

Everybody's All-American *Plenty of hurdles in assessing the real Jim Thorpe*

by Beau Adams (Printed by permission This Land Press)

Roughly five miles outside of Prague, Oklahoma, I make the necessary turn onto Moccasin Trail road and head towards the birthplace of the greatest athlete who has ever lived. Imagining what this land must have looked like a little over 100 years ago when Jim Thorpe was born isn't difficult. I'd guess that it didn't look much different than it does now, save for a few pick-up trucks and a guy in a ditch on a riding lawn mower.

There, just before the road becomes unpaved, is the historical marker chiseled out of what I surmise to be rose quartz. Standing just above head-high, it is dwarfed by the surrounding parcel of land. There is no home on the site, no remnants of a foundation. No old water well or decaying barn—no real evidence that anyone ever lived here except for the marker that insists it is so. This particular marker claims that Thorpe's Sac and Fox name is "Watha Huck," while the one I viewed at the museum in Prague proper only minutes earlier was inscribed "Wa-Tho-Huck," and many other records show as "Wa-Tho-Huk"—all of them offer "Bright Path" as the English translation. This monument seems at best insufficient and at worst, somewhat suspect. Some light sleuthing reveals that there are two Jim Thorpe birthplaces. I am at the one in Pottawatomie County; the one that the Oklahoma Historical Society refers to as "Jim Thorpe Birthplace No. 2."

It is becoming evident that I am chasing a ghost.

"Yeah, that name is bogus," explains Justin Lenhart, museum director of the Jim Thorpe Association at the Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame. "Wheeler completely misinterprets the name. It's not 'Bright Path,'" he says, referring to Robert Wheeler's 1979 biography, *Jim Thorpe: World's Greatest Athlete*.

"The first part of his name is his clan

designation," Lenhart notes. "Thorpe was a member of the thunder clan. Wheeler advanced the theory that Thorpe's mother had a vision of a bright path shortly after his birth and that is where his name came from. But Sac and Fox tribal members do not name their children immediately after birth."

A quick call to Sandra Massey, Historic Preservation Officer for the Sac and Fox Nation, confirms Lenhart's claim. "It's not that 'Bright Path' is wrong, it's just that it is incomplete," Massey explains. "The English translation would be something closer to: 'Bright Path Lightning Makes As It Crosses The Sky.' Since Jim was a member of the thunder clan, his name would have had something to do with the sky. And the story that his mother named him because she had a vision of a bright path doesn't make sense. He would have been given his name by an elder at the clan feast in the spring and it would have had something to do with the sky and not the earth."

In addition to being a Thorpe scholar, Lenhart holds a master's degree in History and Museum Studies. He tells me that most of the research I have done on Thorpe to now has been a waste of time. "Most of the things written about Jim Thorpe were kind of dime novel stuff. There was very little research done, it was just a collection of folk tales."

The events, especially physical feats, are seriously hyperbolized. For more than 100 years, sportswriters have propelled the myth that Thorpe was so fleet of foot that "he could run fast enough to catch his own punt," or that after his father dropped him off at school some twenty miles from home, Jim would escape the school grounds and be waiting for him back at the homestead, having run there.

For most of the world, Jim Thorpe may as well be Paul Bunyan.

Thorpe was born in pre-statehood Indian Territory, but there is some discrepancy about when. Most reputable historians have arrived at 1887, rather than the 1888 that many records note. There is no birth certificate and no one alive who knew Thorpe well. His legacy bears the distortion typical of his ancestry. Historians did a lousy job taking seriously the athletic heroics of Native Americans.

While Thorpe and his teammates at Carlisle Indian Industrial School were crushing their waspy gridiron opponents at Harvard and West Point, sportswriters focused on race instead of results. An article in the *New York Times* recounting Carlisle's visit to West Point notes that Thorpe and his Indians had "invaded the plains ... of Uncle Sam's Military Academy." The *Boston Sunday Post* described a game between Carlisle and Harvard as "an unequal conflict between the white man's brawn and the red man's cunning," in which "the wiles of the redskin prevailed." Not to be outdone, The Philadelphia Press's coverage of the contest

between Thorpe's Carlisle squad and the University of Pennsylvania: "With racial savagery and ferocity, the Carlisle Indian eleven grabbed Penn's football scalp and dragged their victim up and down Franklin Field."

Thorpe's dominance of the 1912 Olympics in Sweden shifted his position from that of otherworldly Indian to the elevated status of American athlete, who according to President Taft was the embodiment of "those qualities which characterize the best type of American citizen." A curious choice of words when one considers that, at the time of Thorpe's Olympic triumphs, he, along with most Native Americans, were considered wards of the state, not citizens.

When Thorpe was stripped of his medals for nullifying his amateur status by accepting payment for playing minor league baseball, he was made a pariah by those closest to him. He was offered up as an example of what our country was willing to sacrifice to protect its honor and integrity in the world of amateur athletics.

(to be continued in the September Issue)

Johnson O'Malley Indian Education Committee

The Sac and Fox Nation is seeking persons interested in serving on the Indian Education Committee which administers the Nation's Johnson O'Malley Program. One (1) representative from each of the following districts is needed:

District #1: Agra, Cushing, Ripley, Oak Grove

District #2: Chandler, Meeker, Davenport, Prague, Stroud

District #3: Shawnee, Pleasant Grove, Grove, North Rock Creek

Representatives can be a parent, grandparent or legal guardian of a Native American student enrolled in the Johnson O'Malley Program, a person acting for or on behalf of the best interests of Native American children in the community, or an interested and concerned Native American community member who is familiar with education and has demonstrated leadership and involvement in the community. Representatives will be expected to be actively involved with school personnel in order to understand and advo-

cate for the needs of the students.

The purpose of the Committee is to: 1) Promote the welfare of Indian children and youth in home, school, community and Tribe; 2) Raise the standards of school achievement of Indian children; and 3) Bring into closer relationship the home and the school so that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the education of Indian children and youth. Representatives will provide positive input and advocate progressive, innovative ideas to promote the betterment of the Johnson O'Malley Program purposes and will attend meetings on a regular basis.

This is a fresh start for the committee and all persons interested in serving are encouraged to submit a letter of interest to serve to the Tribal Secretary at the following address:

Attention: Tribal Secretary
Sac and Fox Nation
920883 S. Highway 99
Stroud, OK 74079

UPCOMING EVENTS

August 15, 2012 - Fellowship meeting/White Elephant Bingo, Stroud Elders Building @ 10:00 a.m.

August 18, 2012 - Breakfast Sale, Multi-Purpose Building, Shawnee @ 8:00 a.m. – 11:30 p.m.

August 20, 2012 - Officers Meeting, Stroud Elders Building

September 10, 2012 - Issue Honorarium Checks for Durant Trip - 8:00 am to 12:00 pm
Gloria Ellis, Shawnee Multi-Purpose Building
Georgia Blanchard-Administration Building Room 1

September 11, 2012 – Bus leaves Stroud 7:30 am, Shawnee – 8:30 am
September 14, 2012 - Return back home

September 19, 2012 – September Fellowship meeting/White Elephant Bingo, Stroud Elders Building @ 10:00 a.m.

September 24, 2012 - Officers Meeting, Stroud Elders Building

Save the Date!!!

Elders Health Fair

September 25, 2012

Where: Community Building
Sac and Fox Nation

Contact person: Leah Carver

Merle Boyd



Phone: (918)968-9531 Ext. 211
E-mail: leah.carver@ihs.gov

More information regarding the Health Fair will be in the next edition of the newspaper. Elders, please mark your calendars for this date. This will be a fun-filled day you will not want to miss!!!!

NOTICE

The Veteran's Administration is partnering with the Pawnee Indian Health Center to enroll all Native American and non-Indian Veterans for health care benefits the third Thursday of every month from 10:30 am to 1:00pm. Veterans will be able to get questions answered about their benefits without traveling to Tulsa, Muskogee or Oklahoma City. The Pawnee Service Unit is located on the Pawnee Nation Tribal Reserve, 1201 Heritage Circle, in Pawnee, Oklahoma 74058, for more information call (918) 762-6724.

☺ AUGUST 2012 ☺				
MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI
August will be a hot month. Please be safe and stay cool!		1 Polish Sausage Mac-n-Cheese Green Beans Bread Jello	2 Hoagie Sandwich Carrot Salad Chips Cookies	3 Pancakes Sausage Boiled Egg Cantaloupe
6 Spaghetti Salad Carrots Bread Fruit	7 Navy Beans/Ham Spinach Corn Bread Cookies	8 Baked Chicken Dressing/Gravy Corn-on-Cob Fruit	9 Hamburger Gravy Mashed Potatoes Corn Bread Jello	10 Tuna Salad Sand. Carrot Salad Chips Fresh Fruit
13 Chicken & Rice Bean Salad Wheat Bread Fruit	14 Corn Dog Fries Fresh Veggies Cookies	15 Ham Scalloped Potatoes Corn Bread Pudding	16 Sloppy Joes Chips Cucumber Slices Fruit	17 Oatmeal Bacon Boiled Egg Toast Juice
20 Catfish Fries Corn on Cob Cole Slaw Fruit	21 Hamb. Enchiladas Spanish Rice Refried Beans Cookies	22 Polish Sausage Potato w/O's & P's Green Beans Corn Bread Fruit	23 Brown Beans Frybread Zucchini Fruit	24 Chili Fritos Fresh Veggies Pudding
28 Beef-n-Noodles Corn Wheat Bread Jello	29 Sauerkraut/hotdogs Beets Wheat Bread Cake	30 Hamburgers Fries Fresh Veggies Fruit	31 Chicken/Dumpling Carrots/Celery Cornbread Jello	31 Sausage Scramble Hash Browns Toast Fruit