

# THE PALIMPSEST

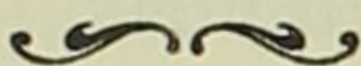
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## Indian Affairs in 1845

While the settlement of the prairies in the Iowa, Skunk, and Des Moines River valleys was progressing rapidly during the year that Iowa sought admission into the Union as a State, the tenure of the Indians became more unsettled. The Sauks and Foxes were pledged by treaty to abandon their favorite hunting grounds and move to Kansas. The Potawatomi around Council Bluffs knew that their residence there was temporary. And although the Winnebago had never been happy in the Neutral Ground, they were reluctant to surrender their claim to that region. Yet the frontier of settlement was continually pressing upon the domain of the red men with evil consequences for both races.

Though game was scarce and whisky vendors plentiful, the Indians tended to follow their customary manner of living. "With about the same regularity that the seasons of the year successively pass on, their seasons of employment and idleness

follow each other — the period lost in idleness and its attendant dissipation greatly preponderating over that devoted to any serviceable occupation", wrote John Beach, agent for the Sauks and Foxes, in his annual report on September 1, 1845. "Having received their annuities," early in the fall, he continued, "they disperse over the country for the purpose of hunting and remain so scattered until spring, inhabiting their temporary lodges made of mats, which they erect under the protection of some densely wooded bottom land, and moving from place to place as circumstances may require. Since they have been confined to the possession of the small tract which they now occupy, its destitution of game has compelled them to visit and remain about the border settlements during the winter.

"As soon as the sap commences to run, the Indians move to their 'sugar camps,' and employ themselves in the manufacture of sugar and molasses as long as they can. After which, they repair to their permanent villages; and, having once more placed their bark lodges in habitable order, the time has arrived for the commencement of their agricultural operations. These are somewhat limited, and mostly performed by the females, being confined to the planting of a little corn, beans, and melons, in the small patches broken up with hoes

in the soft timbered ground, though of late the men have shown an increasing disposition to assist, and have applied to me for the purchase of horses, harness, and ploughs, from their agricultural fund.

“From the time of planting until their payment, except the month of June, (usually consumed in a buffalo hunt,) the Indians hang about their villages, addicted to the most constant and revolting intoxication, the facilities for which are so deplorably numerous, and will continue to increase until greater certainty of detection and the *penitentiary* shall be made to await all those who are guilty of the *crime* of producing it.”

Many of the Indians realized that the old happy hunting days were gone. They were filled with regret. They had no desire to adopt the pursuits of the white men, for they had seen the worst of “civilization”. And yet the wisest of the chiefs, like Keokuk, knew that the braves would have to turn from the hunt to the cultivation of the soil for their livelihood. “As to assuming any of the habits or customs of civilization, these Indians are as averse as ever”, declared Agent Beach. “In regard to some few of their ancient manners, and especially of their superstitions — perhaps, too, in respect to their vindictiveness, cruelty, and other unamiable traits of early character, the last fifty years of intercourse with our countrymen may be

supposed, of necessity, to have modified some habits, and to have softened some asperities of their original nature, yet, in general, they are as much savages, and as anxious to continue such, as they were a half century ago.

“But the new circumstances under which they are soon to be placed, and their own expectations in respect to them; the much diminished size of the country which they will occupy, the reported scarcity of game, and the influence of the example of those tribes more or less civilized, by which they will be surrounded, will, I confidently hope, exert a beneficial tendency at least upon the rising generation, gradual though it may be.”

But long residence among the Indians had taught John Beach to be skeptical of the beneficent influence of the white men with whom the Indians usually associated — “men whose licentious dispositions, love of gain, and propensities for the most sensual indulgences, unchecked by any respect either for their own characters or the opinions of the more virtuous, will ever draw them to our frontiers as long as a hope of success in their shameless course may exist”. To him it was no subject of astonishment that our education appeared to “consist in knowing how most effectually to cheat them; our civilization in knowing how to pander to the worst propensities of nature, and

then beholding the criminal and inhuman results with a cold indifference — a worse than heathen apathy; while our religion is readily summed up in the consideration of dollars and cents.”

It was with considerable satisfaction, therefore, that Agent Beach reported that the Sauks and Foxes were preparing to move beyond the Missouri River to their permanent reservation. The Sauks, “under the good management of Keokuk”, were only awaiting the payment of their annuities, before commencing their migration. The Foxes, he knew, were “less satisfied with the idea of leaving the country which, from long possession,” they called home. Nevertheless, he believed that they intended to go without opposition.

In this prediction he was too sanguine. Keokuk and most of the Sauks were on their way before the end of September and arrived by a direct route before cold weather, but Hardfish with the remnant of the old Black Hawk faction tarried among the Potawatomi with whom they had spent the previous winter. The Foxes under Poweshiek began their march on October 8th and were out of their country by the 11th according to the treaty stipulation. But in passing through the land of the Potawatomi they accepted an invitation of their friends to stop there. Jealous of Sauk leadership, influenced by prejudiced advice, and home-

sick for their old villages beside the Iowa River, they were easily persuaded to remain in Iowa. Only a few moons ago they were living peaceably among the white settlers in their former haunts near the graves of their ancestors. Now they welcomed an opportunity to linger in familiar territory. A year elapsed before they could be induced to join the Sauks in Kansas.

Uncertainty of the future was a prominent factor of Indian discontent. Again and again the natives had been moved westward to "permanent" reservations, only to be ousted in a few years and relocated on poorer land close to hostile tribes. The Winnebago never felt at home in the Neutral Ground between the Sioux on the north and the Sauks and Foxes on the south. They were continually going back to Wisconsin. Military detachments from Fort Atkinson would round them up and bring them back, but they would "almost immediately wander off again". According to the sub-agent at Turkey River in September, 1845, about half of the tribe was then "in Wisconsin and along the Mississippi." Yet when Henry Dodge called a council at Fort Atkinson in June, 1845, to persuade the Winnebago to sell the Neutral Ground and find a permanent reservation west of the Missouri River or north of the Minnesota River they rejected his proposals. He was con-

vinced that the Indians were unduly influenced by traders and half-breeds who had selfish interests. The negotiations failed. Governor Dodge recommended that an exploring party of Winnebago chiefs be sent into the Sioux country to select a permanent residence.

Much the same conditions prevailed among the Potawatomi in southwestern Iowa. With the removal of the Sauks and Foxes they were exposed to the white frontier on the east as well as on the south. They knew that their seasons in Iowa were numbered and so they made no effort to emulate the settled habits of civilized people. But they bargained so shrewdly with Thomas H. Harvey, Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis, when the government proposed to buy their land in 1845, that he called them "veterans in diplomacy". The most sensible of the Indians desired to be permanently settled and were anxious to negotiate, but they were equally solicitous that the terms should be favorable because it was probably the last treaty they would ever make.

According to Richard S. Elliott, sub-agent at "Point Aux Poulos, on the northeast bank of the Missouri river, about twenty miles below the mouth of Boyer's river, and opposite Bellevue," not much progress could be made in civilizing the Potawatomi until the principle of private property

was established. "We must give them not only permanent homes as tribes," he said, "but, as soon as possible, we must permit something in the nature of fee simple rights in individuals to attach to appropriate and allotted parts of their national domain. These will give a settlement to the family, and affect the habits of all its members. A permanent home once selected and established, the individual will, in due course of time, rejoice in the difference between the fireside scenes of a neat and comfortable cottage, and those of an Indian lodge. Home comforts and enjoyments will cluster around him, acting as a constant stimulus to exertion, because they are a certain reward for it."

School was also regarded as a civilizing influence, but none was maintained for the Potawatomi at the Council Bluffs agency. Elliott advocated mission schools in the Indian country under the management of well qualified persons of cultivated minds "who can rise superior to the bigotry of sectarianism". He was convinced that the inculcation of the arts of civilized life would require instruction of the very young. The boys should "be dressed in the costume of the white man, and taught to use the axe, to make fence and plough, to plant, cure, and husband the different crops, to take care of stock, and to work at the carpenter's, miller's, smith, and other trades. The same course



of training, in pursuits suitable for them, must be adopted with the girls."

The Sauks and Foxes were opposed to schools and the cultivation of the soil. Even the "energetic and talented" Keokuk, whom Beach praised for "his aptness to understand motives and arguments, and to appreciate the condition of his people," could see no good in book learning. While the confederated tribes had "faithfully and promptly performed all their treaty obligations," according to Governor John Chambers, and had "generally conducted themselves with much greater propriety than could have been expected from a people so perfectly savage in their habits of living," they would not send their children to school.

Although Governor Chambers thought the Winnebago was the most indolent and degenerate tribe, the school on Turkey River was probably as successful as any. Acting Principal H. N. Thissell reported on September 19, 1845, an enrollment of eighty-three boys and eighty-three girls, a daily average attendance of sixty, and the employment of four teachers. Thirty-eight pupils were learning the alphabet, seventy-five were in the primer, fifty-three were in the first reader or beyond, thirty were studying arithmetic, and thirty-six were involved in geography. But attendance was so irregular that progress was rather spasmodic.

Early in the previous spring "several families who had largely patronized the school were induced, by no good motives on the part of those who influenced them, to remove to such a distance from the school that their children could not attend". Nevertheless the clothing department had produced 438 garments during the year, many of the Indian girls could sew well, and eight had learned to knit.

Conditions were much the same among the Sioux farther north in the Territory of Iowa. At the Traverse des Sioux school there were sometimes "eight or ten scholars, and then, again, obeying impulses of their being, they were away on the prairie, or in the woods seeking roots or game for a subsistence." Nevertheless several boys learned to read a little in their own language. Much of the time at the Lac Qui Parle mission school was "spent in teaching the native females to spin, knit, weave, sew, &c." These Indians were so miserably poor that Missionary Thomas Williamson believed a few hundred dollars worth of provisions would do more to counteract British influence than military expeditions to drive out the half-breed traders.

For several years a band of "half-breeds of the Red River", residing in the Hudson's Bay Company domain north of the border, had been "in the practice of making excursions into our territories

to hunt the buffalo, and not only interfere and sometimes come in conflict with the Indians residing within the jurisdiction of the United States, but destroy a great number of buffaloes, — some years as many as thirty thousand." Being aliens, they claimed they were not subject to the laws governing intercourse with the Indians.

To give visible evidence of law on the frontier, the dragoons stationed in the Territory of Iowa were ordered to march through the Sioux country far to the north. Captain E. V. Sumner, who commanded the expedition, left Fort Atkinson on June 3, 1845, with Company B and ten days later joined Captain Allen with Company I from Fort Des Moines. Together they proceeded over wet prairies and swollen streams to the mouth of the Blue Earth River and thence up the Minnesota River to Lac Qui Parle where a council was held with a large band of Wahpeton Sioux. Captain Sumner told them, and other bands which he met on the march, that the government was interested in their welfare but would not tolerate any interference with the white settlers.

Near Devil's Lake (in North Dakota) he found some of the British half-breeds — about 180 men with their families. They insisted that they had no intention of doing anything unlawful but were merely following their lifelong custom of hunting

on the land of their Indian parents. They said they would be glad to move to the United States, but Captain Sumner demurred at such an immigration. They asked for time to find new hunting grounds, but he gave them little encouragement to hope for such a concession. On the whole he regarded them as more of a nuisance than a threat.

Returning by the same route, the dragoons arrived at Traverse des Sioux on August 7th. Three Indian murderers were captured on the march and sent to Dubuque for trial. The Sioux brave who had stolen three horses and a mule from Captain Allen's expedition in the previous summer, and boasted about it far and wide, was arrested to prove that criminals could not escape. After two months of hard riding, the squadron divided and Company I turned south up the Blue Earth Valley and returned to Fort Des Moines. Captain Sumner arrived at Fort Atkinson with Company B on August 19th.

The military authorities thought that the marches of the dragoons had a very salutary effect upon the Indians, but the Indian agents were more concerned about the liquor traffic than the occasional depredations of aboriginal thieves or half-breed poachers. "Were it not for the facility the Sioux now possess to obtain whiskey," reported Amos J. Bruce of the St. Peter's Agency,

"their situation, compared with that of the adjoining tribes, would be enviable; but, like all of the same race, the greater proportion of the Sioux are much addicted to liquor; and there is no hope that it will not in the end lead to their destruction, unless means are taken, at an early date, to restrain abandoned white men from introducing it among them. It is not an uncommon occurrence for Indians to come a distance of three or four hundred miles to obtain whiskey, for which they will give their horses, guns, traps, &c., &c., in exchange."

Conditions were no better in the Council Bluffs area. "The grog shops along the line in the State of Missouri" furnished the Potawatomi with as much liquor as they wanted, declared Agent Elliott. This was worse than if the licensed traders had supplied the whisky, "for when an Indian gets into one of those grog-shops, literally 'dens of thieves,' he does not get away until he has got rid of horse, saddle, blanket, gun, and whatever property he may have with him, if the dealer can possibly make him drunk enough to carry on the plunder effectually. To supply those who do not choose to go for it, messengers are sent with kegs on horseback, and a revel at the wigwam or village follows."

The evil was aggravated among the tribes that

received large annuities. The Sauks and Foxes were entitled to more than \$70,000 in 1845 and while most of it was probably consumed by debts many of the braves had too much cash for whisky. Keokuk set the bad example. "What a noble Indian that would be," exclaimed Governor Chambers, "but for his intemperate habits!"

The Winnebago should have been the most prosperous tribe in Iowa because they received the largest annuities, but they were actually "the most drunken, worthless, and degraded" Indians in the Territory. Scarcely was the \$48,000 annuity distributed in 1845 before it found its way to the whisky sellers. A considerable proportion of the goods furnished by the government was also traded for liquor. In this way the thirsty savages were reduced to abject poverty. Governor James Clarke despaired of protecting the Indians "against their depraved appetites", since all attempts to "enforce the laws against the unprincipled men who furnish them with liquor have thus far proved abortive".

In 1846, arrangements were made to remove the Potawatomi and Winnebago beyond the borders of the new State. And so the Indian problem in Iowa was solved by elimination.

JOHN ELY BRIGGS