

**DAHKOTAH LAND AND DAHKOTAH
LIFE WITH THE HISTORY OF THE FUR
TRADERS OF THE EXTREME
NORTHWEST DURING THE FRENCH
AND BRITISH DOMINIONS**

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DAKOTA LAND

AND

DAKOTA LIFE,

WITH THE

HISTORY OF THE FUR TRADERS OF THE EXTREME NORTHWEST

DURING THE

FRENCH AND BRITISH DOMINIONS.

By EDW. D. NEILL,

SECRETARY OF THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

"Nearer, and ever nearer, among the numberless islands
Barted a light, swift boat, that sped away o'er the water,
Urged on its course by the snowy arms of hunters and trappers;
Northward its prow was turned, to the land of the bison and beaver."

LONGFELLOW'S EVANGELINE

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DAKOTAH LAND
AND
DAKOTAH LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

MINNESOTA is the "land of the Dakotahs." Long before their existence was known to civilized men, they wandered through the forests, between Lake Superior and the Mississippi, in quest of the bounding deer, and over the prairies beyond in search of the ponderous buffalo.

They are an entirely different group from the Algonquin and Iroquois, who were found by the early settlers of the Atlantic States, on the banks of the Connecticut, Mohawk, and Susquehanna rivers. Their language is much more difficult to comprehend; and, while they have many customs in common with the tribes who once dwelt in New England, New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois, they have peculiarities which mark them as belonging to a distinct family of the aborigines of America.

Winona, Wapashaw, Mendota, Anoka, Kasota, Mahkahto, and other names designating the towns, hamlets, and streams of Minnesota, are words derived from the Dakotah vocabulary.

Between the head of Lake Superior and the Missis-

sippi river, above the Falls of Saint Anthony, is a country of many lakes. So numerous are they, and interlaced by clear and sparkling brooks, to an aeronaut they would appear like a necklace of diamonds, on silver filaments, gracefully thrown upon the bosom of Earth.

Surrounded by forests of the sugar maple—the neighbouring marshes fertile in the growth of wild rice—the waters abounding in fish—the shores once alive with the beaver, the otter, the bear, and the fox—they were sites just adapted for the residence of an Indian population.

When the Dahkotahs were first noticed by the European adventurer, large numbers were occupying this region of country, and appropriately called by the voyageur, “People of the Lakes.”¹ And tradition, asserts that here, was the ancient centre of this tribe. Though we have traces of their warring and hunting on the shores of Lake Superior, there is no satisfactory evidence of their residence, east of the Mille Lac region.²

The word Dahkotah, by which they love to be designated, signifies allied or joined together in friendly compact, and is equivalent to “E pluribus unum,” the motto on the seal of the United States.

In the history of the mission at La Pointe, Wisconsin, published nearly two centuries ago, a writer, referring to the Dahkotahs, remarks:—

“For sixty leagues from the extremity of the Upper Lake, toward sunset; and, as it were in the centre of the western nations, they have all *united their force by a general league.*”

¹ Gens du Lac.

² They have no name for Lake Superior.—G. H. Pond, in “*Dahkotah Tawaxitku Kin.*”

The Dahkotahs in the earliest documents, and even until the present day, are called Sioux, Scioux, or Soos. The name originated with the early "voyageurs." For centuries the Ojibways of Lake Superior waged war against the Dahkotahs; and, whenever they spoke of them, called them Nadowaysioux, which signifies enemies.

The French traders, to avoid exciting the attention of Indians, while conversing in their presence, were accustomed to designate them by names, which would not be recognised.

The Dahkotahs were nicknamed Sioux, a word composed, of the two last syllables, of the Ojibway word, for foes.

Charlevoix, who visited Wisconsin in 1721, in his history of New France says: "The name of Sioux, that we give to these Indians, is entirely of our own making, or rather it is the last two syllables of the name of Nadouessioux, as many nations call them."

From an early period, there have been three great divisions of this people, which have been subdivided into smaller bands. The first are called the Isanyati, the Issati of Hennepin, after one of the many lakes at the head waters of the river, marked on modern maps, by the unpoetic name of Rum. It is asserted by Dahkotah missionaries now living, that this name was given to the lake because the stone from which they manufactured the knife (isan) was here obtained. The principal band of the Isanti was the M'dewakantonwan.¹ In the journal of Le Sueur, they are spoken of as residing on a lake east of the Mississippi. Tra-

¹ Pronounced as if written Medday-wawkawu-twawn.