



Wapahaśa II, or Red Leaf, was born in 1779. Wapahaśa II was a Dakota leader of the Mdewakanton Santee Sioux Tribe and, like his father, fought on the side of the British in the War of 1812. Later he transferred his allegiance to the United States and was respected by both the Whites and his own people. He died at age 63 during a smallpox epidemic that swept through the Mdewakanton Sioux in 1836. His son, Wapahaśa III, succeeded him as the Dakota leader.

The Dakota lived in the valley on the Mississippi River. At the conclusion of the War of 1812, and between the years 1817 and 1823, the Wabashas' trading posts on the upper Mississippi River extended the operation from the foot of Lake Pepin, up the Chippewa River as far as the Falls and down the Mississippi River into Turkey River and Cedar River Counties in Iowa. This prairie is where Witch-e-aim lived before she met Thomas A. Holmes.

Holmes tried to settle in the Winona prairie in what was later Minnesota, but Wapahaśa refused. So Holmes and his group moved and opened a trading post at Wah-ma-dee, or Eagle Bluffs, in what was later part of Wisconsin.

Witch-e-aim, at about 14 years old, was "married" to Thomas A. Holmes, though she was not that thrilled. Within a year, she died of consumption.

Witch-e-aim was around 15 years old in early 1844. Her father was another chief named Mock-ah-pe-ah-ketah-pah (although some people said that Witch-e-aim's father was Wapahaśa).

The name Witch-e-aim is closest to the Dakota word *wićíte*, "the human face," although like some of Lafayette Houghton Bunnell's other names, it is highly corrupted. The name "face" could allude to her beauty and seductiveness. The name may also be a corrupted front formation from *Wićítokapa*, "the eldest born," although this posits such a degree of corruption as to defy probability.

In 1844, a special celebration occurred in Wapahaśa's band. They assembled, and after elaborate preparation and sanctification of the ground by invocations and incense, the chief speaker came forward, and in a sonorous address of lauded the virtues of chastity and warned against the sin of bearing false witness.

Wah-kon-de-o-tah, the great war-chief of the band, addressed his warriors in a quiet and affectionate manner, and told his braves to maintain the truth as sacred, and not offend the spirits of their ancestors.

Wapahaśa then called for the virgins and matrons to come forth, and for some time there was the silence of expectation.

Again, the call was made for any virgin to come forward and receive her reward. Two maidens came partly forward, but upon reaching the line of denunciation, faltered and turned back, probably from modesty. We-no-nah, the wife of the speaker, and eldest sister (or cousin) of Wapahaśa, motioned to her youngest daughter, Witch-e-aim, to come forward, according to *Winona (We-No-Nah) and Its Environs on the Mississippi in Ancient and Modern Days in 1897* by Lafayette Houghton Bunnell.

After repeated calls by the crier of the assembly, Witch-e-aim came modestly forward and was crowned goddess of the feast that immediately followed. Her head was encircled with braids of rich garniture and scented grass, and presents of colored cloths, calicoes, yarns, beads, and ribbons were lavished upon her as the tribe's representative of purity.

Wapahaśa said that Witch-e-aim could pick either Lafayette Houghton Bunnell or Thomas A. Holmes, as both allowed royal alliance for the family.

Witch-e-aim said she did not like the trader, and preferred Bunnell. When Bunnell declined her offer, Witch-e-aim's withering, silent contempt was clear.

During the feast, Holmes was so enchanted that he decided at once to make Witch-e-aim his wife. Witch-e-aim was allowed to marry European American traders, like Thomas A. Holmes, in the fashion of the country. This means that these marriages were not recognized by law or religion.

The French-speaking Canadian traders' term for this is *a la façon du pays*. Some people would call them "country wives."

While many marriages brought loving couples together for the rest of their

lives, other marriages were very short-lived or violent. Many traders married native women but also had other wives back home. Sometimes when the men retired from the fur trade, they returned to their legitimate, or legally married, wives.

These marriages came with the expectation that trade between the woman's relations and the trader would be secured, and that aid would be mutually provided in times of need. It was also the hope of the woman's family that the trader's generosity would increase after the marriage took place.

Marriages between these two groups would lead to the creation of the *Métis* people, who would be considered the offspring of the fur trade.

So, Thomas A. Holmes gave Wapahaśa an offer that he accepted. Based on this, Witch-e-aim then picked Holmes. It happened around 1844.

Holmes then married Witch-e-aim *a la façon du pays*. They were married in the fashion of the country and lived together.

But Witch-e-aim did not like living with Thomas. She was 14 years old, while Tom was forty. Witch-e-aim did not enjoy living at his trading post at Wah-ma-dee, or Eagle Bluffs. It was later called Holmes Landing, and later was called Fountain City, Wisconsin. She missed the Winona prairie in what was later Minnesota.

Like a caged bird, she soon pined for her Dakota prairie home. By the spring of



1845, while flowers bloomed, Witch-e-aim died of consumption.

And that is what the Shakopee Heritage Society learned about Thomas A. Holmes's second marriage, and the sad experience of Witch-e-aim of the Wapahaśas' prairie.

Bibliography

Bunnell, Lafayette Houghton. *Winona (We-No-Nah) and Its Environs on the Mississippi in Ancient and Modern Days in 1897*, 2013.

SHAKOPEE HERITAGE SOCIETY
2109 Boulder Pointe, Shakopee, MN 55379
952-693-3865
shakopeeheritage.org

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Witch-e-aim

ca. 1830-1845

The Second Wife of Thomas A. Holmes

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