

EPISODES IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE DES MOINES VALLEY

[The early history of the Des Moines Valley will be continued in another article by Mr. Van der Zee, dealing with the opening of the valley to settlement by the whites.—EDITOR]

There is no portion of Iowa which offers so rich a field for historical investigation as does the valley of the River Des Moines. A sketch of the events which took place in this region before the coming of permanent settlers excellently epitomizes the story of what happened in the dim period of two centuries preceding the rush of immigration to the fertile lands of the Upper Mississippi Valley. Likewise, the early history of the Des Moines Valley presents a unique cross-sectional view of the history of Iowa before and during its first occupation by the pioneers.

THE VALLEY AND ITS NAME

Relying upon the only known sources of information, the earliest accounts of exploration in the Upper Mississippi region, one is obliged to conclude that no white man laid eyes upon the Iowa wilderness until the memorable year 1673. That the French travelers and traders, Radisson and Groseilliers, set foot upon Iowa soil in 1659 or 1660, as has been claimed, can never be satisfactorily proved by the narrative of their journeyings. Nevertheless, if one may believe the statement that Radisson visited a tribe of Indians called "Maingonis", to him must be ascribed the distinction of having recorded in its original form¹ the name which is now applied, in slightly altered form, as "Moingona", to a

¹ Scull's *Voyages of Peter Esprit Radisson*, p. 246; Dr. L. G. Weld's address entitled *On the Way to Iowa*, p. 20; THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, p. 328.

town, and as "Des Moines" to many townships, to a county, to a tributary of the Mississippi, to a United States fort, and to the State capital of Iowa.

On their epoch-making journey of discovery from Canada by way of the Great Lakes, the Fox and Wisconsin rivers, and down the Mississippi in 1673, Louis Joliet and Father Marquette disembarked upon the Iowa shore at a spot where they found the tracks of human feet. After following a trail for some miles westward, they came to a village of "Peouarea" Indians upon the bank of a river. Besides the account of his experiences Marquette left a rough map of the region visited, showing the river and the Peouarea village, and farther to the westward, away from the river, he indicated a second village by the name of "Moingouena". Judging from these facts and supported also by the latitudes recorded by Marquette, some historians have assumed that the explorers discovered the Des Moines River. This view, however, was exploded upon the scientific investigation of Marquette's map. The better opinion would seem to be that the stream was none other than the Iowa, but it is not intended to deny that the Moingouena Indians even at that time may have dwelt upon the river which to-day bears their name in its abbreviated French form.²

THE DISCOVERY OF THE DES MOINES RIVER

So far, then, as the records bear testimony, there is no evidence to prove that Joliet and Marquette discovered the largest river in the Iowa country, although, of course, they passed its mouth on the long journey southward. In the spring of 1680 three other Frenchmen — Michel Accault, Antoine Angel, and Father Hennepin — were despatched

² Weld's *Joliet and Marquette in Iowa* in THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. I, pp. 14, 15; see also Vol. XII, pp. 330-334. Mr. Johnson Brigham in his *History of Des Moines and Polk County*, Vol. I, p. 3, erroneously cites Dr. Weld as concurring with the older view that Joliet and Marquette landed near the mouth of the Des Moines River.

up the Mississippi by their master, La Salle, who was then laying plans to explore and exploit the Great Valley. Except for the bare mention of two large rivers flowing from the west, the "Otontenta" and the St. Peter's, which may have been the present Des Moines and Minnesota rivers, they left no record of having spent any time in the Iowa country.³

From this time onward French forest-rangers and *voyageurs* resorted more and more to the region west of the Great Lakes in quest of furs and pelts. Just when the French began to use the name "Des Moines" may never be ascertained. In 1688, however, the French cartographer, Franquelin, prepared a map of the Mississippi Valley and noted upon it the "Rivière des Moingona" and a village of Moingona Indians. These details of American geography he may have obtained from traders or explorers who in turn may have learned them by actual experience or by mere hearsay.⁴

In the same year took place the remarkable voyage afterwards reported in Europe by Baron Lahontan in his book of travels. This gentleman announced to the world his discovery and exploration of a wonderful river west of the Mississippi — *La Rivière Longue*. Later travelers revealed the falsity of the Baron's claims and branded him as an impostor, but modern historians have seriously attempted to identify the Baron's fabulous river, some even suggesting the Des Moines. Indeed, a curious map of the Upper Mississippi made in the year 1720 lends color to this view: it depicts the *Rivière Des Moingona* taking its start far to the westward at a point where it bears the words: "Jusqu'icy est venu le Baron de Lahontan" (To this place came

³ THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, pp. 335, 336, 337.

⁴ THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, p. 337.

Baron de Lahontan).⁵ This chart may have been based upon Lahontan's pretended discovery.

Dr. Daniel Coxe, an Englishman who had bought up all rights in the patent of Carolina, some time before the year 1700 sent two armed ships to explore the regions to which he laid claim and in 1722 compiled from the alleged journals and memoirs of the officers of one ship a description of the Great Valley. He told of "a fair river, which our people were at the mouth of, but could not learn its name. I suppose it's the same the French call Moingona. Some make it to proceed from the Mitchayowa or long river, as may be discerned in the annexed map; but as all our journals are silent in that matter, so shall I, till some more perfect discoveries thereof afford us further light and certainty therein." Coxe's book has suffered the fate of Lahontan's: it has come to be looked upon as a mere invention contrived to bolster up his claims "against the French by asserting priority for English explorations."⁶

In the summer of 1700, while Pierre Charles Le Sueur and a score of companions were ascending the Mississippi in a felucca and two canoes, Pénicaut, journalist of the expedition, recorded passing the mouth of a river called "the Rivière de Moingona, the name of a nation of Savages who dwelt upon its banks".⁷ Profiting by the information gained from Le Sueur and earlier explorers, the most famous French cartographer of that day, William de L'Isle, in 1703 compiled a map of Louisiana and the Mississippi,

⁵ A copy of this map may be found in the *Annals of Iowa* (Third Series), Vol. III, p. 558. See Thwaites's *Lahontan's Voyages to North America*, Vol. I, pp. xxiii, xxxviii, 167, 178, 179; Shea's *Charlevoix's History and General Description of New France*, Vol. I, p. 87.

⁶ Winsor's *The Mississippi Basin*, p. 46. For Coxe's account see Alvord and Bidgood's *First Explorations of the Trans-Allegheny Region*, pp. 232, 233; French's *Historical Collections of Louisiana*, Series I, Vol. II, pp. 230, 232.

⁷ Margry's *Découvertes et Etablissements des Français, dans l'Ouest et dans le Sud de l'Amérique Septentrionale*, Vol. V, p. 411.

including among its tributaries the "des Moines ou le Moingona" River.⁸

The only Frenchman of those times who really left more than a fragmentary record of his knowledge of the Louisiana country after a visit was Father Peter Francis Xavier de Charlevoix. From hearsay this Jesuit priest described the valley of the Des Moines in 1721 as follows:

On the left side about fifty leagues above the river of Buffaloes, the river *Moingona* issues from the midst of an immense meadow, which swarms with Buffaloes and other wild beasts: at its entrance into the Mississippi, it is very shallow as well as narrow; nevertheless, its course from north to west, is said to be two hundred and fifty leagues in length. It rises from a lake and is said to form a second, at the distance of fifty leagues from the first.

Turning to the left from this second lake we enter into Blue River, so called from its bottom, which is an earth of that color. It discharges itself into the river of St. Peter [now the Minnesota]. Going up the Moingona, we find great plenty of pit coal, and a hundred and fifty leagues from its mouth there is a very large cape, which causes a turn in the river, in which place its waters are red and stinking. It is affirmed, that great quantities of mineral stones and some antimony have been found upon this cape.

A league above the mouth of the Moingona there are two *rapids* or strong currents of a considerable length in the Mississippi, where passengers are obliged to unload and carry their pirogues: and above the second *rapide*, that is about twenty leagues from the Moingona, there are lead mines on both sides of the river, which were discovered some time ago, by a famous traveller of "Canada called Nicholas Perrot, whose name they still bear".⁹

WAR IN THE IOWA WILDERNESS IN 1735

Having found their way to the Upper Mississippi Valley during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, French-

⁸ A copy of this map may be found in French's *Historical Collections of Louisiana*, Series I, Vol. II, frontispiece.

⁹ Charlevoix's *Journal of a Voyage to North-America* (Printed for R. and J. Dodsley, London, 1761), Vol. II, pp. 225, 226.

men from New France (Canada) and Louisiana began to interest themselves in the religious and economic life of the native inhabitants. In general, the relations between Europeans and Indians were so peaceful that French missionaries and traders achieved considerable success. But an event soon occurred which was the beginning of nearly thirty years of war in the Wisconsin-Illinois-Iowa country.

The main-travelled highway to this region from eastern Canada was an almost continuous waterway consisting of the St. Lawrence, the Great Lakes, Green Bay, the Fox River, one mile and a half of portage by land, and the Wisconsin River. Along the banks of the Fox River dwelt the Fox Indians who had never taken a fancy to the white invaders. After years of non-resistance they burst into open hostility in 1712: not only did they make attacks upon French traders and black-robed priests, but they also raised their tomahawks against all the tribes which had alliances or dealings with the French. Stirred on and aided by the savage Iroquois Indians of the East who were said to be under English influence in the interests of the fur trade, the Foxes practically ruined the Frenchmen's business in furs and carried death and destruction to neighboring tribes to the southward.¹⁰ Indeed, at this time there recommenced the intertribal wars which almost completely wiped out the Illinois family of tribes, among them the Peorias and Moingwenas who had long roamed the Iowa-Illinois country.¹¹

¹⁰ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XVI, pp. 289, 298, 327, 339, 340, 417; Vol. XVII, p. xii. For the beginning of the Iroquois invasions and the alleged English interest in the beavers of the West see *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, Vol. IX, pp. 162, 163.

¹¹ Bureau of American Ethnology's *Handbook of American Indians*, Part I, p. 598. Lewis and Clark in 1804 reported that to the Sacs and Foxes was "justly attributable the almost entire destruction of the Missouries, the Illinois, Cahokias, Kaskaskias, and Peorias."—*American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, Vol. I, pp. 711, 712, 714.

After fifteen years of intermittent and bloody warfare between the Foxes and neighboring tribes, the Governor-General of Canada, Sieur de Beauharnois, determined to destroy the Fox nation in order to effect a sure and enduring peace. To this plan the King of France gave assent. In 1729 the Fox region was laid waste. Finding that the Sioux and the "Ayowets" (Ioways) of the Minnesota-Iowa region would not give them shelter, the Foxes were obliged to return to the site of their old village and sue for peace. Then, harassed on all sides by their hostile neighbors and pursued by their enemies, they were at last brought to bay near "the Rock" on the Illinois River. A French-Indian force in 1730 succeeded in crushing and all but exterminating the rebellious natives: "not more than 50 or 60 men Escaped Without guns and Without any of the Implements for procuring their Subsistence". All the other warriors and many women and children were killed, while the survivors were captured and scattered as slaves among the Indian nations. The warriors who escaped fled across the Mississippi to seek an asylum among the Ioways who then seem to have occupied what is now eastern Iowa.¹²

Scarcely had the French reestablished themselves in the Wisconsin and Minnesota country, however, when a small incident again blasted their hopes of future tranquillity. After their defeat the Fox fugitive warriors gradually collected their enslaved women and children together, and during this revival of their tribal life, they were again attacked by other nations with the approbation of French officers of the colony. The Governor-General then ordered Sieur de Villiers "to bring all the Renards to Montreal", believing "that to send them to France with the view of distributing them among the islands [such as the French West Indies] would Be the most advantageous for the

¹² *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XVII, pp. 21, 62, 63, 65, 113, 117, 130.

Country because here [in Canada] they could always desert to the English." Furthermore, if de Villiers could not get "that Wretched Remnant" to obey, he had orders to wipe them out. This officer with a force of French and Indians repaired to the post at Green Bay in 1733 and called upon the Sac Indians to give up the Foxes who had taken refuge among them. When they temporised, de Villiers with a few others went to demand the refugees and in a rash attempt to enter their fort was shot down.¹³

Already filled with sympathy for the fast-dwindling tribe of Foxes and fearing their inability to atone for the death of so great an official, the Sacs cast in their lot with the hunted Foxes. The allied tribes at once withdrew from the Wisconsin country, crossed the Mississippi, and buried themselves in the Iowa wilderness in the hope of escaping punishment for an act which they had never plotted. In the month of October, 1734, they were reported as having wandered about for some time, asking "In vain for a refuge among the sioux and ayouis who refused it to them", and they finally established themselves in two forts upon the Wapsipinicon River.

Meanwhile the French were not inactive. Governor-General Beauharnois of Canada, fearing that the failure to send a French army in pursuit of the fugitives might produce a bad impression on all the Indian nations, determined "to detach a party of 84 French, consisting of seven officers and the remainder of Cadets, Sergeants, Soldiers and some settlers." All eagerly volunteered for the service, while over two hundred Iroquois, Pottawattamies, and Hurons also expressed the greatest willingness to take revenge upon their Sac and Fox enemies.

Nicolas Joseph de Noyelles was selected to command the

¹³ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XVII, pp. 140, 148, 153, 155, 161, 167, 182, 183, 189, 202, 210. A Fox chief by the name of Kiala about this time was sent to Martinique for safe-keeping.

party, because he was "very Efficient and is greatly loved by the Savages. And he Adds to these qualities a Constitution capable of Enduring the fatigues of an Expedition which can be undertaken only in a very inclement season, for it will be necessary to proceed a very great distance on foot and on Snow-shoes." The captain set out from Montreal on August 14, 1734, with orders to go to Detroit and thence westward to grant peace to the Sacs "if they consent to give up the Renards; If not to destroy both nations And to let our Savages eat them up."¹⁴

On the way to the Iowa country Captain de Noyelles and his war party captured a few Sacs who reported that "the Renards were no longer at la Pomme de Cigne [Wapsipicon River] and that they had withdrawn to the Rivière sans fourche." The French accordingly crossed the Mississippi early in the year 1735 and under the worst conditions penetrated the wilderness in search of the allied tribes. With some surprise they came upon fifty-five Indian lodges "on the other side of a very wide and rapid River full of floating ice." They crossed the stream and commenced an engagement in which the French lost a few men and the allies had thirty killed, wounded, and taken prisoners — perhaps the first and only pitched battle ever fought in the Iowa country between whites and Indians.

Such was the indecisive battle of "the River Mongona 60 Leagues from the spot where that River falls into the Mississippi". De Noyelles informed the Sacs that their Father, the Governor-General, "would grant them their lives on condition that they would abandon the Renards" and return to their old haunts near Green Bay. After they promised to do so, the little French army departed southward, having at least convinced the savages "that the French are as

¹⁴ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XVII, pp. 206, 208, 209, 210, 216.

capable as they of undertaking Marches and of seeking the enemy at the extremities of the Colony."¹⁵

One year later the Fox tribe, still migratory, had a fighting force of one hundred men.¹⁶ They and the Sacs were begging for their lives and in 1737, through the intercession of other tribes, Beauharnois was prevailed upon to grant their request for mercy. Two years had passed, however, when a French officer named Pierre Paul, Sieur Marin, reported that "the Renards And Sakis have not dared to go and Establish themselves at la Baye [Green Bay], because some ill-disposed French had told them that I was Sending a large body of soldiers to Eat them up." The Foxes, feeling that their French overlords were displeased, asserted that they were doing no wrong by staying in the country of the Ioways "as we have only come here to provide for our families who would meet with hardships elsewhere." The Sacs, too, complained that they had not rekindled their fires in the Green Bay region because "there are no longer any Crops, fishing or hunting to be had there, because it is a soil that can no longer produce anything, Being Stained with French blood and with our own." Furthermore, the allies had not returned to their old habitat on the Fox River because they had been frightened by "the Thunder which hangs above our heads ready to Crush us"—a French army of which they had received warning.¹⁷

¹⁵ For two different original accounts of this French expedition into the Iowa country see THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, pp. 247-261.

¹⁶ *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, Vol. IX, p. 1055.

¹⁷ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XVII, pp. 263, 275, 315, 316, 319, 320, 324. In 1718 there was made the following report of the land of the Sacs and the Foxes in Wisconsin: "There is excellent hunting in these parts, and the people live well in consequence of the abundance of meat and fish, of the latter of which this Fox river is very full."—*Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, Vol. IX, p. 889.

Having found safety among the Sioux Indians west of the Mississippi and planning to find a retreat among the Iroquois Indians, if necessary, the Foxes in 1741 caused the French to revive secretly their project of extermination. Marin, nevertheless, left nothing undone to persuade the allied tribes to remove from the Iowa and Illinois country, and owing to his exertions, many of them were again settled near Green Bay in July, 1742. Thus, "the plan of calming Minds by Conciliatory means" brought about the peace which the French needed to exploit the West.¹⁸

FUR TRADE BEGINNINGS IN THE DES MOINES VALLEY

The Fox wars having been ended, who were the native inhabitants of the eastern Iowa wilderness? The Moingwenas and the Peorias who had once used this region as hunting-grounds appear to have joined forces with other Illinois tribes as the only way to protect themselves against their common enemies, the Foxes and the Iroquois. Their numbers were terribly reduced and by the year 1736 the Moingwenas seem to have been completely wiped out as a distinct tribe.¹⁹ The Ioway Indians, never a numerous tribe, are occasionally met with in these early years, but they seem to have had no permanent village homes — they were of a nomadic turn of mind. The Sioux Indians probably frequented the prairies and forests south of their Minnesota habitat more than other native tribes. Certain it is that owing to the general turmoil during the first half of the eighteenth century French *coureurs de bois* and *voyageurs* were never really safe in their search for furs in the Upper Mississippi Valley.

¹⁸ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XVII, pp. 338, 363, 398, 404, 436; Vol. XVIII, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, Vol. IX, p. 1057. The Moingwenas received no mention in a report of 1757.—*Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XVIII, p. 177.

In the summer of 1749 three Frenchmen were murdered by the Sioux and in the autumn another with his slave was killed "on the Rivière des mouens by the petits osages." Such was the report of the French commandant of Fort Chartres opposite the mouth of the Missouri. The Little Osages of the Missouri country, scouring the Iowa wilderness for game or enemies, had come upon a man named Giguière while hunting on the upper Des Moines River. They afterwards atoned for their crime by sending the murderer's scalp to the French officer so that the French could say: "Nothing can be added to the submission of those petits Ossages; their rectitude surpasses everything that can be expected of a savage nation."²⁰

Difficulties began to thicken about the French who were trying to hold the western country in these years. As in Europe, so in America, they were preparing for a death grapple with England. All available troops were, therefore, collected for the struggle in Canada. The year 1760 witnessed the collapse of the French régime in the Upper Mississippi Valley. Then, in 1762, before the French and the English made the treaty of peace which closed the war, France secretly conveyed to Spain all the vast territory west of the Mississippi River. Henceforth the Iowa wilderness lay within the jurisdiction of Spanish officials at New Orleans.²¹

The territory east of the Mississippi having fallen into the hands of England, English subjects lost no time in hastening thither to reap the trade benefits of British domination.²² England's new French-Canadian subjects, however slightly they may have been engaged in the fur trade

²⁰ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 60, 86, 87. The French at this time also gave the Des Moines River the name "des Moens".

²¹ THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, pp. 353, 355.

²² THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, p. 356.

of the Mississippi Valley, no doubt continued their operations wherever they could strike a bargain. When Spanish officials took charge of the government of Upper Louisiana in 1768, their first concern seems to have been to keep all English subjects, whether from Canada or the thirteen Atlantic colonies, from trading with the native inhabitants of Spanish territory. Indeed, in 1767, Governor Ulloa issued instructions to a captain of infantry to construct two forts at the mouth of the Missouri to prevent the English from entering that river and other Mississippi tributaries.²³

Prairie du Chien at the mouth of the Wisconsin was a considerable market to which the Indian tribes already resorted to trade their furs for the merchandise brought in boats from New Orleans and Mackinac. In the summer months of 1769, among the Indians who went for trade and presents to the Spanish settlements near the mouth of the Missouri were the "Ayooua" (Iowa), the Sioux, the Sacs, and the Foxes. It was the beginning of keen rivalry between English subjects and Spanish subjects for the fur trade of the Upper Mississippi. Whether the latter visited the haunts of the Indian tribes in the western half of the valley is not known, but in the year 1777 a Spanish official complained about the loss of trade in the Iowa country. He reported that the "Hayuas" (Iowas), a tribe consisting of two hundred and fifty warriors under the chieftainship of "El Ladron" (The Robber), were located eighty leagues from St. Louis "on the shores of the Muen [Des Moines] river." Their occupation was hunting "but no benefit to trade results therefrom, for the reason that the fur-trade is carried on continually with the traders who are introducing themselves into that river from the English district."²⁴

²³ Houck's *The Spanish Régime in Missouri*, Vol. I, p. 24.

²⁴ THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, pp. 356, 357, 359; Houck's *The Spanish Régime in Missouri*, Vol. I, p. 145.

British traders from Canada and the East seem thus to have been energetic and active enough to beat their Spanish competitors upon Spanish soil. The Indians no doubt looked with favor upon the visits of these merchants at their villages and hunting-camps because it obviated the necessity of long journeys to market. The Sioux tribes, dwelling in Spanish territory north of the Ioways, likewise conferred no trade benefits upon the Spanish, for, in the language of the report of 1777, "the traders from the English district are gaining entrance by way of the Muen river through the district called Fuzch, one hundred and fifty leagues from the Misisipy, in order to trade with them." "Fuzch" was probably the region about the head waters of the Des Moines, then already frequented by the Yankton Sioux of the Dakota country.²⁵

Who were the British merchant adventurers in the Des Moines Valley at this early day? Their names unfortunately have not been discovered. They may have been simply employees of Canadian trading firms or English subjects bartering with the natives on their own account. Whoever they were, they came to be the special mark of Spanish resentment. In November, 1778, Don Fernando de Leyba, Governor of Upper Louisiana, informed his superior at New Orleans that Fort San Carlos situated above the mouth

²⁵ The Spanish reported that the Foxes then dwelt upon the Mississippi two hundred leagues north of St. Louis and that the Saes dwelt thirty leagues farther north. The former had a village on the west side of the river near the Wapsipinicon River, the latter on the east side near the mouth of the Wisconsin. See Houck's *The Spanish Régime in Missouri*, Vol. I, p. 146; *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XVIII, p. 365.

Peter Pond, the illiterate but by no means ignorant Connecticut trader who wrote an account of his western experiences during the years 1773-1775, made the following statement of the Yankton Sioux: "Ye Yantonose are faroshas and Rude in thare Maners Perhaps Oeing in Sum masher to thare Leadig an Obsger [obscure] life in the Planes. Thay are not Convarsant with Evrey other tribe. Thay Seldom Sea thare Nighbors. Thay Leade a wandering Life in that Extensive Plane Betwene the Miseura & Missicippey."—*Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XVIII, p. 353.

of the Missouri had outlived its usefulness and that a new fort should be established "at the entrance of Mua river". To this proposal Bernardo de Galvez made answer in part as follows:

For their garrison and that of the other posts, you would need 200 men, who would be divided in the manner set forth by Your Grace. I must inform you that, not only have I no authority to cause extraordinary expenses on the royal treasury, since that the situado (as Your Grace is not ignorant) of this province is reduced to the mere wages of the employes and the pay of the troops of the province, but that there is also added to this difficulty that of the garrison of all this colony being at present too short to assign 200 men to those settlements. Consequently, I cannot assent to your proposition, although I can lay it before His Majesty so that he may determine what may be his royal pleasure. I charge Your Grace meanwhile to endeavor to prevent the English from entering said rivers, and to see to it that they do not entice our Indians, this being a matter that is so straitly charged in the instructions carried by Your Grace.

I received the plan which Your Grace sent me by which I shall have knowledge of those settlements. I thank you a thousand times for it.

May God preserve Your Grace many years, Nueva Orleans, January 13, 1779.

Spain soon declared war against England, so that the loyal British of the West at this time had two opponents: rebel Americans under George Rogers Clark and Spaniards under the officials of Louisiana. The English lost no time in preparing for an attack upon both. They set about to win over as many of the Indian tribes as possible, among them the Sacs and Foxes. The latter were invited to meet King George's military agent, Joseph Calvé, "at the River des Mouins". A French trader, Pierre Prevost, notified George Rogers Clark early in 1780 that "the people [traders] from michilimakinac who are at the River des Moins tell the Savages that they regard you As The mean-

est of wretches, saying everything against you and all the People of the Illinois advising the Savages to Pillage all those who Come from there, consequently I have not yet gone from here. I could not probably Withdraw without losing money, because of the Counsel of these rascals."²⁶ Although an Anglo-Savage army attacked St. Louis afterwards, the expedition proved to be little more than a useless foray.²⁷

In December, 1780, Francisco Cruzat wrote about "the expenses which the English are incurring and the exorbitant amounts of merchandise which are continually consumed among the Indian tribes, in order to attract them to their side, inducing them by deceitful and threatening words, to turn against us." He also informed his superior at New Orleans of another fact of interest about the native inhabitants of the Des Moines Valley. To quote from his letter:²⁸

I have just learned that a band of the Aioas [Iowa], doubtless excited by the enemy, has corrupted the Hotos [Oto] tribe which is located on the upper Misury and has promised them to join the other tribes opposed to us in order to show as great hostility as possible toward us. I do not doubt the truth of this, for I know the Indians, and I know by experience that the appearance of gain does not excite them to take action, but the reality of the presents does. Since the English make so many of these to all the tribes of whom they wish to make use, they always obtain from them whatever they desire, unless, by the same methods, we destroy their hopes by deceiving the barbarians as they are doing, and, as I have already said, with exorbitant gifts. By this news, although it deserves some confirmation, and by other, which I am receiving daily, and which is current in these countries, but which I omit, as they are related to one another, Your Lordship can infer the situation of these settlements and that of the tribes allied to us. I am contriving to satisfy them more by astuteness than by presents, for, although I work by

²⁶ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 404, 406.

²⁷ *THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, Vol. XII, p. 362.

²⁸ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 413, 414-416.

means of presents as much as is possible to me, they never reach the hundredth part of those which our enemies are distributing among them, as is well known and as Your Lordship can inform yourself — a reason which makes it possible for them to find as many Indian auxiliaries as they wish.

For some time, it seems, the Spanish officials had praised the valor, zeal, and experience of a retired officer named Don Esteban Boucher de Monbruen. Cruzat proposed to put him in command of a small force for further service and in February, 1781, received instructions "to keep Monsieur Boucher de Monbrun, with a detachment of forty militiamen, on the Misisipi among the Sac tribe" forty leagues from St. Louis in order to observe the movements of the English and win the affection of the tribes. Accordingly de Monbruen was stationed at the Sac village just above the mouth of the Des Moines River near the site of the present town of Montrose, Iowa. He must have done his duty unusually well, for the English in the spring of 1783 complained of a "Mr. Moubourne Bouché with a Gang of Moroders, whom annoy the Traders very much, by exacting Goods &c."²⁹

PROPOSED ERECTION OF A FORT AT THE MOUTH OF THE
DES MOINES

By the terms of the treaty of peace which concluded the Revolutionary War in 1783, England retained for Canadians the important right to trade with the Indians upon American soil. About the year 1784 there were formed two corporations for the exploitation of the fur-bearing regions of Canada and the territory west and southwest of the Great Lakes — the North-West and Mackinac companies. The latter appears to have plied its traffic in the country now

²⁹ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XII, p. 66; Vol. XVIII, pp. 419, 422; Houck's *The Spanish Régime in Missouri*, Vol. I, pp. 198, 201; *THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, Vol. XII, p. 363.

included in the States of Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, and Iowa. Spanish authority west of the Mississippi seems to have been regularly defied and even Indian tribes of the Upper Missouri were reached by stemming the current of the Des Moines and the St. Peter's rivers. The use of these water routes by the English resulted in the loss of considerable trade at the Spanish towns of St. Louis and New Orleans.³⁰

Some time during the year 1791 the Governor of Louisiana asserted that the only way to keep the English traders from poaching upon Spanish preserves was to construct "two strong posts on the Mouis and San Pedro Rivers." Baron de Carondelet who became Governor in 1792, when called upon to give his opinion about the plan, answered as follows:³¹

In compliance with your Excellency's order dated February 17 of last year [1792] I have to report that under present circumstances the establishment of the two forts proposed by the then Lieutenant Governor of Ylinoa, Don Manuel Perez, as the only means to restrain the introduction of the English to the Misouris seems to me not only useless but dangerous. They are useless because two forts in a region such as that, extending over more than two hundred and fifty miles of uninhabited country, will never interfere with the communication and the passage of the English to the tribes living near the Misouris. They are dangerous because, this province being so destitute of forces that it can scarcely maintain a garrison of two hundred men at San Louis de Ylinoa [St. Louis], at five hundred leagues distance from this capital [New Orleans], it is evident that these forts situated farther up by eighty leagues or more, in the midst of the warlike tribes who surround them, will immediately excite the wrath of the English and will also arouse the resentment of these same tribes who are so well disposed toward the latter, so that the forts will be exposed at every instant

³⁰ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XVIII, p. 439.

³¹ Houck's *The Spanish Régime in Missouri*, Vol. I, pp. 332, 342, 343; *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XVIII, p. 441.

to the attacks of the one or the other without having any place to rely upon for reinforcements.

Nevertheless, by the year 1794 Governor de Carondelet had changed his mind. He warned Spain that the English of Canada and especially the people of the United States endangered Spanish domination west of the Mississippi, the rich fur trade of the Missouri being their main objective. Only military preparedness could prevent encroachments upon the western half of the Great Valley. Among the fortifications deemed necessary for the adequate protection of Spanish trade and Spanish settlements de Carondelet recommended forts at the entrance to the St. Peter's and the Des Moines rivers. In this way the communication of the English with the savage nations upon the Upper Missouri could be effectually cut off, for Canadians were then said to be introducing themselves in increasing numbers "upon said river and among the nations living near it."

De Carondelet further believed that if such a fort were established many settlers would flock to its vicinity from other Spanish towns, from Canada, and from the banks of the Ohio, and build up towns more populous than St. Louis. Furthermore, military detachments stationed on the Des Moines and the St. Peter's farther north "would suffice to cause the dominion of Spain to be respected throughout Upper Louisiana" against the usurpations of the English and Americans. Such detachments might be recruited from foreigners who should offer to serve five years and afterwards devote themselves to the cultivation of the soil for another five years and at the same time serve as militia-men.³²

Despite the thoroughness of the Governor's military re-

³² Robertson's *Louisiana under Spain, France and the United States*, Vol. I, pp. 298, 299, 335-337; Houck's *The Spanish Régime in Missouri*, Vol. II, pp. 10, 12.

port and the comprehensiveness of his plan of defense the government of Spain took no steps to strengthen its hold upon the western country. Canadian traders continued to visit the region as much as before, and when the Osage Indians of the Missouri country, then at outs with their Spanish masters, made their way to trade with the English upon the Des Moines River, the Lieutenant-Governor of "Illinoia" called attention to the importance of persuading the Indians of the Iowa country — the Ioways, the Sacs, and the Foxes — to refuse the Osages and the English traders a passage across their hunting-grounds.³³

By the year 1795 enterprising British traders had pushed out and planted a blockhouse as far westward as the Platte River in the present State of Nebraska. They also frequently visited the Indian tribes of the upper Missouri west of the Big Sioux River, or else these Indians went eastward to exchange their furs for merchandise furnished by tribes upon the Mississippi. Spanish subjects must have been aware of this activity when some of them organized "The Commercial Company for the Discovery of Nations of the Upper Missouri" and sent Jean Baptiste Trudeau and eight others to conduct the enterprise in the wilderness. On the many trips which Trudeau had made during twenty-six years he had sojourned with the Yankton Sioux upon the headwaters of the Des Moines. On the journey northward he met a few members of this nation who told him they lived on the Des Moines: soon afterward he had the pleasure of being pillaged by them and their Teton Sioux companions. Trudeau later came upon a band of Sioux who dwelt among the Arickara and every spring resorted to the Sioux upon the St. Peter's and the Des Moines rivers to trade their furs for merchandise. The new trade enterprise of the Spanish, or rather French, merchants of

³³ Houck's *The Spanish Régime in Missouri*, Vol. II, p. 50.

St. Louis proved a failure, because, as Trudeau remarked, "of the reluctance they have always had and still have of making expenditures, and because of their fear of failure, they being too easily disheartened by the first obstacles and losses which are encountered; things which have never stopped the English in their commercial ventures."³⁴

Spanish officials bewailed their lack of a sufficient military force to cope with the pressing Anglo-Saxon peril. Although they planned and thirsted for the complete destruction of the English fur trade in the Upper Mississippi Valley, without a sufficient military force they could not hope to monopolize the trade upon Spanish soil. With nothing to fear, therefore, "the traders of the River Monigona" were reported to have sent twelve horses laden with goods destined for the Pawnees and other Indians upon the Platte and the caravan crossed the Missouri in December, 1795.³⁵ Under such circumstances and at a time when Napoleon Bonaparte contemplated the revival of a great colonial empire in America, Spain transferred the whole of Louisiana back to France in 1800.

A SPANISH LAND GRANT NEAR THE MOUTH OF THE DES
MOINES RIVER

Closely connected with the desire to exclude all but Spanish subjects from trade with the natives of Upper Louisiana was the Spanish policy of granting tracts of land to promote the settlement of the wilderness. Among the few land grants made in the Iowa country was that of Louis Tesson Honoré. Ten or twelve miles above the mouth of the Des Moines, on the present site of Montrose, this Frenchman built cabins, cultivated a small plot, planted an orchard of apple trees, and lived in the Iowa country from 1798 until

³⁴ *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. VII, pp. 403, 404, 413, 417, 421, 422, 425, 439, 463, 474.

³⁵ Houck's *The Spanish Régime in Missouri*, Vol. II, pp. 136, 191.

1805. On March 30, 1799, Honoré obtained a concession of land three miles square and a monopoly of the fur trade in that region. Besides, he was "to watch the savages and to keep them in fealty which they owe His Majesty." So poor a business man was Honoré that some time before 1805 an attorney appeared upon the premises and in the presence of two witnesses levied an attachment as a result of which Joseph Robidoux became the owner of the tract.³⁶

ENGLISH SUBJECTS IN THE DES MOINES VALLEY

Although it is well known that fur traders from the English province of Canada reached the Des Moines River as early as 1777, the records at present available do not reveal their identity. Jean Baptiste Faribault was the first representative of the Canadian merchants whose name has come down to us. So successful had he proved as a trader in one season's operations that his employer, Gillespie of the Mackinac Company,³⁷ in 1799 assigned him to a more important post about two hundred miles up the Des Moines River. At this place, named "Redwood", Faribault for four years carried on a profitable business, with the aid of an interpreter named Deban and several assistants. To the region on the upper Des Moines came bands of Sioux Indians, the Sacs and Foxes, and the Ioways. After the winter months spent in idleness the traders sought out the Indian hunting camps and for beaver, otter, deer, and bear skins exchanged blankets, cloths, calicoes, tobacco, cheap jewelry, and other articles. In the spring of 1800, and every year thereafter, Faribault and his *voyageurs* descend-

³⁶ THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, pp. 369, 370.

³⁷ In the *Minnesota Historical Collections*, Vol. III, p. 170, the writer speaks of Mr. Gillespie of "the North West Company". This mistake was easily made because the two companies consisted of practically the same Montreal firms and the operations of both were generally ascribed to the North-West Company. See THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, pp. 479, 481.

ed the river to deliver furs and peltries to "Mr. Crawford, one of the accredited agents of the Company."³⁸

During the winter of 1801-1802 Thomas G. Anderson, an agent of a Green Bay trader, set up a shop at the Ioway village fifty miles up the Des Moines River. To compete for a share of the trade of this "vile set" of Indians a Frenchman named Julien also established himself nearby. The two traders agreed to await the return of the Indians from their hunts near the Missouri, but later Anderson learned that Julien had secretly sent goods to the Ioway hunting camps. As a punishment for such trickery the Englishman left his own interpreter in charge of the Des Moines post, started westward across country with seven loaded men, and in the end did a splendid season's trade.³⁹

So considerable was the business in furs conducted by English subjects west of the Mississippi River that, when the United States had bought Louisiana from Napoleon, President Jefferson at once made preparations to drive foreigners from the fur-bearing field. Even before the purchase was actually made he instructed Lewis and Clark, leaders of an expedition to explore the land west of the Mississippi, to collect information about the Indian inhabitants. In the spring of 1804 the explorers learned that the Ayouwais (Ioways), nicknamed "Ne Perce" by Canadian traders, had a village of probably eight hundred souls, including two hundred warriors, forty leagues up the river "Demoin, on the Southeast side." Besides the Sacs and Foxes these natives, "a turbulent savage race", hunted as far west as the Missouri, collected annually \$6000 worth of "deer skins principally, and the skins of the black bear, beaver, otter, grey fox, racoon, muskrat, and mink", and

³⁸ THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, p. 483.

³⁹ THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, pp. 485, 486.

traded mostly with "Mr. Crawford, and other merchants from Michilimackinac."

Lewis and Clark also reported the activities of the Yankton Sioux of the Dakota country. These savages roamed and hunted among the rivers of northwestern Iowa, as well as about the headwaters of the Des Moines River. They dealt with traders at their hunting-camps and sometimes at the Ioway village on the Des Moines "where a partial trade has been carried on with them for a few years past, by a Mr. Crawford." It is interesting to know that when Zebulon M. Pike made his voyage of exploration up the Mississippi one year later, he prepared some notes by the use of which a map was made to show the course of the river and one of its tributaries, the Des Moines, with twenty streams emptying into it. Upon the chart he located, some distance above the great bend of the river, Fort Crawford; a little farther north and opposite the "Ayouwa" village, Fort Gelaspy; just above what is probably the site of Ottumwa, he located Fort St. Louis and Fort Crawford opposite one another; and still farther on, Crawford and Redwood.

Faribault's memoir of his services at Redwood under Messrs. Gillespie and Crawford, the references of Lewis and Clark to a Mr. Crawford and other Michilimackinac traders, and Pike's notes present a rather unsatisfactory picture of fur-trade activities at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Lewis, Clark, and Pike no doubt obtained their information, meagre as it is, from the traders whom they met. No explanation of the forts named by Pike has yet been offered except that they were doubtless traders' blockhouses — "points of commercial vantage rather than military strong-holds." Their names certainly suggest that two of them were called after Louis Crawford and the other two perhaps after Redford Crawford and George Gillespie.

These British traders had headquarters at Prairie du Chien about this time and were possibly partners of the Mackinac Company.⁴⁰

FOREIGN TRADERS EXPELLED FROM THE DES MOINES VALLEY

Scarcely had Lewis and Clark set out upon their expedition to the Pacific Coast when the United States in 1804 made a treaty with the Sacs and Foxes who used the Iowa country as their hunting-grounds. Among other things it was provided that the government should furnish a trading-house in order to put a stop to the abuses and impositions practiced upon the allied tribes by private traders; while the Indians agreed to allow American traders a free and safe passage through their country. President Thomas Jefferson favored such treaties as "the means of retaining exclusive commerce with the Indians west of the Mississippi River — a right indispensable to the policy of governing those Indians by commerce rather than by arms." It is clear that the American government was now bent upon asserting its exclusive claim to the fur trade upon American soil.

A government representative, Zebulon M. Pike, in 1805 brought important news to the chief men of a Sac village which stood near Louis Tesson Honoré's Spanish land grant, ten or twelve miles above the mouth of the Des Moines. He announced that with their consent a trading establishment would be erected at that place, since it would be easily accessible to the Ioways and the Yankton Sioux and to all the Sacs and Foxes. The chiefs seem never to have agreed to the proposal, and the presumption is that British traders had great influence in their councils. Nevertheless, a United States Indian agent, Nicolas Boilvin, came

⁴⁰ *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, Vol. I, pp. 711, 712, 714. See also *THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, Vol. XII, pp. 170, 171, 487-489, 490, 491.

to dwell among them and reconcile them to their new American overlords. It was also his duty occasionally to visit the Ioway village on the Des Moines and other Sac towns, and to prevent traders from introducing ardent spirits into the country.⁴¹

So far as is known Canadian traders and agents for English merchants still dealt with the native population of the Iowa interior. Faribault in the autumn of 1808, after an absence of four years, returned to his old post at "Redwood", on the upper Des Moines, and when a band of Ioways was on the point of robbing and killing him and his *voyageurs*, he was saved by his friends, the Yankton Sioux. But in the same year, as a part of its general policy of retaliating against Great Britain for the repeated humiliation inflicted upon American shipping, the United States government undertook to "destroy the equilibrium and profits of British traders in the upper Mississippi Valley". Among other steps taken to accomplish this end, such as levying duties upon English goods imported for the Indian trade, a detachment of the First Regiment of Infantry was ordered to march northward and build a government fort and trading-house as near the Des Moines River as possible. For some unexplained reason the site chosen for the establishment was that of the present city of Fort Madison, about twenty miles above the mouth of the river. The story of old Fort Madison or Belle Vue and of "Le Moine Factory" has already been told and does not properly come within the history of the Des Moines Valley.⁴²

Although their traffic with the Indians was thus being undermined, the British traders from Canada did not meekly resign. On the contrary they became the principal insti-

⁴¹ THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, pp. 489, 490, 491, 494.

⁴² THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, pp. 170-178, 495-503.

gators of Indian hostility against Americans and fanned the flame of Indian discontent wherever possible. Although the Mackinac Company sold out in 1811, and John Jacob Astor obtained a controlling share in the new enterprise which he then called the South West Company, the same traders, clerks, and boatmen did the work and independent Canadian merchants still continued to ply their traffic upon American soil. Accordingly, when war was declared to exist between Great Britain and the United States, Great Britain's Indian traders in Canada did everything in their power to bring success to English arms in the Upper Mississippi Valley. Indeed, the War of 1812 in the West came to be merely a conflict between British traders, assisted by their Indian allies, on the one side and American troops on the other.

Early in 1814, while British traders were making preparations to fall upon the Americans at the village of Prairie du Chien, word came that "a Capt. of Gov. Howard was to come to Prairie du Chien with an army of 2700 men." This rumor was not believed by the traders, and it was also learned that the American force had ascended the Des Moines River and "built a Ft. at Pees" before descending. No explanation can be offered of the event here referred to. After the Americans surrendered Fort Shelby at Prairie du Chien in the summer of 1814, Major Zachary Taylor led a keel-boat expedition of nearly four hundred men up the Mississippi from St. Louis, but owing to a skirmish with the British and the Sacs and Foxes he was compelled to retire below Rock Island, stopping long enough near the river Des Moines to repair the boats and bury the dead. Opposite the mouth of the river, in the Illinois Territory, Taylor then constructed Fort Johnson.

Thus British traders of French and English birth held undisputed sway in the Upper Mississippi Valley and by the

distribution of presents from the captured fort at Prairie du Chien they retained the affection of the native tribes. At one time the Sacs and Foxes brought ten scalps to them from "the Rivière Des Forts", perhaps the Des Moines, asserting that they would continue "to bring them in as they do ducks from the swamps." Hoping to retain the trade ascendancy thus won by arms, British subjects in May, 1815, were not a little startled to learn the terms of the treaty which concluded the War of 1812: they were to have no more privileges in the American Northwest. Thus ended the British régime in the Wisconsin-Iowa country. The result was the revival of Astor's South West Company for the exploitation of the American fur-bearing field.⁴³

UP THE DES MOINES VALLEY TO LORD SELKIRK'S COLONY

Just south of the boundary line between the United States and Canada, on the site of the present city of Pembina, North Dakota, the Earl of Selkirk in 1812 established a colony of Scotch Highlanders for the prosecution of the fur business. It was in fact another chapter in the history of the war of competition between two sets of Canadian merchants — the Hudson's Bay Company and the North-West Company. In the summer of 1815 two hundred more Scotchmen arrived at the Red River or Pembina settlement, an event which brought on armed conflict with representatives of the hostile North-West Company. To such hardships, besides the rigors of a northern wilderness region, were the pioneers of western Canada exposed until the competing companies effected a merger in the year 1821. After that time, to secure men for the extension of their monopoly in Canada and the United States, especially among the Indians of the Upper Missouri and the West, the promoters

⁴³ See THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, pp. 504-506, 514-517.

issued a prospectus by which they attracted from Europe "some good and credulous Germans and greedy Swiss".⁴⁴

Meanwhile, in the year 1815 after the close of the War of 1812, so run the reminiscences of an Iowa pioneer, Lord Selkirk arranged for the delivery of five hundred head of cattle at the colony, giving the contract to a citizen of New York. Since St. Charles, in Missouri Territory, was the nearest point at which the cattle could be obtained, the contract was sublet to "Old Dick Carr" and B. Lewis Musick. The story of their driving the herd through the Iowa country to Canada is related in the following words:

Carr and Musick were energetic men, and soon had their cattle collected, buying mostly on credit until they had completed the contract. Giles Sullivan was hired to assist in driving as far as the Des Moines River. They came up the Mississippi bottom and crossed the Des Moines about where St. Francisville is now situated, and stopped for several days on the Sand Prairie, near the present village of Vincennes. Here Sullivan left them, and Carr and Musick, with other assistants, proceeded up the divide between Skunk and Des Moines Rivers, passing through String Prairie, toward Big Mound, and must have passed very near Absalom Anderson's present farm. The Indians troubled them to some extent, and succeeded in stealing some of their stock; but no serious loss was experienced. In due course of time, they reached Selkirk's settlement, where his agent, well pleased with the cattle, issued a bill of exchange for their value in the name of the original contractor. Carr and Musick made their way home, striking the Mississippi River about St. Paul, from which point they came in canoes. They handed over the draft to the contractor, who, by some sort of hocus pocus, cheated Carr and Musick out of every dollar.

John S. McCune, of St. Louis, the King of the steamboat trade, got his first start in the world by helping drive cattle from Louisiana, Mo. to the Selkirk settlement. Whether he went through with Carr and Musick, the writer is not advised; but it is certain that he

⁴⁴ Beltrami's *A Pilgrimage in Europe and America*, Vol. II, pp. 348-353, 360-366; Holcombe's *Minnesota in Three Centuries*, Vol. II, pp. 69-75.

made some two or three trips to the Selkirk settlement as a cattle-driver when he was quite a young man.⁴⁵

Other records substantiate the statement that commerce was carried on between the Selkirk Colony on the Red River and the American frontier settlements in Missouri by way of the Iowa wilderness. Early in the fall of 1821 another "herd of cattle, mostly cows, arrived from the State of Missouri, in charge of a party of armed drovers, and were distributed in the Spring of 1822 among the Swiss settlers. This distribution of cattle, which had been contracted for by Lord Selkirk before his death, was all that had been done for the colonists in fulfillment of the pledges made them before their departure from Europe." On their return to Missouri the drovers were permitted to take along five disappointed families — indeed, their glowing descriptions of Missouri induced several other families to abandon Lord Selkirk's Colony in 1823.⁴⁶ Another interesting reminder of the relations between the far-away Canadian settlement and the nearest American pioneers is a map of Iowa Territory showing "Dixon and McKnight's Route to Pembina Settlements in 1822". These men ascended the valleys of the Des Moines and its tributary, the Raccoon, proceeded almost straight northward along the divide between Spirit Lake and the headwaters of the Des Moines to the sources of the St. Peter's and Red rivers, and then descended the valley of the Red River to Pembina.⁴⁷

AMERICAN FUR COMPANY ACTIVITY UPON THE DES MOINES
RIVER

By the building of a fort at Prairie du Chien, another upon Rock Island, and a third in Illinois just below the mouth of the Des Moines River, the United States in 1816

⁴⁵ A. W. Harlan in *The History of Lee County, Iowa*, p. 412.

⁴⁶ Chetlain's *The Red River Colony*, pp. 20, 21.

⁴⁷ I. Judson's map of the Territory of Iowa in 1838.

made clear beyond a doubt its intention to rule the wilderness region of the Upper Mississippi Valley. Henceforth troops were expected to enforce the acts of Congress which regulated trade with the Indians. It was a time when the government became wedded to the policy of protecting and fostering American industries and American commerce. One of the first fruits of American tariff legislation in the years after the War of 1812 was the birth of what came to be the first American trust: John Jacob Astor reorganized the South West Fur Company and re-named it the American Fur Company, establishing headquarters on Mackinac Island at the head of Lake Michigan. Early in 1817 Astor's enterprise commenced a vigorous commercial campaign in competition with a large number of private traders and the government "factories" or trading establishments located at Prairie du Chien and at Fort Edwards in Illinois below the mouth of the Des Moines.

Major Stephen H. Long, a topographical engineer of the United States Army, on his journey down the Mississippi to St. Louis in August, 1817, stopped at Fort Edwards. There he noticed traces of recent land surveys — the harbinger of settlers yet to come. Crossing the Great River to its western bank, Major Long and Dr. Lane passed driftwood, snags, and sawyers at the mouth of the Des Moines and ascended a few miles. They found the water too shallow to admit boats very far up the stream, although spring floods usually rendered the river navigable for Mackinaw boats from one hundred and sixty to two hundred miles. Long reported that the Ioway Indians dwelt about one hundred and twenty miles up the stream and also observed many fragments of coal of apparently good quality upon the sandbars.⁴⁸

In the autumn of 1817 two American Fur Company boats

⁴⁸ *Iowa Historical Record*, Vol. XVI, pp. 171, 172.

arrived at Prairie du Chien from Mackinac on their way to trade with the Indians upon the Des Moines River. The agents, Russell Farnham and Daniel Darling, having obtained government licenses before they started, received orders from the commandant at Fort Crawford to procure new licenses at St. Louis. The masters and their Canadian crews were in fact sent to St. Louis under military escort and appear to have been deprived of the season's trade: the American Fur Company afterwards recovered \$5000 at law for the damage done to its business. Nevertheless, Astor's men thereafter aimed to reach the Indian hunting-camps upon the Des Moines and thus beat out the government factory located at Fort Edwards, to which the Sacs, Foxes, and Ioways had been coming to trade the furs and peltries collected in the Des Moines Valley.⁴⁹ Indeed, competition became so keen and the American Fur Company's hostility so well organized that an act of Congress in 1822 brought about the collapse of the government factory system in the West. Henceforth the Company exerted its efforts to drive independent dealers from the field by buying them up or depriving them of business.⁵⁰

After the year 1822 the individuals who prosecuted trade in the Iowa country were required to obtain licenses from the government. John Campbell, Joshua Palen, and Maurice Blondeau dealt with the Sacs, Foxes, and Ioways of the Mississippi and Des Moines rivers, and were followed in 1823 by Jean B. Caron, Russell Farnham, and Charles Fabvre. In 1824 licenses were issued to B. Vasquez and St. Armant, while Joseph Dechamp and Edward Plondre were to operate upon the "Raccoon River", perhaps the well-known tributary of the Des Moines.⁵¹ By an act of

⁴⁹ THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, pp. 520-528.

⁵⁰ THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, pp. 531-536.

⁵¹ THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, pp. 536, 538, 539.

Congress passed in 1824 it became "the duty of Indian agents to designate, from time to time, certain convenient and suitable places for carrying on trade with the different Indian tribes, and to require all traders to trade at the places thus designated, and at no other place or places." Traders were to cease sending out "runners to secure credits and follow the hunters to their places of chase".⁵²

In the autumn of 1824 certain Sac and Fox chiefs called upon the United States Indian agent at Fort Armstrong to complain "that their Traders are not to be allowed to go into the Interior of their country to receive their pay in Skins for Credits given them in goods by the Traders in the fall of the year". They asserted that the haunts of game animals were so far from the Mississippi that it would be a great hardship for Indian hunters "to travel a distance of from one to Two or Three hundred miles for a little Gunpowder or any other articles that they might want and more particularly in the winter season while the Snow is on the ground, or in the months of February and March when they ought to be hunting Bear, Beaver and Otters." In view of their lack of horses the Indians saw no way of transporting their families and goods to the hunting-grounds nor of bringing their packs of "Skins, Tallow and Jerked meat" back from the hunt.

Realizing that "if ever the Traders refuse to give the Sauk and Fox Indians credit of arms, amunition, axes, Traps and some Blankets and strouds, the Indians must litterally starve," and inasmuch as "the distance from the Raccoon Fork of River de Moine to the Flint hills [a trading post on or near the present site of Burlington] is great, and too far for an Indian to leave his hunt to travel for any small article he may want for the use of his family," Thomas Forsyth, the Indian agent, licensed Maurice

⁵² *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XX, pp. 337-340.

Blondeau to trade "at the Dirt lodge high up the River de Moine". Blondeau's post was thus established near the Sac and Fox hunting country and during the hunting season from September to April was always accessible to Indian customers. The summer's trade was never large enough to repay the dealers for their trouble.⁵³

In the fall of 1825 André St. Amond (St. Amant) and Jean Baptiste Caron secured licenses to carry on trade at the Dirt Lodge and Flint Hills, while Joseph Montraville and Joseph Laframboise got permits to set up a post at "Fort Confederation, on the Second Forks of the Des Moines River" for trade with the Yankton Sioux.⁵⁴ This "fort", probably just a temporary stockade, doubtless stood at the junction of the upper branches of the Des Moines in the present Humboldt County. The region had no doubt been much frequented for several years. In the treaty of 1825 with the Sioux Indians the United States government obtained from the Yanktons a promise to protect the persons and property of licensed American traders and to seize and deliver to federal officers any foreigner or other person not legally authorized to trade in their country.⁵⁵ This treaty was evidently intended to counteract the influence of British traders on the Upper Missouri.

Beginning in August, 1826, Russell Farnham plied the fur trade at the Dirt Lodge in competition, it seems, with Francis Labussierre. Ramsay Crooks, Astor's right hand man in the West, wrote from St. Louis in April, 1827, that Farnham's Indian customers, panic-stricken by the rumor of warlike preparations on the part of their northern neighbors and old enemies, the Sioux, had abandoned their fine beaver country without attempting to catch a single animal.

⁵³ THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, pp. 541-545.

⁵⁴ *Senate Documents*, 2nd Session, 19th Congress, No. 58, pp. 5, 6.

⁵⁵ Kappler's *Indian Affairs*, Vol. II, p. 227.

Crooks added in conclusion: "This is the most to be regretted, as the rumors were unfounded, and the season has been uncommonly favorable for a Beaver hunt which would have given us at least 3000 more of the article than we shall have." The season's trade in this region proved to be a failure.⁵⁶

Joseph Laframboise met the hunters of the Yankton Sioux "at the second fork" of the Des Moines from 1825 to 1827, part of the time in competition with Wright Prescott. Beginning in the autumn of 1827 Pierre Chouteau, Jr., succeeded Farnham at the Dirt Lodge and served the American Fur Company until November, 1830. William Downey appears to have obtained some of the trade at that point between 1826 and 1828. Laframboise resumed his trade on the Upper Des Moines during the years 1829 to 1831, and took out a license again in 1833 and in 1834 for trade upon "Crooked River near des Moines", while Alexander Fari-bault was stationed at the upper forks. Meanwhile Farnham had returned to the Dirt Lodge for the trade year of 1830-1831. Then John Forsyth came on as the Company's agent at the same place for the year 1831-1832 — the only licensed trader in the Iowa country during this time. Except in the case of Laframboise noted above no more government licenses were granted after the autumn of 1833 when the American Fur Company employing ten men, A. G. Morgan with two men, and Michael Tisson with four men, were authorized to trade with the Sacs and Foxes at the old Dirt Lodge.⁵⁷

Farnham and Davenport, members of the American Fur

⁵⁶ Clarence M. Burton's transcript of Ramsay Crooks's *Letter Book*, pp. 271, 276, 298.

⁵⁷ For all these details of the fur trade see Van der Zee's *Fur Trade Operations in the Eastern Iowa Country from 1800 to 1833*, in *THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, Vol. XII, pp. 547-549; *Senate Documents*, 2nd Session, 23d Congress, No. 69, p. 7.

Company, have left an interesting account of their fur trade transactions in the Iowa wilderness from 1824 to 1831. They stated the amount of capital and the number of clerks, traders, and boatmen they had employed, and the kinds of American and English goods which they had sold. They had done a credit business with the Sacs and Foxes and were still counting on the recovery of over \$50,000 of debt. Furs in the Iowa country were said to be diminishing rapidly, as game was disappearing; while the trade labored under the disadvantage of being conducted at the same places from year to year. Farnham and Davenport made important recommendations to the United States government at this time, among others being the purchase of Sac and Fox lands upon the west bank of the Mississippi, in order to remove the Indians from close contact with unprincipled whites "to whom they part with not only their arms and ammunition, but even their clothing, for strong drink", thus destroying the American Fur Company's trade in furs and peltries at Rock Island, the Flint Hills, and the Dirt Lodge upon the Des Moines.⁵⁸

Early in the year 1832 George Davenport appeared at Washington, D. C., to inform Congress that the Sacs and Foxes were ready to sell their lands. But not until September, 1832, after the Black Hawk War, were the allied tribes forced to cede a strip of country along the Mississippi, partly to indemnify the United States and partly to secure western Illinois against future attacks. At the same time the government promised the Indians a specie annuity for thirty years and agreed to pay \$40,000 to the American Fur Company to liquidate Sac and Fox debts. Then, on the first of June, 1833, with the exception of Keokuk's Reserve upon the Iowa River, the title to eastern Iowa became vested in the United States government and the Indians, after

⁵⁸ THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XII, pp. 554-557.

having dwelt in their villages upon the Mississippi for a generation or two, were obliged to remove westward. Henceforth the scenes of barter and exchange were to be shifted westward also in advance of the wave of whites who were coming to find lands and build homes.

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