

A Potawatomi brave at rest

Chief Toponebee the war chief

Chief Toponebee (spelled many ways, and pronounced by a descendant as Toe-pin'-a-bee) means "A Quiet Sitting Bear." He was the great war chief of the Potawatomi tribe in this area for 40 years, and a son of Chief Aniquiba. He was a brother of Chief Chebass.

His village in 1795 was located in the northwest quarter of the southeast quarter of Section 5, Bertrand Township, about two miles west of what is now the City of Niles. It was afterwards known as "Swoptuck."

Chief Toponebee, representing "the Potawatimas of the River St. Joseph" signed the important treaty at Greenville, Ohio on Aug. 3, 1795; one on July 22, 1814, at the same place, and others in 1818 and 1821.

This chief and Potawatomis from the St. Joseph River took part in the famous battle at Tippecanoe, Indiana, and were defeated by General Harrison's force in November, 1811.

He was present at Fort Dearborn after the massacre on Aug. 15, 1812, and aided in saving the lives of several white persons.

Chief Toponebee succumbed to the temptation of liquor, as did many of the Indians. On one occasion in 1821 when he was admonished by General Cass to stay sober and look after the members of his band, he said, "Father, we care not for the land or the money, or the goods; what we want is whiskey, give us whiskey."

Because he did not, or could not, follow the advice given, he met his death when he was under the influence of ardent spirits. McCoy, who was personally acquainted with Toponebee, states positively on July 27, 1826, that about that date Toponebee fell from his horse while under the influence of liquor and died two days afterwards.

Ellis describes him as "very old" in 1821, and as "the aged chief" in 1825. McCoy was living with or near the Indians at that

time and was well acquainted with Toponebee, so it hardly seems possible for him to be mistaken, yet a Toponebee signed at least five treaties after the death of the old chief.

To make it more complicated, Rogers and McDonald make the statement that in 1838 Toponebee was removed to the west with other members of his tribe, and letters in "John Tipton Papers" confirm this.

Hodges writes that Toponebee took up lands at Silver Creek with Leopold Pokagon in 1838 and died there in 1840.

That there was a young Toponebee is proved by his being granted a quarter section of land in the Wabash, Indiana Treaty of 1826. He was also mentioned, among many others, as one who had been a scholar in the Carey Mission School. Reed also writes of him as "Young Toponebet, the acknowledged heir of the chieftainship."

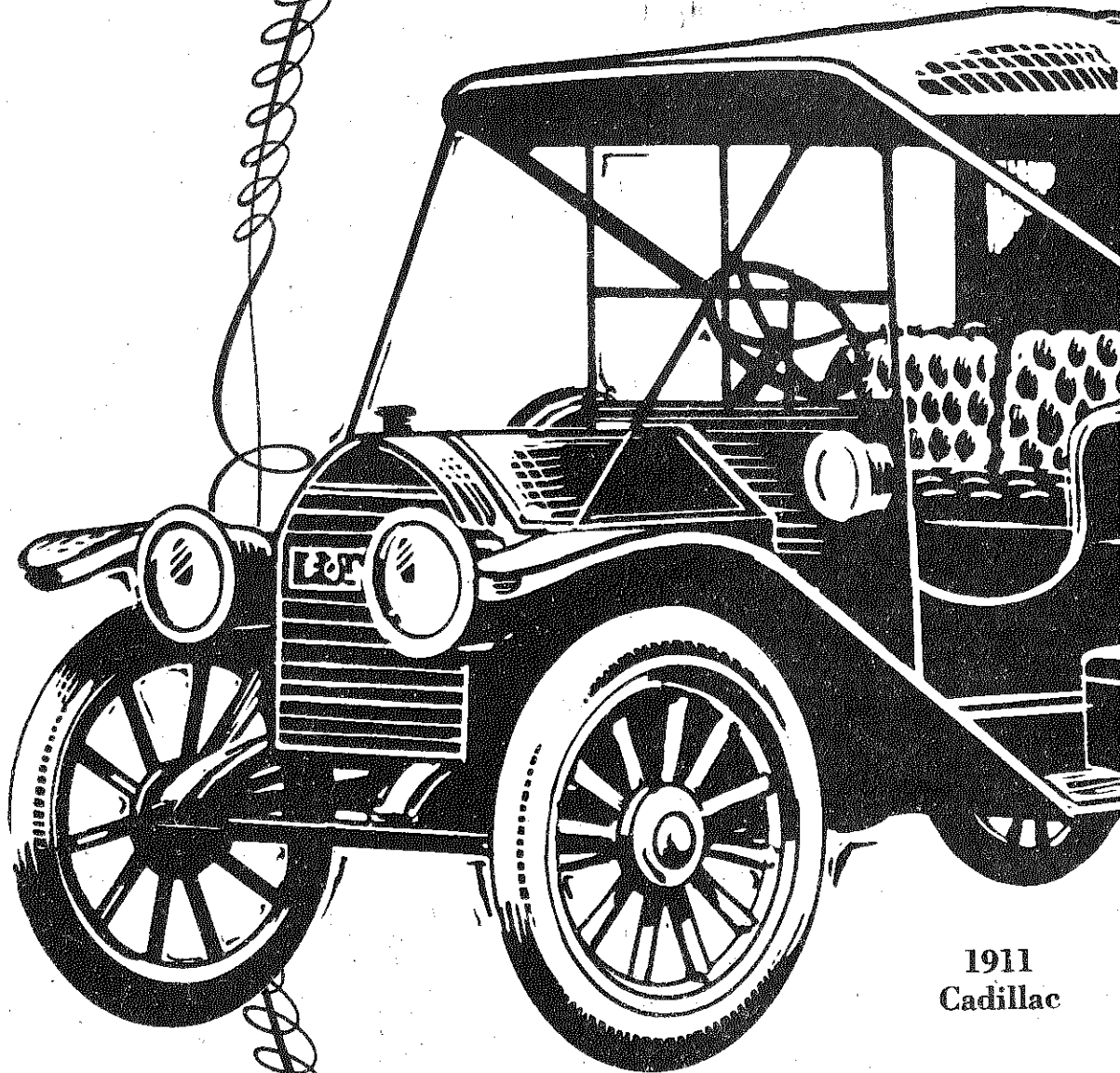
Young Toponebee, son of the old chief, who inherited the position of chief at the death of his father, at the age of 25 years, while in a drunken rage, murdered a popular Indian.

It was the custom among the Indians for a male relative of the murdered man to be given the right to seek retribution and kill the murderer.

On June 11, 1832, a council was held at Carey Mission and young Toponebee looked with resignation at the deadly knives of the relatives of the murdered man. Council in an effort to intercede for Toponebee. Then Father Badin's interpreter, Madam Campeau, who was loved by the Indians, also endeavored to avert his death, finally offering her own life by saying, "Kill me, I stand here to be killed in lieu of Toponebee."

The brother of the murdered man relented and he and his relatives finally agreed to accept gifts instead of the life of Toponebee and both the Indians and whites contributed in order to assist Toponebee in paying the price agreed upon.

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