The Indian Cession of 1842

Times were hard for the Sauks and Foxes in 1842. While the small farm at the agency had produced some corn, oats, potatoes, and turnips in the previous season, the supply was inadequate for the 2300 Indians. Moreover, large parties of Potawatomi, Ioway, and Winnebago visited the Sauks and Foxes and "prolonged their stay through a great portion of the spring and summer, to the no small detriment of the scanty supply of subsistence then remaining". These neighbors had also hunted in the Sauk and Fox territory, to the injury of their hosts, as the game was "by no means abundant". The summer buffalo hunt was unsuccessful. Though crops were better in 1842, the grist mill on Soap Creek was burned in August. "During this summer," wrote Agent John Beach, the Indians under his care "suffered more from want of provisions than ever within my knowledge of them. They are also much more poorly clad than heretofore."

The only article that seemed to be plentiful was whisky. Unprincipled vendors over the Indian boundary kept the fire water flowing. At the time of the Black Hawk Purchase the confederated

tribes were sober and vigorous, but within a decade liquor had wrought serious deterioration. "Except when far distant upon their hunting grounds, the whole nation," reported Beach, "without distinction of rank or age or sex, exhibits a continual scene of the most revolting intoxication." It was a crime to sell whisky to the Indians, but the law provided no adequate means of enforcement.

Internal strife among the tribesmen contributed to their misery. The old rivalry between Black Hawk and Keokuk was perpetuated in the bitter opposition of Hardfish and his band of Black Hawk's followers to the leadership of Keokuk. Discrimination against this minority was evident in the distribution of annuities which the government paid to certain "money chiefs" who were responsible for dividing the cash among the families. In 1840 Hardfish accused Keokuk, Wapello, Appanoose, and Poweshiek of fraud and proposed that the government pay the annuities directly to heads of families. After much bickering among the Indians and confusion on the part of agents and traders this plan was adopted in 1841.

Though more than $80,000 was distributed to the Sauk and Fox braves in October that year, it did little to alleviate the poverty of the tribes and actually contributed to their further degradation.

The payment of the annuities "was followed by a debauch such as the Indians had never known before." Whisky flowed freely for days. Chiefs and braves alike squandered their money on neckties and fancy vests and the squaws bedecked themselves in bright calico and colored beads. Presently the traders had most of the cash, and the debts which the Indians had previously incurred were as large as ever. With their annuities spent and the cloud of debt still darkening their sky, the destitute Sauks and Foxes were in a desperate plight. Their only asset was their land.

When Governor John Chambers had proposed in 1841 that they sell central Iowa to the United States for a million dollars and move to a reservation at the headwaters of the Des Moines River they had refused. But debt and poverty during the following year caused some of the chiefs to reconsider their decision. In February, Keokuk, Appanoose, and Wapello proposed to cede part of their land to pay their debts to the traders. Even Hardfish agreed. By summer conditions were worse. White settlers were crowding close to the Indian country, whisky sellers were increasing, and the Indians were restless. The time was favorable for another treaty council.

In anticipation of such an occasion the traders prepared their claims. Governor Chambers, being

responsible for protecting the interests of the Indians, suspected that some of the accounts might be padded and so he appointed Alfred Hebard and Arthur Bridgman to investigate all claims and determine the amount of the Indian indebtedness. The liquidation of all financial obligations was to be an essential part of the negotiations. Thus, the traders were anxious to promote the land cession and the Indians were willing to pay all just debts.

Fifty-eight claims, amounting in all to $312,-366.24, were presented to the special auditors who listened to the explanations of traders and Indians. The accounts of J. P. Eddy were found to be entirely accurate and most of the bills of Pierre Chouteau, Jr., were allowed, but the demands of W. G. and G. W. Ewing were reduced about 25 per cent because they had charged too much for "Italian cravats", "satin vests", and fancy "looking glasses". Some exorbitant claims by settlers and independent traders were thrown out entirely. Fair charges were promptly acknowledged, which demonstrated the trait of honesty in Indian character. In the end the Sauk and Fox debt was fixed at $258,566.34.

In preparation for the treaty council Agent Beach set up a large circular tent with a raised platform at one side for the government officials facing a row of seats around the opposite side of

the tent for the chiefs. About ten o'clock on the morning of October 4, 1842, Governor Chambers in the dress uniform of a brigadier general, accompanied by Antoine Le Claire and Josiah Smart as interpreters, the claim adjusters, Captain James Allen and Lieutenant C. F. Ruff from Fort Atkinson, and Agent Beach took their places on the platform. They were followed by the Indian leaders. Keokuk in splendid attire stopped opposite the Governor and the other chiefs "freshly painted with gay fantastic figures" took seats on either side. Appanoose was there, and Poweshiek from his village on the Iowa River. The son of Black Hawk, over six feet tall and able bodied, the aged Pashepaho, and Wishecomaque known as Hardfish represented the minority faction. At a signal all were seated. The elegant Kishkekosh rested his chin on the gold knob of his cane "like a fine old English gentleman."

Governor Chambers opened the council. "My friends," he began, "I am glad to meet you once more in council. When I was here last year, at the fall of the leaf, we made you an offer for the sale of your land in this territory to which you were not willing to accede." The Governor then proceeded to explain the new proposition. As he spoke, an interpreter "Indianized" his address sentence by sentence. The Great Father in Wash-

ington offered a "thousand boxes of money" ($1,000,000) for all the Sauk and Fox land in Iowa, he said. "Out of that he expects you to pay all the debts you now owe. He will put a part of it in such a situation that it will never lessen and give you so much a year through all time; that is, he will give 5% a year or fifty dollars on each box. He directs me to urge upon you to apply some portion of it to educate your children, to learn them to read and write and to keep accounts so that they may not be cheated by bad men. He wishes you to make yourselves farms and build comfortable homes." To protect the Indians from the encroachment of white settlers, the President suggested that they move beyond the mouth of the Raccoon River until a permanent reservation could be found for them.

To this plan the Governor gave his approval. "Your money is now wasted, like water", he declared, "your young men are dissipated and you all have a great deal of trouble. If you will adopt his advice, your money will last longer, your young men will be kept from the evils of intemperance, your condition will be bettered and you will all be happier." He concluded by advising the Indians to consider the offer and give their answer the next day.

Two days were consumed in tribal discussion.

Every chief and principal brave had his say many times. At night the Indian camp about a mile east of the agency building was "converted into a vast ball room" where the men performed every variety of dancing known to them, accompanied by the measured beating of the drum. When the council reconvened on Thursday morning, October 6th, Poweshiek announced, in the name of the Great Spirit who had given the beautiful land to the Foxes to do with as they pleased, that the tribes had agreed on a plan to sell part of their territory.

Kishkekosh, proud that this was "the first time the Foxes have ever spoken first in council", explained that four alternative proposals had been considered. In view of the fact that the region contained precious minerals, the Indians thought they ought to have more money for their land. But they had all finally agreed to sell a particular area and authorized the chiefs to "deliver the voice of the nation."

Hardfish spoke for his band of Sauks. "You have heard what my friends, the Foxes, have said. I was pleased to hear you advise us to think deeply of this matter and I think we have done so. Now the fourth proposition upon which we have all agreed", he announced, was to sell all the land east of a line beginning at the old northwest corner of Missouri and running northeast to a point on

the Des Moines River called Painted Rocks and thence to the mouth of Deer Creek on the Iowa River. "This is a serious matter with us", he concluded. "The country we now have left upon which to support our women and children is very small. But we have agreed among ourselves to this offer. We talked a great deal before concluding upon it, weighing and examining the matter well before we made up our mind. And we are now willing to sell you this portion of our land because we want to pay our traders and to please our friends and relations by giving something to them."

Old Pashepaho then endorsed what the Foxes and his chief Hardfish had said. A brave, called the Prophet, stepped into the open space before the Governor, tossed away his blanket, and declared he was "not ashamed to come before you like a man and express my pleasure at the understanding to which we have come among ourselves. I hope that when you make this treaty you will blot out all our debts and I have thrown off my blanket to show you that I am willing to give all I have to pay an old debt we owe for having robbed a trader, Mr. George Hunt, a long time ago."

Of course Governor Chambers could not accept this counter proposal of the Indians. He explained again that the offer of the government was

for all their land. Less than half of it would be worth scarcely enough to pay their debts, and the traders, settlers, and whisky sellers would continue to despoil them "as buzzards do a carcass". The minerals which the Indians considered valuable he said were of no advantage to the white men. Many "wear out their lives in digging without any success", he argued, and such property gave "more trouble than profit". It would be best, he urged, to sell all their land at once, move to better hunting grounds beyond the reach of the white men, and accept the care of the Great Father who would teach them to live easier and better.

When the Governor had finished, Keokuk, who had remained silent, arose with the dignity of one in authority and spoke as the cunning diplomat he was. "This is the second time we have heard you on this subject. I think my friends have made a mistake in saying that all of our people have been in council. That can not have been." Thus, repudiating the plan the other chiefs had presented as a unanimous decision, he kept the way open for further negotiation without personal loss of face, though he humiliated the Foxes and Hardfish's band. Having spoken, he stalked out of the tent, and so the council dispersed.

Again the Sauks and Foxes considered their

plight. Finally, on Saturday morning, when the council reassembled, Poweshiek took the position of spokesman. "I believe we are now all present", he said. "This is an important occasion to us and as is usual with us in such cases, we have taken much time to consider it and we are all willing now to accept the proposition you made us last fall." Kishkekosh endorsed this decision, but tactfully mentioned that the Governor had apparently forgotten that previously he had offered $1,000,000 for their land in addition to paying their debts. These terms were echoed by Hardfish, Pashepaho, and even Keokuk who now joined the other chiefs in the decision to sell all their hunting grounds in Iowa. He insisted, however, that his people should be given three years in which to move to their new home. "We are now ready to draw up the writing", he concluded, "and in doing so, we have many little things to talk about; many poor friends and relatives to think of, and also to provide for the future as well as the present and past."

The informal conversations began that afternoon and all negotiations, including the amount of indebtedness, were concluded on Monday. Keokuk hoped that, inasmuch as this would be the last treaty with the government, the Great Father would send a large medal to each chief and to each

of the principal braves a smaller one. Furthermore, he had heard that the great council at Washington "sometimes altered treaties made with the red men after they were signed" and so he proposed to include a statement that this treaty was "not to be altered or changed in any way".

According to the terms of the treaty which was signed on Tuesday, October 11, 1842, the Sauks and Foxes ceded to the United States all their land in central Iowa and agreed to move west of a meridian running through the Red Rocks on the Des Moines River by the following May and to leave the State within three years. In exchange the Federal government promised to pay the debts and $40,000 annually to the tribes. At the urgent request of the Indians a hundred dollars were set aside to erect a monument over the grave of Chief Wapello who had been buried beside his friend Joseph M. Street, and a section of land including the burial plot and agency house was given to Mrs. Street. Twenty-two Sauk and twenty-two Fox chiefs and braves signed the treaty with Governor Chambers.

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