

From John McClung, *Sketches of Western Adventure, Containing An Account of the Most Interesting Incidents Connected with the settlement of the West, from 1755 to 1794* (Cincinnati: U. P. James, 1839)

Reading aloud from ‘the history [of] Big Foot & Little Foot: two Indian chiefs & their deadly encounters on the banks of the Ohio with one Adam Poe, an Irish settler’ formed a memorable part of William Charles’ (‘Willie’ in OCO) visit to the Evans’s farm (‘Colsonville’ in OCO) (Writing Home 447, Our Cousins in Ohio 223).

About the middle of July, 1782, seven Wyandots crossed the Ohio a few miles above Wheeling, and committed great depredations upon the southern shore, killing an old man whom they found alone in his cabin, and spreading terror throughout the neighborhood. Within a few hours after their retreat, eight men assembled from different parts of the small settlement and pursued the enemy with great expedition. Among the most active and efficient of the party were two brothers, Adam and Andrew Poe. Adam was particularly popular. In strength, action, and hardihood, he had no equal, being finely formed and inured to all the perils of the woods. They had not followed the trail far, before they became satisfied that the depredators were conducted by Big Foot, a renowned chief of the Wyandott tribe, who derived his name from the immense size of his feet.

His height considerably exceeded six feet, and his strength was represented as Herculean. He had also five brothers, but little inferior to himself in size and courage, and as they generally went in company, they were the terror of the whole country. Adam Poe was overjoyed at the idea of measuring his strength with that of so celebrated a chief, and urged the pursuit with a keenness which quickly brought him into the vicinity of the enemy. For the last few miles, the trail had led them up the southern bank of the Ohio, where the foot prints in the sand were deep and obvious, but when within a few hundred yards of the point at which the whites as well as the Indians were in the habit of crossing, it suddenly diverged from the stream, and stretched along a rocky ridge, forming an obtuse angle with its former direction.

Here Adam halted for a moment, and directed his brother and the other young men to follow the trail with proper caution, while he himself still adhered to the river path, which led

through clusters of willows directly to the point where he supposed the enemy to lie. Having examined the priming of his gun, he crept cautiously through the bushes, until he had a view of the point of embarkation. Here lay two canoes, empty and apparently deserted. Being satisfied, however, that the Indians were close at hand, he relaxed nothing of his vigilance, and quickly gained a jutting cliff, which hung immediately over the canoes. Hearing a low murmur below, he peered cautiously over, and beheld the object of his search. The gigantic Big Foot, lay below him in the shade of a willow, and was talking in a low deep tone to another warrior, who seemed a mere pigmy by his side.

Adam cautiously drew back, and cocked his gun. The mark was fair—the distance did not exceed twenty feet, and his aim was unerring. Raising his rifle slowly and cautiously, he took a steady aim at Big Foot's breast, and drew the trigger. His gun flashed. Both Indians sprung to their feet with a deep interjection of surprise, and for a single second all three stared upon each other. This inactivity, however, was soon over. Adam was too much hampered by the bushes to retreat, and setting his life upon a cast of the die, he sprung over the bush which had sheltered him, and summoning all his powers, leaped boldly down the precipice and alighted upon the breast of Big Foot with a shock which bore him to the earth.

At the moment of contact, Adam had also thrown his right arm around the neck of the smaller Indian, so that all three came to the earth together. At that moment a sharp firing was heard among the bushes above, announcing that the other parties were engaged, but the trio below were too busy to attend to any thing but themselves. Big Foot was for an instant stunned by the violence of the shock, and Adam was enabled to keep them both down. But the exertion necessary for that purpose was so great, that he had no leisure to use his knife. Big Foot quickly recovered, and without attempting to rise, wrapped his long arms around Adam's body, and pressed him to his breast with the crushing force of a Boa Constrictor! Adam, as we have already remarked, was a powerful man, and had seldom encountered his equal, but never had he yet felt an embrace like that of Big Foot.

He instantly relaxed his hold of the small Indian, who sprung to his feet. Big Foot then ordered him to run for his tomahawk which lay within ten steps, and kill the white man, while he held him in his arms. Adam, seeing his danger, struggled manfully to extricate himself from the

folds of the giant, but in vain. The lesser Indian approached with his uplifted tomahawk, but Adam watched him closely, and as he was about to strike, gave him a kick so sudden and violent, as to knock the tomahawk from his hand, and send him staggering back into the water. Big Foot uttered an exclamation in a tone of deep contempt at the failure of his companion, and raising his voice to its highest pitch, thundered out several words in the Indian tongue, which Adam could not understand, but supposed to be a direction for a second attack.

The lesser Indian now again approached, carefully shunning Adam's heels, and making many motions with his tomahawk, in order to deceive him as to the point where the blow would fall. This lasted for several seconds, until a thundering exclamation from Big Foot, compelled his companion to strike. Such was Adam's dexterity and vigilance, however, that he managed to receive the tomahawk in a glancing direction upon his left wrist, wounding him deeply but not disabling him. He now made a sudden and desperate effort to free himself from the arms of the giant and succeeded. Instantly snatching up a rifle (for the Indian could not venture to shoot for fear of hurting his companion) he shot the lesser Indian through the body.

But scarcely had he done so when Big Foot arose, and placing one hand upon his collar and the other upon his hip, pitched him ten feet into the air, as he himself would have pitched a child. Adam fell upon his back at the edge of the water, but before his antagonist could spring upon him, he was again upon his feet, and stung with rage at the idea of being handled so easily, he attacked his gigantic antagonist with a fury which for a time compensated for inferiority of strength. It was now a fair fist fight between them, for in the hurry of the struggle neither had leisure to draw their knives. Adam's superior activity and experience as a pugilist, gave him great advantage. The Indian struck awkwardly, and finding himself rapidly dropping to leeward, he closed with his antagonist, and again hurled him to the ground.

They quickly rolled into the river, and the struggle continued with unabated fury, each attempting to drown the other. The Indian being unused to such violent exertion, and having been much injured by the first shock in his stomach, was unable to exert the same powers which had given him such a decided superiority at first; and Adam, seizing him by the scalp lock, put his head under water, and held it there, until the faint struggles of the Indian induced him to

believe that he was drowned, when he relaxed his hold and attempted to draw his knife. The Indian, however, to use Adam's own expression, "had only been POSSUMING!"

He instantly regained his feet, and in his turn put his adversary under. In the struggle both were carried out into the current, beyond their depth, and each was compelled to relax his hold and swim for his life. There was still one loaded rifle upon the shore, and each swam hard in order to reach it, but the Indian proved the most expert swimmer, and Adam seeing that he should be too late, turned and swam out into the stream, intending to dive and thus frustrate his enemy's intention. At this instant, Andrew, having heard that his brother was alone in a struggle with two Indians, and in great danger, ran up hastily to the edge of the bank above in order to assist him. Another white man followed him closely, and seeing Adam in the river, covered with blood, and swimming rapidly from shore, mistook him for an Indian and fired upon him, wounding him dangerously in the shoulder.

Adam turned, and seeing his brother, called loudly upon him to "shoot the big Indian upon the shore." Andrew's gun, however, was empty, having just been discharged. Fortunately, Big Foot had also seized the gun with which Adam had shot the lesser Indian, so that both were upon an equality. The contest now was who should load first. Big Foot poured in his powder first, and drawing his ram rod out of its sheath in too great a hurry, threw it into the river, and while he ran to recover it, Andrew gained an advantage. Still the Indian was but a second too late, for his gun was at his shoulder, when Andrew's ball entered his breast. The gun dropped from his hands and he fell forward upon his face upon the very margin of the river.

Andrew, now alarmed for his brother, who was scarcely able to swim, threw down his gun and rushed into the river in order to bring him ashore; but Adam, more intent upon securing the scalp of Big Foot as a trophy, than upon his own safety, called loudly upon his brother to leave him alone and scalp the big Indian, who was now endeavoring to roll himself into the water, from a romantic desire, peculiar to the Indian warrior, of securing his scalp from the enemy. Andrew, however, refused to obey, and insisted upon saving the living, before attending to the dead. Big Foot, in the mean time, had succeeded in reaching the deep water before he expired, and his body was borne off by the waves, without being stripped of the ornament and pride of an Indian warrior.

Not a man of the Indians had escaped. Five of Big Foot's brothers, the flower of the Wyandott nation, had accompanied him in the expedition, and all perished. It is said that the news of this calamity, threw the whole tribe into mourning. Their remarkable size, their courage, and their superior intelligence, gave them immense influence, which, greatly to their credit, was generally exerted on the side of humanity. Their powerful interposition, had saved many prisoners from the stake, and had given a milder character to the warfare of the Indians in that part of the country. A chief of the same name was alive in that part of the country so late as 1792, but whether a brother or son of Big Foot, is not known. Adam Poe recovered of his wounds, and lived many years after his memorable conflict; but never forgot the tremendous “hug” which he sustained in the arms of Big Foot.