

Rathbun, Known As Woodard, Lifelong Friend of Indians

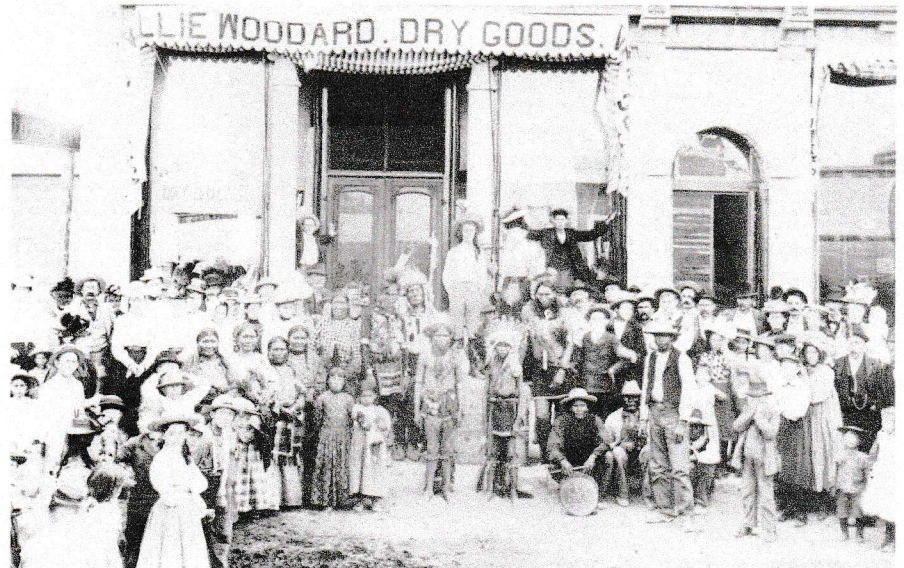
Too often, in our nation's history, the tragic tale of the American Indian is overlooked or brushed aside. This is the story of one of our cousins whose early life was interwoven with the Sioux Indians, and who remained their friend and ardent champion until his death. He was one of the few Rathbuns who went through life bearing a different surname.

Charles Raymond Rathbun was born Nov. 20, 1882, at Peoria, Illinois, the only son of Charles Byron⁸ Rathbun (James⁷⁻³ Samuel² John¹), and his second wife, Ella A. (Nellie) Smith.

Charles Byron Rathbun, the father, was born in 1843 in Erie County, N.Y., and served in the Civil War, although no details of his service are known. He married Mattie L. Bentley in 1867, but he apparently left her after a few years. Their only child, a daughter, Cora, died at the age of 10. He was a detective for the Philadelphia and Erie Railroad after the war, and later was a traveling salesman in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Iowa and Illinois.

In the middle 1870s, he met a young divorcee, Ella (Nellie) Smith, with whom he had a tumultuous relationship. He apparently divorced his first wife about 1881, and married Nellie, but their marriage also ended in divorce a year or two after the birth of Charles Raymond, and Rathbun moved back east. He never saw Nellie or his son again, and died Feb. 8, 1889, in Concord, Pa. (We are planning a later story on his eventful and tragic life.)

Nellie, who had gone into the "human hair" business in Peoria, where Charles Raymond was born, later opened a branch in Burlington, Iowa, under the name "N. Woodard." She sold wigs, hairpieces, sets of curls and other hair items. About 1887 she sold her business and moved to Chadron, Neb., the home of her older sister, Mary E. Smith, one of the founders of Chadron and a prominent businesswoman there. Mary



Nellie Woodard's dry goods store in Chadron, Nebraska, as it appeared about 1898. Her son Charles (with long hair) is standing just right of the door, next to Nellie. More than a dozen Indians can be seen in the crowd.

was later a prominent leader in the women's suffrage movement.

At Chadron, with her sister's help, Nellie opened a general merchandise store. Again, she used the name Woodard, and young Charles Raymond Rathbun became Charles Raymond Woodard. They both used the Woodard name for the rest of their lives. The family today has no idea why she chose the name Woodard.

Chadron then was a bustling frontier village, with a collection of hotels, saloons, gambling halls, and assorted stores, and with a population of nearly 3,000. One writer called it a "rough and lively place." It was here that young Rathbun, now known as Raymond Woodard, was to spend his early years.

Much of the local business came from Sioux Indians living on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations, just across the state line in South Dakota. Nellie soon expanded her business to the two reservations, hauling her goods there in a horse-drawn wagon, usually accompanied by young Raymond, then

only six or seven years old. They often spent several days at a time on the reservations, sharing the homes and meals of the Indians.

Both Nellie and Raymond developed a fondness for the proudly independent Sioux, and both learned to speak the Sioux language fluently. As a result, they made many friends among the Indians.

Raymond developed beautiful, curly hair, which his mother let grow to shoulder length. He became a familiar sight at the reservations, and was given the nickname "Pahahanska-Okshila," meaning "Long-Haired Boy" in Sioux.

But storm clouds were gathering in those years. The Indians had been driven from their lands throughout the West by settlers, miners, ranchers and railroads. By the 1880s, the Sioux had been forced to give up their once vast hunting lands, and held possession of only the area around the Black Hills, which they called "Paha Sapa" and considered a sacred place.