

MAJOR ISRAEL MCCREIGHT

Who was he?
What were his accomplishments?
Where did it all begin?

For me, it began in the mid-fifties when I first met M.I. and his wife, Alice, at their famous house, known as the "Wigwam". An older brother of one of my friends asked us if we wanted to help him do some yard work for an elderly couple that lived atop the hill behind the well-known "Pimlacle". It was a chance to make some money for the Saturday Movie Matinee (only 13 cents at the time).

When we arrived at the Wigwam early Saturday morning, my friend's brother told us to wait at the foot of the steps, while he knocked on the door.

Soon, an elderly lady opened the door and the older brother told her that we were there to help do the yard work. She smiled and told us to come up on the porch and sit while she went to get her husband. In short time, M.I. came out the door, smoking his pipe and began to tell us what jobs he wanted us to do. If we did a good job, he would pay us each 50 cents and there was a chance he would let us come in to the house to see all the Indian artifacts he had collected over the years. We agreed to his offer and to tell the truth, the money was the top priority for all of us. We didn't have a clue as to what

M.I. was all business, while Alice sat in the rocking chair with a big warm smile on her face. It was the beginning of a memorable day in the life of a young boy.

- .. Major Israel McCreight - born near Soldier, Jefferson County, April 22, 1865. Died, October 13, 1958 at the age of 93 .
- ... At age 16, he asked his father if he could attend college at Eastman in Poughkeepsie, NY, 1882 - cost \$110.00. He completed school in just four months .
- ... After graduation, he came back to Reynoldsville to work at the Fuller Store for \$20.00 per month. In the evenings he helped out at the local bank.

- ~∴. After two years of this, he had a strong desire to see the West (1885).
Although it was tough to leave his girlfriend (little Alice Humpfrey), she was still in school.
- ∴. He traveled by train to the Dakota's and worked at different jobs (selling meat and bones and having the opportunity to meet some of the legends of the West) .
- . He helped shovel the first dirt to lay the first tie in the Great Northern Railroad.
- . But after two years, he had the urge to go back home and see the girl he left behind. He was 21 years old .
- . On July 20, 1887, they were to be married and, it just so happened that Buffalo Bill was in town with his Wild West Show and he was an invited guest.
- ∴. In ~8, the first of seven children was born and the following month was the "great fire of DuBois". It destroyed the town. He had just started the new Deposit Bank. He ended up managing the bank for 50 plus years .
- . At this time, coal was king and Major purchased thousands of acres, mostly on behalf of the railroads. He became a wheeler/dealer and was responsible for bringing the Erie Railroad to the region .
- . In June of 1908, Buffalo Bill came back to DuBois with his Wild West Show. He had with him 150 Indians, including 4 chiefs of the Sioux tribe. Buffalo Bill, Chief Iron Tail (U.S. nickel), and Monroe McCaudles were Major's guests. Monroe's father was shot by Wild Bill Lickok. It was during the visit that Major was made a Chief of the tribe. The ceremony was conducted by Iron Tail and was witnessed by M.I.'s wife, Alice, at their home.

∴ Major had a hand in many projects.

- He helped write the conservation policy for Pres. Teddy Roosevelt.
 - He organized the State Conservation Society
 - * He was the originator of Cook Forest State Park
 - School Director for 20 years (12 as President)
 - Owner and builder of the street railway system and the Electric Light Co. (later sold as Penn Elec)
 - Owner and operator of Hotel DuBois
 - Helped establish the car shops
 - ~ Spaded the cornerstone for DuBois Brewery
 - Bought the DuBois Waterworks for the City
 - The principal promoter for the first cross-state concrete road, known as the BuffaloPittsburgh Highway
- But perhaps his greatest accomplishment resulted in saving the virgin timber in Cook's Forest. He spent thousands of his own money over a period of 17 years to save the forest. The Park will stand forever as a monument to his memory .

•. M.L.'s autobiography tells the story of how he became friends with the well known of the time.

- Friends such as Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Luther Burbank, John Wanamaker who was said to be the greatest merchant in America, had their autographed pictures hanging on the walls of the Wigwam.
- Usually the famous speakers who came to town to lecture at the Opera House, such as Gov. Bob Taylor of Tennessee, were later entertained by Mr. McCreight at this home .

•. Chief Flying Hawk of the Sioux nation was M.L's true friend. The great Chief Sitting Bull was Flying Hawk's uncle. Flying Hawk had accepted Major's request to come to his "Wigwam House", one last time before his death. He came by train to tell for the first time, his account of the battle of "Custer's Last Stand" (1876), which he fought in, alongside Crazy Horse .

∴ Flying Hawk brought with him Thunderbull, friend and interpreter. Flying Hawk was 76 when he came to the Wigwam for the last time.

- ∴. After finishing his account of the "Battle of Big Horn", he wanted to smoke from the famous peace pipe that he had given Major.
- ∴. Sitting Bull had ownership of this ceremonial pipe for over 50 years before he had given it to Flying Hawk, who had it another 50 years, before giving it to Major. Most of the great treaties had been made over its smoke.
- ~∴. The Chief was tired, so he asked for a shaggy buffalo robe and some blankets so he could sleep on the open veranda (no white man's mattress and springs for him) .
- . The next day, after an early morning walk in the woods (just on the far side of Wasson Elementary School), Flying Hawk also wanted to give his account of the famous battle of Wounded Knee. According to Flying Hawk, it was a massacre of the Indians by the white soldiers .
- . Chief Flying Hawk died Dec. 24, 1931, at Pine Ridge, South Dakota .
- . Two years before his death, he named Major McCreight his successor.

Summary:

Yes, Mr. McCreight was satisfied with our work, so he invited us to come into the Wigwam to see his collection. However, he wanted us to wash-up first and then Alice would have some fresh lemonade for us to drink before we went into the house.

As we drank the lemonade on the huge veranda, Mr. McCreight told us there were many famous people who sat and slept on the very spots where we were sitting. One that I remember he mentioned was Buffalo Bill Cody (but did he, really)?

Soon, we were ready to enter the Wigwam. We walked into a large room behind M.I. He stopped and said, "I want to show you this first". There were several large trunks and he opened one of them. What a smell! He reached in and pulled out a robe. He said it was an Indian Buffalo Robe that belonged to his friend and Indian Chief, Flying Hawk, Chief of the Sioux nation. I saw he was getting our attention. I can still remember that still.

Next to the tmks were other items, such as Calvary unifonns, with sabers and Indian lances. M.I. usually gave a brief account and background of each item. Our interest continued to mount.

After viewing most of the items in the large room, we moved into a smaller room that was loaded with items. Many of the items were in glass cases under lock and key. Now the eyes were starting to get bigger and bigger. There were all types of weapons, headdresses, peace pipes, and many pictures on the walls. The stories got more interesting, particularly when he brought out the carbine that belonged to the famous Crazy Horse with which he killed General George Custer. He gave us the whole story. Next, he brought out the tribal peace pipe that belonged to Sitting **Bull** and, again, gave us the background story. What a storyteller he was.

Finally, it was time for us to leave». M.I. had some important things to do. He asked if we enjoyed the tour and if we would be interested in helping Alice put in her flower gardens the following week. Maybe he would have time to finish the tour with more background stories.

Yes - we would be there!

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