

= Kechewaishke =

Chief Buffalo (Ojibwe : Ke @-@ che @-@ waish @-@ ke / Gichi @-@ weshkiinh ? " Great @-@ renewer " or Peezhickee / Bizhiki ? " Buffalo " ; also French , Le Boeuf) (1759 ? ? September 7 , 1855) was a major Ojibwa leader born at La Pointe in the Apostle Islands group of Lake Superior , in what is now northern Wisconsin , USA .

Recognized as the principal chief of the Lake Superior Chippewa (Ojibwa) for nearly a half @-@ century until his death in 1855 , he led his nation into a treaty relationship with the United States Government . He signed treaties in 1825 , 1826 , 1837 , 1842 , 1847 , and 1854 . He was instrumental in resisting the efforts of the United States to remove the Chippewa to western areas and secured permanent Indian reservations for his people near Lake Superior .

= = Background = =

= = = Political structure of the Lake Superior Ojibwa = = =

Kechewaishke was born around the year 1759 at La Pointe on Madeline Island (Mooningwanekaaning) in the Shagawamikong region . Now part of Wisconsin , La Pointe was a key Ojibwa village and trading center for the empire of New France , which was engaged in the Seven Years ' War with Great Britain at the time of Kechewaishke 's birth . Throughout the 18th century , the Ojibwa spread out from La Pointe into lands conquered from the Dakota people , and settled several village sites . These bands in the western Lake Superior and Mississippi River regions regarded La Pointe as their " ancient capital " and center for spirituality . It had also become a center of trade .

Traditional Ojibwa government and society centers around kinship clans , each of which was symbolized by animal doodem . Each doodem had a traditional responsibility within the tribe . Kechewaishke , or Buffalo as he was known to Europeans , belonged to the Loon clan .

The Loon Clan were said to have been rising in prominence in the middle of the 18th @-@ century due to the efforts of his grandfather Andagweos (Ojibwe : Aandegwiiyaas , " Crow 's Meat ") . Andagweos was born in the Shagawamikong region , son to a man described as " a Canadian Indian " (i.e. a Saulteaux from Sault Ste . Marie , a key Ojibwa village at the eastern end of Lake Superior) . At the time of first French contact in the mid @-@ 17th century , men of the Crane doodem held the positions of hereditary peace chiefs of Chippewa communities at both Sault Ste . Marie and La Pointe . Andagweos was a skilled orator and favorite of the French officials and voyageurs . In that period , leaders of the Cranes were concerned more with internal matters . By the 19th century , it was Buffalo 's clan the Loons , rather than the Cranes , who were recognized as principal chiefs at La Pointe .

Although the Loons were afforded respect as principal peace chiefs , this status was not permanent . The Cranes , led in Buffalo 's time by his sub @-@ chief Tagwagane , maintained that they were the hereditary chiefs . They said the Loons ' status as spokesmen hinged upon recognition by the Cranes . A chief 's power in Ojibwa society was based on persuasion and consensus ; it was contingent , holding only as long as the community of elders , including the women , chose to respect and follow the chief 's lead .

= = = Personal life = = =

Sources conflict as to the identity of Buffalo 's father , who may also have been named Andagweos . He appears to have been a descendant or relative of the famous war chief Waubojeg . When he was about 10 , Buffalo and his parents moved from La Pointe to the vicinity of what now is Buffalo , New York , and lived there until about he was about 12 . The family then relocated to the Mackinac Island area for a while before returning to La Pointe . In his youth , he was admired as a skilled hunter and athlete .

Like many Anishinaabe people , Buffalo was known by more than one Ojibwe name : Peshickee (Bizhiki : " the Buffalo ") , and Kechewaishke (Gichi @-@ weshkiinh : " the Great @-@ renewer ") . This has caused confusion in records of his life not only because he carried two names , but also because both names were very similar to those of other prominent contemporaries . Bizhiki was the name of a chief from the St. Croix Band , and also of a warrior of the Pillager Chippewa Band (see Beshekee) . Additionally , a leading individual of the Caribou doodem , and a son of Waubojeeg , in the Sault Ste . Marie area was known by the name of Waishikey (Weshki) . Scholars have mistakenly attributed aspects of the lives of all three of these individuals to Buffalo of La Pointe .

In his long life , Buffalo had five wives and numerous children , many of whom became prominent Ojibwa leaders in the reservation era . He practiced the Midewiwin religion . He converted to Roman Catholicism on his death bed .

= = = Views on international relations = = =

Details on Buffalo 's early life are sparse . Although he appears to have been favored by British traders and decorated by British authorities , few Ojibwa from Lake Superior fought in either the American Revolution or the War of 1812 . There is no record of Buffalo participating .

When Tecumseh 's War broke out , Buffalo and a number of other young warriors from the La Pointe area abandoned the Midewiwin for a time to follow the teachings of the Shawnee prophet Tenskwatawa . While en route to Prophetstown to join the attack on the Americans , they were stopped by Michel Cadotte , the respected Métis fur trader from La Pointe . Cadotte convinced Buffalo and the others that it would be fruitless to fight the Americans .

After that incident , Buffalo is recorded as using only peaceful tactics in his relations with the United States , though he often opposed US Indian policy . He also drew a contrast between himself and his contemporaries Aysh @-@ ke @-@ bah @-@ ke @-@ ko @-@ zhay and Hole in the Day , two Ojibwa chiefs from present @-@ day Minnesota , who carried out a long war against the Dakota Sioux people . Although Armstrong records Buffalo winning a large victory over the Dakota in the 1842 Battle of the Brule , 20th @-@ century historians have cast doubt on his account . That year Buffalo was recorded as saying he " never took a scalp in his life , though he had taken prisoners whom he fed and well @-@ treated . " Overall , he seems to have supported efforts at peace between the Ojibwa and Dakota .

Buffalo inherited not only the status afforded his family , but also had skills praised in his grandfather Andaigweos . Noted for his abilities in hunting and battle , it was through his speaking abilities that Buffalo was recognized as chief by his people . By the time the Ojibwa of Wisconsin and Minnesota started treaty negotiations with the US Government , Buffalo was recognized as one of the primary spokesmen for all the bands , not just for the Ojibwa from La Pointe .

= = Treaties of 1825 and 1826 = =

In 1825 , Buffalo was one of forty @-@ one Ojibwa leaders to sign the Treaty of Prairie du Chien , his name recorded as " Gitspee Waishkee " or La Boeuf . He is listed third after Shingabawossin , who was recognized as head of the Crane doodem at Sault Ste . Marie , and therefore of the whole Ojibwa nation ; and chief " Gitspee Jiuaba " . The treaty , which the US Government advanced as a pretext to end hostilities between the Dakota and their neighbors , required all American Indian tribes and bands in and around Wisconsin and Iowa to delineate where their territories began and ended . Although the treaty did not state this goal , the US used information acquired to negotiate to gain Indian lands and remove the nations westward .

A year later , the Treaty of Fond du Lac was signed at a meeting at the western edge of Lake Superior . The signatories were listed by band , and Buffalo , recorded as Peezhickee , signed as the first chief from La Pointe . The treaty , mainly dealing with mineral rights for Ojibwa lands in what is now Michigan , had little immediate effect but foreshadowed future treaties . Buffalo did not speak on the copper issue . He praised the US officials for their ability to keep their young people under their control ; he asked for whiskey to accomplish the same ends among the younger members of

his band . When the agent presented him with a silver medal as a symbol of his chieftainship , he explained that his power stemmed from his clan and reputation , and not from anything received from the U.S. Government .

Shortly after the treaties , Henry Rowe Schoolcraft , acting in his capacity as US Indian agent , visited La Pointe . He reprimanded Buffalo for not stopping the continuing sporadic warfare between the Ojibwa and Dakota . Buffalo replied that he was unable to stop the young men of Lac Courte Oreilles , St. Croix , Lac du Flambeau or other bands beyond La Pointe from going against the Dakota . Historians take this to mean that while he was regarded as the head spokesman of the Ojibwa in Wisconsin , he could not control the day @-@ to @-@ day affairs of all the bands , which were highly decentralized , particularly about warfare . Buffalo also said that , unlike the British before the War of 1812 , the U.S. Government had not done enough to help maintain the peace among the tribes .

= = Treaties of 1837 and 1842 = =

In the next decades , there was pressure from Americans who wanted to exploit the mineral and timber resources of Ojibwa country , and the US government sought to acquire control of the territory through treaties . The Treaties of 1837 and 1842 covered La Pointe and territories held by other bands over which Buffalo held considerable influence . In both treaties , Americans recognized Buffalo 's position as the principal chief of all the Lake Superior Chippewa .

= = = " Pine Tree " Treaty = = =

In the Treaty of St. Peters (1837) , the government sought the pine timber resources on Ojibwa lands . They intended to float the harvested timber southwest into the Mississippi River . The negotiations took place at Fort Snelling , near present @-@ day Minneapolis . The delegations from Minnesota and the St. Croix area arrived first and began discussions on July 20 . The assembled chiefs awaited the judgment of Buffalo before deciding to approve the treaty . Despite the impatience of the territorial governor , Henry Dodge , the negotiations were delayed for five days as the assembled bands waited for Buffalo to arrive . While other chiefs spoke about the terms of mineral rights and annuity amounts , Buffalo discussed treatment of the mixed @-@ blood traders , stating :

I am an Indian and do not know the value of money , but the half @-@ breeds do , for which reason we wish you pay them their share in money . You have good judgment in what you do , and if you do not act yourself , you will appoint someone else to divide it between the half breeds I have good reasons for saying to you what I have just said ; for at a certain Treaty held heretofore , there were some who got rich while others received nothing .

Once the terms were agreed to , Buffalo marked and was recorded as Pe @-@ zhe @-@ ke , head of the La Pointe delegation . Although Buffalo and the other Lake Superior chiefs signed , they were said to be relatively silent compared with the Mississippi Chippewa chiefs during the negotiations . Historian Satz says this symbolized disagreement rather than acceptance of the terms of the treaty . Lyman Warren , a trader and interpreter from La Pointe , later complained that the Pillagers (bands from present @-@ day Minnesota) had been bribed into selling the lands rightfully belonging to the Wisconsin bands .

Buffalo expressed his misgivings over the treaty negotiations in a letter to Dodge stating ,

" The Indians acted like children ; they tried to cheat each other and got cheated themselves . When it comes my turn to sell my land , I do not think I shall give it up as they did . " Regarding possible future land cessions , he said : " Father I speak for my people , not for myself . I am an old man . My fire is almost out ? there is but little smoke . When I sit in my wigwam & smoke my pipe , I think of what has past and what is to come , and it makes my heart shake . When business comes before us , we will try and act like Chiefs . If any thing is to be done , it had better be done straight . "

= = = " Copper " Treaty = = =

Five years later , Buffalo was presented with the Treaty of La Pointe covering his lands . Acting Superintendent of Indian Affairs Henry Stuart , who was promoting development of the Lake Superior copper industry , led the negotiations for the US government . No record of the negotiations was made . But materials written by missionaries , traders , and the Ojibwa through their agent indicated that Stuart used bullying and outright deception to force the Ojibwa to accept the terms .

Buffalo signed and was recorded as Gichi waishkey , 1st chief of La Pointe . Writing in 1855 , Morse describes Buffalo 's " voice so potent at the treaty of ' 42 . " However , three months after the treaty , Buffalo dictated a letter to the government in Washington D.C. , saying he was " ashamed " of the way the treaty was conducted . He said that Stuart had refused to listen to any objections by the Ojibwa , and that Buffalo wanted to add a provision to ensure permanent reservations for the Ojibwe in Wisconsin .

The interpretation of the 1837 and 1842 treaties remains ambiguous , as the US government claimed the Ojibwa ceded title to the lands , and the Ojibwa claiming they ceded only resource rights . The government had stated that the lands of the Ojibwa were unsuitable for farming and white settlement . The Ojibwa did obtain annuity payments to be paid each year at La Pointe , and reserved the right to hunt , fish , gather , and move across any lands outlined in the treaties . They obtained the promise that the nation would not be removed across the Mississippi River , unless they somehow " misbehaved . "

= = Threats of removal = =

In 1830 , President Andrew Jackson had signed the Indian Removal Act , which authorized the government to remove any Indian nations east of the Mississippi River across to the western side and offer land in exchange . As northern Wisconsin was not then under pressure for development by white settlers , as occurred in the Southeast , the Ojibwa were not among the first targets of the act . They watched closely as the government used the territorial claims defined by tribes in 1825 to force numerous tribes in Indiana , southern Michigan and southern Wisconsin to move west to Kansas , Iowa , Minnesota , and Indian Territory , present @-@ day Oklahoma . These included the Odawa and Potawatomi , two Anishinaabe tribes closely related to and allied with the Ojibwa .

In 1848 , Wisconsin achieved statehood ; Indian nations were under increased pressure for removal and marginalization . Corrupt US Indian agents controlled annuity payments , sometimes underpaying tribes , and took authority not granted them by the bands . They allowed white settlers to move onto Ojibwa lands and refused the Ojibwe the rights reserved by treaties . The Ojibwa complained to the President about the mistreatment and broken promises , but politicians were more apt to listen to western land speculators , who saw possibilities for profit in removing the Ojibwa to Minnesota .

Even with the treaties of 1837 and 1842 , leaders worried about Ojibwa removal . Buffalo kept in constant contact with the other bands to ensure the Ojibwa upheld their obligations . He sent runners to all the bands to report back on any conduct by the Ojibwa that could construed as grounds for removal . Nothing was reported . But , President Zachary Taylor signed the removal order on February 6 , 1850 , under corrupt circumstances , claiming to be protecting the Ojibwa from " injurious " whites . The Wisconsin legislature resisted the order and put aside plans for removal . Alexander Ramsey , the territorial governor of Minnesota , and Indian sub @-@ agent John Watrous conspired on a plan to force the Ojibwa to Minnesota anyway , as the two men stood to gain personal economic and political benefits from removal .

= = Sandy Lake Tragedy = =

To force the Ojibwa to comply , the subagent Watrous announced he would pay future annuities only at Sandy Lake , Minnesota instead of La Pointe , where they had been paid previously . This

change resulted in the Sandy Lake Tragedy , when hundreds of Ojibwas starved or died of exposure in Minnesota and on the journey home because the promised annuity supplies were late , contaminated or inadequate .

In a later letter , Buffalo described the conditions :

And when a message was sent to me by our Indian agent to come and get our pay , I lost no time in arising & complying with my Agents voice and when I reached my point of destination , verily my Agent fed me with very bad flour it resembled green clay . Soon I became sick and many of my fellow chippewas also were taken sick , and soon the results were manifested by the death of over two hundred persons of my tribe , for this calamity , I laid blame to the provisions issued to us ...

Back in La Pointe , Buffalo took several actions to forestall and prevent removal . He and other leaders petitioned the US government for the next two years to no avail . They did win considerable sympathy from whites who learned of the debacle in Sandy Lake . Newspapers throughout the Lake Superior region ran editorials condemning the removal effort . Buffalo sent two of his sons to St. Paul , the state capital , where they obtained a portion of the annuities still owed .

Ramsey and Watrous continued to work to remove the Ojibwa to Sandy Lake . Watrous said they considered Sandy Lake a " graveyard , " but he still tried to move all the bands to Fond du Lac . Young Ojibwa men in Wisconsin were outraged at these developments and the threat of violent revolt grew . Buffalo called on the services of his well @-@ spoken sub @-@ chief Oshoga , and son @-@ in @-@ law Benjamin Armstrong , a literate white interpreter married to Buffalo 's daughter . He drew up a petition that the 92 @-@ year @-@ old Buffalo would personally deliver to the president in Washington .

= = Trip to Washington = =

After spring thaw in 1852 , the elderly Buffalo , Oshoga , Armstrong , and four others set out from La Pointe for Washington , D.C. by birch bark canoe . Along the way , they stopped in towns and mining camps along the Michigan shore of Lake Superior , securing hundreds of signatures in support of their cause . At Sault Ste . Marie , they were held by the US Indian agent , who told them that no unauthorized Ojibwa delegations could go to Washington and they had to turn back . The men pleaded the urgency of their case and traveled to Detroit by steamship . There another Indian agent tried to stop them . Once allowed to proceed , they sailed to Buffalo , New York and then on to Albany and New York City .

In New York City , the Ojibwe attracted attention , gaining publicity and money for their cause . In Washington , however , they were turned away by Indian Affairs , and told they should never have come in the first place . Luckily , they drew the attention of the Whig Congressman Briggs from New York , who was scheduled a meeting with President Millard Fillmore the next day . At the meeting , Buffalo rose first . He performed the pipe ceremony with a pipe made especially for the occasion . He had the younger chief Oshoga speak for more than an hour about the broken treaty promises and the disastrous attempt at removal . Fillmore agreed to consider the issues . The next day , he announced that the removal order would be canceled , annuity payments would be made at La Pointe , and another treaty would set up permanent reservations for the Ojibwe in Wisconsin .

The delegation traveled back to Wisconsin by rail , spreading the good news to the various Ojibwa bands as they went . Buffalo also announced that all the tribal representatives should gather at La Pointe for payments the next summer (1853) , and he would reveal the specifics of the agreement .

= = 1854 Treaty and Buffalo estate = =

As promised by Fillmore , treaty commissioners arrived in La Pointe in 1854 to conclude a final treaty . Recalling the experiences of 1837 and 1842 , the Ojibwa leaders sought to control the negotiations in 1854 . Ambiguity in those treaties had been partially to blame for ensuing problems , so Buffalo insisted he would accept no interpreter other than Armstrong , whom he referred to as his adopted son . The Ojibwa insisted on a guarantee of the right to hunt , fish , and gather on all the

ceded territory , and on the establishment on several reservations across western Upper Michigan , northern Wisconsin , and northeastern Minnesota. in his mid @-@ nineties and in failing health , Buffalo directed the negotiations but left most of the speaking to other chiefs . He entrusted Armstrong with taking care of the details in the written version .

The reservations in Wisconsin were named the Lac Courte Oreilles Indian Reservation , Lac du Flambeau Indian Reservation . The La Pointe Band was given a reservation at Bad River around the Band 's traditional wild ricing grounds , and some reserved land for fishing grounds at the eastern tip of Madeline Island . In Minnesota , the reservations for the Fond du Lac and the Grand Portage bands were established , with pending negotiations promised for the Bois Forte Band . In Michigan , reservations for the Lac Vieux Desert , Ontonagon and L 'Anse bands were established . The St. Croix and Sokaogon bands left the negotiations in protest and were excluded from the agreement .

A small tract of land was also set aside for Chief Buffalo and his family at Buffalo Bay on the mainland across from Madeline Island at a place called Miskwaabikong (red rocks or cliffs) . Many of the Catholic and mixed @-@ blooded members of the La Pointe Band elected to settle there around their chief rather than at Bad River . In 1855 , this settlement at the " Buffalo Estate " was acknowledged ; it was extended by executive order into what is now called the Red Cliff Indian Reservation .

= = Death and legacy = =

Chief Buffalo was too ill to participate in the speeches at the time of the annuity payments in summer 1855 . Tensions continued , as the Ojibwe accused US officials of corruption , threats of violence were made by members of the American Fur Company , and infighting erupted among the Ojibwa bands . Morse records that these conflicts worsened Buffalo 's condition . He died of heart disease on September 7 , 1855 , at La Pointe . Members of his band blamed his death on the conduct of the government officials .

He was described as " head and the chief of the Chippewa Nation " and a man respected " for his rare integrity , wisdom in council , power as an orator , and magnanimity as a warrior . " In his final hours he requested that his tobacco pouch and pipe be carried to Washington , D.C. and given to the government . His funeral was conducted in military fashion , with volleys fired at intervals in his honor .

Great Chief Buffalo is regarded a hero of the Lake Superior Ojibwe . Those at Red Cliff also remember him as a founding figure of the community . His life is celebrated during commemorations of the treaty signings and the Sandy Lake Tragedy . Missionary Edmund Ely identified Ojibwe chief John Little Wolf , or Maiingans , as one of Buffalo 's sons . He is buried in the La Pointe Indian Cemetery , near the deep , cold waters of Ojibwe Gichigami (Lake Superior) , the " great freshwater @-@ sea of the Ojibwa " . His descendants , many going by the surname " Buffalo , " are widespread in Red Cliff and Bad River . During the series of late 20th @-@ century treaty conflicts that have been called the Wisconsin Walleye War , beginning in 1983 , his name was frequently invoked as one who refused to give up his homeland and tribal sovereignty .