

Famous Batavians

ELY SAMUEL PARKER

Ha-sa-no-an-da was born in 1826 on the Tonawanda Indian Reservation near Pembroke, NY. "Leading Name" was fortunate that his parents believed that in order to survive in the world of that time it was important to receive an education. They sent their children to a Baptist missionary school. Ely adopted his English name from Reverend Ely Stone a teacher at the school. His father and brothers had adopted the name Parker several years earlier to show their respect for a British officer. Though Ely Parker is considered a Seneca he was 1/4 white, his paternal grandmother was white. At the age of ten, Ely went to Grand River in Ontario, Canada to live with his people and learn their ways. Three years later, when he was laughed at for his broken English, he elected to return to New York and learn how to speak more fluently. In 1842, Ely went to Yates Academy in Orleans County. While there he took several trips to Albany to act as a translator for his people. In April of 1844 he met an attorney from Rochester named Lewis Henry Morgan. Their friendship grew and Morgan arranged for Parker's tuition to be paid at Cayuga Academy. Ely only studied at Cayuga for one year. In 1846 he left the school to help his people save their land. By 1847, with no way to return to school and continue his education he studied law with William P. Angel and his partner Addison J. Rice. Ely later passed the bar exam, but was not allowed to practice law because he was not a citizen. Consequently, he studied Civil Engineering at Renesslaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. In 1850, the by New York State Canal Board employed him as an engineer. In 1852, he became the eighth Grand Sachem of the Iroquois Confederacy. In 1860, he meets Ussleys S. Grant while supervising a construction project for the US government. Ely participated in the Civil War as captain of the Engineers Seventh Division XVII Corps. Through the war he worked up the ranks until he eventually became Grants military secretary. On September 18, 1863 he joined Grant in Vicksburg. In 1865, he wrote the final draft of terms for the surrender of Lee at Appomattox. After the war when Grant was elected president, Parker was appointed Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the first Indian to be appointed to that position. In 1871 he resigned as Commissioner and became the Supervisor of facilities for the New York City Police Department. While in this position he reforms the police department. On August 30, 1895 Ely Parker died of Bright Disease. At that time he was buried in Oak Lawn Cemetery in Fairfield, Connecticut. On January 20, 1897 he is reburied in Forest Lawn Cemetery in Buffalo. His grave is near his ancestor Red Jacket.