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# Bad Bird, Indian Chief Early Bird in Kalamazoo

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## Matchebenashewish, First Signer of Greenville Treaty, First Settler Here, Belief.

More than a century has elapsed since the first permanent white settler located on the present site of Kalamazoo. But history remains dim and will probably always be obscure as to who among the early aborigines of North America first made this place his home.

Search for Kalamazoo's "first settler" has led back to the old Chippewa Matchebenashewish, born on Mackinac Island, probably in old chief locality various times made his home here on the banks of the river. But even he was not the first to live here, for trace has been found of a tribe of Miami Indians who were on the site of Kalamazoo, probably before 1703—or more than 234 years ago.

Two men who have made ex-

tensive research in this Indian lore are Edward J. Stevens, engineer, archeologist and historian, and Charles A. Weissert, State editor of The Kalamazoo Gazette, former president of the Michigan Historical Society and author of many articles on early Michigan history. Stevens is now preparing an exhaustive book on Indian place names in Michigan which it is expected will be the future authentic source book for this historical information.

### WINTER HOME HERE

Like many prominent residents of later years, Matchebenashewish maintained a summer home at Mackinac, but made his winter residence on the present site of Kalamazoo, where the trapping and hunting were good.

"This old chief was familiarly known as 'Bad Bird,'" Stevens writes. "He visited the French at the Falls of Montmorency below Quebec prior to 1760 and it is probable that he was present at the massacre of the British at Fort Michillimackinac in 1763. It is known that he was at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in which General Anthony Wayne so decisively defeated the Indians covertly allied under direction of the British. This was in August, 1794.

"After that defeat, Bad Bird, Little Turtle, the Miami, and Tarke and Crane, the Wyandot, were satisfied that it would be useless to prolong the war further and with that aim in view advised the other chiefs that they would accept any overtures for peace that General Wayne might send. When rumors came to the Chippewas announcing that Wayne would like to talk over preliminary peace proposals with a few of the influential Indians, they held a council and Bad Bird was selected to represent the 'Three Fires,' meaning the Chippewa, Pottawatomi and Ottawa tribes.

### ADVOCATE OF PEACE

"In January, 1795, Bad Bird repaired to Greenville, Ohio, for this preliminary meeting. He was one of the foremost advocates of peace and it is credited to him that he did more to bring about a peaceful solution to the problem, than to any other chief. This meeting was probably one of the most important councils ever held with American Indians up to that time. It temporarily halted a war that had continued almost uninterrupted for 18 years. If Bad Bird had been a white man representing a civilized nation, his name would have been carried down to

posterity as a benefactor of the human race. Unfortunately, he was only an Indian, with no one to sing his virtues or to erect a monument over his unknown grave."

Concerning the Miami Indians who earlier lived on the site of Kalamazoo, Stevens has found that this band was allied with those of the same tribe who held Fort St. Joseph near Niles. On one occasion when the Indians here left to join their tribesmen at the fort, they were attacked by Sioux between here and Niles. Many were slain, 100 bodies having been found in a single grave.

In his historical writings, Weissert has paid tribute, too, to the memory of Matchebenashewish, or Bad Bird: At the Council of Greenville, Weissert quotes Bad Bird as having said to General Wayne: "I have heard your words and have received great pleasure from them. I never make long speeches; what I have to say I say in a few words. Look at your warriors and view ours. Does it not give you pleasure to see us all met together in brotherly love?"

Stevens reports that at the termination of the meeting at Greenville, Bad Bird returned to the site of Kalamazoo by way of Fort Wayne. He was accompanied as far as the fort by Pepin, who had a trading post on the Kalamazoo river, and by Baptiste Saincrainte, also a trader, who had recently been engaged by Gen. Wayne as

an interpreter and an assistant to Bad Bird in marshaling the Indians for the conference at Greenville the following spring.

### TRIES TO BREAK INFLUENCE

"The British hearing of Bad Bird's intention to assist in making a peace, sent Alexander McKenzie from Detroit to visit the chief and to endeavor to break up this new influence that had been exerted by General Wayne," Stevens continues. "On his arrival at the trading house of Pepin, McKenzie found Saincrainte there and induced him and Pepin to accompany him to the village of Bad Bird. In a letter to Alexander McKenzie, British Indian commissioner at Detroit, McKenzie said:

"I prevailed on those two to come with me to Kekalamazoo in hopes I might discover the whole of Saincrainte's business in this part of the country. On the 10th we reached Mr. Burrell's house where I met the Indian chief of the Chippewas, called Bad Bird."

"On the night of Feb. 11, 1795 a meeting was held at Burrell's house where Saincrainte after having drunk a little freely, produced the speech he brought from General Wayne to the Indians throughout all this part of the country, which was an invitation to all the chiefs and warriors to meet at Fort Greenville on the 15th of June next, where he hoped to establish a firm and lasting peace."

### CALLED KALAMAZOO HOME

"The council fire at Greenville was lighted June 16, 1795. It was customary to light a fire at the beginning and keep it burning until the completion of the meeting."

Stevens recounts many of the speeches delivered at this memorable Council of Greenville and adds: "The last speech of Bad Bird establishes beyond a doubt the fact that his winter quarters were at Kalamazoo:

"The good work now being completed, we are left without a subject to employ our conversation. You see your children of the Ottawas, Chippewas, and Pottawatomes around you. Those at home will be rejoiced when we inform them that, for the future, they will enjoy the protection of a new father. Our happiness is great in being permitted to address you by that endearing appellative. we have been ignorant of the perpetrators. much, and indignation, will discover to you and wicked disturbers who punishment. I have to license a trader to reside with your children at Ki-ka-na-ma-sung (Kalamazoo) where we shall pass the ensuing winter. I have never been guilty of stealing horse, nor shall I now commence the practice. But as I am an old man, I would ask you for one to carry me home."

### LEADER IN SIGNING TREATY

"During this treaty council, Bird was one of the leading its. He made during the course of the council at least 13 speeches and by his arguments and his ample influenced other chiefs making their decisions to sign treaty.

"Bad Bird probably was at Treaty of Chicago in 1821 though then about 86 years where a reserve was established his name. This was to be 100 miles square and located at village of Matchebenashewish the headwaters of the Kalamazoo river. This does not exactly the subsequent location of the reserve, as it was finally surveyed at the present site of the city Kalamazoo.

"Nothing has been learned of Bad Bird's death or where he was buried. He has won a place in history, however, as a leader of his tribe, a lover of peace, and first signer of the Treaty of Greenville."

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