

With the Indians

Most of Iowa a hundred years ago was occupied by red men. According to a treaty in 1837 the Potawatomi Indians from the area around Lake Michigan, together with some Ottawa and Chippewa, were removed to southwestern Iowa. The emigration records indicate that 5297 were transferred. In 1840 United States soldiers escorted several bands of the Winnebago to the Neutral Ground in northeastern Iowa. By the fall of 1842 they numbered 2183. Meanwhile, hunting parties of Sauk and Fox roamed over the prairies from the western edge of settlement to the Missouri slope and as far north as the scattered bands of hostile Sioux would permit. Though indigenous to that region, the confederated tribes were not as large as their alien neighbors, for only 2300 were counted in the fall of 1841.

The large tract of country occupied by the Sauk and Fox Indians was described as "undoubtedly equal, if not superior, in value, to any north of Missouri; abounding in groves of the most valuable timber, intersected by streams; and adapted to every kind of agriculture." But the Indians were not much interested in agriculture.

"The chase, with the labor bestowed by the females on the cultivation of corn, beans, melons, &c." was their principal employment. To stimulate an interest in agriculture Agent John Beach sowed seventy-two acres of wheat in 1840, but the Indians used the field for a pasture so that the harvest was a failure. In 1841, however, conditions were more encouraging. The farm was enlarged to 177 acres and nearly 100 acres were enclosed by a rail fence. Seventy-five acres were in corn, fifteen acres in oats, and large potato and turnip patches were expected to yield abundantly. In the fall of 1841 ninety acres were seeded to wheat. But the crop which the Indians liked best was watermelons. About half the Indians in the Des Moines River villages were invited alternately once a week to visit the agency for melons. "As this is the only article which they prefer to whiskey," reported Agent Beach, "they readily come several miles to procure them."

Though the Sauk and Fox Indians had been long exposed to the vices and virtues of civilization they retained their primitive barbarity. "Still, with all their wildness," in the opinion of Agent Beach, "they are a people possessing many estimable and redeeming characteristic features; and it should be a subject of deep solicitude, that they be efficiently protected from the villany of those

who are rapidly wasting and depraving them by the murderous draught of intoxication. That untutored ferocity which, in war and among their enemies, derives the most exquisite delight from the highest refinement of agony and torture inflicted upon their victims, in peace, and among friends, is replaced by the most bland and amiable deportment. They are emphatically a religious community; are, with a rare exception, very honest; and of the sincerity of the friendship cherished by at least the mass of them towards our Government and people there need exist no doubt."

Only two Indian schools in the Territory of Iowa were officially reported in 1841: one at Little Crow's village near Fort Snelling, and the other at Lac qui Parle. A new Winnebago school was opened late that year. The Sauk and Fox chiefs were opposed to the white man's education; and "neither farmer nor school teacher" was employed for the instruction of the Potawatomi.

A Methodist missionary named W. B. Kavanaugh, with the able assistance of two other teachers, had interested about fifteen Sioux and twenty half-breed children in learning to read and write. But in the spring of 1841 Little Crow had forbidden the boys to attend "under the ill-conceived idea that, if they were educated, they would not make soldiers". By the following September

this school was reported to have been "broken up" and "discontinued".

Another mission school was operated at Lac qui Parle by Dr. T. S. Williamson, Stephen R. Riggs, Alexander G. Huggins, and their wives. Although 101 pupils were enrolled, the average attendance during the winter term was only thirty-five, in the spring seven, and in the fall of 1841 twelve. English and arithmetic were the principal subjects taught. The girls had spun and woven three blankets and eight gowns. This mission also had to be abandoned in the winter of 1842-43 because of a food shortage.

Meanwhile, on October 1, 1840, the Indian school on Yellow River was closed preparatory to establishing an agency and school for the Winnebago on the Turkey River in the Neutral Ground. The Reverend David Lowry, sub-agent at that post, admitted that probably no material change could be wrought in the habits of the adult Winnebago, but, he said, "their children are objects of bright promise. They possess beyond doubt all the elements of a capacity for a higher life, and ought to be furnished with ample means for intellectual and moral improvement. Every opening chink that lets into the mind the least light of knowledge should be carefully watched and improved, and everything done in the power of the

Government to afford such protection to the half-formed habits imbibed in school by these children, as will prevent their going back to savage manners on returning to their parents."

J. W. Hancock began his work as a teacher at the new school on Turkey River in the fall of 1841, and during the first year instructed more than one hundred different pupils. Eighty-five attended with enough regularity to derive some benefit. Of these, forty-six were boys and thirty-nine were girls. They studied chiefly reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic, geography, astronomy, and "the construction of sentences". One group was "ciphering in the rule of interest". Another was working "in fractions". The advanced class could spell words from the reader correctly, and could write "tolerably well". Vocal music was also taught "with very good success". The boys who were old enough labored two hours a day on the farm, while the girls spent a part of their time "in the sewing-room".

In spite of the diligent efforts of agents and missionaries, the general condition of the Indians was deplorable. The birth rate was declining, infant mortality was high, and drunkenness was increasing. In the opinion of Agent Cooper at Council Bluffs the principal obstacle to civilizing the Potawatomi was their thirst for "*ardent spir-*

its" which were kept along the boundary of Missouri and conveyed to the Indians by the half-breeds. The whisky trade had doubled there during 1841. "The Indian", it was said, "will sell anything for liquor; not infrequently bartering off his horses, guns, and blankets".

Similar conditions prevailed at the other agencies. Amos J. Bruce declared that if any change had occurred among the Sioux it was "for the worse". After spending much of their annuity for whisky, they had "sold a great part of their flour, pork, and nearly all the corn furnished" by the government to buy more liquor.

Agent John Beach deplored the iniquity practiced upon the Sauk and Fox Indians by those "depraved and lawless individuals who hover upon the confines of their country, engaged in the detestable occupation of providing them with whiskey". Though the Indians were advised not to pay their liquor debts, they feared to offend the traders who threatened to cut off the supply of whisky and so the Indians liquidated these obligations "with a most scrupulous integrity".

Though the relations between the two races on the Iowa frontier were deplorable, the Indians exhibited no inclination in 1841 to raise the tomahawk against their unscrupulous white neighbors. Indeed, it seems to have been a relatively peaceful

year among the tribes themselves. "No incident has occurred," reported Beach in September, "to disturb that harmony between the Sacs and Foxes and their neighboring tribes, so essential to the repose and safety of our own frontier." Their hatred of the Sioux was unabated, however, and he attributed the absence of conflict more to the lack of opportunity than to inclination.

Fear of the Sioux prompted the Potawatomi to seek an alliance with neighboring tribes and go on the warpath against the aggressors from the north. Agents were advised to dissuade them with promises that the government would provide adequate protection. According to Agent Bruce at St. Peter's, the Sioux warriors were pleased to have the alliance prevented and promised to stay at home unless "drawn into war by the attacks of their enemies."

These conciliatory measures were apparently no more trustworthy than modern diplomatic negotiations, for late in the fall of 1841 a roving band of Sioux destroyed a small party of Potawatomi and Delaware. A Sauk and Fox hunting party in the following summer came upon the place where the tragedy had occurred. It was reported to be "clearly within the territory of the Sacs and Foxes, being several miles below the southern boundary of the neutral ground."

This massacre may have been the basis of the somewhat legendary story of a terrible fight in which twenty-three Delaware and twenty-six Sioux warriors were killed. One Delaware escaped to a large Sauk and Fox encampment at the mouth of the Raccoon River. Incited by his account of the episode, "five or six hundred" Sauk and Fox braves immediately went on the warpath against the Sioux. After following the trail for about a hundred miles toward the northwest they overtook the enemy and killed 300 warriors.

No such battle was mentioned by any of the Indian agents in the Iowa country either in 1841 or later. Indeed, the relations between the tribes seemed to become more pacific. Though the Potawatomi, Sauk and Fox, Delaware, and tribes west of the Missouri River hated and feared the Sioux, only occasional minor conflicts were mentioned in official reports. In the spring of 1842 the Potawatomi still talked of forming a military alliance against the Sioux, but a company of dragoons was sent to Council Bluffs to allay their fears and prevent a concerted uprising. Another company marched across country that summer from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Atkinson and thence to the Sauk and Fox agency. No general outbreak of Indian warfare occurred.

J. A. SWISHER