

THE PETRIFIED MAN OF BLOOMER

A QUEER CUSTOMER WAS LODGED IN THE GRAND FORKS COUNTY JAIL IN THE SUMMER OF 1896. HE WAS IN JAIL, BUT HE HADN'T BEEN ARRESTED FOR THIEVERY, MURDER, VIOLATION OF WHAT EVER LIQUOR LAWS NORTH DAKOTA MAY HAVE HAD AT THAT TIME, OR FOR ANY OTHER CRIME OR MISDEMEANOR. AS A MATTER OF FACT, HE HADN'T BEEN ARRESTED AT ALL. HE WAS SIMPLY PUT IN A CELL FOR SAFE-KEEPING. HE BELONGED TO SOMEONE, BUT ONLY A COURT COULD DECIDE TO WHOM. HE WAS BOOKED WITHOUT A CHARGE AND WITHOUT A NAME.

THIS SINGULAR INDIVIDUAL WAS THE CELEBRATED PETRIFIED MAN OF MARSHALL COUNTY, MINNESOTA, AND HIS HISTORY WAS ALMOST SENSATIONAL AS THAT OF THE FAMOUS CARDIFF GIANT. HE WAS EXHIBITED ALL OVER THE COUNTRY, BECAME INVOLVED IN LAWSUITS, AND CAUSED ENDLESS DISCUSSION AS TO WHETHER OR NOT HE WAS GENUINE. THE BEST AUTHORITY NOW HAS IT THAT THE MAN WAS MANUFACTURED BY A TALENTED CROOKSTON PLASTERER, IN BLOOMER, MN. ABOUT FIFTEEN MILES NORTHWEST OF WARREN, WAS THE SCENE OF THE "DISCOVERY" OF THE PETRIFIED MAN. AN ACCOUNT OF THE DISCOVERY PUBLISHED IN THE "MINNEAPOLIS JOURNAL" OF JUNE 13, 1896. READ IN PART:

D. M. WILLIAMS OF WARREN AND RICHARD OMAND ON JUNE 8, 1896 FOUND THE BODY OF THE PETRIFIED MAN IN THE TOWN OF BLOOMER. THE MEN WERE ENGAGED IN DIGGING A CULVERT ON THE PUBLIC HIGHWAY. WHEN THEY MADE THE FIND,

ABOUT TWO AND A HALF FEET BELOW THE SURFACE, IN A BED OF ALKALI CLAY. A LARGE NUMBER OF PERSONS LIVING IN THE VICINITY SAW THE BODY EXHUMED AND CAN BEAR WITNESS TO THE GENUINENESS OF THE FIND.

"NATURE HAS A WONDERFUL MANNER PRESERVED THE FORM AND FEATURES OF THIS MAN. IN A FAR MORE PERFECT CONDITION THAN IN ANY EGYPTIAN MUMMY EMBALMED BY THE HANDS OF A MAN. TEETH, FINGER NAILS, MOUSTACHE AND EVEN THE COLOR AND TEXTURE OF THE SKIN SHOW PLAINLY. IT IS A SPLENDID SPECIMEN OF A MAN FIVE FEET, NINE INCHES TALL, MUSCULAR AND WELL PROPORTIONED. A LONG HOLE IN THE CHEST MIGHT INDICATE THAT HE HAD BEEN KILLED, AND THE POSITION OF THE HANDS AND ARMS, THE LEFT RESTING ON THE CHEST AND THE RIGHT STRETCHED OUT ALONG THE SIDE, THE HAND RESTING ON THE THIGH, WOULD SHOW THAT HE HAD RECEIVED A CAREFUL BURIAL.

"AS YET NO ONE WHO HAS SUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE OF ANTHROPOLOGY TO TELL WHAT RACE OR AGE HE BELONGS HAS EXAMINED THE MAN. CERTAIN IT IS FROM MANY PROOFS THAT THE BODY HAS BEEN IN THE GROUND AT LEAST 150 YEARS TO 200 YEARS, AND POSSIBLY FOR A FAR LONGER PERIOD, POSSIBLY THE BODY IS THAT OF A FRENCH VOYAGEUR OR COURIER DU BOIS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY, OR IT MAY

2 THAT OF A MEMBER OF SOME PREHISTORIC RACE, WHOSE RELICS AND TRACES ARE OCCASIONALLY SEEN IN VARIOUS PARTS OF THE STATE, HE CERTAINLY NOT AN INDIAN."

THE GREAT ERROR MADE BY THE CROOKSTON PLASTERER SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN IN THE PERFECTION OF HIS WORK. HE MADE HIS "PETRIFIED MAN" SO WELL THAT IT ULTIMATELY STRAINED THE FAITH OF EVEN THE MOST GULLIBLE. HOWEVER THAT MAY BE, THE UNFORTUNATE RELIC ~~WAS~~ WAS NOT TO HAVE A MOMENT'S PEACE FOR MANY A YEAR, FOR HE WAS MADE THE SUBJECT OF SEVERAL LAWSUITS, AND EVENTUALLY FOUND HIMSELF LODGED IN THE GRAND FORKS COUNTY JAIL AWAITING FINAL DISPOSITION.

FROM THE OUTSET IT WAS CONCEDED THAT THOSE WHO HAD FOUND THE MAN WERE IN NO WAY CONCERNED WITH HAVING PLACED HIM IN THE DITCH; RICHARD OMAND, THE TENANT ON THE FARM, SOLD HIS HALF INTEREST IN THE EXHIBIT TO ONE WILLIAM LEE, AND LEE, WITH D.M. WILLIAMS, THE OTHER DISCOVERER, DISPOSED OF IT TO A PETER BERGO FOR \$175.00. NOT MUCH OF A PRICE FOR A PREHISTORIC MAN. BERGO TOOK HIS PURCHASE TO CROOKSTON, WHERE HE RENTED A STORE BUILDING AND CHARGED ADMISSION TO SEE HIS FREAK, AND THEN DISPOSED OF IT FOR ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS, THEREBY TURNING A HANDSOME PROFIT.

MEANTIME GEORGE H. MCPHERIN, OF MINOT, NO. DAK., THE OWNER OF THE LAND ON WHICH THE BODY HAD BEEN FOUND, APPEARED AND INSTITUTED REPLEVIN PROCEEDINGS TO GET POSSESSION. THE SHERIFF, WHO AT CHARGE OF HIM, WAS SO FEARFUL FOR THE SAFETY OF THE MAN THAT HE STATIONED AN ARMED GUARD OVER HIM NIGHT AND DAY, AND LATER PUT HIM IN THE CROOKSTON JAIL. THE QUESTION WAS WHETHER THE BODY WAS REAL ESTATE OR PERSONAL PROPERTY. THESE DIFFICULTIES WERE AT LAST STRAIGHTENED OUT, BUT ONLY AFTER A BATTLE IN WHICH CONSIDERABLE LEGAL ABILITY WAS CALLED UPON AND PUZZLING QUESTIONS WERE ANSWERED BY AN ERUDITE JUDGE.

THE BODY NEXT CAME INTO THE LIME LIGHT AT GRAND FORKS, WHERE IT HAD PASSED INTO THE POSSESSION OF ANNE MARIE HOLMS, GEORGE MCPHERIN, AND M. GRAHAM. BY THIS TIME IT WAS RECOGNIZED THAT THE THING HAD A GREAT DEAL OF POTENTIAL MONEY-EARNING POWER, SO EVERYONE WHO COULD ESTABLISH ANY SORT OF A CLAIM EMPLOYED A LAWYER AND ASSERTED RIGHTS.

TWO LACOUNT BROTHERS, ANTOINE OF MEDICINE LAKE AND MALVE OF RED LAKE FALLS, NOW ENTERED THE CONTROVERSY. THEY APPEARED AT CROOKSTON, WHERE THEY FILED A COMPLAINT AGAINST THE GRAND FORKS CLAIMANTS, CONTENDING THAT THE BODY WAS THAT OF THEIR FATHER, WHOM THEY HAD BURIED ~~HIM~~ IN A SHALLOW GRAVE AFTER HE WAS KILLED NEAR THE SNAKE RIVER IN MARSHAL COUNTY

FIFTY-EIGHT YEARS BEFORE, THE CROOKSTON PAPER ADMITTED THAT THERE WAS A STRIKING RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN THE PETRIFFED BODY AND THE BROTHERS. TWO OLD SQUAWS VIEWED THE BODY AND IDENTIFIED IT, TO THEIR SATISFACTION, AT ANY RATE, AS THE ELDER LACOUNT. IT WAS SAID THAT OLD LACOUNT, WHO WAS A GUIDE AND HORSE DEALER, LIMPED AND THAT THE BODY HAD ONE LEG SHORTER THAN THE OTHER. ARREST OF THE GRAND FORKS CLAIMANTS WAS ORDERED, AND IT WAS FEARED THAT EXTRADITION PAPERS WOULD HAVE TO BE ISSUED BEFORE THE ARGUMENT WAS SETTLED. THE SHERIFF OF GRAND FORKS TOOK NO CHANCES, BUT KEPT HIS CHARGE IN JAIL BEHIND LOCK AND KEY.

AT JUST ABOUT THAT TIME THE MOULDS IN WHICH THE "PETRIFFED MAN" WAS MANUFACTURED WERE DISCOVERED IN CROOKSTON. THE PLASTERER HAD MADE THE FIGURE WHEN HE HAD NOTHING ELSE TO DO. WHEN IT WAS DISCOVERED THAT IT WAS A HOAX MINNESOTA'S INTEREST IN THE DISCOVERY PRACTICALLY VANISHED. THE BEST AUTHORITY HAS IT THAT IT WAS FINALLY SOLD TO A TRAVELING SHOWMAN WHO EXHIBITED IT IN THOSE PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, WHERE ITS TRUE HISTORY WAS NOT KNOWN.

- THIS STORY IS FOUND IN - 101 BEST STORIES OF MINNESOTA. AUTHOR MERLE POTTER PAGES 15, 16, 17 + 18