

MENOMINEE RANGE MEMORIES 5: NATIVE AMERICAN VISITS TO EARLY SETTLEMENTS AND THE EFFECTS AND REPERCUSSIONS OF THEIR USE OF “FIREWATER”

By William J. Cummings, Menominee Range Historical Foundation Historian



Edwin Trestrail, son of William C. Trestrail, posed by an Indian grave at the burial ground at Badwater near the Big Bend of the Menominee River in about 1922-1923. William C. Trestrail acquired the property February 19, 1912, and named it Riverview Farm. Edwin J. Trestrail acquired the property from his father May 25, 1925. When the Twin Falls Dam was built this land was flooded by the backwater. [Putnam W. Robbins]

Early area newspapers frequently contained accounts of Native Americans, who passed through the new settlements on the Menominee Iron Range.

Some of the items quoted below may have overtones not acceptable by today's standards, but, unfortunately, reflect the times in which they were printed.

An item from the August 9, 1879 issue of Escanaba's *The Iron Port*, taken from *The Menominee Ranger*, a single-page of Menominee Range news in Marquette's *The Mining Journal*, noted the following:

“VULCAN – A number of Indians – men, women and children – came into town Wednesday last from Bad Water for the purpose of selling berries, furs, etc., having

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with them a lot of regular Indian ponies. They make a novel picture as they go along one after the other, looking more like Indians we read about than those usually seen in civilization, and are always looked upon in wonderment by strangers, though it has long since lost its novelty to the residents here.”

In the August 27, 1881 edition of *The Florence Mining News*, the following item appeared:

“LO [*Indian*] the poor Indian,” was observed at Godshall’s hardware store the other day, buying – not deadly warlike “weepins” [*sic – weapons*] – but scythes and hay rakes, thus literally showing that their ‘swords had been turned into pruning hooks’ or something of a similar character. It is thus that the civilizing influences of Florence reach even the untutored savage.”

On November 14, 1885, Norway’s *The Current*, in a column titled Quinnesec Quotum, stated:

“Twenty-five Indians in town this week and not a scalp missing.”

The Current contained the following announcement in its August 4, 1888 edition:

“Spotted Horse, the one and only Indian doctor, continues to wear buckskin and perscribe [*sic – prescribe*] for the ills, fancied and otherwise, of Norway people.”

Incidents involving liquor being sold to the Indians illegally frequently appeared, reflecting the disapproval of newspaper editors, community leaders and the general public.

The following two incidents appeared in *The Florence Mining News*, just over a month from each other:

On September 24, 1881: “An Indian with a mouth on him like the opening of navigation came past our office door the other day, with as big a load of venison on his back as he could conveniently carry.

Shortly afterwards we saw the same dusky son of the forest carrying even a bigger load. The venison was gone, but in its place he seemed to have taken some kind of freight, internally, which interfered very much with his homeward journey. Some of these parties who are furnishing the Indians with return loads of this kind [*selling liquor to Indians*] will be brought up with a twist some of these days.”

October 29, 1881: “On Wednesday last the town was invaded by a squad of dusky sons of the forest. There is nothing so very unusual about this, and THE NEWS would hardly deem their presence worthy of notice were it not for the fact that they hadn’t been in town more than an hour or two before the most of them were esthetically weary. Well, we should say so; worse than that, they were petrified. An “Injun” that tackles “Biler” avenue’s fluid extract of corn generally becomes more or less that way in a short time. But seriously, it is against the laws of this state to give liquor to an Indian, and probably those among us who do it may yet see the time they will regret having done so.”

Another incident, copied from the *Norway Iron Chronicle*, appeared under Range Items in Escanaba’s *The Iron Port* on December 22, 1883:

“A couple of drunken Indians smashed Rosenheimer’s window and were arrested and fined. A sober Indian notified the saloon men that the money to pay the fines must be raised by them or they would be prosecuted for selling the liquor to the Indians. The fines will be paid.”

On March 28, 1889, Iron Mountain’s *The Menominee Range* reported:

“Day officer Eslick had to do some considerable hustling on Friday when he had three prisoners in the lock-up at one time, and all within a few hours. One was

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an Indian whose people live in Quinnesec. He got fighting drunk on whiskey sold to him by somebody unlawfully here and had to be locked up. The two others were a man named John Campbell and a laborer named George Dorsey. The Indian was handed over to the care of his people. Campbell's friends paid his fine and costs, and on Saturday morning Constable Martin escorted Dorsey to Menominee county jail, where he will remain for sixty days.”

Under the headline “A Shocking Fatality: David White Killed at the St. Paul Depot Last Monday” in the March 17, 1904 edition of the *Iron Mountain Press*, an unfortunate and incorrect conclusion was reached by the public regarding White's condition at the time of the accident.

“David White, an Indian, was killed at the St. Paul depot last Monday afternoon in the presence of a large number of spectators while endeavoring to board the north-bound passenger train.

“White had reached the depot just as the train was pulling out. He had a woodsman's pack on his left arm and in endeavoring to secure footing on the front end of the smoking car, he was thrown under the wheels. His neck and left arm were broken and his breast was crushed in. He was dead when released and the remains were taken to Hansen's morgue.

“Reports to the contrary notwithstanding, White was not intoxicated at the time and the verdict of the coroner's jury to that effect does the dead man an injustice. The stumbling way in which he walked, and which no doubt lead [*sic – led*] people to believe that he was intoxicated, was the result of an accident to his feet, a log having rolled over them a few days previous at the camp of the National Hardwood company. President Fischer, of the company, vouches for the statement

that White was not a drinking man. White had been in the employ of the company for some time and Mr. Fischer states that he was a most faithful worker and a man of unusually good character.

“The remains were forwarded to relatives in Wisconsin for burial last Tuesday.”

However, a tragedy involving alcohol was reported in the March 9, 1905 issue of the *Iron Mountain Press*, as follows:

“As the climax of the drunken carousal of several days' duration, Mrs. Joe Gristoe, a Chippewa squaw, was burned to death at her home in Waucedah. The Indian woman and her husband, who is a hunter and trapper, were said to be intoxicated when they went to bed in their shanty. Shortly before midnight the man, in lighting his pipe, also ignited the straw bedding. Stupefied by drink the squaw was unable to move, while the intoxicated husband had not sufficient presence of mind to extinguish the flames. Some passing Indians who reside nearby happened to observe the extraordinary illumination in the shanty and upon hurrying to the scene succeeded in quenching the fire, but not before the unfortunate squaw had been practically burned to a crisp.”