

April 1818: Potawatomi apprehensive about impending Illinois statehood

by Dr. James F. Paul

Like other Native Americans in the Illinois Territory, the Potawatomi of the Kankakee worried about their fate in the spring of 1818. This was the year that territorial legislators in the capitol at Kaskaskia had set for achieving statehood. In the eight months from April to December 1818, many issues had to be addressed. The legislators' sights were not yet set specifically on the Potawatomi of the Kankakee, but how long would that last?

The Potawatomi way of life and concerns in 1818 will be addressed by Potawatomi descendant and author, Dr. George Godfrey, as he speaks at the Durham-Perry Farmstead open house on Saturday, May 5, 2018 at 11 a.m. The Farmstead is located at the Bourbonnais Township Park District Perry Farm, 459 N. Kennedy Dr., Bourbonnais.

Dr. Godfrey is a Citizen Potawatomi and descendant of Watcheke and Shabonna, local princess (based on her kindness) and chief respectively. He taught biology and ecology at the Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, KS. He also served as Haskell's vice-president of academic affairs and, later, as a National Program Leader in the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Godfrey worked with 31 Tribal Colleges and Universities to improve their science and research departments. He has also served as president of the Potawatomi Trail of Death Association.

At the Durham-Perry Farmstead Open House, Dr. Godfrey will offer signed copies of his books **The Indian Marble** (fictional history novel based on the life of Jean Baptiste Bergeron—Citizen Potawatomi and son of Watcheke and Francis Bergeron), **Watcheke (Overseer) Walking in Two Cultures** and **Once a Grass Widow: Watcheke's Destiny**.

Nine years before Illinois statehood, the Illinois Territory was formed on April 28, 1809 out of the 1787 Northwest Ordinance's westernmost lands. The territory consisted of today's Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota's east bank of the Mississippi River. President James Madison appointed the Kentuckian aristocratic lawyer, livestock farmer and slave owner, Ninian Wirt Edwards, Sr. (his son's wife, Elizabeth Porter Todd, was Abraham Lincoln's sister-in-law), as the first Illinois Territory governor. The seat of government was in Kaskaskia on the Mississippi River. By 1812, all tax abiding, free white males gained the right to vote. At the first general election in October, Shadrach Bond was sent to the U.S. Congress as the first territorial representative of Illinois; Pierre Menard became president of the Council of Five (one from each county) who assisted the governor; and a six-man House of Representatives was chosen (Howard, 76 and 79).

After the War of 1812, the Native American population of the Illinois Territory remained on the defensive and compelled, more and more every year, to concede white settler ownership of the land. The population centers of the territory were along the rivers with the southern part most densely populated and the northern part—even Chicago—most thinly populated. The population of Chicago, where Jean Baptist Point du Sable (of African descent) and his Potawatomi wife, Kitiwaha, operated a trading post from 1779-1800 and Fort Dearborn was built in 1804, had only a population of 100 in 1830. By late 1818, the population of the territory was estimated at 40,000, the number needed for statehood. However, Robert Howard in **Illinois: A History of the Prairie State** (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), stated that "a federal report said Illinois had 34,620 when it was admitted as a state (pg. 102)."

On Nov. 20, 1817, Daniel Pope Cook, a lawyer who by 1818 became the clerk of the Illinois Territory House of Representatives, editorialized for Illinois statehood in Kaskaskia's *Intelligencer*.

By the end of January, 1818, the Illinois Territorial legislature and governor endorsed an Illinois statehood bill for the U.S. Congress to consider. The bill passed on April 14 and was signed by President James Monroe on April 18, 1818. The next task for the Illinois Territorial legislature was to write a constitution for the proposed state. The main issue to be addressed in the summer of 1818 would be slavery. Native Americans, including the Potawatomi, realized that their constitutional rights would be nonexistent. Indian removal was the sentiment of the time. Some Potawatomi had allied in 1811-12—War of 1812—with Tecumseh, his brother the Prophet and the British when this Native American-British alliance fought against the Indiana and Illinois Territorial military (which promoted white settler advancement into Native American lands). Some Potawatomi had participated in the attack and burning of Fort Dearborn. They had gained the reputation of "known troublemakers" by the Illinois Territory governing officials (Howard, pg. 89).

The Illinois Territory legislature in 1814, according to Howard, "obligated itself to pay fifty dollars [equivalent to \$800 today] for the death of an Indian who entered a settlement with hostile intent. Civilians who had official permission to send an expedition into Indian country could qualify for a one-hundred-dollar [equivalent of \$1,600 today] reward for killing an Indian warrior," (Howard, pg. 93).

With this reputation and reward system, one can understand how the Potawatomi of the Kankakee would be ap-

prehensive about impending Illinois statehood.

The Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting local history.

Monthly meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month, March to December.

Museum hours are 1-4 p.m. first and third Sundays of each month, March to December or by appointment.

Visit bourbonnaishistory.org, [facebook.com/bourbonnaisgrove](https://www.facebook.com/bourbonnaisgrove) or call 1-815-933-6452.

Photograph by Sharon Hoogstraten, Chicago
Dr. George Godfrey, Potawatomi descendant, (right) will speak at the Durham-Perry Farmstead Open House on Saturday, May 5, 2018.



Officer promoted

Herald photo by

Laura McElroy
Bourbonnais police department officer Henry Joseph Bertrand was promoted to sergeant during the village's Monday, April 2, 2018 board meeting. Sgt. Bertrand has been with the department for 13 years. He is a graduate of Herscher High School and Olivet Nazarene University where he earned a bachelor's in law enforcement. He and his wife, Carrie, have two children. Sgt. Bertrand (left) was sworn into the new position by Bourbonnais police chief James Phelps. Sgt. Bertrand was also commended by the department and board in February for his efforts on Dec. 5. On that day, a man collapsed at a local gas station and being the first responder, Sgt. Bertrand utilized an AED to resuscitate the man until the fire department arrived.



and share best practices. LEC makes it fun for youth of all ages to learn about substance abuse prevention at any age, thanks to help from their mascot, Harold the Giraffe. High school students remember Harold as a fond memory of their youth and students recently took to Twitter to share memories of Harold and LEC with the hashtag "rememberwhen".

Pledge for Life

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Brenda Wetzal, director of Life Education Programs, stated, "Work together, collaboration is key. We can't do it alone, we have to do it together."

CADCA sent a film crew to Kankakee County to make a promotional video for the Pledge for Life that debuted at the forum and reached 89,000

individuals. In the video, Pledge for Life Drug-Free Communities coordinator Kate Reed talks about an increase in the abuse of over-the-counter drugs.

Kankakee County serves 113,000 individuals, populated in 677 square miles.

"It's a mosaic of cultures, rural and urban, with unique flavors from the metropolitan area to corn fields," said Reed.

Pledge for Life Partnership touts the importance of partnership through diverse connections, collaboration with sectors, such as law enforcement, schools and parents and hosting forums with community leaders, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored

People.

When asked what advice she would share with fellow coalition members, Reed said, "The importance of celebration—our prevention advocates, they are in the trenches. In Kankakee County, we had 56 overdoses. The people that are our partners, they feel it. Anything we can do to celebrate what others are doing to make a difference and encourage others to follow their examples."

To see the video, visit <http://pledgeforlife.org>. As recipient of the award, Pledge for Life received \$1,500 to assist with their prevention efforts. Jerry Campbell, Drug Free Communities project officer, attended a recent Pledge for Life Partnership board meeting to address members.