

THE PALIMPSEST

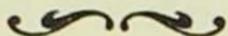
EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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About the middle of June, 1841, Governor John Chambers hired a carriage in Burlington and drove cross country to visit the Indian villages on the Des Moines River. As Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the Territory of Iowa, he talked with his red-skinned wards and discussed conditions with Agent John Beach. Besides their usual irresponsibility, extravagance, and taste for whisky, dissension over the payment of annuities was demoralizing the tribes. In 1840 Chief Hardfish had insisted that the money should be distributed to the heads of families instead of being paid to the chiefs. Keokuk and the traders opposed any change, with the result that payment was suspended entirely that year. Governor Chambers urged the rival factions to settle their dispute before the next payment was due.

His advice was apparently heeded. The Sauk and Fox chiefs and warriors met at the Agency House on July 23rd and old Pashepaho proposed

to refer the question to the braves since the chiefs were unable to agree. After much talk the braves decided that the annuity for 1840 should be paid to the chiefs while that for 1841 should be distributed to heads of families. This compromise was accepted but a new dispute arose. The followers of Hardfish wanted \$18,000, whereas Keokuk's braves refused to concede them more than \$14,000. Finally Agent Beach suggested the Yankee method of splitting the difference, and so Hardfish's band settled for \$16,000. The remainder, approximately \$25,000, was allotted to the Keokuk faction.

When this settlement was reported to the authorities in Washington, Governor Chambers was instructed to pay the annuities for 1840 and 1841 at the same time and according to the decision of the Indians. Furthermore, he was informed that Governor J. D. Doty of Wisconsin and the United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs, T. Hartley Crawford, had been appointed to help him negotiate at the same council with the Sauks and Foxes for the cession of their land. The War Department had conceived of establishing an "Indian territory in the northern part of Iowa" comparable to the territory west of Arkansas reserved for southern tribes. For this purpose Governor Doty had negotiated with the Sioux for the use of their

land "west of Fort Snelling, embracing the St. Peter's [Minnesota] river, in the neighborhood of the Blue Earth river and Swan lakes." The plan contemplated moving the Sauks and Foxes to this region, at the headwaters of the Des Moines River, represented "to be advantageously undulating, and to have a sufficiency of timber". In preparation for the council Governor Chambers sent a military force to the Agency to preserve order during the negotiations. He also excluded the traders and other white men in order to get the unbiased consent of the Indians.

The council was called to meet at the Sauk and Fox Agency on Monday, October 11, 1841. Governor Chambers and Commissioner Crawford arrived on Sunday. Some of the Indians, as usual, did not appear at the appointed time and so the meeting was postponed until Tuesday. When the Indians were asked how they wanted the annuities distributed they conferred and reaffirmed their agreement of the previous July. Since the money for 1841 was to be paid to heads of families "in proportion to their respective numbers", they requested that a census should be taken. This was done at once. The count which was completed on Thursday revealed that the confederated tribes numbered 2300 persons — of whom about 500 were children under ten years of age. There were

more females than males, which seems to have been characteristic of the Indian population in Iowa at that time.

With \$82,000 in their "pockets" the Indians felt rich. They paid some of their debts and spent the rest for whisky, horses, guns, calico, and trinkets. Whatever they wanted they bought for cash or on credit. After such a spree they were in no mood to sell their hunting grounds and move north on the open prairie to live among their worst enemies.

Nevertheless, Governor Chambers opened the treaty council at eleven o'clock on Friday, October 15th, with friendly words. "My friends," he said, "we are now about to enter upon a subject of vast importance to you, and one of deep interest to the Government of the United States. Your great father, the President, has sent us here to act the part of friends toward you, and we wish you to act as such toward us. We want your own honest and candid opinions upon the subject we are about to submit to you, and not the opinion of your traders and those who have claims against you. We want, I say, your own opinions, for we believe you are capable of forming correct ones, and honest enough to express them. Your friend from Washington, who has been sent here by your great father, the President, will explain to

you what the President wants. We come as friends from your great friend the President, and we wish to act toward you in pure friendship. We do not wish to entrap or overreach you, but to act honorably and fairly toward you, and we wish and believe you will act so toward us."

When he had finished, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs from Washington explained the terms of the land cession which the government proposed. "My friends and brothers," said Commissioner Crawford, "your great father, the President of the United States, has sent me, in conjunction with my powerful friend on my left, and my friend, the Governor of Wisconsin, on my right, to tell you what he wants. I am extremely happy to see you once more, friendly and united, and I sincerely hope you will remain like the iron on a wheel, no part of which can move without the whole. You are yet a handsome and powerful people, but you must know that you will become weak if you do not cultivate peace and friendship among yourselves, and cease to follow the advice and practice of those whose design is to destroy you. What is better than anything else, you are honest still, but will not remain so if you obey the counsel of those whose endeavor it is to corrupt you. The times past have satisfied your great father that there is no safety for you unless you

are removed beyond the reach of white men, where they can have nothing to do with your funds, or anything that concerns you. We wish to purchase the lands you now occupy and claim, but not without your full and free consent. To get that assent freely, and without the control of anybody, we have sent away all white people from you, and from the council-house, and want you to be let alone, to get your opinions without the interference of white people. It is the opinion of the Sac and Fox nations we desire, and not the opinion of persons coming from a distance, who want your money, and care nothing about your condition or happiness.

“Having these views for your advantage, we propose to you, in behalf of the President of the United States, to cede to the United States all that portion of land claimed by you and embraced within the present limits of the Territory of Iowa. For this we propose to give you one million of dollars and money enough to pay your debts. The country we wish you to remove to, should such cession be made, will be on the head waters of the Des Moines, and west of the Blue Earth river. To remove apprehension of hostilities from your red brothers in that section, we propose to establish and man three forts there for your protection, to be established before your removal from your

present villages. Out of the million of dollars we propose that you have farms and farmers, mills and millers, blacksmiths, gunsmiths, school-houses, and a fine council-house. But, what will be of more value to you than all, we would propose to build a house for each family, each house to be worth not exceeding one hundred and fifty dollars, and to fence and plough six acres of ground for each family. We propose to build for each of the chiefs a house worth not exceeding three hundred dollars, and fence and plough twelve acres of ground for each. We then intend you all to live in one village like brothers. This is the proposition we are authorized to make. If you will once try this mode of life you will never quit it. The white people have found it good. You will be happy with your wives and children, in fine, warm, and close houses. Your children will grow strong and be healthy, if kept from the weather and well fed, and you will all live long. But to make your children respected, they should be taught to read and write. To enable them to do so, we propose to place fifty thousand dollars at interest for the purposes of education. If you will live in houses, cultivate the land, and educate your children, you will be contented and happy. I have now told you the terms upon which we propose to treat. You will probably want time to reflect upon

this subject. In making this proposition I have been honest and plain with you, and I expect the same from you. Any other course of conduct would be unworthy of you and unjust to the Government."

Again Governor Chambers addressed the assembled Indians, warning them against the unscrupulous traders and promising fair treatment by the government. "My friends," he began, "you have listened to what your friend the chief from Washington has said. I approve of everything you have heard from him. I am sent here to remain as your superintendent. It is my duty to watch over you, and see that no injustice is done to you by any one, either by our traders or the Government. If the President should require me to do what was wrong toward you, I would spurn the direction. We have been directed by him to treat with you, and to make you proposals for the purchase of your lands. If I thought the proposals you have heard were unjust or dishonorable I would not sanction or advocate them. I may be mistaken as to what is for your interest, but you are capable and must judge for yourselves. I have fought the red men, and esteem them brave. Brave men are always honest, and I respect them for their bravery and honesty. You have now been two years without your money.

You are surrounded by blood-suckers, who are constantly endeavoring to obtain all the money paid to you. All the money you yesterday received has already gone into their hands. You have paid them enough to supply all your wants for a year. Those of them who sell you whisky are men who desire only your money, and would kill all your women and children to obtain it. They have no souls — they are men of bad hearts, and you should not permit them to exercise any influence over you whatever. I believe it to your interest to get out of their reach. Your great father proposes to give you such an opportunity — he proposes to you to go north. I know that in going north you will go toward your enemies, the Sioux and Winnebagoes; but the President authorizes us to propose to establish for you a line of forts for your protection, and to place sufficient troops there to prevent aggression upon you, and if they will not be peaceable to chastise them. Farther south a great many red men have been gathering for some years, and frequent difficulties have occurred among them. You would be much safer where we propose to send you. We propose to give you, as your friend from Washington has stated, one million of dollars, and money enough to pay your debts — to build you out of that one million dollars comfortable houses and farms,

mills, blacksmith-shops, school-houses, &c. Why is it the white people increase like the leaves on the trees, and the red men are constantly decreasing? Because the whites live in comfortable houses, are well fed and comfortably clothed. Your band only fifteen years ago numbered no less than sixteen hundred warriors, and now it numbers but twenty-three hundred persons, including men, women, and children. Another reason why the red man is continually decreasing is, that the evil spirit has been introduced among you in the shape of liquor, impregnated with pepper and tobacco and other poisonous ingredients. But few as you now are, there are young men among you who will yet live to see you a powerful and prosperous people, if you settle down and cultivate the earth as we propose to you. There is no reason why you should not increase as fast as any people on the earth if you live in comfortable houses, are well fed, and keep clear of the vultures who are about you. It will, indeed, be a happy day to me to hereafter go among you and find you a happy and strong people. These old men and myself must soon be gone; but if we are so disposed, we can do much good for those who shall come after us. In deciding upon the acceptance of our proposals, we wish you to use your own judgment, without the control of others. We

have forbidden white men to have any intercourse with you during the progress of this treaty."

At last Keokuk arose. "All our chiefs and braves have heard what you have said to us, and understand your desire", he said. "We are glad you have told us to reflect upon it, and not decide immediately. Our chiefs, and then our braves, will have to counsel together, before we can give you an answer. We have to take more time among us, in matters of this kind, than the whites do. When the sun is half gone to-morrow, we will give our answer."

At noon the next day the council met again. "We have come to hear what reply the chiefs and braves have to give to our proposals", announced Governor Chambers. Thereupon Keokuk spoke for the tribesmen. "We have come together without coming to any conclusion", he replied. "Many of our people are not accustomed to business, and do not understand your propositions. We want them explained slowly and plainly. We do not know whether the houses are to be paid for from the thousand boxes [\$1,000,000], or to be paid besides. We wish this explained so there will be no misunderstanding. We hope we shall be excused for our not understanding, for our people are not much acquainted with business. After you will explain to us, we shall have a council among

ourselves alone, and then explain and talk over the whole matter among ourselves. We wish a guard stationed around us, to prevent interference from the whites while in council."

Commissioner Crawford repeated the proposal of the government to buy the Sauk and Fox land in Iowa for \$1,000,000 and the amount of their debts. The cost of the houses and other improvements, he said, would be paid out of the thousand boxes of money and not in addition to the stipulated sum. Again he explained the plan to move the tribes to a reservation farther north. And so the council adjourned until the next day while the Indians discussed the offer.

At ten o'clock on Sunday, October 17, 1841, the council convened for final deliberations. The principal chiefs of the various bands stated their judgments which James W. Grimes carefully recorded. One after another they told why they did not want to surrender their hunting grounds and leave their villages. According to the official report, Kishkekosh announced that Hardfish's band would give their opinions first and then Keokuk's band would state their decision. The speeches follow in order.

Wishecomarquet, the Sauk chief called Hardfish: "My braves and warriors who sit around me had a council yesterday. All our chiefs, braves,

and warriors, had one council, and are all of one opinion. We have thought of our families and those who are to follow us; and my answer is the answer of all. It is a great concern to us, and we hope the great Spirit and this earth will bear favorable witness to our answer. It is impossible for us to accept your proposals. We can not subsist in the country where you wish us to go. It is impossible for us to live there. In reflecting upon it, it seems like a dream to think of going and leaving our present homes; and we do not want to hear any new proposals."

Poweshiek, Fox chief from the Iowa River: "You have heard, through Wishecomarquet, the opinion of our whole nation. We have thought of the condition of our families, and what it will be where you wish us to live. We hold this country from our fathers; we have an hereditary right to it, and we think we have a right to judge whether we will sell it or not. According to our custom, our chiefs own all the trees and the earth, and they are used for the benefit of our people. We should give up a timber for a prairie country, if we went where you wish. I call the Great Spirit, earth, sky, and weather, to witness that we choose what is best for our people. After being a powerful people, we are now but the shade of one. We hope the Great Spirit will pity and protect us."

Pashepaho, a Sauk brave: "We yesterday listened to what was said to us from our great father at Washington. We have had a council together about it, and now come to give our answer. After thinking of our families, and those who are to come after us, we think we cannot accept your proposals. We have already given to Government all the land we owned on the other side of the Mississippi river, and all they own on this side. Our country is now small; and if we part with it we cannot live. We hope you will not be displeased with our refusal."

Kishkekosh, a Fox brave: "You have heard the unanimous opinion of our nations. We do not wish to accept your proposals. This is the only country we have. It is small, and it is our only timber."

Wishewahka, a Fox brave: "You have already heard our opinion. We are all of the same mind. This is the only spot of timber we own, and it is small. The country you wish us to remove to is without timber, and very poor. We hope our great father will not insist upon our removal."

Keokuk, chief of the Sauk nation: "Day before yesterday we did not understand the terms upon which you wish to buy our land. We have since then had a council, and have come to one mind. We have never heard so hard proposals; we never

heard of so hard a proposal as you have made us. The country where you wish to send us we are acquainted with. It looks like a country of distress. It is the poorest, in every respect, I have ever seen. We own this land from our fathers; and we think we have a right to say whether we will sell or not. You have read and heard the traditions of our nation. We were once powerful; we conquered many other nations, and our fathers conquered this land. We now own it by possession, and have the same right to it that the white men have to the lands they occupy. We hope you will not think hard of our refusal to sell. We wish to act for the benefit of our children, and those who shall come after them; and we believe the Great Spirit will bless us for so doing. As to the proposal to build school-houses, &c., we have always been opposed to them, and will never consent to have them introduced into our nation. We do not wish any more proposals made to us."

Wapello, a Fox chief: "You said you were sent by our great father to treat with us and buy our land. We have had a council, and are of one opinion. You have learned that opinion from our chiefs and braves who have spoken. You told us to be candid, and we are. It is impossible for us to subsist where you wish us to go. We own this country by occupancy and inheritance. It is the

only good country, and only one suitable for us to live in on this side the Mississippi river; and you must not think hard of us because we do not wish to sell it. We were once a powerful, but now a small nation. When the white people first crossed the big water and landed on this island, they were then small as we now are. I remember when Wisconsin was ours; and it now has our name: we sold it to you. Rock river and Rock island were once ours: we sold them to you. Dubuque was once ours: we sold that to you. And they are occupied by white men who live happy. Rock river was the only place where we lived happily, and we sold that to you. This is all the country we have left; and we are so few now we cannot conquer other countries. You now see me, and all my people. Have pity on us; we are but few, and are fast melting away. If other Indians had been treated as we have been, there would have been none left. This land is all we have; it is our only fortune. When it is gone, we shall have nothing left. The Great Spirit has been unkind to us, in not giving us the knowledge of white men, for we would then be on an equal footing; but we hope he will take pity on us."

Appanoose, a Sauk chief: "You have truly heard the opinion of our nation from our chiefs and braves. You may think we did not all under-

stand your proposals, but we do. We have had a council upon them among ourselves, and concluded to refuse them. We speak for our whole nation. We were told at Washington that we would not be asked to sell any more of our land, and we did not expect to be asked to do so so soon. We would be willing to sell some of our country, if we could subsist where you wish us to live. The country you offered us is the poorest I ever saw; no one can live there. Wish our great father at Washington to know the reason why we do not wish to sell."

This decision was, of course, disappointing to the commissioners. Governor Chambers could not refrain from saying that he thought the Indians were making a mistake, but he assumed that their judgment was honest and he was not disposed to exert any pressure to change it. "My friends," he concluded, "we have heard your answer to the proposals the President directed us to make to you. We hope, and have reason to believe, you have been governed by your own judgment, and not by the advice of others. Your great father has no intention to drive or force you from your lands. I am sent here to remain and to watch over and attend to you; to see justice done, and I will not see wrong done to you while I can prevent it. I have been led to believe that the country we wish

you to go to is different from the description you have given of it. Your friend, Governor Doty, has lately been over it, and says it is different. He says there is timber there. There must be some mistake. Now, I will tell you why your great father proposes to you to sell at this time. He knows, and I know, that white people have got near you; are selling you whiskey, and that we cannot prevent them from selling, or you from buying. Bad white people are thus encouraged to sell, and you are degraded by buying; and you will become more and more degraded until you become wholly extinct. Troops have been sent here, but on account of your proximity to the white settlements, improper intercourse with them cannot be prevented. I had learned, and reported to your great father, that you bought goods which you did not need, and immediately traded them away for whiskey. Your great father thought you wished to pay your debts. I have ascertained that \$300,000 will not pay them. This is another reason why he thought you should sell. A few months ago you went to Montrose and bought \$15,000 of goods, none of which you needed (save, perhaps, a few horses), and they are now all given to the winds. How will you pay the man of whom you procured them? The whole amount of your annuities for five years will not pay your

debts to your traders. They will not trust you any more. They have sold to you, heretofore, expecting you would sell your lands, and that they would then be paid. You will get no more goods and credit. It was kindness, then, on the part of your great father which induced him to offer to buy your lands to furnish you with money, with which you could render yourselves, your wives and children, comfortable and happy. It is my business to superintend your affairs, and watch over your interests as well as the interests of the Government; and I want you to reflect upon the fact that in a few days all your money will be gone; you will be without credit; you may be unsuccessful in your hunts, and what will become of you? Even your whiskey-sellers will not sell to you that, without money or an exchange of your horses, guns, and blankets for it; many of you do not reflect upon this now, but you will before a year with sorrow.

“These chiefs (Governor Doty and Mr. Crawford) are going away, I am to remain; and, it will be the first wish of my heart to do you all the good in my power, but I cannot render you much service unless you are more prudent. We shall not come to you any more to induce you to sell your lands, however great may be your sufferings. We shall let the matter rest until your misfortunes and suf-

ferings will convince you that you have been guilty of an act of folly in refusing to sell your lands."

And so, since the Indians signified no further disposition to negotiate, the council was dissolved. The plan proposed by the government was not suggested again. What Governor Chambers prophesied soon came to pass. The impoverished Sauks and Foxes were glad to sell their land a year later.

JOHN ELY BRIGGS