

Famous people that contributed to our town

Chief Okemos

The history of the Indian would not be complete without considering Chief Okemos - a most controversial subject, albeit an interesting one.

Okemos was born in Shiawassee County, probably in the 1770's, although he always claimed to be 110 years old. He grew up following

the tribal customs of the Ottawas and in the War of 1812 he acted as a scout for the British against the Americans. In one skirmish which turned into a massacre for the Indians he was left for dead, but eventually recovered from the skull fracture and severe saber wounds. In 1814 he presented himself to a commanding officer at Fort Wayne and Detroit, and announced that he would fight no more. For his valor he was made leader of a Red Cedar Band of Shiawassee Chippewa Indians which was no outstanding position, but he did take the title Chief.

His settlement was in the vicinity of the town which now bears his name, but the smallpox and cholera epidemic in the 1830's wiped out most of that tribe and he became a wanderer, eventually making the Shimnecon area his residence. He was said to have had four wives in his lifetime.

He is remembered by early settlers as always ready to boast of his exploits and always ready for a free handout. He made his appearance at temperance picnics or any gala occasion attended by eight to twelve young ragged and dirty Indians, all of whom he claimed as his children.

An article published in the Portland Observer of 1873 gives the following account of his death and burial: "On a bleak day on the sixth of December of 1858, a small train of Indians entered Dewitt, having with them drawn upon a hand sled the remains of an old chief of the tribe of the Ottawas. The body was that of Okemos and they who accompanied it were his only kindred. They had brought it from five miles northeast of Dewitt where he had died the previous day. They bought tobacco and filled the pouch, powder for the horn and bullets for the bag. They brought also, contrary to the usual custom of their race, a coffin in which they placed the

remains and then took up their silent march toward the Indian village of Shimnecon on the Grand River, twenty-four miles below Lansing, the principal residence of the Chief."

Hall Ingalls tells an entirely different story. He was known to be a friend of Chief Okemos and even spoke the Indian language and was working on the mission house in Shimnecon at the time, his version cannot be disregarded. He claims that Okemos died there after an illness of several days and he was asked to bury the Chief. A direct quote from a newspaper article follows though it is not documented for name or date: "The grave the Indians dug was larger than usual, for it had to hold the personal effects of the chief as well. It was four feet deep, seven feet long and wide. Mr. Ingalls had the Indians gather bark, a floor was laid on the bottom and the grave was also sided up with bark.

It was so close to the hut where the remains were lying that but few steps were required. The body was lowered and then covered with blankets. Blankets were placed under the head so that the August sun fell upon the face. At the Chief's right were his two guns. At his left his tomahawks, scalping knives, and other personal effects were placed, and over the whole went another blanket as a shroud. Bark was then laid and the grave was filled with earth."

Three years later the brother of Mr. Ingalls interrupted vandals at the grave as they were digging for what they thought might be valuables said to have been buried with the Chief.

The Ingalls brothers then placed a number of stones in the hole which had been dug and so when the D.A.R. wished to place a gravestone, Mr. Ingalls was able to vouch for the fact that it was directly over the head of Chief Okemos for the stones were still intact.

Clarence Budington Kelland

Clarence B. Kelland was one of the most famous people to come from Portland. The highly successful author was born in Portland, Michigan on July 11, 1881. He wrote for the Saturday Evening Post for many years and several of his writings provided the basis for motion pictures, radio programs and television shows. From the 1920's through the 1950's "Bud" Kelland was one of the most widely read and highest paid authors in America. He published 60 novels and more than 200 short stories.

His numerous works included "Scattergood Baines" published in 1921; "Arizona" in 1939; "Sugarfoot" in 1942; "Archibald The Great" in 1943; "The Great Mail Robbery" in 1951; and "The Monitor Affair" in 1960. His mind also gave birth to such fictional heroes as Mark Tibb and Mr. Deeds.

Kelland was executive director of the Republican National Committee in 1942 and served as Republican National Committeeman from Arizona in 1940. He was very active in Arizona GOP Affairs.

He lived in Portland until he was 10 years old. "The happiest days of my life were spent in Portland, Michigan" Kelland was quoted as saying. Many of his early writings were about Portland.

In October of 1987, a memorial stone was dedicated to Kelland's birthplace. The stone is located beyond the left field fence at Powers Park. It was purchased and donated to the city by Donald and Elmere Wright, former owners of the land.

Clarence Budington Kelland died February 19, 1964, at the age of 82.

Theron "Bud" Hunt

"Bud" Hunt joined the City of Portland in 1946 as the Director of Public Works. In 1948 he became a member of the Portland Fire Department serving in many capacities. Some years later he served as Fire Chief for a period of 10 years. In 1972 he became the director of the volunteer Ambulance Service and was the emergency Medical Technician. "Bud" spent much of his time pursuing grants for equipment for the Portland Ambulance Service.

In 1985, in recognition of his 31 years of service, the City dedicated the Emergency Services Building in his name. The building houses the Fire Department, Police Department, Ambulance Service and Dispatching. Theron "Bud" Hunt passed away July 31, 1979.

