

STORY OF ISH TAK HA BA

The City of Sleepy Eye was named after the body of water bordering its northwest side. The lake was named after a peaceful, friendly Dakota Chief named Ish Tak Ha Ba (Sleepy Eyes).

Ish Tak Ha Ba was born around 1780, at Swan Lake, Nicollet County, and was commissioned Chief of the Sissetons by the head of the Indian Department, succeeding Blue Spirit. Ish Tak Ha Ba was not a hereditary chief – neither his father nor his grandfather held the position.

Ish Tak Ha Ba's jurisdiction covered not only his band from Swan Lake, but also included all the Lower Sioux (Dakota) from Carver to Lac-Qui-Parle.

During his lifetime Ish Tak Ha Ba signed the Prairie du Chien (1825 and 1830), Mendota (1836), and Traverse des Sioux treaties.

J. N. Nicollet, the cartographer, wrote in his notes, published with his maps, of Ish Tak Ha Ba and the friendly hospitality of his people.

Ish Tak Ha Ba was described in 1836, while in Washington to sign a treat, as “large and well proportioned, of rather dignified appearance, good natured and plausible, but lacking distinction as a hunter or a warrior.” It is believed that his eyelids drooped slightly and his name Ish Tak Ha Ba, which translates in English to Sleepy Eyes, was derived from this physical characteristic.

When Ish Tak Ha Ba signed the Traverse des Sioux Treaty, which he did reluctantly, he said that he would like to live out his days in the “Lake of Many Swans,” which was known for its many species of geese, ducks, wild rice, fish and many swans. Ish Tak Ha Ba asked U.S. commissioners if he could live out his remaining days and die on the land that he so truly loved. A commissioner in a public forum said it should be as he desired.

In 1857, after some settlers were killed, residents in the Minnesota River Valley were thrown into a panic. A company of U.S. soldiers went to Sleepy Eyes' camp and requested that he move on to the reservation. Sleepy Eyes, being non-violent, agreed and moved to a lake west of his village, which was later named after him, as was the town, which was erected years later, near the lake.

Sleepy Eyes died around 1860 in Roberts County, South Dakota. In 1902, the city of Sleepy Eye disinterred his remains from South Dakota and buried them with proper ceremonies in a small park dedicated to him. The park is located in the center of town with a tall obelisk marking Sleepy Eyes' final resting place.