

Making the Treaty of 1842

The Sacs and Foxes did not prosper after their crushing defeat in the Black Hawk War. By the treaties of 1832, 1836, and 1837 the eastern Iowa country had passed from their possession. Each year they became more heavily indebted to the traders and the white frontier pressed harder and harder against them. In 1841 Governor Chambers held a conference with them in regard to their debts and suggested that they sell the rest of their land in Iowa and move to a new home. But the Indians refused to sell. The debts, however, had to be paid, and the red men had nothing with which to pay them except their land. Accordingly in 1842 the Sacs and Foxes were summoned to another conference at the site of the Agency, a few miles east of the present city of Ottumwa.

At the appointed time the tribes assembled and encamped about a mile east of the agency house. They spread their wickiups, several hundred in number, over half a mile of prairie, making "as pretty and romantic a scene as eyes could rest upon" according to a writer who beheld the encampment and wrote about it for the *Burlington Territorial Gazette and Advertiser*.

To this same writer the Indians appeared much more elegant than he had anticipated, for their

clothing and trappings were all new. The Sacs and Foxes, he thought, were "the finest looking Indians on the globe — of large, athletic, and perfect forms, and most graceful carriage." Keokuk was there in savage splendor; and the handsome son of Black Hawk, over six feet in height and weighing two hundred pounds, was a striking figure. Kishkekosh, the Beau Brummel of the Foxes, carried a gold headed cane which he twirled in his fingers "in the most elegant style imaginable".

Nor were the whites eclipsed by the splendor of the red men. Upon the advice of his friend, William Henry Harrison, Governor Chambers had donned the showy uniform of a brigadier general of the army for the occasion. Captain James Allen and Lieutenant C. F. Ruff had arrived from Fort Des Moines with a detachment of United States dragoons. And the dragoon uniform of that day with its fancy cap, dark blue coat, and light blue trousers was impressive indeed. Commissioners Alfred Hebard and Arthur Bridgman, Indian Agent John Beach, the interpreters Josiah Smart and Antoine Le Claire, and the licensed traders such as George Davenport, J. Sanford, L. S. Phelps, William Phelps, J. P. Eddy, W. G. and G. W. Ewing, and James Jordan were prominent figures in the white contingent at the conference. Hundreds of visitors — small traders, land speculators, whisky vendors, some newspaper editors, and prospective settlers — had gathered for the occasion.

For a council chamber Agent Beach had erected a large circular tent with a slightly raised platform on one side for Governor Chambers, his interpreter, Antoine Le Claire, and a few others. In front of the platform was an open space for the Indian orators. A circular row of seats extended around the body of the tent for the accommodation of the chiefs.

Shortly before ten o'clock on the morning of October 4th, Governor Chambers, his interpreter, and his unadorned aids marched into the tent and took their places on the platform. Then Keokuk and his fellow chiefs "filed in slowly and as gravely as a band of Roman Senators" — Keokuk stopping directly in front of the Governor and his companions deploying on either side. Each chief wore his best blanket, "freshly painted with gay fantastic figures, with feathers and fine plumage in the hair." Many wore bracelets on their wrists and various dangles in their ears, "having a fancy war-club in one hand, richly embossed with large-headed brass nails."

At a given signal all were seated. Kishkekosh rested his chin upon the gold knob of his cane like a fine old English gentleman. Governor Chambers arose and said: "My friends, 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. I then told you that no further attempt to treat with you would be made until you asked for it. Towards the close of the last winter,

your agent told me you wished to go to Washington for that purpose. I wrote to your Great Father and told him of your wishes, but the great council of the whites was then in session and he had too much business to permit him to meet you there. But he has now sent me here to talk to you again about it and he has told me he does not wish to hold frequent councils with you and make frequent purchases of you. He wishes now to settle you in a permanent home."

Then Governor Chambers explained that their Great Father would give them one thousand boxes of money — \$1,000,000 — for their land, out of which he would pay all their debts which ought to be paid, and would give them a new home out of the way of the white men who were pressing against them in such great numbers. His speech was translated sentence by sentence by the interpreter as he went along.

One by one the chiefs made reply. Said Keokuk, "We are happy to meet you here to-day, as the representative of our Great Father in Washington in friendly council." Kakake, a Fox chief, declared, "My friends, the advice of our father is good and I hope we may all meet and talk it over friendly and amicably."

After these opening speeches and greetings there was a general handshaking all around and the council adjourned. Meanwhile, the Claim Commissioners Hebard and Bridgman had begun their task of

investigating the debts of the Indians. They found that the total amounted to \$312,366.24. Among the items charged were looking glasses at \$30 each, "Italian cravats" and "satin vests" at \$8 each, "dress coats" at \$45, and superfine "satinet coats" at \$60 each. The commissioners sifted the claims carefully and reduced the total to \$258,564.34. There appeared no disposition on the part of the Indians to avoid payment of their just debts, but when a party near Iowaville brought in a bill for beef supplied the red men there was a hurried conference. Then Keokuk jumped up and in a loud voice exclaimed, "Throw that out! That worthless old bull has been too much paid for already!" This claim was omitted.

The negotiations lasted for several days. Many of the chiefs were loath to part with more land. They claimed that the Great Spirit made this beautiful country and put the Indian into it. His title to the land ran back to the beginning of things. They talked of "their great meadows of green, gay in the aftermonths of the season with blooming flowers — of the springs and running streams — of the groves that bordered the streams, and especially of the great sycamores and walnuts, that stood in vast numbers on all the larger alluvians." They also talked "of the sun and the moon, as though made for them — of the stars, with a kind of wondering delight, as guardian watchmen — of their Great Spirit hovering over them." There was some hag-

gling too about prices. Keokuk said little at first, allowing others to indulge themselves in oratory, but when he spoke he commanded instant attention by his eloquence. Throughout the conference he was a dominating figure.

Every night the Indian camp was converted into a vast ball room and every variety of dance was performed by the tribesmen. Under the bright light of a harvest moon young men and old joined in the revelry of the dance, swirling faster and faster in time to the weird throbbing of the drums. The younger members of the Indian encampment amused themselves by apeing the dance at a respectful distance or by wrestling and running races. The squaws took little part in the amusements, being content apparently to watch their resplendent braves perform tribal ceremonies.

At last the Indians reached an agreement among themselves and with Governor Chambers as to what they were willing to do. According to the treaty concluded and signed on October 11, 1842, the Sacs and Foxes ceded to the United States all of their land in Iowa, nearly one-third of the State. The tract extended from the boundary line of the so-called Second Purchase westward to where the waters begin to fall into the Missouri River and from the State of Missouri on the south to the Neutral Ground on the north. The Indians agreed to vacate the lands as far west as a line running north and south through the Red Rocks in Marion County by

the first of May, 1843, and to remove from the remainder in 1845. In exchange for this vast area the government agreed to pay annually to the Sacs and Foxes an interest of five per cent upon the sum of \$800,000 and to pay their debts amounting to \$258,566.34. At the request of the Indians the sum of \$100 was set aside to erect a monument over the grave of Chief Wapello who had been buried alongside the body of his friend, the late General Joseph M. Street. Moreover, a section of land, including the burial plot and the agency house, was given to the widow of General Street by the Indians in appreciation of the many acts of kindness he had extended to them as their Agent.

When the treaty had been duly signed, Governor Chambers said: "My friends, this business on which we have been engaged, being now concluded, I take pleasure in saying to you that you have acted nobly and generously. I shall so inform your Great Father who I am sure will feel much kindness toward you. The step you have taken is an important one.

"In conclusion, I implore that the Great Spirit above will always watch over and protect you. I bid you now farewell."

And the Indians, having taken the Governor by the hand, departed from the council chamber in solemn dignity. They had sold the very heart of the State of Iowa for approximately twelve cents per acre.

BRUCE E. MAHAN