

THE PALIMPSEST

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Indian Affairs

We were fortunate in having arrived at the Sac and Fox Agency on Monday last, October 11, 1841, before any business had been transacted. Governor Chambers and T. Hartley Crawford, two of the commissioners, having arrived the day before, the several Indian bands paid their respects to them shortly after our arrival. The Indians were clothed in their best, and being well mounted presented a most imposing appearance. The usual ceremony of shaking hands being ended, they had a talk with the Governor and Mr. Crawford, the burden of which was that they were very much gratified at their visit, and expressed themselves much pleased at the happy issue to which the Governor and Agent had

[This narrative of the proceedings at the conference on the payment of government annuities held in October, 1841, at the Sac and Fox Agency on the Des Moines River was written by the editor of the Burlington *Hawk-Eye* who, among other notable Iowans, was present on the occasion. It is here reprinted from *Niles' National Register*, Vol. 61, pp. 168, 169, November 13, 1841.—THE EDITOR]

brought their long standing difficulties, so that now the several bands connected with their nation had the most amicable feeling toward each other. Directly after this interview we learn that Poweshiek's and Keokuk's bands were about to go through the ceremony of "smoking for horses". This being new to most present, excited considerable curiosity and as our readers may be equally curious, we shall attempt to give them a description of it.

Poweshiek, with his band, assembled on the beautiful lawn in front of the agency house, and commenced the ceremony by ranging his followers in a sitting posture on the ground. Keokuk and his band took their position about twenty paces immediately in front. These remained standing. Presently one of Keokuk's men crossed over to the other band, leading a horse with one hand and carrying a pipe in the other. Having selected his man, he handed him the pipe; after it was taken and smoked, he then placed the bridle in the smoker's hand and presented him with the horse. The horse was then led off to the rear of Poweshiek's band by the man who had received it, the donor retiring in great glee to his companions opposite. Immediately after and in quick succession several horses, amounting to thirteen, were smoked for and given in the same way. The most interesting part of the ceremony consisted in seeing Keokuk leading a horse with a small boy, about six or seven years old, mounted on him. Just before he arrived at the place of presen-

tation, he lifted the boy off the horse, placed the bridle in his hand, and then handed the pipe to one of Poweshiek's men, at the same time directing the boy to give the horse to the man to whom he gave the pipe. What added the most interest to this transaction was the fact that this little boy is a Sioux prisoner, who has been adopted by Keokuk, and is treated by him as kindly — and perhaps more so — as an only son. It is known that the Sioux are the most deadly enemies of the Sacs and Foxes, and the tenderness with which this child is treated may appear strange to those who are not aware that it is a custom among various tribes so to treat the children of their enemies who are taken in battle. Several have offered to take this child, and Mr. William Phelps promised to bring it up and educate it with his own children, if Keokuk would give him up; another offered two horses for the child, but all these propositions were peremptorily declined by O. K. as Keokuk is now called.

It is surprising to see the excitement this "smoking for horses" produces among the Indians. They not only gave away horses, but blankets, whole pieces of calico, every article of dress, and one Indian, who had on a handsome military coat, for which he probably allowed the trader from whom he purchased it one hundred dollars took that from his back and presented it to the Indian who had smoked for it. Another absolutely stripped off all his clothing, saving his leggings, breech cloth, and

moccasins, and gave them away in the same manner. When the above ceremony is conducted between two distinct tribes, it has another appendage, which was not put in requisition at this time. It is this: the Indian who makes the present starts off with a bridle and pipe in one hand and a common Indian whip in the other. The receivers or donees sit in a row, with their backs all bared. He approaches, and, after selecting his man, lays on the whip with all his might. If the man does not flinch under two or three "licks" on his bare back, the pipe is handed him, and, after taking a "whiff", he receives the horse, or whatever else it may be. If, however, he should make the least movement, or appear to writhe under the lash the present is withheld from him, and he is called a "squaw".

We have been thus particular in describing this ceremony, supposing many of our readers unacquainted with its details, and because nothing of more novelty has transpired since our arrival. Directly after the "smoking" was over, Keokuk made a speech, and the Indians dispersed.

The dragoons, who are stationed here to protect the Indians, then turned out and went through various evolutions, exhibiting a precision in all their movements which reflected credit on their commander and a state of discipline which can hardly be found out of the regular service. This company is composed of fine looking men. They are commanded by Lieutenant Thomas McCrate, who is a

noble, gallant officer, and by his modest, gentlemanly deportment in the private circle has endeared himself to all his acquaintances. The manœuvrings of this corps greatly delighted the Indians, who, while they care little for infantry, stand in great awe of mounted soldiers. Each man in the company is armed with a sabre, pair of pistols, and a "carbine", or short musket, with a very long bayonet. Since they have been stationed here, which is about a fortnight, they have done considerable service. It is known that all trespassers on the Indian lands were warned by the Agent, in pursuance of instructions, to leave the country by the first of October. Several left; and among them one man had secreted his household effects under the floor, with the evident intention of returning as soon as the dragoons had gone, which he thought would be as soon as the payments and treaty were over. Not knowing anything of what was under the house, the dragoons set fire to it, as they had done to fifteen or eighteen other cabins, and burned it up, with all its contents. Public sentiment, we are glad to find, seems to accord with this action on the part of the government officers; and it certainly has given the Indians confidence in their protectors. Infringements on the Indian territory will not be tolerated by the administrators of the government in these parts, depredators may rest assured.

In the evening we visited Hardfish's encampment. Before mentioning the circumstances of our visit,

however, we shall endeavor to describe the various localities. As you approach the Agency from the settlements, the whole landscape is most beautifully interspersed with prairie and delightful groves of timber. Within a few miles of it, two of these groves nearly meet, as if disposed to kiss each other. The prairie is just rolling enough in all this region to make excellent farms. The agency house, which is built in handsome style, is situated directly in front of an extensive grove of first-rate timber, having a never failing stream suitable for stock, running within a few hundred yards of its rear; and in front, for about a mile in extent each way, lies a small prairie, most of which is under a high state of cultivation, called the agency farm. Directly to the east, in an enclosure, is the encampment of the dragoons. As you go beyond the Agency, and less than a mile to the southwest of it, you come to the encampment of Hardfish. About two or three hundred yards to the south, near a branch, the Burlington encampment may be seen composed of about a dozen tents, all crowded with a set of as jolly fellows as ever "camped out". About half a mile west of the agency house, Poweshiek's band have made their encampment. Near the road, and directly south of this encampment, stands the new council house. These with numerous individual encampments, form the *tout ensemble* of the vicinity of the Agency, including the interpreter's house, blacksmith's house and shop, and the old council house. About one mile

west the farm is situated. It is highly cultivated; upwards of one hundred acres of wheat have been sown this season, which looks remarkably well. Large quantities of corn, potatoes, turnips and melons, besides stock, have also been raised on it, the whole reflecting much credit on Richard Kerr, the government farmer.

Our visit at Hardfish's tent was interesting. We found most of the squaws cooking, which added much novelty to the scene. To see upwards of two hundred tents with a large fire at the mouth of each on a dark night was quite imposing. While the *ladies* were employed in cooking, some of the young men were engaged in dancing, others again were singing war songs in their tents. We visited Nahseuskuk's (Young Black Hawk) tent, where we found him with his handsome young wife and child, more comfortably and neatly fixed than many white families in regular built houses. This young man excites more interest than almost any other Indian. He belongs to this band. Next to his tent may be found his mother, who is still as polite to strangers as she was in the lifetime of her chief.

On Tuesday, the commissioners met the several bands at the council house, for the purpose of giving them a talk relative to the manner in which they would receive their second annual payment, two of which were now due. They had at a previous council determined to receive their first payments through their chiefs. Governor Chambers congrat-

ulated the Indians on the settlement of their difficulties, and hoped that they would now come to some harmonious conclusion among themselves, without the influence of the traders. He commented pretty severely on the course and influence of the traders, and told them he should leave a guard around the council house, at which place he would leave them to consult among themselves, without the presence of a single white man, including even the interpreters. He told them he should look for an answer from them the next morning.

On Wednesday, the commissioners and Indians again assembled at the council house. All the chiefs and head men spoke on the subject of the second payment. The purport of their talk was that they had concluded to receive it by heads of families. It appeared, however, that the very men who were the most strenuous for this mode of payment from the first, and who had permitted this question to foster the feud and bitter feeling which has for the last two years existed between them, were now most anxious that it should be made in the usual way. They could now see that by paying individuals, the traders were less likely to get their pay than by the old mode. It was anticipated that as soon as the heads of families received their share, instead of paying their old debts, they would scatter their money for new purchases, whereas, if it was paid to the chiefs, they would pay it out for the liquidation of their old debts.

After the Indians had expressed their determination to be paid in the new mode, it was necessary before proceeding any further to take a census of the whole nation and ascertain the number in each family. The Agent, Captain John Beach, then informed the Indians about the order in which he should take the census, and required that all the chiefs should be present during the whole process, so that they might be a check on each other, and detect fraud if any was attempted to be practiced. Governor Chambers also informed them that if he found a single family giving in more than its actual number he should deprive it of every cent of the payment. The Agent commenced taking the census on Wednesday afternoon, and by noon the next day he had completed it. Such expedition and promptitude on this occasion is highly creditable to the Agent. While the census was being taken, the Indians seemed to have much sport among themselves. As each representative head of a family would come up with his bundle of little sticks, to show the number in his or her family, numerous jokes were passed on both sides, either about the name or the queer way in which the interpreter spoke it, or about their families, children, &c. After the census was taken, it appeared that the whole nation of Sacs and Foxes only amounted to just twenty-three hundred. Mr. D. D. Mitchell, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis, who is now here, says that at the last treaty at Rock Island in 1832, he saw nearly

fifteen hundred warriors on horseback, who belonged to this same nation, and the nation could not then have numbered much less than *eight thousand* people. What a melancholy difference nine years have made among them!

In the afternoon of Thursday the money was conveyed to the council house. The Agent informed the Indians that he was now ready to pay them their last year's annuity in the manner agreed upon. Before he proceeded to pay them, however, the Governor addressed them. It had been intimated to him that as soon as the individual payment was made the Indians would probably scatter, and thus frustrate the principal object of the commissioners in their attempt to hold a treaty. He informed the Indians that he wished the chiefs to pledge themselves for their several bands, that they would remain on the ground after the individual payment was made, as the commissioners had much of importance to say to them. The chiefs required till the next morning to make up their minds as to giving this pledge. Forty-one thousand dollars were then distributed to the several chiefs. The chiefs handed the bundles of Missouri bank bills around among their people, each headman taking them in his hands. While it was thus passed about, a bundle containing twenty-six thousand dollars was handed to Kishkekosh, who shrewdly asked if he might go away with it. On the breaking up of the council to-day we found Governor J. D. Doty at the agency house, who had

arrived a few hours previous, and of course the commission was now full.

On Friday morning, very early, the chiefs informed the commissioners that they could not accede to the pledge required of them, as some of their people might leave after the individual payment was made; and, rather than be thought to have deceived the commissioners, they declined giving the pledge. This frankness and honesty on the part of the chiefs is highly commendable, and shows that they have some honor in their composition, if they are Indians. This was good news for those who had been waiting for the treaty. Preparations were immediately made, and the council house was crowded early.

Mr. Crawford, Superintendent of Indian Affairs at Washington, in accordance with his instructions, made a proposition to the Indians, which was briefly this: The Indians were to cede all their lands to the United States. The government on being assured of such cession promised to convey the Indians to the *north* and give them a place on the land recently purchased from the Sioux by Governor Doty. For their safety, the government promised to erect three forts and man them; it also promised to erect for each family a *house* to cost \$150, with six acres of land fenced and plowed; the chiefs to have each a house at double the cost with twelve acres attached. They were also to be furnished with agricultural implements; a schoolmaster was likewise to be provided and a schoolhouse erected.

The proposition was left with the Indians, and they were to meet again at twelve o'clock on Saturday. On Saturday they met, but the Indians gave notice that they were not prepared to give an answer. They met again on Sunday at ten o'clock and informed the commissioners that they could not accede to the proposition of the government. Keokuk, since their reconciliation, has again become their chief orator. He objected to going north, and seemed quite eloquent, as he dwelt upon the claims his people had to the country they now occupied — that they had gained it fairly by conquest, and that they did not want to leave it. He spoke in the most ironical manner of the attempt to build houses and establish schools among them. They were free, and wished to remain free as air. Of course, this broke up the treaty.

To the thousands who are anxiously wishing for a new purchase, we would say, by way of consolation, that the prospect of making a purchase between now and next summer is very fair. Few will be sorry that the purchase was not made on the terms proposed. To erect the forts and the large number of houses, and plow up the ground, and perform the other preliminary engagements proposed by the government, would have occupied nearly three years; and as the government had pledged itself that the Indians should not be removed until everything was prepared for them, they of course would not have left Iowa until the government had complied with

its engagements. We believe that representations will be made to the government, and the people interested should petition Congress, so as to induce the government to acquiesce in the proposition to purchase one-half of the Sac and Fox country, say as high up as the Raccoon Forks, which place is upwards of one hundred miles west of our present boundary. We know from individual personal intercourse with the Indians that they are willing to sell half. If such a purchase should be made, the Indians could move beyond the boundary at a moment's notice, and the government could come into immediate possession of a large and beautiful tract of country.

We are informed by those who have travelled several hundred miles above the Raccoon Forks, that the country is not at all desirable after you get fifty or seventy miles above that point. The country abounds in elk and buffalo. Lieutenant McCrate informed us that he saw about seven hundred elk in one drove, and that it took the dragoons half a day to *cross* the trail of one drove of buffaloes.

JAMES G. EDWARDS