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Report from George N. Smith to William A. Richard

George N. Smith

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Recommended Citation

Smith, George N., "Report from George N. Smith to William A. Richard" (1846). *Van Raalte Papers: 1840-1849*. 82.

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10 September 1846

Old Wing Mission, [Holland, MI]

In a report to William A. Richmond, Acting Superintendent [of] Indian Affairs at Detroit, Michigan, Rev. George N. Smith said that his family had gone to Vermont last summer for their health's sake. The death of the chief, Joseph Wakazoo, had been a blow. "...He should be regarded as a benefactor of his race." Peter Wakazoo, his brother, now served as acting chief. White men who give liquor to the Indians are a "curse." The Catholic priest who visited was an intrusion.

Excerpt of a published report in the Grand Rapids Library, gift of Donald Van Reken.

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ization, intelligence, morality, religion, and the securing of comfortable means of support from their agricultural efforts, their condition is flattering. Still there are difficulties in the way, as there must always be in attempting to raise the condition of a savage people to the enjoyment of the blessings of civilization and christianity; but we are encouraged to hope that, with patient perseverance, the time is not far distant when this band will bless the government for its means of improvement, and for its fostering care.

I am, dear sir, respectfully, your humble and obedient servant,
GEORGE N. SMITH.

WILLIAM A. RICHMOND,
Acting Superintendent Indian affairs.

Rev. Smith made ^{an} ~~his second~~ report on September 10, 1846 and he again has a very optimistic viewpoint. Some significant facts are:

1. He had taken leave of about six months to visit his relatives in Vermont and, while there, he gathered clothing for his Indian friends.
2. The Indian Chief, Joseph Wakazoo, died in October 1845.
3. Interest in farming was developing and the farmer, not identified by name, was helping in this work.

No. 41.

OLD WING MISSION, *September 10, 1846.*

SIR: Agreeably to the regulations of the Department, I send you my annual report.

You have been informed of the fact that I spent a part of the last season on a journey to Vermont, my native State, for the health of my family. We had spent about six years of privation and trial away from friends and every improving association, and considered it our duty to make the journey, in order to recover our bodily health and refresh and invigorate our minds, that we might return to our work with renewed energy and interest. Such has been the consequence.

While east, we collected a small amount of clothing in Swanton, my native town, (about \$30 worth,) and nearly the same in Enosburgh, Vermont, for the family of our chief; but, to the great grief of our mission, he died soon after our return, and did not enjoy the favor; but it has been faithfully put into the hands of his family, who were in indigent circumstances, and has been a great relief to them. The death of the chief, Oge-maire-mire, (Joseph Wakazoo,) was severely felt by all who had an interest in the welfare of the Indians. He was about seventy years of age—died suddenly, of a congestion of the lungs. Medical aid was obtained for him, but all to no purpose; and when he closed his eyes with the setting sun, on the 18th of last October, I almost felt that the doom of our mission was sealed. He was wise in council, noble in spirit, and upright in life. His advice was sought for, far and near, among his fellow red men, and he should be regarded as a benefactor of his race.

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In his brother, Peter Wakazoo, who is now our acting chief, we hope we may have one who will equal the one we have lost.

I commenced school soon after my return last fall, and continued it till late in the spring, when the Indians went to the shore of Black lake, four miles from the school-house, where they still continue, and will till after payment. The number of scholars on my list is—

Males	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	23
Females	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11
My own children	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<u>37</u>

The course of instruction has been the same as last year—the alphabet, spelling, reading, writing, and singing, with the addition of ciphering, and something of geography. The attendance of the scholars has been more uniform, and their conduct and progress better than any former year.

I also taught a Sabbath school through the winter, which I think was very useful. Our meetings on the Sabbath have been kept up through the year, with very few unavoidable exceptions, and they have been decidedly interesting generally; and the effect of Gospel truth on the mind and heart is more obvious than formerly. The habits of the Indians during the past year, in relation to the use of ardent spirits, especially at home, have been very good. There have been some instances of drunkenness abroad, under the tempting influence of wicked white men, who, when they can find nothing else bad enough to do, will get an Indian drunk that they may rob him the easier. It is a curse to our land that there are such men in it; they are worse than the worst Indians, and need a house of correction for their benefit; but the prevalent and increasing feeling of our Indians is, that it is a bad business to drink whiskey.

During the year the farming interest has increased considerably; about 7,000 rails have been split, by the assistance of the farmer, and a portion of them laid up into fence. He has also, in company with the Indians, done a considerable amount of logging, ploughing, and harrowing; they have planted their corn and potatoes in rows, which makes the farming of several families look quite systematic and pretty. The crops are very good; the amount of corn will be greater than the colony will consume.

Now, in summing up the progress of the year, I may safely say that the advance has been in a higher ratio than any former one; but there are two important impediments which I must name: one is, the intrusions of the Catholic priest from the station at the Rapids, who went so far at one time, as to come into our meeting during worship, and call out a part of my congregation, &c. The other is, the Indians living on the shore on Black lake (an unhealthy place) in hot weather. The evils resulting are these:

- 1st. Their children cannot be in school in the summer season.
- 2d. They are at a distance from their farms when it is very important they should be on them.
- 3d. I have no doubt it is the cause of quite all the sickness they experience.

The past month they have had a good deal of the fever and ague, and there have been a few deaths by dysentery; but I do not think the sick-

ness and deaths have more than equalled the white settlements. In this region, generally, they are becoming sensible of these evils, and manifest a strong determination to live permanently on their farms as soon as they can get their houses completed; so that I hope this evil will occasion its own remedy. I have no doubt but our colony location is decidedly a healthy one.

I will only add, that I have obtained a place for the two young men, Joseph and Mitchell, in the Kalamazoo branch of the Michigan university, under the kind patronage of a committee of the Kalamazoo presbytery, and the Marshall Congregational Association.

I remain, truly, your humble and obedient servant,
GEO. N. SMITH.

WILLIAM A. RICHMOND, Esq.,
Acting Superintendent Indian Affairs, Detroit, Mich.