



The Stories of Shateyoranyah, Wyandot Chief Leatherlips

Since the mid-1970's, Dublin, Ohio has been the home of Jack Nicklaus' Muirfield Village Golf Club and, a few years later, the Memorial Golf Tournament. The Tournament often has been plagued by rain. When this happened, the ensuing delays gave people time to look for blame or an explanation. Someone offered the possibility that the ghost of Leatherlips brings the rain because the Tournament, its traffic and crowds, upsets the Wyandot Indian

chief executed in 1810 by members of his own tribe not far from the site of the Muirfield course.

A monument to Leatherlips stands on Riverside Drive, about three miles north of the Scioto River bridge at State Route 161. This is said to be near the site of the execution. Readers should know the tournament course and the execution site are on opposite sides of the Scioto River, so it is a stretch

of most peoples' imagination that the ghost of Leatherlips, a friend of the early settlers of what became Dublin, is being disturbed by the annual golf event.

We offer two stories of the death of Chief Leatherlips. The first is one generation away from an eyewitness account. The second is based on historical accounts. Finally, we have found an Associated Press account of "the curse of Leatherlips".

The Death of Chief Leatherlips

An Historical Sketch, from "The Community Calendar", Vol. II, No. 16; Dublin, Ohio, October 25, 1929; The Dublin Community Church

The account here given is as related to the editor by John A. Wing, since the death of Wray R. Coffman, the oldest native resident of Dublin. Mr. Wing received the story from Wm. Sells, an eyewitness of Chief Leatherlips' death. Wm. Sells, known until the day of his death as "Uncle Billy" Sells, was the grandfather of Mrs. Mary Dun Hutchinson and Lewis Davis. The old home farm of Wm. Sells, south of Dublin, is now owned by J.R. Poste.

Leatherlips was a Wyandotte Indian who became very much attached to the few white people in the vicinity of what is now Dublin. He was especially fond of the Sells boys. When the major portion of the Wyandottes finally left to go north and settle near Sandusky, these Indians wanted Leatherlips to go with them. He refused to leave the vicinity of his birth and his white friends.

The Wyandottes settled in northern Ohio were visited with ill fortune. There was much sickness and death in their midst. This they laid to Leatherlips' "witching" them. Groups of Indians came down at different times, seeking to persuade this member of the tribe to join his fellows in the north. Attached to the few whites here, he steadfastly refused to go. Finally a delegation came, dispatched by the tribe, with orders to bring Leatherlips back or, failing in that, to massacre him.

The delegation arrived and worked with Leatherlips two or three days. He was persistent in his refusal to leave. As the negotiations proceeded, Leatherlips realized that his life was in danger but made no effort to flee. He would go to a nearby spring, wash, and return, refusing such opportunity to escape. Finally, he was given one or two days to make up his mind. The Sells brothers, hearing of the crisis being met by their

Indian friend, came up and offered the Indians a fine horse and what money they had (about three hundred dollars in gold) if this friend of the whites might be spared. The offer was refused. On the other hand, Leatherlips himself declined the proffered assistance of the Sells brothers who would aid him to escape.

When the time appointed for the final decision came, the Indians had dug a shallow grave. Some time was given the condemned chief to change his mind. The request that he might go to the spring to bathe and pray was granted. Returning, he knelt at the edge of the grave tilting back his head with face toward the sky. The whites who were watching could see no weapon with which death might be inflicted. Suddenly, one of Leatherlips' own relatives whipped a large and new tomahawk from under his blanket to send it crashing through the upturned

forehead. The body was placed in the grave, the grave hastily filled, and the Wyandottes departed, their mission, from their viewpoint, accomplished.

In relating this story to the boy, John Wing (now a man in his seventies), Uncle Billy Sells would close his account, tears in his eyes, with these words: "O, Johnny, how my heart was touched by the taking away of

that good Indian. His word was as true as Gospel. He proved it by his actions."

Execution of a Witch Doctor

Leatherlips, a powerful Wyandot chief, forfeited his life for his white friends.

By Anne Meyer, Patty Koegel

A great union of Indians, molded by Tecumseh, and by far greater than any other Indian confederation ever heard of before, began circulating rumors that one day without warning "a bloodthirsty horde" would sweep down upon the white settlers and destroy them.

Upon hearing reports of Leatherlips' refusal to unite in any alliance under Tecumseh, William Henry Harrison dispatched a messenger to the chief's village, with a letter congratulating the chief for his wisdom and strength, praising his refusal to aid Tecumseh, and warning of the great destruction which would strike the red men if they went to war. The messenger returned with news that the Indians were pleased with Governor Harrison's letter and reaffirmed their friendship under the terms of the Greenville Treaty signed by Leatherlips in August of 1795.

Chief Roundhead of the Wyandots had long been enthusiastic over Tecumseh's plan and immediately called a council of the remaining Wyandot chiefs upon hearing that Leatherlips had taken away his men from the council, refusing to take part in a war against his friends, the white men. It was determined by the council that Leatherlips had been among the chiefs who had sold the land east of the Wabash to Governor Harrison, and he therefore should be executed for witchcraft and treason. An actual account of Leatherlips' execution has been taken from an article in a literary magazine called *The Hesperian of the West*. Otway Curry, who was one of the editors, wrote the article which was published in 1838. *(article follows)*

The Doomed Wyandot

The Hesperian of the West; Otway Curry
Columbus, Ohio, 1838

In the evening of the first day of June in the year 1810, there came six Wyandot warriors to the home of Mr. Benjamin Sells on the Scioto River, about twelve miles above the spot where now stands the City of Columbus. They were equipped in the most war-like manner and exhibited during their stay an unusual degree of agitation. Having ascertained that an old Wyandot Chief, for whom they had been making diligent inquiry, was then encamped at a distance of about two miles farther up on the bank of the river, they expressed a determination to put him to death and immediately went off in the direction of the lodge.

These facts were communicated early in the ensuing morning to Mr. John Sells, who now resides in the City of Dublin on the Scioto about two miles from the place where the doomed Wyandot met his fate. Mr. Sells immediately proceeded up the river on horseback in quest of the Indians. He soon arrived at the lodge which he found situated in a grove of sugar trees, close to the bend of the river.

The six warriors were seated in consultation at a distance of a few rods from the lodge. The old chief was with them, evidently in the character of a prisoner. His arms were confined by a small cord, but he sat with them without any manifestation of uneasiness. A few of the neighboring white men were also there and a gloomy looking Indian who had been a companion of the chief, but now kept entirely aloof—sitting sullenly in the camp.

Mr. Sells approached the Indians and found them earnestly engaged in a debate. A charge of "witchcraft" had been made at a former time against the chief by some of his captors, whose friends had been destroyed as they believed by means of his

evil powers. This crime, according to the immemorial usage of the tribe involved a forfeiture of life. The chances of a hunter's life had brought the old man to his present location, and his pursuers had sought him out in order that they might execute upon him the sentence of their law.

The council was of two or three hours duration. The accusing party spoke alternately with much ceremony, but with evident bitterness of feeling. The prisoner, in his replies, was eloquent, though dispassionate. Occasionally, a smile of scorn would appear, for an instant, on his countenance. At the close of the consultation it was ascertained that they had affirmed the sentence of death, which had before then passed upon the chief.

Inquiry having been made by some of the white men, with reference to their arrangements, the captain of the six warriors pointed to the sun and signified to them that the execution would take place at one o'clock in the afternoon. Mr. Sells went to the captain and asked him what the chief had done. "Very bad Indian," he replied, "make good Indian sick"—"make horse sick,—make die,—very bad chief." Mr. Sells then made an effort to persuade his white friends to rescue the victim of superstition from his impending fate, but to no purpose.

They were then in a frontier situation, entirely open to the incursions of the northern tribes and were, consequently, unwilling to subject themselves to the displeasure of their savage visitors by any interference with their operations. He then proposed to release the chief by purchase—offering to the captain for that purpose a fine horse of the value of \$300. "Let me see him," said the Indian; the horse was accordingly brought forth, and closely examined; and

so much were they staggered by this proposition that they again repaired to their place of consultation and remained in council a considerable length of time before it was finally rejected.

The conference was again terminated and five of the Indians began to amuse themselves with running, jumping and other athletic exercise. The captain took no part with them. When again inquired as to the time of execution, he pointed to the sun, as before, and indicated the hour of four. The prisoner then walked slowly to his camp—partook of jerked venison—washed and arrayed himself in his best apparel and afterwards painted his face. His dress was very rich—his hair grey, his whole appearance graceful and commanding. He then observed the exertions of Mr. Sells in his behalf, and now presented to him a written paper, with a request that it might be read to the company. It was a recommendation signed by Gov. Hull, and in compliance with the request of the prisoner, it was fixed upon the side of a large tree, a short distance from the wigwam.

The hour of execution being close at hand, the chief shook hands in silence with the surrounding spectators. On coming to Mr. Sells he appeared much moved—grasped his hands warmly, spoke for a few minutes in the Wyandot language and pointed to the Heavens. He then turned from the wigwam, and with a voice of surpassing strength and melody, commenced the chant of the death-song. He was followed closely

by the Wyandot warriors, all timing with the slow and measured march, the music of his wild and melancholy dirge. The white men were all, likewise, silent followers in that strange procession.

At the distance of seventy or eighty yards from the camp, they came to a shallow grave, which, unknown to the white men, had been previously prepared by the Indians. Here the old men knelt down, and in an elevated, but solemn voice, addressed his prayer to the Great Spirit. As soon as he had finished, the captain of the Indians knelt beside him and prayed in a similar manner. Their prayers, of course, were spoken in the Wyandot language. When they arose, the captain was again accosted by Mr. Sells, who insisted that if they were inflexible in their determination to shed blood, they should at least remove their victim beyond the limit of the white settlement. "No!; good Indian afraid—he no go with this bad man—mouth give fire in the dark night, good Indian afraid—he no go!" "My friend," he continued, "me tell you white man, white man kill him, Indian say nothing."

Finding all interference futile, Mr. Sells was at length compelled reluctantly, to abandon the old man to his fate. After a few moments delay, he again sank down upon his knees and prayed, as he had done before. When he had ceased praying, he still continued in a kneeling position. All the rifles belonging to the party had been left at the wigwam. There was not a weapon of any kind to be seen at the place of execu-

tion, and the spectators were consequently unable to form any conjecture as to the mode of procedure, which the executioner had determined on for the fulfillment of their purpose.

Suddenly one of the warriors drew from beneath the skirts of his capote, a keen, bright tomahawk, walked rapidly up behind the chieftain brandishing the weapon on high for a single moment and then struck with his full strength. The blow descended directly upon the crown of the head and the victim immediately fell prostrate. After he had lain a while in the agonies of death, the Indian directed the attention of the white men to the drops of sweat which were gathering upon the neck and face, remarking with much apparent exultation that it was conclusive proof of the sufferer's guilt. Again the executioner advanced and with the same weapon inflicted two or three additional and heavy blows.

As soon as life was entirely extinct, the body was hastily buried with all its apparel and decorations and the assemblage dispersed. The Wyandots returned immediately to their hunting ground and the white men to their homes. The murdered chief was known among the whites by the name of Leather Lips. Around the spot where the bones repose the towering forest has given place to the grain fields and the soil above him has for years been furrowed and re-furrowed by the plow-share.

The Curse of Leatherlips

An Associated Press story, June 1, 1997, during another wet Memorial Tournament at the Muirfield Village Country Club in Dublin, Ohio, included this excerpt:

Rain is a common curse at the Memorial, interrupting or canceling more than one-third of the rounds over the last nine years. The 1990 tournament was shortened to 54 holes, with (Greg) Norman the winner.

Though there is no evidence that it is true, local lore has it that the course was built on an Indian burial ground.

In 1993, when the Memorial was delayed by rain for the fourth straight years and 11 of 18 years overall, Barbara Nicklaus tried to do something about it.

Arnold Palmer's wife, Winnie, suggested that if Muirfield Village was built over an old cemetery that a glass of gin left at the burial site of Chief Leatherlips—it rests in the trees beyond the practice fairway—might mollify any angry spirits.

So, late Thursday night during the '93 tournament and again during the Friday afternoon suspension, Barbara Nicklaus made trips to a nearby cemetery and monument to Chief Leatherlips. Both times she left a glass with gin in it. Jack even drove her

Thursday night, albeit reluctantly.

"I had nothing to do with it, absolutely nothing," he said at the time in mock disbelief. "She just said, 'Maybe I'll give them a little gift this year, and maybe next year it'll be something really nice.'"

Not even that worked.

Being the most successful golfer in history carries clout with the USGA, but not with the weather.