

Indian Suffrage, Bingham

Aaron B. Page
Letter Aug 1 1866
on Indian Suffrage

Bingham, Mich
Aug 1st, 1866
R.M. Smith, Indian Agent

I herewith enclose a brief statement of the proceedings of the Inspectors of Election, viz Robert Lee, Supervisor, H.G. Sutton, Town Clerk and A.D. Belloy, oldest justice of the town of Bingham at the last Township Meeting at which time they refused the Indians the right to vote.

As long as the Indians allowed themselves to be dictated by them and vote as they wished there was not one word said against their voting. But the Indians had become dissatisfied with the Assessment made by the Supervisor, Robert Lee, and as he had held the office several terms they determined if possible to elect a new man.

As soon as the Town Board were apprised of their intention it was hinted about that the Indians would not be permitted to vote, but on what grounds they were to be excluded was not mentioned. The Indians therefore resolved to fulfill on their part every requirement of the law that there should be no lawful reason to deter them from voting, consequently all that were not certain their names were entered on the Book of Registration went to the Town Clerk previous to the day of the Election and had them registered.

On the day of Election all Indians, numbering between forty and fifty, went to Polls together, taking an Interpreter with them. On their arrival I stated to the Town Board that as the Indians had learned they were to be excluded from the Polls they had provided themselves with an Interpreter that all might plainly understand on what grounds the Hon. Board pretended to sustain such a decision. To which they replied they were very glad that we had brought an Interpreter as they were very desirous of explaining to the Indians the reasons that had induced them to make the decision they had. They went on to say that if the Indians were permitted to vote they would lose their Annuities. The Indians replied "we will run the risk - we have voted ten years, receiving our annuities in the meantime as usual and we are confident we shall not forfeit by exercising our rights as citizens by voting."

The Board then said "they could not receive their votes as they were not citizens. They were receiving pay from the government and were consequently minors, besides they were not subject to the draft." Neither did the same laws of the state prohibit their killing deer and other wild game.

It being noon the Board adjourned for dinner. The Polls were again opened at three o'clock and Peter Ance offered his vote, which was challenged by L. D. Quackenbush, and told by A. D. Belloy that his name was not on the Register. The Indian enquired how it could be that his name was not on the Register for he had voted here several times before and no one had made the least objection. The Board offered no explanation but asked him if he did not receive pay from the government. To which he replied in the affirmative, and to the question "do you belong to a Tribe" he answered No! He then offered to swear in his vote but the Board would not administer the oath nor receive his ticket. I referred them to the law on this subject where it plainly states that "if the Indian shall take the oath prescribed the Board shall receive his vote. But the Board were immovable and after two more had made ineffectual attempts to vote the Indians retired peaceably and returned home.

John B. Ance, Peter Ance, and Joseph Chippewa were the only ones who presented their tickets to the Moderator as they were repeatedly informed by the Board that they would not be received.

Yours Respectfully,
A.B. Page