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Reminiscences of Tecumseh's Youth

by Stephen Ruddell

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Secumtheth as the Indians pronounced the name of the celebrated Secumsech (or the blazing comet ^{in English} from his mother seeing a meteor shooting across the sky on the evening of his birth) was born in the neighbourhood of Old Chillicothe in the year 1768.

He was of the Wispookoo tribe of the Shawnee Indians. The Shawnees were divided like the Iroquois into twelve tribes and with the exception of the Maykecha tribes which ~~had a king~~ the chiefs owed their power & authority to their merit; but the tribe just mentioned had a king over them whose authority was hereditary.

His father was a great war chief & fell at the head of his tribe in the battle at the mouth of the Kenhaway, between the whites & Indians - he was a man highly respected among the tribe both as a statesman & warrior - at his dying moment he called to him his oldest son a youth of twelve or thirteen years named Piquannakech (or gun shot) and ~~strongly~~ joined

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on him to preserve unsullied the dignity and
honour of his family; and directed him in
future to lead forth to battle his younger
Brothers. The Mother of Tecumtheth was of
one of the most respectable families in the Pickoway
tribe of Shawnees -

They had five sons & one daughter (viz ~~Tecumtheth~~
~~was the second son~~ Papgumake, Tecumtheth,
Lolloway (or the Prophet) - the other three's names
I cannot recollect - The Prophet and two
other boys were born at one birth. The oldest
was a great warrior and fell at the head of
a war party which he had conducted to
attack some fort in the south during Wayne's war.
Agreeably to the instructions of his father, ^{at his death} he
took upon himself the education of his brothers
and used every means to instil into the mind
of Tecumtheth correct, manly, & honourable
principles, leading him forth himself to battle
and instructing him in warfare. He taught
them to look with contempt upon every thing
that was mean - He used frequently to take
Tecumtheth & they alone would go and commit
depredations on their enemies, when they were
mere boys -

I first became acquainted with Teumtheth at
 the age of twelve years, and being the same age
 myself, we became inseparable companions -
 Teumtheth was always remarkable from his
 boyhood up for the dignity & rectitude of
 his deportment. There was a certain something
 in his countenance and manner, that always
 commanded respect & at the same time made
 those about him love him. ~~He was very~~
~~easy of access.~~ ~~At the age of twelve & from~~
~~his boyhood~~ he used to place
 himself at the head of the youngsters and
 divide them, when he would make them
 fight sham battles, in which he always
 distinguished himself by his activity, strength
 & skill - He was a great hunter and what
 was remarkable would never if he could
 avoid it hunt in parties where women were.
 He was free hearted & generous to excess - always
 ready to relieve the wants of others - Whenever
 he returned from a hunting expedition he
 would harangue his companions, and
 made use of all his eloquence to instil

into their minds honorable and humane sentiments. He ~~was~~ rarely over drunk ardent spirits to excess - when ~~intoxicated~~ ^{intoxicated} he was widely different from other Indians - perfectly good humoured & free from those savage ideas which distinguished his companions; and always reproving them for their folly - He was by no means savage in his nature - always expressed the greatest abhorrence when he heard of or saw acts of cruelty or barbarity practiced.

From his earliest days he was remarkably easily awoken out of sleep - He was always on the alert and it was impossible to take him by surprise - He was always averse to taking prisoners in his warfare; but when prisoners fell into his hands he always treated them with ~~the~~ much humanity as if they had been in the hands of civilized people - No burning - no torturing - He never tolerated the practice of killing women and children - He was a man of great courage and conduct - perfectly fearless of danger - He always inspired his companions with confidence and valour

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He never evinced any great regard for the female sex - it was a custom among the Shawnees to marry as many wives as they pleased & to keep them as long as they pleased. Tecumthe had at different times a wife whom he did not keep very long before he parted from her. He had a Cherokee squaw who lived with him the longest of any other. The women were very fond of him - much more so than he was of them. He was a very social companion - fond of cracking his jokes; but his wit was never aimed to wound the feelings of his comrades -

The first engagement in which he particularly distinguished himself was in an attack on some boats coming down the Ohio, he being then about fifteen years old - the boats were taken & all the persons ^{on board} were killed. In the action Tecumthe behaved with great bravery & even left in the back ground some of their eldest & bravest warriors. ~~After~~ In the action ~~in which~~ one prisoner, as well as a scalped, was taken - the Indians proceeded to burn him and after it had been done Tecumthe who had been a spectator, expressed great

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abhorrence of the deed and finally it was
concluded among them not to burn any more
prisoners that should afterwards be taken,
which was ever after strictly adhered to ^{by him} The boats
were owned by traders, a number of persons on
board not recollected. These boats were taken
in the spring and in the fall they moved towards
the south on an expedition against the whites.
On the route to the south Tecumthe's horse fell
with him & broke his thigh which confined
him until spring following, when the party headed
by Tecumthe's oldest brother proceeded on their
expedition - He was then able to walk with the
assistance of crutches & his brother endeavoured
to persuade him to remain behind but
he could not be prevailed on to comply.
They had several engagements with the
whites in this expedition which kept them absent
from home three years - Tecumthe always
distinguished himself - It was in this expedition
that his oldest brother fell in an attack on
some fort the name or situation of which
I cannot now tell. The party was chiefly
composed of Cherokees - a few days before they
attacked the fort this oldest brother or Gun shot
harangued the party & told them that on

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such a day and such a kind of the day they
would arrive at the fort - that they would
attack the fort in the morning & would succeed
if they would persevere in the fight - That
precisely at noon he would be shot through
the centre of his forehead. When he related
this, the Indians endeavored to persuade
him to turn back, which he refused to do,
saying [The attack was commenced & as he had
predicted he received the shot in his head
& fell] saying that his father had fell
gloriously in battle - that he considered
it an honour to die in battle & that it
was what he wished & did not wish to
be buried at home like an old Indian,
to which he preferred that the fowls of
the air should pick his bones -

After his death the party was disheartened
in spite of all the exertions of Tecumthe
they Cherokee left the ground - thus they failed
in their attempt - Tecumthe then told the
party that he would not go home until he
had done something to shew for his good conduct
He accordingly took with him a small party
of eight or ten & a short time after attacked

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a family & perhaps killed the man & took
the woman & children prisoners - I cannot
recollect any of the particulars of the other engagements
which occurred on this expedition - He was ~~three~~ three
times attacked in the night in his encampment;
but being remarkably watchful, he was always
ready for the enemy & they seldom gained any
advantage - He always scanned with great
care the ground on which he encamped no matter
whether in the neighbourhood of the enemy or not,
so that it was almost impossible to gain any
advantage of him - During this expedition he was
attacked on the edge of a cane brake, perhaps
on the waters of Tennessee, whilst dressing some
meat, by a party of about thirty whites - He
immediately ordered his small party to charge
& leading on himself with the most determined
bravery, he put the whole party to flight -
Two whites were killed - At the expiration of
three years from the time he left home he
returned - This ~~I think~~ was shortly after
Harmers defeat - He was not in St Clair's
defeat; being at that time on a hunting
expedition & not having heard of the
approach of St Clair -

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In Wayne's battle, he took a conspicuous part
or at least as much as the nature of the
case would admit of. There he he
commanded a band of the Shawnoes - at
the time the Indians commenced retreating
he together with ^{two or three others} ~~another~~ Indian rushed
on a party ^{of the white} that had a field piece in
charge, drove the artillery-men from their
posts, cut loose the horses, mounted them &
cleared themselves -

In April 1793 ~~In the spring before~~ ~~the Shawnoes~~
hunting party, headed by Tecumthe were one
night attacked by a company of men under
Simon Kenton, the circumstances of which are as
follows - On the day one of our party was
out hunting up the horses and being discovered
by Kenton's party, was shot. They put forward
on his tracks and on coming in sight of their
camp, they discovered that we were unalarmed
and after making all the observations they wished
they returned back some distance where they
made their preparations for the attack -
Tecumthe had laid down at night out side
of the camp or tents, along side of the fire where

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we had been gherking some venison through the
day - In the night the attack was made by
firing into the tent - I ran the spray to his feet
with his war club in his hand, a weapon which
he invariably carried both in peace & war,
hunting & in battle, and calling to me asked
big fish where are you? Here I am say I -
Then do you charge on that side & I will
charge on this - With that he rushed on
those on his side, knocked me in the head
with his club & drove the rest back - I
on my side met a man as I came out
of the tent, whom I afterward found out to
be Henton himself - I fired on him but
my gun having gotten a little wet through
the day, it blowed considerably & at last
just blowed out the ball without injuring
Henton, who had taken to his heels - I
raised the Indian yell & called that
they were running upon which the rest of
the Indians in the tent who had till now
remained silent sprang out and raising
the war whoop, we run them off the
ground ethi-tah-bease on the water.

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of either the little Miami or brush creek.
We had ten men including the one killed
in the morning - they had twenty eight
men - Tecumthe was particularly attached

to the war club - it was a weapon which
he said had been used by his forefathers.

One of Kentons party, named McIntire
a resolute fellow resolved to take a horse and
leaving the rest of his company accordingly went to
where our horses were feeding & carried one off.
In the morning Tecumthe with four others followed
after them & after going some distance they came
to where McIntire had turned off the road -
He had struck a fire & was cooking some
victuals - They charged on him - McIntire took
to his heels; but after running some distance he
discovered the Indians fast gaining on him -
he faced about & presented his gun - two
Indians that were some what in advance of
Tecumthe sprang to trees; but he rushed
right up to McIntire & made him prisoner.
McIntire was brought back to camp & tied -
We then concluded that we must retreat &
requested ~~them~~ the rest of the Indians to
go out for the horses, but they being

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was somewhat timid, Tecumthe proposed that he
himself should go out. On our return we found
that the rest of the Indians had killed
all Antine at which Tecumthe was very angry,
telling them that it was a cowardly act to
kill a man who was tied and that
expressed in the strongest terms his disapproval
of their conduct. It may be proper
for me to state that Sinnamatha or
Big fish was the name the Indians had
given me.

In the Spring before the battle with Wayne
he was on a hunting expedition in the same neighbor-
hood where the action with Clinton took place.
His party was composed of 6 or 7 warriors. He was
attacked by a scouting party of whites of ^{between} ~~about~~
20 and 30 men. In the fight one of Tecumthe's party
named Joseph ^{Ward} ~~Ward~~ who had been taken prisoner when
a small boy during Sumner's war & had been
raised by the Indians, was killed. He & his
party were compelled to give ground after fighting
desperately; but he made out to carry off
board. His company deserted him during the battle.
He then returned home; but not being pleased
with an inactive life, he again went out to
hunt & continued in that employment until
the Indians collected to give ^{Wayne's} battle in
fall of '94.

134 He was not engaged in any other battle or skirmish
after that with Wayne during my continuance with
the Indians. He was pleased with the peace of
Greenville - said that now he was happy - that he
could pursue his hunting without danger &c &c
He had no children whilst I knew him -

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He was naturally eloquent - very fluent - graceful
in his articulation but not in the habit of using many
figures - There was no violence - no vehemence in
his mode of delivering his speeches - He always
made a great impression on his audience - He was
about five feet ten inches high, very well made
full of activity, & possessed of great strength -

I know of no peculiarity about him, that gained
him popularity - His talents, rectitude of deportment
and friendly disposition, commanded the respect
and regard of all about him -

In short I consider him a very great as well
as a very good man, who, if he had enjoyed
the advantages of a liberal education, would
have done honour to any age or any nation.

This account of Tecumthe is
from Stephen Riddle, procured for me
from him by Miss R. Graham - Riddle
lived at the time, in Mipouri - a
man of veracity. B Drake

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Mr. A. Thomas, who
narrative is given
within, says that the
census was at the
attack on Bryant's
Station in 1840. Is this
the fact? If so he
must have been very
young.

Indian Narratives.

Thomas, M. Fullock,
Knapp, & Dyce's

Statements.

Ex. Aug. 27. 1840

— Scribner, Greenville, O.

— Duro, Penn. Ind.

John B. Richardson

Fort Wayne

The above named persons
written to for Indian in-
formation, Aug. 27. 1840
B.D.