

INDIAN PATHS OR TRAILS

IN BRADFORD COUNTY.

PAPER BY CAPT. J. ANDREW WILT.

MEMBERS OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF BRADFORD COUNTY:—We cannot present to you anything new on so old a subject as Indian Paths or Trails in Bradford county. The subject is too old to be new. Neither can I present to you anything original for the reason that we know of these Indian highways only as we gather the information from those who made a record of them years ago. We can, therefore, present only the facts as found and mentioned by others and try to show their importance to the Indian and afterwards to the white man.

These Indian Paths or Trails, however, show to us of this progressive and scientific age some of the traits and

characteristics of the men who inhabited these hills and valleys before the advent of the "pale face." Roads and highways, such as we have, they had not. Before the general use of railroads we had great highways or turnpikes, leading from one prominent point or center to another, and were thus connected or bound together by such highway. So the Indian had highways or paths connecting one prominent point or center with another. Some of these as with us, were more prominent or more extensively travelled than others. Two of these great highways called *great war paths*, traversed the territory embraced within the present limits of Bradford county.

"Diahoga" (Tioga, now Athens), situated at the point where the Tioga river (Chemung) unites with the Susquehanna, was the great gateway or door to the entrance of the Five Indian Nations from the south, and all who entered their territory from that direction were required to have the consent or pass of the chief located at that important entrance. From this point, also, war parties assembled and then travelled over their great highway down the Susquehanna to Wyoming, thence following the important path or highway to Easton, or following the river to the junction of the West Branch of the same river near Fort Augusta. From Fort Augusta (now Sunbury) another path led up the West Branch of the Susquehanna to near the mouth of Lycoming river (creek) near Fort Muncy (now Williamsport), following said creek to its headwaters, near the present village of Grover in Bradford county, thence striking the headwaters of the Towanda creek, following it to its mouth at Towanda, where at one time was located an important Indian village and where it connected with the great path along the river. This path down the Towanda

creek, however, was not used generally by those who wished to reach "Tioga," so we find that at or near Le-Roy it crossed over the divide between the Towanda and Sugar creeks, thence following the Sugar Creek to its mouth, where was located the Indian village called Osculni, thence the great path to Tioga. There was another crossing down the Towanda creek, at or near a point now Powell, thence to Sugar Creek at a point commonly known as the "Pail Factory." We find also the Indians evidently found that by passing over a slight elevation they could leave Sugar Creek near the "Pail Factory" and strike the source of Hemlock Run and intersect with the main path at the river. This by some early writers is called "St. Joseph's Path." From the vicinity of Luther's Mills another short-cut path led from the main path down Sugar Creek, over the hill to the Indian village of Sheshequenock on the west bank of the river (now Ulster).

Conrad Weiser, the first white man who travelled through this county as early as 1737, followed this path up the Lycoming creek, thence down the Towanda, crossing over to Sugar Creek, thence up the Susquehanna to Tioga. This same path or trail was also followed by Colonel Hartley with two hundred soldiers in 1778 when he destroyed Queen Esther's town at or near Milan on the west bank of the river, and returned by the way of the trail along the Susquehanna and by boats, he being overtaken by the Indians, below Wyalusing, where he fought the battle on what is known as "Indian Hill" in Tuscarora township, between Laceyville and Wyalusing.

Colonel Hartley, with his little army of 200 men, demonstrated the practicability and feasibility of trans-

porting and marching soldiers over these Indian paths or trails, which led to the General Sullivan expedition into the Indian country in the following year.

To show that the Indians considered the fact of distance, it is only necessary to state that the distance from Sunbury to Tioga Point (Athens) by way of the path along the Lycoming creek, thence over the trail Colonel Hartley had travelled, is nearly 40 miles less than by way of Wyoming (Wilkes-Barre) and along the North Branch of the Susquehanna.

When we study the location of these paths of the Indian, we must bow with respect to his skill as a civil engineer in determining elevations, as well as to express our admiration for his knowledge of location and distance. The Indian trail, or path, as a rule, passes along the rivers and streams and over the divides between them at the lowest altitudes and the nearest and most accessible places.

These paths traversing this county, as our roads do now, is proof that the Indian had a thorough knowledge of geography as well as of distance. Having no instruments by which to measure distance or direction, we must conclude that such knowledge was obtained by close observation and experience and almost a resulting intuitive knowledge.

The Indian, living in his crude way, was largely a "child of nature," and consequently observed closely all the marks and signs of nature and judged correctly of distance, direction, altitudes and the changes of the seasons.

When the poet wrote that celebrated poem in which the Indian is made to say, "O why does the white man follow my path?" (which of course had no reference to

the subject under discussion), we can truthfully say in answer, because his path led the white man in the most direct route at the lowest altitude from one place to another.

The Great Paths of the American Indian, which was used by him when this continent first became known to the white man, whether North or South, East or West, are to-day the routes for the railroads which connect all parts of the United States and Canada. The main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad follows the path projected and used by the Indians from the Susquehanna across the Allegheny mountains to the junction of the two rivers which form the Ohio. The Northern Central from Sunbury follows the West Branch of the Susquehanna northerly to the mouth of Lycoming creek, thence up said creek to its headwaters at Grover, where it crosses the divide between the waters of the West Branch and North Branch of the Susquehanna. At or near Canton the railroad leaves the main Indian trail and follows a lesser one, which crossed to Troy and thence extended to Elmira (Newtown), N. Y. So with the Lehigh Valley Railroad; it follows the great war path of the Indians from the great and lesser lakes in New York State to the junction of the Tioga (Chemung) with the Susquehanna at "Diaboga," Tioga Point, now Athens and Sayre, Bradford county, thence down the river to Wilkes-Barre (Wyoming).

Besides using the rivers and creeks for transportation, by means of canoes and rafts, the Indian had well located beaten and marked paths or trails which were used by him in times of peace on fishing and hunting expeditions and communicating with different tribes, or with villages of the same tribe. Evidence of lesser paths or

trails exist, showing that one from the Susquehanna river, leading from the vicinity of Nichols in New York, led up the Wappasenning creek to near its source, thence to the headwaters of the Wysauking creek to its junction with the Great Path, leading down the river to Wyoming (Wilkes-Barre).

From Wyalusing (Moravian, Friedenshutzen) a path led up the creek (Wyalusing creek) and another across the river, and from Sugar Run led up the Sugar Run creek and thence over the divide to the headwaters of the Little Loyal Sock to Dushore, Sullivan county, thence down said creek and the Big Loyalsock to its mouth at Montoursville on the West Branch of the Susquehanna.

There is also evidence of a trail or path, leading from Diahoga, now Athens, across the hills in an easterly direction, to the river Delaware and thence to the Hudson, called the "Minisink" path.

Thus was this territory, now called Bradford County, covered by these Indian highways, which for aught we know were travelled by these aborigines for thousands of years before the coming of the European.

SUGGESTION: The Historical Society of Bradford County should take steps to definitely locate, on the ground as near as possible, the location of these Indian highways now within the limits of Bradford county.

