

WISCONSIN'S NEW INDIAN COUNTY

Self-Determined Menominees Win Citizenship

by Bert Reichert

A CENTURY-OLD DREAM of freedom and equality neared realization last July 30, when Wisconsin's Governor Gaylord Nelson signed into law a bill to make the 234,000-acre Menominee Indian Reservation the state's 72nd county.

Although Menominee County will not be set up until final approval has been given by the federal government, the legislation cleared the way for ending federal trusteeship over some 3,500 Menominees and their lands. Termination of government jurisdiction has Congressional approval and is scheduled for 1960.

The Menominees are one of the few Indian tribes still living on lands held by their ancestors when the white men first met them. They have a proud heritage of tribal entity and self-determination. With the ending of federal jurisdiction, they will become full citizens, contributors to Wisconsin's

economic and political life.

They will not join Wisconsin's official family as "poor relations." Reputed to be one of the richest Indian tribes in the United States, the Menominees have for many years used their native forests to their own advantage. They operate their own saw mill, and the selective harvesting of large timber stands on their reservation provides a livelihood for many of the tribe's members. Because of selective harvesting, these timber stands—valued at 40 million dollars—are about as heavy today as when they started cutting. The pending legislation has safeguards to protect the Menominees against exploitation by outsiders while they are new in self-government: It prohibits the sale of timber lands to non-tribal interests for 30 years without approval of the state. It also calls for continued timber cutting on a selective and sustained basis.

LIKE so many other Indian tribes, the Menominees had an unhappy history after the arrival of the white men. When French explorers first met them in the 1600's, their domain covered much of what is now Wisconsin, and extended north to include a part of Michigan's upper peninsula. However, during the next two centuries the tribe was forced to part with vast acreages at prices ranging from one-half cent to 17 cents an acre. Under increasing pressure from white settlers, the Menominees moved from place to place in their shrinking domain, but they never set foot outside the area which they considered their own.

A crisis in the tribe's affairs came in the middle 1800's when the federal government wanted them to move to land on the Crow Wing River near St. Paul, Minnesota. The Menominees refused to leave their ancestral lands, and staged what probably was the first sit-down strike in the state. They were saved from forcible eviction by their famed and able leader, Chief Oshkosh, who went to Washington to plead their cause. He told President Millard Fillmore how his tribe already had been forced to part with nearly all of its domain for pennies an acre, and asked only that the Menominees be permitted to remain on lands their ancestors had occupied.

Touched by the chief's appeal, Fillmore agreed that the tribe should not be forced to leave Wisconsin. But the determined action taken by Chief Oshkosh gave the Menominees no preference on the site they were to occupy. They were ordered to move into a wilderness area shunned by white settlers as worthless. The Menominees obeyed the order. Although winter was fast approaching, some 2,000 Indians canoed up the Wolf River to the Northeastern Wisconsin location that is their home today. Forced to move without adequate preparation, they paid a heavy toll to snow, cold, hunger and disease. But they were on their own ancestral lands.

The federal government in 1854 officially reserved the site to the Menominees. The Indians tried farming, but found the land unsuited for crops raised by their primitive methods. They then turned to logging, and cut and marketed their own timber on a selective basis at a time when the white men were denuding much of the state's timber lands.

"We trust that this carefully worked plan for transferring the Menominee tribe from hardship to self-determination will furnish one bright ray of hope in the grand tradition of the Wisconsin Idea," the governor said, in signing the legislation.

The Practical Professor and

The Honorable Sweet Potato

by Christine Starr

DO YOU FEEL chilly in the honorable inside? The Japanese will tell you to buy a couple of sweet potatoes, hot from the oven; stow one inside the bosom of your kimono while you eat the other. You'll feel warmer right away.

A common sight on a cold day in Nippon is to see a crowd of uncommonly well-behaved children fidgiting outside the door of a potato shop. Out steps a kimono-clad grandpa with a full mouth and a somewhat surprising bosom.

Fetchingly, the children beseech a sweet slice; as other mothers scold because their little ones eat too much candy, so Japanese mothers complain that their children "want to live on *osatsu*."

The sweet potato came to Japan from China by way of the Loo Choo Islands (modern Okinawa). Long ago, a Loo Choo king sent some as a gift to a lord of Satsuma, the Japanese province nearest the islands. The Satsuma prince was so pleased with the strange vege-

table's agreeable flavor that he asked for seed potatoes and had them planted on his estate. *Satsuma imo* is Japanese for sweet potato; a shortened form, *osatsu*, is used by children, the prefix "o" meaning "honorable."

Because of prohibitive fuel costs, the average Japanese home has no oven capable of baking potatoes. So in villages and small towns the potato shop is usually located in the front room of a dwelling, with the women of the household looking after the business—a sideline enterprise that flourishes only during the fall and winter months, when the potatoes are plentiful. *Osatsu* heat blesses residents of homes having only a charcoal brazier to give a wisp of warmth.

The oven is built of bricks, plastered with cement. A slow fire burns inside. On top is fitted a capacious iron pan. The potatoes are not peeled. Smaller, whole *osatsu* are packed into the pan and slices of large potatoes are fitted