

Dispossession of the Tribes

Out into the Mississippi Valley flowed the tide of white settlement, irresistible and overwhelming. Before the advancing hosts the red men receded. Again and again the Indian bade farewell to his native village and familiar hunting grounds, to the hills and valleys of his youth, as the pale faces pressed forward to occupy the ancient haunts of his fathers.

But never was the Indian dispossessed without the color of law. Before the white men were permitted to settle on the lands of the red men, the Great Father at Washington sent his emissaries to treat with the natives. Always the high covenant of cession and contract was solemnized by formal ceremony. Always there was some semblance of value given to assuage the tribes. And always behind the treaty was likewise the heavy shadow of the gathering numbers of settlers. Under one circumstance or another the chiefs and head men signed on the dotted line, but they always signed. There was no choice for them. The white man was strong.

So it was in the Iowa country. Even before the press of settlement reached the Mississippi a treaty was made with the Sacs and Foxes providing a reservation for half-breeds of the tribe. It was in 1824 that the triangular region between the Mississippi

and Des Moines rivers south of an extension of the northern boundary line of Missouri was set aside at the request of the Indians. Unfortunately, however, the beneficiaries soon disposed of their lands and the Half-Breed Tract came to be known chiefly for interminable litigation over real estate titles.

For many years the Indians in the Iowa country had waged continual warfare with the hostile Sioux to the north. In 1825 the government decided to intervene and fix definite boundaries for the hunting grounds of the various tribes. To this end a line was drawn from the mouth of the Oneota (Upper Iowa) River to the upper fork of the Des Moines River dividing the Sioux from the Sacs and Foxes. But how could an Indian brave, hot on the trail of deer or elk, be expected to halt at an imaginary line? The pledge to hunt at home was often broken.

Finally, in 1830, the tribes were summoned to another council at Prairie du Chien and, on July 15th, they concluded a new treaty whereby the Sioux ceded to the United States a strip of territory twenty miles wide north of the line of 1825 while the Sacs and Foxes relinquished a similar strip south of the line. Thus the Neutral Ground was established. But even this zone forty miles wide proved inadequate to keep the implacable foes apart. Two years later the government prevailed upon the Winnebago of southern Wisconsin to occupy the Neutral Ground as a buffer, though it was not until 1840 that they were actually moved across the Mississippi.

At the same time and by the same treaty that the Neutral Ground was established, the Omaha, Ioway, Oto, Missouri, and various bands of Sioux gave up their claim to the western part of Iowa. This cession included the whole Missouri slope in Iowa except the territory lying north of Rock River and Otter Creek in Sioux, Lyon, and Osceola counties. The Neutral Ground and the Missouri slope together cost \$190,000 in cash annuities. In accordance with the policy of the government to use the Iowa country for Indian reservations, the treaty stipulated that the President might assign the territory to the tribes then living thereon or to other tribes. For several years the native Indians retained undisputed possession of their relinquished hunting grounds. In 1837, however, some Pottawattamie were located on part of this tract in compliance with a treaty made in 1833.

Within two years after 1830 all thought of giving Iowa to the Indians was swept aside by the turbulent Black Hawk. Whatever may have been the merits of his grievance, however futile his rebellion, the results of the Black Hawk War served to hasten the day when the settlers would demand the right to make their homes west of the Mississippi.

In September, 1832, General Winfield Scott at a great council held on the site of the present city of Davenport concluded a treaty of peace with the Sacs and Foxes. As reparation they were required to surrender about six million acres in Iowa for

which the government agreed to pay \$20,000 annually for thirty years. The Black Hawk Purchase was bounded on the west by a direct line from a point on the southern boundary of the Neutral Ground fifty miles from the Mississippi to a point on the Cedar River forty miles from the Mississippi and thence to the northern boundary of Missouri fifty miles west of the Mississippi. Out of this tract Keokuk's Reserve, four hundred square miles lying along the Iowa River and including Keokuk's principal village on the right bank about twelve miles from the Mississippi, was retained by the Indians. The Black Hawk Purchase was the beginning of Iowa.

Settlement of the new country was unusually rapid. Merchants and farmers hastened across the river to start up in business or stake out their claims. It was not long before Keokuk's Reserve was coveted and the more venturesome pioneers began to feel the urge to move even farther westward. So it happened that on September 28, 1836, the Sacs and Foxes, "being desirous of obtaining additional means of support, and to pay their just creditors", gave up Keokuk's Reserve for the sum of \$178,458.87½. A year later at Washington they ceded a tract containing a million and a quarter acres just west of the Black Hawk Purchase at a cost to the government of approximately \$377,000.

For the Indians conditions went from bad to worse. Whisky debauched them and unscrupulous

traders sold them trinkets at outrageous prices. In a few years their debts mounted into the hundreds of thousands of dollars: the traders demanded payment and the settlers wanted their land. The Sacs and Foxes particularly were loath to sell their last possessions, but how could they resist? After days of negotiation in October, 1842, while only the son of Black Hawk stood aloof, the confederated tribes surrendered all of their lands west of the Mississippi (central Iowa south of the Neutral Ground, valued at \$800,000) and agreed to move to a reservation in Kansas at the end of three years. So passed the Sacs and Foxes out of the "beautiful land".

Only the Pottawattamie, Winnebago, and Sioux remained on Iowa soil. With the advent of Statehood they too were destined to be dispossessed. In June, 1846, the Pottawattamie ceded their reservation, which included all of the Missouri slope east of the Little Sioux and Missouri rivers. In October of the same year the Winnebago gave up their claim to the Neutral Ground and agreed to move to Minnesota. And last of all, in 1851, the government secured the remaining Indian territory in northern Iowa from the Sioux for ten cents an acre. Thus Iowa was bought and paid for.

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