



CHIEF IRON TAIL of the SIOUX



Iron Tail-Head on the Buffalo Nickel

Iron Tail was Buffalo Bill's best friend. More than once Col. Cody said to the writer: "He is the finest man I know---bar none." The great showman was acquainted with most prominent people in the United States and it included kings, queens and statesmen of England and France, It is when we try to comprehend that wide range of social and business contact with the leading people of the world, that we may measure the judgment and deep feeling that the famed scout had for one red man who wore an eagle's quill instead of a crown. Knowing both well, for many years, the writer can freely confirm the Colonel's remarks about the Sioux chief.,

Twenty-seven years ago, the writer gave a "reception" for him and Flying Hawk, at the Wigwam, at which there were more than two hundred and fifty guests present to shake their hands and join in a "Dutch Lunch." Among them was the writer's mother, then past 80 and whom Iron Tail had met once some ten years before for a moment only. When he came to see the big crowd that was milling around on the veranda and lawn, he at once recognized her and pointed her out as mother of the host and when she approached to shake his hand he recalled to her the time and place he had met her. This is mentioned to illustrate what a clear mind he had and how observant of everything passing every day. Note worth because he was meeting people, just as Cody was meeting them by the hundreds every day in every part of the United States and in Europe.

But when the Chief was finished with greeting the long line of judges, bankers, lawyers, business men and neighbors who filed past in a receiving line just as the President is obliged to receive and shake the hands of multitude of strangers who call on New Years, the chief grasped hold of the fine buffalo robe which had been thrown over a porch bench for him to rest on and drawing it around his shoulders, walked out on the lawn and lay down to gaze into the clouds and over the hundred-mile sweep of the hills and valleys forming the Eastern Continental Divide,---in Indian times the eastern boundary of New France, and the forefront of which was the choice trapping region of the French in that period. He had fulfilled his social obligations when he had submitted to an hour of incessant hand-shaking, and as he could talk in English, further crowd mixing did not appeal to him. He preferred to relax and smoke his redstone pipe and wait his call to the big dining room. There he re-appeared in the place of honor and partook of the good things in the best of grace and gentlemanly deportment. His courteous behavior, here and at all places and occasions when in the company of the writer, was worthy of emulation by the most exalted white man or woman!

About ten years prior to the above mentioned episode, both the chief and Buffalo Bill were guests at the East Long Avenue home of the writer for an evening dinner, along with Monroe McCanles of Wild Bill's time and notoriety, but who escaped from the affray in which his father Dave McCanles and two of his employees, at the Rock Creek station of the Overland Stage line in Southern Nebraska in 1861, he had known only of the lurid tales of it then published in the New York papers. It was from Monroe, the son who was present and witnessed the whole affair and was, himself a party along with his father, of those attacked,---that Colonel Cody first got the details of the murderous and wholly uncalled for onslaught by Hickok and his pals. He listened attentively to McCanles' story of just what actually took place, and said he was going to correct U.S. History by incorporating these facts in his new book, but unfortunately he never did get out this proposed new autobiography. But the writer had McCanles dictate the entire story, from which some years later he prepared an article which was published in Forest & Stream magazine. This stirred up such interest that the Historical Society of Nebraska collected all the data from old files and court records, all in complete verification of McCanles' account. The material was of such historic importance, that the State Society published a special volume

devoted wholly to this much misrepresented for sixty years, notorious wild west lie, started by an irresponsible reporter for sensational-hungry eastern newspapers. That number of a state official publication set at rest for all time the ridiculous story of Wild Bill's single-handed killing of ten notorious outlaws known as the McCandless Gang of horse thieves. The truth is, that Hickok, coward that he was, while hidden behind a curtain separating the two sections of the log cabin, took from the wall a carbine belonging to McCanles, and when McCanles came into the door to talk with Welman, to whom he had rented the cabin and owed the rent for it to McCanles, Hickok leveled the carbine and shot McCanles in cold blood as he stood in the doorway; then calling Welman to his aid, they ran out and shot the two men who had come with McCanles, unarmed and on a peaceful errand; they then attacked the Monroe boy as he stood beside his father's corpse, but he was active and fleet-footed; and escaped. He ran several miles to his home, to tell his mother of the unholy experience he had been through. Thus in DuBois, was debunked, one of the most persistent wild west tales ever invented. Hickok later got the same kind of treatment when McCall stepped up behind him while standing at the bar of a saloon in Deadwood, and put a bullet through his head.

Sinta-Muzza was the chief's tribal name. Asked why the white people called him Iron Tail, he said that when he was a babe his mother saw a band of warriors chasing a herd of buffalo, in one of their periodic grand hunts, their tails standing upright as if shafts of steel, and she thereafter called his name Sinta Muzza as something new and novel.

Iron Tail was not a war chief and had no remarkable record as a fighter; he was not a "medicine" man or conjurer, but a wise counselor and diplomat---always dignified, quiet and never given to boasting and seldom made a speech; cared nothing for gaudy regalia---very like the famed War Chief Crazy Horse in this respect and he always had a smile, was fond of children, horses and his friends.,

Col. Cody once told the writer that every fall he and Iron Tail went for a two weeks' hunt for elk and bighorn---just the two---and would camp together, depending on the game they killed for their food supply; said it was only real vacation he could find and the only one he could enjoy.

When Col. Cody took his Wild West Show to Europe on his second trip---this time to France (1889) he took Iron Tail with him and, as in England, he was feted by the aristocracy of Paris and so was Iron Tail. Many years later in the 1920's a friend of the writer former Administrator of the French African Colonies--sent to the writer a newly published copy of a work on The American Indians, the front cover of which bore Iron Tail's portrait in color. He of course did not know Iron Tail, nor did he even suspect that the book was to fall into the hands of one of the Chief's best and most intimate friends, but was thrilled when he received the acknowledgement and thanks for the book and told that though then dead, Iron Tail was during his life, Buffalo Bill's best friend---and the most popular Indian in the United States. To Honor him by placing his portrait on so important a work proves that he was the most popular in France also.

It was when The Wild West Show was exhibiting in Philadelphia in early 1917, that Iron Tail was placed in St. Luke's Hospital with a severe case of pneumonia. Col. Cody was obliged to go on with his show next day to Baltimore and the Chief was left alone in a strange city with doctors and nurses who could not talk with him, and to whom he could not make his wants known; it was terrifying to him; he wanted to go home,---to be with his wife who could understand, and make him well again. That morning Philadelphia paper contained a dozen-line item about his admittance to the hospital, on reading which, the writer immediately sent a telegram to Colonel Cody at Philadelphia, to send Iron Tail by next train to DuBois, where the writer would see to his proper treatment to recovery. No reply was had---the wire had not been delivered, nor was it forwarded to Baltimore as it should have been; instead, the hospital authorities put the old chief on a Pullman, ticketed for home, in the Black Hills country of South Dakota. When the porter of his car went to his berth to wake him, at South Bend, the great chief was a corpse, his body continuing on to its destination---the sand hills.

It was the last year for Colonel Cody too---the two great men and great friends passed on together---as they had so long lived together! As the season was about to close, the last one for the famous show, the writer went to see the Colonel at his last stand. The old showman was frail---he had just completed the Grand Entrance act in the arena; was lying on his saddle in a weakened condition, exhausted from a prancing white horse ride around the big enclosed exhibition grounds; he was grey and stooped, hardly recognized his caller at first, then shook hands without rising.

The old Colonel expressed deep feeling about the death of Iron Tail, and when I asked why he did not reply to the telegram when the Chief was in the hospital, he said he had not known of any wire; had not received any. He censured himself for letting the sick chief be taken to the hospital at all, knowing that he would be helpless among strangers, helpless and hopeless. If he had only got the wire, and sent the old man to the Wigwam, he said he would be alive yet; that it was a grave mistake in the hospital to send him off alone as was done. He spoke of the burial, and that he was going to erect a granite marker with the replica of the five cent coin on it at his grave. Somewhat rested, the writer assisted him to rise and walked with him to his private car. Not long after, they carried him to his tomb on the high Rockies.

The best photograph of Iron Tail ever made, hangs in the Wigwam. Once when Colonel Cody was looking over the many relics with which the walls of the Wigwam were decorated, he took from his wallet his most recent photo, autographed it and asked that it be hung alongside of that of the chief; there they hang, and have hung for more than thirty years, the daily reminder of two old time friends.



Chief Iron Tail & "Tonk" McCreight - c. 1911-12

Major I. McCreight, Jr. was adopted into the Sioux tribe and named Tchantan Tanka (Great Heart) which evolved into "Tonk" as his nickname. He was presented a beautiful beaded vest, which about 94 years later, is held in front of his great grandson, Jordan McCreight. In the color photo, Jordan stands in front of his father, Jeffery C. McCreight, who in turn sits beside his father, John C. McCreight.