

THE SAC AND FOX INDIANS AND THE TREATY OF 1842

[The account given below of the treaty made with the Sac and Fox Indians at their Agency on October 11, 1842, by Governor John Chambers is copied verbatim from the *Iowa Territorial Gazette and Advertiser* (Burlington), Vol. VI, No. 14, October 15, 1842. The account not only presents the impressions of an eye-witness of the negotiations of the treaty, but it furnishes some interesting sidelights on the character and customs of the Sac and Fox Indians. The text of the treaty of 1842 may be found in Kappler's *Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties*, Vol. II, p. 546.—EDITOR.]

Leaving Fairfield after breakfast, we drove to the Indian Agency by 12 o'clock, where we found congregated in a common mass from a thousand to fifteen hundred whites and upwards of two thousand Indians. We passed the Indian encampment about a mile east of the Agency. Their tents, (wik-ke-ups,) several hundred in number, and covering a half mile square of beautiful prairie, presented as pretty and romantic a scene as eyes could rest upon. The tents were all new, as indeed were all the clothing and trappings of the Indians — and in this respect their appearance was much more elegant than we had anticipated.

The Sacs and Foxes are perhaps the finest looking Indians on the globe — of large, athletic, and perfect forms, and most graceful carriage — and a brave, high-minded and honorable set of fellows. There are few men in this world equal to the celebrated *Keokuk*, whose commanding oratory raised him even in his youth from the common ranks of his tribe, and placed him without hereditary right, and in despite of all competition, at the head of his nation. Many statesmen in our own government might learn useful lessons in diplomacy, and many of our best orators receive profitable instruction, from this gifted Indian. The young-

er son of Black Hawk is the Adonis of his tribe — and is probably the handsomest man in the world. He is six feet three or four inches high, graceful and elegant in his manners — and although weighing perhaps two hundred, he treads as lightly as an infant. *Kish-ke-kosh*, a chief of much distinction among them, is also a talented and fine looking man — and though as brave as Caesar he is a regular built Brummell exquisite. He usually sports an ebony cane with a gloriously large and bright brass head, which he twirls in his fingers in the most elegant style imaginable, and when sitting rests his chin and lips upon the brilliant ornament, *a la* “the fine old English Gentleman.” He is a smiling chap, and celebrated as a gallant, as your smiling gentlemen usually are. It is rather amusing to witness his efforts to come the polite thing over his brother savages.

Every night the Indian camp was converted into a vast ball room — & every variety of dances known among them, from the “clothing of the dead,” to the flat boat “double shuffle,” were performed by them. The squaws have no part in these amusements, and usually manifest but little curiosity to witness their performance. It is any thing but dancing, according to our notions, consisting as it does of violent stamping upon the ground to the measured beats of a drum — a regular tearing up of the earth — or, as the Mississippi indictment expresses it, “kicking up a d——d fuss generally” — though there is system in it, and we noticed that the dancers preserved excellent time.

The chiefs and braves are the principal performers in these scenes. In addition to the beating of the drum, the dancers are enlivened by perhaps the wildest and most hideous yells that ever issued from the throats of human beings. And although a good christian might think that all Pandamonia had been turned loose upon our prairies, yet, strange to say, there is music in the horrid compound.

When all things are put into full blast — the drum beating — the dancers moving — and the singers yelling — hundreds of Indian dogs join in the delightful chorus, and it is then that the air is made redolent with savage sounds which make the listener quake while he laughs at the superlatively ludicrous character of the whole scene before him. The younger members of the tribe amuse themselves, some by aping the dancers at a respectful distance, and others by wrestling, foot-races, &c. Most of these young rascals have horses of their own, and it was laughable while pitiable to see them abuse the poor animals by running them from morning till night, sometimes in races, and at others without any apparent motive but to “cut a splurge.” This is the only thing we have against the Sacs and Foxes — they have no mercy on horses. The abuse of these noble animals is the meanest sin which any one, white, red or black can commit. It is a great mistake that Indians are stoics, misanthropes, or any thing of the kind. A more sociable, communicative, happy or laughing set of fellows than the Sacs and Foxes do not exist any where. But we believe it not only impossible but impolitic to civilize them. They are happier as they are — and we should regret any attempt to interfere with their domestic policy. Place them beyond the corrupting influences of the white settlements — keep from them that destroyer of human happiness among all colors, the death-dealing “fire water” — and government will then have conferred the best blessing upon the Indians, and the only one for which they will feel thankful.

The treaty was conducted with great dignity and propriety, if we may except the introduction of dragoons to keep out citizens beyond hearing distance. Capt. Allen and Lt Ruff, of the Dragoons are talented and gentlemanly officers, and were present in obedience to orders — but Gov. Chambers certainly believes too much in show, or greatly mis-

takes the character of our citizens, if he deems all this flummery and metal-button authority necessary to the order, dignity or success of a treaty. With this exception, (which we do hold to be most ridiculous and most reprehensible,) we freely unite in giving Gov. Chambers all due praise for his prudent and judicious management of the affair. One or two bands of the Indians had difficulty in bringing their minds to part with their lands, and several days and nights were spent in anxious deliberation before they gave a final answer. This was a natural feeling, and one that did credit to their hearts. They were asked to part with the last of their earthly possessions, to abandon the graves of their fathers, and remove to a new and distant country. But the conviction that there was little or no game in their present country, and that the one to which they were invited abounded in every species that could give pleasure to the chase and profit to success, finally overcame their objections, and the treaty was ultimately accomplished with the unanimous consent of all parties.

While we regard this result as most fortunate for our Territory, we consider it not less so as to the Indians themselves. They will be made independent and comfortable for life. Their annuities will clothe and feed them bountifully. They will be placed beyond the baneful influences of unprincipled whites who drench them with whiskey and then rob them of their money. And they will go to a country abounding in game where they can pursue their favorite pleasures at will and without interruption from their ancient enemies the Sioux.

Here we will take occasion to correct an error which we committed some two or three weeks ago in our speculations upon the probable contingencies upon which the result of the then approaching treaty would depend. We said that although the Indians were willing to sell all their country,

the traders were opposed to such a measure, and would advise the selling of only a portion that they might have the balance to operate upon for a few years longer. This remark was predicated upon reports which came from the Agency during the payment of the annuities. As we now know, from personal observation, that precisely the reverse of this is the fact, we deem it our duty to correct the error. Indeed, but for the activity and influence of Messrs. Sanford, Davenport and Le Clair and the Messrs. Phelps, who exerted every means in their power to harmonize the clashing among the bands, we doubt much whether the purchase of the whole country could have been effected.

To conclude this article, and the subject, for the present, we will state that after camping out a night or two for the mere humor of the thing, we, in company with many others, obtained excellent quarters at the residence of Mr. Smart, the Government Interpreter. Mr. S. has been many years among the Indians, and is a worthy, upright and clever man, and lives most sumptuously. His wife is a very handsome, amiable and interesting Sac and Fox woman — and he has a couple of very sprightly little daughters, about six and eight years old, of whom he seems dotingly fond, and for whom, but for the comfortable circumstances of their father, we should regret that no provision was made in the treaty. There are but few half-breeds among the Sacs and Foxes — and as the Indians themselves were anxious to extend the benefit of some small donations to them, it is deeply to be regretted that their benevolent purposes were frustrated either by the arbitrary orders of Government or the over-anxious zeal of the Governor to protect the Indians against themselves.