

Indian Affairs and Treaties

Prior to 1871 the United States Government negotiated treaties with the Indians, and to impress the Indians with the importance of the agreements, proclaimed these treaties with solemn pomp and ceremony. This method of dealing with the Indians as independent nations was continued until the act of March 1, 1871.

It was not an easy affair to negotiate a treaty, for a satisfactory time and place had to be selected, hundreds of Indians had to be fed while they were away from home, and they had to be protected from lurking enemies. In treaty making with the Indians of the Upper Mississippi Valley the military posts played an important part.

The Great Council of 1825

The first important treaty negotiated with the tribes of the Upper Northwest after the establishment of military posts was the Great Council of 1825 at Prairie du Chien. This was an earnest effort on the part of the government to induce the Indians of the Upper Mississippi Valley to bury the tomahawk and to agree to confine their excursions in search of game within specified boundaries. The government desired especially to put an end to the bloody clashes between the Sioux and

the confederated Sauk and Fox in the Iowa country and the equally sanguinary Sioux-Chippewa feuds to the north.

In many respects the Great Council of 1825 was one of the most imposing ever held with the red men. To this meeting there came not only the chiefs, principal men, and warriors of the tribes, but their families as well. And many a town in Iowa, as well as in other states of the Upper Mississippi Valley, bears the name of some Indian who affixed his mark to the Treaty of 1825 — Decorah, Tama, Keokuk, and Mahaska for example.

From the region about Fort Snelling came Indian Agent Lawrence Taliaferro with almost four hundred Sioux and Chippewa. From distant Sault Ste. Marie, by way of Lake Michigan and the Fox-Wisconsin waterway, the scholarly Henry Schoolcraft brought one hundred and fifty Chippewa. Nicholas Boilvin, Indian agent at Prairie du Chien, had gathered hundreds of Winnebago from the Wisconsin country. And from Rock Island came Thomas Forsyth — agent of the Sauk and Foxes. Major Thomas Biddle came from St. Louis to act as secretary of the conference; and the arrival of General William Clark, Superintendent of Indian Affairs with headquarters at St. Louis, and Governor Lewis Cass of Michigan Territory, United States Commissioners for the Council, gave added distinction to the assemblage.

Captain R. A. McCabe, then in command at Fort Crawford, and nearly a hundred soldiers of the Fifth Infantry represented the army at this event.

A keelboat containing provisions and presents for the Indians left St. Louis on June 30, 1825, bound upstream for the conference. It contained rations valued at \$6,750 for an estimated crowd of two thousand Indians. In addition, there were presents of tobacco, salt, sugar, guns, powder, lead, and liquor to the amount of \$2,000. Clark had further estimated that the pay of interpreters and other helpers would be \$750, transportation costs \$400, and subsistence for hired help \$500 — a total of \$10,400.

Prairie du Chien was agog with excitement. Taliaferro's delegation had stopped at the Painted Rock above the Prairie and had prepared for an impressive arrival. Their boats, arranged in columns, swept down the river with flags flying, drums beating, and guns firing, and stopped at the Fort Crawford levee in an imposing array. Soon high pointed tents covered with buffalo skins dotted the prairie for miles above and below the village. Tall and warlike Chippewas and Winnebagoes from Lake Superior and the St. Croix Valley jostled Menominee, Potawatomi, and Ottawa Indians from Lake Michigan and Green Bay.

The Sioux Indians were a picturesque group. They carried war clubs and lances decorated with almost every imaginable device of paint. Wanita,

a Yankton chief, wore a magnificent buffalo robe decorated with porcupine quills and sweet grass.

The Sauk and Fox and the Ioways were the last to arrive. On the fourth of August they were sighted approaching in a flotilla of seventy canoes. They had stopped at an island downstream to array themselves in their finery; and in compact formation, singing their war songs, they swept up the river past the village and back again. As the prairie was already filled with the teepees of earlier arrivals, these tribes encamped on the large island in midstream and on the opposite shore.

They came to the treaty ground armed and dressed as a war party. Many of the warriors had a long tuft of red horse hair tied at their elbows, and wore a necklace of grizzly bear claws. Their head-dress consisted of red dyed horsehair tied in such a way as to present the appearance of the decoration on a Roman helmet. Except for this scalp lock their heads were shaved and painted. They were practically naked. Some carried long iron-shod lances; others were armed with clubs, guns, and knives. They looked the very spirit of defiance. Keokuk, their leader, stood as a prince "majestic and frowning."

At last all was ready for the council. A bower of trees with a raised platform for the commissioners had been erected near Fort Crawford for the assemblage. At ten o'clock on the morning of August 5th, the firing of a gun at the fort summoned

the braves to the council. The commissioners and their party took their places on the raised platform. In a semi-circle in front of them sat the gay clad chiefs and principal men of the tribes, back of them the braves, and on the outside fringe of the great concourse were the squaws and children. On long benches on one side of the Indians sat the soldiers from the fort, resplendent in their high bell crowned "tar bucket" hats with white pompons, tight fitting blue jackets with white crossed breast belts, and white trousers. Behind them sat the wives of the officers and other ladies of Prairie du Chien. Back of the assemblage loomed Fort Crawford with its loop-holed walls and block-houses. It was a picture for an artist, and fortunately an artist — James O. Lewis — was present to catch and preserve the details of the scene.

General Clark opened the conference. "Friends and children," he said, "we have been directed by your Great Father, *your* President of the United States, to meet you here in council at this time, and we are rejoiced that the Great Spirit has enabled you all to arrive here in peace and safety. He has given us a clear day and we hope he has opened your ears and will prepare your heart for the good work before us." He told them that their Great Father did not ask for any of their land, but that he wanted them to live in peace as brothers of one great family. He said that boundaries for their hunting grounds should be established. He con-

cluded by saying, "Children," you can "take time to consider these subjects and when you are prepared to answer we shall be ready to hear you." Then the pipe of peace was smoked and the ashes thrown into the council fire. The council then adjourned until the next morning. Rations of beef, bread, corn, salt, sugar, and liquor were distributed, which the Indians consumed voraciously.

The next morning the council reassembled, and the chiefs gave their replies. One Fox chief said, "My Fathers, I am glad to see all my relations assembled together. I was glad to hear what you said yesterday; how could it be otherwise when what you said were my own thoughts."

Proud Keokuk declared, "My great wish is accomplished in meeting you all together." And he added that the idea of establishing boundaries was agreeable to his people.

Other chiefs disagreed. One said, "I wish to live in peace. But in running marks around our country or in giving it to our enemies it may make new disturbances and breed wars."

Governor Cass replied, "We tell you again your Great Father does not want your land. He wants to establish boundaries and peace among you." He said that he had no disposition to hurry them but that "no more whisky will be issued until the business of this council is finished — at the conclusion of the business a great feast will be given you all."

The chiefs argued for days about the boundaries of their land; but at last all the various disputes seemed to be adjusted, and on August 19, 1825, the celebrated treaty embodying these agreements was signed by all, the wampum belt was passed, and the calumet was smoked as a solemn pledge that the war tomahawk was buried "never to be raised again as long as the trees grow, or the waters of the river continue to run."

On the next day copies of the treaty of peace were delivered to each band of Indians. Again the pipe of peace was passed, presents were exchanged, and a great feast concluded the ceremony. However, the small amount of liquor which had been given to the Indians during the meeting led to much grumbling on their part.

Tribe by tribe the Indians departed. Cass and Clark with their assistants took their boats for home, and the soldiers of Fort Crawford returned to the routine of garrison duty. The Great Council of 1825 at Prairie du Chien was ended.

The Winnebago Outbreak

In the spring of 1826 another flood of the Mississippi occurred, and the water at Prairie du Chien, it is said, rose twenty-six feet above low water mark. Again Fort Crawford was flooded and the soldiers were forced to abandon the post and encamp on higher ground east of the slough for almost a month.

An inspection report of Fort Crawford early in

August, 1826, revealed the condition of the post two months before its temporary abandonment. At that time the garrison consisted of Companies G and K of the Fifth Infantry commanded by Captains Robert McCabe and George Bender respectively. Colonel Willoughby Morgan was again the commanding officer of the post. The appearance of troops under arms was "pretty good," and the discipline of the troops appeared "sufficiently rigid and correct." The quarters and hospital building were still in a bad state after the flood, and leaking roofs made satisfactory use of the storerooms and commissary department difficult. It appeared to the inspector that a much longer occupancy of Fort Crawford was doubtful; but, should the garrison be continued there because of the threatening attitude of the Winnebago, "a new work must be erected for the present one is in ruins."

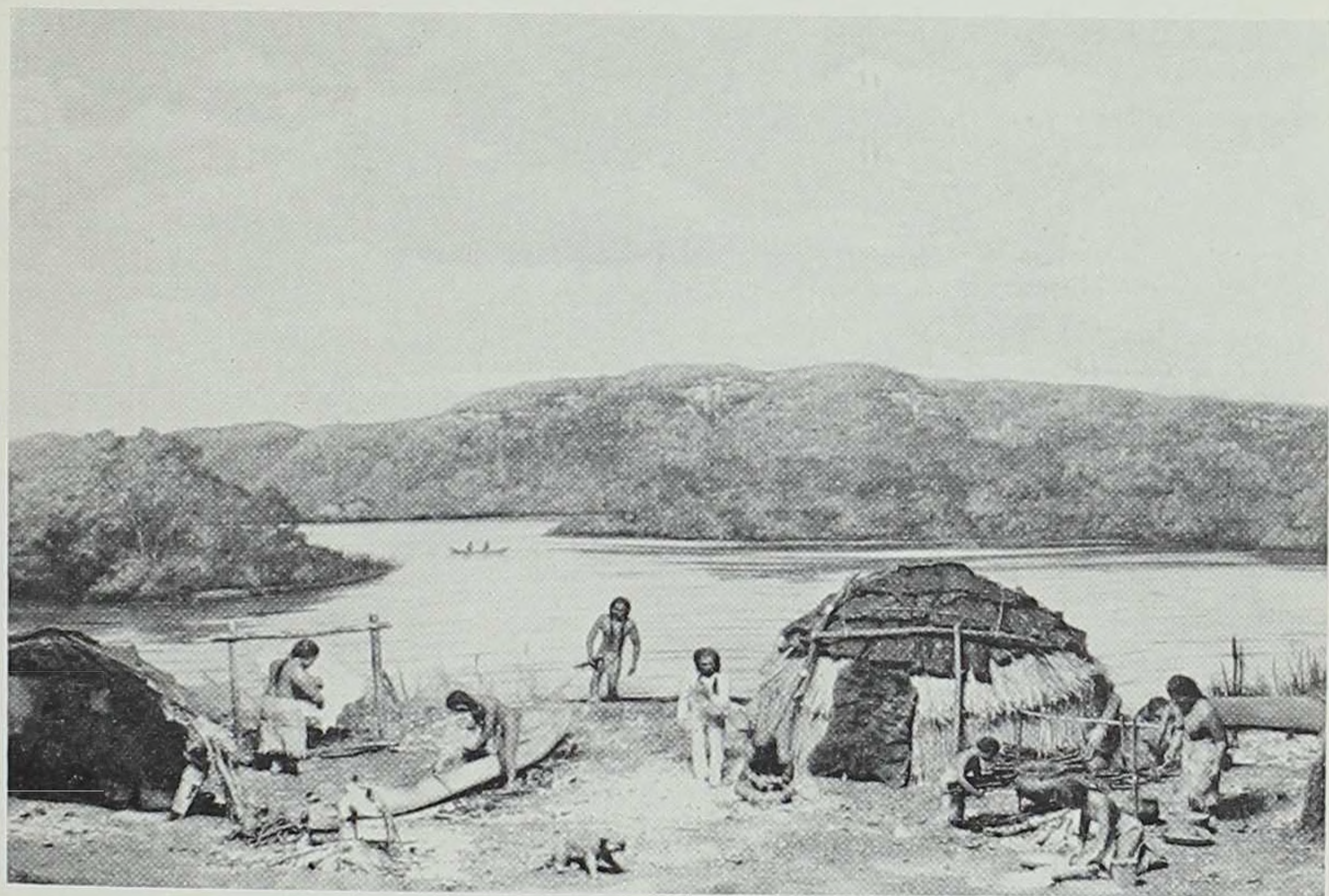
This part of the report was almost a prophecy. Within two months definite orders had been received for the abandonment of the post. In less than a year, however, the Winnebago outbreak necessitated the reoccupation of the fort, and within three years work was begun on a new and larger Fort Crawford located on a better site.

Although no serious disturbance had occurred in the Upper Mississippi region since the establishment of Fort Edwards, Fort Armstrong, Fort Crawford, and Fort Snelling along the Missis-

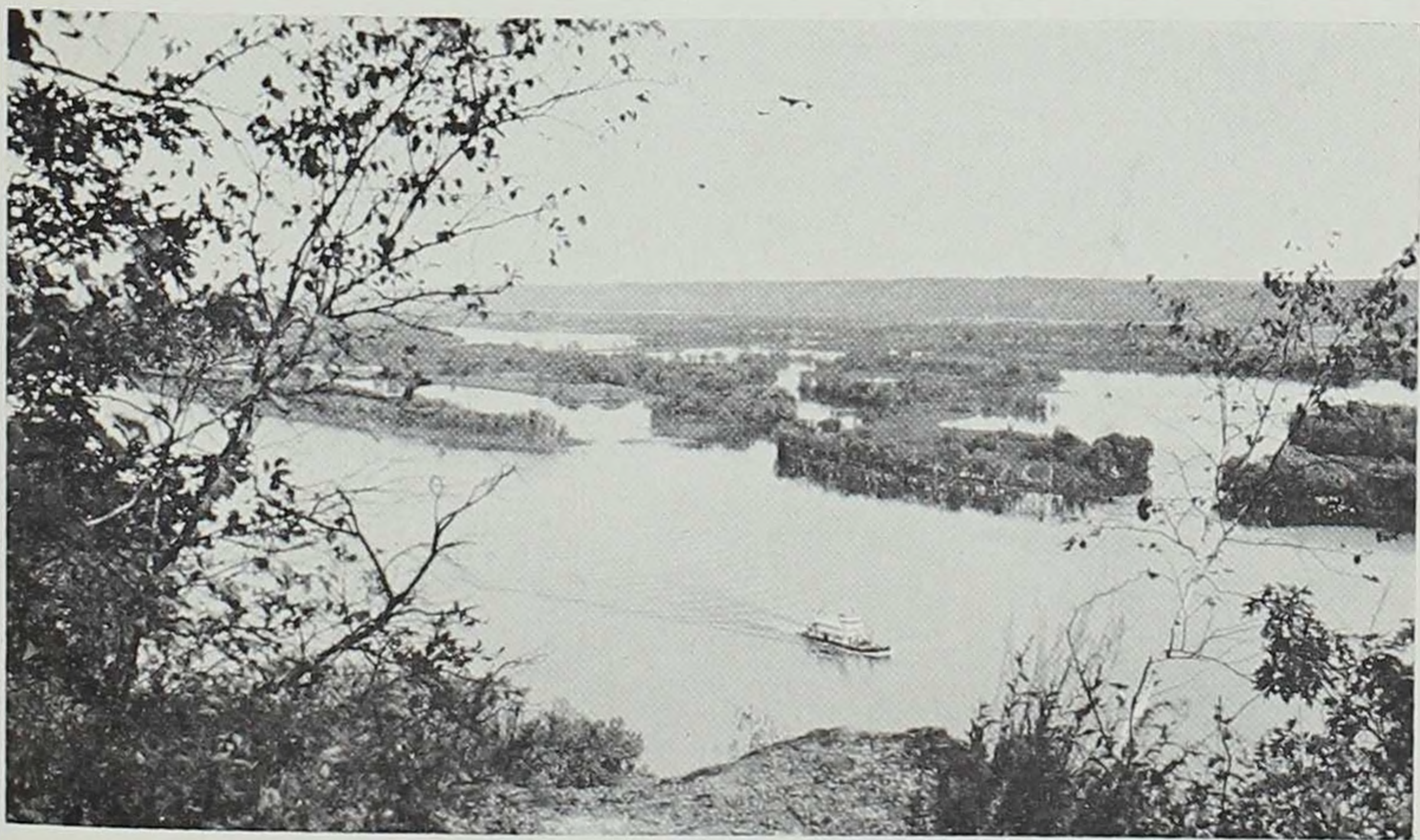
Mississippi River frontier, the growing encroachment of the whites in the lead region around Galena aroused the hostility of the Winnebago. In March, 1826, one of the inhabitants of the Prairie, Methode by name, accompanied by his wife and children, went up Yellow or Painted Rock Creek, some twelve miles distant on the Iowa side of the Mississippi, to make maple sugar. When the sugar making season was over and Methode had not returned, a party of his friends went to look for him. His dog was first found riddled with bullets but holding in his jaws a piece of scarlet cloth, apparently torn from an Indian legging. The camp had been consumed by fire, and the bodies of the Methode family were found burned to a crisp. It was generally thought that a party of Winnebago Indians had murdered them and burnt their bodies.

Reports of the threatening attitude of the Winnebago in the summer of 1826 led Colonel Snelling to reinforce the garrison at Fort Crawford. Leaving Fort Snelling on August 18th, Captain D. Wilcox moved down the river with Companies A, B, and I of the Fifth Infantry. The August returns from Fort Crawford revealed the presence of one hundred and seventy-six officers and men, the largest force that had been quartered at the Prairie in years.

As the recent inspection indicated, however, the fort was unfit for occupancy without extensive repairs; and, notwithstanding the fact that the Win-

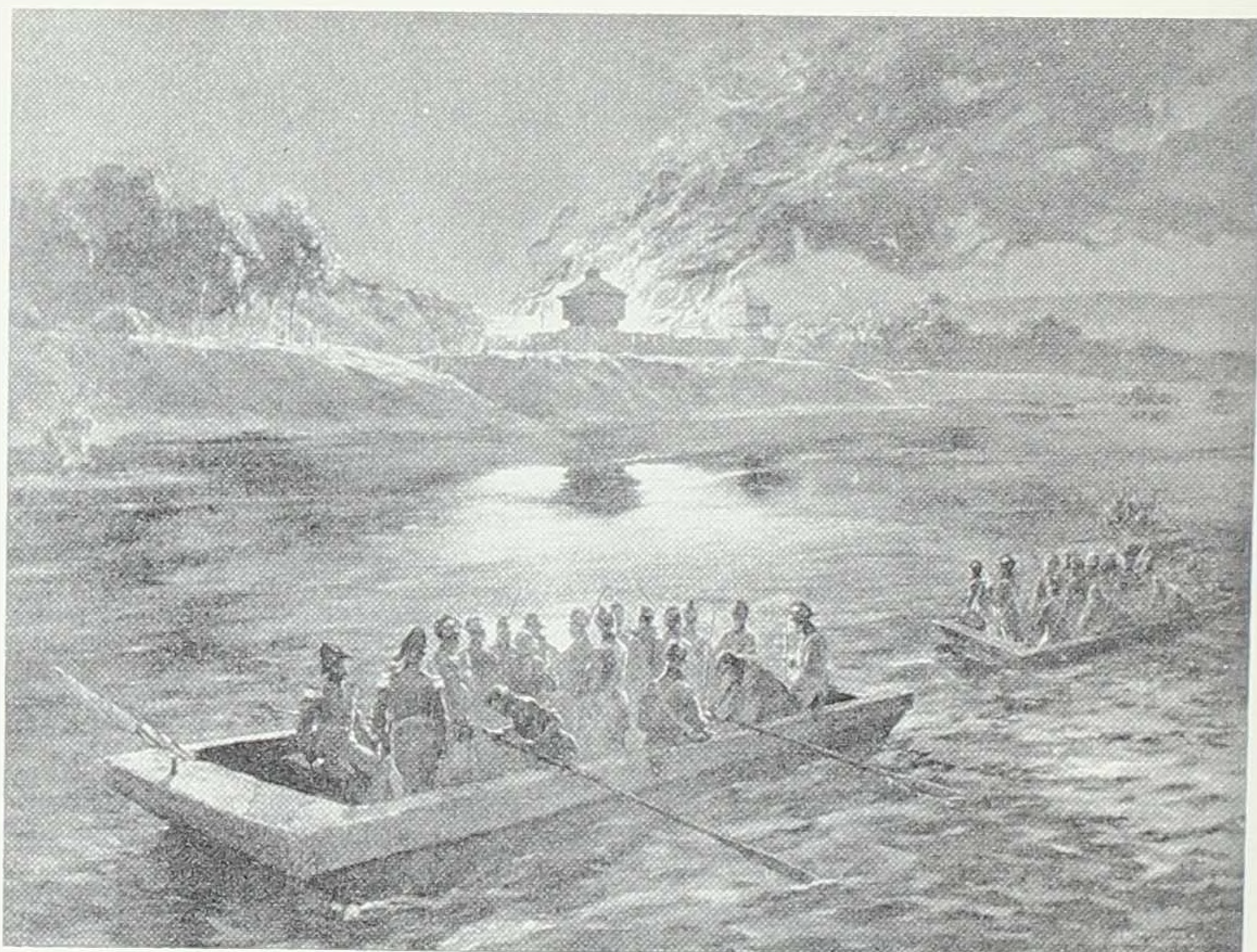


Diorama — Prehistoric Indian Village on Island near Site of Prairie du Chien



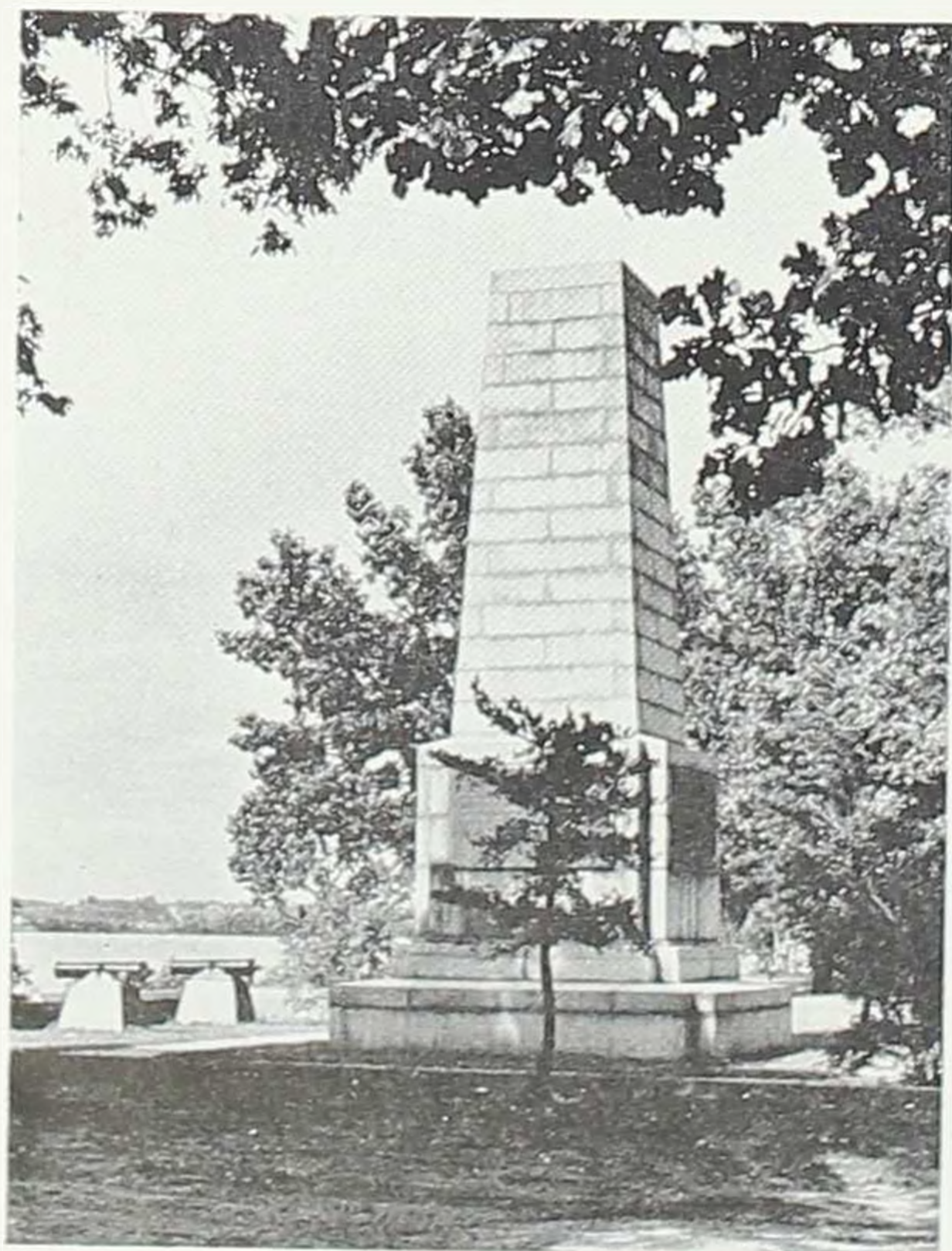
Mississippi River and Prairie du Chien Area from Pike's Peak State Park

DRAMATIC EPISODES ON IOWA FRONTIER

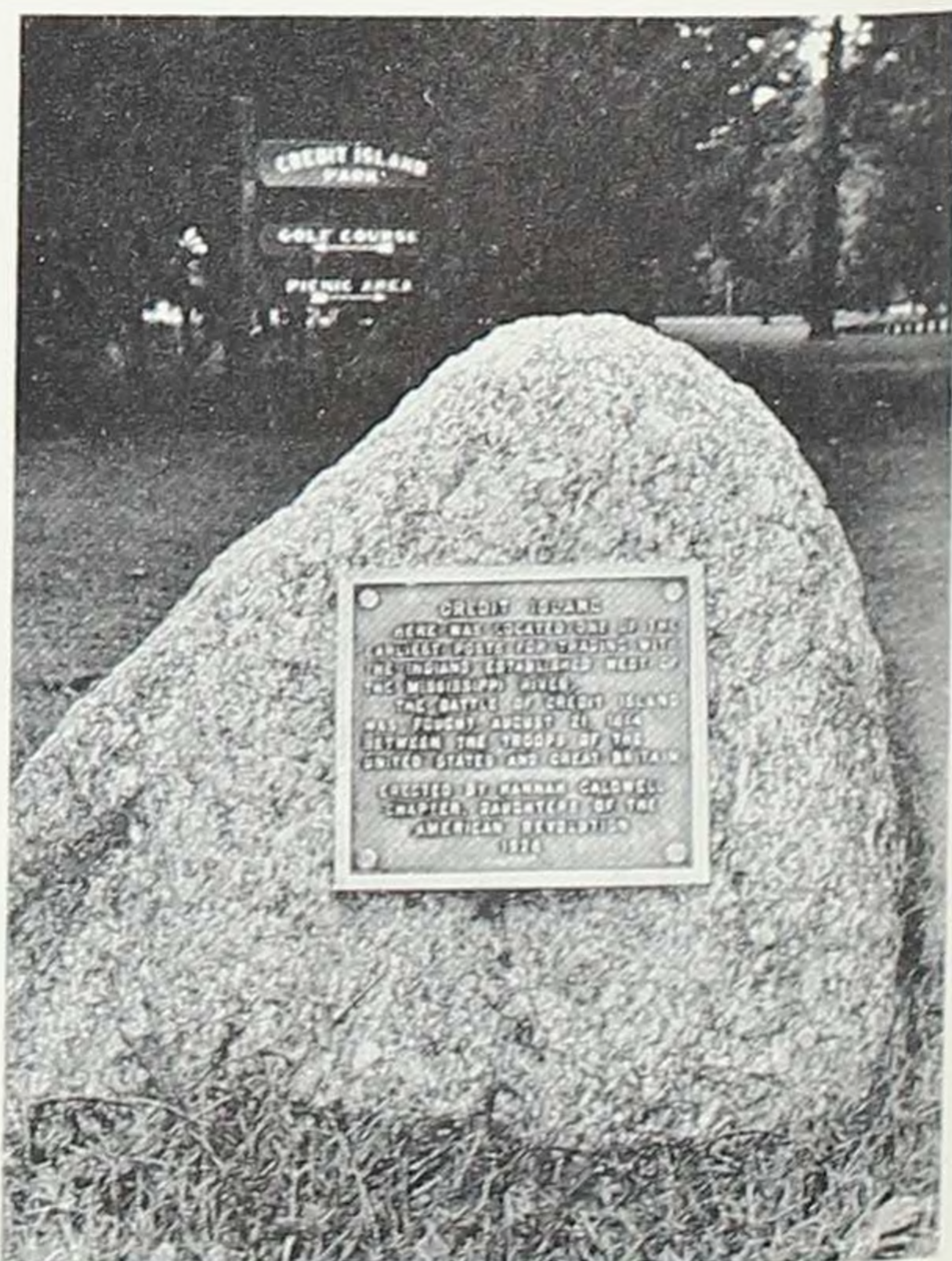


St. Louis Globe Democrat, March 23, 1902

Burning and Evacuation of Fort Madison in 1813



Marker Battle of Campbell's Island,
July 19, 1814



Photos Davenport Democrat

Marker Battle of Credit Island,
September 5, 1814

DURING THE WAR OF 1812

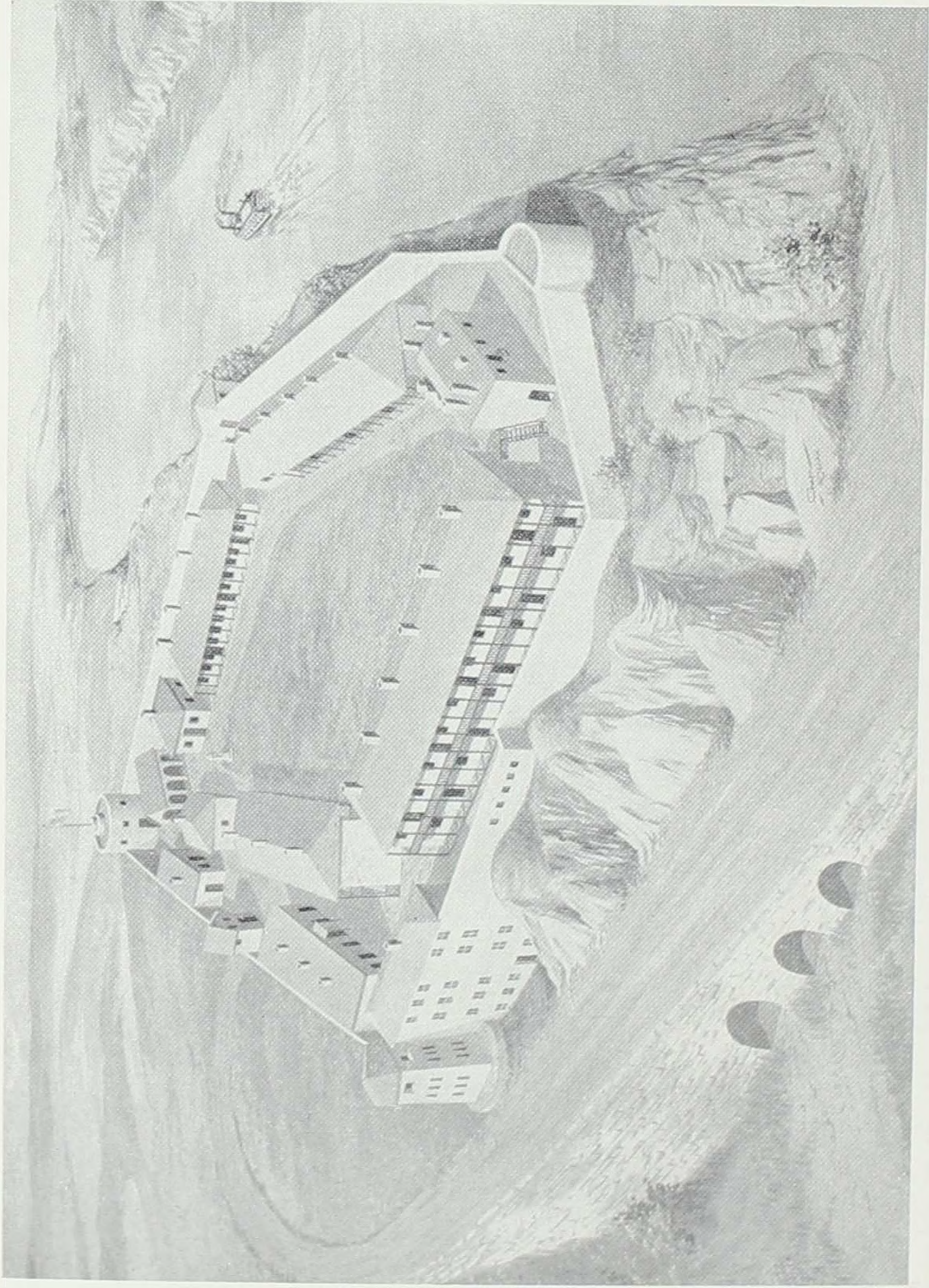


Mural — British and Indians Attack Fort Shelby, July 17, 1814



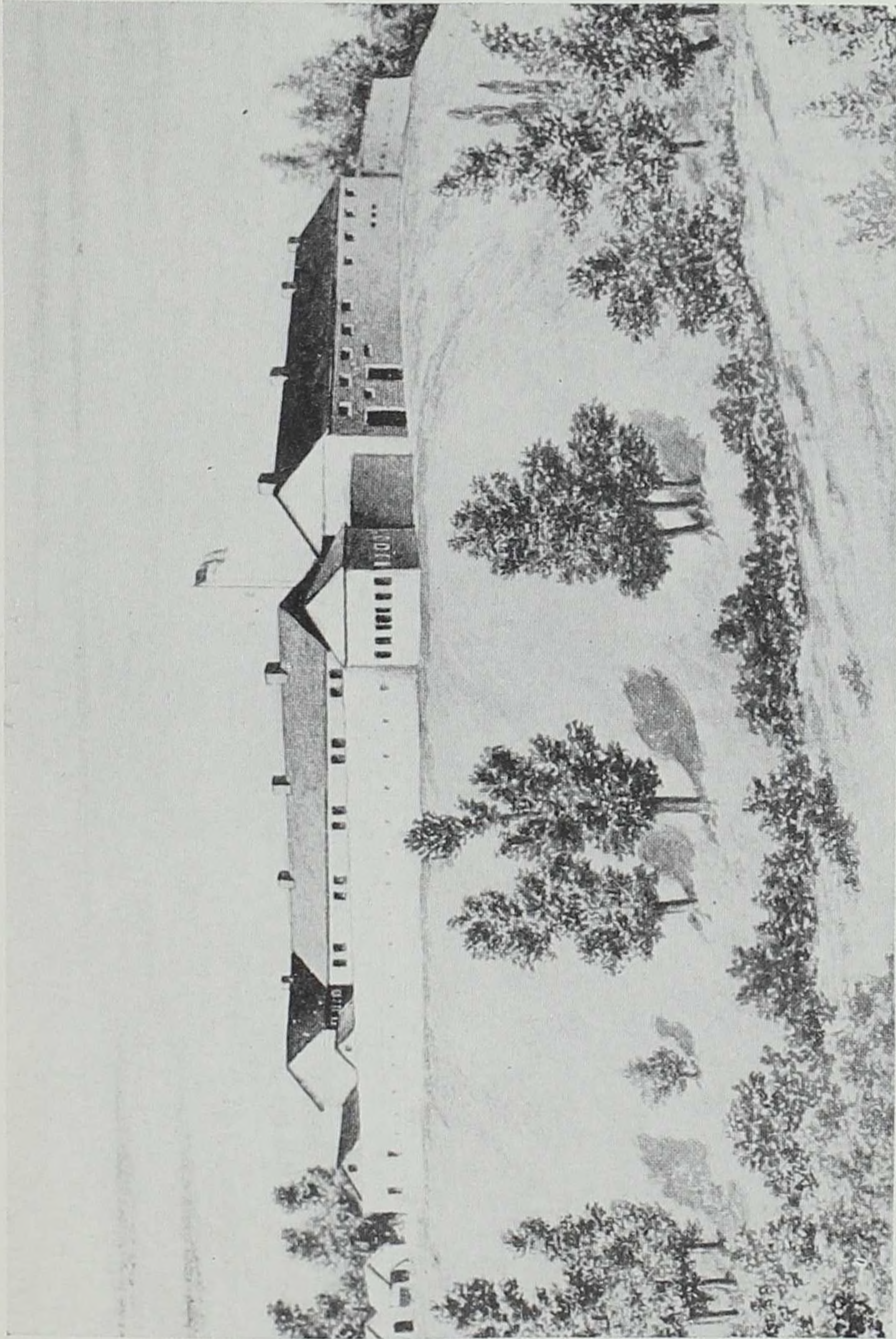
Photo *Davenport Democrat*

Fort Armstrong Replica Blockhouse on West End of Rock Island. Erected 1816.
Named for Secretary of War John Armstrong.

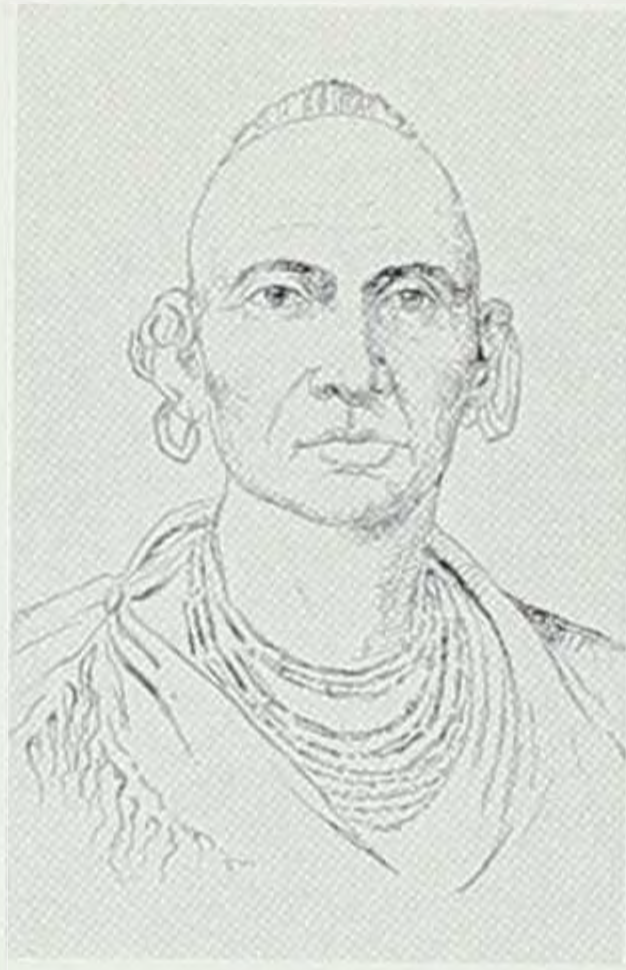


Fort Snelling at Junction of Minnesota (St. Peters) River and the Mississippi. Erected 1819. Named for Col. Josiah Snelling. From a Watercolor and Tempera by Chester Kozlak.

Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society



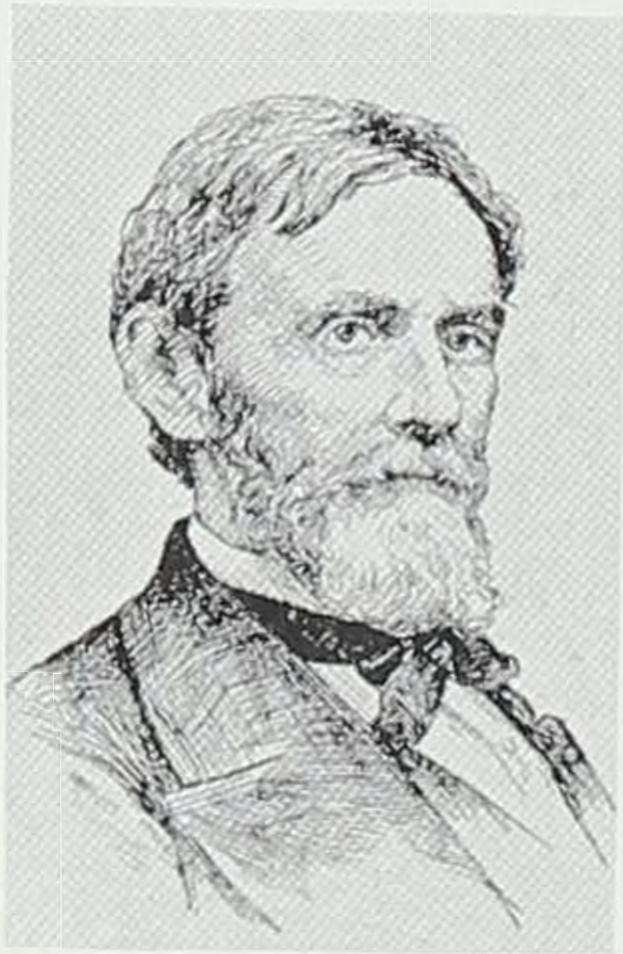
Fort Atkinson. Erected 1840 in the Iowa Neutral Ground to Protect Transplanted Winnebago Indians from Sauk and Fox on the South and Sioux on the North. Named for General Henry Atkinson. Winnebagoes Removed to Minnesota 1848. Fort Abandoned 1849.



CHIEF BLACK HAWK



CHIEF KEOKUK



JEFFERSON DAVIS



WILLIAM H. CRAWFORD



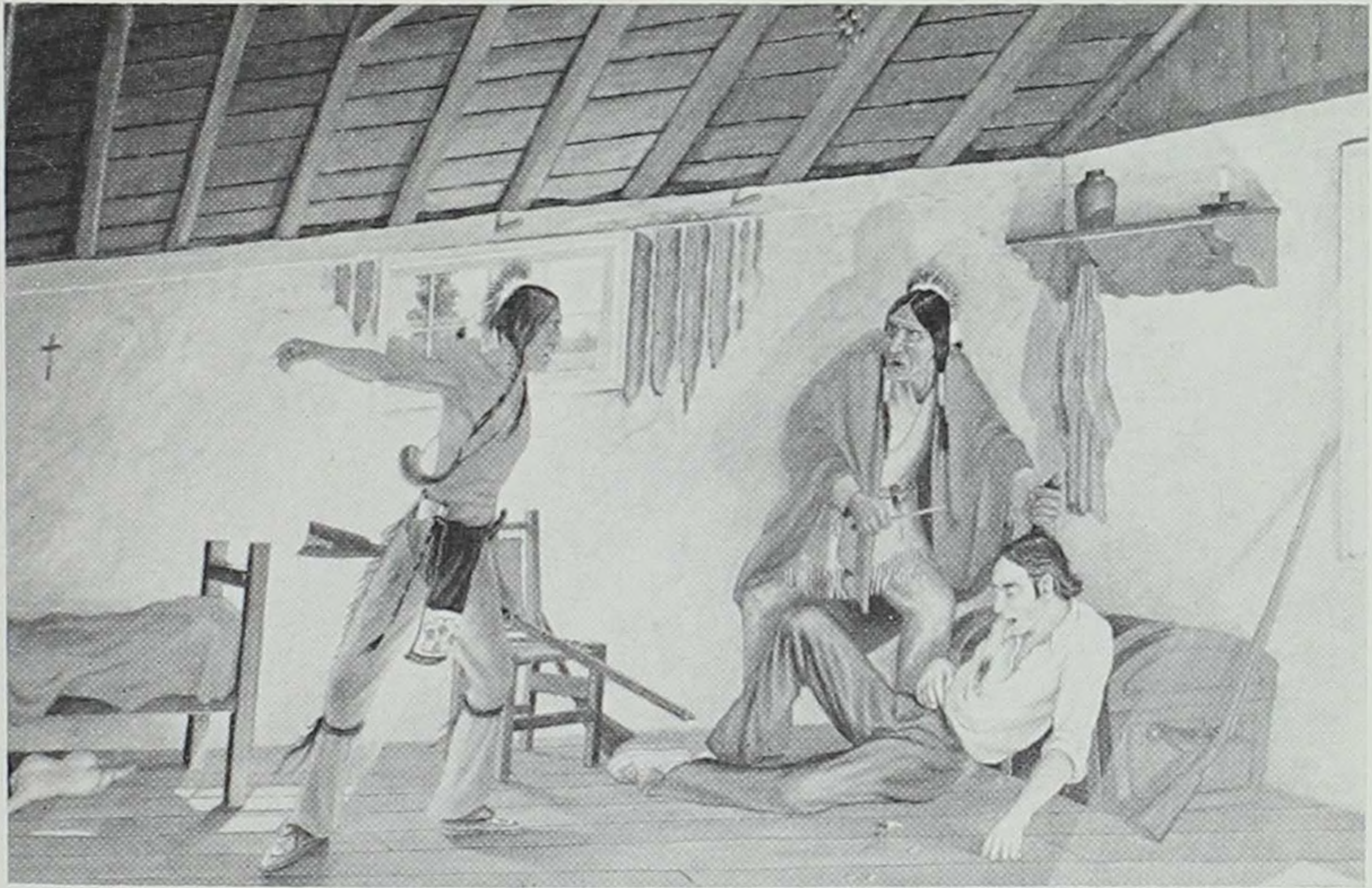
ZACHARY TAYLOR



WINFIELD SCOTT



JAMES MADISON

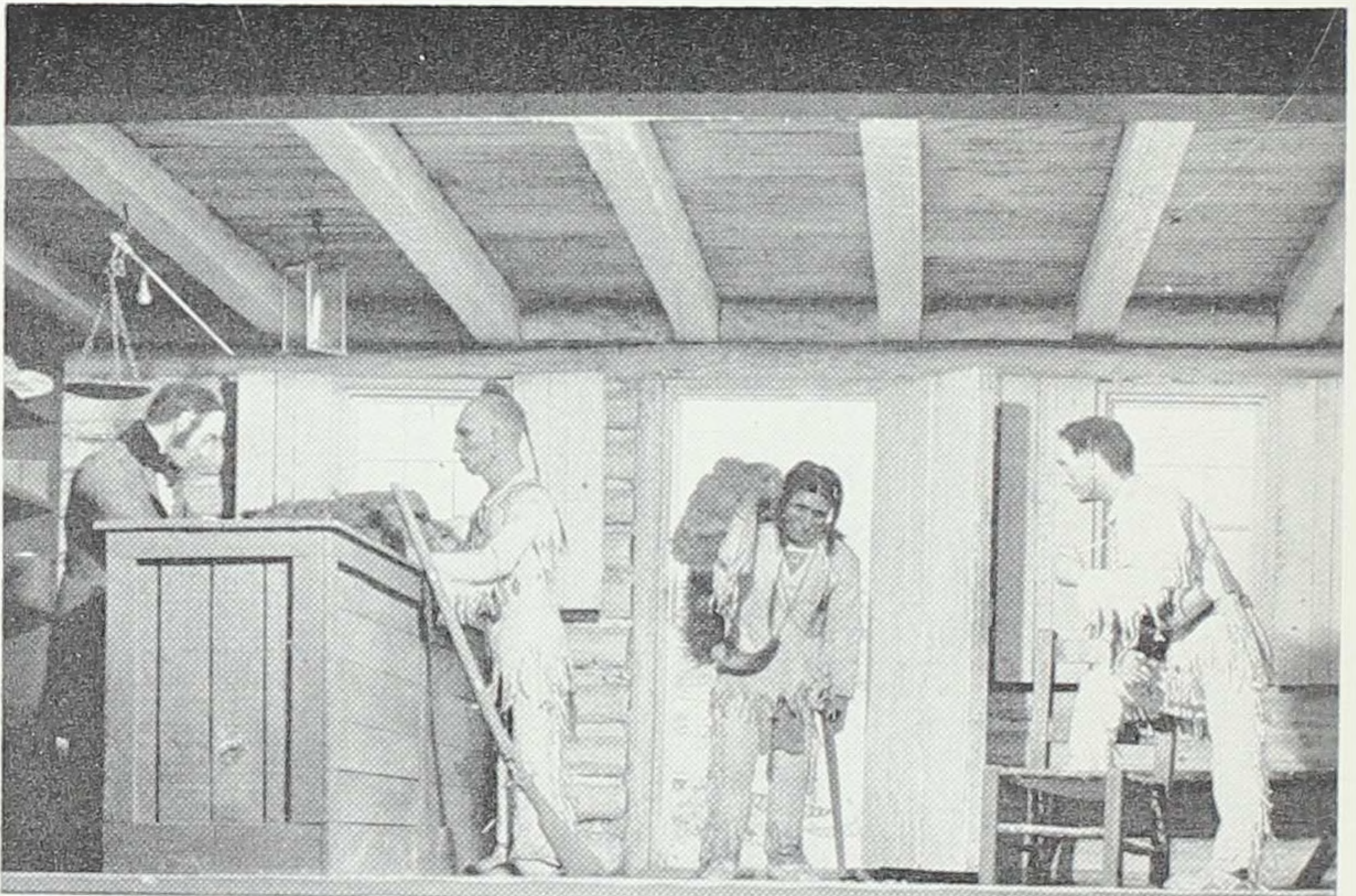


Mural — Gagnier Murder near Prairie du Chien. Beginning of Winnebago Outbreak of 1827. Scalped Baby on Floor under Bed Recovered and Grew to Womanhood.

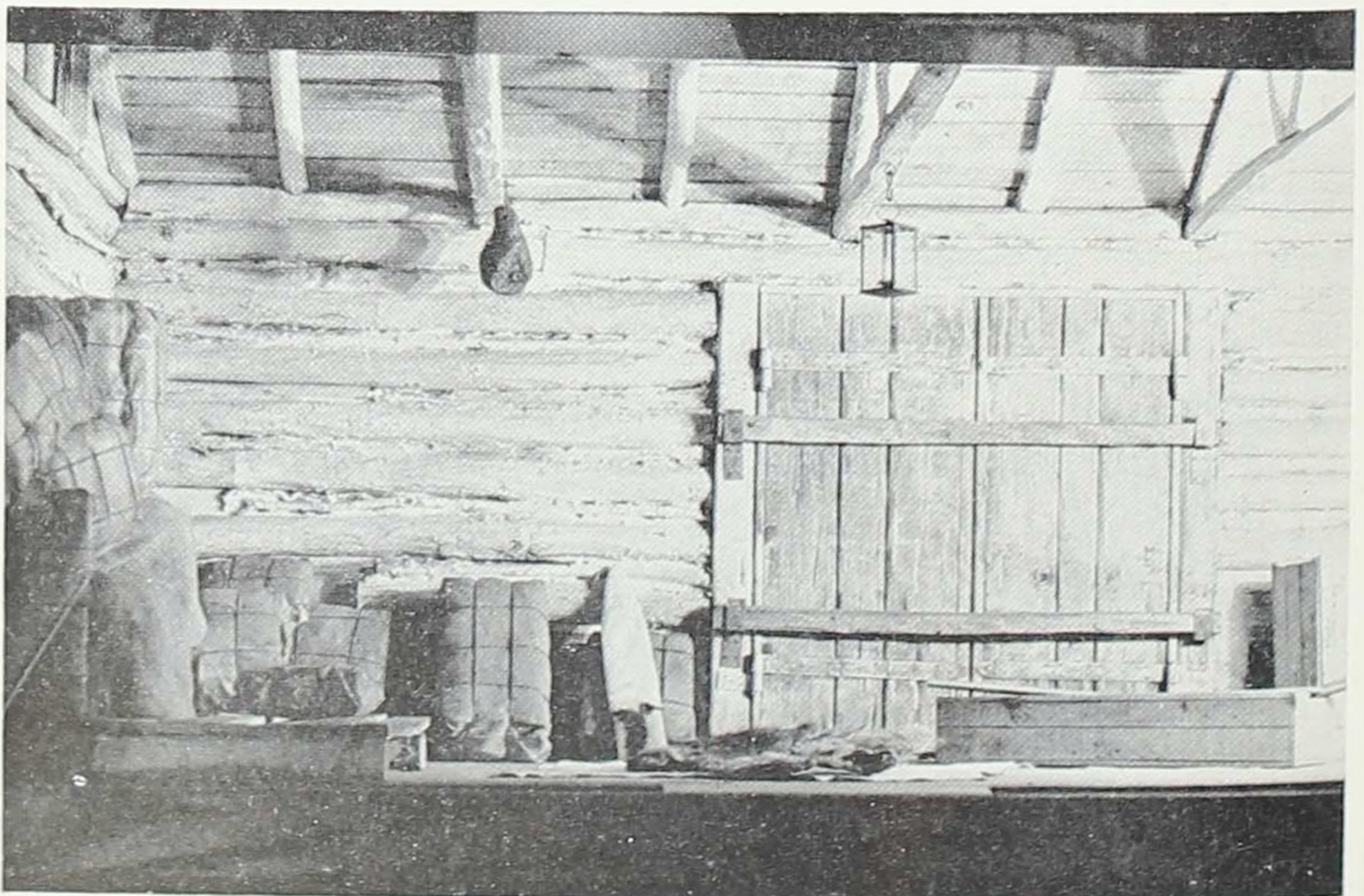


Diorama — Hospital Room First Fort Crawford. Here Dr. William Beaumont studied Digestive Processes through Gunshot Hole in Stomach of his Patient, Alexis St. Martin.

FUR TRADE ACTIVITIES AT PRAIRIE DU CHIEN

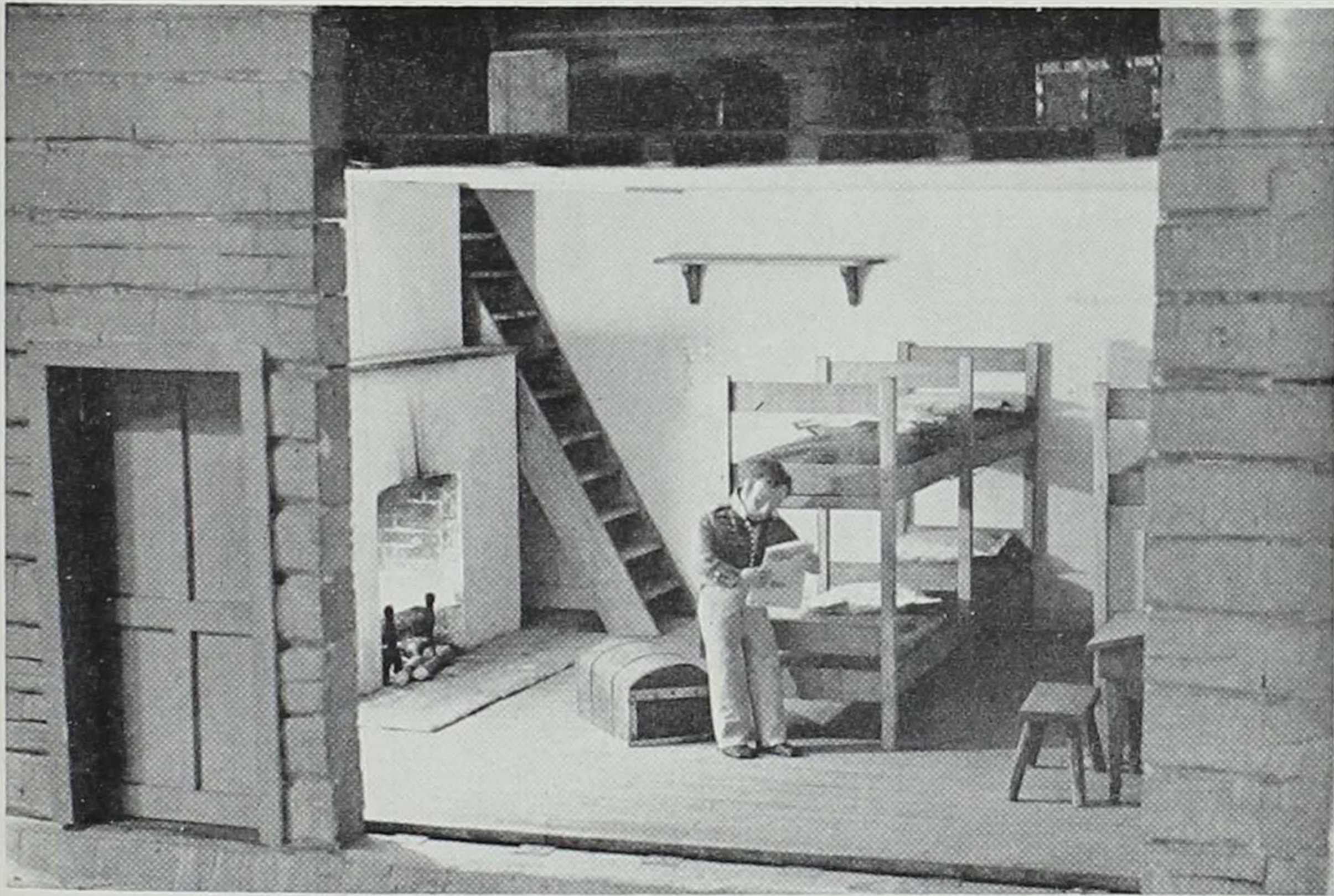


Diorama — Trading Post at Prairie du Chien where Indians traded Furs and Pelts for Guns, Knives, Traps, Tobacco, Whisky, Bright Colored Cloth, and Blankets.



Diorama — Fur Warehouse. Bundles of Furs Packed and Ready for Shipment. Notable Traders — Michel Brisbois, Joseph Rolette, James H. Lockwood, Hercules L. Dousman at Prairie du Chien, and Henry Sibley near Fort Snelling.

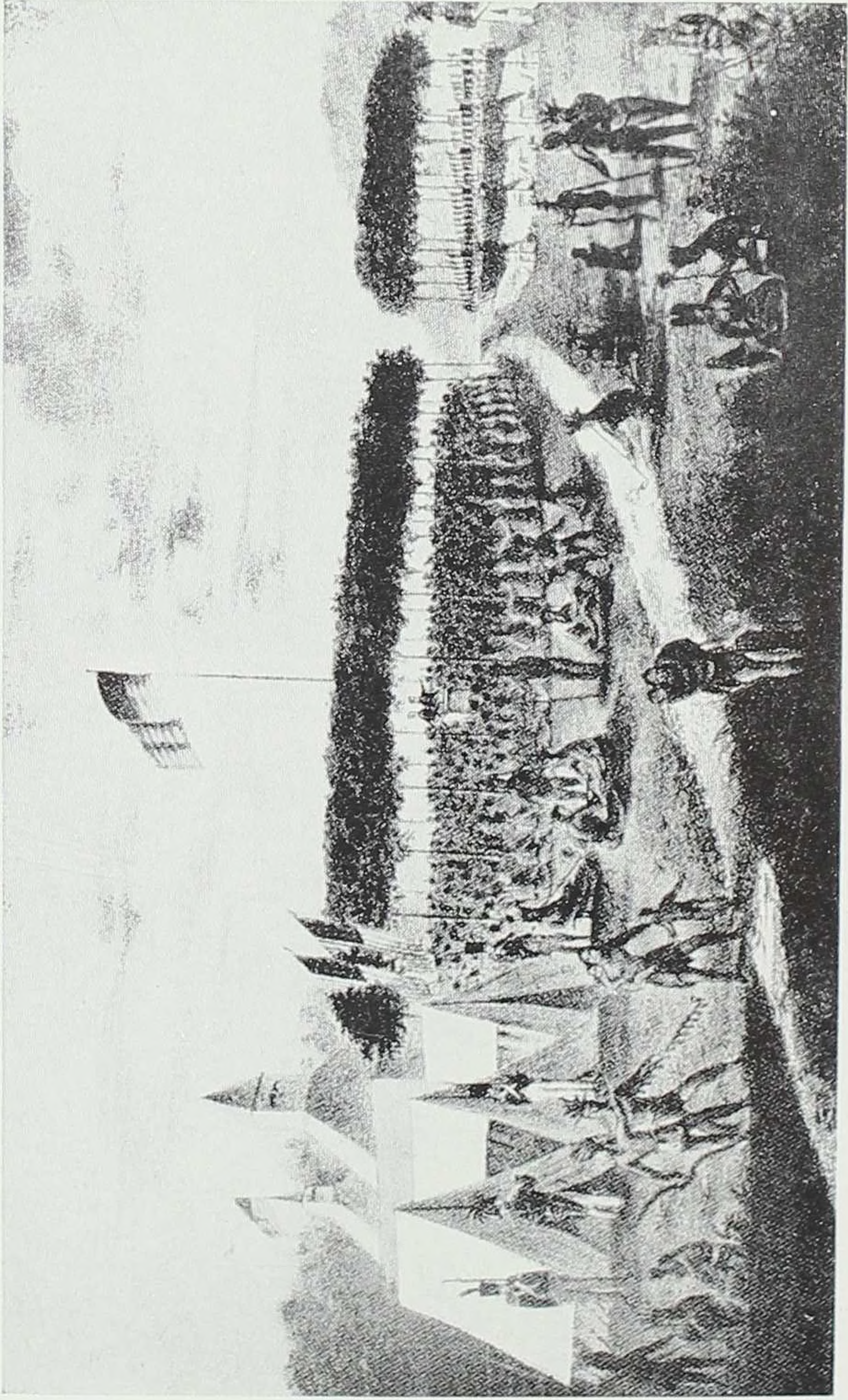
MILITARY ACTIVITIES AT OLD FORT CRAWFORD



Diorama — Soldiers' Barracks at First Fort Crawford. Loft used for Storage. Port Holes in Loft Rear Wall. Single Chimney Served Fireplaces in Adjoining Barracks.

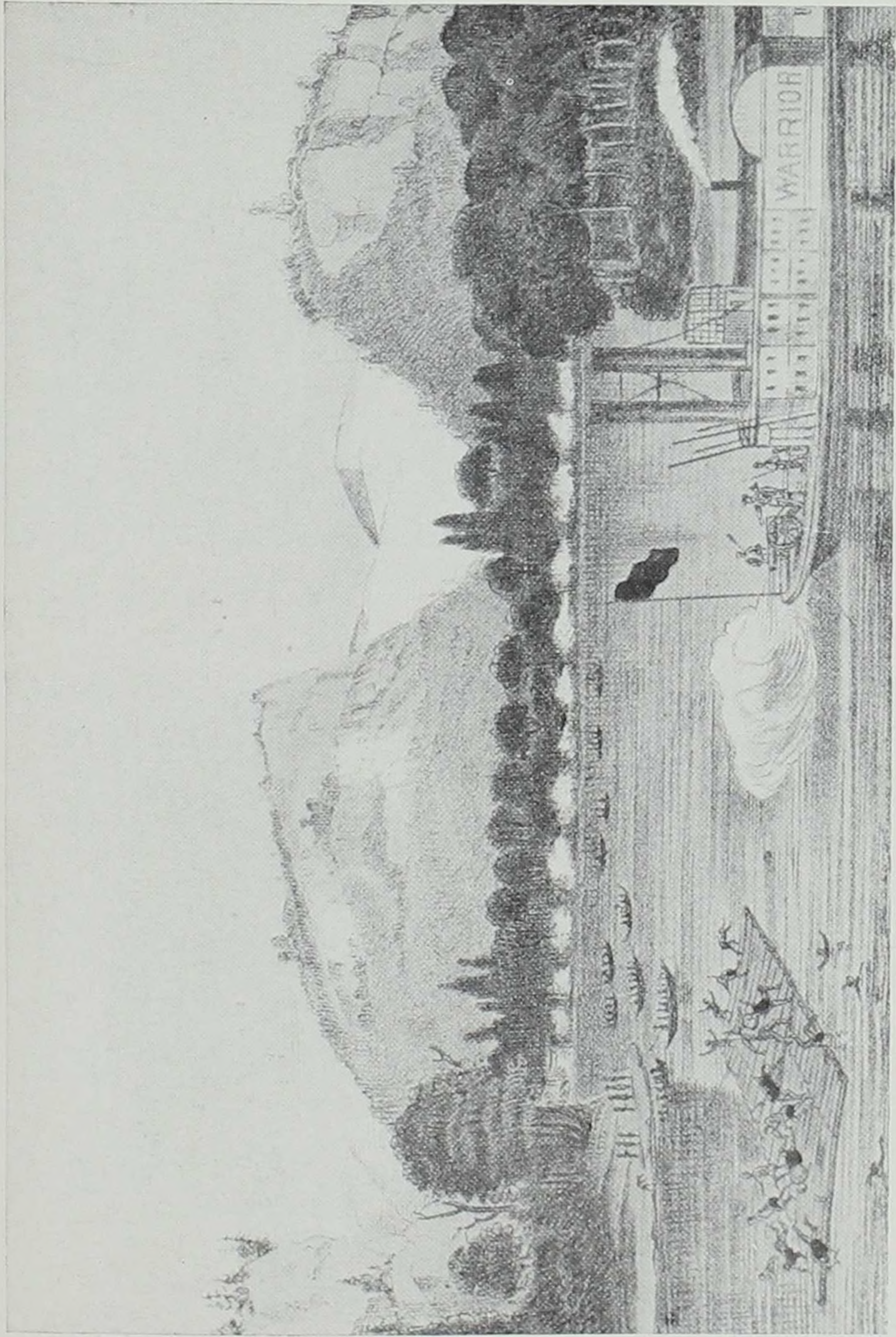


Diorama — Blacksmith Shop First Fort Crawford. Blacksmith, Carpenter, and Gunsmith worked at Tasks for Officers and Men.

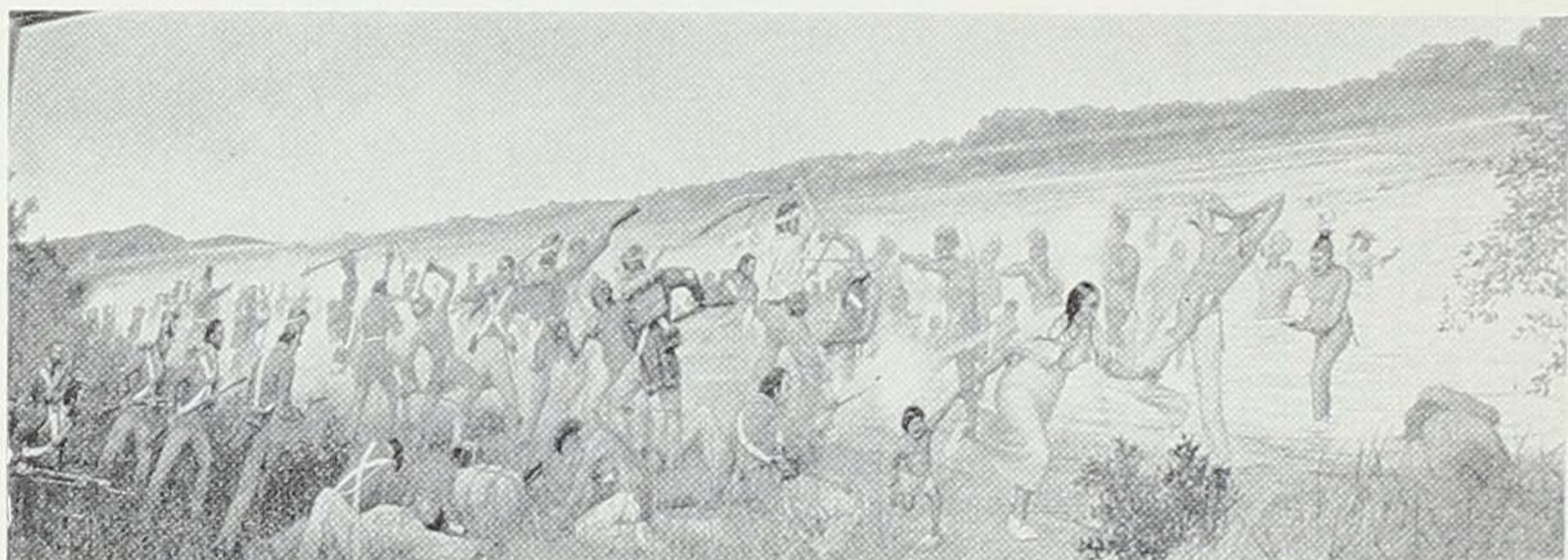


The Great Council of 1825 at Old Fort Crawford Established a Boundary Line between Sauk and Fox to the South and Sioux to the North in Iowaland.

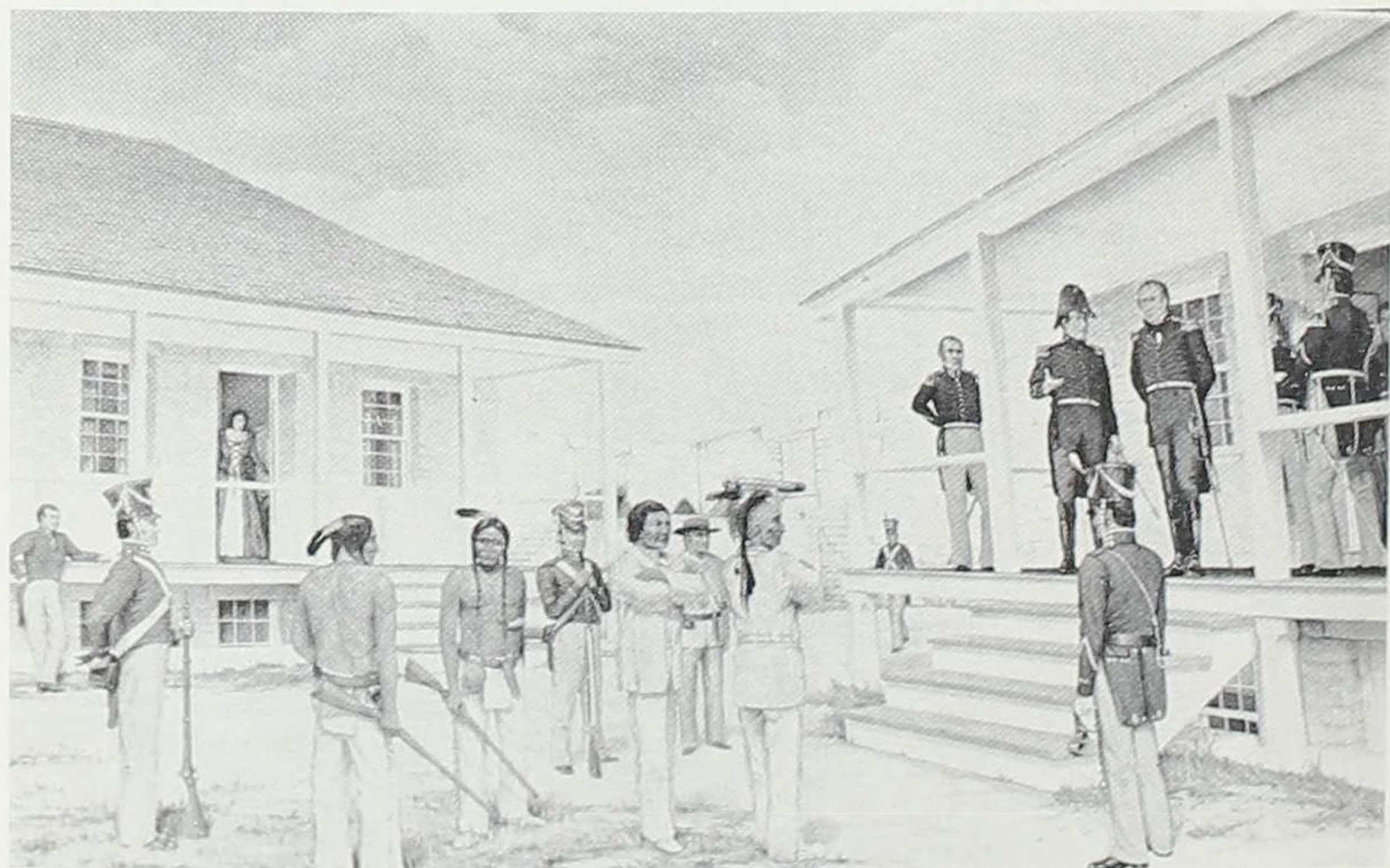
From a painting by J. O. Lewis



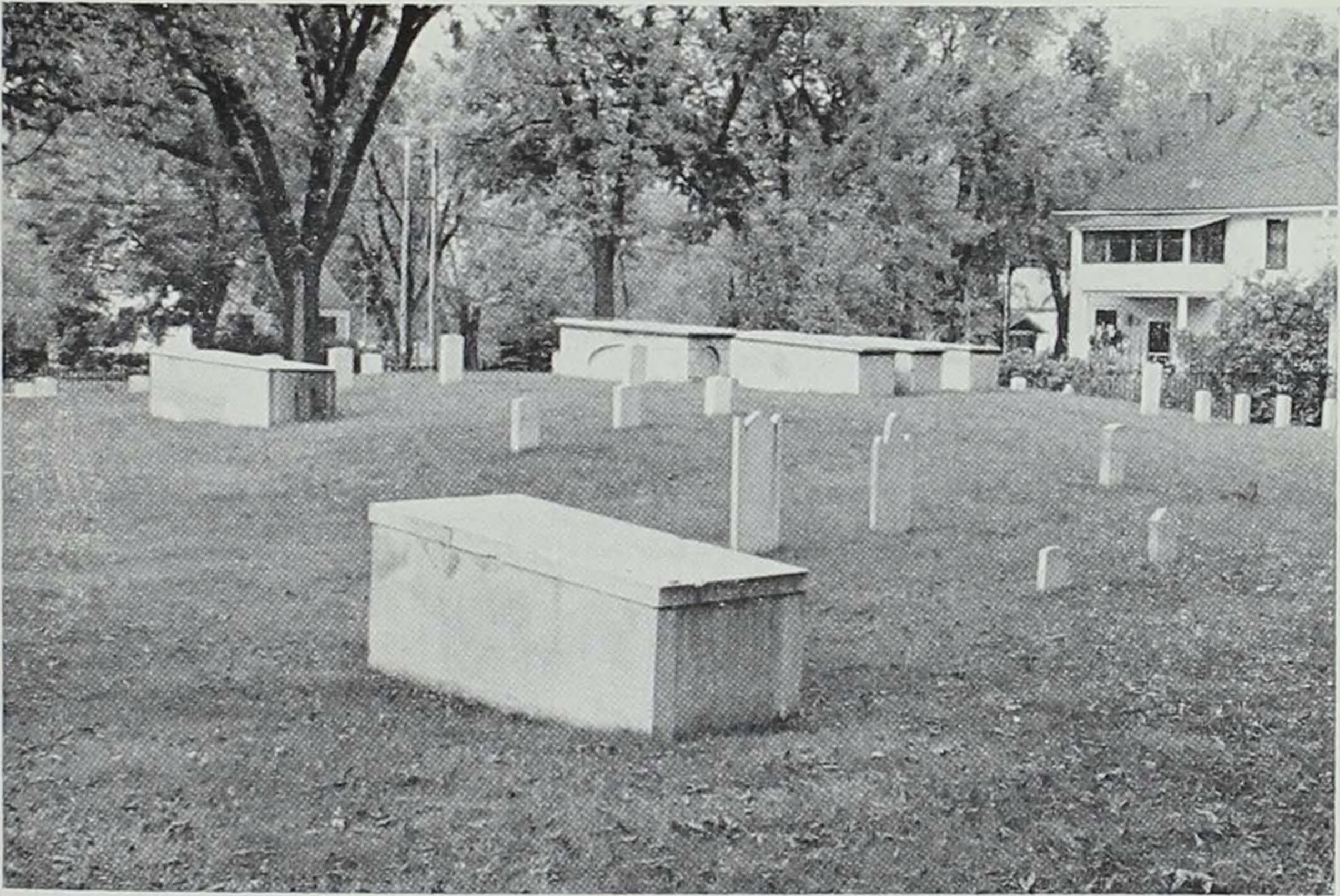
From a Painting by Henry Lewis in *Das Illustrierte Mississippithal*
Steamboat *Warrior* Repulses Indians at Battle of Bad Axe, August 1, 2, 1832.



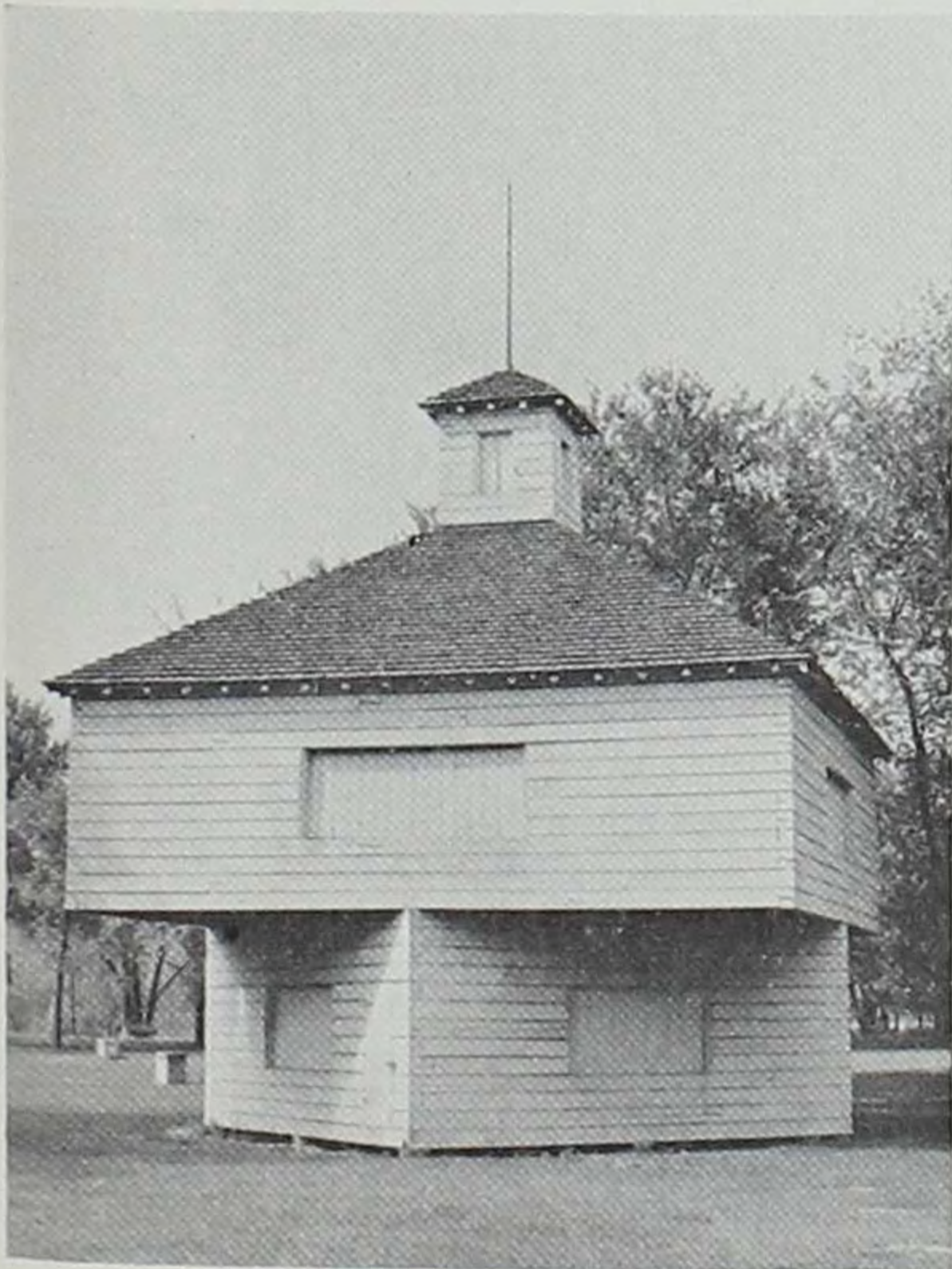
Mural — Soldiers Attack Indians Trying to Cross the Mississippi at Battle of Bad Axe



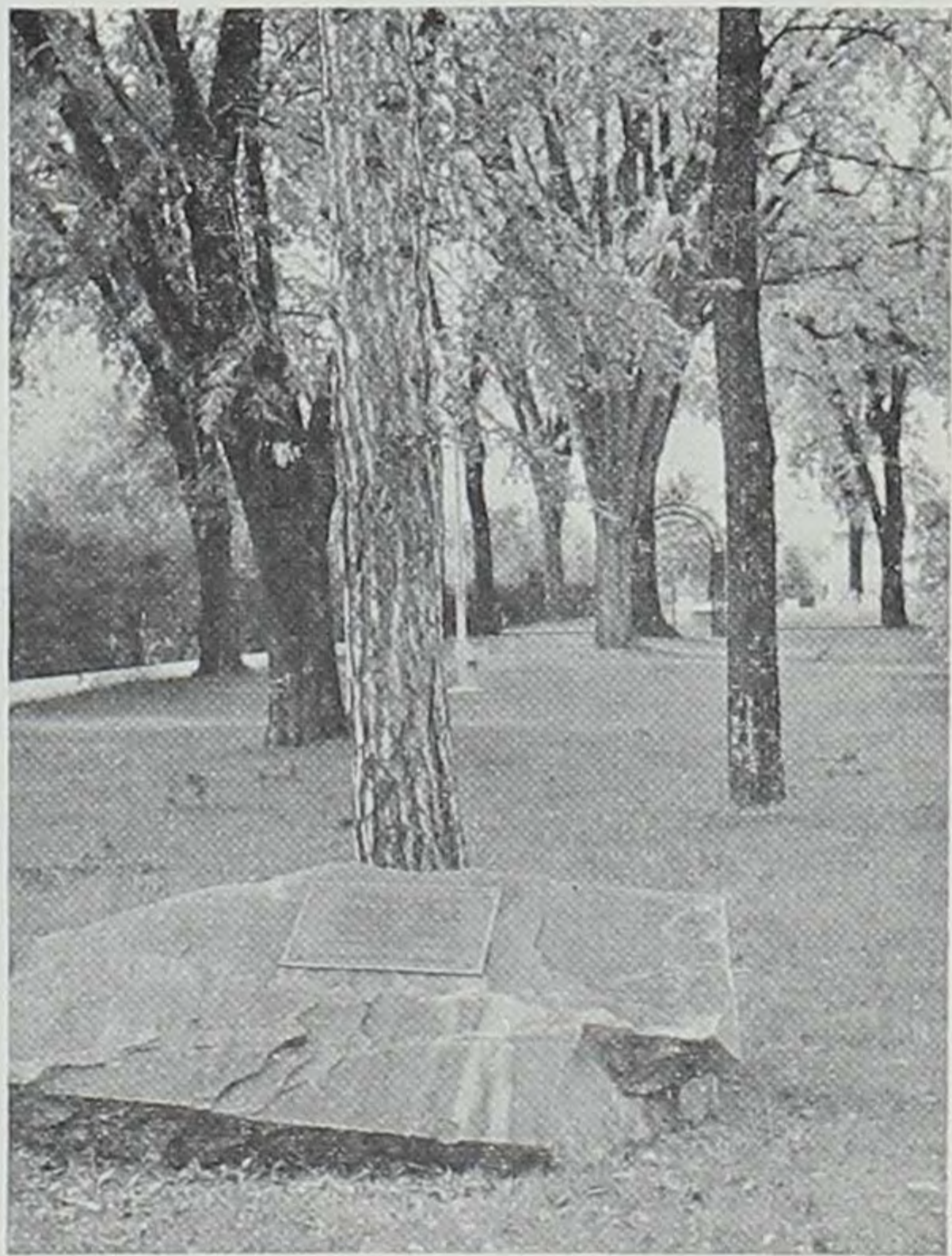
Mural — Prisoners Black Hawk and the Prophet at Fort Crawford on August 27, 1832. Lieut. Jefferson Davis Escorted Black Hawk to Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis



Fort Crawford Military Cemetery. Contains Sixty-two Graves including Vault of Col. Willoughby Morgan, Longtime Commandant of the First Fort Crawford



Replica Corner Blockhouse on Site of First Fort Crawford



Photos *Kent Studio*
Jefferson Davis Memorial at Entrance to Fort Crawford Military Cemetery



Restoration of Second Fort Crawford Hospital. Houses the Museum of Medical Progress Established by the State Medical Society of Wisconsin

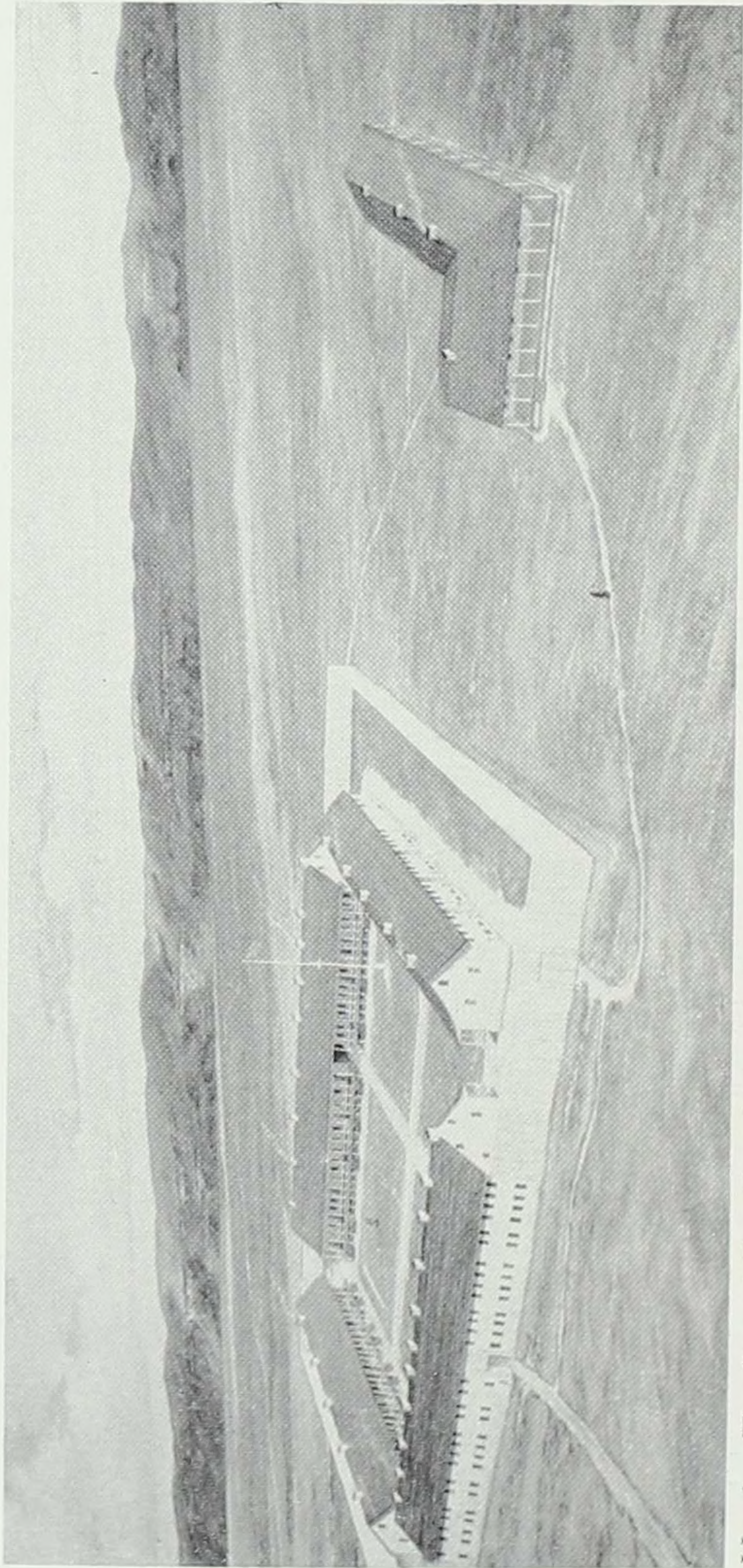


Photos Kent Studio

Villa Louis, Former Home of Hercules L. Dousman, Fur Baron of Early Prairie du Chien. Built on site of Fort Shelby, Fort McKay, and a Blockhouse of the First Fort Crawford. Restored Villa Louis is now Owned and Operated by the Wisconsin State Historical Society



Dousman Memorial Park. Villa Louis and Prairie du Chien Museum of History in Background. Costumed Guides Conduct Tours for the Wisconsin State Historical Society throughout the Summer and Fall Months



Mural — The Second Fort Crawford with Hospital to the Right. Begun in 1829. Partially Occupied 1831. Completed 1834. Abandoned 1849. Reoccupied 1855. Finally Abandoned 1856.

nebago appeared to be hostile, it was decided to concentrate the Fifth Infantry at Fort Snelling. Upon the receipt of a definite order for the abandonment of Fort Crawford in October, 1826, the commandant proceeded at once with his troops up the Mississippi, taking with him two Winnebago prisoners who had been confined in the guardhouse. He left behind a number of damaged arms, a brass swivel, and a few wall pieces in charge of John Marsh, sub-agent at Prairie du Chien.

Throughout the following winter, older traders at Prairie du Chien were apprehensive about more trouble with the Winnebago in the spring. Late in the spring of 1827, a rumor was circulated among the Winnebago that the two prisoners of their tribe who had been taken from Fort Crawford to Fort Snelling had been killed. Although this rumor was false, it inflamed the Indians and they resolved to seek revenge. Red Bird, a Winnebago chief, drew the assignment to go out and "take meat" as they phrased it. Not wishing to murder his friends, the whites, Red Bird made a circuit of the settlement and returned saying that he could find no meat. Upbraided and taunted as a coward, he resolved to redeem his reputation and taking with him WeKaw and another Indian he set out for Prairie du Chien. They arrived June 28, 1827.

The three Indians first stopped at the home of James H. Lockwood who had left for New York the day before to purchase goods for the next sea-

son's trade. Mrs. Lockwood, certain that the Indians intended to kill her, rushed into the store where Duncan Graham, a veteran trader and former British officer, persuaded Red Bird and his companions to leave.

The Indians then proceeded to McNair's Coulee some two or three miles from the village at the lower end of the Prairie. Here lived Registre Gagnier, a French halfbreed, with his wife and two children, a boy three years old and a daughter aged eleven months. With them was an old, discharged soldier, Solomon Lipcap. The entire family was in the log cabin when the Indians arrived and entered. As visits of Indians were common, no apprehension was felt, and Mrs. Gagnier turned to get them some food. Just then Red Bird shot and killed her husband, and the third Indian shot and killed old Lipcap. Mrs. Gagnier struggled with WeKaw, wrested away his gun; but before she could fire, he took off on the run. Taking her small son, but forgetting in her fear and excitement the baby covered up in bed, she hurried away to the village to give the alarm. WeKaw returned to the cabin where he scalped the helpless child, and tossed her under the bed. When a party of armed men, aroused by Mrs. Gagnier, arrived from the village they found the mangled child, scalped, and with its neck cut to the bone, still alive. Strange to relate, the babe recovered and grew to womanhood.

When the armed group returned to Prairie du Chien with the bodies of the murdered men and the child, great alarm was felt by the inhabitants who expected a general attack by the Indians to follow this outbreak. The villagers threw up breastworks about Jean Brunet's tavern; the swivel and wall pieces from the fort were mounted; and blacksmiths set to work to repair the muskets left by the soldiers. All was confusion, "each commanding, none obeying, but every one giving his opinion freely."

On the day of the Gagnier murders, two keelboats which, under the command of Captain Allen Lindsay, had ascended the Mississippi a few days previously with provisions for Fort Snelling, were on their way back to St. Louis. By the time one boat, the *O. H. Perry*, had reached the mouth of the Bad Axe River on June 30, 1827, it was several miles in advance of the second boat, the *General Ashley*.

As the *O. H. Perry* approached an island where Winnebago Indians lay in ambush "the air suddenly resounded with the blood-chilling and ear-piercing tones of the war-whoop, and a volley of rifle balls rained across the deck." One of the sixteen men on board was mortally wounded. A second volley killed another member of the crew instantly. The boat grounded on a sand bar, and an exchange of shots continued until nightfall. In the morning the crew managed to get the boat afloat

again and to escape downstream. Two members of the crew had been killed, two had been mortally wounded, and two slightly wounded. Several Indians had been killed and many more wounded.

When the second keelboat, with Captain Lindsay in command, reached the scene of the encounter it, too, was fired on by the Winnebago. The crew returned the fire. Only one ball struck the boat, the others passed over the deck harmlessly, and the vessel escaped downstream unscathed.

The arrival of the keelboats at Prairie du Chien with the story of the bloody encounter and the dead and wounded on board added to the general alarm. A local militia company was organized with Thomas McNair as captain, Joseph Brisbois as lieutenant, and Jean Brunet as ensign. The fort and blockhouses were put in as good order as possible. Dirt was thrown up two or three feet high around the bottom logs which were rotten and would easily ignite. The swivel and wall pieces were remounted, and blacksmiths continued to repair muskets. Two men were dispatched on horseback to Fort Snelling for help.

When the keelboat, with dead and wounded on board, arrived at Galena on its way to St. Louis, the news of the attack on the keelboats and the murders on the Prairie created the utmost alarm and confusion. Men, women, and children flocked from the diggings thereabouts to Galena expecting at any moment to be overtaken and scalped.

As soon as Colonel Snelling learned of the situation at Prairie du Chien, he set out down the Mississippi with four companies of the Fifth Regiment. When Governor Cass, who with Colonel Thomas L. McKenney had come to Butte des Morts on the Fox River for a parley with the Winnebago, heard of the outrages near Prairie du Chien, he resolved on a bold plan to quell the uprising. He hastened to Prairie du Chien, arriving on July 4, 1827, enrolled the local militia company in the service of the United States, and assured the villagers of reinforcements. Then he hastened to Galena where he calmed the fears of the inhabitants, and enrolled a rifle company under command of Abner Fields to go to Fort Crawford. William Stephen Hamilton, son of Alexander Hamilton, joined this group of volunteers. Captain Fields and his company proceeded at once by keelboat to Prairie du Chien, accompanied by Lieutenant Martin Thomas of the United States Army, who happened to be at Galena. Upon their arrival at Fort Crawford, Thomas mustered the volunteer troops into the service of the United States.

Governor Cass sped down the river to Jefferson Barracks to carry the news of the Indian uprisings to Brigadier General Henry Atkinson, then in command of the post. Soon Atkinson with over five hundred men on board a steamboat was on his way to the scene of the trouble. At Galena he had the committee of safety organize a company of

mounted volunteers under Henry Dodge to proceed to the Portage; then he hurried on to Prairie du Chien.

Cass went on to Chicago, thence back to Butte des Morts, to resume his treaty council. The result of this swing around the circle was a prompt convergence of troops from all directions into the land of the Winnebago. Colonel Snelling assumed command of the forces at Fort Crawford until General Atkinson arrived. Colonel Snelling then returned to Fort Snelling with his troops replacing them with four other companies of the Fifth Infantry under Major John Fowle.

Major William Whistler set out with a detachment of regulars from Fort Howard at Green Bay for the Portage, there to await the coming of General Atkinson and his troops from Fort Crawford. Shortly after his arrival at the Portage, the Winnebago sent word to Major Whistler that the murderers would be surrendered and begged the soldiers not to attack. In a slow and solemn procession, a body of Indians approached the camp with Red Bird and WeKaw in the center of the group. The soldiers formed in line, and the Indians halted in a semi-circle in front of them. Red Bird presented a noble appearance dressed in a suit of white deer skin, but WeKaw looked like a "starved wolf, gaunt, hungry, and bloodthirsty." Indian spokesmen announced that they had brought in two of the murderers — the third had

gone away. They asked that the prisoners be treated kindly, and offered twenty horses if their lives would be spared. The Indians were told that the prisoners would be treated kindly, and were admonished to warn their people not to kill the whites. Then the two prisoners were marched to a tent in the rear, and the friends of the captives left with presents of flour, meat and tobacco.

General Atkinson and his command and the mounted troops under Dodge, who had joined forces with the former on September 1st, reached the Portage on September 6th, three days after the surrender of Red Bird and WeKaw. Two days later two other prisoners were delivered to Atkinson; and, on September 9th, he drew up articles of agreement with the Winnebago chiefs stipulating that the miners at Galena should be allowed to secure mineral in the area between the Galena and Wisconsin rivers, unmolested until claims to the region had been settled.

The four captives were brought back to Prairie du Chien and put in prison. Later in the month two other Winnebago leaders implicated in the attack on the keelboats were delivered to General Atkinson; and, on September 22, he issued a proclamation granting the Indians peace.

Leaving Fort Crawford garrisoned by the four companies under Major Fowle with provisions for twelve months, Atkinson returned to Jefferson Barracks, leaving the frontier as he thought in a

“state of tranquility” which would “not be shortly interrupted.”

Although the Winnebago outbreak was thus speedily crushed, the cause of the trouble had not been removed — aggressions of the whites in the lead mining region south of the Wisconsin continued, and Winnebago resentment flared anew over the confinement of Red Bird and his companions. Indeed, they regarded their imprisonment as worse punishment than death.

Red Bird sickened and died; WeKaw and one of his companions were finally brought to trial in September, 1828. They were found guilty and sentenced to be hanged, but before the sentence could be carried out both were pardoned by President Adams. The other two prisoners were discharged for lack of evidence of their participation in the outrages of the previous year.

The Winnebago outbreak had been stopped by the bold course adopted by Governor Cass and the prompt response of regulars and volunteers; but it opened the eyes of the government to the fact that a garrison should be maintained at Fort Crawford and that a new post should be built at the Wisconsin Portage in the heart of the Winnebago country. In September, 1828, Major David E. Twiggs with three companies of troops from Fort Howard at Green Bay began the erection of temporary quarters at the Portage. To this new post was given the appropriate name of Fort Winnebago.