

MENOMINEE RANGE MEMORIES 2: TOM “WILDCAT” KING, NATIVE AMERICAN DICKINSON COUNTY PIONEER

By William J. Cummings, Menominee Range Historical Foundation Historian



Thomas “Wildcat” King
[Menominee Range Historical Museum Photo]

Perhaps the best-known of the Native Americans who made Dickinson County their home was Thomas “Wildcat” King, for whom Tom King’s Creek which crosses M-95 just south of Randville is named.

According to King’s obituary which appeared in the February 24, 1910 edition of the *Iron Mountain Press*, Tom King was 83 years old which would make his birth year 1827. However, his date of birth was listed as January, 1830, in the 1900 U.S. Census, and his age was given as 80 on his death certificate. His birthplace was not given.

In his early manhood he was employed by Col. Boswell in the United States mail service, delivering mail between Green

Bay, Wisconsin, and Copper Harbor, Michigan, covering the entire distance on foot.

According to King’s obituary, “Early settlers remembered him as owner of a trading post on the Menominee River at a point known as the New York Farm, a few miles from Vulcan. He sold the trading post in 1869 to Eli Wright and removed to Badwater, five miles north of Iron Mountain, and kept a half-way house at a point where the old State Road crossed the Menominee River.”

However, land records show Patrick Mullen, another trading post operator, as owning this land and selling the property to Ely Wright in 1870.

His obituary also states that in 1879, when the right of way was being cleared for the railroad between Florence and Iron River, he kept a boarding camp near what became Saunders in Iron County.

In his book *Be-Wa-Bic Country*, Iron County author Herbert F. Larson, Sr., mentioned Tom King operating a ferry with Jerome Dakota in the late 1870’s as follows:

“Since many prospectors were coming up the river on their way to Florence, Wisconsin, Tom King operated an inn on the Wisconsin side of the river near the Indian trail which led to Chicagon Lake. With Jerome Dakota, he operated a ferry across the Menominee River just above Twin Falls. The ferry boat was propelled across by poling and a rope was anchored to pine trees on each side of the river. The usual rate for crossing was a dollar a head and three dollars for a team and wagon. Business was good until the increased traffic demanded a bridge. That put the ferry out of business.”

On the 1880 U.S. Census for Breitung Township, Menominee County, Michigan, 45-year-old Thomas King was listed as

MENOMINEE RANGE MEMORIES 2: TOM “WILDCAT” KING, NATIVE AMERICAN DICKINSON COUNTY PIONEER

By William J. Cummings, Menominee Range Historical Foundation Historian

operating a trading post. His wife, Mary, was a 32-year-old housekeeper. Their neighbors were Jerome Dakota, 40-year-

old farmer, and his wife Mary and their daughters Katie and Sophia.



A William A. Holmes & Son logging crew had just finished loading a narrow gauge railway car, probably somewhere east of the Michigamme River in the mid-1880's. William A. Holmes was standing fourth from the left in front of the carload of logs. Tom King, a Menominee Indian who lived around Dickinson County for many years, was seated on the log, holding his hat against his leg with his left hand. The lumberjack behind King with his foot resting on the log and a cant hook over his left shoulder was Patrick “Paddy” Costigan. [William J. Cummings Photo]

Apparently Tom King moved to Chicagon Lake shortly thereafter, as indicated in the following accounts from the February 26, 1881 edition of *The Florence Mining News*:

“TOM KING, the last chief of the once powerful tribe of the Menominees, called on us the first part of the week. His name shows his mixed blood. He is apparently a powerful man, weighing two hundred pounds or more, and is the sole survivor of eight brothers, consequently his title is undisputed. During his infancy, he tells us, that the great chiefs Oshkosh and Keshena swayed absolute power over his red

brethren, but upon his obtaining his majority, he was acknowledged head of the present remnant of his tribe. His present home is on the borders of the romantic Lake Chicagon, where he is keeping a stopping place for tourists and travelers.

“As he told us his history, we seemed to discover a shade of sadness overspreading his features, and it was in a subdued tone that he told us of the fate of his brothers and the fast disappearing handful of the powerful tribe, who with the Chippewas – or more properly speaking, the Ojibwas – once swayed supreme power over this portion of the country. The Ojibwa tribe is

MENOMINEE RANGE MEMORIES 2: TOM “WILDCAT” KING, NATIVE AMERICAN DICKINSON COUNTY PIONEER

By William J. Cummings, Menominee Range Historical Foundation Historian

forever embalmed in eccentric verse by the imaginary legend of Hiawatha. Who will remember the fast fading Menominees?”

...

“TOM KING, of Lake Chicagon, informs us that in addition to the Mackinaw trout and white fish in that sheet of water, that there are plenty of herring. From all accounts Lake Chicagon must be a kind of subdued paradise and we think we must emigrate that way soon after the pond lilies blossom. Contemplating these last may invigorate our aesthetic tastes and a combined acquaintance with the former, may stimulate our brain.”

Another mention regarding King appeared in the November 5, 1881 issue of *The Florence Mining News*:

“Hon. Tom King was the way the name of the Chief of the Menominee Indian tribe, at Lake Chicagon, was described on the register of the Florence House, last Monday.”

In the June 17, 1882 edition of *The Florence Mining News*, the following announcement appeared:

“The Chippewa Indian Troupe will exhibit their celebrated genuine, native Indian Dance at Juneau’s Opera Hall on next Tuesday evening June 20th 1882. It will be one of the most unique and comical entertainments that has ever struck the town.”

The editor of *The Florence Mining News* described the performance the next week as follows:

“The genuine Chippewa Indian Dance at Juneau’s opera house on Tuesday evening was a grand success. They were genuine Indians, with Chief Tom King at the head. In the street parade Tom marched ahead, followed by an Indian carrying a large American flag. In the train were squaws and younger Indians, each carrying smaller flags.”

On the 1894 Michigan State Census, 56-year-old Thomas King was farming in Breitung Township, Dickinson County, with his 40-year-old wife Josephine and 10-year-old daughter Maggie.

The 1900 U.S. Census for Sagola Township, Dickinson County, Michigan, indicates that 70-year-old King and his wife Josephine must have moved to their Randville farm between 1894 and 1900. The census report stated that they had been married twenty years and were the parents of one child. King was listed as a member of the Menominee tribe, but other accounts at times list him as a Chippewa.

According to King’s obituary, “he moved to what is now Randville and kept another boarding-house during the time that the Milwaukee & Northern railroad was being extended from Iron Mountain to Champion. After the road was completed he remained in Randville, keeping occasional travelers and carrying passengers from Randville to Metropolitan, until ill-health and old age compelled him to give up work, when he sold his hotel and retired to his farm a short distance from Randville, where he spent the last years of his life.”

The obituary also noted that “in business matters Mr. King was shrewd at driving a bargain, but always upright and trustworthy in his dealings.”

Tom King died at his home in Randville on February 16, 1910, suffering from “kidney trouble and the ills attendant upon old age.” His death record in the Dickinson County Court House gave Bright’s disease, a kidney inflammation, as the cause of death. He was survived by his wife and one granddaughter.

His funeral services were conducted at St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Iron Mountain. A clipping from the February 18, 1910 edition of *The Tribune-Gazette*, another Iron Mountain newspaper, noted

MENOMINEE RANGE MEMORIES 2: TOM “WILDCAT” KING, NATIVE AMERICAN DICKINSON COUNTY PIONEER

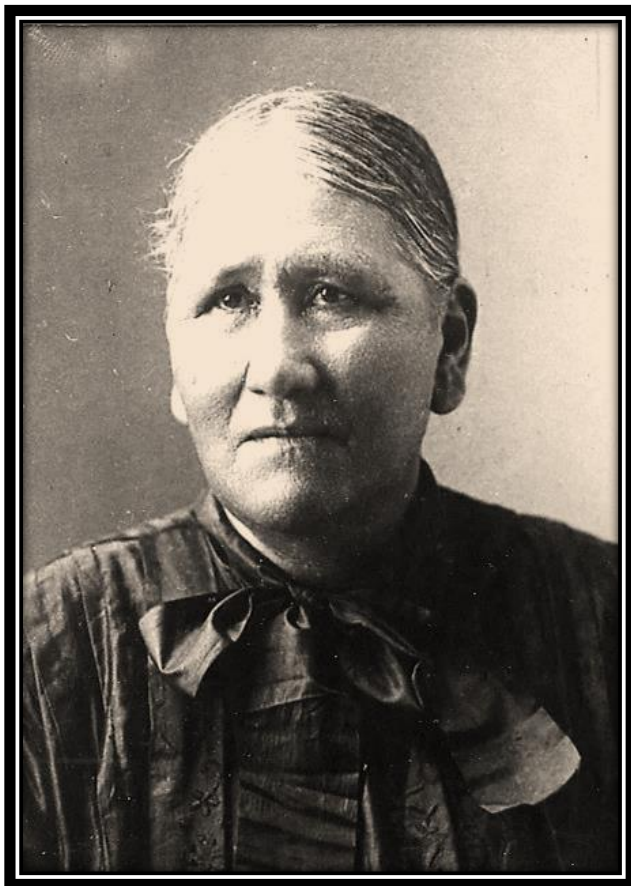
By William J. Cummings, Menominee Range Historical Foundation Historian

the following pallbearers for King, all of whom were pioneers of the area and influential men in Iron Mountain: George F. Seibert, C.E. Lawrence, A.E. Robbins, Dr. J.D. Jones, J.H. Karkeet and John Russell.

The record of burials in the sexton’s office at Iron Mountain’s Cemetery Park shows King – with the name “Wildcat” in parentheses – was buried on Lot 92 of the Wisconsin Section, next to his daughter Maggie. She died of pneumonia on her father’s farm near Randville July 4, 1909, according to her death record at the Dickinson County Court House. She was listed as a 25-year-old housekeeper, the daughter of Wildcat and Mary King.

Confusion exists as to the name of King’s wife and whether or not he was married more than once. In both the 1894 and 1900 census reports her name is listed as Josephine, and in the 1910 U.S. Census Josephine King, a widow, is listed as living with her nephew, Fisher Negaunee, and his family, all of whom were Chippewa Indians, in Sagola Township.

However, in the 1880 census and on Maggie’s death records, Mary is the name given as wife and mother respectively. Maggie was born in about 1884, and since the 1900 census indicates Tom and Josephine were married for twenty years at that time, it would appear that Maggie is their daughter.



Josephine King
[Menominee Range Historical Museum Photo]



The graves of MAGGIE KING (1884-1909) and her father TOM KING (1836-1909) are located on Lot 92, Wisconsin Section of Iron Mountain’s Cemetery Park.



MENOMINEE RANGE MEMORIES 2: TOM “WILDCAT” KING, NATIVE AMERICAN DICKINSON COUNTY PIONEER

By William J. Cummings, Menominee Range Historical Foundation Historian

