

Perhaps the most interesting and most telling bit of research to describe the prominence of Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ or Grey Cloud Woman was a story told in 1858 by Thomas Anderson Robertson, a grandson of Grey Cloud Woman.

Thomas Anderson Robertson and his father had accompanied a treaty agent who tried to bully some Yankton tribal members into a deal they did not want to make. The Yankton men showed their displeasure by taking the group's horses. Thomas had the task of trying to get them back. After giving the men each a knife and some tobacco, Thomas shared with them his lineage including the name of his grandmother, Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ or Grey Cloud Woman.

They knew her right away and said, They knew her right away and said, "she had fed many of them the winter of the great famine when so many of them starved to death getting back from their winter hunt". With that, the horses were immediately returned to Thomas and his party.

Even with the limited amount of specific data regarding her life, it is apparent that Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ, or Grey Cloud Woman was an important part of local heritage, and a highly regarded citizen in the early history of Tinta Oturŋwe, on the land later called Shakopee.



Thomas Anderson Robertson (1839-1924) was a grandson of Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ. He was born at Grey Cloud Island to parents Andrew Robertson (born in Scotland) and Jane Anpachiyawewiŋ (Day Break Woman) Anderson, who was part Dakota. His father was the superintendent of schools and an interpreter at the Lower Sioux Agency. Thomas received his education from the missionaries, and later he was employed as an interpreter at the agency. Thomas described his experience with Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ in 1858.

Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ "had fed many of them the winter of the great famine when so many of them starved to death getting back from their winter hunt."



SHAKOPEE HERITAGE SOCIETY
2109 Boulder Pointe, Shakopee, MN 55379

952-693-3865

shakopeeheritage.org



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Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ
ca. 1793-1849

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Hohaanskae or Black Dog Village, pictured in 1853, based on a drawing by Adolf Hoeffler. A burial scaffold is pictured in the distance on the bluff at right. Maḥpiya-ḥota died here, surrounded by her Dakota relatives in 1849.



Seth Eastman's view of burial scaffolds at Black Dog Village, around 1847. Pilot Knob is pictured in the distance between the two scaffolds. From the Minnesota Historical Society.

Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ was born in 1793 at Prairie du Chien on the Mississippi River. Her father was James Aird, a prominent fur trader. James was a Scotchman, born in Ayrshire, and was a cousin of Robert Burns, the poet. He came to America in 1783, landing at Quebec and then heading to Wapahaša's village as a trader in the employ of the Hudson Bay Company. Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ's mother, also known as Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ, and was a member of the Dakota tribe. She was born at her father's village where the city of Winona now stands.

Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ was of noble lineage. She was the daughter of powerful Dakota leader Wapahaša I and sister of Wapahaša II. Maḥpiya-ḥota's grandfather was Wapahaša (Red Cap) who was born in 1720 and died in 1806.

Because of her unique family position, Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ became a major facilitator in trading between tribal members and white traders, even at a very young age. Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ was "a beautiful and attractive half-breed girl, not without schooling, and it is not surprising that she should have found favor among the few white men employed about the trading post."

In 1818, Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ married her second husband, Hazen P. Mooers, an American who was sent to Minnesota to work with the American Fur Company in 1816.

After years of traveling throughout the state to various trading posts, in approximately 1838, the family moved to Spirit Wood Island, what is now called Grey Cloud Island. Grey Cloud Island, about five miles long and one to two miles wide, is situated in the south end of Washington County, Minnesota, between St. Paul and Hastings. Historical accounts surmise the move was made in order for Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ (Grey Cloud Woman) to be closer to relatives in Hohaanskae (Black Dog Village) directly across the river, while Hazen P. Mooers could establish a trade center.

Thanks for the strong influence of his wife, Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ, he was able to traffic with three bands of the Dakota Indians.

In the fall of 1846, Hazen and Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ moved to Tínta Oturŋwe and lived there among the tipi tanka (or bark lodges) and a tioti or two until the spring of 1849.

The house was built in the fall of 1846, and located just as you arrived on Highway 101 into downtown Shakopee. It was located on the right side as you head west, close to the duck pond. The location is also located about 10 rods, or 55 feet north of the Reverend Samuel W. Pond and Cordelia Eggleston Pond's house (which would be built the next year).

The family moved here because Hazen was appointed as an Indian Farmer, and this also provided land to farm.

Hazen P. Mooers and Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ moved out in the spring of 1849.

Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ, known as Grey Cloud Woman, and also known as Margaret Aird Anderson Mooers died on July 20, 1849, appropriately enough, at Hohaanskae, or Black Dog Village, a village of her Dakota relatives. Family traditions state that she was buried near the village and the burial site of her mother in what is now Eagan, Minnesota.

There is no picture of Maḥpiya-ḥota Wiŋ, although she was described in a historical memoir as "by no means unattractive."