

Shawsheen

Shawsheen was a Ute Indian Princess.

Shawsheen (Shosheen) was Chief Ouray's sister. Her name means "Shining Water." One of her Ute names was Cutshutchous. It meant "Elk Tooth Dress." Her descendants (family members today) give her name as She-towitch, so that probably was her given name. In her adult life, she was called Susan Johnson.

Shawsheen was captured by the Arapaho Indians while hunting.

During the summer of 1863, Shawsheen was in the Big Thompson Canyon on a hunting trip with her family when she was captured by a band of 200 Arapaho. Later she was traded to the Cheyenne.

One story tells that she was held prisoner for two years, when a group of soldiers from Camp Collins (Ft. Collins today) were riding in the area known today as Island Grove Park. The soldiers saw Shawsheen tied to a cottonwood tree, and they released her. The soldiers called her "Susan" or "Shawsheen."

Another tells that the soldiers saw her, they released her and one of the soldiers took her to his home. His wife cared for Shawsheen, sewed her calico dresses, gave her the name Susan and wanted to adopt her into the family. But she knew that Shawsheen wanted to go home to her people. They were waiting to get her home safely. The Arapaho were looking for her so it was dangerous for Shawsheen to leave. However, one day they returned home to find that Shawsheen had left taking clothes, some meat and a knife. Later some white men found her and were able to get her home to her people.

One family story says that she escaped on her own. They do not tell of the rescue by soldiers.

Shawsheen saved Mrs. Meeker and her daughter in 1879.

If the soldiers did rescue her, Shawsheen never forgot their kindness. As she traveled with the Josephine and Arvilla Meeker and Flora Price and her children after the Meeker or White River Massacre, she always was looking to comfort and take care of them. When she heard that some of the Ute warriors wanted to kill the hostages, she went to the Ute camp where the women were being held. She burst into the lodge shouting at the men. The men were surprised at her outburst and decided to release the women and children. The Meekers and Mrs. Price always gave thanks to Shawsheen for saving them and for her kindness to them.

Shawsheen was remembered for saving Mrs. Meeker and Josephine.

Mrs. Meeker and Josephine said that Shawsheen saved their lives, and she was a heroine. The Chicago Tribune on October 29, 1879 had this headline:

A Strategic Squaw How Susan, the Ute Woman affected the Meekers' Release By Pleading for Them in a Council of Warriors.

Such a Thing Never Before Heard Of in Indian History.

The Chicago Tribune had other articles praising Shawsheen. One lady, Jane Gray Swisshelm asked Congress to let the Utes stay in Colorado and to grant Shawsheen and her family land in Colorado. Her requests were not granted.

The cottonwood tree where Shawsheen was found was named "Susan's Tree." It was still standing in Island Grove Park until the early 1900's when it died.

Another monument was built to honor Shawsheen, but it too became worn and weather-beaten, so it is gone today. However, today Shawsheen Elementary School stands as a monument for the Ute Princess.

Shawsheen spent the rest of her life in Utah.

After the White River Massacre, the Utes in Colorado moved to a new reservation in Utah. Shawsheen moved with her people. Her family says that she lived to be more than 100, but some people think she may have been in her 90's when she died. Her bravery and kindness are remembered by her family and those who have heard her story today.