

Memories of an Ojibwe Woman:

Alice E. Ackley-Randall

by Richard D. Ackley, Jr.



In 1962 Alice Ackley-Randall, was performing the routine tasks of maintaining record keeping on behalf of the Sokaogon Mole Lake Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa. She dedicated much of her time performing the job as secretary for this tiny community along Hwy 55, in the southern corner of Forest County, Wisconsin. Alice was the sister of the last federally recognized chief, Willard L. Ackley, of this small band consisting of just a few hundred. She has always been remembered as a kind hearted, unassuming champion for her people supporting every aspect of the culture and sustenance. She dedicated her life ensuring that everyone in the community was cared for; food, clothing, raising the children, providing important leadership, support and education and keeping records for the tribe. She held fast to the ideals and religious beliefs of her culture; preserving the time-honored traditional beliefs and ideals and most importantly, respect for Mother Earth and the bounty it provides.

The Ojibwe view the world, as living on the back of a turtle referring to Earth as "turtle island." This land is a gift from the Creator or Great Spirit "Gitchie Manitou", each person must be responsible for taking care of the Earth to ensure that the next seven generations will have everything necessary to survive. She worked along-side her brother Willard, who was affectionately known by everyone as Uncle Willard. Life on the Mole Lake Indian reservation was harsh, by modern standards. Indians in general were misunderstood, if not ignored. The culture and traditions of Indigenous people remained a bit obscure, in relationship to the dominate society and somehow just did not fit into modern times. The language, religious ceremonies and traditional gatherings such as Pow Wows, was perceived generally taboo for non-Indians.

The mission civilisatrice embarked upon by the United States government and Christian churches produced major changes for Native cultures by the late 19th century. The mission civilisatrice (in English "civilizing mission") was a rationale for intervention or colonization, purporting to contribute to the spread of civilization, and used mostly in relation to the Westernization of indigenous peoples. Reservations began to be established in Minnesota as early as 1851 – seven years before Minnesota's statehood. Over the next fifty years, Indian lands would continue to shrink in the face of the burgeoning American population's increasingly voracious appetite for land. Land loss, in turn, led to the near collapse of anishinaabe' society, which then buttressed the American sense that assimilation into American culture was the only way forward for Native peoples in the US.

As the 20th century evolved the tribe, accepted modernization. The Wigwam homes disappeared. Well water was hand-pumped outside small wooden frame shacks dotting the landscape on this 1700 acre Indian reservation. Out-houses or pit toilets as they were called served each dwelling. There was very little money to spare, only a few jobs, many children with worn out shoes, tattered winter coats and keeping food on the shelves, was always a challenge. The winters were especially harsh, yet the people whose whole existence is tied directly to Mother Earth, understood the wealth of benefits nature had to offer, each season of the year. Uncle Willard, maintained an old pick-up truck and made regular trips to pick up supplies and food and clothing for his people. He applied his carpentry skills to build and maintain the dwellings. He transported those who needed medical help and made every attempt to fulfill his duties as Chief. Back in the 1930s he made sure that the neighboring Forest County Potawatomi band had food. Members of the Potawatomi who resided about nine or ten miles northeast would routinely walk the distance to and from Mole Lake and Chief Ackley shared as much food as possible, on behalf of the community. Alice Ackley-Randall, made every effort to maintain organization of the tribe's government; creating, detailing and saving all necessary and important records for Chief Willard.

This semi-nomadic tribe, had always taken every advantage offered by the natural world while moving across the land in harvesting and gathering seasonal foods, but the modern world pressed the Sokaogon to accept change. This band of Chippewa had always subsisted on deer, walleye and a variety of fish species along with a bounty of small game, fruits and many different native species of berries, and especially the "manoomin" wild rice. Harvesting however was not an easy task, as hand-made wooden spears were used to spear the walleye in the spring. Handmade fish decoys and jig poles were used to spear the fish through holes cut into the many area frozen lakes, during winter. There were no instructions, nothing written on paper for younger generations to follow. Only the spoken word and hands-on teaching lead to the successful trapping of small animals.

Hunting deer required tools created from the knowledge and skill passed down through generations, utilizing the raw products found within the dense forests, rivers and streams. Unfortunately, this all came to a disappointing end; never to be regained. This band of Indians, like most all Indian tribes, had lost the hundreds of thousands of acres of traditional homelands, once freely enjoyed before Wisconsin gained statehood.

For those who know little about the history of this band of Wisconsin Chippewa must be reminded that all of the history was passed down through the generations, without any written records to review. Their history did not appear in any books, or any written records or on any maps until the 19th century. The US government began establishing a relationship for land ownership and political boundaries as the Wisconsin territory grew from its infancy and became a state in 1848. The Sokaogon utilizing no written language, relied on the oral traditions which transcended eons of time. Back in the early years of the 1800s the French and English fur traders ventured into the great lakes and began to share friendship and establish commerce with the tribe which opened new advances in technology. The importance of a friendly exchange of goods was well accepted. The fur trader's desires for animal furs was crucial for both sides of the trade. The Indians began accepting the new technology which came about during the trading activity and as a result these items became highly sought after. Items such as an iron frying pan for example and pots and kettles and metal tools revolutionized daily life. Fabrics, guns, gun powder, lead shot, metal axes and knives; all had a dramatic effect on Indian life as never before. This period in history offered new innovation; a good thing, yet short lived. Most remarkably, a bad thing for the Indian people, was looming on the horizon.

The federal government was expanding to the west following the Treaty of Greenville, Greenville, Ohio in 1795. The military at Fort Greenville, under the command of General Anthony Wayne, needed a treaty to be able to advance peacefully farther to the west and north and eventually into Wisconsin territory. The advancing white settlers, or sometimes referred to as "long knives" because of the long swords they carried, maintained a friendship leading to the eventual treaties with the Chippewa. This friendship eventually lead to ultimately giving up the homeland and ceding vast territories forever. Since a written language never existed, the ability to orally pass knowledge and information to future generations was essential to maintaining a separate and unique identity ensuring the future survival of both cultural and religion.

Excerpt: Ancestral Women Exhibit: Wisconsin's 12 Tribes Artist, Mary Burns, September 23 - November 12, 2016: A brief biography: *Alice E. Ackley (Randall), Wa We Ya gesuck go qwa, Indian name, "Around the Sky Lady" Sokaogon Chippewa Community of Mole Lake, Wisconsin*

Alice Ackley was born to Chief Dewitt Ackley and Phyllis (Johnson) Ackley in 1900 on the shores of Lake Metonga, Forest County, in a wigwam near Crandon, WI. She was born a member of the Sokaogon Chippewa Community Band of Lake Superior Anishinabe Indians. As a young girl, Alice lived and roamed the home land of her people, The Post Lake Band of Chippewa Indians, Townships 34 and 35, R.L. 11 & 12, East. She lived with her grandparents until the BIA government school at Thoma, WI, came to pick up all Indian children and educate them. Upon finishing her education at Thoma, she returned to Antigo, WI, to stay with her aunt and uncle. There, she married George S. Randall and had 4 children. They lived and farmed near the city of Antigo, and in 1938, the family moved to Mole Lake, WI. The Federal Government passed a bill to establish Indian Reservations for landless Indian People. She helped her brother, Willard Ackley, who was Chief of the Mole Lake Band of Chippewa Indians, to write the Constitution and

By-Laws for the Sokaogon Chippewa Tribal Government. She served as enrollment clerk for the Tribal Government and also served as tribal secretary for 27 years. Alice was also a healer and spiritual leader. In gratitude for the time she spent serving her people, she was elected as Indian Mother of the Year in 1967. She was proud to receive this honor. She spent the rest of her days wild ricing, weaving rugs, and as tribal historian. She finally walked on into the Spirit World surrounded by her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren near her home at Mole Lake in the year of 1978. The Ackley family has always been very involved with wild ricing. Wild rice is seen as a gift from the creator and a main staple in their traditional diet. She created a special weaving which portrayed her beneath a "sun circle" to acknowledge her name and her spiritual path, as she is parching wild rice.

Alice Ackley-Randall, who recognized the importance of creating written records for the tribe, drafted her version of the "Sokaogon Chippewa Chiefs Past and Present of Wisconsin" using a typewriter in 1962, as follows:

"A treaty was made and concluded at Fond du lac, Wisconsin, August 5, 1826, for the Lake Superior Chippewa's. The treaty was signed by approximately seventy-five chiefs and Headmen. The signers of this treaty from the Sokaogon Band were Gitshee Waubeeshaans and Mizhauquot.

It is believed that it was at this time that Chief Gitshee Waubeeshaans received the Peace and Friendship medal or token marked President John Quincy Adams, 1825.

The treaty was proclaimed February 7, 1827. Chief Gitshee Waubeeshaans was located at Pelican Lake, Wisconsin, he made his home on Me-kin-noc point by this lake.

He lead his band to LaPoint, Wisconsin to receive their annuities which consisted of the following articles: Machinaw goods, many yards of heavy goods, broadcloth, ribbons, sewing awls, guns, powder, shot, netting twine and knives.

The treaty of 1842 was made and signed at LaPoint, Wisconsin for the Lake Superior Chippewa's.

The signers from the Sokaogon Band, called Lakes Band in the treaty, were Ki-ji-ua-be-she-shi, and Ke-kon-o-tun. There were about forty signers to this treaty. The treaty was proclaimed March 23, 1843.

One year after the signing of this treaty, Chief Ki-ji-ua-be-she-shi and his Sokaogon Chippewa Band received a cash payment of four dollars and forty-six cents (\$4.46) per head. The tribe has the pay roll of this date in their possession.

The treaty of 1847 was made and signed at Fond Du Lac, Wisconsin for the Lake Superior Chippewa's. The treaty was signed by

approximately seventy-five Chiefs and headmen. The signers from the Sokaogon Band, called Pelican Lakes Band in this treaty were Kee-che-waub-ish-ash, Chief and his Speaker, Nig-gig. This treaty was ratified April 3, 1848.

Chief Kee-she-waub-ish-ash lead his people to Fond Du Lac, Wisconsin to receive payment for their annuity which consisted of the following: Jean Cloth, Blankets, Guns, Powder, shot, netting twine, knives, wedge axes, iron and copper kettles, hooks and chains.

After receiving this payment, Chief Kee-che-waub-ish-ash died at his home at Sokaogon or Post Lake, Wisconsin, and was buried at the outlet of this lake. He also lived at Pelican Lake or Indian name Sha-da-ga-e-gon for many years.

The treaty of 1854 was made and signed at LaPointe, Wisconsin, on an island located three miles east of Bayfield, Wisconsin.

This was the pay station for all the Lake Superior Chippewas. Chief Mi-gee-see, second chief of the Sokaogon Band was unable to be there, but it is believed that Nig-gig, the Head Speaker

for Chief Mi-gee-see signed the treaty for him. This treaty was ratified January 10, 1855 and proclaimed January 29, 1855.

Later Chief Mi-gee-see was able to lead his Band to L'Anse, Michigan, to receive their share of payments due them from funds created by sale and concessions of 1854. It was at this time that Chief Gitshee Mi-gee-see called the government officials attention to the fact that he had no reservation.

The officials asked him where he wanted his reservation. He replied by showing them a handful of wild rice, explaining that the territory he referred to had many lakes and streams in which this rice grew wild. He also told them there was a great quantity of timber, fish and game in this territory; besides the wild rice which he held in his hand, which was the stable food of his people. The officials agreed that this territory was the ideal location for the Sokaogon Chippewa. It was here at L'Anse, Michigan that the government officials gave Chief Mi-gee-see a map and patent of the Reservation with a medal or token marked President Franklin Pierce, 1853, Love, Virtue, Honor. It was then, as before and after recognized as the Sokaogon or Post Lake Band of the Lake Superior Chippewas Band of Wisconsin.

A treaty was made and signed in the city of Washington, D.C. in the year of 1855. The treaty was signed by approximately twenty Chiefs and Headmen.

Chief Mi-gi-si or Great Eagle, from the Sokaogon Chippewa Band signed with the Mississippi Band. Ki-ji-ua-be-she-shi or Great Marten was first Chief. This treaty was ratified April 3, 1855 and proclaimed April 7, 1855.

Chief Mi-gi-si or Great Eagle, lived only a few years after receiving the map and patent for the Sokaogon Chippewa twelve mile square reservation. He died at Antigo, Wisconsin at the home of his daughter Ma-dwa-ga-wa-no-qua and his son-in-law Willard Leroy Ackley and was buried at the forks of the Eau Claire River about the year of 1860.

Chief Wau-be-ski-be-ne-se was appointed by the Sokaogon Chippewa Band to take Chief Mi-gi-si- or Great Eagle's place. Wau-be-ski-be-ne-se falling heir as he was the son of Chief Mi-gi-si.

Chief Wau-be-ski-be-ne-se lead his Band to Peshtigo, Wisconsin in the year of 1872 to receive a payment which consisted of one dollar and fifty cents (\$1.50) in cash and three yards of calico per person. Chief Wau-be-ski-be-ne-se left the medals, patent and map to the reservation with William Johnson, a fur trader, for safe keeping while he was gone to Peshtigo, Wisconsin.

Before Mr. William Johnson died he gave the articles to Mr. Henry Strauss who sent them to Washington, D.C. to be recorded sometime between the years of 1889 and 1900. Indian Agent Scott came from Ashland, Wisconsin, in the years of 1895-96 and offered Chief Wau-be-ski-be-ne-se and the Sokaogon Chippewa Band a small reservation consisting of approximately forty acres all around Rice Lake and a big piece of land north of the lake but Chief Wau-be-ski-be-ne-se or White Eagle did not say anything, but one of this Speakers by the name of John Hardhead spoke up and told the agent that the Chief wanted the same amount of land that was promised to Chief Mi-gi-si or Great Eagle, then the agent told him that he would take the matter up at Washington, D.C. for him but nothing was heard about it after that. Then Agent Scott took Chief Wau-be-ski-be-ne-se to Barker's store at Crandon, Wisconsin, and dressed him from head to toe in new clothing but still he would not accept the offer. He was then the recognized Chief of the Sokaogon Chippewa Band. The Indians were then issued flour, pork, dry goods only enough to last for six months. George Armstrong was the Interpreter for the Indians. Chief Wau-be-ski-be-ne-se died soon afterward, not acquiring the promised reservation for his people. He died in the town of Crandon, and was buried near Sam Shaw's property.

The next Chief to be appointed was John Seymour or Wam-bash, Indian Agent Major A.J. Campbell, came to Crandon, Wisconsin,

from Ashland, Wisconsin to issue provisions to the Sokaogon Chippewa Band. The Breakstone Store at Crandon, got the bid to furnish the Indians with mackinaws, jackets, heavy trousers, heavy socks, mittens, underwear and stockings for the women. Agent Campbell also made a tribal roll at this time. About 1906 Agent Campbell came to Crandon and called the Indians of the Sokaogon Chippewa Band together at Vine's Hardware Store where they received a payment of Five Dollars and Seventy-Four Cents (\$5.74) per each head. The parents received payments for their children and the total number that received payments was approximately three hundred. Rations were received every years until 1910. Chief Wam-bash or John Seymour died in the City of Crandon, Wisconsin and was buried there.

The next Chief in line to take Chief Wam-bash's place was Chief Me-sa-be or Edward Ackley. He was the son of my grandmother Ma-day-gee-wa no-qua or Mrs. Willard L. Ackley and was adopted by my Grandfather Willard LeRoy Ackley of the Town of Ackley in 1925. Chief Ma-sa-be or Edward Ackley went to Washington, D.C. to secure the long promised reservation for his band of Sokaogon Chippewa. He was unsuccessful and so received nothing. The Indians were still getting provisions from the United States Government. Chief Me-sa-be died in the year 1927 at the Lac View Desert in Michigan.

Chief Me-sa-be's brother Dewitt Ackley was the next in line to take the Chieftainship but as Chief DeWitt Ackley or Chief Ge-ga-key-yoshi was in poor health and a cripple he decided that his eldest son Willard LeRoy Ackley should take his place. He then made a statement for release of his Chieftainship to him. Willard LeRoy Ackley then made out nomination papers so that his band could sign them. After the papers were signed they were voted upon by three states of the Lake Superior Chippewa Nation which were Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin at a tribal council meeting held at LaPointe, Odanah, Wisconsin, in the year 1929. Willard LeRoy Ackley or Chief Gay-bay-a-skung was then recognized by the three Nations as Chief of the Sokaogon Chippewa band of Mole Lake, Wisconsin. The nomination papers were sent to Washington, D.C. and were approved. He became recognized as Chief.

After the recognized Chief Willard LeRoy Ackley or Chief Gay-bay-skung took over the duties of his father, in 1919, Inspector Coleman made a tribal roll of the Sokaogon Chippewa Band. Nothing was accomplished by his efforts. The destitute Indians were still getting provision and a truck load of Army clothes, blankets and flour was received. A short time assistant commissioner, William Zimmerman, Jr. appropriated five hundred

dollars (\$500.00) for a garden spot for the Sokaogon Chippewa Chippewa Band. The garden spot was purchased at the outlet of Rice Lake to enable the Indians to protect the wild rice crop in Rice Lake. The cost of two hundred dollars (\$200.00) had to be worked out by the Band and the balance was returned to the Indian Agency office at Ashland, Wisconsin to Discuss the Wheeler-Howard Bill. He and his people who attended were in favor of the Bill but received nothing.

On December 29, 1934, Chief Willard LeRoy Ackley and his people were called to Ashland, Wisconsin to discuss the Re-organization Act.

They met and talked with Commissioner John Collier. Commissioner Collier asked Chief Ackley where he desired a reservation and he designated the present location, naming Rice Lake as the center. He was asked why he desired this certain location. He told Commissioner Collier that there were six Rice Lakes in this territory and that the wild rice was food for the Indians. They agreed to buy the reservation. The reservation was bought for the Indians and was 1700 acres.

Then money was appropriated for the Housing Act. The purpose to build homes for the Indians. Eighteen house were built. The homes of the white settlers in this territory were bought and the Indians are now living in many of them. About ten chicken house were built. An appropriation of two thousand dollars (\$2000.00) was made for the purchase of farm equipment, one team of ponies and one team of heavy horses, four cows and machinery. Another appropriation of Three Thousand Dollars (\$3000.00) was made for an Indian project for the purpose to build the chicken houses and to put in pumps. The Band asked for more appropriations for Indian projects but were refused.

Mr. Frank Smart was instructed by the U.S. Government in the year of 1937 to make a tribal roll of the Sokaogon Chippewa Band. It was regarded as the census roll but was incomplete.

In the year 1942 Chief Willard LeRoy Ackley was instructed by the United States Government to make a complete tribal roll of the Sokaogon Chippewa Band, and it was sent to Washington, D.C. and was approved.

In 1957 another tribal roll was made and children that were born to adult members are being added to the tribal roll of 1957 and the membership numbers 649 as of this date.

Since Chief Willard LeRoy's appointment he has taken up the treaty claim case and has worked very hard to get a reservation

and he has done a great deal of corresponding with the United States Government. He hired lawyers in 1937 with James B. Poler, George Poler, Sr. and I, Chief Willard L. Ackley all signed the first contact with the same lawyers.

In 1962 our Chippewa Band approved another contract with the same lawyers signed by Secretary Alice A. Randall and I, Chief Willard LeRoy Ackley as chairman of the council. We still have the two silver medals or tokens, dated 1825 and another dated 1853.

The following lakes were included in the first reservation promised to Chief Mi-gee-see or Great Eagle; Sokaogon or **Post Lake**, Sha-da-sa-ga-e-gon or **Pelican Lake**, Ke-bing-ka-ku-wa-si-go-e-ga-ons or **Rice Lake**, Bah-to-we-gum-mong or **Dry Lake**, Ke-bing-ka-ku-wa-si-go-e-ga-ons or **Mole Lake**, A-sin-a-bit or **Rolling Stone Lake**, Ka-mu-ji-gog or **Pickerel Lake**, Ma-no-sa-se-wong or **Grand Lake**, Bah-ya-go-ge-she-wa-gog or **Mud Lake**, Sa-ca-we-a-gns or **St. John Lake**, Na-ca-wa-she-gog or **Ground Hemlock Lake**, Ma-no-menno-ka-nese or **Little Rice Lake**, Ma-shaw-be-she-kawk or **Depot Lake**, Me-to-me-ne-she-gog or **Oak Lake**, Me-tong-ga-gog or **Big Sand Lake**, Me-tong-gonse or **Little Sand Lake**, Ma-ing-ga-se-beor or **Wolf River**, Na-go-an-da-se-be or **Eau Claire River**, Mush-ga-mong-se-be or **Swamp Creek**. The reservation meets and bounds Sokaogon or Post Lake, Ba-be-ka-ma-me-go-kwak or **Crane Lake**, Me-tong-ga-gog or **Big Sand Lake**, Ma-no-men-no-ka-ne-se or **Little Rice Lake**, and Sha-da-sa-ga-e-gon or **Pelican Lake**.

We hold the following burying grounds as evidence; Mush-gig-hwa-wa-si-go-e-ga-ons or **Rice Lake**, Ka-bing-ka-ku-wa-si-go-e-ga-gons or **Mole Lake**, Bab-to-we-gum-mong or **Dry Lake**, now known as Lake Bishop, A-sin-a-bit or **Rolling Stone Lake**, Ka-mu-ji-gog or **Pickerel Lake**, Go-no-she-bu-shong-se-be or **Pickerel Creek**, Sokaogon or Post Lake, Sha-da-sa-ga-e-gon or **Pelican Lake**, Ma-tong-ga-gog or **Big Sand Lake**, Peshtigo River, Na-go-an-n-go-se-be or **Eau Claire River**.

The Chiefmanship of the Sokaogon Chippewa Band, Mole Lake, Wisconsin. First Chief, Ki-ji-w a-be-she-shi or Great Marten, father of second Chief Gitshee-Ma-gee-see or White Eagle, Brother of Ma-day-gee-wa-no-qua or Mrs. Willard L. Ackley, Grandmother, and mother of Fourth Chief Ma-sa-be Edward Ackley, half-brother of Fifth Chief, Gee-ga-key-yash-she or DeWitt Ackley, who was not able to carry on as Chief so passed it on to his son, Sixth Chief Ka-ba-is-gonor-Gay-bay-shung or Willard

LeRoy Ackley, father of Charles Wilbert Ackley, father of Jeffery Allen Ackley,

Signed by the Present Willard L. Ackley

(Copied by Secretary Alice A. Randall)

Sunday, August 25, 1974

THE MILWAUKEE



-Photo by Olive Glasgow

BUSY FINGERS — Alice Randall, Wisconsin's Indian Mother of the Year in 1967, hasn't rested on her laurels. Mrs. Randall, 75, keeps busy at her loom working out native designs. Since her retirement as secretary of the Forest County band of Chippewas, she's turned out hundreds of decorative wall hangings, carpet bags and throw rugs at her Mole Lake home. They are eagerly purchased by tourists as gifts.

(The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel-1974)