

# THE PALIMPSEST

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## The Upper Mississippi Frontier

When the region that is now Iowa became United States territory in 1803, the Sauk and Fox Indians claimed the country on both sides of the Mississippi, from the Wisconsin River to the Illinois on the east, and from the Upper Iowa to the mouth of the Missouri on the west. The Foxes for the most part lived in villages west of the Mississippi with their principal village near present-day Davenport. The Sauk clung to the east side of the river with their principal village, called Saukenuk, near the present site of Rock Island.

The Americans had scarcely taken over the government of the Louisiana Purchase when they came into contact with the Sauk and Foxes. One night in the spring of 1804, an Indian murdered a white man at a rough frontier settlement on the Quivre River in northern Missouri. The murder of a white man by an Indian was a crime which the government could not overlook, and a detachment of soldiers was sent up the Mississippi from St. Louis to apprehend the murderer. He had fled



to Saukenuk, and there Sauk chieftains turned the fugitive over to the soldiers who returned to St. Louis with him, and thrust him into prison.

In an attempt to secure the release of the prisoner, a Sauk and Fox delegation of five headmen went to St. Louis with authority to offer a money compensation in appeasement for the white man's murder, but their mission failed. Meanwhile, William Henry Harrison, Governor of Indiana Territory, arrived in St. Louis with instructions to conclude treaties of trade and friendship with the Indians.

Harrison met the five headmen of the Sauk and Foxes and on November 3, 1804, concluded a treaty with them by which they agreed to cede 50,000,000 acres of their land lying in the present states of Missouri, Illinois, and Wisconsin for a cancellation of their debts to a trader and annuities for an unspecified period. The prisoner was then released, but he was immediately shot down.

The only generous provision of this treaty was a section that permitted the Indians to occupy their land until it was needed for settlement and a promise to erect a trading house or factory within the ceded domain to put a stop to the impositions of private traders and to supply the Indians with goods at a more reasonable rate. At the same time the government secured the right to erect a military post at or near the mouth of the Wisconsin.

Upon their return to Saukenuk, the five head-



men reported shamefacedly the results of their mission, and Black Hawk, a chief of the Sauk, denounced their unauthorized action and the unfair treaty. This Treaty of 1804 at St. Louis marked the beginning of the long process by which the Indian title to the soil of the Upper Mississippi Valley was extinguished. Taking advantage of the five headmen may have seemed a good bargain at the time, but the results proved tragic and costly, culminating finally in the Black Hawk War.

Before the promise made in the Treaty of 1804 to build a trading post for the Sauk and Foxes was fulfilled, an exploratory expedition up the Mississippi was entrusted to Lieut. Zebulon M. Pike.

Pike was instructed by General James Wilkinson to undertake the exploration of the Mississippi River to its sources, noting the rivers, prairies, islands, mines, quarries, and timber, as well as Indian villages and settlements. Furthermore, he was instructed to select suitable locations for military posts, and to conciliate the Indians. Pike at this time was only twenty-six years of age, but his subsequent career justified his selection.

Late in the afternoon of August 9, 1805, Pike set sail from St. Louis with one sergeant, two corporals, and seventeen privates, on a keelboat, seventy feet long, provisioned for four months. Eight months and twenty-two days elapsed before the party returned to St. Louis on April 30, 1806.

Pike accomplished more than his orders speci-



fied. He recommended the location of forts at the present site of Burlington, on a high bluff below the present site of McGregor, still known as Pike's Hill or Pike's Peak, and on a bluff near the confluence of the Minnesota (St. Peters) River and the Mississippi. He brought back new and accurate information about the climate, soil, drainage, and timber of the Upper Mississippi region. Tables and charts prepared by him gave definite knowledge of the Indians — their tribes, numbers and characteristics. He visited the Sauk and Foxes in Iowa and Illinois and the Sioux and Chippewa in Minnesota. From the Sioux Indians he acquired 100,000 acres of land for the government, as he put it, "for a song." He warned British traders to desist from their practices of corrupting the Indians, and made an honest attempt to create a friendly attitude on their part toward their new "White Father" at Washington.

Not until two years after Lieutenant Pike returned from his voyage up the Mississippi did the government begin to erect a trading post for the Sauk and Fox Indians as was promised them in the Treaty of 1804 at St. Louis, and then it was an annex to a fort.

In the early fall of 1808, Lieutenant Alpha Kingsley with a company of the First United States Infantry was sent up the Mississippi from Fort Belle Fontaine, near St. Louis, to erect a fort and trading post near the Des Moines River.



From the first arrival of the troops, the Sauk and Foxes resented the presence of soldiers on their land. In vain Lieutenant Kingsley tried to allay their fears by telling them that the government planned to keep a few soldiers there as company for the traders. British traders, who saw in the activities of the Americans a threat to their trade monopoly, stirred up the hostility of the Indians which grew steadily as progress in building the trading post and fort continued. In the spring of 1809, a threatened attack on the fort was thwarted by Lieutenant Kingsley. In August of 1809, Captain Horatio Stark arrived with reinforcements and assumed command. Thereafter for two years affairs at Fort Madison ran their routine course without excitement. Then came the War of 1812, and during the summer of that year Lieutenant Thomas Hamilton assumed command.

The war went badly for the Americans in the Northwest; and with the capture of Mackinac and the shameful surrender of Detroit by General William Hull, the British and Indians were free to wreak their vengeance on Fort Madison, the sole remnant of American power in the Upper Mississippi Valley. Attacks on the Fort in the fall of 1812 led Lieutenant Hamilton to burn the factory outside the post as a precaution. Indian attacks continued, and in September, 1813, Hamilton and his men slipped away one night in boats for St. Louis after setting fire to Fort Madison.