



Western Michigan University
ScholarWorks at WMU

Master's Theses

Graduate College

6-1964

Andrew Jackson: Blackbird of L'arbre Croche

Grace Walz

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses



Part of the History Commons

Recommended Citation

Walz, Grace, "Andrew Jackson: Blackbird of L'arbre Croche" (1964). *Master's Theses*. 3857.
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses/3857

This Masters Thesis-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



ANDREW JACKSON BLACKBIRD
OF L'ARBRE CROCHE

by

Grace Walz

A thesis presented to the
Faculty of the School of Graduate
Studies in partial fulfillment
of the
Degree of Master of Arts

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
June 1964

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer wishes to express her sincere appreciation to the many persons, too numerous to mention here, who gave assistance in obtaining materials and providing advice for the preparation of this paper.

Special thanks go to the reference staff of Waldo Library, Western Michigan University, for aid in obtaining interlibrary loans of material pertinent to the study, and to the librarians at the Michigan History Building of the Grand Rapids Public Library for the time they so willingly gave to help locate references in their collection.

The writer can never repay Mr. Charles Starring, her thesis chairman, for the many hours he gave in guidance on the research and in editing the paper in its stages of preparation.

Grace Walz

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
PROLOGUE	1
CHAPTER	
I BACKGROUND	5
II ANDREW STRIKES OUT ON HIS OWN	14
III A CITIZEN IN HIS HOME TOWN	21
IV A LAST ATTEMPT AT EDUCATION	29
V A SETTLED CITIZEN	33
VI DECLINING YEARS	42
VII THE MISFIT	52
BIBLIOGRAPHY	64

PROLOGUE

I work very slowly on my lecture. My strength is failing and my eyes are so that I cannot use them by candlelight. I have many pages written with pencil and when I can get them copied in ink, I will send them to you.

My object in trying to have this printed is that it might live after I am dead and finally be adopted as the plan or means to bring about the true development of American Indians.

My days are numbered, as I am entirely unable to do any manual labor, not only from old age but from ill health, also. Whether I shall see next summer or not, I am somewhat doubtful.

I have many other things written, beside this which I am sending you,¹ which I hope may be heard by civilized people long after I am dead.

The old Indian whose gnarled hands labored over this letter in 1900 lived until September 8, 1908. In those last seven years he saw his eldest son sentenced to a year in prison for repeated disorderly conduct, and found himself removed from his home in Harbor Springs, Michigan, to the county poor farm at Brutus.

To those who know the American Indian only in terms of his baser qualities, or who can picture the red man only as a drunken, uneducated burden to society, such a finale may not seem unusual. But this brief glimpse is incomplete and misleading, for, until the closing years of his life, Andrew Jackson Blackbird had not been a burden to society. It is the story of his struggle to succeed in a white man's society that I intend to record.

The reader may ask why an obscure Indian deserves this attention - why he merits research among voluminous government documents that contain materials for the clarification of more important matters. The

¹Andrew Jackson Blackbird, The Indian Problem from the Indian's Standpoint, (1900), p. 5.

answer is that as I delved into Michigan Indian history, Andrew Blackbird came alive as a unique personality of the time when the white man's culture was beginning to overwhelm the Indian culture of northern Michigan. Here was a man who did not retreat from this threat. From boyhood through manhood into old age, Blackbird always strove to attain a measure of respectability in a culture strange to his nature. His struggle to find a place in the white man's world deserves attention.

Andrew Jackson Blackbird² was the son of Mack-a-te-pe-nessy, an Indian chieftain of the Arbor Croche band of Ottawa. Though a more accurate translation of Mack-a-te-pe-nessy was Black Hawk, at some point the name was corrupted into Blackbird and that translation was accepted by the family from Andrew's time to the present.³

The land of the Arbore Croche Ottawas reached along Lake Michigan from Cross Village on the north to Little Traverse on the south. The eastern side of their land was unmarked, but the Ottawa usually lived within five or six miles of the shore of Lake Michigan.⁴ The Ottawa, members of the Algonquian language group, had settled here about 1750,

²Andrew's Indian name was originally Pe-ness-wi-qua-am Mack-a-te-be-nessy. When he was baptized in 1825 his first name was changed to Amable. (Andrew Jackson Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan; A Grammar of their Language, and Personal and Family History of the Author [Ypsilanti: the Ypsilantian Job Printing House, 1887], p. 47. Just when or why he began using the name Andrew Jackson Blackbird is not clear. He is referred to as Jackson Blackbird by Henry Schoolcraft as early as 1840. (U. S., National Archives, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Microcopy, Michigan Superintendency of Indian Affairs and Mackinac Indian Agency, Letters sent, Vol. 2), p. 312.

³Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 27.

⁴Ibid., p. 10.

pushed westward from the Manitoulin Islands by the Iroquois.⁵ About 1828 the Arbre Croche Indians made northern Michigan their year-round home. Until that time they had done their winter hunting and trapping farther south, sometimes as far as the valley of the St. Joseph River.⁶

Andrew Blackbird belonged to this band of Indians. He said he was born "south of the Traverse Region about 1820."⁷ His birthplace may have been above the big rapids of the Muskegon River, the favorite winter quarters of his family.⁸ It is impossible to know the precise date of his birth. Though he gave 1820 as an approximate date, other statements introduce confusion on this point. In 1900 he said, "I don't know just how old I am, as my parents did not remember, but however, I well remember in 1825 walking 14 miles that New Years Day, which is 75 years ago."⁹ But in the same interview, he said, "The first remembrance I have of seeing the white man is more than 80 years ago, or soon after the war of 1812 . . ."¹⁰ Probably he was born

⁵George I. Quimby, Indian Life in the Upper Great Lakes, 11,000 B.C. to A.D. 1800 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 128.

⁶John R. Swanton, The Indian Tribes of North America (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin No. 145; U. S. Government Printing Office, 1953), p. 245-46.

⁷The Traverse Region, Historical and Descriptive, with Illustrations of Scenery and Portraits and Biographical Sketches of Some of its Prominent Men and Pioneers (Chicago: H. R. Page and Company, 1884), p. 145.

⁸Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 33.

⁹Blackbird, The Indian Problem from the Indian's Standpoint, p. 5.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 7.

between 1815 and 1825, and settled with his family in L'Arbre Croche about 1828. What of those early years in L'Arbre Croche? What were the influences that would affect his life as a member of a mixed community of Indians and pioneer white men?

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

Andrew's family seems to have been highly regarded in the settlement. His father had come into northern Michigan from Manitoba in 1800, and had soon been appointed head speaker in the Council of the Ottawa and Chippewa.¹¹ Mack-a-te-pe-nessy appreciated education, and made a great effort to teach reading and writing to the adult Indians of L'Arbre Croche, using an alphabet which he himself had prepared. In 1823 he appealed to the President of the United States to send a Catholic Priest to L'Arbre Croche so that his people might receive instruction and religious training.¹² Mack-a-te-pe-nessy had a brother, Wa-ke-zoo, who was a chieftain in Manitoba. Another brother, Late Wing, supposedly fought for the United States in the War of 1812 and was a friend of Lewis Cass.¹³

Mack-a-te-pe-nessy may have participated in the Treaty of 1836 by which the Ottawa gave up much of their land in northern Michigan. A name on that treaty might be his, though the spelling, Mukuday Benais, is irregular.¹⁴ Jonas Shawanesssee, an Ottawa from Harbor

¹¹Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 31.

¹²Chrysostomus Verwyst (O.F.M.), Life and Labors of the Right Reverend Frederick Baraga, First Bishop of Marquette, Michigan (Milwaukee: M. H. Wiltzius and Company, 1900,) p. 57.

¹³Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, pp.26-27.

¹⁴U.S. War Department, Treaties between The United States of America and Indian Tribes, 1778-1837 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1837), p. 655-56.

Springs who has spent many years of research on Indian history, especially regarding Indian claims against the government, maintains that the "Blackbird" whose mark appears on the Treaty of 1836 was an Indian from Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, not the Blackbird known as Mack-a-te-pe-nessy, from L'Arbre Croche.¹⁵ But since Shawanessie's purpose has been to show that the government dealt unfairly with the Indians of northern Michigan, his theory might be biased. Andrew, though he recalls in his book the departure in 1835 of the delegates to the peace talks in Washington, does not mention his father among the delegation.

Little is known about Andrew's mother. It has been suggested that Andrew's father met her while on a trip to Washington, D.C., in the early 1800's, as spokesman for his band of Indians. But there is no evidence of such a trip. It has also been suggested that she was a white woman.¹⁶ Blackbird says nothing about this in his book. He says only that his mother's brother was Shaw-be-nee, who fought on the side of the United States in the war of 1812.¹⁷

Andrew was the youngest of six boys and four girls born to Chief Mack-a-te-pe-nessy and his wife. Of the ten children, at least one boy besides Andrew managed to excel in academic studies and was helped by missionaries to gain advanced schooling.

The circumstances in which Andrew spent his boyhood were typical for Indians in the Great Lakes area in the early 1800's. The Ottawa

¹⁵Letter from Jane Ettawageshik to William Hampton, Harbor Springs, Michigan, February 21, 1957.

¹⁶Interview with Susan Shagonaby, formerly curator of the Andrew J. Blackbird Museum at Harbor Springs, July 9, 1962.

¹⁷Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 26.

were semi-sedentary. In summer they lived in villages and tended small vegetable gardens near their dwellings.¹⁸ While they waited to harvest their scanty crops they gathered wild strawberries, raspberries, and blackberries, which grew in abundance around the settlement and added variety to their diet of fish, vegetables and game. There were fishing expeditions and wild pigeon hunts which occupied many hours of a boy's days. In the winter they hunted deer, elk, bear, beaver, and muskrats. Their bows, arrows, spears, snares, and traps had been repaired during the summer months and were ready for use when the families arrived at their winter hunting grounds.¹⁹ Certainly, a boy couldn't want for things to keep him busy, and Andrew learned early the skills needed to live in his culture. That he would need an entirely new set of skills to live out his adult years successfully, he could not then know.

L'Arbre Croche, like so many other Indian settlements, had felt the influence of Catholic missionaries. A mission may have been established on Little Traverse Bay by the Jesuit Father Dablon, who had built a chapel at Michilimackinac the winter before Father Marquette's arrival there in 1671.²⁰ In 1695 the Little Traverse Bay mission was tended by fathers stationed at the Straits, and in the

¹⁸Quimby, Indian Life in the Upper Great Lakes, p. 128.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰George Pare, The Catholic Church in Detroit: 1701-1888 (The Gabriel Richard Press, Detroit, 1951), p. 38.

1700's Father Du Jaunay served the Indians at L'Arbre Croche. He was in western Michigan continuously after 1735, and seems to have lived at L'Arbre Croche during the final years of his ministry until being recalled to Quebec in 1765.²¹ After Father Du Jaunay's departure, the L'Arbre Croche mission was abandoned and it was not until 1825 that the Catholics sent a missionary to serve the area once more.²²

The re-establishment of the mission may have been instigated by the L'Arbre Croche Indians themselves. In 1823 they sent a petition to the United States Congress through Father Gabriel Richard, then delegate from Michigan territory. Included in their request were sound reasons for their need of a missionary.

We, the undersigned, chiefs, headsmen and others belonging to the Ottawa tribe, who reside at Arbre Croche, on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan, use this opportunity to make known our wishes and wants to our Father, the President of the United States. We thank our Father and Congress for all they have done for us to introduce amongst us morality and the knowledge of Jesus, the Savior of the red and white people. Confiding in your fatherly goodness, we ask for freedom of conscience and for a teacher or preacher of the Gospel, who belongs to that society to which belonged the member of the Catholic Order of St. Ignatius, which was established at Michilimackinac and Arbre Croche by Father Marquette and other missionaries of the Jesuit Order. They lived many years in our midst. They cultivated a field in our land in order to teach us agriculture and Christianity. Since that time we have longed for such priests. Should you deign to grant us such, we shall ask him to settle again on the shore of Lake Michigan near our village, Arbre Croche, on the same place which Father Du Jaunay possessed.

If you comply with the humble wish of your faithful sons, they shall be forever thankful to you and pray the Great Spirit to shed his blessings over the Whites.

²¹Paré, p. 94.

²²Verwyst, p. 58.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto signed our names
[marks]. August 12th, 1823.

Hawk	Fish
Caterpillar	Crane
Eagle	Flying Fish
Bear	Deer ²³

Four months after this message had been sent, Mack-a-te-pe-nessy, father of Andrew J. Blackbird, addressed a personal appeal for a "Blackrobe" to President Monroe.²⁴ Again, the request was entrusted to Father Gabriel Richard to carry to Washington.²⁵ Apparently these messages were heard and acted upon, for in July of 1825 Father Badin visited L'Arbre Croche. He had sent word ahead that the Indians should erect "a prayer-wigwam in honor of the Great Spirit, with a Cross in front of it."²⁶ When he arrived at L'Arbre Croche Father Badin found a chapel measuring 25 x 17 feet on the summit of a hill at Seven-Mile Point, a spot about seven miles north of the present city of Harbor Springs. No nails or iron had been used in its construction, and the timbers had been hewn with tomahawks.²⁷

Father Badin paid another visit to L'Arbre Croche in September of the same year, 1825, and baptized thirty children and adults. One of the children was Andrew Blackbird. Father Badin was not able to

²³Verwyst, p. 56-57. The Father "Du Jaunay" to whom the Indians refer in this letter is the priest who was at L'Arbre Croche in the 1760's.

²⁴Ibid., p. 57.

²⁵Marion A. Habig (O.F.M.), Heralds of the King: The Franciscans of the St. Louis - Chicago Province: 1858-1958 (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1958), p. 536.

²⁶Verwyst, pp. 58-59.

²⁷Ibid., p. 59.

remain among the Ottawa, though he came back for another visit in 1826.²⁸ Fortunately, about this time a brother of Mack-a-te-pe-nessy, Au-se-go-nock, who was a Catholic and had been living on Drummond's Island, came to L'Arbre Croche to serve as a lay missionary in the absence of a priest. He conducted Sunday services for his people, using prayer books printed in the Stockbridge Indian language, which he had brought from Montreal.²⁹

Another Jesuit, Father Peter De Jean, visited L'Arbre Croche for the first time in the spring of 1829 and baptized twenty-one Indians. On his second visit he found 130 catechumens of all ages well enough instructed by Au-se-go-nock to be baptized. Before leaving the settlement, Father De Jean urged the Christians to live apart from pagans because of conflicts between the two groups. It was these conflicts which prompted the removal of the Church from Seven-Mile Point to what is now the city of Harbor Springs, New Arbre Croche.³⁰

Sometime between 1827 and 1830, probably in 1828, the Indians who had previously lived in L'Arbre Croche only in the summers began winter residence there as well. Perhaps they decided to live in the area all the year because of the re-establishment of the mission. In 1829 Chief Mack-a-te-pe-nessy left Middle Village in charge of a brother, Kaw-me-no-te-a, and moved with his family to New Arbre Croche, on Little Traverse Bay, in order to enter his children in the mission

²⁸Habig, p. 537.

²⁹Stockbridge was a dialect of the Ottawa and Chippewa language. (Habig, p. 537.)

³⁰Ibid.

school located there.

The mission comprised three Indian log houses.³¹ Father De Jean had been assigned there as the resident pastor. Under his supervision, two large buildings had been constructed. The larger one, 54 x 30 feet, was to serve as a permanent church. The smaller one, 46 x 20 feet, was to house both rectory and school in three rooms. The school, a boarding and day school, opened on August 23, 1829, with Joseph L'Etorneau, a Frenchman, and Miss Elizabeth Williams as teachers. By September of 1829 it had thirty-eight students, of whom twenty-five were boarders.³²

Probably Andrew J. Blackbird was among those thirty-eight students enrolled in the mission school, as were some of his nine brothers and sisters. He does not say he was, but it is a reasonable inference, because when he enrolled in a grammar school in Ohio seventeen years later, he could speak and write English. Moreover, since one purpose of his father's move to New Arbre Croche was to enter his children in school, and since Andrew was then of an age for admission, it is altogether likely that he was enrolled. In any case, his education was cut short after four years, when the school was discontinued. Rev. De Jean had been removed, and Father Baraga, his replacement, had been sent to Lake Superior.³³

The first winter Andrew's family stayed in northern Michigan his

³¹Ibid., p. 538.

³²Ibid., p. 539.

³³Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 49.

mother died as a result of scalding from maple syrup.³⁴ The removal of the family from Middle Village to New Arbre Croche may have been brought about by her accidental death. Certainly, the loss of the mother in a family of ten children, most of them still living at home, would require serious readjustments--readjustments that must have taken a long time, for Andrew says that his father "could not very well keep us together; being the least one in the family, I became a perfect wild rover."³⁵

He must have done his roving fairly close to home for at least eight years after his mother's death, because he was still living in New Arbre Croche in 1833 when he learned of his brother William's death. William had been taken by Catholic missionaries to be trained for the priesthood. After preparatory schooling in Ohio, he had been sent to Rome, where, with his cousin Augustin Hamelin, he had received final training. William died very close to the time set for his ordination. Because he and his cousin were the first American Indians to attain such a high level of training, their course had been followed by the Indians of L'Arbre Croche with great interest. Catholic fathers at Rome asked if another boy in the Blackbird family could replace William, but, although Andrew's name was suggested, Chief Mack-a-te-pe-nessy refused to let another son go into seminary training.

The Blackbird family thought there was something mysterious about William's death. They believed he had been murdered. Since William had warned his people at L'Arbre Croche not to sign any papers

³⁴Ibid., p. 53.

³⁵Ibid.

which would cause them to lose land to the United States government, Andrew thought that government officials may have wished to eliminate William in order to conclude more easily pending treaties with the Indians of northern Michigan.³⁶ But letters exchanged between Bishop Reese of Detroit and the Catholic fathers in Rome indicate that William's death was caused by complications following an injury to his chest when he was run over by a cart while in school in Ohio.³⁷ The Blackbird family seems never to have accepted this as an honest explanation of William's death.

In New Arbre Croche Andrew saw in 1835 the departure of the delegation of Indians to Washington, D. C. for the treaty talks. Shortly thereafter he decided to leave New Arbre Croche to live with a married sister in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Andrew says he was about thirteen or fourteen years old then,³⁸ but he may have been closer to sixteen.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 35-36.

³⁷Carolyn T. Foreman, Indians Abroad (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943), pp. 149-50.

³⁸Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 53.

CHAPTER II

ANDREW STRIKES OUT ON HIS OWN

With his departure from New Arbre Croche in the late 1830's Andrew's childhood years were ended. His associations with his tribe and with white missionaries had been the major influences of his life. While these associations would stand him in good stead later when he returned to his home town, his immediate problem was to find a place in the world as an independent young adult. He hoped he would find that place in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

His stay with his sister was short-lived. Although Andrew does not say why he wandered off to a series of jobs soon after he arrived in Green Bay, it can be assumed that he had to go where work was available. For a while he tried his luck as a farm hand with a man named Sylvester, but was soon persuaded to go on the fishing grounds, near Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. There he took a job aboard a ship skippered by Mr. Robert Campbell, with whom he sailed for one summer. At Mackinac Island in 1840 he met his family, who, with many other Indians, were receiving their annual payments there from the United States government as provided in the treaty of 1836.³⁹

Andrew took a temporary job as a clerk in the store on Mackinac Island, intending to move on when the rush of the annuity payments was over. While there he met a traveling missionary, Rev. Alvin Coe

³⁹Ibid., pp. 53-54.

from Ohio. Coe had become acquainted with Andrew's family during an earlier trek into northern Michigan and on this occasion he urged Andrew to return with him to Ohio and enter grammar school there. Andrew accepted the offer, agreeing to meet Rev. Alvin Coe aboard ship that same evening for passage to Cleveland. But there was a mix-up over the meeting time and place, the two failed to make the connection,⁴⁰ and Andrew's hope of further schooling faded away.

A few days after the departure of Rev. Alvin Coe without his Indian student, Andrew was invited by John M. Johnston to accompany him to Grand Traverse Bay to learn the blacksmith's trade at Old Mission. Mr. Johnston, a brother-in-law of Henry R. Schoolcraft, was traveling with the government blacksmith from Old Mission and the blacksmith promised Andrew \$20 per month as his assistant. Andrew took the job, happy to have an opportunity to earn his living while learning a trade.⁴¹

His appointment was not without complications. No sooner had he arrived at Old Mission than he had to return to Mackinac to carry a letter to the Indian Agent there requesting his appointment as apprentice in the blacksmith shop. He received his commission and returned to Old Mission to find the Indians opposing his appointment on the grounds that he did not belong to their tribe. Mr. Johnston told him not to worry but to go about his work and learn the trade to the best of his ability.⁴²

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 54.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 56.

⁴²Ibid.

Henry R. Schoolcraft was the Indian Agent at Mackinac. He wrote to the Indian Commissioner at Washington, recommending Blackbird's appointment:

I also nominate Jackson Blackbird, alias Muckesdaymenaice, as striker at Grand Traverse Station, in place of D. A. Wilcox, whose nomination was not approved by the department on the ground of his being a foreigner. Jackson Blackbird is an Indian of pure blood, eighteen years of age, of sober habits, speaks a little English, can read and write, is of an industrious turn, of character, and will, it is thought, make a good work-man.⁴³

Andrew was fortunate to have made a favorable impression on Mr. Johnston.

Blackbird worked at the blacksmith's trade for five years when, he says, he quit of his own accord.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs reveal many pressures upon him in those years, and a certain unrest, centering around the head blacksmith, Mr. Casselman, who did not pay attention to his duties. Complaints were made at Mackinac about the laxness of Mr. Casselman; two of them asserted that the only reason any work was accomplished in the blacksmith shop was that, "The striker, a young Indian lad, seems to have been the most busy."⁴⁵

Andrew also had to contend with other Indians who wanted his job, and this probably ended his services at Old Mission. In early

⁴³U.S., National Archives, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Microcopy, Michigan Superintendency of Indian Affairs and Mackinac Indian Agency, Letters sent Vol. 2, p. 312.

⁴⁴Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 56.

⁴⁵U.S., National Archives, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Microcopy, Michigan Superintendency of Indian Affairs and Mackinac Indian Agency, Letters received, Vol. 12, p. 155.

April of 1844 Justin Rice of Grand Traverse reported to Mr. Robert Stuart, who had succeeded Schoolcraft at Mackinac, that Chief Kosa of Old Mission was seeking Andrew's job for his son, and was requesting that Blackbird be transferred to the blacksmith's post at Mackinac so that the Grand Traverse assistantship would be available.⁴⁶

The wheels of change began to roll soon after Chief Kosa made his request. On April 27, 1844, Justin Rice wrote to Robert Stuart that it would be best for Blackbird to move up to Mackinac because,

He does not appear to be very well contented at Grand Traverse Bay. He is a Catholic, and in that respect not at home [Old Mission was a Presbyterian mission] He is represented as a good workman, particularly at kettles, a branch in which there is much to be done⁴⁷

By May 14th Andrew had penned his reply:

I have received your letter with your proposal for me to leave this shop and go to work at Mackinac and as you leave it to my choice to go or stay I would say that I would prefer remaining here if the wages are the same. I think I can live on the wages that I now have better here than I would at Mackinac and as I have none of my relatives living at Mackinac I would rather remain among my friends here. It is my intention to leave the Department and work on my own account this fall if I can buy my stock of Iron. Mr. Stuart told me last fall that I might make tools for myself if I had spare time and found my own iron and I think I can do that better here than I could at Mackinac -- There are my reasons for choosing to remain here at present. I hope they will be satisfactory to you.⁴⁸

The matter of Andrew's employment was allowed to rest for a while, but he resigned the next year. Had he not, he probably would have soon been asked to, for a letter from Mr. Stuart to Dr. Justin Rice dated April 22, 1845, reads:

⁴⁶Ibid., Vol. 16, p. 338.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 343.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 263.

You had better advise Jackson Mucatapenaice to relinquish his present appointment between this and 1st September, as he must no longer continue in a subordinate position, but place himself in the way of Johnston, and leave his present place to be filled by some new hand, for we must teach trades &c to as many of them as we can⁴⁹

Andrew's visit in 1840 with Rev. Alvin Coe must have made an impression upon the young Indian, for as soon as he resigned at Old Mission he made plans to go to the Ohio boarding school. He left Old Mission in October, 1845, for New Arbres Croche, by this time called Little Traverse, to say his farewells to his relatives. He stayed at Little Traverse only part of a day, then made his way to Middle Village to board a boat for Mackinac. On his way he met an orphan named Paul Naw-o-ga-de, and proposed that they go together to Ohio, Andrew to pay for the other's passage. Paul accepted.

At Middle Village the two young men found a ship leaving for Cleveland that very day. At a Cleveland hotel where they stopped overnight the landlady began plying her Indian guests with questions. It turned out that she was a niece of Rev. Alvin Coe, and she told them of another guest who was setting out on foot next day toward the home of their missionary friend. At the end of the next day's walk they were in the village of Twinsburg, where their white companion of the day suggested they find lodging for the night and enroll in a local school rather than continue their search for Rev. Alvin Coe.⁵⁰

This school was the Twinsburg Institute, established and operated by Rev. Samuel Bissell, a Presbyterian minister. Since its founding

⁴⁹Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 595.

⁵⁰Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, pp. 57-58.

in 1832 it had become a boarding school providing an inexpensive education for students from a wide area. Many of them paid little or nothing in actual cash for their schooling.⁵¹ For such students Bissell tried to find places to work for their room and board.

In the evening the two young Indians arranged for a meeting with Rev. Samuel Bissell. He told them he had had other students from Michigan, including Simon Pokagon, who later became the last chief of the Pottawattomies.⁵² Bissell told Andrew and Paul he would be happy to enroll them if they wished. He also offered to notify Rev. Alvin Coe of their arrival and arrange a meeting with him. Andrew and Paul were entered on the school rolls. Andrew boarded with the village blacksmith, where he worked for two hours in the mornings and two hours in the evenings to pay for his room and board. Paul boarded with Rev. Samuel Bissell. During the winter Rev. Alvin Coe visited Andrew and took him to look over the school at Sandusky. But Andrew returned to the Twinsburg Institute.

In Andrew's fourth year at Twinsburg, Dr. Brainsmade, from Newark, New Jersey, offered to help him through medical school.⁵³ How far these plans advanced cannot be determined, for soon the illness of Andrew's father sent him back to Little Traverse. Then, perhaps, the distance between Little Traverse and Andrew's potential benefactor caused the plans to fade away.⁵⁴

⁵¹Lena M. Carter, Twinsburg Ohio 1817-1917 (Twinsburg: Champlain Press, 1917), pp. 54-56.

⁵²Carter, p. 56.

⁵³Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 59.

⁵⁴Ibid.

Samuel Bissell spoke of the Indian students at his institute in some papers which are included in a history of Twinsburg, Ohio:

Most of them [the Indian boarding students] remained on an average, at least a year. All boarded in the family and were supplied with books and stationery. Of these, two have been teachers in academies, one a very respectable minister of the Gospel, several have taught schools among their own people. Andrew J. Blackbird, or Mack-a-de-pe-nessy, son of a chief of the Ottawas from the northern part of Michigan, has been a national interpreter, postmaster, and soon after leaving the Institute obtained from the Michigan Legislature the rights of citizenship for his people in that state.⁵⁵

Andrew stayed at the institute longer than most Indian students. He had been there for over four years when he received the word from home that his father was ailing and that he should return to care for him. With great sadness Andrew left Twinsburg Institute and headed homeward. What he found in Little Traverse made him even more sad:

I found my people to be very different then from what they were, as they were beginning to have a free use of intoxicating liquors. I immediately caused the pledge to be signed in every village of the Indians, in which I was quite successful, as almost everyone pledged themselves never again to touch intoxicating drinks.⁵⁶

Andrew's withdrawal from Twinsburg did not end his schooling. But six years elapsed before his next attempt, and during this interval he was caught up in the politics of his hometown.

⁵⁵Carter, pp. 55-56.

⁵⁶Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, pp. 59-60.

CHAPTER III

A CITIZEN IN HIS HOME TOWN

Upon his return to Little Traverse, Andrew worked to encourage temperance among the Indians and to gain citizenship for them. To understand his position we must review the Indian's dealings with the United States government in land cessions and tribal status.

By the Treaty of Washington of 1836, the Ottawa and Chippewa ceded to the United States government their remaining land in the lower peninsula north of the Grand River, and the eastern half of the Upper Peninsula. In this cession, five tracts, amounting to 142,000 acres, were reserved to the Indian tribes for their use over a five year period.⁵⁷ Such reservations were gradually ceded as more settlers pressed into Michigan, and by 1840 many Indians were being moved from these lands onto reservations farther west.⁵⁸

One of the tracts of land reserved by the 1836 treaty was 50,000 acres around Little Traverse Bay where the Arbore Croche Indians were living.⁵⁹ Fearing that they would be removed from the land after five years, many of them left of their own accord in 1839

⁵⁷George N. Fuller, Economic and Social Beginnings of Michigan, A Study of the Settlement of the Lower Peninsula During the Territorial Period, 1805-1837 (Lansing: Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Company, 1916), pp. 527-28.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 59.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 528.

and 1840.⁶⁰ Some went to Canada; others moved to the western shore of Lake Michigan. Andrew's family, though concerned about the future, remained at New Arbre Croche. Andrew at that time was working in the blacksmith shop at Old Mission.

When Andrew returned from Twinsburg to Little Traverse in 1849, he found the Indians there greatly confused. Thirteen years had passed since the signing of the treaty and they had been living on the reserved tract eight years beyond the allotted time. Though no steps had been taken to remove them, the Arbre Croche Indians were uncertain of their status. Andrew concluded that if the Indians could become citizens of the State, they could avoid being driven westward. His white neighbors told him that Indians could not become citizens so long as they were receiving annuities from the national government. Within the year Andrew and a young chieftain from Cross Village decided to confer with the officials of Michigan on the matter of citizenship.⁶¹

In January, 1850, the two men traveled to Detroit on snowshoes, resting in Indian camps along the eastern side of Michigan. In Detroit they went immediately to see Judge Warner Wing to get a legal opinion of their proposal. Judge Wing thought that if they would renounce their allegiance to their chiefs and recognize the authority of the President of the United States, they could qualify as Michigan

⁶⁰Perry F. Powers, A History of Northern Michigan (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1912), Vol. 1, p. 45.

⁶¹Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 60.

citizens.

Blackbird stated that after meeting with Judge Wing, he and his partner appeared in the State Legislature to present the Indians' case. Whether this was a session in the chambers of the legislature, or meetings with committees considering a new State constitution, Blackbird does not make clear. Michigan's Constitution, which became effective on January 1, 1851, provided that every civilized male person of Indian descent, not a member of any tribe, would be "an elector and entitled to vote."⁶² Though Blackbird did not say specifically that he believed this clause was the direct result of the testimony he gave, he did say that he felt his discussions with State officials were quite successful.⁶³

The constitutional clause allowing them citizenship status was a significant achievement for Michigan Indians, but to insure Blackbird's people against eviction from their lands, Andrew knew it would be necessary to conclude a new treaty with the United States government. He was delegated by the Arbre Croche Indians to attend the council of Detroit for the Treaty of 1855.⁶⁴ Both the Ottawa and Chippewa were represented at these talks. George W. Manypenny and Henry C. Gilbert served as commissioners for the United States government.⁶⁵

⁶²Floyd B. Streeter, Political Parties in Michigan, 1837-1860 (Lansing: Historical Commission, 1918), p. 329.

⁶³Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p.61.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵U.S., Department of War, Treaty between The United States of America and the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan, July 1, 1855, p. 3.

The new treaty, concluded on July 31, 1855, included a plan by which the Indians would become owners of land individually rather than tribally. From lands made available by the treaty, each head of a family would choose eighty acres, and each single Indian over twenty-one years of age would choose forty acres. Other provisions enabled orphan children to acquire land. Single orphan children under twenty-one years old could choose forty acres, and eighty acres were allowed in instances where there was a family of orphan children. Selection of the plots would be supervised by the Indian Agents and had to be completed on July 31, 1860.⁶⁶ In exchange for these allotments the Ottawa and Chippewa agreed to dissolve their tribal organizations except as they were needed to carry out the treaty provisions.⁶⁷

At these talks Andrew made several speeches concerning the educational funds established in the 1836 treaty, and which he believed had been improperly distributed. The government had placed the funds in the hands of religious societies operating missions among the Michigan Indians. Andrew felt that the government should give the money to Indian youths who went into civilized communities to be educated.⁶⁸

He believed that Commissioner Manypenny was impressed with his arguments and would have helped to bring about changes in the

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 4-5.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 6.

⁶⁸Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 62.

method of distribution had Andrew been supported by his fellow delegates.⁶⁹ Despite this lack of support, and even though his pleas were to no avail, Andrew stood firmly for his plan for the distribution of the educational funds.

By 1855 Andrew was making himself felt at the county level of government. In 1853 the village of Little Traverse was in Michilimackinac County, whose county seat was St. James, on Beaver Island. After a dispute early in 1855 involving the Beaver Island Mormons, Mackinaw City was made the county seat of Emmet County, with Little Traverse a village in this newly organized unit. In elections held on the first Tuesday in June of 1855, Andrew was elected probate judge.⁷⁰ From that time through the 1860's his name appeared often in the election results for the county. Why he became so involved in local government is difficult to determine. Probably the reason was the comparatively small population of the county. Few persons sought offices in those years and Andrew, though his education was limited, was among the better qualified few.

In the election of November 7, 1855, he received all 40 of the votes cast for Register of Deeds.⁷¹ But when he ran for the office of County Clerk in 1856, he was less fortunate; Michael Kewa beat him by a vote of 136 to 25.⁷² In November, 1857, he waged a better campaign for that office; this time he defeated Kewa by 25 to 2. Yet

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Powers, p. 122.

⁷¹Emmet County, Michigan, Supervisors' Journal, 1859-1863 and Statement of Votes from 1865-1869, Vol. 1, p. 1.

⁷²Ibid., p. 10.

something must have gone awry, for a later entry in the Supervisors' Journal indicates that Michael Kewa was still serving as County Clerk in 1858. This entry appears in a report of the County Canvassers for the County of Emmet, 1858:

At a meeting of the Board of County Canvassers for the county of Emmet held at Mackinaw City on the 10th day of August, 1858 at the office of the County Clerk.

Present Michael Kewa County Clerk, Paul Wasson Inspector from Little Traverse Twp. Francis Labassaih inspector from Cross Village Twp.

On motion Paul Wasson was chosen chairman of the Board then proceeded to examine the returns from Little Traverse and Cross Village. No other township having made any returns, and found and determined as following vis.

The whole number of votes given for the office of County Clerk was one hundred and thirteen and they were all given for Michael Kewa.⁷³

Since it was 1856-1858 that Andrew was probably attending the new Michigan State Normal School in Ypsilanti, the most likely explanation is that he had run for the office, won the seat, and then had to forfeit it because of his absence from the county.

In 1860 he returned to the political fray by campaigning in November of that year for the post of Register of Deeds. His opponent received 143 votes to his 33.⁷⁴ In November of 1862 he was elected Circuit Court Commissioner, receiving 5 votes to his opponent's 1.⁷⁵

In April, 1864, he ran for the office of Register of Deeds once again, but lost to Joseph Pyant by a count of 106 to 40.⁷⁶ Still searching for a political post in November, he ran for County

⁷³Ibid., p. 22.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 76.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 47.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 82.

Treasurer, and this time came out second: Louis Mashenenee received 150 votes, Andrew 60, with 4 votes scattered.⁷⁷

The November elections of 1868 found Andrew again seeking the post of Register of Deeds. Five candidates were in the contest and Andrew won handily with 125 votes, his closest contender polling only 83. He served until 1870.⁷⁸ In 1870 he was elected Supervisor of Little Traverse Township, and served as Chairman of the County Board of Supervisors.⁷⁹

At this point the story of Andrew's political life becomes complex. It appears that while serving as Township Supervisor he had run successfully for the office of County Treasurer, for at a meeting of the Board of Supervisors on April 20, 1871, he moved that the office of County Treasurer be declared vacant, giving as reasons that he, the incumbent, had not filed bond and moreover was not eligible to be County Treasurer because of his position as a Township Supervisor.⁸⁰ And as though matters were not complicated enough, he apparently was trying to act as a Deputy Sheriff at this same time. The Circuit Court Journals show that in the session beginning June 27, 1871, "His Honor, A. J. Blackbird, Deputy Sheriff was present each day."⁸¹ On October 9, 1871, he paid \$20.70 in fines for concurrently being Chairman of the Board of Supervisors and Deputy County Sheriff.⁸²

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 90.

⁷⁸Ibid., Vol. 21, p. 35.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 77.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 67.

⁸¹Emmet County, Michigan, Circuit Court Journal, pp. 32-36.

⁸²Emmet County, Michigan, Supervisors' Journal, Vol. 2, p. 82.

His term as Supervisor of Little Traverse Township and Chairman of the Board of Supervisors in 1870-1872 marked the end of his career in local and county politics. In later years he sometimes petitioned the courts on matters concerning politics, but he held no offices after 1872.

CHAPTER IV

A LAST ATTEMPT AT EDUCATION

We must trace another of Andrew's activities during these same years, one not concerned with public office but with higher education. Of his situation in 1855, just after he had returned to Little Traverse from the treaty talks, he said:

Soon after the council of Detroit, I became very discontented, for I felt that I ought to have gone through with my medical studies, or go to some college and receive a degree and then go and study some profession. But where is the means to take me through for completing my education? was the question every day.⁸³

Concerned about his future, and aware that the treaties of 1836 and 1855 both provided an educational fund for the Ottawa and Chippewa, Andrew decided to seek assistance for a college education. When Mr. Henry Gilbert, the Indian Agent, came to Little Traverse in the autumn of 1856 to distribute the 1855 treaty annuities, Andrew asked for guidance in obtaining financial aid. Gilbert's curt reply was that Andrew had voted wrong the previous year and therefore could not expect any favors.⁸⁴

Andrew had voted the Republican ticket in 1855, as had a man accompanying him to the polls. Gilbert could discover this because of the way elections were then conducted. Andrew's vote had caused a commotion and the manager of the election had even tried to

⁸³Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, pp. 64-65.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 65.

discard the ballots of Andrew and his companion. Andrew knew that he had been a victim of an improper challenge. To be told that the educational funds were dependent upon voting a Democratic ballot was more than he could take, and Andrew decided to take passage on the same vessel that took Mr. Gilbert back to Mackinac, to transfer there to another ship which would take him to Detroit, where he would make his plea to Senator Lewis Cass for educational funds.⁸⁵

He hurried home to pack a few personal belongings and to say good-bye to his father. Catching up with the vessel as it rounded the point opposite the Little Portage, he was taken aboard. At Mackinac the next day he again asked Gilbert for the educational funds. When Gilbert again mentioned Andrew's Republican vote, Andrew claims to have said:

I now see clearly that you don't care about doing anything for my welfare because I voted for the republican party. But politics have nothing to do with my education; for the Government of the United States owes us that amount of money, not politics. I was one of the councilors when that treaty was⁸⁶ made, and I will see some other men about this matter, sir.

Gilbert agreed to pay his passage to Detroit. Immediately upon his arrival in the city he went to Senator Cass's residence. He told Cass of his desire for further education and related his conversations with the Indian Agent. Cass promised to take up the matter with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs at Washington and to notify Andrew of the outcome. Asked where he intended to enroll for his schooling, Andrew mentioned the University of Michigan at

⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 65-66.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 66.

Ann Arbor. Because Cass was uncertain of Andrew's ability, he suggested that he try the Michigan State Normal School at Ypsilanti instead. Although Andrew had not heard of that school, he accepted Cass's suggestion and left for Ypsilanti the next day.

For three weeks he worked on a farm near Ypsilanti. Then, when word came from Cass that the treaty fund would pay all of his expenses, he enrolled at the Normal School. But, the money was to be administered by Gilbert, the Indian Agent with whom he had had the unhappy experience at Mackinac. When Andrew met him again, at Detroit, Gilbert received him most coldly. Unwilling to stir up further trouble, and glad to know he could enroll in the Normal School, Andrew settled for a meager monthly allowance.⁸⁷ His acceptance of this inadequate allowance caused him later to cut short his schooling.

At Ypsilanti Andrew struggled with his studies for about two years and then gave up. The records at the school show only one reference to his academic work, a reference that gives no suggestion of the course he was pursuing or how successful he was in it. On page sixteen of a handwritten, unmarked record book filed in the basement of the Administration Building at Eastern Michigan University is this entry:

Andrew J. Blackbird of Little Traverse, for Term 12 [October 1858 to March, 1859] has passed most studies to date.

Since there are no later entries, it can be assumed that he left after March, 1859. While the date of his enrollment cannot be

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 69.

determined, he said he spent almost two and a half years there, and that he left because his allowance did not pay for his necessary living expenses. He lived as cheaply as possible, sometimes going without food for several days to make his money last the month. Perhaps this penurious life hurt him academically, for his slow progress discouraged him and once more he failed to complete his schooling. With no money left to pay for passage home after his withdrawal from school, he took odd jobs around Ypsilanti in order to return to Little Traverse, where he would "try to live once more according to the means and strength of my education."⁸⁸

The Ypsilanti venture ended Andrew's attempts at education. Through his basic schooling at the mission in New Arbre Croche, the grammar school at Twinsburg, Ohio, and the Normal School at Ypsilanti, he had tried to equip himself for life in the white man's world. Perhaps he failed at Ypsilanti simply because he did not have the ability. But he had given education a fair try, and though he had to settle for less than a college degree, he put his years of training to good use.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 70.

CHAPTER V

A SETTLED CITIZEN

If the registration record at Eastern Michigan University is accurate, Andrew withdrew from the Michigan State Normal School in the early spring of 1859. For a while he worked at various tasks to earn passage home, occasionally lecturing on the subject of the Indians of Michigan.⁸⁹ How long it took him to raise the needed funds is not clear. Emmet County records show he was present for the November elections of 1860, when he ran for the office of Register of Deeds.⁹⁰

While the exact time of his return to Little Traverse is not important in itself, an accurate date would help clear up some questions concerning his marriage, which occurred within this period. As it is, we must conjecture as to where and when he met Elizabeth Martha Fisk, who, according to Andrew's statement, became Mrs. Andrew Jackson Blackbird on September 4, 1858.⁹¹

This date falls within the period of his attendance at the Normal School, and it seems odd that if he were living as meagerly as he says, he would take on the responsibilities of marriage. On the other hand, this date is consistent with the belief of some long-time

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Supra, p. 26.

⁹¹Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 70.

residents of Harbor Springs that he met her in Ypsilanti while attending the Normal School. Dr. Emerson F. Greenman accepts this theory.⁹² But there is another theory. Some of Andrew's acquaintances believed he married the daughter of an English lake captain whose ship came into Little Traverse often in the late 1850's.⁹³ I could find nothing to prove either theory. If they married in Ypsilanti, the certificate should be registered at the county seat for that town, but there is no evidence of the marriage in the Washenaw County records between 1857 and 1863. Neither is there any certificate of the marriage in the Emmet County records at the county seat.

Though neither theory can be proved, I favor the one that has Andrew married to Elizabeth in Ypsilanti. This inclination is based on two inferences from Andrew's statements relating to the years 1857-1863. First, he mentions his marriage before referring to his return to Little Traverse from Ypsilanti.⁹⁴ Second, he uses the phrase, "The first year we lived in Little Traverse"⁹⁵ This implies that they had lived elsewhere as a married couple before going to Andrew's home town.

But if we suppose that he married while in Ypsilanti, we are

⁹²Emerson F. Greenman, "Indian Chiefs in Michigan", Michigan History Magazine, XXIII, (Spring, 1939), p. 221.

⁹³Emmet County Graphic, February 4, 1932.

⁹⁴Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 70.

⁹⁵Ibid.

still left with an unsettled date. It is possible that the date given in Andrew's book, 1858, is a typographical error--there is at least one known incorrect date in his book.⁹⁶ If 1858 is corrected to read September, 1859, he could have worked and lectured in Ypsilanti as a single man, and have been married shortly before returning to Little Traverse in 1860. At least we can say with assurance that he married a white woman. All birth, marriage, and death records for the family give London, England, as Elizabeth's birthplace, and in each instance she is listed as a white woman.⁹⁷

Soon after Andrew returned to Little Traverse with his new wife, he became the official interpreter for the Mackinac Indian Agency by the recommendation of DeWitt C. Leach, the Indian Agent at Mackinac, and a Republican.⁹⁸ Andrew served as interpreter from 1861 through 1869. During this time he was also an assistant prosecutor of the Indian soldier claims resulting from the Civil War,⁹⁹ and he handled claims for the widows and orphans of white soldiers as well.¹⁰⁰ In addition, he held various political jobs during those years. All these duties allowed Andrew and Elizabeth to live comfortably, though not luxuriously.

⁹⁶In reporting a letter written by William Mack-a-te-pe-nessy while he was in Rome, the date is given as 1883. The corrected date should read 1833. Ibid., p. 36.

⁹⁷Emmet County, Michigan, Births, 1867-1889.

⁹⁸Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 70.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Greenman, p. 221.

In April, 1869, he was relieved of the interpreter's job and was appointed postmaster for Little Traverse, a position he held until 1877.¹⁰¹ Apparently there was no longer enough business to require an interpreter, and perhaps he was appointed postmaster because the government felt an obligation to him. Whatever the circumstances, the postmastership caused Andrew much grief in later years. But now let us pause to consider his family life.

People who knew the Blackbird family agree that Elizabeth found her position as the wife of an Indian a difficult one. Evidence that the Indians of the village caused Elizabeth much grief is the story of her baldness, a tale which became almost legend in northern Michigan. Elizabeth told the story of her humiliation to my mother as she cared for Blackbird's widow in the last years of her life. It runs like this:

Soon after Elizabeth had married Andrew, she became aware of the jealousy of some of the Indian girls. Hoping to break down the barrier between the Indian girls and herself, she accepted a bottle of hair tonic from them, to make her hair darker and more glossy. Perhaps she really wanted to become a brunette; perhaps she used the gift out of politeness. Whatever her reason, her blonde hair began falling out and in a few days she was completely bald. No treatments ever brought back her hair, and for the rest of her life she kept her head covered with white cloths.¹⁰² While this tale seems more

¹⁰¹Letter from the United States Postoffice Department to the Blackbird Museum, July 9, 1956.

¹⁰²Interview with Mrs. Lynn Burgess, July 9, 1962.

like legend than truth, Elizabeth was bald, and residents of Little Traverse accepted this explanation for her baldness.

The Blackbirds reared four children. In the opinion of the community the three boys never amounted to much. The girl, Nettie, acquired advanced musical training and married a well-to-do man named Scofield, from New York, and lived out her adult years in California.¹⁰³

The first child of Andrew and Elizabeth was born September 29th, 1867.¹⁰⁴ They named him William, probably in memory of Andrew's brother, William, who had died in Rome while studying for the priesthood. A second son was born to them in 1870.¹⁰⁵ This child, Fred, was the one who was sentenced to a year of hard labor at the Michigan Reformatory at Ionia on September 22, 1906, for "being a disorderly person."¹⁰⁶ Nettie, their only girl, was born May 19, 1872,¹⁰⁷ and Bert, the youngest child, was born on February 5, 1877.¹⁰⁸ Only Fred and Nettie married, and only Fred had any children. Descendants of Fred and his wife are scattered throughout Michigan and the Great Lakes area.

¹⁰³Letter from Nettie Scofield to William H. Hampton, August 4, 1956.

¹⁰⁴~~Emmet~~ County, Michigan, Births, 1867-1889, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁰⁶~~Emmet~~ County, Michigan, Circuit Court Journal, Vol. V, p. 224.

¹⁰⁷~~Emmet~~ County, Michigan, Births, 1867-1889, p. 19.

¹⁰⁸~~Emmet~~ County, Michigan, Index and Record of Deaths, A-Z from January 1, 1931.

The rearing of their children was one of the least successful ventures which Andrew and Elizabeth undertook. A resident of Harbor Springs who knew the children says that none of the boys ever held steady jobs. William and Bert lived at home until their mother's death in 1920 and then wandered from one seasonal occupation to another until they died in the 1940's. Fred, after serving his prison sentence at Ionia, moved out to Minnesota. Nettie, whose situation in adult years seemed the most agreeable, got her start not from her parents but from a family which spent summers in Harbor Springs and realized her musical ability.

Perhaps much of the difficulty in rearing the children hinged on the confusion over racial affiliation. Mrs. Blackbird impressed upon her children that they were of English descent. Nettie, in a letter to William Hampton in 1956, indicated the pattern of the children's growth as members of a white culture rather than an Indian one:

I do not recall knowing any Indians very well when I lived in Harbor Springs. My mother's friends were all white, and her friends and their children were my friends and playmates. Not that we felt superior in any way, as the Indians are a fine people.¹⁰⁹

Just how Andrew felt about this pattern of associations we are not sure, but undoubtedly he had very little opportunity to concern himself with the matter. He had other worries.

When Andrew accepted the postmaster's job in 1869, Little Traverse was a small village, whose postoffice had been established

¹⁰⁹Letter from Nettie Scofield to William H. Hampton, September 21, 1956.

only eight years before.¹¹⁰ The postoffice was set up in Andrew's home, and residents stopped at the house to pick up their mail. This arrangement worked out well for a short time. Since the work load was light, Andrew could also handle soldier's claims and participate in county government. As long as the volume of mail was low and the salary was small, he had no trouble. But after 1872 increasing numbers of white people came into the village, and his salary was gradually increased.

About 1873 other persons in the town wanted the postmaster's job and they petitioned Washington to have him removed.¹¹¹ Andrew learned the basis of these petitions when an assistant Postmaster-general informed him that the complaints had to do with the postoffice being in his home, an arrangement inconvenient for the public.¹¹² The Washington official advised Andrew to "please the public as well as he could."¹¹³ Andrew reacted quickly to this suggestion. He says, "I took what little money I had saved and built a comfortable office, but before the building was thoroughly completed I was removed."¹¹⁴ Andrew felt that he had been treated unjustly with regard to the petitions, and he may well have been. He said, ". . . no one ever had any occasion to complain of having lost his money or

¹¹⁰Supra, p. 38

¹¹¹Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 71.

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 70.

letter through this office during my administration."¹¹⁵

I have talked with acquaintances of Andrew who believe that he was removed from the postmastership as a result of misappropriation of funds.¹¹⁶ Others think that the task of handling the United States mail was becoming too complicated for him. I consulted the National Archives and Records Service and they reported:

The records of the Post Office Department in our custody contain orders of the Postmaster General which show that Andrew J. Blackbird was appointed postmaster at Little Traverse, Emmet County, Michigan on April 12, 1869, and that he was 'removed for cause' from that position and replaced by Lorenzo A. Clark on June 4, 1877. We have not found any records which indicate the nature of the 'cause' for Mr. Blackbird's removal from office.¹¹⁷

This statement barely suggests that he may have been suspected of improper procedures. It must be remembered that there was a change of administration in Washington in 1877. Though it was not a change of political parties, it involved a change in control from Radical Republicans to Moderate Republicans. And in 1875 the Radical Senator Chandler from Michigan had been replaced by the Moderate Senator Christy. It is quite possible that Senator Christy was using his privilege of appointment to reward one of his political supporters. Postmasterships were an easy means of fulfilling obligations to constituents and the Little Traverse position would have been an especially easy place to use since some citizens had

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Interview with Mr. Charles Meyers, June, 1962.

¹¹⁷Letter from General Services Administration, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D. C., July 24, 1962.

already expressed their displeasure with Andrew Blackbird's services.

The loss of the Harbor Springs postmastership in 1877 marked the end of his employment by the United States government, and his last term as an elected county official had ended in 1872. From his earliest adult years until the birth of his youngest child, Andrew had received a government salary. The assistant blacksmith's job at Old Mission was a government appointment. His schooling at Ypsilanti was paid for, though meagerly, by the government, and for the jobs he held at Little Traverse after he returned from Ypsilanti, he received payment from the government. This should be remembered when we examine his later pleas to Washington for reinstatement. His pleas sometimes seem foolish, almost improper; but, after all, he had been accustomed to government employment for thirty-seven years of his life.

CHAPTER VI

DECLINING YEARS

When Andrew lost the postmastership, he had a wife and four children to support. The oldest child was ten years and the youngest one just four months old. At this time Andrew probably became a full-time farmer; the Treaty of 1855 had given him the usual forty acres allowed each adult male Indian.

Though his public career had come to an end, he continued as the informal spokesman for his people. A series of letters in the National Archives shows extensive correspondence concerning land ownership, pensions, and other legal issues among the Indians at Little Traverse. Between 1881 and 1899 he sent more than fifty letters to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Many of these were written at the request of Indians who wanted to clear up land title complications but could not write the letters themselves.

How many of these matters needed attention by the Bureau of Indian Affairs is questionable. The Indian Agent at Mackinac could have handled many of the claims, but Andrew began corresponding with the Washington office when Mackinac was without an agent, between 1876 and 1882, and he got into the habit of dealing directly with the Bureau. An added reason for his writing to Washington may have been to convince the Bureau that a paid Indian interpreter was needed at Little Traverse. Andrews seems to have been job hunting again, this time for reinstatement as interpreter.

Andrew got solid support from the former Indian Agent at Mackinac for whom he had worked, when De Witt C. Leach recommended his reappointment in a letter to Washington in July, 1884. Leach pointed out that Andrew had executed his duties faithfully when he had been the Indian interpreter from 1861 through 1869, and that he was still doing much unpaid work for his people.¹¹⁸

Shortly before Agent Edward P. Allen forwarded Leach's letter to Washington, Andrew had sent Senator Omar D. Conger a long, involved review of his services, referring to his unjust removal as postmaster, and emphasizing the importance of his efforts as Indian spokesman. There is a bitterness apparent in this letter, dated May 18, 1884. It said in part:

I do actually believe that I have twenty times more Indian matters and Indian troubles to content with, than the Indian Agent himself who is getting good salary today for being employed to look after the interests of the Indians and the Government. And for this reason--and it is plain to be seen that I am here amongst the majority of the Indians of the state as the old saying is in the hottest fire and being so long in the department they have got a costumed or the habit of running to me for their every little matters and dealings with the Government--now I ask you as our Senator of Congress to look this matter over well, and should you think it proper to reinstate Government Interpreter of Little Traverse who might even receive regular salary according to Statute Laws at large, it would be very acceptable and most certainly, our Government would not find any inconvenient nor any poorer on account of this matter.¹¹⁹

But no appointment as Indian interpreter came to him, either from Andrew's letter or Leach's recommendation.

¹¹⁸U.S., National Archives, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Microcopy, Letter from former Mackinac Indian Agent De Witt C. Leach to Agent Edward P. Allen, May 10, 1884.

¹¹⁹U.S., National Archives, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Microcopy, Letter from Andrew J. Blackbird to Senator Omar D. Conger, May 18, 1884.

In September, 1884, Andrew wrote again. This time his letter dealt mainly with his own land claims, but toward the end again he pleaded for the appointment:

I had to content with many Indians matters as though I was yet Government Interpreter, as my people had formed the habits of running to me for their many wants and troubles, and not only those that are near me but they come in every direction far and near--concentrating all their various troubles, which makes it very great hardships to me, as I have done very little for myself to support of my family.¹²⁰

When this letter brought no appointment, he became more persistent. He sent letters in October 1885 and March 1886. The letter of March 29, 1886, is phrased in almost desperate terms:

Sir; I am very poor! And a family of six therefore I cannot afford to work for nothing and be robbed at the same time! [In earlier letters he had written that persons were taking land from him.] And this poverty came on me through the Service of the U.S. as I was running Post Office in this town--with a very small salary--but after on petition failed for my removal, I was advised by the Department to try and please my costumers as my place of business was too small for the public.

Accordingly I went to work and built very comfortable office with expectation to repay me after a time, as my salary was beginning to increase--but alas! As soon as the building completed I was removed without any cause, but simply because that some one else more favored was after this office!

Thus left me in this cold world penniless, and heavily in debt on account of the building, for which from time to time I have been sued.--The building has been a dead matter to me ever since.

Now the object of stating more fully to this subject and situation is that the matter might be more thoroughly looked into and reconsidered--I know that the Government will not be, or, feel any poorer for this act while it will do a vast deal of good.

After your honorable due consideration and thoroughly digestion of this matter, I shall look for a reply.¹²¹

¹²⁰U.S., National Archives, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Microcopy, Letter from Andrew J. Blackbird to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, September 10, 1884.

¹²¹U.S., National Archives, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Microcopy, Letter from Andrew J. Blackbird to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 29, 1886.

With this letter, Andrew gave up. He was not reappointed to the interpreter's post, and he never mentioned it again. He continued to correspond with the Indian Commissioner about matters of land and money, revealing in his letters his suspicion of the government's sincerity. These letters also show much concern about his personal finances. Apparently he was unable to support his family by farming.

When he learned, in the spring of 1892, that a school for Indian children was to be established at Mount Pleasant, Michigan, he immediately grasped at the chance of becoming a staff member. When his letter to the superintendent of the institution brought no reply, he once again addressed himself to officials in Washington. On June 26, 1892, he wrote the Commissioner of Indian Affairs:

I have for some time been looking for a position whereof I could be any service towards the enlightenment of my people--the Indians, particularly Ottawa and Chippewa Indians to whom I am immediately connected of their common destiny. When I saw an advertisement that the Institution for Indians was to be about to established (Industrial School) at Mt. Pleasant Michigan I wrote to Dr. Riopel--Superintendent--on the subject but heard nothing from him since. Whether he got my letter or not I don't know. Should I have a place in the Institution I think I can do much good lecturing and teaching and otherwise, and at the same time getting my living--Should the recommendations be required as to my standing and ability--it can be easily furnished from my neighbors and former Indian Agents. I noticed in the advertisement some enlighten and an educated Indian to make an application or to be one required in the Institution I therefore make an application. Hoping to hear from you on the subject.¹²²

If this letter seems less coherent than earlier ones, it should be remembered that Andrew was then probably over seventy years old.

¹²²U.S. National Archives, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Microcopy, Letter from Andrew J. Blackbird to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, June 26, 1892.

He never had written accurately in English and his ~~grammar~~ often showed a carry-over of Indian phrasing. But it is the content, not the construction, of the letter that is more revealing. Andrew seems to be greatly overestimating his ability.

It is even more surprising to note the position he desired, for in a subsequent letter to the Indian Commissioner, he suggested he might serve as an assistant Superintendent. This letter shows too that Andrew's hopes for any employment had begun to fade:

In looking over these blanks [application forms] I found that 2 or 3 questions I could not legitimately and satisfactorily given, viz; that of my age, and being hard of hearing, and beginning to be partially blind, as I cannot now read without glasses. Therefore I thought it would be no use for me to make further applications, and although I can yet labor almost like a middle age man, either in mental or manual.

For years I have acted under capacity as U.S. Interpreter for the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan, and PostMaster 11 years in this county. But now there is nothing to maintain me in my old age--I am very poor--and am burying here my educational qualifications--in this miserable hole! As I did not had to through all these long lingo--when I got my commissions as Interpreter and Post Master--so I thought it will be so again when I wrote my first letter for appointment.¹²³

Obviously, whatever hope Andrew may have had of returning to government employment was gone. His only other major correspondence with Washington related to financial settlement by the government with the Potawatomi Indians of Michigan as provided in treaties signed between 1821 and 1833. Between 1893 and 1899 Andrew sent a steady stream of requests about that matter, claiming he was in line for a share of the settlement because he was the only living relative of a

¹²³U.S., National Archives, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Microcopy, Letter from Andrew J. Blackbird to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Mar. 15, 1893.

Potawatomi who would have received a portion of the money distributed.¹²⁴

These letters are even more incoherent than those quoted above. Andrew sent affidavits to prove his relationship to the Potawatomi, and warned that he would not rest the case until justice was done. Finally, on May 30, 1899, he submitted his last plea for any kind of government help. It was a pathetic message, written in a feeble scrawl.

I write to inform you and it is the last hope and should I fail in this matter my little home will be gone soon, or, inside of June 1899 (and would have gone this present month), by foreclosure on the mortgage of my little home. But I prevail on the mortgagee to wait another month for the foreclosure. As I have been working faithfully many years for the government, or ever since a boy and am now over 80 years old, blind, deaf, and full of rheumatism in my body and consequently terrible decrepit. First I worked in the government blacksmith shop at Grand Traverse Michigan. Secondly as Government Interpreter for Mackinac Michigan Indian Agency. Thirdly as U.S. Post Master at Little Traverse, but now Harbor Springs Michigan in which when removed I was damaged of \$610 not by misdemeanor or anything wrong in the office but through politics. I was even in debt at that time. After which misfortunes came, sickness, burglary, and robbery in various ways and entirely financially broke down without income. And I begin to scratch the ground to sustain myself and family with 4 children. But sickness came to me and consequently I was obliged to borrow money of \$200 with interest at 8 per cent, but failed to produce on account of continual sickness as above stated. Now the debt amounted including the tax title on my home about \$400.

I thought if I should get to the Capital of the U.S. I would solicit aid from the employees of the Government by subscription within the month of June 1899. I further thought your and our present member of Congress might endorse this idea.

So let me hear from you right away if possible on this subject as my home will be gone soon.¹²⁵

¹²⁴U.S., National Archives, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Microcopy, Letter from Andrew J. Blackbird to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, June 19, 1893.

¹²⁵U.S., National Archives, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Microcopy, Letter from Andrew J. Blackbird to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, May 30, 1899.

Whether the financial circumstances of the Blackbird family were as precarious as this letter says they were cannot be determined. As Andrew aged, his letters grew less coherent and more sentimental. He referred frequently to his family of six, as though he had many young mouths to feed. In 1886, when he began using his large family as a reason for government employment, his oldest child was nineteen and his youngest one nine. Granted that he had certain responsibilities to a family of teen-age children, in 1899, when he was pleading with the government to help him pay off the mortgage on his home, his youngest child was twenty-two years old, hardly an age to be considered a dependent. Why hadn't his children come to his aid by paying the \$400 mortgage? In 1899 Fred, the oldest son, was the only child who was married.¹²⁶ The other three children had no families of their own. Possibly they worked so irregularly that they had no money for their father's emergency.

Perhaps Andrew worked out his financial troubles without government help. Perhaps his children did lend a hand. At least no more letters from Andrew appear in the files of the National Archives. While I was unable to learn how the mortgage problem was solved, the Blackbird home remained in the family until Bert, the youngest son, died in 1947.¹²⁷ The house was then purchased by the Michigan Indian Foundation and is now used as a local museum, housing a few relics of the once important Indian culture of the community.

¹²⁶ Emmet County Michigan, Record of Marriages, 1887-1899, p. 78.

¹²⁷ Emmet County Graphic, September 11, 1947.

From the time of his mortgage letter of 1899 until his death in 1908, Andrew's story is a blank. No sources tell how he spent those last few years. Old-time residents of Harbor Springs vaguely recall that he was seen about town on a few occasions. Dr. Louis Gariepy, who began coming to Harbor Springs in 1906, says he talked with Andrew occasionally, and remembers him as a rather keen conversationalist, "whose conversation in English was good for an Indian."¹²⁸ If Dr. Gariepy's memory is reliable, then Andrew must have remained in his home town until very shortly before his death in 1908 at the county poor farm in Brutus.

What circumstances required his removal to the poor farm? Was it neglect by his family? He had a wife and four children who might have cared for him in his last year. Perhaps a lingering illness necessitated the move from Harbor Springs to Brutus. No one seems to know why he was placed in the county poor farm. Joe Kishigo, one of the oldest living Indians of Harbor Springs, gave this answer when questioned about the closing months of Andrew's life: "Chief Blackbird owned part of what is now the Wequetonsing Golf Course, He farmed it in early times. He was a letter carrier for a while too. He shouldn't have died there at Brutus."¹²⁹

Andrew was given an Episcopal funeral, for he had left the Catholic Church soon after he returned to Little Traverse in 1849. He spoke of this change to Protestantism in his book saying he had

¹²⁸Interview with Dr. Louis Gariepy, July 9, 1962.

¹²⁹Interview with Mr. Joseph Kishigo, July 10, 1962.

become a Protestant ". . . not by any personal persuasion, . . . but by terrible conviction on reading the word of God--'That there is no mediator between God and man but one, which is Christ Jesus, who was crucified for the remission of sins'."¹³⁰ Mrs. Blackbird purchased a family lot in the cemetery at Harbor Springs, and there, without any kind of marker, his body was laid to rest.

Elizabeth continued to live in the family home on Main Street in Harbor Springs until her death in 1920. Two of the Blackbird children, William and Bert, occupied the house throughout their lifetimes.¹³¹ After Bert's death in 1947, Nettie came from California to settle the estate. Dr. Joseph A. Braun, a trustee of the Michigan Indian Foundation, says that Mrs. Blackbird had ordered everything burned, and that Nettie carried out her mother's instructions, except for a few items which are now at the museum.¹³² Mr. C. Fay Erwin, a long-time druggist and undertaker in Harbor Springs, has a different story. He says that Nettie destroyed the family records because she didn't want to be known as an Indian. Erwin maintains that the few items that were rescued for the museum were things that Nettie had missed in her housecleaning.¹³³

Perhaps the burned possessions might have helped to fill in the void of Andrew's last years. More likely there never were records of

¹³⁰Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 64.

¹³¹Interview with Mr. C. Fay Erwin, July 9, 1962.

¹³²Letter from Dr. Joseph A. Braun, October 19, 1962.

¹³³Interview with Mr. C. Fay Erwin, July 9, 1962.

those last years. The letter which Blackbird wrote in 1899 was in a feeble hand, and when he wrote in 1900 about his efforts to complete his essay, The Indian Problem from the Indian's Standpoint, he admitted that his strength was failing, his days numbered.

When the essay was completed, Andrew's writing days were over. He had led a full life, but whether it was a useful one is questioned by those who remember him. Few would deny, though, that Andrew Blackbird's was an unusual life for an Indian in northern Michigan in the last century.

CHAPTER VII

THE MISFIT

One of the first questions about Andrew Blackbird's life is his explanation of his family's tribal origin. Early in his History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians he refers to himself and his near relatives as descendants of "Underground" Indians,¹³⁴ thus setting himself apart from the Ottawa among whom he grew up. He explains that long before his birth Ottawa tribes of the Great Lakes area sometimes went on the warpath toward the south or west, and that on one of these expeditions the Ottawa captured his ancestors and brought them back as prisoners of war.¹³⁵ These captives were adopted as children of the Ottawa and "intermarried with the nation in which they were captives."¹³⁶

To learn more of these "Underground" Indians I wrote to Dr. Volney H. Jones, Curator of Ethnology at the Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan. It is entirely possible, he replied, that Blackbird was descended from war captives obtained in the west, and added that the Columbia Plateau was a center of underground or pit houses in North America. But with regard to Blackbird's statement that "I am descended, as tradition says"¹³⁷ Dr. Jones replied:

¹³⁴Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 25.

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Ibid.

All tribes have a great web of mythology, tradition, legends, and pseudo-history accounting for their origins, wanderings, and various subdivisions of the group. Blackbird uses his to establish the superiority of his particular lineage.¹³⁸

I agree with Dr. Jones that because Blackbird lived with the Ottawa, spoke their language, grew up with them, and represented them, we will have to consider him an Ottawa. Dr. Emerson F. Greenman also considered Blackbird an Ottawa.¹³⁹

A more immediate question of Blackbird's heritage is whether his mother was an Indian or a white woman. If she was a full-blooded Indian then we can be fairly certain that Andrew also was full-blooded, since in all probability his father was an Ottawa from the Manitoulin Islands. But at least two informed persons maintain that Andrew was a half-breed, and his children therefore quarter-breeds.¹⁴⁰

The first, Mrs. Susie Shagonaby, formerly the curator of the Blackbird Museum in Harbor Springs, Michigan, and herself an Ottawa, believes that Andrew's father was first married to a Chippewa woman whom he left at Manitoulin when he came to L'Arbre Croche about 1800. Mrs. Shagonaby also believes that sometime before 1810 Mack-a-te-pennessy was delegated to go to Washington as spokesman for his tribe and that while there he married an Englishwoman. She says that Andrew and his nine brothers and sisters were born of this second marriage.¹⁴¹ But the supposed second wife died in 1828, before the

¹³⁸Letter from Dr. Volney H. Jones, November 17, 1962.

¹³⁹Greenman, pp. 41-42.

¹⁴⁰Interview with Mrs. Susie Shagonaby, July 10, 1962 and with Mr. Charles J. Meyers, June 20, 1962.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

Arbre Croche Ottawa appear in vital records, and there is no way of checking Mrs. Shagonaby's theory. She cites as her authority Indians living in northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula, with whom she has corresponded.¹⁴² But since she is hazy in other matters about Andrew which check fairly accurately with information in government files, I hesitate to accept Mrs. Shagonaby's theory. Another comment on Andrew's ancestry came from Mr. George A. Newark, an insurance and real estate dealer in Harbor Springs, who went there in the lumbering era of the 1890's. He believes that white contacts in the region for nearly 200 years allowed little possibility of a full-blooded Indian living there in the early nineteenth century.¹⁴³

But whether Andrew's mother was a white woman, an Indian, or of mixed ancestry, he was certainly identified as an Indian by those who knew him as he was growing up in L'Arbre Croche. Henry Schoolcraft also characterized him as an "Indian of pure blood" when recommending him as assistant blacksmith at Old Mission.¹⁴⁴ Blackbird must have considered himself an Indian, for he speaks of "my own race" and "my own people"¹⁴⁵ when referring to the Ottawa. Because data that might prove otherwise are not available, we have to assume that he was an Indian by culture, if not entirely by blood.

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³Interview with Mr. George A. Newark, July 9, 1962.

¹⁴⁴Supra, p. 17.

¹⁴⁵Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, pp. 24 and 10.

But I was more interested in Blackbird's attempts to fit his life into white man's ways. Andrew believed education would open doors otherwise closed to him. He must have been deeply hurt on the two occasions when he had to discontinue his schooling. His departure from Twinsburg must have been especially disheartening. Blackbird said that he was "called away to come home and look after my aged father."¹⁴⁶ With eight living brothers and sisters it would seem that if Andrew's education had been considered important, some of the other members of the family could have helped his father.

This abrupt cancellation of his schooling seems especially strange in the light of his portrayal of his situation at Twinsburg as quite satisfactory. The History of Summit County, Ohio, says of Blackbird's work at Twinsburg: "He excelled in composition, and composed a comedy, three hours in length, that was presented by the societies of the institute publicly to large audiences with great success."¹⁴⁷

Rev. Samuel Bissell, founder and director of the institute, related that many Indians came to his school as boarding students and that most of them remained, on an average, at least a year.¹⁴⁸ Andrew stayed over four years before his father's illness called him home. Considering his struggle in getting to the institute, it seems odd that Andrew interrupted his schooling to help his father,

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁴⁷William H. Perrin (ed.), History of Summit County, Ohio (Chicago: Baskin and Battey, 1881), p. 658.

¹⁴⁸Carter, pp. 55-56.

unless he was convinced that no one else in the family could. If it is true that the shadowy Dr. Brainsmade had offered about this time to help him through medical school, then his return to Little Traverse was an especially selfless act.¹⁴⁹ With what feelings must Andrew have looked back upon those hopeful years at Twinsburg!

His second attempt to get an education, at Ypsilanti, also raises questions. Andrew made much of the Indian Agent's refusal to cooperate in getting money from the Indian educational funds, and he played up his appeal to Senator Lewis Cass, whose intercession enabled Andrew to attend the Normal School. But then Andrew blames his failure at Ypsilanti on the meagerness of his monthly allowance. There is a lack of consistency here. If Blackbird had the courage to appeal to Cass over the head of Indian Agent Gilbert then we are left to wonder why he later allowed Gilbert to limit his monthly allowance so drastically as to cause him to withdraw from the Normal School.

I am inclined to lay more stress on another reason for Blackbird's withdrawal from the Normal School: failure to meet the academic standards of the school. He mentions this reason only lightly in his book. Andrew was a man in his thirties when he enrolled at Ypsilanti with incomplete preparatory schooling. It is not derogatory to suggest that he could not complete his courses satisfactorily. The only evidence that he was short of money lies in his own statement, while both his mention of his academic difficulties and the entry in the school records suggest that he could not

¹⁴⁹Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 59.

meet the requirements of the institution.

Another puzzling aspect of Andrew's life is his participation in local public offices. His record here exhibits a frenzied pace. He was hardly out of one office before he was seeking another, and in at least one instance he tried to hold two at the same time. Candidates for local offices were probably more difficult to find then than they are now, and perhaps he won more often by default than by reason of competence. Was he really a leader in his community or was he merely seeking paying jobs? Andrew probably saw in officeholding the chance to use his schooling to give him prestige in a village where other Indians were only background figures. His desire to excel in the white man's world appears early in his book. When he was speaking of Rev. Alvin Coe's offer to take him to Ohio for an education, he said: ". . . the idea struck me that I could be really educated and be able to converse with the white people."¹⁵⁰ To say that he was awed by the prospect of entering into the white man's society would not be an overstatement. That he could actually become an elected official of the village and county must have pleased him immensely.

Andrew's record of public service is not remarkable. All too often he had little understanding of the duties of his office. Perhaps his contribution was to make himself available when the few other qualified men were not interested. As more white men moved into northern Michigan, his political successes were fewer. One thing

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 24.

can be said with certainty-he was never venal.

Perhaps the best measure of his success can be found in evaluations by his own people and by white men who knew him. Such evaluations are difficult to find, because few persons who knew Blackbird are still living. Several persons in Harbor Springs remember their parents' comments about him, or can recall a few associations with the Blackbird family, and there are a few references to him in local newspapers.

What did the Ottawa Indians think of Blackbird? They seem to have respected him more in his early adult years than in his later life. Mrs. Shagonaby believes that political office tended to make Andrew somewhat vain, and that the cool treatment he often received from Indians was caused by his increasing pomposity.¹⁵¹ Joe Kishigo believes that Blackbird himself was a respected member of the Ottawa community but that because his children did not show good upbringing, the family name fell into disrepute.¹⁵² Whatever the Indian's opinion of Andrew and his family, many of them used his services. George A. Newark often comes upon papers in which Andrew J. Blackbird is listed with power of attorney for Indians who could not write English, these documents often being signed, "A. J. Blackbird and one-hundred Indians."¹⁵³

Evaluations by white persons are mixed. George Newark says that Andrew did amount to something, that for his time and place he

¹⁵¹Interview with Mrs. Susie Shagonaby, July 10, 1962.

¹⁵²Interview with Mr. Joseph Kishigo, July 10, 1962.

¹⁵³Interview with Mr. George A. Newark, July 9, 1962.

was a significant person.¹⁵⁴ But Mr. Newark had no personal dealings with Andrew. Others held different views. Such a person was Andrew L. Deuel, real estate dealer and lawyer, who in 1889 carried on a running argument with Blackbird in the columns of The Northern Independent. Deuel accused Andrew of acquiring land illegally from certain Indians in the town, and of tricking his fellow Indians because he was more educated than they.¹⁵⁵ This may have been no more than a dispute between two people who had had difficulties in their business dealings.

The evaluations of other white persons are less harsh. Mr. G. Fay Erwin, the undertaker who handled the funerals for the Blackbird family, says that Andrew was just another Indian, slightly more educated than most, but beyond that, not especially noteworthy.¹⁵⁶ Other residents of Harbor Springs who knew the Blackbird family seem most impressed by Andrew's educational attainments. They also point out that while it was not uncommon in those years for an Indian woman to marry a white man, that Andrew should have married a white woman was most unusual.

One of the best comments on Blackbird by one who knew him is provided by Ulysses P. Hedrick. Hedrick was a young boy when his family moved to Little Traverse in 1874 and he lived there until 1890. In his book, The Land of The Crooked Tree, he refers to the Blackbirds

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

¹⁵⁵The Northern Independent (Harbor Springs, Michigan), May 23, 1887.

¹⁵⁶Interview with Mr. C. Fay Erwin, July 9, 1962.

as "left-overs of Indian royalty", with Andrew "reduced in royal functions to helping the descendants of former subjects bear as best they could the miseries of the new regime."¹⁵⁷ Hedrick recalls that while Andrew held government jobs he was a well dressed, respectable man, but that after he was ousted from his government positions he degenerated to wearing cast-off garments and accepting charity.¹⁵⁸ Hedrick noted that Blackbird's once fluent English left him and he fell back into the speech of his childhood.¹⁵⁹ The last time Blackbird talked with Hedrick, sometime between 1900 and 1905, Blackbird asked for the loan of a dollar.¹⁶⁰ Thus, Hedrick's report follows closely the story of Andrew's life as pieced together from a variety of sources.

These opinions suggest that Blackbird was a misfit. As the spokesman for his Indian constituents he sometimes did not speak for their real desires. For example, while he was seeking funds to educate the Indians in the white man's ways, they were clamoring for cash payments and acreage allotments from the United States government. And they were doubtful of the value of his educational attainments.

If he was a misfit in his own culture, he was also out of place in the white man's society. True, he did gain positions in local government, but only until enough white settlers had moved into

¹⁵⁷Ulysses P. Hedrick, The Land of The Crooked Tree (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 27.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

Harbor Springs to fill the offices. After 1872 Andrew's services were no longer needed and he was cast aside. Nor was he accepted socially by the white people of the town. Mrs. Blackbird had white friends and tried to rear her children as white children, but Andrew seems to have had no dependable friends whatever among the white population of Harbor Springs.

Were it not for his writings, Blackbird would have to be rated pretty much a failure. In his essays, letters, and one book, he recorded something of the culture of his people and threw some light on Indian life in northern Michigan toward the end of the last century; and for this he did not need approval by either his fellow Indians or his white contemporaries.

Blackbird's major written work was a book, first published in 1887, entitled, A History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan; a Grammar of their Language, and Personal and Family History of the Author. This title, appearing frequently in bibliographies, made Blackbird a recognized authority on the history of his people. Nine leading citizens of Harbor Springs, all white men, endorsed its first publication, and the Ypsilanti Auxiliary of the Women's National Indian Association sponsored its printing. Blackbird wrote this book because he believed his tribe's language and traditions would be lost unless someone recorded them.¹⁶¹ His book gives much information about the Michigan Ottawa and Chippewa a hundred years ago. Except for a few possible errors in dates, it seems to be an

¹⁶¹ Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 5.

accurate account.

Andrew's last known published work was a pamphlet, The Indian Problem from the Indian's Standpoint, copyrighted in 1900.¹⁶² A quotation from the preface of this pamphlet appears on the first page of this study. That this essay is less coherent than his earlier writings should not be surprising, for he must have been in his eighties when he wrote it. Even in this last work he reiterated his belief in education. He said that Indian children must be taught skills which would serve them in an integrated society, and that Roman Catholic mission schools did not offer the whole solution.¹⁶³

The full extent of Blackbird's writings may never be known. When Nettie, his daughter, was closing out the family estate in 1947, trustees of the Michigan Indian Foundation persuaded her that the home should be preserved as a museum for the Ottawa Indians of northern Michigan. Unfortunately, she had already destroyed many of her father's papers. While a few personal items from the Blackbird family are now in the museum, none of Andrew's unpublished writings, if there were any, are among them. But this is not critical, since his published writings establish his importance as an historian of the Indians of L'Arbre Croche region.

Andrew Jackson Blackbird was a unique personality, and for other reasons than his writing. He was exceptional for his race. While

¹⁶² Andrew Jackson Blackbird, The Indian Problem from the Indian's Standpoint (1900). While no publisher is given, the National Indian Association of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, controlled its circulation.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 19.

other Indians found useful roles in the white man's world in his times, few of them followed the path that Andrew took. Those who acquired any education did so mostly through attendance at local schools. Only a very few traveled far from home to improve themselves, and only in rare instances did those few return to positions of leadership in their native communities.

When Blackbird was a youth, few men of either race, white or red, attached so much importance to education as he did. There were in those years many respectable occupations which did not require even a grammar school preparation, and that Andrew strove so hard for an education shows an unusual appreciation of education.

One more question remains. Why did he pursue his unusual path, a path that led him to an unhappy death in a white man's home for the aged and impoverished? Perhaps he gave the answer himself:

When the white man took every foot of my inheritance, he thought to him I should be the slave. Ah, never, never! I would sooner plunge the dagger into my beating heart and follow the footsteps of my forefathers, than be slave to the white man.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, p. 102.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Public Documents

- Michigan, Emmet County. Births, 1867-1889.
- Michigan, Emmet County. Circuit Court Journal. Vol. 5.
- Michigan, Emmet County. Index and Record of Deaths, A-Z, from January 1, 1931.
- Michigan, Emmet County. Record of Marriages, 1887-1899.
- Michigan, Emmet County. Supervisors' Journal, 1859-1863 and Statement of Votes from 1865-1869, Vol. 1 and 2.
- Report of the Board of Commissioners, Assembled at Michilimackinac, September, 1836. A report on the claims of creditors, of the Ottawas and Chippewas, presented under the Treaty of Washington, concluded with those tribes March 28th, 1836. Detroit: George L. Whitney, 1837.
- Swanton, John R. The Indian Tribes of North America. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin No. 145; U. S. Government Printing Office, 1953.
- U. S. Department of War. Treaties between The United States of America and Indian Tribes, 1778-1837. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1837.
- U. S. Department of War. Treaty between The United States of America and The Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan, July 1, 1855.
- U.S., National Archives, Bureau of Indian Affairs. Field Office Records of the Michigan Superintendency of Indian Affairs, 1814-1851.
- U.S., National Archives, Bureau of Indian Affairs. Letters Received from the Mackinac Indian Agency, 1828-1880.
- U.S., National Archives, Bureau of Indian Affairs. Letters Received from the Michigan Superintendency of Indian Affairs, 1824-1851.

Books

- Blackbird, Andrew Jackson. History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan: A Grammar of their Language, and Personal and Family History of the Author. Ypsilanti: the Ypsilantian Job Printing House, 1887.
- Carter, Lena M. Twinsburg, Ohio, 1817-1917. Twinsburg: Champlain Press, 1917.
- Foreman, Carolyn T. Indians Abroad. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943.
- Fuller, George N. Economic and Social Beginnings of Michigan, A Study of the Settlement of the Lower Peninsula During the Territorial Period, 1805-1837. Lansing: Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Company, 1916.
- Habig, Marion A. (O.F.M.). Heralds of the King: The Franciscans of the St. Louis - Chicago Province: 1858-1958. Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1958.
- Hedrick, Ulysses P. Land of the Crooked Tree. New York: Oxford University Press, 1948.
- Pare, George. The Catholic Church in Detroit: 1701-1888. Detroit: The Gabriel Richard Press, 1951.
- Perrin, William H. (ed.). History of Summit County, Ohio. Chicago: Baskin and Battey, 1881.
- Powers, Perry F. A History of Northern Michigan. 3 vols.; Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1912.
- Putnam, Daniel. A History of Michigan State Normal School at Ypsilanti, Michigan, 1849-1899. Ypsilanti, 1899.
- Quaife, Milo M. Lake Michigan. ("The American Lakes Series") New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1944.
- Quimby, George I. Indian Life in the Upper Great Lakes, 11,000 B.C. to A.D. 1800. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.
- Streeter, Floyd B. Political Parties in Michigan, 1837-1860. Lansing: Historical Commission, 1918.
- The Traverse Region, Historical and Descriptive, with Illustrations of Scenery and Portraits and Biographical Sketches of some of its Prominent Men and Pioneers. Chicago: H.R. Page and Company, 1884.

Verwyst, Chrysostomus (O.F.M.). Life and Labors of The Right Reverend Frederick Baraga, First Bishop of Marquette, Michigan. Milwaukee: M. H. Wiltzius and Company, 1900.

Wright, John C. The Crooked Tree. Charles F. Erwin: Harbor Springs, 1917.

Articles, Periodicals, and Pamphlets

Blackbird, Andrew Jackson. The Indian Problem from the Indian's Standpoint. 1900.

Emmet County Graphic. (Harbor Springs, Michigan), 1932-1950.

Greenman, Emerson F. "Indian Chiefs in Michigan." Michigan History Magazine, XXIII, (Spring, 1939), pp. 220-249.

The Northern Independent. (Harbor Springs, Michigan), 1887.

Letters

Braun, Dr. Joseph A. Letter to Grace B. Walz, October 19, 1962.

Ettawageshik, Jane. Letter to William H. Hampton, February 21, 1957, Michigan Historical Collections, Ann Arbor, Hampton File.

Jones, Dr. Volney H. Letter to Grace B. Walz, November 17, 1962.

Leach, De Witt C. Letter to Edward P. Allan, Mackinac Indian Agent, May 10, 1884, National Archives, Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Scofield, Nettie. Letter to William H. Hampton, August 14, 1956, Michigan Historical Collections, Ann Arbor, Hampton File.

U.S., General Services Administration, National Archives and Records Service. Letter to Grace B. Walz, July 24, 1962.

U.S., National Archives, Bureau of Indian Affairs. Letters received by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs from Andrew Jackson Blackbird, 1881-1899.

U.S., Postoffice Department. Letter to the Blackbird Museum, July 9, 1956, Blackbird Museum, Harbor Springs, Michigan.

Personal Interviews

Personal interview with Mrs. Lynn Burgess, July 9, 1962.

Personal interview with Mr. C. Fay Erwin, July 9, 1962.

Personal interview with Dr. Louis Gariepy, July 9, 1962.

Personal interview with Mr. Joseph Kishigo, July 10, 1962.

Personal interview with Mr. Charles Meyers, June 20, 1962.

Personal interview with Mr. George A. Newark, July 9, 1962.

Personal interview with Mrs. Susan Shaginaby, July 9, 1962.

Bibliographic Footnote:

The interviews and other research techniques used in the preparation of this paper were less difficult for me than might ordinarily be the case because Harbor Springs, Michigan is my hometown. Most of the interviews conducted were with people I had known personally during the twenty years I lived there. Many leads to sources pertinent to my research were a direct result of my first-hand knowledge of people and places around Harbor Springs.

My great-grandparents homesteaded on a 160 acre plot outside Harbor Springs in the 1850's, at about the time Andrew Blackbird entered Ypsilanti State Normal School. My grandmother has been able to recall a few incidents in the life of Blackbird, and my mother, as related in this paper, cared for Andrew Blackbird's wife in 1920 during her last illness.

I went to public school with many of the Arbre Croche Ottawa Indians, some of whom were descendants of Andrew Jackson Blackbird, and my initial interest in this man's life was a result of having grown up in this setting.