

# Inkpaduta in Iowa: Dakota Decline, Dispossession, and Erasure

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## ***Wotaâiâ*—an Announcement: Reintroducing the Dakota in Iowa**

On an unrecorded date during the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century, nestled among the Big Bluestem of an endless prairie stretching across what soon became Iowa and Minnesota, a mother gave birth to a son. As she watched him open his eyes for the first time, she could not have comprehended how he might one day represent the incredible changes that soon came to her people, the Wahpekute Dakota, or how his memory might overshadow the legacy of the Dakota in Iowa for well over a century. His father, a Wahpekute war chief named Wamdisapa, welcomed his new son, naming him Inkpaduta. Eventually, Inkpaduta's name struck fear into the hearts of American settlers throughout the developing upper midwestern frontier, and more importantly, his life and legacy embodied the plight of dispossession and erasure suffered by the Wahpekute Dakota in Iowa.

Many Iowans might vaguely recall Inkpaduta as the antagonist of an event that became known as "The Spirit Lake Massacre." Early in March 1857 Inkpaduta and his band of Wahpekute Dakota violently attacked the collected American settlements

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surrounding Spirit Lake in northwestern Iowa. Over the course of several days, the band moved from cabin to cabin, leaving a trail of destruction that resulted in thirty-nine casualties. Public memory casts the event as the senseless and brutal murder of innocent Americans at the hands of blood-thirsty Indigenous people. But for decades, Inkpaduta and his band of Wahpekute Dakota had watched the familiar environment that they expertly used to survive disintegrate around them. The Wahpekute Dakota attack on Spirit Lake in March 1857 occurred in the face of extreme circumstances and even then, only after their carefully developed lifeways collapsed and other types of resistance failed.

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Inkpaduta came of age on the prairies of what later became Iowa and southern Minnesota. Prior to his attack on Spirit Lake, Inkpaduta led a small group of Wahpekute Dakota across a range stretching from at least the Shell Rock River in the east to the confluence of the Missouri and Little Sioux Rivers in the west. Across that landscape, Inkpaduta's people utilized knowledge passed down from generations before them to survive in a difficult climate. The United States' burgeoning influence and settlement in the area exacerbated the challenges faced by Inkpaduta and the Wahpekute during this period of extreme change, which ultimately culminated in the attack on Spirit Lake. Only through recognizing and understanding how the Dakota lived in Iowa and how individuals, including Inkpaduta, sought to navigate a rapidly changing world, can we begin to better reconcile, honor, and understand the true and extensive legacy of the Dakota in Iowa's history.

***Oyake—To Tell a Story:***  
**Inkpaduta & Iowa's Erasure of the Dakota**

On the shores of West Lake Okoboji, visitors to the Abbie Gardner-Sharp Cabin (a State Historical Society of Iowa historic site) learn about Inkpaduta. Perhaps they even pause at the gift shop to pick up a copy of Gardner-Sharp's captivity narrative. Inkpaduta and Gardner-Sharp are linked through the violence that erupted at the cabin site in March 1857, and many know of one only in the context of the other. Gardner-Sharp lived through horrors that defy the imagination. As a teenager, she watched as the

Wahpekute killed her family before they took her captive.<sup>2</sup> In captivity, she undoubtedly suffered physical, mental, and emotional trauma as she marched through the snow barefoot, watched two other captive women die, and waited for her own fate to unfold. After four months, the governor of Minnesota secured her ransom only after Inkpaduta had sold her to a Yanktonai man known as End of Snake.<sup>3</sup> Following her release, she faced the difficult challenge of returning to her regular life without her family.

The next year Gardner-Sharp failed to recover the deed to her father's lands on Lake Okoboji. Eventually, Gardner-Sharp wrote a memoir about her experiences, and in 1891, she utilized the profits to purchase the cabin her father had built and a portion of his thirteen-acre tract.<sup>4</sup> She spent her life seeking to make the land a historic site dedicated to commemorating the suffering experienced by her community at the hands of Inkpaduta's band, appealing directly to the Iowa legislature during the 1893–94 session about the possibility of erecting a monument to the memory of those who perished at Spirit Lake in 1857.<sup>5</sup> During that congressional session, Iowa pledged \$5,000 for the project.<sup>6</sup> Gardner-Sharp turned the cabin into a museum and commissioned four paintings of the attack and her captivity. She operated the museum until her death on January 21, 1921, and was buried with the rest of her family across the street from the cabin site.<sup>7</sup>

Gardner-Sharp's memory represents only one side of the Spirit Lake story, yet it has clearly resonated as Iowa's public memory has developed over the 164 years since the attack. A large stone

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2. Abbie Gardner-Sharp, *History of the Spirit Lake Massacre & Captivity of Miss Abbie Gardner: The Raid of the Santee Sioux Against the Iowa Frontier Settlements, 1857* (London, UK, 2011).

3. Charles Flandreau, "The Ink-Pa-Du-Ta Massacre of 1857," *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* (1880), 3:386–407.

4. Lake Okoboji is the most commonly utilized modern moniker for the collective Iowa Great Lakes Region, but in this text the area is referred to as Spirit Lake because it was the preferred moniker during the nineteenth century. Therefore, Spirit Lake refers to the entire Iowa Great Lakes Region unless otherwise explicitly stated.

5. Gardner-Sharp, *History of the Spirit Lake Massacre*.

6. Frank Herriott, "Aftermath of the Spirit Lake Massacre," *Annals of Iowa* 18 (1932), 434–70, 482–517, 597–631.

7. Herriott, "Aftermath of the Spirit Lake Massacre," 434–70, 482–517, 597–631.

monument constructed in 1894 still looms among the ancient oak trees of the Gardners' lot, casting a shadow over the graves of the Gardner family. Gardner-Sharp's representation of events continues to shape how Iowans see themselves and their past, and her stories greatly influence the public memory of Indigenous peoples in Iowa. The stories Iowans tell themselves echo stories like Gardner-Sharp's depiction of her father early in her narrative:

But, like many others, my father was confident that greater success awaited him. His ambition was like that of thousands of others, who seem to think that because it is best for some to go west, it is best for each one to go farthest west of all. Thus the race is kept up. We chase the setting sun; and, like the boy in pursuit of the rainbow, we hope to find the pot of gold just beyond.<sup>8</sup>

The Gardners never found their pot of gold, but their memory lingers as a sacrifice to the pioneer ethos in the settlement of Iowa. Gardner-Sharp worked to faithfully record her perspective on the personal tragedy caused by Inkpaduta's attack, and it has served as a cornerstone for scholars, teachers, and artists who have minimized the significance and relevance of the Dakota to Iowa history. By relying on Gardner-Sharp's account as the definitive description of events in the northern Iowa borderlands during the settlement era, more nuanced narratives, like those potentially centered on Inkpaduta's agency and the dispossession of the Dakota in Iowa, failed to materialize.

One hundred years after Gardner-Sharp's death, visitors climbing the marble staircase leading to the second level of the Iowa State Capitol in Des Moines come upon a 14' x 40' depiction of Iowa's pioneer past. Painted by Edwin H. Blashfield in 1905 for \$10,000, the six-canvas image has hung at the top of the grandest staircase in Iowa's central government building for over a century.<sup>9</sup> Blashfield's work lacks any sign of Indigenous

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8. Gardner-Sharp, *History of the Spirit Lake Massacre*, 10.

9. Elmer E. Garnsey to F.D. Harsh, 11/15/1904, Capitol Commission II Records, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, IA.



*Photograph of the Blasfield painting in the Iowa Capitol. Photo courtesy of the author.*

presence. The artist created contrast by using darker hues on the left-hand side of the painting while brightening the pioneers and their wake on the right.<sup>10</sup> On the left, or western portion of the painting, Blasfield depicted a leafless scrub oak and a sun-bleached bison skull. Immediately above these objects, a child driving an ox cuts across the canvas. Two women, one clutching a small child to her breast and the other tending a young girl, ride on a large covered wagon that dominates the center of the painting. Blasfield also depicted three men presumably sowing the seeds that result in the extreme right-side of the painting blooming with tasseled corn and a ripened watermelon. Blasfield's painting depicts a barren land being remade into a fruitful agricultural landscape by triumphant pioneers taming a wilderness. Blasfield perhaps summed up his own work best when he described his focus: "The main idea of the picture is a symbolical presentation of the Pioneers led by the spirits of Civilization and Enlightenment to the conquest by cultivation of the Great West."<sup>11</sup> The image, like the work of Abbie Gardner-Sharp, contributes to a triumphant representation of pioneers overcoming challenges from the external environment with little regard for prior natural or Indigenous history.

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10. Edwin Howland Blasfield, "Westward," Oil on Canvas, Collection of the State of Iowa, Des Moines, IA.

11. Edwin Howland Blasfield, Correspondence 1870-1956, MS 61, New-York Historical Society Museum and Library Collection, New York, NY.

In broad histories focused on Iowa, most historians commonly provide an initial section seeking to quickly summarize the realities of life in Iowa prior to American settlement. Dorothy Schwieder's 1996 book *Iowa: The Middle Land* stands as perhaps the most significant and nuanced work focused broadly on Iowa history. Its initial, eighteen-page chapter entitled "Native Americans in Iowa," opens the 327-page work.<sup>12</sup> Although the chapter begins with an emphasis on the Meskwaki, which is characteristic of many Iowa histories, Schwieder also highlighted the importance of the Dakota, writing: "The last tribe to relinquish its Iowa lands, the Santee Sioux, left in 1851."<sup>13</sup> Schwieder began her analysis of Iowa's Indigenous peoples with another Siouan speaking people, the Ioway. Within the analysis of the Ioway, Schwieder used early French accounts to identify them as a mixed sustenance people practicing limited agriculture on the Upper Iowa River and the Blue Earth River; however, the journal of Frenchman Pierre Le Sueur from the early 1700s indicates the tribe did not live in the area at the time as originally thought. Instead, Le Sueur noted a prevalence of Dakota in the area, who he believed to have aggressively pushed the Ioway out of the area prior to his construction of Fort Vert at the mouth of the Blue Earth River.<sup>14</sup> The Ioway traded with both the French and Spanish, but these sources often echo Le Sueur's expectant but empty sentiments that misplace the evidence of a Dakota presence in the northern Iowa borderlands while insisting the Ioway must have lived there prior to western recorded history. When more consistent and reliable source material emerged in the 1800s, it located the Ioway in southeastern Iowa and northern Missouri along the Mississippi and Rock Rivers.<sup>15</sup>

The final two pages of Schwieder's chapter on Native Americans in Iowa focus on the Santee Sioux, including the Wahpekute band that eventually passed leadership to Inkpaduta. Although she previously dated the Dakota presence in Iowa to dovetail with

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12. Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Iowa City, IA, 1996), 3–21.

13. Schwieder, *Iowa*, 4.

14. Marc de Villiers Du Terrage, "Noms de lieux Sioux tirés d'un Dictionnaire inédit et probablement perdu de Le Sueur," *Journal de la Société des américanistes* 14 (1922), 220–21.

15. Greg Olson, *The Ioway in Missouri* (Columbia, MO, 2008).

the retreat of the Ioway in the 1700s, here Schwieder suggested an earlier origin date of at least the early 1600s, which is supported by French and Spanish colonial sources and other early accounts.<sup>16</sup> Schwieder proceeded to assert firmly that the Dakota ceded their lands in 1851, and then she included an account of Inkpaduta and the 1857 attack near Spirit Lake. Schwieder at least partially attributed the motivation for the attack to the environmental factors presented by the winter of 1856–57, and also highlighted the reality that settlers could not expect any protection from the military after Fort Dodge’s abandonment in 1853. The two paragraphs focused on Inkpaduta and the attack at Spirit Lake make up the bulk of the account, representative of a common tendency of Iowa historians to focus on that singular event while fast forwarding through the hundreds of years of Dakota history in the state or the decades of dubious dispossession preceding Inkpaduta’s actions in 1857. Schwieder represented the Dakota as a valued part of Iowa’s history. Nevertheless, her treatment of Inkpaduta, particularly her focus on the attack near Spirit Lake, still lacked the exploration and nuance necessary to contextualize his actions, demonstrating how easily (and even unintentionally) Dakota erasure has occurred in the historiography.

Educators have also failed to represent Inkpaduta and the Dakota adequately, especially when depicting their varied responses to colonization during the mid-nineteenth century. Curricula often treat Inkpaduta as a violent renegade who ranged from the Dakota reservation not far from Mankato, Minnesota, southwest to the confluence of the Missouri and Little Sioux Rivers in western Iowa. In 2018, third grade teacher Patricia Hammann of Monroe Elementary in Mankato, Minnesota, discussed her approach to curriculum related to the Dakota people in an NPR radio segment for the program *This American Life* entitled “Little War on the Prairie.”

We just talked about, like a conflict is a disagreement. And we talked how the Dakota Indians didn’t know how to solve their conflicts. And the only way they knew how to solve their disagreements was to fight, which we know, we don’t fight to solve

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16. Schwieder, *Iowa*, 3–21.

conflicts. We use our words. But that was their only way that they knew to solve a conflict. They fought. And so then the white settlers needed to fight back to protect themselves. And then we talked about people were killed.<sup>17</sup>

The Iowa Core Curriculum, although not specifically emphasizing the event or Dakota history in the eighth grade “Iowa History” content standard, provides a link to a video created for classroom use by Iowa Public Television.<sup>18</sup> The video shows an actor portraying the settler Henry Lott murdering Dakota leader Sintominiduta before the narrator identifies the murder as the sole motive for Inkpaduta’s 1857 attack on Spirit Lake. Over grainy footage and a bobbing camera overlaid with a series of stereotypical war whoops, a narrator asserts, “It was the worst mass murder of innocent people by Indians in Iowa history. The Spirit Lake massacre caused panic on the Northwestern frontier and settlers feared further bloody raids by the Sioux.”<sup>19</sup> The video serves as a jumping off point for Iowa teachers to discuss an event that is still used to cast Inkpaduta and the Wahpekute as violent renegades and to justify the dispossession and erasure of the Dakota from Iowa’s history. Over the past 164 years, the products of public memory in Iowa—from memoirs and historical studies to educational materials—have suffered from a myopic focus on Inkpaduta’s attack on Spirit Lake, which accentuates the erasure of the Dakota people’s long history in the state.

***Cantemawâste—I am Happy:***  
**The Dakota in Iowa before Iowa**

A more nuanced and realistic depiction of Inkpaduta and his people must focus on their existence in northwestern Iowa and southern Minnesota long before the nineteenth century. Archeological evidence, early colonial records, and tribal sources attest to a strong and longstanding Dakota presence in Iowa. As the last

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17. “497: Little War on the Prairie – 2018,” *This American Life*, National Public Radio, accessed 1/6/2021, <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/479/transcript>.

18. “First People of the Prairies,” *The Iowa Heritage: Program #1*, Iowa PBS (1979), <http://www.iowapbs.org/iowapathways/artifact/massacre-spirit-lake>.

19. “First People of the Prairies.”



glaciers retreated between 14,000 and 12,000 years ago, human inhabitants made their way into the land between two rivers. Prior to the earliest European recordings, Indigenous peoples developed rich cultures and expert approaches to surviving in the upper Midwest's difficult climate. Early European accounts identified the Dakota as a significant people in the region, even as they struggled to identify specific Dakota land claims. By the time that American expeditionary, geographical, and other records brought clarity to the historical record, the Dakota occupied a territory stretching from the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers to the lower Missouri. Within this range they faced competition and pressure from peoples including the Ioway, Sauk, Meskwaki, Omaha, and Osage.<sup>20</sup>

At the time of the first European contact, the Dakota—a term reflecting a collective identity shared by an array of named bands of Siouan-speaking peoples—referred to themselves as the *Oceti Sakowin* (Seven Council Fires).<sup>21</sup> The *Oceti Sakowin* consisted of seven *oyate* (peoples): the Mdewakanton, Sisseton, Wahpeton, Wahpekute, Yankton, Yanktonai, and Teton.<sup>22</sup> The *Oceti Sakowin* bound the people to both one another and the universe by the universe's mysteriousness, known as *wakhan*. The Dakota found connection through kinship, alliance, and language. The *oyate* of the *Oceti Sakowin* consisted of groupings of *tiyospaye* (bands). Each *tiyospaye* consisted of roughly five to twenty families making up an individual camp circle. Although more often associated with the western *Oceti Sakowin*, the Dakota frequently utilize the term to describe their more clan-like band structure even into the twenty-first century.<sup>23</sup> For example, the Wahpekute *oyate* consisted of *tiyospaye* under specific leaders like Inkpaduta or Sintominiduta.<sup>24</sup> The *tiyospaye* existed as kin, regardless of

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20. Lance M. Foster, *American Indians of Iowa* (Iowa City, IA, 2009).

21. James R. Walker, *Lakota Society*, ed. James DeMaillie (Lincoln, NE, 1992), 14.

22. Gary Clayton Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650–1862* (St. Paul, MN, 1984), 2.

23. Christopher Pexa, *Translated Nation: Rewriting the Dakhota Oyate* (Minneapolis, 2019), 10.

24. Gwen Westerman and Bruce White, *Min Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota* (St. Paul, MN, 2012), 15.

biological reality, and those relationships underpinned the patterns of Dakota existence on a day-to-day basis.

The Dakota are not a fixed relic of the past who are frozen in a specific moment in time. Modern audiences tend to picture the Dakota as a part of a bygone era, often as an esoteric remnant of the frontier situated on horseback. In reality, the Dakota adaptively faced challenges that persist into the modern day. The regimented yet variable nature of Dakota kinship organization allowed for flexibility and fluidity when encountering new challenges. For instance, smaller units could combine when necessary for tasks including diplomacy, warfare, or large hunts.<sup>25</sup> When smaller units proved to be more advantageous, specifically during lean winter months like those Inkpaduta faced in 1856–57, the Dakota maintained social cohesion yet could disperse geographically to reduce the burden on available resources. The adaptability of Dakota leaders like Inkpaduta provided the opportunity to consistently adjust to the circumstances presented by the natural environment.

Establishing the pre-history of the Dakota continues to challenge archeologists, but their work has documented the long history of Inkpaduta's Dakota ancestors in Iowa. Lloyd Wilford and Elden Johnson focused their work on several village sites near Mille Lacs Lake in Minnesota, and their studies of the prehistory and contact eras found shared linkages between peoples occupying sites ranging from the Brainerd Complex in northern Minnesota to the Effigy Mounds site in Iowa.<sup>26</sup> Effigy Mounds National Monument, even today, recognizes significant ties to the Dakota, including the descendants of Inkpaduta's band. Of the twenty tribal groups affiliated with the site in northeastern Iowa, ten are peoples of the *Oceti Sakowin*. Archeologists also concluded that Terminal Woodlands peoples (1000–1400 CE) throughout what became Iowa and Minnesota shared a similar material culture and mobile hunter-gather lifeway built around gathering wild

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25. Michael Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (Philadelphia, 2012), 163–66.

26. Elden Johnson, "The 17<sup>th</sup> Century Mdewakanton Dakota Subsistence Mode," in *Archaeology, Ecology and Ethnohistory of the Prairie-Forest Border Zone of Minnesota and Manitoba*, eds., Janet Spector and Elden Johnson (Lincoln, NE, 1985), 154–65.

plant resources, including wild rice and hunting deer, elk, and small mammals. Creating one-to-one correlations between archaeological evidence and biological populations is difficult; however, the evidence uncovered provides meaningful documentation of the Dakota and their forebears living in Iowa during the period.

Linguistic studies and oral histories also root the Dakota in Minnesota, northwest Iowa, and South Dakota prior to European contact. James Springer and Stanley Witkowski compared lexical terms from sixteen different Siouan languages or dialects, and identified fourteen languages derived from Proto-Siouan, a parent language centered in the central Mississippi Valley region around 500 BCE.<sup>27</sup> Throughout the rest of pre-history the language divided into subgroups several times. Building upon lingual research, oral traditions and written accounts commonly agree Minnesota, northwest Iowa, and South Dakota served as the homeland of the Dakota prior to the seventeenth century.<sup>28</sup>

The earliest Europeans to enter the Dakota's area of influence noted them repeatedly in what became northern Iowa. The first recorded contact between the Dakota and Europeans occurred during the winter of 1659–60 when Pierre Radisson and Medart Chouart de Grosseilliers visited Wisconsin and Minnesota. After 1660, French sources referencing the Dakota expanded with Father Claude Allouez's trip to the region in 1665–67, Nicolas Perrot's journeys throughout the area between 1665–99, Daniel Greysolon Duluth's expeditions in 1678–82, Father Louis Hennepin's visit to the Mille Lacs Lake Dakota villages in 1680, and Pierre Charles Le Sueur's account of the 1700–01 winter on the Blue Earth River. These accounts began to clarify and expand European knowledge of the Dakota. The French also made maps of the areas occupied by the Dakota. Jean-Baptiste Franquelin created the earliest known French map of the region in 1678, and Claude Delisle utilized Le Sueur's geographical knowledge of the area to put out an improved map in 1702.<sup>29</sup> Both of these maps clearly

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27. James W. Springer and Stanley R. Witkowski, "Siouan Historical Linguists and Oneota Archaeology," *Oneota Studies* 1 (1982), 73.

28. For further insight into origin stories and migration theories, see Guy Gibbon, *The Sioux: The Dakota and Lakota Nations* (Malden, MA, 2003), 18.

29. Gibbon, *The Sioux*.

recognized Dakota occupancy of the prairies of southwestern Minnesota and northern Iowa by at least 1680. Accounts through the middle of the nineteenth century consistently identify the Dakota in the area around Spirit Lake, further demonstrating that Inkpaduta's people occupied parts of what became Iowa from a time prior to western recorded history.

For the Dakota, Spirit Lake held (and still holds) further significance as the initial site of corn-based agriculture as well as the origination site of the sacred Corn Dance.<sup>30</sup> Limited agricultural practices allowed the Dakota to expand their population and geographic footprint. As the French entered the upper Midwest, the landform referred to as *Bdote*, which sits at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, served as the spiritual center of the Dakota world. "From there was a road to Spirit Lake in what is now Iowa," recorded enrolled member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota *Oyate* Gwen Westerman in her 2012 work *Mni Sota Makoce*. "The people would walk or ride horses, and soon the different groups of Dakota spread out to the south and west of *Bdote* and lived all through the prairies. . . . Many villages were established around Spirit Lake."<sup>31</sup> The Dakota moved throughout their environment as they sought to meet their dietary requirements, maintaining vital kinship and social structures as they survived the harsh winters, sweltering summers, and frequent storms in northern Iowa and Minnesota. For generations stretching down to Inkpaduta, in order to meet their dietary needs, the Dakota developed a variety of hunting, foraging, and agricultural strategies that were specifically adapted to their homelands.

The Dakota hunted and fished throughout the entirety of their range to obtain vital proteins. Iowa's animal populations existed in large numbers almost unfathomable today. Records of the earliest expeditions through the lands of northern Iowa provide insight on animal populations prior to the nineteenth century. In February 1820, U.S. Army explorer Stephen Long noted his expedition took twelve bison from a herd on the Little Sioux River.<sup>32</sup>

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30. Westerman and White, *Min Sota Makoce*, 17.

31. Westerman and White, *Min Sota Makoce*, 27.

32. Stephen Long, "Account," Record Group 75, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter NA); "Treaty of Mendota, 1851," Documents Relating to the

Also in 1820, Stephen Watts Kearney recorded bison in large numbers, noting the largest herd that he encountered numbered an estimated 5,000 near present-day Northwood.<sup>33</sup> The most numerous records of bison in Iowa came from near the headwaters of the Iowa, Cedar, and Des Moines Rivers.<sup>34</sup> Trader Joseph Hewitt's 1851 account noted the presence of many bison near Clear Lake, and bison skulls were still being fished out of its waters as recently as 2019.<sup>35</sup> However, by 1870, a settler observed the last two wild bison ever recorded in the state standing on the shores of the Little Sioux River in Dickinson County. The decline of the bison, as well as other animal populations, during the first half of the nineteenth century drastically undercut the ability of the Dakota to maintain a diet high in protein.

Both before and after American colonization of the region, deer and elk also played a critical role in the sustenance of the Dakota in northern Iowa. On his 1820 journey from Council Bluffs to modern-day Worth County, Stephen Watts Kearney noted the presence of elk in five separate journal entries.<sup>36</sup> The largest grouping he saw consisted of roughly two hundred cows on July 10 along the Little Sioux River. Joseph Street even estimated that there were more elk in the region than bison.<sup>37</sup> During the 1844 Iowa Dragoons Expedition, Captain James Allen noted a large herd of roughly one hundred elk near the confluence of the east and west forks of the Des Moines River.<sup>38</sup> Settlers also

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Negotiation of Ratified and Unratified Treaties with Various Tribes of Indians (hereafter Documents Relating to Negotiation), Record Group 75, NA.

33. Stephen J. Kearney, "An expedition across Iowa in 1820," *Annals of Iowa* 10 (1912), 343–51.

34. J.H. Wheeler, *History of Franklin and Cerro Gordo Counties, Iowa* [. . .] (Springfield, IL, 1883).

35. Joseph Hewitt, General Store Ledger, October 1855–April 1857, Lee P. Loomis Archive of Mason City History, Mason City Public Library, Mason City, IA.

36. Kearney, "An expedition across Iowa in 1820," 343–51.

37. Joseph Street, "The Collected Papers of Joseph Street," Record Group 75, NA; "Treaty of Mendota, 1851."

38. James Allen, "Account," Record Group 75, NA; "Treaty of Mendota, 1851."

reported deer herds as large as two hundred in northern Iowa as late as the 1870s.<sup>39</sup>

Deer formed an important staple of Dakota sustenance, especially for the Wahpekute in Iowa during the nineteenth century. Each year Dakota bands moved to river-valley hunting grounds in late September or early October, and hunted deer in backwater regions. The Dakota scoured small streams and valleys, often moving away from major rivers in order to provide the geographic dispersion necessary to avoid overtaxing local populations of deer and other animals.<sup>40</sup> As winter approached, larger bands, like the one led by Sintominiduta, broke down into smaller groups like Inkpaduta's.<sup>41</sup> Dakota women dried the meat to provide a large surplus for the winter months.

Fish and birds also provided important sources of protein within the diets of peoples living in northern Iowa prior to American colonization. The Dakota commonly ate smallmouth bass, northern pike, perch, trout, and walleye.<sup>42</sup> They fished in the coldest parts of the year, often starting as food supplies began to grow scarce. In 1864, United States Indian Agent Lawrence Taliaferro recorded the Dakota fishing for a variety of species including "Pike, Pickerel, Black Bass & Sun fish in all their varieties."<sup>43</sup> The Dakota fished during winter months by cutting holes in the ice and then using spears to stab at fish beneath the surface.<sup>44</sup> Various birds also underpinned the Dakota's sustenance. The Dakota commonly clubbed birds instead of shooting them, and they also utilized traps. Like all Wahpekute Dakota boys,

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39. T.G. Scott, "Mammals of Iowa," *Iowa State College Journal of Science* 12 (1937).

40. Matthew D. Therrell and Makayla J. Trotter, "Waniyetu Wówapi: Native American Records of Weather and Climate," *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 314 (September 2011), 6.

41. "The Lakota Moon Calendar," Akta Lakota Museum and Cultural Center (website), accessed 1/6/2021, <http://aktalakota.stjo.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=8991>.

42. Samuel W. Pond, *Dakota Life in the Upper Midwest: The Dakota or Sioux in Minnesota as they were in 1834* (St. Paul, MN, 1908), 30–31.

43. Lawrence Taliaferro, *Autobiography of Major Lawrence Taliaferro: Written in 1864* (St. Paul, MN, 1894), 6, 180–210.

44. Royal B. Hassrick, *The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society* (Norman, OK, 1964).

Inkpaduta learned the diverse methods of hunting and fishing from older male tribal members. The skills passed down developed over centuries, yet over the course of Inkpaduta's lifetime, the decline of wildlife populations strained the ability of the Dakota to continue to utilize traditional methods to procure steady protein sources.

The traditional *Oceti Sakowin* moon calendar reveals how access to different foods throughout the year shaped not just daily life but also how Inkpaduta and the Dakota ordered time. They divided the year into thirteen different moons, each comprised of 28 days, and four seasons, which consisted of three to four moons.<sup>45</sup> *Wetú*, or the moons of renewal and growth, started the calendar in the spring.<sup>46</sup> *Magáksicaagli Wí*, the first moon of *Wetú*, roughly translates to when the ducks come back. The return of ducks and other migratory birds signaled the end of the harsh northern Midwest winters and represented an opportunity to include a new dietary element to the staples of dried corn and dried meat that the Dakota relied on to survive during lean months. *Blokétu*, or the Warm Moons, defined the summer months. *Wípazuka Wasté Win*, or moon of the berries (also translated as *Wípazatkan Wastte Wi*, or when the berries are good), marked the emergence of wild berries throughout the Midwest. The Dakota gathered berries as an important springtime staple.<sup>47</sup> The Dakota most commonly ate ripening fruits immediately after picking, for example, using berries as a relish on various types of game. The final summer month, or *Wasúton Wi*, moon of the harvest, signaled the time of Dakota reaping corn, squash, and other agricultural products to provide both immediate and long-term nourishment for the people.<sup>48</sup> As the fall and winter moons waxed and waned, the Dakota continued to live on the fruits of the past year's labors, as well as any goods gathered from

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45. "The Lakota Moon Calendar."

46. "Four Seasons of the Dakota," *Lessons of Our Land* (website), September 2017, <https://www.lessonsofourland.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Four-Seasons-of-the-Dakota-Stories.pdf>.

47. Sean Sherman, *The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen* (Minneapolis, MN, 2017), 199.

48. "The Lakota Moon Calendar."

hunting, raiding, or relying on kinship obligations. As these months passed, so did the end of the Dakota year as winter yielded to *Wetú* and its season of renewal and growth. For Inkpaduta and the Wahpekute, these cyclical processes ordered time and reflected an intimate connection to the land.

Outside of the forgeable foodstuffs that the Dakota routinely harvested along the calendar cycle, limited agriculture played a role in ensuring adequate caloric intake. Contrary to characterizations of the Dakota as a non-agricultural people, early observers consistently recorded the Dakota as engaged in the process of growing corn.<sup>49</sup> In the seventeenth century, Pierre Radisson's account detailed his exchanges of iron implements for corn. As Radisson traveled south several days after wintering on Lake St. Croix, he noted: "They sowe corne, but their harvest is small."<sup>50</sup> Archeological evidence of residues preserved in clay pots suggests that the Dakota grew corn as far north as Mille Lacs.<sup>51</sup> If the Dakota grew crops successfully in the acidic soil profiles and less-than-hospitable climate in the northern reaches of their territory, they likely found equal or greater success in the rich soil and corn-friendly climate near Spirit Lake. U.S. Army topographical engineer Stephen Harriman Long visited Sakpe's village of *Tinta Otonwe* in 1823 and recorded extensive corn cultivation on the south side of the Minnesota River.<sup>52</sup> An early missionary to the Dakota, Samuel Pond, recorded the Dakota planting corn in hills during early June and harvesting when it reached a "green" state. Although Pond minimized Dakota agricultural practices by suggesting they ate all of the harvested corn off the cob within a few days of picking, he also recorded "their corn was preserved by boiling it before it was hard, scraping it from the cob with musselshells, and drying it."<sup>53</sup> Joseph Renshaw Brown, a prominent early settler, trader, and American negotiator at the Treaty of

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49. Royal B. Hassrick, *The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society* (Norman, OK, 1988), 209.

50. Pierre Radisson, "Account," Record Group 75, NA; "Treaty of Mendota, 1851."

51. Gibbon, *The Sioux*, 27.

52. Henry P. Beers, *The Western Military Frontier 1815–1846* (Philadelphia, PA, 1935), 287–90.

53. Pond, *Dakota Life in the Upper Midwest*, 36.



Traverse de Sioux, actively “bought large quantities of it (corn)” from the Dakota in 1831.<sup>54</sup>

The specific motivations of military, missionary, and civilian minimization of Dakota agricultural practice exist in doctrines of effective occupation that were necessary to nineteenth-century treaty practice and served as a potential motive for under-recording and over-simplifying the importance of limited agriculture within Dakota sustenance techniques. To dispossess the Dakota of lands, Americans readily asserted the Dakota did not use the land in a meaningful way. Indisputably, by the nineteenth century, the Dakota had long lived in the region, and by the time of Inkpaduta’s birth, they had built their lives (and even their calendars) around agricultural, hunting, and foraging practices to manage the world around them expertly and survive in a difficult climate. Over the course of Inkpaduta’s lifetime, the environment around him began to change in significant and drastic ways. Declines in game populations began with the introduction of the commercial fur trade by the French and continued throughout the nineteenth century.

### ***Omdaskiska*—To Speak Unintelligibly: Inkpaduta & the Dakota During the Treaty Era**

Aside from material changes to the natural environment, the diplomatic situation of the Wahpekute changed as the U.S. developed power in the region. This was especially true for the bands who inhabited large swaths of northwestern Iowa and southwestern Minnesota, including Inkpaduta’s band. Treaty negotiations with the Dakota began in 1805 during Zebulon Pike’s expedition up the Mississippi River and the agreement to the cession of lands for the eventual site of Fort Snelling.<sup>55</sup> Pike started an American relationship with the Dakota that was characterized by bad faith negotiations, misunderstandings, and duplicitous dealings. On September 23, 1805, Pike called a council with the Dakota on

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54. J. Wesley Bond, *Minnesota and Its Resources, to Which Are Appended Camp-Fire Sketches* [. . .] (Chicago, 1856).

55. Zebulon Pike, *An Account of Expeditions to the Sources of the Mississippi and through the Western Ports of Louisiana* (Washington, D.C., 1807).

an island near the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers. Pike included in his speech an exhortation to avoid the evils of alcohol, an empty plea immediately preceding the distribution of sixty gallons of liquor by the men of the expedition in order "to clear their (Dakota) throats."<sup>56</sup> Pike distributed gifts before he allegedly struck a deal for 100,000 acres of Dakota lands to the United States at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers.<sup>57</sup> Pike recorded how he clearly conveyed the negotiations meant to secure lands for military posts; however, the Dakota likely believed Pike asked to establish trading posts similar to those previously established by the French and English. Upon his return, the United States Senate ratified the treaty. Pike submitted the document with a notable blank: how much money the United States would pay the Dakota for their cession of 100,000 acres.<sup>58</sup> The Senate determined the United States would pay \$2,000 for the land.<sup>59</sup> The treaty looked dubious to the Senate's Military Affairs Committee not even fifteen years later:

It does appear that General Pike made an arrangement in 1805 with two Sioux Indians for the purchase of lands of that tribe, including the Faribault island, but there is no evidence that this agreement, to which there is not even a witness, and in which no consideration was named, was ever considered binding upon the Indians, or that they ever yielded up the possession of their lands under it. . . . It was never promulgated, nor can it be now found in the statute books, like any other treaty—if

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56. Pike, *An Account of Expeditions to the Sources of the Mississippi*, 232.

57. Francis Paul Prucha, *Documents of United States Indian Policy* (Lincoln, NE, 1990), 23.

58. As a part of the land cession, the Americans allowed the Dakota to continue hunting and fishing in areas included in the treaty. Although the majority of the area has developed into urban space, the Dakota continue to assert their rights to hunt and fish on the treaty lands against resistance from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

59. Pike to Wilkinson, 5/26/1806, in Pike, *An Account of Expeditions to the Sources of the Mississippi*, 270–71.

indeed a treaty it may be called—nor were its stipulations ever complied with on the part of the United States.<sup>60</sup>

The initial treaty kicked off decades of dispossession that ultimately culminated in the establishment of the reservation and annuity system and created a dynamic where Dakota like Inkpaduta who did not wish to sacrifice a more traditional life for one on a reservation grew more marginalized.

Successive treaties negotiated at Prairie du Chien in 1825 and 1830 brought together the vast diaspora of Indigenous peoples from the upper Midwest and the treaties allowed the United States government first to segment and then to reduce tribally held lands throughout Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, and Minnesota. In 1825, the United States sought to parcel out lands in an attempt to hem in Indigenous peoples, while also seeking to reduce violence by establishing clearly delineated boundaries.<sup>61</sup> Conflicts almost immediately followed the 1825 negotiations, and the struggle between the Wahpekute Dakota and the Meskwaki and Sauk in northern Iowa underscored the inadequacy of the treaty and the Americans' inability to enforce its provisions.

As a young man, Inkpaduta watched his father test treaty provisions and make the initial adaptations necessary to lead their people in a region with an increasing American presence. Inkpaduta's father Wamdisapa as well as Wahpekute leader Tasagi attempted to follow the provisions outlined at Prairie du Chien in 1825. Yet violence erupted along the Des Moines River when a Sauk leader named Morgan attacked the Dakota, killing one of Wamdisapa's wives before beheading her and throwing her corpse in the river.<sup>62</sup> Wamdisapa appealed to Taliaferro for justice, but after months of inactivity on the part of the United States, Wamdisapa conducted a revenge raid that resulted in the deaths of several Sauk.

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60. United States Congress, *Congressional Series of United States Public Documents* 1327 (Washington D.C., 1869).

61. Council Notes from Prairie du Chien, 8/2/1825, William Clark Papers, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, KS.

62. Lawrence Taliaferro Journal, 4/1/1829, Documents Relating to Negotiation, Record Group 75, NA.

Both men again visited Indian Agent Lawrence Taliaferro during 1829 to ask what the American planned to do about escalating violence between the Dakota and the Sauk and Meskwaki. After not receiving an adequate response, Wamdisapa resumed warfare.<sup>63</sup> Taliaferro focused on other pressing issues, including the starvation of thirty Dakota lodges under his supervision during the brutal winter of 1828–29. The failure of the 1825 treaty undermined the Wahpekute’s belief in the validity of American treaties, and the fallout led to portions of the band refusing to participate in subsequent treaties. These critical flaws of the 1825 treaty necessitated a second treaty in 1830.<sup>64</sup> As a young man, Inkpaduta undoubtedly bore witness to these events, which likely shaped his views going forward in life.

The bands of Wahpekute that passed leadership to Inkpaduta and Sintominiduta did not attend the proceedings for the 1830 Treaty of Prairie du Chien. The government acknowledged that further treaties would prove necessary to complete their stated goal of “clearing the title” to the lands in order to allow for future purchases, but the Wahpekute band eventually led by Inkpaduta would not take part in another meaningful negotiation during the era.<sup>65</sup> After Tasagi’s previous experience with the Americans’ failure to execute treaty provisions adequately, he indicated to Taliaferro that he did not believe the Sauk or Meskwaki would respect the 1830 treaty, or the United States’ commitment to upholding it. Clark threatened military invasion and a cessation of trade if the tribes did not respect the new “neutral ground,” but Wahpekute respect for the American ability to project power in the area had already waned. The “neutral ground” provision of the 1830 treaty sought to move the Ho-Chunk into northeastern Iowa to serve as a buffer between the Sauk and Meskwaki and the Dakota. The arrival of the Ho-Chunk only exacerbated tensions for Indigenous peoples, the military, and settlers alike.

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63. Lawrence Taliaferro Journal, 3/29/1829, Documents Relating to Negotiation, Record Group 75, NA.

64. “Multinational Treaty of Prairie du Chien, 1825,” Documents Relating to Negotiation, Record Group 75, NA; “Multinational Treaty of Prairie du Chien, 1830,” Documents Relating to Negotiation, Record Group 75, NA.

65. Taliaferro, *Autobiography of Major Lawrence Taliaferro*, 6, 180–210.

Eventual conflicts between the Dakota, the Ho-Chunk, and settler communities like the one at Clear Lake in the early 1850s illustrated the Wahpekute's persistent resistance to agreements to which they had not consented as well as their willingness to harass anyone in league with their traditional enemies. Additionally, the unwillingness of Tasagi, Wamdisapa, Sintominiduta, and Inkpaduta to abide by the treaties eventually led to American officials characterizing their bands as Dakota renegades, a portrayal that undercut the legitimacy of their bands' land claims as Iowa formed.

With the wide-ranging treaties at Traverse de Sioux and Mendota in 1851, the United States government officially acquired the part of northern Iowa occupied by the Wahpekute, and by that time, Inkpaduta was known as an opponent to American acculturation and the reservation system.<sup>66</sup> Other Dakota bands sold the vast majority of their lands for roughly twelve cents per acre and consented to the creation of the reservation and annuity system in Minnesota. The United States expected the tribe to locate to a small strip of land along the Minnesota River. Sintominiduta and Inkpaduta were leading bands ranging throughout southern Minnesota and northern Iowa at the time, but neither leader signed the treaty.<sup>67</sup> Despite white incursions and rapidly dwindling natural resources, both men continued to lead their bands along the Blue Earth, Des Moines, and Little Sioux Rivers, living life largely as their ancestors had in previous generations. The creation of the treaty and annuity system stimulated American settlement in Minnesota and Iowa, exacerbated cultural tensions between settler communities and the Dakota, and created an illusion of safety for eager pioneers hoping to homestead in lands still occupied by wide-ranging bands of Dakota. A history of bad faith dealings between the Dakota and the United States government culminated in the treaties of 1851. The Dakota who honored the agreement and moved to the reservation faced radical lifestyle changes, which ultimately led to the 1862 US-Dakota War, and those who

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66. "Treaty of Traverse de Sioux, 1851," Documents Relating to Negotiation, Record Group 75, NA.

67. "Treaty of Traverse de Sioux, 1851," Documents Relating to Negotiation, Record Group 75, NA.

chose not to follow the treaty became further branded as outcasts and renegades.

***Paganya*—to Cause to Open:  
Inkpaduta during the Rise of American Power**

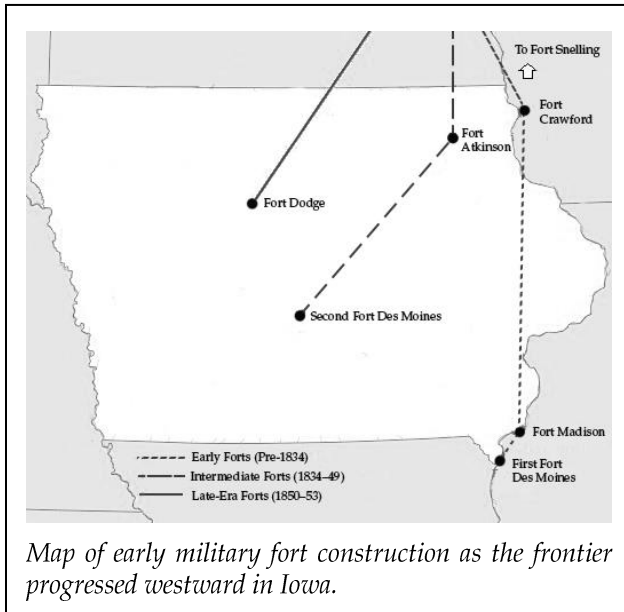
To enforce treaty provisions and provide a sense of security to American migrants and new immigrants hoping to settle on agricultural homesteads, the government commissioned and decommissioned a series of forts throughout Dakota lands. Fifteen years after the Dakota made the treaty with Zebulon Pike, the military arrived at the heart of Dakota lands and began constructing Fort Snelling.<sup>68</sup> Fort Snelling served as the northernmost fort in a chain extending southward to Oklahoma, which provided protection for American settlers and regulated interactions with Indigenous peoples. The military initially struggled to project power adequately throughout the region, but the forts reassured American migrants of their safety in choosing to settle. After the War of 1812, where the United States military failed against a British-Indigenous alliance in the Mississippi Valley, the military built Fort Crawford to house the treaty negotiations at Prairie du Chien.<sup>69</sup> When the government completed the treaties of 1825 and 1830, Fort Atkinson in northeastern Iowa extended the military frontier, while the second Fort Des Moines marked the emergence of American power in the central portion of the state.<sup>70</sup> The military positioned both forts strategically to ease tensions between the Dakota and their traditional enemies the Meskwaki and Sauk. The forts also provided protection for the Ho-Chunk who underwent a forced removal from their Wisconsin homelands during the time period. The increased settlement developing under the protection of each fort created tensions pushing the Dakota further north and west.

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68. Marcus L. Hansen, *Old Fort Snelling, 1819–1858* (Iowa City, IA, 1926).

69. Bruce E. Mahan, *Old Fort Crawford and the Frontier* (Iowa City, IA, 1926), 69.

70. Christopher M. Schoen and Kathryn E.M. Gourley, "Fort Des Moines No. 2, 1843–1846," in *Frontier Forts of Iowa: Indians, Traders, and Soldiers, 1682–1862*, ed. William E. Whittaker (Iowa City, 2009), 161–77.



Before the military became a consistent presence in Inkpaduta's life in the 1850s, his band of Wahpekute faced other significant changes during the first half of the nineteenth century. Smallpox served as one of the first manifestations of American influence on the Wahpekute bands living in northwestern Iowa. Inkpaduta suffered a bout with smallpox during a major outbreak in 1837. The epidemic cut the population of the Wahpekute by as much as 75 percent by 1839.<sup>71</sup> Population loss resultant from smallpox devastated the Dakota. The steep decline meant fewer men to hunt, fewer women to gather food and preserve it, and dwindling populations to resist settler encroachment.

The earliest forts exhibited little influence on Inkpaduta or the Wahpekute still living in Iowa, but by the mid-1800s, the military arrived in northwestern Iowa. The military continued to move in tandem with the settlement of larger white populations in the eastern portion of Iowa during the first half of the

71. Lawrence Taliaferro to William Clark, 8/8/1831, Documents Relating to Negotiation, Record Group 75, NA.

nineteenth century. The construction of Fort Dodge near the confluence of the Des Moines River forks in 1850 marked the arrival of the United States military in northwestern Iowa. William Williams, a prominent figure in the establishment of the fort referred to the river above the forks as "The River of the Sioux."<sup>72</sup> The fort, constructed specifically at the edge of Dakota lands along the Des Moines River to project power near Sintominiduta's large village at Lizard Creek, signaled to pioneer populations that the area had opened for settlement. Fort Dodge projected weak power at best, and the Wahpekute continued to range as they had in previous decades. In 1853, the government decommissioned the fort and moved the garrison to Fort Ridgely, Minnesota, signaling to pioneers that the Dakota had once again moved further north and west.<sup>73</sup> In reality Inkpaduta continued to lead the Wahpekute in a life centered on summering at Spirit Lake and wintering near the confluence of the Little Sioux and Missouri Rivers. Through the 1851 treaties and the abandoning of Fort Dodge, the government led settlers to believe the Dakota had cleared out of northern Iowa and the lands stood ready for settlement. In contrast, from the decommissioning of Fort Dodge in 1853 until his attack on Spirit Lake in 1857, Inkpaduta continued to confront settlers throughout the area, ranging from the Shellrock River to the Missouri.

Following in the wake of disease and the army, American citizens became a more prominent presence in Dakota life. Where previous interactions between the Wahpekute and Americans occurred only when a rare exploratory expedition passed through or at specified treaty gatherings, during Inkpaduta's adolescence and adulthood, individual citizens began to enter Wahpekute territory. By the fall of 1856, Inkpaduta had created a mixed legacy in the northern Iowa borderlands. He amicably worked with settlers like Charles Lamb in Smithland who sought accommodation

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72. Wood to the Assistant Adjutant General, 8/24/1853, Fort Dodge, letter book, Letters Received and Sent, Record Group 393, NA.

73. William Williams, *The History of Early Fort Dodge and Webster County, Iowa*, ed., Edward Breen (Fort Dodge, IA, 1950), 34.



with the Wahpekute.<sup>74</sup> Inkpaduta proved to be fair in trade with several traders throughout the region who continued to extend him credit well into the 1850s.<sup>75</sup> In contrast, he consistently challenged settlers from the Cedar River to the Missouri. He captured two men on the Shellrock River, confronted settlers at Clear Lake for housing his enemies, and harassed surveying parties in Algona.<sup>76</sup> Inkpaduta ignored treaties to which he had not assented, but also showed his knowledge of the same treaties when he sought to draw annuities on two separate occasions in the early 1850s. Like all people, Inkpaduta was a complex person actively seeking to navigate the challenges of a world increasingly squeezed and depopulated by encroaching American power.

### ***Makoce nonpa umanipi*—Walking in Two Worlds: Inkpaduta's Attack on Spirit Lake**

By the onset of the harsh winter of 1856–57, a variety of increasing pressures created a desperate tipping-point moment for Inkpaduta and his band. The lands Inkpaduta called home rapidly began to change. The “enchanted world” described by Agnes C. Laut started to yield to the pioneer’s plow.<sup>77</sup> The area’s oak savannahs yielded to the settler’s ax, and in time a greater diversity of trees covered portions of a landscape that annual prairie fires had formerly made inhospitable to trees. The process of ditching and draining wetlands began and resulted in over 1.5 million acres of prairie being repurposed into agricultural lands.<sup>78</sup> The complicated web of life in northern Iowa faced a century-long shift from a prairie biome to an agricultural landscape.

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74. Vernon Blank, “Inkpaduta’s Great White Friend,” *Iowa Magazine* (December 1960–January 1961), 17–19.

75. Cardinal Goodwin, “The American Occupation of Iowa, 1833 to 1860,” *The Iowa Journal of History and Politics* (1919), 83, 101.

76. Joseph Hewitt Journals, Mason City Public Library Archives, Mason City, IA; Ambrose Call, “Account, Early Days of Algona,” Algona Public Library Collection, Algona, IA; Williams, *The History of Early Fort Dodge and Webster County, Iowa*, 47–49.

77. Agnes C. Laut, “Pioneer Women of the West—The Heroines of Spirit Lake, Iowa,” *Outing* 51 (October 1907), 686.

78. Richard A. Bishop, *Iowa’s Wetlands* 88 (Des Moines, 1981), 1–2.

Inkpaduta witnessed the arrival of Americans and Europeans in accelerating numbers. The first half of the nineteenth century also saw wide-scale change in the human population. At the onset of the century, a variety of Indigenous peoples lived in, partially occupied, or regularly crossed through Iowa. By 1850, the population critically shifted toward American settlement. The white population of the state exploded. From the first territorial census of 1836 to the United States census of 1860, Iowa's recorded population climbed from 10,531 to 674,913. Many of the inhabitants still clustered in the eastern half of the state, even in 1860, but settlement in northern and western Iowa made the area a rapidly closing frontier. By the 1860 census, twenty-one of twenty-two counties previously occupied by the Wahpekute recorded American residents.<sup>79</sup> The 1856 census noted only Hamilton, Hardin, and Webster counties as exceeding two-persons per square mile, which was the federal government's population threshold for the frontier. By 1860, Cerro Gordo, Franklin, and Worth joined the group of counties in the area considered behind the frontier by the Census Bureau. In reality, the entire area ceased to be a borderlands space by 1860.

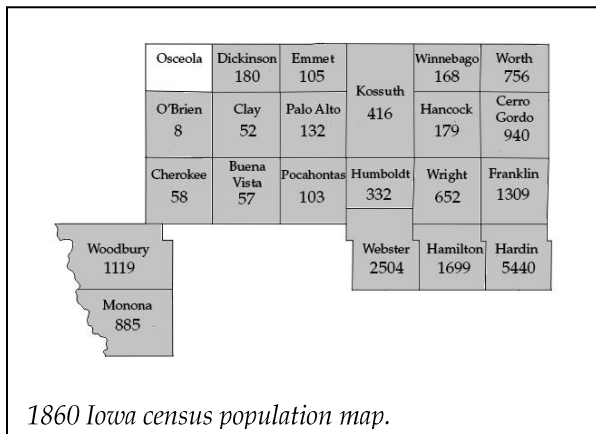
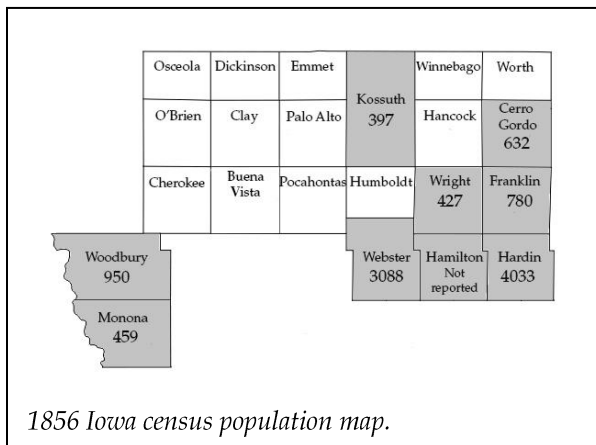
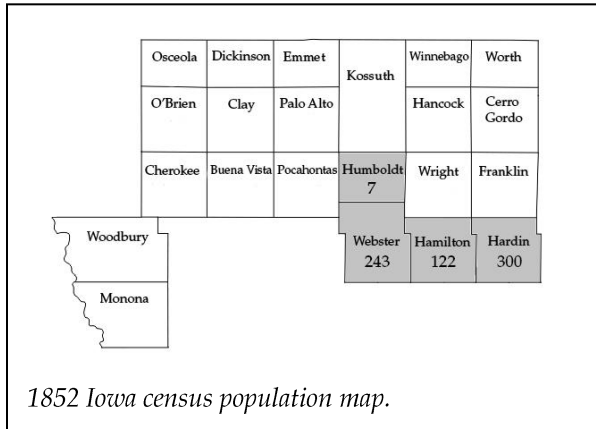
Inkpaduta undoubtedly watched as these new people radically altered the landscape they entered. The area's first American settlers quickly set about converting the tallgrass prairie biome consisting of forty to sixty distinct species per acre into one focused solely on agriculture.<sup>80</sup> Over the course of the 1850s, an area the government previously recorded as not having a single improved acre was converted primarily to agricultural land. By 1860, a government-completed survey of 294,092 acres throughout the twenty-two-county area previously occupied by the Wahpekute considered 93,564 of those acres improved.<sup>81</sup>

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79. F. M. Mills and Geo. E. Roberts, eds., *1836-1880 Census of Iowa for 1880* [ . . . ] (Des Moines, IA, 1883).

80. Daryl D. Smith, *Iowa Prairie: Original Extent and Loss, Preservation and Recovery Attempts* (Cedar Falls, IA, 1998), 2.

81. The twenty-two-county area surveyed includes Worth, Cerro Gordo, Franklin, Hardin, Winnebago, Hancock, Wright, Hamilton, Kossuth, Humboldt, Webster, Pocahontas, Palo Alto, Emmet, Dickinson, Clay, Buena Vista, Osceola, O'Brien, Cherokee, Woodbury, and Monona. The area is largely the watersheds of the Little Sioux River and northern Des Moines River above the confluence of the East and West forks.



Throughout the following decades, the land conversion continued to a point where agriculturalists converted 33,359,000 acres of Iowa's total land acreage of 36,016,500 into agricultural lands by the twenty-first century.<sup>82</sup> Although modern crop agriculture in Iowa focuses predominantly on corn and soybeans, a variety of other new crops popped up in the northern reaches of Iowa by 1860. Where the 1850 census recorded no agricultural yields in the previous Wahpekute range, the 1860 census recorded a harvest of 616,273 bushels of corn, 80,212 bushels of wheat, and 102,200 bushels of oats.<sup>83</sup> The numbers signify a shift from sustenance farming toward participation in a broader market.

As settlers converted lands toward agricultural pursuits, Inkpaduta and his people faced a dramatic decline in the region's diverse wildlife. During the nineteenth century, the great diversity of larger animals fell to a point where only two of the nine initial large mammalian species continued to occupy the region.<sup>84</sup> Although smaller animals and birds fared better during the environmental changeover, their diversity also declined following initial American settlement in the northern Iowa borderlands. All told, twenty-nine species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish were extirpated from Iowa, thirty-eight more became endangered, and another nineteen gained threatened status over the course of the twentieth century. Elk and deer populations saw significant reduction during the harsh winter of 1856–57.<sup>85</sup> Deep snow limited forage and paired with desperate overhunting by American settlers to decimate the population in locations throughout the state.

In place of the rapidly disappearing wildlife of Iowa, Inkpaduta and the Wahpekute took notice of settlers introducing new animals. The introduction of livestock brought the need for

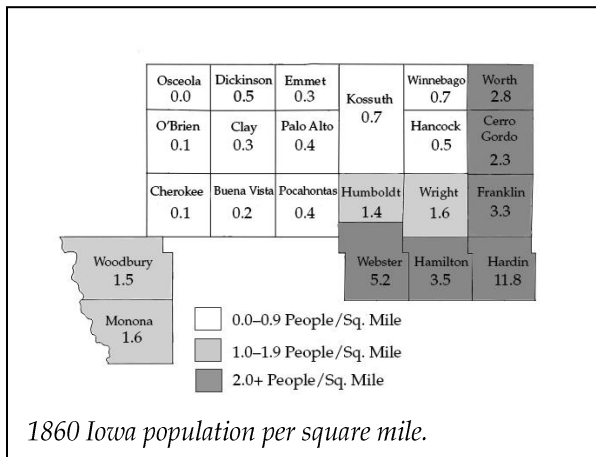
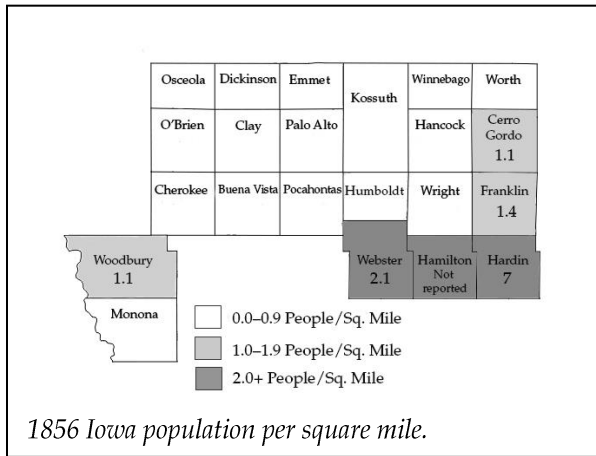
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82. "Crop and Land Use: Statewide Data," Iowa State University: Extension and Outreach, Ames, IA (website), accessed 1/6/2021, <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/soils/crop-and-land-use-statewide-data>.

83. Mills and Roberts, *1836–1880 Census of Iowa for 1880*.

84. James J. Dinsmore, *A Country So Full of Game: The Story of Wildlife in Iowa* (Iowa City, 1994), 3.

85. J.M. Brainard, "The Great Blizzard of 1856," *Annals of Iowa* 1, no. 5 (1894), 393–94.



fencing that disrupted the open range, placed the burden of forage on the area's flora, and disrupted Dakota sustenance patterns. Cattle proliferated throughout the northern Iowa borderlands. By the 1860 census, 13,145 cattle lived in the area, which was roughly half the number of the newly arrived American population. Settlers relied on horses and oxen to break the tough prairie sod and to complement their own labors on newly founded farms. By 1860, the northern Iowa borderlands hosted 3,203 horses on

farms, or roughly one for every eight people.<sup>86</sup> Despite these changes, Inkpaduta still sought to lead his people according to the Dakota's time-tested seasonal sustenance strategies, yet the 1850s provided an increasingly dire situation as the transition to agriculture disrupted the long-standing order of the natural environment within the northern Iowa borderlands.

As the world rapidly changed around him, Inkpaduta also tried to maintain sovereignty and autonomy for his band. During 1856, Inkpaduta ranged as far north as the reservation near Mankato and as far south as Smithland. The band spent time on the shores of Spirit Lake and went west into what would become South Dakota to hunt bison. During their return in November, they briefly stopped near Peterson, Minnesota, where Inkpaduta told William, George, and Charles Wood that he had never harmed a white man. The band met a few other settlers as they wound their way south, passing through the Spirit Lake region and into the Little Sioux River Valley. As the band descended the river they encountered settlers in a variety of locations including the newly forming towns of Cherokee and Peterson, Iowa. Relations between the band and settlers continued amicably, and two of Inkpaduta's sons competed in shooting and wrestling contests with several settlers at Peterson, Iowa.<sup>87</sup> The band eventually continued down the Little Sioux, arriving near its confluence with the Missouri in early December.

The opening salvo of the winter of 1856–57 ravaged Iowa. The first snows of the year blanketed the state in November, and the Great Blizzard of 1856 arrived on December first.<sup>88</sup> The storm dumped wet, heavy snow in intervals as the temperature undulated wildly, eventually leading to the storm closing with a shower of freezing rain.<sup>89</sup> Inkpaduta's band arrived at their destination of

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86. Mills and Roberts, *1836–1880 Census of Iowa for 1880*. The Census Bureau did not record hogs individually by county in the 1860 census, but listed the total number in the state at 540,088.

87. Joseph Henry Taylor, "Inkpaduta and Sons," *North Dakota Historical Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (October 1929–1930), 153–64.

88. Theodore S. Parvin Collections, The Iowa Heritage Digital Collections, State Library of Iowa, Des Moines, IA.

89. Brainard, "The Great Blizzard of 1856," 391–97.

Smithland on the heels of the storm to find an unwelcoming settler community on edge. Many people in the settlement suffered when a late-season prairie fire devastated grain crops, and survival would have proven difficult even if the area experienced a mild winter. Instead of relying solely on laid-in provisions, settlers had to survive through the bounty found in the natural environment surrounding them.

All during the winter of 1856–57 the Adams and Hawthorn families depended upon a water hole in the Little Sioux River, for themselves and for their livestock. The women had gathered wild plums and wild grapes, preserving as much as they could. The men had butchered three wild hogs, left behind by the Mormons, and kept the meat frozen in the attic for their winter supply. They had milk and butter, and had laid in a stock of staples before the December 1 blizzard.<sup>90</sup>

They scavenged and saved, and their meager provisions would have to hold them through the winter.

The departure of Charles Lamb, the amicable settler on whose land Inkpaduta wintered for several previous years, removed a critical buffer as tensions between the Smithland community and the band quickly escalated. Lamb rented his farm to a man named Livermore, and the new tenant did not foster positive relations with the Wahpekute when they arrived late in 1856. After finding Livermore inhospitable, Inkpaduta led his people to the land of another settler, Elijah Adams.<sup>91</sup> As the winter continued, food supplies depleted and relations deteriorated further. In one incident, the Wahpekute harvested a deer only to have it stolen from them by a settler. Later in the winter, several hunters from the band spotted a large grouping of elk in a stand of trees along the Little Sioux River and prepared to go out for a hunt.<sup>92</sup> The elk's stored energy and protein would have proved vital to maintaining the Wahpekute as they lingered on the brink of

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90. Will Leach Clark, *History of the Counties of Woodbury and Plymouth, Iowa: Including an Extended Sketch of Sioux City* [ . . . ] (New York, NY, 1890), 172.

91. Miriam Hawthorn Baker, "Inkpaduta's Camp at Smithland," *Annals of Iowa* 39, no. 2 (Fall 1967), 90–91.

92. Taylor, "Inkpaduta and Sons," 153–64.

starvation. The hunters headed out in pursuit of the herd, when a settler's dog attacked one of the band. The Wahpekute killed the dog, and the settler severely beat the offender. The thrashing disturbed the hunt, and the band failed to reinforce their food supply.

Exacerbated by deadly winter conditions, both the Wahpekute and the settler populations headed toward a tragic clash. At least eighteen settlers were ready to confront Inkpaduta by early to mid-February 1857.<sup>93</sup> During early 1857, the settlers of Smithland called a meeting where they accused the Dakota of stealing corn and hay. Additionally, the group agreed the Dakota's burden on the community should end. They organized a militia to drive the band away from the area. Inkpaduta protested the settlers' demands that the band disarm, but they reluctantly handed over their arms. The band left Smithland that night, heading up the Little Sioux River and into the forbidding winter landscape.<sup>94</sup>

Instead of resorting to violence after being confronted and disarmed by settlers at Smithland, Inkpaduta led his starving band up the Little Sioux River toward their traditional summer home at Spirit Lake. Along the way, the band suffered casualties as members starved to death, including one of Inkpaduta's grandchildren.<sup>95</sup> The band pillaged the countryside, taking guns and foodstuffs from a variety of settlements without perpetrating any large-scale violence as they struggled northward. As Inkpaduta made his way to Spirit Lake up the Little Sioux River, his motives became clear. Past chroniclers of the event dismissed the motivations of Inkpaduta as both unexplained and unexplainable, or as retribution for Sintominiduta's murder three years earlier, but the evidence paints a clearer picture.<sup>96</sup> Inkpaduta arrived

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93. Frank Herriott, "The Origins of the Indian Massacre between the Okobojis," *Annals of Iowa* 18 (1932), 323–82.

94. Herriott "The Origins of the Indian Massacre," 323–82.

95. Paul N. Beck, *Inkpaduta: Dakota Leader* (Norman, OK, 2008), 64.

96. As the historiography of Inkpaduta's attack on Spirit Lake developed, many authors misconstrued the events as a revenge raid in retribution for the murder of Sintominiduta. Although the death of Sintominiduta and Inkpaduta's attempts to obtain justice through the American justice system undoubtedly shaped Wahpekute actions during the 1850s, identifying the attack on Spirit Lake as a revenge raid is not consistent with other recorded Dakota responses to similar



not at an isolated moment frozen in time but at one that developed over the course of his lifetime. The band avoided confrontation when it actively courted them at Smithland and expected to arrive at Spirit Lake devoid of white settlement. Instead their frustrations boiled over as they came upon cabins erected at the site of their summer village.

American settlement had arrived on the shores of the sacred lakes where the Dakota first learned to plant and harvest corn. Desperate and frustrated, Inkpaduta entered a cabin and demanded supplies to sustain his band. When Rowland Gardner refused, violence erupted. The Wahpekute brutally killed, captured, and robbed virtually all of the settlers on Spirit Lake before making their way north to attack the settlement of Jackson, Minnesota, two weeks later. In all, they killed at least thirty-nine people, including two of the four initial captives.<sup>97</sup> Inkpaduta then set his eyes west where he could continue to elude American justice and join with Yanktonai relatives who still lived a more traditional life than the one offered by the reservation system. He sold the two remaining captives—including Abbie Gardner—and argued with his sons over whether or not the band should return to their lands in Iowa.<sup>98</sup>

Inkpaduta stayed west, continuing to live in ways consistent with his Dakota upbringing and fighting when necessary to preserve what sovereignty and autonomy he continued to wield.<sup>99</sup> He fought against the forces under Brigadier General Henry Hastings Sibley during 1863, again against Brigadier General Alfred Sully in 1864, and finally against Brevet Major General George Armstrong Custer in 1876 before absconding with Sitting Bull to

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events in the nineteenth century. Specifically, the gap of over three years between the murder and the attack undermines assertions of a direct relationship between the events. For a more nuanced discussion, see: Kevin T. Mason, "Forces of Nature: An Environmental History of Inkpaduta's 1857 Attack on Spirit Lake" (Ph.D. Diss., Iowa State University, 2020).

97. Flandreau, "The Ink-Pa-Du-Ta Massacre of 1857," 3:386–407.

98. Inkpaduta sold the remaining two captives to a Yanktonai man named End of Snake. When Gardner was ransomed by the Governor of Minnesota, it was End of Snake who participated in the agreement.

99. Flandreau to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 9/24/1857, Record Group 75, NA.

Canada following the Battle of the Little Bighorn.<sup>100</sup> “If I were an Indian, I often think that I would greatly prefer to cast my lot among those of my people who adheres to the free and open plains, rather than submit to the confined limits of a reservation,” wrote Custer before his death. He continued, “The Indians can never be permitted to view the question in this deliberate way.”<sup>101</sup> Inkpaduta spent his adult life fighting and fleeing to maintain his freedom from American acculturation and eventually died outside of the United States in Manitoba, Canada, in 1881.<sup>102</sup> The Americans may have forced him to abandon his traditional lands, but he went to his grave actively seeking to maintain the sovereignty and autonomy of his people while practicing a life culturally consistent with generations past.

***Wo’wicake Ocowasiŋ—All Truth:  
Reconciling Inkpaduta and the Dakota in Iowa’s Past***

The place of Inkpaduta and his people in the history of Iowa needs to undergo an honest reconsideration. Only through recognizing and understanding how the Dakota lived in Iowa, and how individuals including Inkpaduta sought to navigate a rapidly changing world, can we begin to better reconcile, honor, and understand the true and extensive legacy of the Dakota in Iowa’s history. Gardner-Sharp’s voice still dominates the discussion of Inkpaduta’s attack on Spirit Lake after nearly 170 years. Iowans need not only a more nuanced understanding of Inkpaduta’s attack on Spirit Lake but also a more realistic interpretation of the Dakota in Iowa’s past. It is clear that the Dakota both ranged into and lived in Iowa as far back as western sources date. With this knowledge, the story of Inkpaduta gains new levels of complexity, linking it to a much deeper Dakota past. The incredible change encountered by the Dakota in Iowa as they navigated the first half of the nineteenth century precipitated the decision by Inkpaduta to attack the community he found on Spirit Lake. Only

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100. Beck, *Inkpaduta*, 135–38.

101. George Armstrong Custer, “My Life on the Plains: Origin and Decay of the Indians,” *Galaxy* (February 1872).

102. Mark Diedrich, *Famous Chiefs of the Eastern Sioux* (Minneapolis, 1987), 51.

through understanding environmental change, population expansion, duplicitous governmental dealings, and erroneous communications to settler communities does a nuanced picture emerge, which should significantly alter how Iowans remember their shared past as well as the role the Dakota played in the state from a time predating western history.

