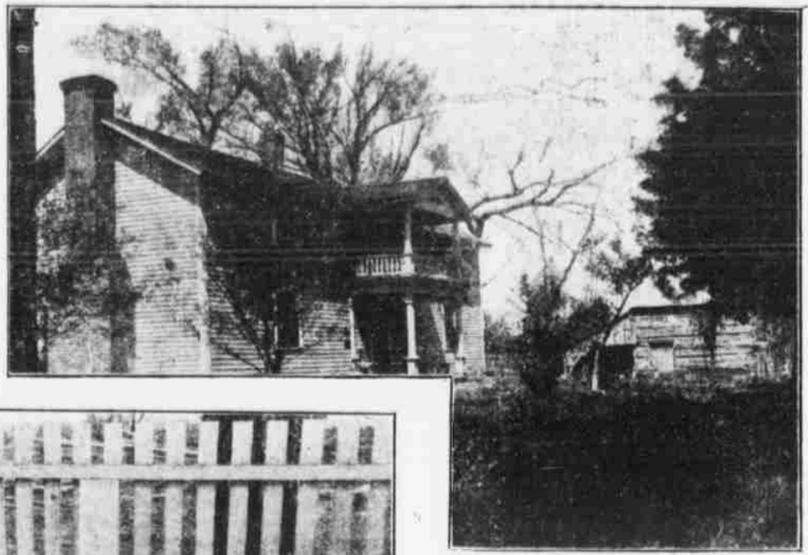


# Wa-Pel-Lo's Grave a Landmark



ONE OF THE OLD AGENCY BUILDINGS, STILL SERVICEABLE.—Photo by a Staff Artist.



FIRST OF THE AGENCY BUILDINGS, WHICH ARE STILL INHABITED.—Photo by a Staff Artist.

**G**IANT elms cast their shade in summer and their bare limbs in winter stand watch and ward over the burial place of the Indian chief, Wa-Pel-Lo, and the Iowa county in which he is interred perpetuates his name. For years the spot has been the trysting place of lovers and the one of particular interest in the vicinity of the little town of Agency, seven miles east of Ottumwa. He was buried there in 1842, when the land was embraced within the Indian reservation.

Historically it is a short span from May 1, 1843, to the present, but measured by the changes which the passing years have wrought it is a long period. On the date mentioned the Sac and Fox Indians surrendered title and possession to that portion of southeastern Iowa which lies west of the east line of Wapello county and the white settlers came in. Today all that remains to mark the passing of a race are names given to rivers, towns and places, the one grave on what was once a part of the agency farm, and some old log buildings. Of the men who were connected with the agency only one, so far as known, is now living—Thomas Wilcoxson, who resides in the town built on part of the agency farm and which still retains the name of Agency. Mr. Wilcoxson was employed on the Indian farm. He is very feeble and the years which remain to him are in the nature of things not many.

The mute relics of the race which has gone are scattered over the various portions of the section of land which once comprised the agency farm. The land is as fine as any in the entire state of Iowa. It is gently rolling prairie, dotted here and there with patches of native timber, and with its growing crops is a picture to delight the eye of the admirers of rural scenery. The man who selected this site for the agency and Indian farm made an ideal choice, even in a section of country which abounds in fine agricultural lands.

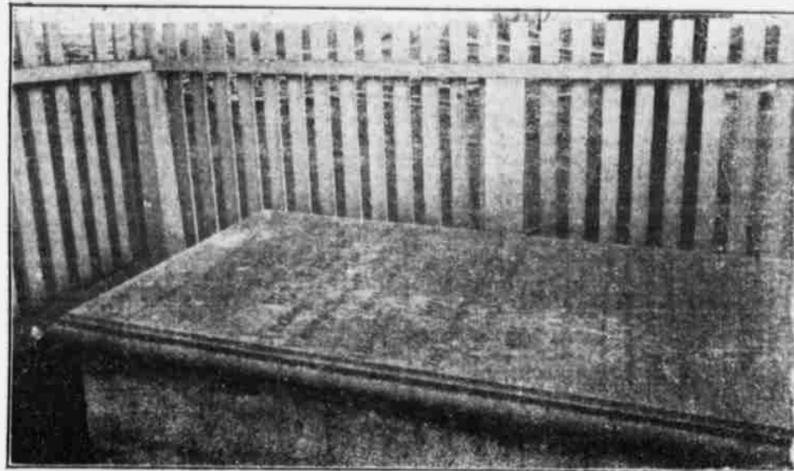
The agency was established at this point in 1837 under the treaty signed by the Sac and Fox Indians at Washington. Previous to that time the tribe had been located near Davenport. General Joseph M. Street was agent at the time, the Indians then being under the charge of the War department.

With the energy which had marked his entire career General Street set about making the new agency an ideal one. It was located at the edge of the timber belt which fringes the Des Moines river and from that timber the logs were cut and hewed for the erection of the buildings, several of which stand to this day, the pictures of which show how thoroughly the work was done. The logs, where exposed, are weather-beaten, but the structures stand apparently as firm as upon the day they were pronounced finished.

In other ways General Street demonstrated that he had the welfare of the Indians at heart, but his labors were to be cut short. In November, 1839, he was taken sick and died in the following spring. There was sincere mourning in the tribe when the general died. Practically all of the Indians collected at the agency and, with Chief Wa-Pel-Lo as spokesman, insisted that the "White Chief" be buried on Indian land where they could watch over his grave. The wishes of the Indians were complied with, and thus it was that the start was made on this historic little burying ground.

On the death of General Street, his son-in-law, Major John Beach, was designated agent by the War department and remained in that position even after the agency was moved to Fort Des Moines, now the city of Des Moines.

In passing the writer cannot refrain from paying a tribute to the memory of Major Beach. With the possible exception of Charles D. Fuller of Ottumwa, no person now living knew him better. He was graduated from Dartmouth college and from there entered West Point Military academy. He was a thorough scholar, and not only



GRAVE OF WA-PEL-LO, THE FAMOUS CHIEF OF THE SAC AND FOX TRIBES, AT AGENCY, IA.—Photo by a Staff Artist.

retained what he had learned in these institutions, but added to his store of learning up to the day of his death in the early '70s. Irascible he was called by many, but those who knew him well knew him for as kindly a soul as ever lived. Puntilious to a degree, he considered his pledged word as binding as any bond. John Beach may have been mistaken sometimes, but a willful untruth never passed his lips. Neither did a penny of dishonest money ever stick to his fingers, and the property of the Indians was guarded as faithfully as though they had been his own children. Those who dealt with them were held to the most strict accountability and sharks found poor picking around that agency. His advice was ever sought by the Indians, was never denied and the implicit trust which they placed in him was thoroughly deserved. That they appreciated this appeared later.

In the spring of 1842 Wa-Pel-Lo, the head chief of the Foxes, died. He started from the agency in March to pay a visit to the old home of the tribe near Davenport and Rock Island. He was taken sick enroute and died near the forks of the Skunk river, in what is now Keokuk county, and at his own request was buried beside his old friend, General Street, on the agency farm, and thus was the second grave added to the little cemetery.

Later in this same year a treaty was negotiated with the government by the Indians by which they surrendered title to the lands on which they then resided and moved further west and the agency was removed to Fort Des Moines, now the city of Des Moines. They insisted in making the treaty upon reserving a section of land on which the agency stood, to be disposed of as the tribe willed, and they made the following disposition: The quarter on which the agency building stood was given to the widow of General Street. Another quarter was given to Major

Beach, a third to Samuel Smart, the interpreter, and a fourth to Thomas Wilson, the agency farmer, all of whom had endeared themselves to the Indians by their kindness and fair dealing. Smart disposed of his land years ago. The Street heirs long ago disposed of their portion. Wilson retained his until he died a few years ago, and the portion given to Major Beach was retained during his lifetime and part of it still remains in possession of his heirs. The land all adjoins the little town of Agency.

The Indians took their departure early in 1843, and in May of that year the country was opened to white settlement. That "sooners" are not a development of the present day is evidenced by the events preceding the opening. The writer well remembers, the descriptions given by Major Beach of the times he was compelled to take detachments of cavalry and eject white men from the reservation who attempted to make settlement before the appointed time.

The widow of General Street and the daughter, first wife of Major Beach, died later and were buried in the cemetery at the old agency, thus completing the group of graves. Unfortunately, Major Beach when he died was not buried here, but was laid to his final rest in the beautiful cemetery which adjoins the town and which is the burial place of many of the early settlers from points fifty miles distant.

All but one of the stones which mark the graves lie parallel with the ground, supported by stone masonry. That of General Street bears the following inscription:

In Memory of  
General Joseph M. Street,  
Son of Anthony and Molly Street,  
Born October 18, 1782, in Virginia,  
Died at the Sac and Fox Agency,  
May 5, 1840.

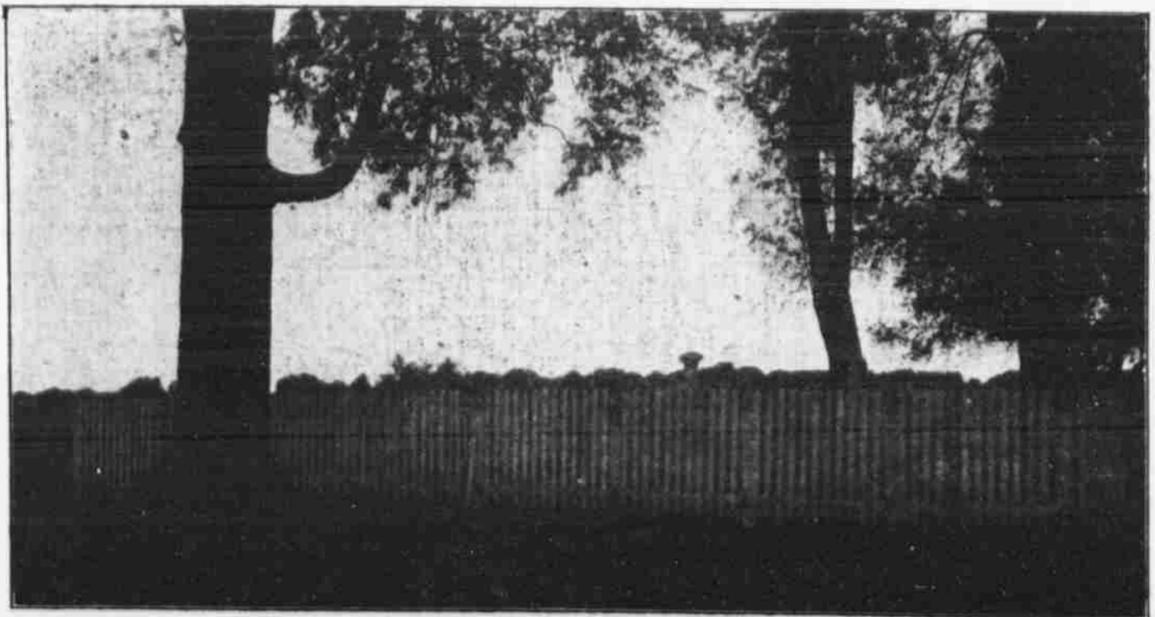
The tablet which marks the grave of

Chief Wa-Pel-Lo is inscribed as follows:  
In Memory of  
Wa-Pel-Lo,  
A Principal Chief of the Foxes,  
Who Was Born Near Prairie du Chien,  
About the Year 1787,  
Died Near the Forks of Skunk River,  
March 15, 1842,  
And Here Buried at His Own Request.  
This Stone is Placed by the  
Sac and Fox Nation.

Distinguished from early manhood no less for his wisdom than courage. Towards his own people he was always just and lived in strict friendship for the white man.

In the early '70's these graves had become much neglected and the brick work which originally supported the tablets had crumbled away. About this time the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad company was building a stone culvert nearby to replace a wooden trestle. The late T. J. Potter, then division superintendent, was inspecting the work. The day being hot the friendly shade of the elms invited him, and his attention was thus directed to the dilapidated condition of the graves. To see something needing attention with him was to act. He immediately went to the owner of the land and sought permission to restore the tombs and it was granted. The workmen were at once instructed to tear out what remained of the crumbling brick and replace them with stone and it is to this kindly act that the present condition of the little cemetery is due. The company has ever since cared for the graves, having erected the fence which now surrounds them. A change in the track at this point has brought the burial place within the railroad "right-of-way," which was purposely widened to allow them to be taken in that there might never be any question of the right of the company to care for them. In addition to maintaining the tablets as they now are, the company contemplates the erection of a shaft which shall be conspicuously visible from passing trains.

Only fifty-nine years have passed since the Indians left this section, an uncultivated wilderness, and the idea of a railroad ever penetrating it was not thought of. Today practically every acre of it is under cultivation or put to the uses of civilization and the only relics of Indian occupancy are the names they left behind, three log buildings and a grave which a railroad company is caring for, opposite which the passing engineer pulls the whistle to announce the approach to a town the Indian never saw. Time and the hand of the white man indeed work wonders.  
C. J. BEST.



GRAVEYARD AT AGENCY CITY, IA., WHERE CHIEF WA-PEL-LO IS BURIED.—Photo by a Staff Artist.