

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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Indian Affairs

Though the Territory of Iowa extended north to the Canadian boundary, including most of Minnesota and the eastern half of the Dakotas, only a small portion in the southeast corner had been purchased from the Indians. For four years after the Territory was established, white settlement was limited to this strip of land containing seven and a half million acres — about a fifth of the present area of the State. All the rest belonged to the Indians. The prairies of central and western Iowa, the high plateaus of the Dakotas, and the lake-strewn forests of Minnesota were still hunting grounds. Over this vast region and the tribes that occupied it, the Governor of Iowa Territory had general supervision.

In the southern part of the Territory, which became the State of Iowa, the Indian country was apportioned by treaty among several tribes. Extending twenty miles on each side of a line from the mouth of the Upper Iowa River to the junction

of the east and west forks of the Des Moines was the Neutral Ground to which the Winnebago Indians had agreed to move in 1832. Except for a few hunting excursions, however, they had remained in Wisconsin. During the summer of 1840, United States soldiers began the construction of Fort Atkinson on the Turkey River and escorted several bands of the Winnebago to the Neutral Ground. The Indians came to Iowa reluctantly and, setting up their lodges along the west bank of the Mississippi, refused to go to the agency near the fort on Turkey River.

North and west of the Neutral Ground ranged the hunting parties of the Sioux. The Sisseton and Wahpeton branches of that populous nation had their principal villages in what is now southern Minnesota, and the Yankton tribe lived in the valley of the Big Sioux River. Warlike and nomadic, they were feared and hated by their Indian neighbors, particularly the Sauks and Foxes. Indeed, the Neutral Ground was designed to keep these implacable foes apart.

The Missouri slope, once occupied by the Ioway, Omaha, Oto, and Missouri Indians, was ceded by them to the United States in 1830. Though for the most part they moved across the Missouri River, these related Siouan tribes held undisputed possession of their relinquished hunt-

ing grounds until 1837 when some Potawatomi were transplanted from Illinois to the vicinity of Council Bluffs.

South of the Neutral Ground and west of the white settlements to the Missouri divide was the Sauk and Fox country. In 1840 these confederated tribes, including between three and four thousand persons, were living in six villages, each ruled by a principal chief. Keokuk, recognized by the government as the head of the tribes, had moved his village from the mouth of the Iowa River to the Des Moines about where Ottumwa is now located. On a bend in the river about a mile upstream Wapello had located his Fox band, and a mile beyond that lived Appanoose with his Sauk followers. Hardfish, the leader of the Black Hawk faction, had a big village about where Edyville is now located. Two Fox bands were more widely separated: Kishkekosh on the Skunk River probably somewhere in Mahaska County, and Poweshiek on the Iowa River close to the Indian boundary line a few miles south of the new Territorial capital.

In 1838 Joseph M. Street, government agent for the Sauk and Fox Indians, selected the site for his headquarters near the Des Moines River, about five miles east of Keokuk's village, where the town of Agency is now located. When Street

died in May, 1840, his son-in-law, John Beach, was appointed agent. Besides the government employees, the only white men permitted to live in the Indian reservation were licensed traders. J. P. Eddy had a trading house near Hardfish's village. The Chouteau post was a quarter of a mile down the river. At the mouth of Sugar Creek, W. G. and G. W. Ewing were situated advantageously to trade with the braves in Keokuk's, Wapello's, and Appanoose's villages. The American Fur Company maintained traders among the Indians on the Des Moines River and near Poweshiek's village on the Iowa. There were seven licensed traders at the Council Bluffs agency.

According to a treaty with the Sauks and Foxes in 1837, the United States government agreed to build and operate two gristmills, to break and fence farm land, and to maintain two blacksmiths and a gunsmith at the agency. During 1838, Joseph M. Street supervised the erection of a council house, residences, shops, and other buildings at the agency. Under the direction of Richard Kerr a farm was started for the instruction and sustenance of the Indians. One mill was built on Soap Creek across the Des Moines River about seven miles from the agency. The other, at the request of Appanoose, was located on Sugar Creek. Both were badly damaged by floods in the spring or summer of 1840.

After a visit to the agency, Governor Lucas decided that the Appanoose mill should not be rebuilt but, upon the advice of "a gentleman of experience," he recommended that \$1500 should be spent to repair the Soap Creek mill and add a bolt to manufacture flour. His advice was followed and the flour bolt was ready for the 1841 wheat crop. In 1842 Agent Beach declared that the "saw and grist-mills belonging to the Indians on Soap creek are not surpassed by any, possessing the same water-power, in the country". Inasmuch as there was little demand for lumber in that region, the sawmill, capable of producing 2000 feet per day, was usually idle. The gristmill, however, when there was sufficient water power, was kept busy. "It can grind about eight bushels per hour," wrote Beach. "It will now be of much service to the Indians in manufacturing their flour; and having a good bolt attached, it makes a good flour, and as much from the grain, as is made at any mill upon the Des Moines. A race, with suitable gates, has been lately added, at an expense of \$200, which places the mill out of danger, except in extraordinary cases; whereas, before it was opened, the dam was in danger of being swept away at every freshet." Scarcely had the agent written his report when the mill was burned in August, 1842. Beach strongly suspected that it had been

set on fire by angry settlers who had been driven off the Indian reservation.

It was the policy of the government to teach the Indians agriculture by precept and example, but none of the Iowa tribes appreciated the instruction. Stephen Cooper, the sub-agent at Council Bluffs, reported in 1840 that the Potawatomi did not want a farmer. The Indians themselves had "raised a fine crop of corn and ground-provisions." Some, declared the agent, "have large fields, well fenced in, with good log-cabins, and are settled in villages from two to five, ten, and fifteen miles from the Council Bluffs sub-agency — except Big-foot's band, who live upon the waters of the Nishnebottona, about fifty miles east of this agency, which band constitutes about one-third of the nation. They have horses, cattle, hogs, and poultry, with farming utensils, such as ploughs, hoes, &c."

David Lowry, the Winnebago agent, was anxious to have his wards moved farther into the Neutral Ground away from the evil influences of the Prairie du Chien traders. "About one thousand acres of prairie will be broken up *this fall* [1840], and fenced during the winter", he wrote, "so that every thing will be ready *next spring* for the Indians to commence cultivating." Land in the vicinity of Fort Atkinson, "is of unsurpassed fertility, and timber sufficiently abundant to answer all

the purposes of farming." A gristmill was being erected near the new agency for the "comfort and convenience" of the Indians who, he insisted, would need these facilities to sustain themselves when their annuities expired.

The plan for the Sauks and Foxes was to provide a farm for each village. Agent Street proposed to cultivate about 1440 acres, but the results in 1840 were discouraging. Governor Lucas, who visited the agency in September, reported in detail to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs:

The pattern farm, containing thirty acres or upwards, as well as the farm at the agency, containing upwards of one hundred acres, appeared to be in good repair, and had the appearance of having been well cultivated.

In Appenoose's field, there had been about eleven acres of wheat, which had been hauled and stacked in the field. Nothing further had ever been done with this field since it had been ploughed and fenced. The fences were down in places, and the fields grown over with grass and weeds; and I should apprehend danger of the fences being burnt this fall, should the prairie get on fire.

Wappello's field has never been cultivated in anything since it was ploughed and fenced. The fences are down, and he told me in conversation with him at his village, that it had never been of any benefit to him.

A part of Keokuck's field was sown last year with wheat, which has been harvested and stacked. Nothing further has been done with this field. As I could not get across the river to the village, I can only speak from in-

formation. I was told that the fences were down, and that there was some danger of the wheat being destroyed by the Indian horses. It is the opinion of Major Smith, the miller, that there is wheat enough now stacked in the Indian fields, could it be properly saved and manufactured, to make them over a barrel of flour.

Agent Beach was more optimistic. Though the destruction of the mills was disappointing, the Indians had offered to tread out the wheat with their horses. He thought only a small quantity of produce could be expected the first year and estimated that the thirty-five acres of corn would yield 700 bushels, the two acres of buckwheat would produce thirty bushels, and the acre and a half of oats would yield thirty bushels. Eleven and a half acres were devoted to vegetables. The turnips looked unpromising in August, but Beach predicted a crop of 1000 bushels. Probably 400 bushels of potatoes would be dug. In addition, there would be "a good supply of beets, cabbage, onions, beans, and pumpkins, for the use of the farm hands."

Not enough wheat was harvested in 1840 to pay for the labor and money expended. "The quantity of ground sowed last year in wheat for the Indians was 72 acres," reported Agent Beach, "of which was destroyed, by their opening their fence, and letting in their horses, 16 acres. The balance, 56 acres, was harvested in due time and in good or-

der; and, I think, had it not been wasted, would have yielded $12\frac{1}{2}$ bushels to the acre, giving an aggregate of 700 bushels. But the crop having been much wasted while standing in the fields to cure, preparatory to stacking, by the Indians opening the fence and turning in numbers of their horses, will fall far short of the foregoing estimate."

On the whole, the Sauks and Foxes had exhibited no inclination "to undergo a practical instruction in agriculture or any of the mechanical arts," except what they could acquire "by a mere casual observation." Yet they often proved skillful in helping the blacksmith, and the agent was confident he could "engage much of their assistance in working the next and succeeding crops."

Measures taken to "effect a change upon the rude habits of these people," Agent Beach conceived to be eminently desirable. "Prove to them the material change that the improvements of civilization which are now attempted, and the result of industry, must exert in favor of their comfort and security," he advised, "and much of the difficulty is accomplished that now offers so great a barrier to the progress of the best-directed efforts to convince them of the value of those higher refinements of mind, of habits, and of character, to which the philanthropist should aim. Then will

the indifference now manifested towards education, and their aversion to the introduction of schools and teachers among them, be removed, and a taste for knowledge and instruction assume its place. Then, and not till then, can they be taught to feel a sincere interest in the sublime truths of religion, and yield a preference to the charitable inducements offered by the zealous Christian over the mercenary allurements of sordid avarice."

Everybody agreed that whisky was the principal menace to Indian welfare. Sub-agent Cooper said the Potawatomi could not be restrained from "trading with the whites for spirits," though he thought the traffic was less than it had been. Among the Sioux, however, the evil was growing rapidly in 1840. "The Indians will barter any thing for whiskey", wrote Agent Amos J. Bruce. "Unmindful of future wants, they sell corn, or clothing, or even their guns." Beach reported that the Sauk and Fox braves bought expensive goods, such as calf-skin boots, side saddles, and forty-five-dollar dress coats, which they never intended to use but traded, at a fraction of their value, for whisky. "I am credibly informed," he said, "there is a store, a few miles from this place, wherein whiskey was the only original article, that has become stocked, by exchange with the returning

Indians, with a large, though badly assorted quantity of goods, useless to them."

Control of the traders was, indeed, a serious problem. Some of them were unscrupulous and all assumed that the season was always open to plunder the Indians. Knowing that the various tribes received certain annuities, the traders extended credit so freely that the money paid to the Indians went immediately into the pockets of the traders. Presently, the annual allotments were insufficient to pay the debts, which caused dissatisfaction among both the creditors and the Indians. Independent traders claimed that the American Fur Company was favored, and the braves complained that they did not get their share of the money.

To remedy some of these conditions Agent John Beach thought that "the law should allow but one trader to one tribe, as the rivalry of interest that must of necessity exist among several can be productive of no good, and much evil". Furthermore, he suggested that the agent "should be vested with authority to direct the kind and quality of the merchandise that shall be offered for sale to the Indians." There was so much discord among the different bands that the efforts of the agent to improve conditions were practically hopeless. His endeavors to fulfill treaty obligations were "urged

as evidence of his improper personal friendship" toward one faction and enmity toward the other. The fomenters of dissension had inculcated this belief so successfully that the antagonistic element had "discontinued almost all use of him as a medium for the transaction of their business with the Government."

The tribal dissension culminated in a quarrel over the distribution of the annuities. In July, 1840, the Iowa Legislative Assembly advised President Van Buren to cause the Sauk and Fox allotments to be paid to the heads of families, or as the majority of the braves might request. Meanwhile, however, the Indian Office ordered the annuity to be given to the chiefs as before. The payment was already overdue when Governor Lucas met the Indians at the agency late in September, 1840. Agent John Beach, Major Joshua Pilcher who was Superintendent of Indian Affairs at Saint Louis, interpreters, agency employees, and traders were present. Governor Lucas described the occasion fully in his message to the Legislative Assembly on November 4th.

On the 28th of September the Indians were assembled at the Agency for payment. They arrayed themselves into two parties. One party wanted the money distributed on principles of justice and equity among the different bands and to the heads of families. The other party contended for its payment to a few of the chiefs, to be

distributed by them alone. I was present on the occasion, and addressed both parties. I advised them to compromise the difference among themselves — read and explained to them the treaties, as well as the intercourse law of the United States, and the regulations of the Indian Department. I also explained to them the order of the Indian Department of the 18th of August, and informed them that, according to my understanding of the order, the money must be paid to the same chiefs and braves that received it last year. I had the names of the chiefs and braves read to them, and advised them to meet in friendly council by themselves without the interference of any white men, and to decide among themselves as to the receipt and distribution of the money — and told them that when they had agreed among themselves the money would be paid them. The council adjourned in the evening, and the chiefs and braves who received the money last year were expected to have met in friendly council next morning to arrange their difficulties and receive their money. But some arrangements appear to have been made at the agency during the night, unknown to me, that frustrated the council to be held on the morning of the 29th, and Keokuck through the Agent, had advised Maj. Pilcher to leave the Indian country with the money, which he did that morning. This removal of the money from the Indian country caused great excitement and dissatisfaction among the Indians. When Maj. Pilcher left the agency he informed me that the funds being in paper, could be changed for specie, and might be returned for payment in about three weeks thereafter. I informed the Indians of what Maj. Pilcher had told me, which appeared for the time present to reconcile them. But I have learned, since my return from the Indian country, that some mischievous

individuals have been impressing upon the minds of the Indians the belief that the annuity will not be paid until spring. This was calculated to dissatisfy them with the government, lead to difficulties among themselves, and endanger the peace of our borders. I therefore, with a view to check these evils, issued a peremptory order to the Agent of the 15th of October, directing him to obtain the funds that had been set apart for the payment of the annuity of 1840, and to pay it to the same chiefs and braves whose names were found to the receipt roll of last year. This I conceived to be in strict accordance with the order of the Department. Those chiefs and braves number about 30, and are distributed about equally among the different parties; and should the money be paid to them in accordance with my order to the Agent, and they be left to dispose of it among themselves, without the interference of any of the traders, I have little doubt but that it will be distributed among the different bands justly, and be paid, as far as it will go, towards the liquidation of their just debt. But should the payment, from any consideration, be much longer delayed, there is danger that the excitement produced by its postponement will burst beyond the bounds of restraint and the Indians commence fighting among themselves and thereby endanger the peace of our frontier.

The Governor's anxiety about Indian hostilities was well founded. Ancient feuds between the tribes were perpetuated by occasional depredations. Early in September, 1840, four Sioux warriors killed and scalped a Potawatomi near Billy Caldwell's village, whereupon offended Indians

went on the warpath, pursued the Sioux, killed one, and wounded another. A Potawatomi brave was killed and a Sauk wounded.

The Sauks and Foxes hated the Winnebago for betraying them in the Black Hawk War. Since then they had murdered about forty Winnebago women and children. In 1839 a war party fell upon an encampment of Winnebago and killed several braves. This outrage was amicably adjusted through the intervention of the government whereby the Sauks and Foxes agreed to pay \$5000 to the aggrieved tribe. Soon after the truce was concluded, according to Governor Lucas, some Winnebago Indians visited the Sauk and Fox country as friends and treacherously killed two Foxes. This murder suspended the fulfillment of the former settlement. Relatives of the murdered braves, who according to tribal custom decided such matters, were consulted. The punishment of the guilty ones, argued the Foxes, would do the mourners no good. Furthermore, "they were poor; and if the arrangement could be made to pay them \$1,000 of the money that was to be paid by their nation to the Winnebagoes, that they would be satisfied; but observed, at the same time, that if the money was paid to cover their dead relatives, they wanted it paid to themselves".

If the relations between the Winnebago and the

Sauks and Foxes were generally hostile, a state of chronic belligerency existed between the Sioux and the Sauks and Foxes. Their implacable enmity seemed unabated in 1840. "Within a few months," reported John Beach, "parties from each nation have made incursions upon each other, several upon both sides having been killed. These actions are not reported to me by the Indians, as it seems to be their wish that the Government should interpose no restraint upon their relations with the Sioux, but suffer each to gratify their revengeful propensities, as their own wishes may dictate."

This continual warfare among the Indians, the pressure of settlement along the frontier, and the knavery of the traders were intolerable. The plight of the Winnebago was particularly bad. Situated on a narrow strip of land between two unfriendly tribes and accessible to unscrupulous white men, they were exposed to constant danger and therefore were a menace to the peace of the frontier. In the opinion of Governor Lucas nothing but the removal of the Sauks and Foxes could "wrest them from the avaricious control of the traders, and the blighting effects of intemperance, which, combined" were rapidly "hastening them to the lowest degree of degradation." He, therefore, advocated the negotiation of a treaty where-

by the Sauks and Foxes would cede all their land in Iowa "upon terms advantageous both to the Government and these Indians." This was accomplished in 1842.

Meanwhile, the dissatisfaction of the Indians with the payment of annuities and the encroachments of settlers on the reservation were provocative of trouble. Only the presence of soldiers prevented serious conflict. This situation "should admonish us," explained the Governor to the legislature, "to be on our guard, and to depend upon ourselves for defence in case hostilities should be commenced." He recommended "the expediency of authorizing by law, the organization of a number of mounted volunteer riflemen, say one company at least to every regiment of militia within the Territory, with authority for the commandant of any brigade to increase the number to a battalion within his brigade, and to provide for calling them into service in case of Indian depredations or threatened invasion. This precautionary measure can do no harm, and may ultimately secure our frontier from an Indian war." Though the legislature did not follow the Governor's advice, some such volunteer companies were formed. The dragoons stationed at Fort Atkinson were able to maintain peace on the frontier until the Indians were removed.

JOHN ELY BRIGGS