ore. His clothes were wet, which indicated that he had crossed the river from his home. This is the only fact ever elicited in regard to the location of the Indian's secret "mine".

All the pioneers of Lowell were acquainted with the Indian, but he became especially attached to a colored man named Lewis Collins. Collins was an industrious and respected negro, who was employed in the flouring mills at Lowell. Indian Jim grew very intimate with Collins and promised to reveal to him the location of his lead ore cache. The day was set when they were to start on the journey but Collins became ill and was unable to go. Before he had sufficiently recovered to make another effort, Indian Jim decided to visit his tribe at the Sac and Fox Agency, on the site of the present town of Agency. Before his departure, however, he promised Collins that when he returned they would make a trip to his "mine". That was in 1839.

The red man never returned. Like most members

of his race he was a lover of the pernicious fire water, and in some altercation, caused by excessive drink, he was slain by members of his tribe.

The people of Lowell who had been living in high anticipation of the day when their town would enjoy the riches of the "mine" were sadly disappointed. So strongly had the thought become fixed in the minds of the settlers that many were the efforts made to uncover the much sought treasure. But all was in vain. Whether the supply of lead ore was a cache of the ancient mound builders or more recent tribes, whether it was an unusual glacial deposit, or whether it was the cargo of a sunken barge from the Mines of Spain at Dubuque is entirely a matter of conjecture. The secret "lead mine" of Indian Jim remains a secret still.

O. A. GARRETSON