

Lonely Sentinel: A Military History of Fort Madison, 1808–1813

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FORT MADISON was the first American fort in Iowa and the site of the westernmost battles of the War of 1812. Significantly, it was the only army post in Iowa ever to be attacked by Indians. Scholars who have studied Fort Madison generally agree that its location was its greatest liability.¹ However, those scholars have

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1. The most significant works on Fort Madison are Charles Aldrich, ed., "Fort Madison," *Annals of Iowa* 3 (1897), 97–110; Jacob Van der Zee, ed., "Old Fort Madison: Some Source Materials," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 11 (1913), 517–45; and Donald Jackson, "Old Fort Madison—1808–1813," *Palimpsest* 39 (1958), 1–65. Most recent is a three-part article in the *Journal of the War of 1812* 12, available at <http://journal.thewarof1812.info/>: David Bennett, "A New Perspective on the Last Days of Fort Madison," Part I, "The Fort at 'Belle Vue,'" (Spring 2009), 17–23; Part II, "Defense under Siege" (Summer 2009), 7–15; Part III, "Abandonment and Result" (Fall 2009), 14–20. An online source with valuable information is Eugene Watkins, "U.S. Regulars at Fort Madison: Biographical Sketches," www.fortmadison-ia.com/DocumentCenter/View/502. Archaeological work done at the site since the 1960s provides insights into the layout and geography of Fort Madison. See Marshall McKusick, "Exploring Old Fort Madison," *The Iowan* 15 (Fall 1966), 12–13, 50–51; John Hansman, "An Archaeological Problem at Old Fort Madison," *Plains Anthropologist* 32 (1987), 217–31; Marshall McKusick, "Fort Madison, 1808–1813," in *Frontier Forts of Iowa: Indians,*

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overlooked other factors that rendered Fort Madison inadequate, particularly for defending the region north of St. Louis. Military officers suggested establishing additional posts farther north on the Mississippi River, but the parsimony of the federal government meant that no other fortifications were built, and the vast area north of Fort Madison was left undefended. Moreover, because the War Department established Fort Madison only to provide local defense for an Indian trading establishment, it never had enough soldiers to defend the entire upper Mississippi valley, or even for local defense because of its poor location. As a result, it was susceptible to attacks by the Sauk and Ho-Chunk (Winnebago), two powerful Indian tribes who perceived Fort Madison's presence as an alien and threatening military occupation of their country. Thus, Fort Madison—small, undermanned, poorly located, and dangerously situated—was vulnerable upon the commencement of hostilities in 1812.

To fully grasp why Fort Madison was generally ineffective as a military fortification during the War of 1812, one must understand the post's history prior to the conflict. This requires an assessment of the decisions made by various federal officials and military officers about the post's purpose and location. Equally important is an examination of the U.S. Army in the period before the War of 1812, particularly those institutional characteristics that undermined military readiness and morale at isolated frontier installations. Earlier studies of Fort Madison have generally neglected these factors, and none have examined the cultural forces that led the Indian tribes in the post's vicinity to repeatedly attack Fort Madison during its short existence. The story of Fort Madison during the War of 1812 becomes much clearer once these elements are considered.

WITH THE ACQUISITION of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the United States gained possession of both banks of the Mississippi River. Spain had received Louisiana from France in 1762, and Napoleon Bonaparte reacquired it for France in 1800. When the United States took possession of New Orleans in 1803 and

Traders, and Soldiers, ed. William Whittaker (Iowa City, 2009), 55–74; and John Doershuk et al., "Defining Battlefield Archaeological Context at Fort Madison, Iowa," *Midcontinental Journal of Archaeology* 37 (2012), 219–42.

St. Louis in 1804, the Louisiana Purchase had a mixed French and Spanish population as well as slaves of African ancestry, Métis of European and Native American descent, and many populous and powerful Indian tribes. The American occupation caused little concern among the French and Spanish residents, but the Sauk Indians who lived north of St. Louis expressed considerable apprehension.

Unlike other colonial powers, such as France, Great Britain, and Spain, all of whom had allowed Indian communities to retain their tribal domains and autonomy in exchange for alliance and trade, the United States aggressively sought to dispossess the Indians of their lands. Shortly after taking possession of St. Louis, the United States in 1804 negotiated a fraudulent treaty with the Sauk and their close confederates, the Meskwaki (Fox) that eventually forced them to cede 15 million acres of land east of the Mississippi. The Sauk war leader Black Hawk, who at the time was in his mid-30s, noted that the Spanish, who still occupied St. Louis at the time of the transfer, “appeared to us like brothers—and always gave us good advice. . . . We had always heard bad accounts of the Americans from Indians who had lived near them!”²

Initially, the small garrison of 57 American soldiers at St. Louis posed little threat to the Sauk, but the great expanse of undefended territory north of the settlement unnerved federal officials who wanted a more robust military presence in the region. In 1805 President Thomas Jefferson appointed James Wilkinson as the territorial governor of Louisiana Territory, which consisted of the part of the Louisiana Purchase north of the present-day Louisiana-Arkansas border. Wilkinson believed that the upper Mississippi valley was exposed and vulnerable. Of even greater concern to Wilkinson were British traders from Canada who purchased furs from the Indians. Jay’s Treaty of 1794 allowed British traders from Canada (many of whom were actually of French Canadian ancestry) to operate south of the border. Wilkinson

2. Francis Prucha, *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783–1846* (London, 1969), 1–6, 63–72; Patrick Jung, “Toward the Black Hawk War: The Sauk and Fox Indians and the War of 1812,” *Michigan Historical Review* 38 (2012), 29–31; Black Hawk, *Black Hawk: An Autobiography*, ed. Donald Jackson (Urbana, IL, 1955), 56–60 (quote).



Portrait of Black Hawk by Charles Bird King (1837), from The McKenney-Hall Portrait Gallery of American Indians, by James D. Horan (1972).

and other American officials feared that these men would turn the native communities against the United States. Wilkinson wrote, "If We admit the British trader to a free intercourse with them [the Indians] . . . he will oppose himself to our plans. . . . By a Single whisper he may destroy our present good understanding with the natives."³

Wilkinson developed an expansive plan for additional forts farther north on the Mississippi. In 1805 he ordered Lieutenant Zebulon Montgomery Pike to ascend the Mississippi and select

3. Prucha, *Sword of the Republic*, 73-76; Francis Prucha, *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years: The Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts, 1790-1834* (Lincoln, NE, 1962), 76-77; James Wilkinson to James Madison, 8/24/1805, in *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, ed. Clarence Carter and John Bloom, 28 vols. (Washington, DC, 1934-1975), 13:189-91 (quote; hereafter cited as *TPUS*).

possible sites for military posts. Pike identified sites at the mouth of the Wisconsin River at Prairie du Chien, the mouth of the St. Croix River, and the Falls of St. Anthony on the Mississippi River about seven miles north of the mouth of the Minnesota River. He stopped at the location where Fort Madison later stood, but he did not recommend it as a location for a fort; instead, he proposed two other sites roughly 20 and 30 miles to the north of that location. When he met with a group of local Sauk, he only discussed establishing a trading house in the area, and he left before identifying a site for such an establishment. The War Department did not share Wilkinson's belief that extensive and costly fortifications were necessary on the western frontiers. Thus, Wilkinson's plans never came to fruition, and the sites Pike identified would not see any fortifications, at least not before the War of 1812.⁴

Wilkinson settled for establishing a fortification at St. Louis. He selected the site for Fort Belle Fontaine along the Missouri River about four miles upstream from its confluence with the Mississippi. He also selected a site close by for a government trading house. Federal policy makers believed that private traders were a dangerous element among the tribes. British traders might undermine the influence of the United States, but American traders, many of whom defrauded the Indians and, worse yet, introduced alcohol into native communities, often were little better. Thus, in 1795, Congress approved plans for government trading houses, or factories, as they were known. By 1810 twelve factories operated in the Great Lakes, the Mississippi valley, and the South. The network of factories was never large enough to drive private traders from the field, however, so by 1822 the system was abandoned. During the time they existed, though, the fac-

4. Prucha, *Sword of the Republic*, 76-79; Wilkinson to Henry Dearborn, 9/22/1805, *TPUS*, 13:230; Wilkinson to Zebulon Montgomery Pike, 7/30/1805, *TPUS*, 13:185-86; Zebulon Montgomery Pike, *The Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike, With Letters and Related Documents*, ed. Donald Jackson, 2 vols. (Norman, OK, 1966), 1:14-15, 14n20, 15n22, 22, 37-38, 232, 235-36, 237n1, 245-46; Dearborn to Wilkinson, 6/28/1805, *TPUS*, 13:239. An article published in 1897 asserts that the first site identified by Pike for a fort was the location of Fort Madison, but Pike's description places his site farther north near present-day Oquakwa, Illinois. See Aldrich, "Fort Madison," 98; Pike, *Expeditions*, 1:235, 237n1.

tories often stood alongside forts; in fact, protecting them was the principal mission of many army posts.⁵

Advocates believed that the factories were vital for maintaining friendly relations with the Indians. Among these supporters was Meriwether Lewis, who, fresh from his journey on the Lewis and Clark Expedition, was appointed as governor of Louisiana Territory in 1807. Lewis believed that the factory at Fort Belle Fontaine was inconvenient for the tribes farther north, particularly the Sauk and Meskwaki, so he petitioned the War Department to establish a new factory in the heart of their country. Secretary of War Henry Dearborn acquiesced and in May 1808 ordered that a trade factory and fort be built. Upon learning of Dearborn's order, Lewis met with Sauk and Meskwaki leaders in St. Louis and secured three square miles of land about a mile above the mouth of the Des Moines River (present-day Keokuk, Iowa). Dearborn also ordered the construction of another factory and military post (Fort Osage) on the Missouri River roughly 250 miles west of St. Louis. Colonel Thomas Hunt was to oversee the construction at the two sites. Dearborn confidently stated that both forts would be "a guard at each of these trading houses."⁶ He apparently did not believe that either post would serve any significant military function; if he had, he would have followed the advice of Wilkinson and Pike and had the fort on the Mississippi built farther upriver at a more strategic location.⁷

5. Wilkinson to Dearborn, 7/27/1805, *TPUS*, 13:167; Francis Prucha, *A Guide to the Military Posts of the United States, 1789-1895* (Madison, WI, 1964), 60; Francis Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, 2 vols. (Lincoln, NE, 1984), 1:115-34; John Mason to Joseph Anderson, 4/12/1810, in *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC, 1832-1834), 1:768 (hereafter cited as *ASP:IA*).

6. Treaty with Sauk and Foxes, 11/3/1804, in *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, ed. Charles Kappler, vol. 2 (Washington, DC, 1904), 76; Meriwether Lewis to Dearborn, 7/1/1808, *TPUS*, 14:202-3; Lewis to Thomas Hunt, 8/8/1809, Letter 21, Daniel Bissell Papers, 1800-1820, St. Louis Mercantile Library, University of Missouri-St. Louis, St. Louis, Missouri (hereafter cited as Bissell MSS, SLML); *Missouri Gazette* (St. Louis), 6/28/1809; Dearborn to Hunt, 5/17/1808, Letters Sent by the Secretary of War Relating to Military Affairs, 1800-1889, Microfilm Publication M-6, reel 3, vol. 3., p. 347, Record Group 107, National Archives, Washington, DC (quote; hereafter cited as M-6, with references to reel, volume, and page numbers).

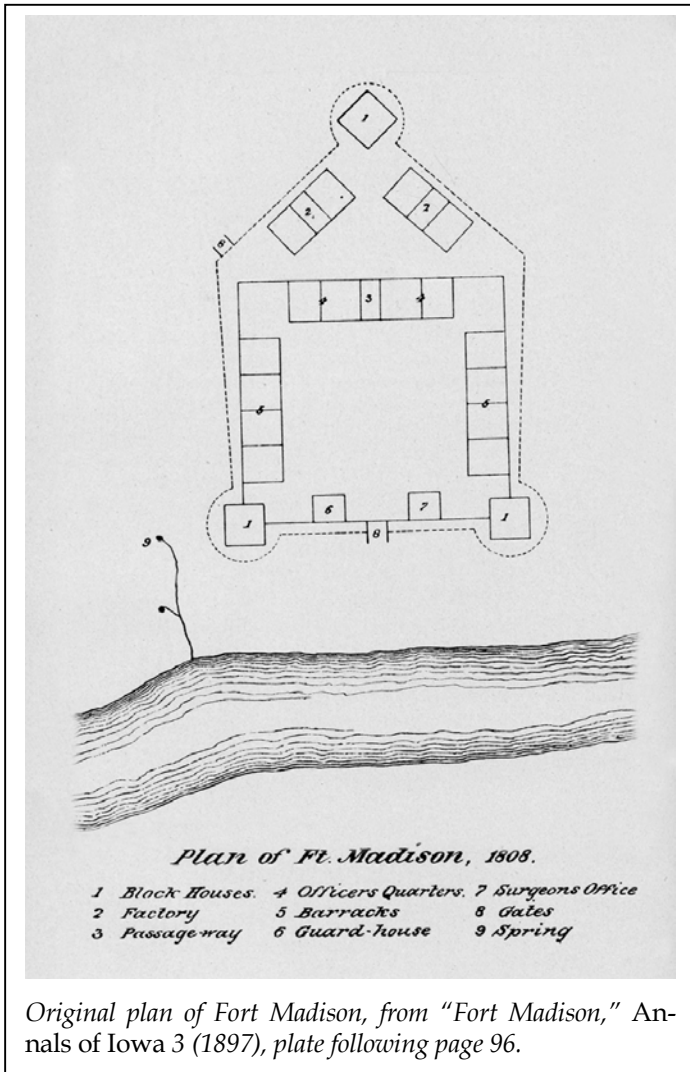
7. Documents written by contemporaneous observers support this conclusion. For examples, see Alpha Kingsley to Dearborn, 4/19/1809, Fort Madison Res-

Hunt's sudden death meant that the task of establishing Fort Madison fell upon a less experienced junior officer, First Lieutenant Alpha Kingsley. Along with John Johnson, the government factor appointed to run the factory, and Nicolas Boilvin, the assistant Indian agent to the tribes of the upper Mississippi valley, Kingsley departed Fort Belle Fontaine on August 24, 1808, with about 60 men of the First Infantry Regiment. On or about September 11, the little squadron of flatboats arrived at the mouth of the Des Moines River as per Dearborn's orders, but Kingsley and Johnson believed it was a poor site since it was subject to flooding. The location selected earlier by Lewis was also inadequate as it had few trees for lumber, no clean water, and was a half-mile from the river. Kingsley and Johnson apparently had no knowledge of the sites upriver suggested by Pike three years earlier. They finally chose a location, which the War Department subsequently approved, about 25 miles north of the Des Moines River on the western bank of the Mississippi (the location of the present-day town of Fort Madison, Iowa). They arrived there on September 26, 1808. The site had plenty of timber, a good view of the river, and "an excellent spring of water" that Kingsley believed was vital for the soldiers' health. Because of the spring and its "extensive view of the [Mississippi] River," Kingsley named the site Belle Vue (Beautiful View).⁸

KINGSLEY'S MEN erected a temporary camp surrounded by a low picket stockade only five or six feet high. The permanent fort, as designed by Kingsley, would have two blockhouses fronting the Mississippi River with a third in the rear, thus creating a

ervation File, entry 464, folder 4, box 68, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, DC (hereafter cited as FMRF); Thomas Hamilton to Daniel Bissell, 9/10/1812, in *Official Letters of the Military and Naval Officers of the United States during the War with Great Britain*, ed. John Brannan (Washington, DC, 1823), 65 (hereafter cited as *Official Letters*).

8. William Clark to Dearborn, 8/18/1808, *TPUS*, 14:208; Pike, *Expeditions*, 1:15n22; James House to Dearborn, 8/26/1808, FMRF; Bennett, "Fort Madison," Part I, 21-22; Watkins, "U.S. Regulars at Fort Madison," 1; John Johnson to Mason, 9/19/1808, FMRF; Mason to Johnson, 11/11/1808, Letters Sent by the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Microfilm Publication M-16, reel 1, vol. A, p. 259, Record Group 75, National Archives, Washington, DC (hereafter cited as M-16, with references to reel, volume, and page numbers); Kingsley to Dearborn, 11/22/1808, FMRF (quote).



five-cornered fort that measured 160 feet wide by 210 feet long. The soldiers labored throughout the winter cutting lumber for the fort, which would have a much stronger stockade with oak pickets 14 feet tall and between 12 and 18 inches in diameter. During the first two weeks of April 1809, Kingsley's men completed work on the permanent fortification, christened Fort

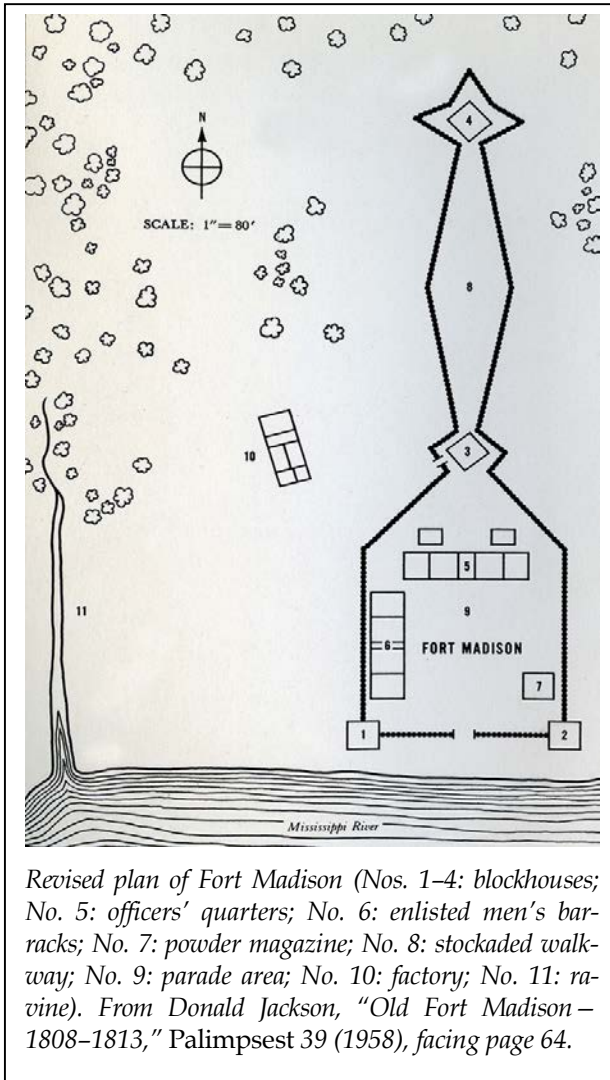
Madison in honor of the new president, James Madison. They moved in on April 14, 1809.⁹

The site had several handicaps. First, a ravine about 100 yards from the western wall of the stockade could afford an enemy 60 yards of shelter. Second, a ridge of high ground about 250 yards beyond the north end of the fort could allow an enemy to fire down inside the walls of the stockade. Third, the bank along the shore of the Mississippi, like the ravine, afforded cover to a potential enemy. During the construction, Kingsley addressed only the second shortcoming. He built a fourth blockhouse on the ridge to the north and created a long, stockaded passageway to the main fort. The officers and soldiers of Fort Madison derisively referred to this appendage as the "Tail."¹⁰

Kingsley originally wanted the factory within the stockade, but an event during the final phases of construction changed his mind. Kingsley and Johnson met with Sauk and Meskwaki leaders and received their permission to occupy the site. During the course of their earlier meetings with Pike and Lewis, the Sauk had raised no objections to a factory; however, they were never told that a fort with soldiers would be built alongside it. The Sauk perceived the presence of American soldiers in their country as unnecessary and provocative. News of the expedition under Kingsley spread among the members of the tribe throughout the autumn of 1808, and the garrison's presence caused them great concern. Black Hawk noted, "The news of their arrival was soon carried to all the villages. . . . [We] were told that they were a party of soldiers, who had brought *great guns* with them – and looked like a *war party* of whites!" Kingsley assured the Sauk that his purpose was to construct a factory, and that the soldiers were only there "to keep him [Johnson] company!" As

9. Kingsley to Dearborn, 11/22/1808, FMRF; [George Hunt], "A Personal Narrative," in Van der Zee, "Old Fort Madison," 517–18; Kingsley to Dearborn, 4/19/1809, FMRF; Jackson, "Old Fort Madison," 15.

10. Hamilton to Bissell, 7/18/1813, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Registered Series, 1801–1860, Microfilm Publication M-221, reel 53, document H232, Record Group 107, National Archives, Washington, DC (hereafter cited as M-221, with references to reel and document numbers); House to William Eustis, 5/9/1809, FMRF; *Missouri Gazette*, 9/11/1813; Doershuk, "Battlefield Archaeological Context," 223–24, 228, 237; McKusick, "Fort Madison," 57; Bissell to Eustis, 9/26/1812, *TPUS*, 14:595.



the soldiers completed their work, a few Sauk warriors would sneak up on the men, take their guns as they worked, give a yell to startle them, and then return the weapons as they laughed at the frightened soldiers.¹¹

11. Jackson, "Old Fort Madison," 13-14; Black Hawk, *Autobiography*, 59-60, 63-64 (quote).

Kingsley took these pranks seriously. He requested another meeting with the Sauk leaders, although the council did not end as he had hoped. In early April 1809, as his men were busy finishing the fort's construction, Kingsley held the council within the confines of the temporary camp. Many Sauk stood on barrels and blocks of wood to watch the proceedings over the short stockade. Worried about the presence of about 400 Indians, Kingsley had his soldiers load their individual weapons and had several men ready an artillery piece. A group of warriors outside the stockade began to dance, proceeded to the gate, and indicated their intention to dance for the soldiers within the enclosure. Upon their arrival at the gate, the council abruptly ended. Kingsley ordered his men to their arms and wheeled the artillery into place, with a soldier holding a lit match ready to fire a blast into the Indians if they forced their way through the entrance. The Sauk leaders ordered the dancers back, and the tense situation was defused. Nonetheless, the incident led Kingsley to decide, during the final phases of construction, to place the factory 30 yards outside the stockade so the Indians could conduct their transactions without having to enter the confines of Fort Madison.¹²

Black Hawk later asserted that there had been no premeditated intent to assault the fort. Yet it appears that the Sauk had assembled at Fort Madison with the intention of destroying it. Black Hawk subsequently acknowledged that "had our party got into the fort, all the whites would have been killed."¹³

It also appears that Kingsley had been alerted to the plot. George Hunt, the post sutler who ran the soldiers' commissary – which provided sundry items such as tobacco, sugar, and shoe polish – had received word about an intended attack from a friendly Ioway Indian. Nicholas Jarrot, a local trader, had heard of a plan to infiltrate the fort and slaughter its inhabitants from other traders who worked among the Sauk. Both men passed their intelligence on to Kingsley.¹⁴

12. Jackson, "Old Fort Madison," 16–19; Kingsley to Dearborn, 4/19/1809, FMRF.

13. Black Hawk, *Autobiography*, 65.

14. Kingsley to Dearborn, 4/19/1809, FMRF; [Hunt], "Personal Narrative," 520–24; Affidavit of Nicholas Jarrot, 5/23/1809, FMRF; Affidavit of John Johnson, 11/18/1809, FMRF.

Prior to receiving that information, Kingsley had sent one of his subordinates, Second Lieutenant Nathaniel Pryor, to St. Louis to acquire additional building materials. By the time Pryor arrived in St. Louis, William Clark, Meriwether Lewis's former co-commander and the government's chief Indian agent at St. Louis, had received similar intelligence from his "spies" among the Indians, and he learned from Pryor of the unfinished state of the fort. In response, Captain James House, Kingsley's superior at Fort Belle Fontaine, took two artillery pieces and 30 men on flatboats to reinforce Fort Madison. Lewis also sent a detachment of militia northward by land. Neither House nor the militia arrived in time to be of assistance.¹⁵

THE THREAT of Indian attacks was not limited to Fort Madison in the spring of 1809. Army officers, Indian agents, and territorial officials noted a significant amount of Indian unrest throughout the Old Northwest. They placed the blame for this discontent squarely upon the shoulders of British traders from Canada.¹⁶ The reality was more complex, however. From the late 1730s onward, native communities developed a newfound sense of racial solidarity that emerged from increased contacts among the tribes. From this invigorated sense of pan-tribal identity, powerful religious movements arose that mixed traditional beliefs with elements of Christianity learned from missionaries. Religious leaders known as "prophets" preached a brand of militant nativism that advocated Indian unity in the face of white encroachment. According to this theology, an all-powerful deity, known as the Master of Life, had created Indians, while Euro-Americans were

15. House to Dearborn, 5/9/1809, FMRF; Clark to Dearborn, 4/5/1809, *TPUS*, 14:260; House to Eustis, 4/10/1809, M-221, 23:H392; *Missouri Gazette*, 4/26/1809. Several earlier scholars have asserted that Kingsley sent Pryor to St. Louis to request reinforcements, but Kingsley's letter of April 19, 1809, cited in n. 14, does not support that conclusion. See Jackson, "Old Fort Madison," 16-17; Aldrich, "Fort Madison," 101; and Bennett, "Fort Madison," Part I, 23.

16. For examples, see William Wells to William Henry Harrison, 4/8/1809, in *Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison*, ed. Logan Esarey, 2 vols. (Indianapolis, 1922), 1:239-43 (hereafter cited as *WHHL*); Harrison to Eustis, 4/18/1809, *WHHL*, 1:340-42; Boilvin to Clark, 4/21/1809, *TPUS*, 14:272-73; Clark to Dearborn, 4/30/1809, *TPUS*, 14:271; Mason, Circular Letter, 4/16/1811, M-16, 2:B:289-90; Kingsley to Dearborn, 4/19/1809, FMRF.

a manifestation of malevolent forces that had to be effaced from North America in order for native communities to regain their lands and autonomy.¹⁷

Indian political leaders tapped into these sentiments and built military alliances that warred against the colonial powers. For example, Pontiac, with the assistance of Neolin, or the Delaware Prophet, crafted a pan-tribal movement in the 1760s and launched a series of assaults against British posts in the Great Lakes region. As white settlers poured into the trans-Appalachian West in the early nineteenth century, the nativist movement became decidedly anti-American. During this period, Tenskwatawa, better known as the Shawnee Prophet, claimed to have received a vision from the Master of Life and encouraged his followers to resist white culture and its expansion. Soon, his teachings were carried to Indian communities throughout the region.¹⁸

Tenskwatawa's brother Tecumseh used this message to forge a pan-tribal confederacy that sought to turn back the tide of white settlement. The Ho-Chunk were among the strongest supporters of the Shawnee Prophet and Tecumseh; some Sauk also followed them. Yet the Shawnee brothers' movement was just one component of a larger ideology of resisting American expansion that pervaded the Indian communities in the region.

The deceit exhibited by the federal government in its negotiation of the 1804 treaty with the Sauk as well as the military occupation of their homeland with the establishment of Fort Madison drove many Sauk warriors to embrace this ideology. Black Hawk in particular adopted much of the rhetoric of the greater nativist movement. In one speech he asserted that all Indians "form but one body, to preserve our lands, and to make war against the Big Knives [Americans]. . . . If the Master of Life favors us, you shall again find your lands as they formerly were."¹⁹

17. Gregory Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore, 1992), 23-201; Alfred Cave, *Prophets of the Great Spirit: Native American Revitalization Movements in Eastern North America* (Lincoln, NE, 2006), 1-139.

18. Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance*, 33-36; R. David Edmunds, *The Shawnee Prophet* (Lincoln, NE, 1983), 28-78.

19. R. David Edmunds, *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership* (Boston, 1984), 32-44, 94-95; idem, "Tecumseh's Native Allies: Warriors Who Fought for the Crown," in *War on the Great Lakes: Essays Commemorating the 175th An-*

Thus, despite the pronouncements of American officials that the British in Canada were the cause of Indian unrest, tribes such as the Sauk and Ho-Chunk developed an ideology of resistance against the United States independent of any British machinations. Instead, the various native communities and the British in Canada became allies because they pursued a common policy: protecting their lands from the rapacious American republic and its land-hungry population.²⁰ The soldiers of Fort Madison had the misfortune of being situated in the midst of two tribes that zealously sought to prevent the American occupation of their homelands.

THE UNFINISHED STATE of Fort Madison had made it an inviting target for the Sauk in April 1809. The completion of the fort and its sturdy stockade delayed further Indian attacks until conditions became more favorable with the creation of a renewed British alliance and the initiation of hostilities in late 1811. Thus, in the three years that followed the attempted Sauk assault, the garrison experienced peace and the routine of a frontier post.

That routine and order were undermined, however, by a chronic shortage of soldiers. Never in the first four years of its existence did Fort Madison have more than 80 men. Discharges, desertions, and sickness continually drained the garrison of its manpower until periodic replacements and reinforcements arrived. A report in March 1811 recorded a total of 74 officers and men at the fort. However, since some soldiers were absent from the post on furloughs or assorted duties, the number present was only 59, and 11 of those men were sick or in confinement for various infractions. A report from October 1811 tells a similar

niversary of the Battle of Lake Erie, ed. William Welsh and David Skaggs (Kent, OH, 1991), 60–63; Timothy Willig, *Restoring the Chain of Friendship: British Policy and the Indians of the Great Lakes, 1783–1815* (Lincoln, NE, 2008), 229–34; Jung, “Toward the Black Hawk War,” 33–37; Black Hawk, *Speech*, 4/18/1815, in *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, ed. Lyman Draper, 20 vols. (Madison, WI, 1882), 9:278 (quote).

20. Willig, *Chain of Friendship*, 5, 205–63; Colin Calloway, *Crown and Calumet: British-Indian Relations, 1783–1815* (Norman, OK, 1987), 193–222; Robert Allen, *His Majesty's Indian Allies: British Indian Policy in the Defence of Canada, 1774–1815* (Toronto, ON, 1992), 110–22.

story: of the 56 officers and men assigned to Fort Madison, only 38 were present, and 9 were sick or in confinement. In fact, illness frequently had the most negative impact on manpower. Frontier areas swarmed with disease, and army posts, where men lived in close quarters in drafty, log barracks, were particularly susceptible. At one point in 1811, the post surgeon at Fort Madison noted that two-thirds of the garrison was ill.²¹

Other factors also undermined military readiness, particularly low morale among the enlisted men, who, even by the standards of the day, were poorly paid. Privates earned only \$5 per month, while non-commissioned officers—corporals and sergeants—earned \$7 and \$8, respectively. Considering that unskilled civilian laborers at that time earned between \$10 and \$20 per month, the army's pay scale was relatively low. Of course, Congress also mandated seemingly generous daily rations that included 1¼ pounds of beef or ¾ pounds of pork; 18 ounces of bread or flour; and a gill (about half a cup) of whiskey, brandy, or rum. However, the army depended on private contractors to supply these provisions, which, if they arrived at all, were often spoiled and inedible. Not surprisingly, desertion from frontier posts was common, and often epidemic. Fort Madison was not immune from this phenomenon; in fact, three of Kingsley's men attempted to desert as he made his way up the Mississippi to establish the post. Enlisted men also spent much of their time engaged in toilsome and dreary pursuits, particularly the building and maintenance of their forts. Since army units constituted a concentrated force of manpower, particularly in frontier areas, soldiers spent much of their time engaged in construction projects such as building roads. At Fort Madison, Johnson had the soldiers construct his factory and process the furs he collected,

21. Willig, *Chain of Friendship*, 219–25, 251–55; Watkins, "U.S. Regulars at Fort Madison," 1–2, 71; Number of troops in service on the Peace Establishment, 6/6/1812, in *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 7 vols. (Washington, DC, 1832–1861), 1:320 (hereafter cited as *ASP:MA*); Aldrich, "Fort Madison," 103; Quarterly Return of the Troops belonging to the First Infantry Regiment, February–March 1811, Bissell MSS, SLML; Monthly Return of the United States Troops stationed in the District of Louisiana, October 1811, M-221, 42:B146; Norman Caldwell, "The Frontier Army Officer, 1794–1814," *Mid-America* 37 (1955), 120–22; Robert Simpson to Eustis, 10/31/1811, M-221, 48:S50.

tasks for which they received an additional ten cents per day and an extra ration of liquor.²²

Fort Madison also had problems peculiar to it that stemmed from its leadership. In September 1809, Captain Horatio Stark replaced Kingsley as the fort's senior officer. Stark's superior was Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Bissell, who commanded Fort Belle Fontaine. Stark's immediate subordinate was First Lieutenant Thomas Hamilton. Stark was frequently absent from the post, citing the difficult winters as a reason for spending many months away from his command while recuperating at Fort Belle Fontaine and enjoying the more cosmopolitan atmosphere of nearby St. Louis. Stark was a stern disciplinarian and liberally meted out punishment, particularly flogging. He regularly sentenced soldiers to as many as 50 lashes for minor offenses such as sitting down while on guard duty. Fort Madison, like all frontier posts, had a variety of civilian personnel, and Stark often had stormy relations with them as well. He dismissed George Hunt as the post sutler so he could appoint a local favorite, Denis Julien. In one case, Stark had a civilian employed by Julien sentenced to 50 lashes for selling whiskey to a soldier without permission. Hunt did not record whether he harbored ill will against Stark as a result of his ouster, but the post surgeon, Robert Simpson, wrote a scathing letter to the War Department complaining about Stark's capricious leadership. After Stark arrested him on "a frivolous charge," Simpson requested a furlough so he could travel to Washington to lodge a formal complaint. Secretary of War William Eustis took the accusations seriously and forwarded a copy of Simpson's charges to Bissell, noting that Fort Madison appeared to be "the scene of many irregularities."²³

22. Edward Coffman, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898* (New York, 1986), 15-16, 20-21; Donald Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Urbana, IL, 2012), 31, 70-73; Norman Caldwell, "The Enlisted Soldier at the Frontier Post, 1790-1814," *Mid-America* 26 (1955), 195-204; *U.S. Statutes at Large* 2:133; Causes of the Failure of the Expedition against the Indians, 5/8/1792, *ASP:MA*, 1:38; Kingsley to Dearborn, 11/22/1808, *FMRF*; Francis Prucha, *Broadax and Bayonet: The Role of the United States Army in the Development of the Northwest, 1815-1860* (Lincoln, NE, 1953), 34-36; Mason to Johnson, 5/16/1809, M-16, 1:A:375-76; Mason to Johnson, 7/14/1809, M-16, 2:B:23.

23. Fort Madison Garrison Orders and Belle Fontaine with Copies of Belle Fontaine Letters, 2/20/1812, 2/25/1812, Special Collections, Jefferson Library, United States Military Academy, West Point, New York (hereafter this volume cited as

Eustis almost certainly referred at least indirectly to another letter his office received. Who wrote that letter is unknown; the writer identified himself only as "A Democrat." The contents leveled serious allegations against Stark, asserting that he was partial to British traders and that he once even uttered the scandalous statement, "A *limited Monarchy* would suit the *American people best!!!*" The anonymous letter writer's most severe indictment concerned the lack of preparedness at Fort Madison. As the unknown author caustically noted, "The Garrison looks as if it was ready to be given up at the first Summons. No fixed ammunition—no appointed places for her officers and soldiers in case of an alarm."²⁴ Of course, one must take these accusations with a grain of salt, coming as they do from an anonymous source. Yet the author, whether a soldier or a civilian, echoed many of Simpson's complaints. Bissell, for his part, noted in a letter to the War Department that while there may have been a "Relaxation of Duty and some want to Propriety in Capt. Starke's [*sic*] conduct," Fort Madison, as far as he knew, was "in Good Repair, and Judiciously Commanded."²⁵

Bissell did not believe that his subordinate exhibited sympathies toward British traders. In fact, after Stark seized goods belonging to three British traders in October 1809, he wrote to Bissell, "Should those persons still have any sinister designs against the United States the means of future mischief is thus withheld from them until they can clear up their characters." While Stark's action may have demonstrated his loyalty to the United States and undermined the idea that he sympathized with the British and their traders, it was nevertheless characteristic of his injudicious nature. Bissell, seeing no justifiable grounds for the seizure, ordered the goods returned.²⁶

FMGO); Norman Caldwell, "Civilian Personnel at the Frontier Military Post (1790–1814)," *Mid-America* 38 (1956), 101–19; Jackson, "Old Fort Madison," 22, 29–30, 53; [Hunt], "Personal Narrative," 525; Caldwell, "Frontier Army Officer," 119–25; Robert Simpson to Eustis, 10/31/1811, M-221, 48:S50 (quote); Eustis to Bissell, 11/4/1811, M-6, 5:5:230; Eustis to Bissell, 2/25/1812, M-6, 5:5:283 (quote).

24. The full text of this letter is reprinted in Donald Jackson, "A Critic Views Iowa's First Military Post," *Iowa Journal of History* 58 (1960), 33–36, 33n6.

25. Bissell to Eustis, 1/20/1812, M-221, 42:B165.

26. Horatio Stark to Eustis, 11/10/1809, FMRF; Stark to Bissell, 10/4/1809, M-221, 18:B631 (quote); Bissell to Stark, 10/25/1809, M-221, 18:B631.

If Stark did not endear himself to traders or civilians, his men thought even less of him, and his leadership negatively affected morale and manpower. When soldiers' terms of service ended, few reenlisted at Fort Madison. In the summer of 1811, 25 men were discharged, and Stark could convince only a few "drunken vagabonds" to reenlist. The next year was no better. He lamented to Bissell, "I have not men sufficient to post the proper number of Sentries, three being the extent of our force. — The aggregate present is forty Six . . . from which are to be deducted three Privates that can do no Duty. . . . Besides I have lost all Confidence in the men who have . . . been discharged; and who are liable to leave me every Day."²⁷

In addition to highlighting Stark's flaws, the author of the anonymous letter cited above also mentioned the poor location of the post and the chronic shortage of soldiers. "The Garrison is in such a rascally situation and so badly calculated for defence, that at least 300 men could be hidden around it and could not be hurt by either Cannon or small arms. . . . There is 1290 feet of the Garrison to be defended, and at present but 50 men to do it — which makes 64½ feet for each man."²⁸

Stark agreed that the fort was poorly situated and expressed misgivings about its defensibility, but he could not be blamed for that failure; that had been Kingsley's doing. Kingsley, though, was simply following the orders of Dearborn and Lewis, both of whom had decided to place the fort and factory near the Des Moines River. Even Kingsley admitted, in the wake of the attempted assault by the Sauk, that building another fort farther north at Prairie du Chien — a location that, unlike Fort Madison, controlled key terrain and water routes — would be necessary to properly defend the upper Mississippi valley. Other military and territorial officials voiced similar sentiments.²⁹

27. Jackson, "Iowa's First Military Post," 34 (quote); Stark to Bissell, 2/7/1812, *TPUS*, 14:522 (quote).

28. Jackson, "Iowa's First Military Post," 33.

29. Stark to Bissell, 4/22/1812, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Unregistered Series, 1789–1860, Microfilm Publication M-222, reel 6, document S1812, Record Group 107, National Archives, Washington, DC; James Many to Wilkinson, 5/20/1806, *TPUS*, 13:512; Kingsley to Dearborn, 4/19/1809, FMRF; House to Eustis, 5/9/1809, FMRF; Boilvin to Eustis, 3/5/1811, Nicolas Boilvin Letters, 1811–1823, box 3, vol. 1, p. 10, in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, Papers,

BY THE TIME the anonymous letter reached Washington, the trans-Appalachian West was already in a state of war. From the time the Shawnee Prophet began to preach in 1805, Indian attacks slowly increased for the next six years. Clark recorded a total of 21 such actions against isolated American settlements in his jurisdiction from April 1805 to November 1811. Most incidents amounted to little more than the theft of livestock and other property, but some were more serious. In 1805 Sauk and Meskwaki warriors killed three white settlers in Missouri; in 1807 a Sauk warrior killed a trader at Portage des Sioux, just north of St. Louis. Fort Madison would have been the scene of another attack in April 1809 had Kingsley not acted promptly. Military commanders, including Stark, remained in a constant state of vigilance as they saw growing numbers of Indians following the Shawnee Prophet and Tecumseh even as the British in Canada aggressively sought alliances with the tribes.³⁰

The war with the Indians began on November 7, 1811, when Indiana Territorial Governor William Henry Harrison, fearing the growing power of the Shawnee Prophet, led an army of regulars and militia against the Prophet's village near the Wabash and the Tippecanoe Rivers in present-day Indiana. Harrison claimed victory and dispersed the followers of the Shawnee brothers. Afterward, the frontier witnessed even more Indian attacks as enraged warriors sought revenge for what became known as the Battle of Tippecanoe. Thus, seven months before Congress declared war against Great Britain on June 18, 1812, the United States found itself in an undeclared Indian war on the frontier.³¹

University of Wisconsin-Platteville Area Research Center, Platteville, Wisconsin (hereafter cited as Boilvin MSS, with references to page numbers in this volume); Eustis to Benjamin Howard, 4/13/1812, *TPUS*, 14:544.

30. Marsha Rising, ed., "White Claims for Indian Depredations: Illinois-Missouri-Arkansas Frontier, 1804-32," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 84 (1996), 281-304; William Foley, "Different Notions of Justice: The Case of the 1808 St. Louis Murder Trials," *Gateway Heritage* 9 (Winter 1988-1989), 2-13; Wilkinson to Sauk Chiefs, 12/10/1805, *TPUS*, 13:300-302; Boilvin to Dearborn, 6/16/1807, M-221, 4:B256; Lewis to Boilvin, 5/14/1808, Letter 17, Bissell MSS, SLML; Lewis to Dearborn, 7/1/1808, *TPUS*, 14:202; Stark to Bissell, 2/10/1810, FMRF; Clark to Dearborn, 7/20/1810, *WHHL*, 1:449; Harrison to Dearborn, 8/28/1810, *WHHL*, 1:471.

31. Jung, "Toward the Black Hawk War," 36-37; John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier, 1607-1814* (New York, 2005), 205-10.

White observers attributed these attacks to what they believed was the inherent barbarity of native peoples, but the Indians simply possessed a different culture of warfare. They avoided pitched battles that were costly in lives and fought only when they believed they could inflict damage against an enemy with a minimum number of casualties. The loss of a warrior meant one less man for future battles, and because Indian men were also hunters and providers, the death of a husband and father presented an Indian family with a significant burden. Thus, Indian warriors preferred raids and ambushes that depended on the element of surprise (as did the Sauk attempt to attack Fort Madison by subterfuge in April 1809). Indian war parties also avoided fighting enemies that had superior numbers, and they saw no shame in withdrawing from a battle when the tide had turned against them. While Euro-American armies depended on discipline to maneuver and control large bodies of soldiers, the Indian way of war stressed individual initiative in battle. Unlike Euro-American warfare, which sought to neutralize an enemy's ability to make war, Indian warfare served to avenge wrongs, and the mutilation of the bodies of dead enemies as a means of revenge was accepted. Thus, rather than being "massacres" and "depre-dations" as defined by whites, Indian military operations served to punish those who had committed unjust acts and force enemies to practice what was perceived as proper behavior.³²

Indian war parties in the upper Mississippi valley skillfully demonstrated these cultural practices both before and after the Battle of Tippecanoe. Once war between Britain and the United States commenced seven months later, the Indian confederacy, more so than British soldiers and militia in Canada, carried out several of the first spectacular victories. A combined force of about 50 British regulars, 200 Canadian militia, and almost 400 Indians conquered the post on Mackinac Island on July 17, 1812, before the American soldiers even knew that war had been declared. On August 15, about 400 Potawatomi ambushed and killed most of the soldiers, militia, and civilians from the garrison of Fort Dearborn as they attempted to make their way from

32. Armstrong Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare, 1675-1815* (Norman, OK, 1998), 17-56, 127; R. David Edmunds, "Indian-White Warfare: A Look at Both Sides." *Northwest Ohio Quarterly* 61 (1989), 35-45.

Chicago to Fort Wayne. The next day brought another American defeat, when General William Hull, with a force of 1,100 men, surrendered Detroit – without firing a shot – to a British force of 1,800, including 400 Indians under Tecumseh’s command.³³

On January 1, 1812, a war party of about 100 Ho-Chunk warriors, seeking revenge for Tippecanoe, killed two American lead miners at Dubuque’s Mines (present-day Dubuque, Iowa), about 200 miles north of Fort Madison. George Hunt, the former sutler who was in charge of the mining party, only saved his life by telling the Ho-Chunk that he was English. Hunt traveled to Fort Madison to deliver the news, which had a devastating impact on morale there. Stark again had trouble convincing soldiers to reenlist. He wrote to Bissell, “My force is diminishing so fast that it will be necessary to have a reinforcement. The Soldiers who have been discharged . . . [have been] much opposed to remaining, which was very much against my expectation.”³⁴

THE FIRST FATALITY at Fort Madison came on March 3, 1812, when Corporal James Leonard was killed by a Ho-Chunk war party while he was hunting about two miles from the post. Several days later, friendly Indians found his body and returned it to the fort in a horrific state; his head was severed from the body, as were his arms, and his heart had been removed. The killing created a sense of panic among the soldiers and civilians at Fort Madison. “We are now so surrounded by [Indian] enemies,” John Johnson wrote, that “we dare not venture to the limits of the public ground, or with safety, two hundred yards from the garrison. . . . I learn from all Indians visiting the Factory . . . we are to be attacked. . . . I believe every man of us will perish, as there are not sufficient men here to defend the garrison.”³⁵

33. Brian Dunnigan, *The British Army at Mackinac, 1812–1815* (Mackinac Island, 1980), 11–12; Hickey, *War of 1812*, 81–84; Louise Kellogg, *The British Regime in Wisconsin and the Northwest* (Madison, WI, 1935), 285–87; Edmunds, *Tecumseh*, 179–81.

34. Stark to Bissell, 1/6/1812, FMRF; [Hunt], “Personal Narrative,” 527–38, 526n11; Johnson to Howard, ASP:IA, 1:805; Niles’ *Weekly Register* (Baltimore), 3/7/1812; Stark to Bissell, 1/22/1812, FMRF (quote).

35. Jackson, “Old Fort Madison,” 32; *Louisiana Gazette* (St. Louis), 3/21/1812; Stark to Bissell, 3/8/1812, M-221, 42:B208; Johnson to Eustis, 3/9/1812, TPUS, 14:535 (quote).

Small Ho-Chunk war parties lingered in the vicinity of the post. On March 29 a Ho-Chunk warrior shot a soldier on sentry duty who died of his wounds two weeks later. On April 3, a guard killed a Ho-Chunk Indian near the gate. If the constant harassment of the Ho-Chunk was not enough, the summer of 1812 brought further depressing news.³⁶

In July 1812, during another of Stark's absences, Bissell informed Hamilton of the declaration of war. Soon after, Hamilton learned of the disasters that had befallen Fort Mackinac, Fort Dearborn, and Detroit.³⁷ The loss of Forts Mackinac and Dearborn in particular meant that Fort Madison truly stood as a lonely sentinel in the region.

In August 1812 Hamilton only had about 40 men. He asked Bissell for more, but Bissell was already stretched thin. He commanded Forts Belle Fontaine, Madison, Osage, and Massac (near present-day Metropolis, Illinois). In addition, Territorial Governor Benjamin Howard had him establish yet another post, Fort Mason (near present-day Saverton, Missouri). Bissell complied, although by spring he had only 29 privates at Fort Belle Fontaine.³⁸

Nonetheless, Bissell well understood Fort Madison's vulnerability, so he acceded to Hamilton's request, ordering Stark to depart Fort Belle Fontaine on September 3 with 19 soldiers, 14 of whom were artillerymen who brought an additional artillery piece. Along the way, Stark was to rendezvous with 17 U.S. Rangers who would accompany him. Those reinforcements would have increased Hamilton's force to almost 80 men and officers.³⁹ However, they did not arrive on time.

36. Clark to Eustis, 4/12/1812, *ASP:IA*, 1:807; *Louisiana Gazette*, 4/25/1812; Watkins, "U.S. Regulars at Fort Madison," 35; Howard to Bissell, 2/13/1812, *TPUS*, 14:522; Bissell to Eustis, 5/28/1812, *TPUS*, 14:551; *FMGO*, 5/4/1812.

37. Bissell, Circular Letter, 7/28/1812, Letterbook vol. 5, Daniel Bissell Papers, Missouri History Museum, St. Louis, Missouri (hereafter this letterbook is cited as Bissell MSS, MHM); Hamilton to Bissell, 8/24/1812, *FMRF*.

38. Bissell to Stark, 9/2/1812, Bissell MSS, MHM; Bissell to Howard, 9/6/1812, Bissell MSS, MHM; Bissell to Eustis, 9/6/1812, Bissell MSS, MHM; Bissell to Howard, 9/11/1812, Bissell MSS, MHM. Fort Mason was later garrisoned by the U.S. Rangers, a new, mounted military force.

39. Bissell to Stark, 9/11/1812, Bissell MSS, MHM; Bissell to Eustis, 9/19/1812, *FMRF*.

By early September 1812, the majority of the Ho-Chunk—including the chiefs—were committed to the confederacy of the Shawnee Prophet and Tecumseh as well as to the British alliance. The Ho-Chunk had a more hierarchical tribal structure than most other tribes in the region, including the Sauk, whose leadership took a more cautious approach and did not commit to war. However, Sauk chiefs, like those of other tribes in the Old Northwest (and unlike those among the Ho-Chunk), had little coercive power over their young men and could only employ persuasion to try to convince them to adhere to tribal policies. In the end, the decision to go to war rested with individual warriors. Thus, while the Sauk leadership openly professed neutrality, that did not stop many young Sauk warriors from acting on their own volition and joining war parties that attacked American settlements and military targets. This became clear when a party of Ho-Chunk stopped by the main Sauk village of Saukenuk at the mouth of the Rock River and convinced many Sauk warriors, including Black Hawk, to attack Fort Madison.⁴⁰

As the warriors set out, Hamilton had one small stroke of luck. On September 4, 1812, a private trader named Graham and 16 of his hired men arrived in two boats. These men were the only reinforcement Hamilton received. Along with them were Emile Vasquez and her baby daughter. Emile was the wife of Second Lieutenant Antonio “Baronet” Vasquez, a man of Spanish ancestry who hailed from a prominent St. Louis family. His ability to speak Spanish, French, and English had made him indispensable to Pike on his expeditions, and upon his return, Vasquez had accepted an army commission. He arrived at Fort Madison in February 1812 along with 12 enlisted men as part of Bissell’s efforts to increase the garrison’s manpower.

Vasquez proved to be a valuable officer; the same could not be said of the other junior officer at the post, Second Lieutenant Robert Page. Stark had earlier brought up Page on three charges: drunkenness on duty (eight offenses), disobedience of orders (two offenses), and disorderly conduct (two offenses). Page loathed Stark and tendered his resignation from the army in

40. Willig, *Chain of Friendship*, 232–42; Jung, “Toward the Black Hawk War,” 36–38; Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare*, 34; Black Hawk, *Autobiography*, 67–68.

May 1812, but his original letter was lost on its way to Washington. Hamilton, in turn, despised Page, describing him as a "Cowardly pittiful *Wretch*."⁴¹ Luckily for Hamilton, Bissell transferred Page to another post while he awaited his separation from the army, so he was not present when the Indians attacked Fort Madison.⁴²

In response to the attack at Dubuque's Mines, Stark had developed, and Hamilton later refined, detailed plans in the event of an attack. Hamilton was to command the two front blockhouses (blockhouses 1 and 2) and another eight men were assigned to the front stockade. Page, while he remained at Fort Madison, was to command blockhouse 3 and the western side of the stockade; Vasquez would command the soldiers on the eastern side. A sergeant had charge of blockhouse 4, which stood at the end of the notorious "tail." Each artillery piece had a dedicated, well-drilled crew. By August 1812, Hamilton took the additional step of having all settlers in the vicinity remain inside the safety of the stockade at night. Hamilton even motivated the soldiers with stirring oratory, urging them to "*Sell that life* (which we only value for the *Glory* of our Country) as dear as possible."⁴³

THUS, when the Indian war party arrived on the night of September 4 and quietly took positions, the men and officers of Fort Madison were as ready as they could be given the fort's limitations. The various terrain features, particularly the bank along the Mississippi and the ravine, provided cover for the Indians. Black Hawk noted that he was so close to the fort he could hear the sentinels walking.⁴⁴

41. *Niles' Weekly Register*, 10/31/1812; Janet Lecompte, "Antonio Francois ('Baronet') Vasquez," in *French Fur Traders and Voyageurs in the American West*, ed. LeRoy Hafen (Lincoln, NE, 1993), 302-8; Baronet Vasquez to Benito Vasquez, 9/16/1812, Vasquez Family Collection, 1774-1925, folder 4, box 1, Missouri History Museum, St. Louis, Missouri (hereafter cited as Vasquez MSS, with references to folder and box numbers); Bissell to Eustis, 2/19/1812, *TPUS*, 14:521; Bissell to Eustis, 9/4/1812, M-221, 42:B454½; Stark, Charges & Specifications exhibited against Lieut. Robt. C. Page, 4/24/1812, M-221, 42:B454½; Hamilton to Bissell, 5/8/1812, M-221, 42:B454½ (quote).

42. FMGO, 5/5/1812.

43. FMGO, 1/12/1812, 4/11/1812, 8/26/1812 (quote).

44. Black Hawk, *Autobiography*, 67-68.

Shortly after daybreak, several soldiers left by the front gate. A Ho-Chunk warrior opened fire, killing Private John Cox, who was a mere 25 paces from the gate. A sentinel in one of the blockhouses returned fire, and soon shooting commenced on all sides. Hamilton and his men remained inside the fort for the remainder of the siege, much to the disappointment of the Indians, who had hoped that the soldiers would emerge from the stockade and engage in open combat. The Indians withdrew at nightfall but resumed the battle the next morning. On the second day, after shooting about 400 rounds, they struck the halyard of the flagpole and gave a great yell of victory upon seeing the American flag flutter to the ground. At nightfall, they withdrew again, taking Cox's body, which had remained where it had fallen.⁴⁵

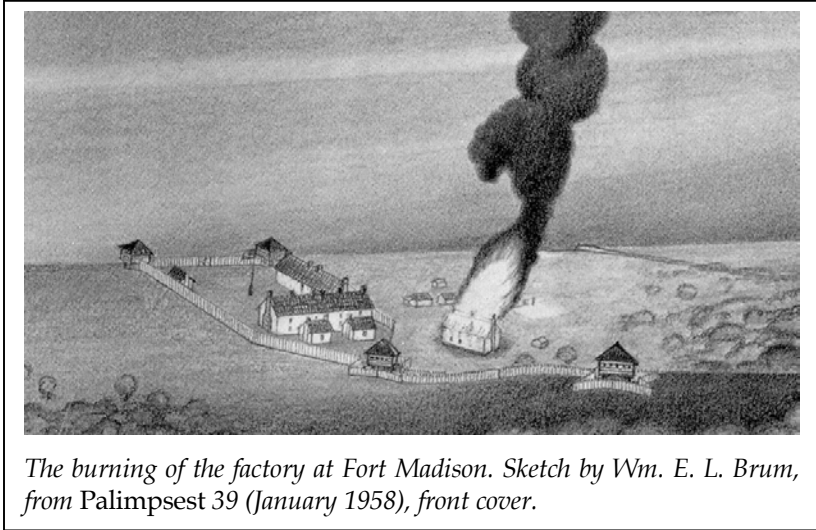
The third day proved to be the most dramatic. At dawn, the soldiers of Fort Madison woke to the grisly scene of Cox's head and heart impaled on sticks by the river bank. The Indians attempted a new tactic, hurtling flaming arrows at the fort so as to burn it down. Hamilton responded with an ingenious solution: he had eight old gun barrels made into syringes, or "squirts" as he called them, and used them to extinguish the fires. Outside the stockade, the Indians plundered and burned Graham's boats as well as nearby cabins. Warriors on the ridge to the north made it dangerous to move from one blockhouse to another; the "tail" and blockhouse 4 had failed to fully neutralize the danger of that treacherous piece of terrain. That night, Hamilton had the factory set ablaze to prevent the Indians burning it at a time when it could pose a risk to the fort.⁴⁶

On the fourth day, September 8, the Indians fortified a nearby stable. Vasquez dispersed them with two well-aimed shots from an artillery piece. The Indians continued to fire on the fort until about 10:00 p.m., when their ammunition and powder ran low. By the morning of September 9, the Indians had withdrawn. In the end, Cox and a Ho-Chunk warrior were the only fatalities.⁴⁷

45. Hamilton to Bissell, 9/10/1812, *Official Letters*, 63-64; *Niles' Weekly Register*, 10/31/1812; Watkins, "U.S. Regulars at Fort Madison," 10-11.

46. Black Hawk, *Autobiography*, 68; Hamilton to Bissell, 9/10/1812, *Official Letters*, 64-65.

47. Baronet Vasquez to Benito Vasquez, 9/16/1812, Vasquez MSS, 4:1; *Niles' Weekly Register*, 10/31/1812; Watkins, "U.S. Regulars at Fort Madison," 10-11.



The burning of the factory at Fort Madison. Sketch by Wm. E. L. Brum, from Palimpsest 39 (January 1958), front cover.

IN THE WAKE of the siege, military officials began to question the wisdom of maintaining Fort Madison. Hamilton asserted that “this garrison is in the most ineligible place that ever could have been chosen by any man even if he would try.”⁴⁸ Bissell had long believed that Fort Madison’s perimeter was too large for such a small number of soldiers to defend. After reading Hamilton’s report, he noted, “The extraordinary *Tail*, as it is Called, might be taken entirely from the Works, which was not thought by the Commanding Officer adviseable, as it is a covered way to the only Block House, which commands the ground back of the Fort. . . . I am fully of the opinion the Site chosen for that Post, is a very improper one.”⁴⁹ Bissell, who believed that neither Fort Madison nor Fort Osage had any military value, suggested that new posts be established at more strategically significant locations such as Peoria on the Illinois River and Rock Island at the mouth of the Rock River.⁵⁰

Secretary of War Eustis gave Bissell permission to evacuate both posts if the territorial governor approved. However, Terri-

48. Hamilton to Bissell, 9/10/1812, *Official Letters*, 64.

49. Bissell to Stark, 9/2/1812, Bissell MSS, MHS; Bissell to Eustis, 9/26/1812, *TPUS*, 14:595 (quote).

50. Bissell to Eustis, 12/28/1812, *TPUS*, 14:612-14.

torial Governor Howard was absent from St. Louis and did not return until March 31, 1813. Upon his return, Bissell immediately laid before him the reasons to abandon Fort Madison. Howard objected, arguing that it was vital to retain this lone outpost. He wanted to establish a fort at Prairie du Chien and believed that Fort Madison could serve as a staging area for such an endeavor. Despite his decision, Howard acknowledged Fort Madison's flaws. "I never considered it a happy selection of Scite [*sic*]," he wrote. "Had my Opinion been taken before we were in Hostility with the Indians, it certainly would have been in favor of its evacuation." Now, however, "I deem the abandonment of it unadvisable. . . . Our inability to maintain it . . . would embolden those who are now hostile."⁵¹

Thus, Fort Madison remained, and as long as it remained, Bissell believed it needed more men. He dispatched a sergeant and 12 privates in early March 1813; later that month he ordered Stark to take 40 enlisted men and a lieutenant from the recently arrived Twenty-Fourth Infantry Regiment northward to Fort Madison. By early April 1813, Fort Madison had four officers and more than 100 enlisted men. The army underwent a reorganization that year, and Howard became a brigadier general within the newly created Ninth Military District, constituting the territories of Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri (formerly Louisiana Territory); Clark became governor of Missouri Territory. That summer Fort Madison reached the zenith of its strength after Howard ordered 40 members of another unit, the U.S. Riflemen, to join Stark's company there, and Bissell dispatched an additional detachment of artillerymen. By then, as many as 150 soldiers from various regiments may have been stationed at Fort Madison. Stark received a promotion in April 1813 and soon after departed Fort Madison, leaving Hamilton once again in command. Exhibiting his usual bold leadership, Hamilton had the soldiers cut away the bank along the river so that it could be raked by fire from the forward blockhouses.⁵²

51. Eustis to Bissell, 10/7/1812, M-6, 6:6:186; Bissell to John Armstrong Jr., 3/30/1813, FMRF; Bissell to Eustis, 4/12/1813, FMRF; Howard to Bissell, 4/4/1813, *TPUS*, 14:663-64 (quote).

52. Bissell to T. H. Cushing, 12/26/1812, Bissell MSS, MHM; Bissell to Stark, 3/27/1813, Bissell MSS, MHM; Bissell to Armstrong, 3/30/1813, *TPUS*, 14:646-48;

There were other seemingly positive developments as well. In August 1812 President Madison hosted a delegation of 33 chiefs from the Sauk, Meskwaki, Dakota (Santee Sioux), Ho-Chunk, Osage, Ioway, and Shawnee tribes in Washington and convinced them to remain neutral in the war between the United States and Great Britain. Nicolas Boilvin, who led the diplomatic offensive in the West in early 1813, had a young subagent, Maurice Blondeau—who was of French and Meskwaki ancestry and fluent in the Sauk and Meskwaki language—meet with the Sauk chiefs in several councils, three of which took place inside the walls of Fort Madison. Once again, the Sauk leaders professed neutrality. The recruiting efforts of the British Indian agent Robert Dickson at Prairie du Chien did much to undermine Boilvin's diplomacy, however. By the summer of 1813, Boilvin reported that, despite his efforts and despite the Sauk leaders' professed neutrality, many Sauk warriors, particularly those at Saukenuk, remained hostile to the United States, as did a large number of Ho-Chunk.⁵³

BOILVIN'S FEARS were confirmed during the next attack on Fort Madison on July 8, 1813, when a 100-man Ho-Chunk and Sauk war party (which possibly also included Menominee warriors) attacked a wood-cutting detail outside Fort Madison's stockade, killing two soldiers. The remaining men fled for the safety of the fort. A short exchange of gunfire followed before the warriors decamped. No prolonged siege occurred as in September 1812, but, as in the earlier action, the Indians used the ravine for cover. Hamilton decided further changes were re-

Gillum Ferguson, *Illinois in the War of 1812* (Urbana, IL, 2012), 129, 147; Bennett, "Fort Madison," Part III, 16-17; Bissell to Stark, 4/16/1813, Bissell MSS, MHM; FMGO, 6/29/1813, 7/28/1813, 10/25/1813; *Missouri Gazette*, 9/11/1813.

53. Herman Viola, *Diplomats in Buckskin: A History of Indian Delegations in Washington City* (Washington, DC, 1981), 22-23; Jung, "Toward the Black Hawk War," 39-42; Council Held with Sacs, 1/22/1813, Boilvin MSS, 30-32; Maurice Blondeau to Howard, 4/3/1813, *TPUS*, 14:658-61; Boilvin to Eustis, 2/6/1813, Boilvin MSS, 34a-35a; Vasquez to Boilvin, 2/27/1813, Boilvin MSS, 39a-40a; Council held at Fort Madison, 3/27/1813, *TPUS*, 14:661-62; Boilvin to Clark, 7/25/1813, William Clark Papers, 2:13-17, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas (hereafter cited as Clark MSS, with references to volume and page numbers); Johnson to Clark, 7/25/1813, Clark MSS, 2:17-18.

quired. The ravine was too large to be cut away in the same manner as the riverbank, so he erected a blockhouse near its mouth along the banks of the Mississippi. He even built a “subterranean passage” – probably a trench rather than a tunnel – from the fort to the new blockhouse so his soldiers had cover as they traversed the open ground between the two.⁵⁴

Hamilton gave the men strict orders to keep the door closed and barred until the new guard arrived. However, on the morning of July 16, 1813, a corporal failed to follow that order. When Indians hiding in the thick brush of the ravine opened fire at about 7:00 a.m., the corporal tried to close and bar the door, but an Indian warrior attempted to force it open; that Indian was immediately gunned down. Then, suddenly, another warrior rushed to the blockhouse and thrust a long spear into a loophole, impaling and killing the four men inside. The entire action, according to Hamilton, occurred in a mere ten minutes.⁵⁵

The Indians attempted to gain entry into the blockhouse by removing the stones of the foundation. By that time, the garrison was alerted to their presence. Hamilton’s artillery crews fired shots and severed the arm of one warrior above the elbow and broke another’s above the wrist. The Indians and the soldiers spent most the day exchanging fire until the war party departed at about 5:00 p.m. Six soldiers died at Fort Madison in July 1813, more than during the siege ten months earlier. Many years later, the warrior who killed the four soldiers in the blockhouse, the Sauk chief Weesheet, posed for a sketch by George Catlin, the great chronicler of American Indians; at the time, he still possessed the spear and related with pride how he had killed four men with it.⁵⁶

DESPITE THESE ATTACKS, the soldiers of Fort Madison continued to defend the post. In May 1813 Bissell ordered Fort Osage evacuated. The demands of the war created a constant

54. Watkins, “U.S. Regulars at Fort Madison,” 46, 61–62, 71; *Missouri Gazette*, 9/11/1813 (quote).

55. *Missouri Gazette*, 9/11/1813; Bennett, “Fort Madison,” Part III, 18.

56. *Missouri Gazette*, 9/11/1813; Bennett, “Fort Madison,” Part III, 18; George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*, 2 vols. (London, 1841), 2:211, plate 286; Hamilton to Bissell, 7/18/1813, FMRF.

need for men and officers, and a post so far west served little purpose. Reports of Indian hostilities in the vicinity of Prairie du Chien and Saukenuk and Dickson's success in recruiting native allies the previous year made Bissell and Howard reluctant to abandon Fort Madison. Moreover, it was one of only three forts, along with Forts Wayne and Harrison in Indiana Territory, that had been successfully defended during the first year of the war.⁵⁷

While the threat remained in the upper Mississippi valley, it would not be hostile Indians or the British that ultimately caused Fort Madison's demise. After the attacks in July 1813, it was never attacked again. The problem was more mundane, but equally as serious: the lack of adequate provisions. The system of private contractors upon which the army relied had been inefficient before 1812, and the war's burdens exposed its weaknesses, particularly in frontier areas where transportation was difficult and expensive. The contractor who supplied the posts under Bissell's command was particularly lax in his duties. Bissell castigated him, noting, "I never have seen so much neglect in 25 years Service. . . . [Fort] Madison is now on allowance [i.e., rationing its food], and [Fort] Mason has long since been out of Flour, [Fort] Osage had a scanty supply the first of January, your boat having never reached that."⁵⁸

After the evacuation of Fort Osage, some of its men and officers were transferred to Fort Madison. While that increased the number of soldiers, it also increased the number of mouths to feed. In October 1813 Hamilton discovered that the supplies of flour and pork at Fort Madison were spoiled and unfit for consumption. Soon, winter would come, making resupply from St. Louis impossible. The specter of starvation presented a far greater danger than the Indians ever had.⁵⁹

57. Bissell to E. B. Clemson, 5/13/1813, Bissell MSS, MHM; Bissell to Stark, 5/5/1813, Bissell MSS, MHM; Bissell to Jonathan Campbell, 3/10/1813, Bissell MSS, MHM; Stark to Howard, 4/24/1813, *TPUS*, 14:670; Howard to Armstrong, 6/20/1813, *TPUS*, 14:680.

58. Hickey, *War of 1812*, 72-73, 83; Bissell to Hamilton, 1/16/1813, Bissell MSS, MHM; Bissell to Decius Wadsworth, 1/25/1813, Bissell MSS, MHM; FMGO, 7/6/1813; Bissell to William Morrison, 2/7/1813, Bissell MSS, MHM (quote).

59. FMGO, 7/28/1813, 10/25/1813.

Thus, on October 25, 1813, Hamilton ordered the evacuation of the post. He had six vessels to transport the soldiers and equipment to Fort Belle Fontaine. On November 3, he ordered his men to assemble the fort's property on the parade (the open area within the stockade) so it could be loaded on the boats. That order was the last entry made in the garrison orderly book. When exactly the small fleet departed Fort Madison is unknown, but Hamilton recorded an entry as officer of the day at Fort Belle Fontaine on November 21. Presumably, the garrison departed within a few days of the November 3 order. All the buildings of Fort Madison—the stockade, barracks, officers' quarters, block-houses, and other structures—were burned. For many years afterward—indeed, until the 1830s, when white settlers began to enter the region—several of the stone chimneys and fireplaces stood like charred ghosts marking the place where Fort Madison once stood.⁶⁰

THE STRUGGLE for the upper Mississippi valley continued after Fort Madison's abandonment. In fact, during the later stages of the war, American victories in other theaters allowed military planners to devote more attention and resources to the region than they had while Fort Madison existed. By the end of 1813, Oliver Hazard Perry's victory on Lake Erie and William Henry Harrison's success at the Battle of the Thames had secured the lower Great Lakes and the transportation routes into the upper Great Lakes. That same year, Benjamin Howard ordered the construction of Fort Clark at Peoria, which closed the Illinois River to Indian war parties and provided security for American settlements in southern Illinois and Missouri.⁶¹

The situation at St. Louis improved modestly in the spring of 1814, when Major Zachary Taylor (the future president) arrived with two additional companies of regulars from the Seventh Infantry Regiment. William Clark decided that the time had arrived for the United States to reassert its military power in the upper Mississippi valley, so he led an expedition that

60. FMGO, 10/25/1813, 11/3/1813, 11/21/1813; Jackson, "Old Fort Madison," 33, 40.

61. Robert Quimby, *The United States Army in the War of 1812: An Operational and Command Study* (East Lansing, MI, 1997), 259–94, 733–35.

established Fort Shelby at Prairie du Chien in early June 1814. However, the British commander at Mackinac Island organized a campaign that forced the surrender of that garrison in late July. The United States launched two more attempts to fortify the region north of St. Louis, but Sauk, Meskwaki, Kickapoo, and Dakota warriors thwarted both efforts. In the end, the British and their native allies controlled a wide arc of territory that stretched from Mackinac Island in the north to the mouth of the Rock River in the south.⁶²

The British did not retain this vast domain as a potential homeland for their Indian allies, however. Instead, they decided to return it to the United States in exchange for a much desired end to the hostilities. Peace between the United States and Britain finally came on December 24, 1814, with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, which went into effect on February 17, 1815, after both governments ratified the agreement. Great Britain merely demanded that the United States return to the *status quo antebellum* by making peace with the native communities in the Old Northwest. The federal government and the tribes negotiated a series of treaties between 1815 and 1818. Despite those agreements, the Ho-Chunk and Sauk continued to harbor deep distrust toward the Americans and their government. The uneasy relationships between the United States and the two tribes, strained by the continued misdeeds of federal officials in the postwar years, eventually resulted in the 1827 Winnebago Uprising and the 1832 Black Hawk War.⁶³

The officers and men who had fought at Fort Madison had nothing to be ashamed of; neither did their Indian adversaries. The soldiers were forced to defend an indefensible site. That they successfully held out against three Indian assaults, and lost

62. Clark to Armstrong, 5/4/1814, *TPUS*, 14:762–63; David Grabitske, “The 7th U. States Infantry in the Midwest: A Sketch of the Detachments of Captains Thornton Posey and Zachary Taylor,” undated, <http://umbrigade.tripod.com/articles/midwest7th.html>; Reginald Horsman, “Wisconsin and the War of 1812,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 46 (Autumn 1962), 8–13; Barry Gough, “Michilimackinac and Prairie du Chien: Northern Anchors of British Authority in the War of 1812,” *Michigan Historical Review* 38 (Spring 2012), 98–105.

63. Hickey, *War of 1812*, 199, 228, 284–316; Robert Fisher, “The Treaties of Portage des Sioux,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 19 (1933), 495–503; Jung, “Toward the Black Hawk War,” 46.

nine men in the process, was a testimony to their ability. In retrospect, the Sauk and Ho-Chunk warriors who fought against them cannot be held culpable for defending their homelands against what they saw as a foreign invasion by an aggressive colonial power.

In 1913 the Daughters of the American Revolution commemorated the centennial of the burning of Fort Madison by erecting a stone chimney as a memorial to the soldiers who served there. At the time, the exact location of the fort was unclear. Later, the monument was moved to avoid highway construction. When archaeological work began on the site in the 1960s, archaeologists confirmed that the new location of the monument happened to be where blockhouse 1 had once stood.⁶⁴ Today, this monument can memorialize all the participants—soldier and civilian, native and white, American and Canadian—whose lives were touched by the War of 1812 in the upper Mississippi valley.

64. McKusick, "Old Fort Madison," 51.