

Black Hawk — The Last Campaign

In early April, 1832, Black Hawk brought his band of followers up the Iowa side of the Mississippi. He had been able to recruit between four and five hundred warriors, mainly on horseback, for the crusade to regain his homeland. With them were their women and children, making an assemblage that may have totaled about two thousand persons.

It was not so much a war party as a tribal migration. Transporting all they owned, about a third of the Sauk and Fox confederacy was returning to the land that Black Hawk was now sure he could reoccupy. The men carried arms but the women carried a possession even more important to survival, their bags of seed corn. Black Hawk insisted that he was going to plant corn, at the invitation of the Prophet, and that he would not fight unless attacked.

Perhaps urged on by the women who knew that the planting season would soon be upon them, Black Hawk led his band across the Mississippi, just below the mouth of the Iowa River, on April 5. Then, as the mounted warriors strung out along the shore and their families followed them upstream in canoes, the group began a slow march

toward their destination — the cornfields they had been promised by the Prophet.

A worrisome aspect of their trip was the fact that they had been passed by several steamboats carrying soldiers. Black Hawk feared that these troops might be waiting to intercept him at the mouth of the Rock. "Consequently," he wrote in his autobiography, "on entering the Rock River, we commenced beating our drums and singing, to show the Americans that we were not afraid." But he met no opposition at the mouth of the river, and his party journeyed on toward the Prophet's village.

The soldiers whom the Indians had seen were under the command of General Henry Atkinson. The General arrived at Fort Armstrong on April 12 with six companies, and the next day held a council with representatives from the peaceable majority of the Sauks and Foxes — those who had chosen to remain west of the river. He then sent a message to Governor John Reynolds, of Illinois, reporting the return of Black Hawk.

With rumors now flying, and with no one certain of the disposition of the Indians, Governor Reynolds called out the militia. On the day after he heard from Atkinson, he ordered twelve hundred men, armed and mounted, to assemble by April 22 at Beardstown.

At Fort Armstrong the General did what he could to avoid a clash. He sent a messenger to

overtake Black Hawk and demand his return. When this failed, he sent the following warning:

If you do not come back and go on the other side of the great river I shall write to your great father & tell him of your bad conduct. You will be sorry if you do not come back. . . . If your hearts are good I will send an officer to talk with you in three or four days.

The tenor of Black Hawk's reply was aggressive. He sent word that his "heart was bad." In other words, his heart bore anger and he was not inclined to obey the General's order. The old man still believed what he had been told by his advisers: that the British would send help down from Canada, and that other tribes would join him to fight, if he was opposed by the Americans. During a council with Henry Gratiot, the Indian Agent for the Winnebagoes, Black Hawk's men confidently hoisted the British flag.

By now, however, General Atkinson's sternness was beginning to make an impression. It looked as if Black Hawk would really need the help he had been promised, if he was to resist six companies of United States regulars and an army of irate Illinois settlers. He pushed on up the Rock River to see the Potawatomi chiefs, because he had been told that they strongly supported him. When a deputation of Potawatomi Indians called on him, they offered little help and showed no great interest in the situation. As Black Hawk relates:

I inquired if they had heard that a chief of our British father was coming to Milwaukee, to bring us guns, ammunition, goods and provisions? They said no. . . . I concluded to tell my people, that if the White Beaver came after us, we would go back — as it was useless to think of stopping or going on without provisions. I discovered, that the Winnebagoes and the Pottowatomies were not disposed to render us any assistance.

United States troops were now headed up the Rock River, on foot and by boat, and the Illinois volunteers were waiting for them at Dixon. On May 12 the Potawatomi Indian Agent reported that "the Sauk are on the Rock River about thirty miles above Ogee's Ferry [Dixon] in a state of starvation and anxious to descend the river. But if they came back down, they would be met by the trigger-happy Illinois militia.

At this point the Black Hawk War could have been averted without violence. The old leader, deceived and full of regret, was ready to call off his march. No British aid, no Indian aid, no food, no hope. He seemed to realize now the degree to which he had been fooled by false promises and his own naive compulsion. In despair, he fell back upon the only device he could think of to relieve his hungry people. He ran up a flag of truce.

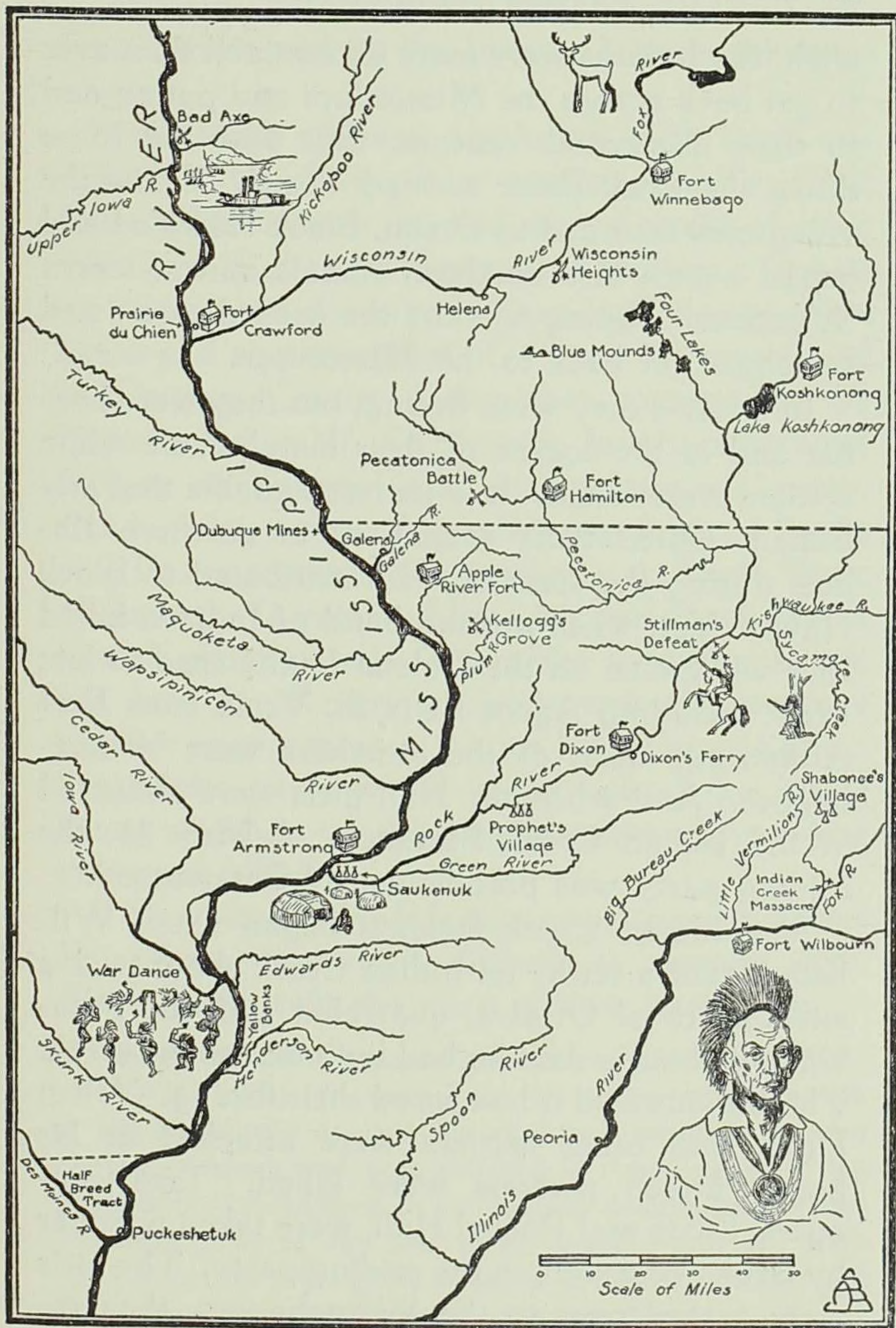
Unfortunately, the men to whom Black Hawk sent the flag of truce were not disciplined regulars, but militiamen who had been under arms but a few days. Major Isaiah Stillman, commanding a battalion of about 275 men, was preparing to en-

camp at sundown, May 14, a few miles southwest of Sycamore Creek in Ogle County, Illinois (the creek is now called the Kishwaukee River). When Black Hawk learned of this force, he sent three of his men with a white flag to the camp, "that we might hold a council with them, and descend Rock river again." He also sent a party of five scouts to watch, from a distance, the reception given by the Americans to his truce-bearers.

What excited the militiamen was not the three men with the flag, but the scouts watching from afar. Apparently thinking that a large Indian party was present, Major Stillman's men fired upon the scouts. In the confusion and excitement, two of the scouts were killed, and in the camp one of the emissaries was also killed.

In some disorder, the troops then set off in pursuit of the Indians. Most of Black Hawk's band was scattered into small groups, and only a few were available to resist Stillman's attack. Governor Reynolds later estimated the number of Indians at between fifty and sixty; Black Hawk said there were twenty-five. Greatly outnumbered in any case, they fired upon the advancing militiamen. Many of the Americans fled in panic and the attack ended. And that was the Battle of Stillman's Run.

Zachary Taylor later called the battle "that disgraceful affair of Stillmans" and declared that it never should have occurred. After the skir-



State Historical Society of Iowa
Cyrenus Cole's *I Am a Man — The Indian Black Hawk*

mish, the Indians were more determined than ever to get back across the Mississippi and put an end to their ill-advised venture. But now the route down the Rock River seemed closed. While the volunteers returned to Dixon, Black Hawk's band began a trek into northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin, hoping to skirt the settled areas and somehow get back to the Mississippi.

In a sense they were fleeing, but they were hostile and in the course of their march some white settlers were killed. It is understandable that any Indian depredations committed in northern Illinois during the summer were attributed to Black Hawk. Yet, when a small band of Indians killed four white men on the Galena-Dixon road in late May, including Agent Felix St. Vrain from Fort Armstrong, most of the attackers were Winnebagoes. And when the Hall girls were abducted at the Indian Creek Massacre of May 21, the raiding party was predominantly Potawatomi.

The Indian Creek incident began when William Davis, a settler on Indian Creek about twelve miles north of Ottawa, quarreled with the Potawatomi about a dam he had built across the creek. The Indians said it hampered their fishing. When Davis and other settlers were attacked at his home, fifteen persons were killed. Two teenagers, Silvia and Rachel Hall, were taken prisoner by Sauks who were in the raiding party. The girls were turned over to the Winnebagoes, then re-

leased unharmed by the Indians later in the summer.

The month of June produced some more encounters. On June 16, a company of St. Clair County Volunteers clashed with a party of more than fifty Sauks and Foxes near Kellogg's Grove, in Stephenson County. Three white men were killed and one wounded. On June 18, a group of Jo Daviess County Volunteers commanded by Captain James W. Stephenson fought a party of Indians on Yellow Creek, in Stephenson County, and lost three men. A much larger force of Sauks and Foxes attacked the stockade at Apple River (Elizabeth, Illinois) on June 24, and Black Hawk himself participated. One white man was killed. On June 25, Kellogg's Grove was the scene of another engagement as Major John Dement's men fought the party which had attacked the Apple River stockade on the previous day. Five white men were killed.

The main body of Indians was now in lower Wisconsin, finding it difficult to remain alive. Black Hawk tells the story of their hardships:

During our encampment at the Four Lakes [the Madison, Wis., area], we were hard put to, to obtain enough to eat to support nature. Situated in a swampy, marshy country, (which had been selected in consequence of the great difficulty required to gain access thereto,) there was but little game of any sort to be found — and fish were equally scarce. The great distance to any settlement, and the impossibility of bringing supplies therefrom, if any

could have been obtained, deterred our young men from making further attempts. We were forced to dig *roots* and *bark trees*, to obtain something to satisfy and keep us alive! Several of our old people became so much reduced, as actually to *die with hunger!*"

At about this time, General Atkinson dismissed some of the Volunteer companies not attached to larger units, and one of the men he mustered out was Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln had been elected captain of a company in the Fourth Regiment, Whiteside's Brigade, and later had re-enlisted as a private after his original term had expired. He and many other Volunteers came down to Dixon, then to their homes, but Atkinson's regulars and several units of militia pressed on in search of Black Hawk.

The Indians had reached the Wisconsin River and were attempting to cross, on July 21, when two contingents of Volunteers caught up with them. One was a Wisconsin group led by Henry Dodge, the other an Illinois brigade under the command of James D. Henry. The Sauk and Fox braves fought a holding action while trying to get their families to an island, but they were hopelessly outnumbered — especially since many were too busy with women and children to fight. Nevertheless, they did manage to cross the river and disengage the militiamen after heavy losses.

Black Hawk claimed he lost only six men, "though opposed by a host of mounted militia."

LIFE
OF
MA-KA-TAI-ME-SHE-KIA-KIAK
OR
BLACK HAWK,
EMBRACING THE
TRADITION OF HIS NATION—INDIAN WARS IN WHICH HE HAS
BEEN ENGAGED—CAUSE OF JOINING THE BRITISH IN THEIR
LATE WAR WITH AMERICA, AND ITS HISTORY—DES-
CRPTION OF THE ROCK-RIVER VILLAGE—MAN-
NERS AND CUSTOMS—ENCROACHMENTS BY
THE WHITES, CONTRARY TO TREATY—
REMOVAL FROM HIS VILLAGE IN 1831.
WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE CAUSE
AND
GENERAL HISTORY
OF THE
LATE WAR,
HIS SURRENDER AND CONFINEMENT AT
JEFFERSON BARRACKS,
AND
TRAVELS THROUGH THE UNITED STATES.
DICTATED BY HIMSELF.
CINCINNATI:
1833.

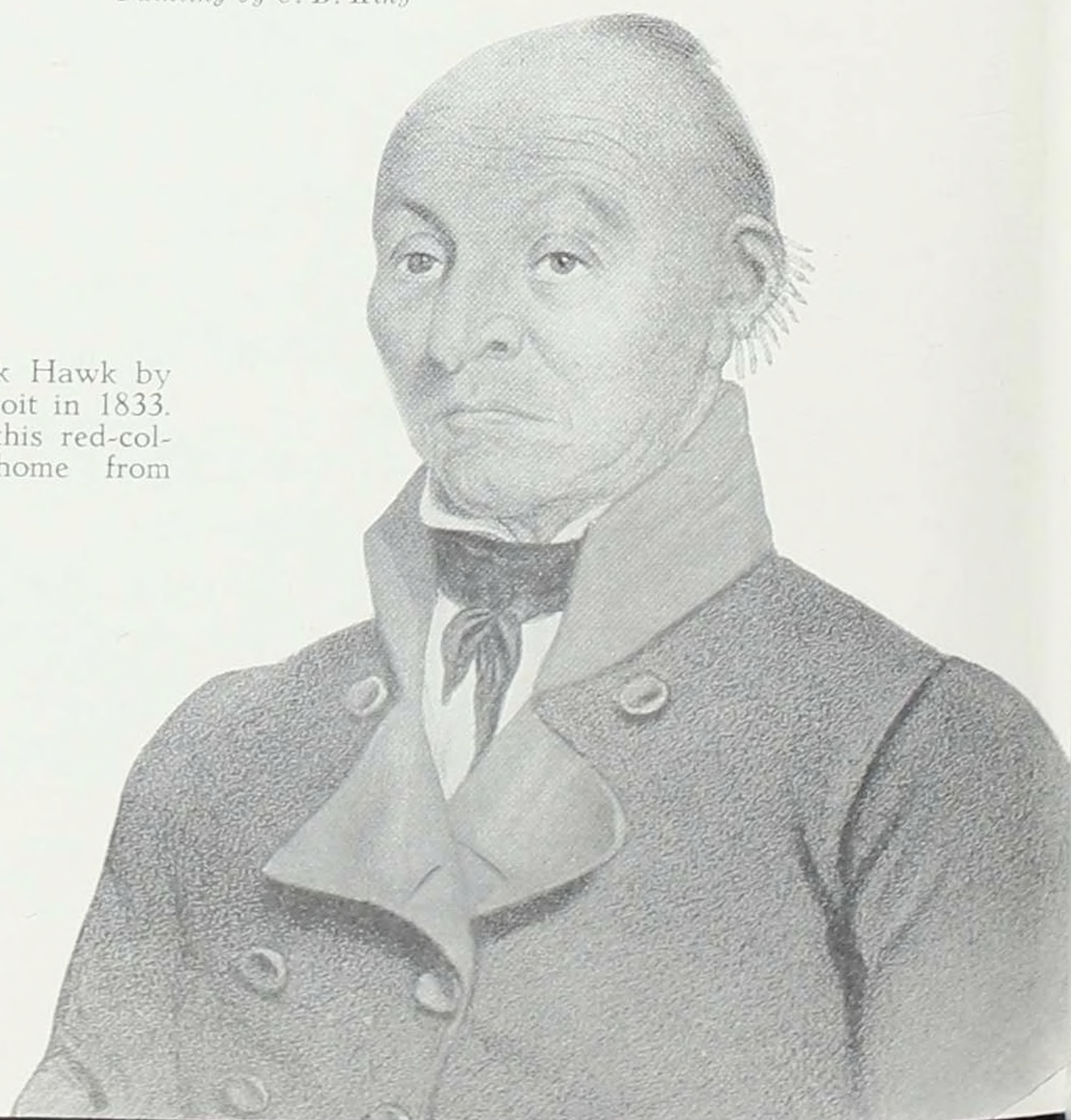
The first and only edition of Black Hawk's autobiography to appear in 1833. Several editions appeared in 1834, including one at Boston which was reprinted by the State Historical Society of Iowa in 1932 on the occasion of the Centennial of the Black Hawk War.



*From a Lithographed Copy of a
Painting by C. B. King*

BLACK HAWK
OR
MA-KA-TAI-ME-SHE-KIA-KIAK

A painting of Black Hawk by
J. O. Lewis in Detroit in 1833.
Black Hawk wore this red-col-
lared blue coat home from
Fortress Monroe.

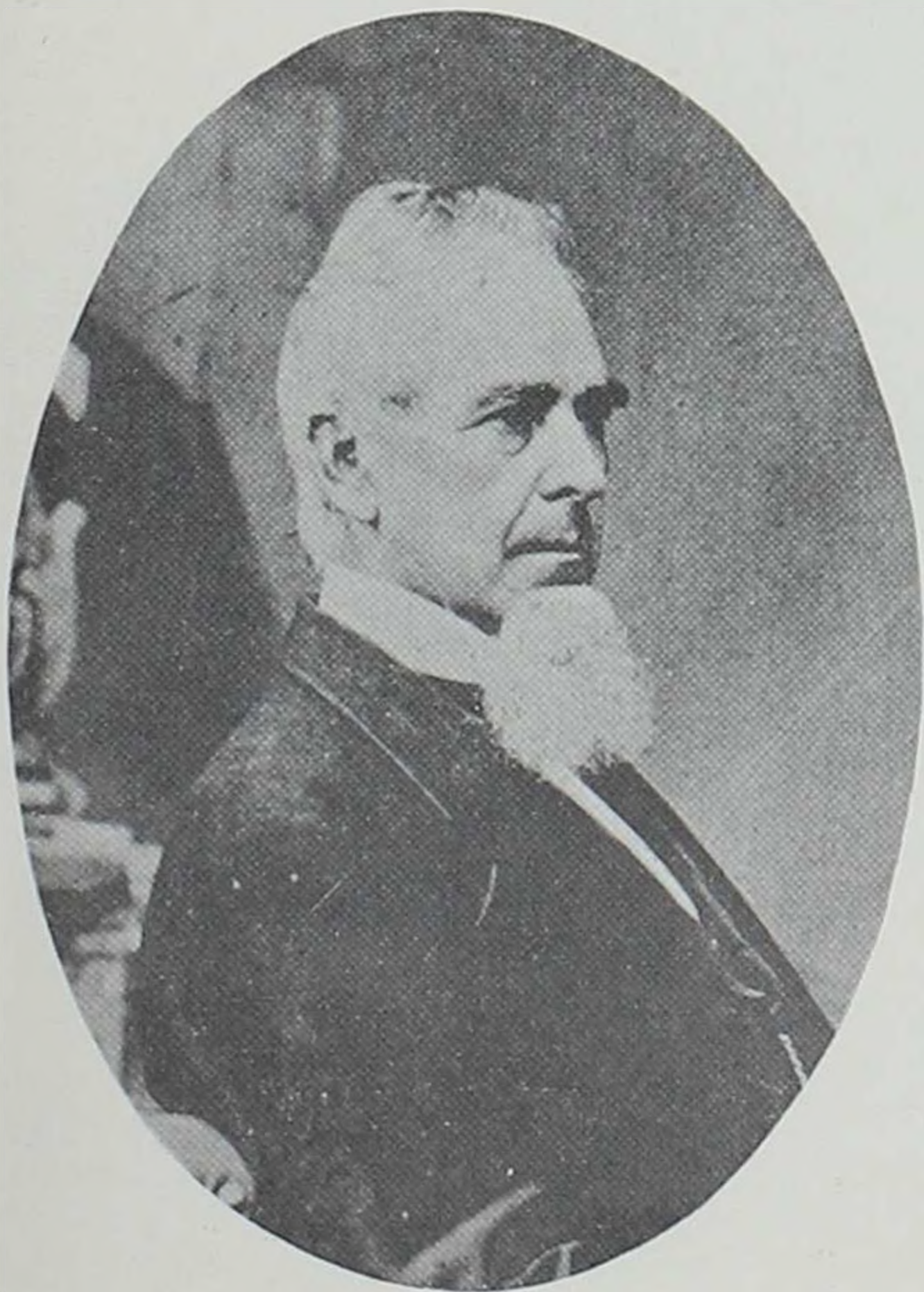


ANTOINE LECLAIRE

He served as interpreter for Black Hawk when he dictated his autobiography. He became a distinguished citizen of Davenport. The town of LeClaire was named for him.



Courtesy State Historical Society of Iowa



J. B. PATTERSON

Illinois editor who wrote the autobiography "according to the dictation of Black Hawk, through the United States' Interpreter, at the Sac and Fox Agency of Rock Island." He lived in Oquawka, Illinois.

Courtesy Illinois State Historical Society

MEDALS COMMEMORATING DRAMATIS PERSONA



Harrison negotiated Treaty of 1804 which Black Hawk steadfastly refused to accept until 1816.



When he visited President Jackson in 1833 Black Hawk said: "He looks as if he has seen as many winters as I have . . ."

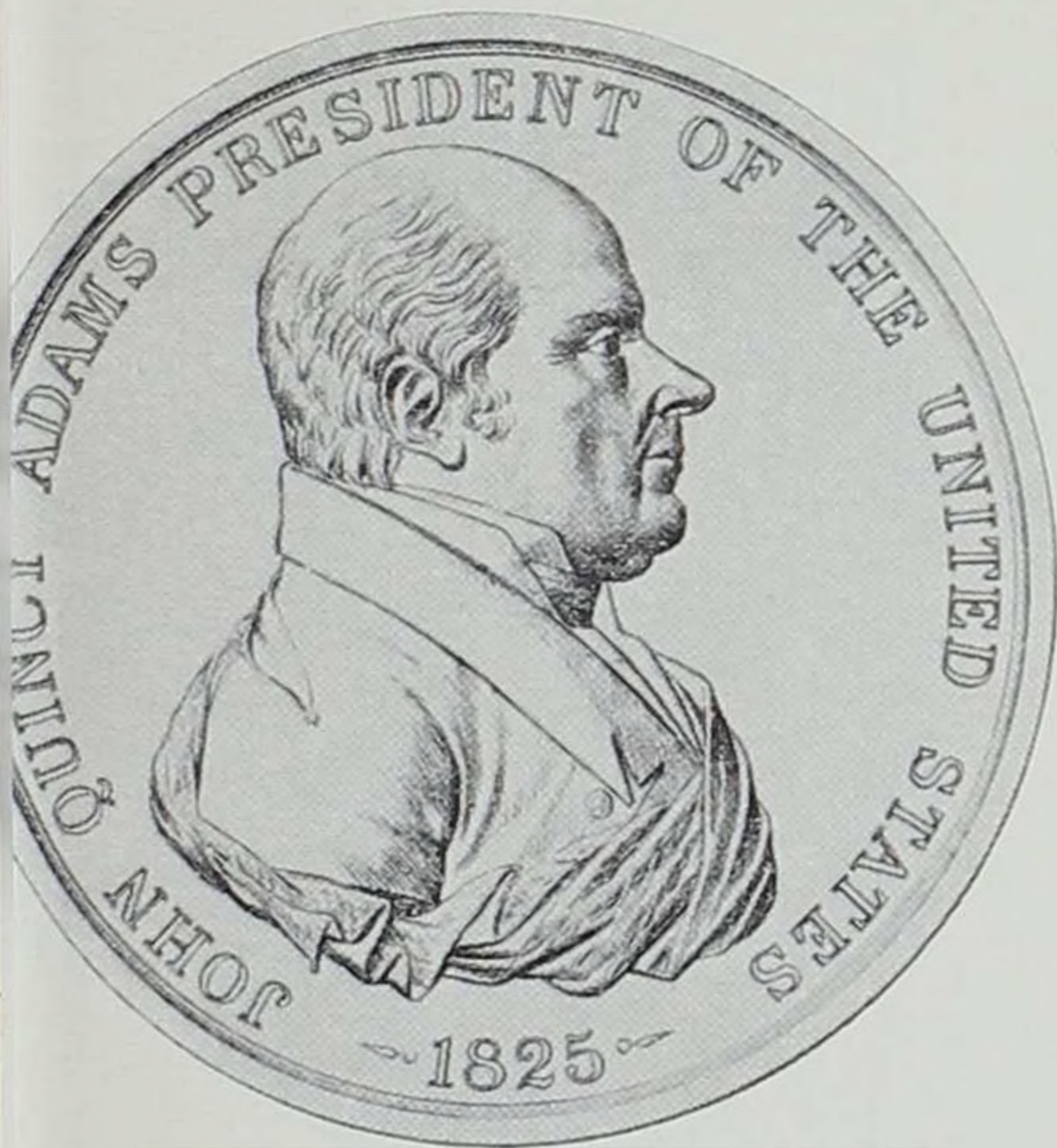


Held council with Black Hawk: "I told him that I never could consent to leave my village" of Saukenuk and move across the Mississippi.



Defeated by Sauk Indians at Credit Island (now Davenport). In his autobiography Black Hawk declared: "We were pleased to see that almost every fire took effect . . ."

ASSOCIATED WITH THE BLACK HAWK STORY

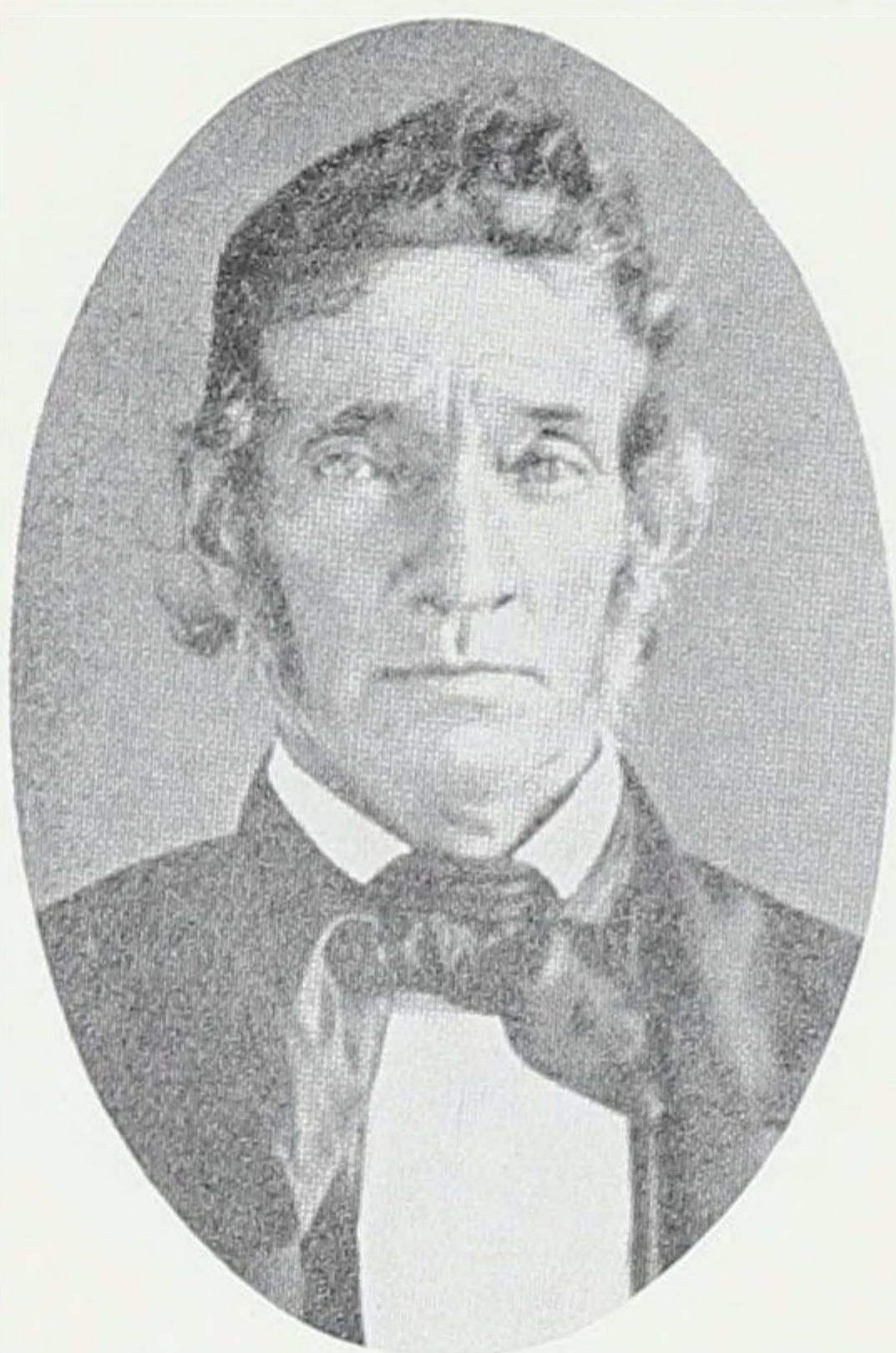


John Quincy Adams was president when the Grand Council of 1825 at Prairie du Chien drew the Neutral Line in Iowa. Medals were struck and presented to Indian Chiefs, like Black Hawk, who regarded them highly.



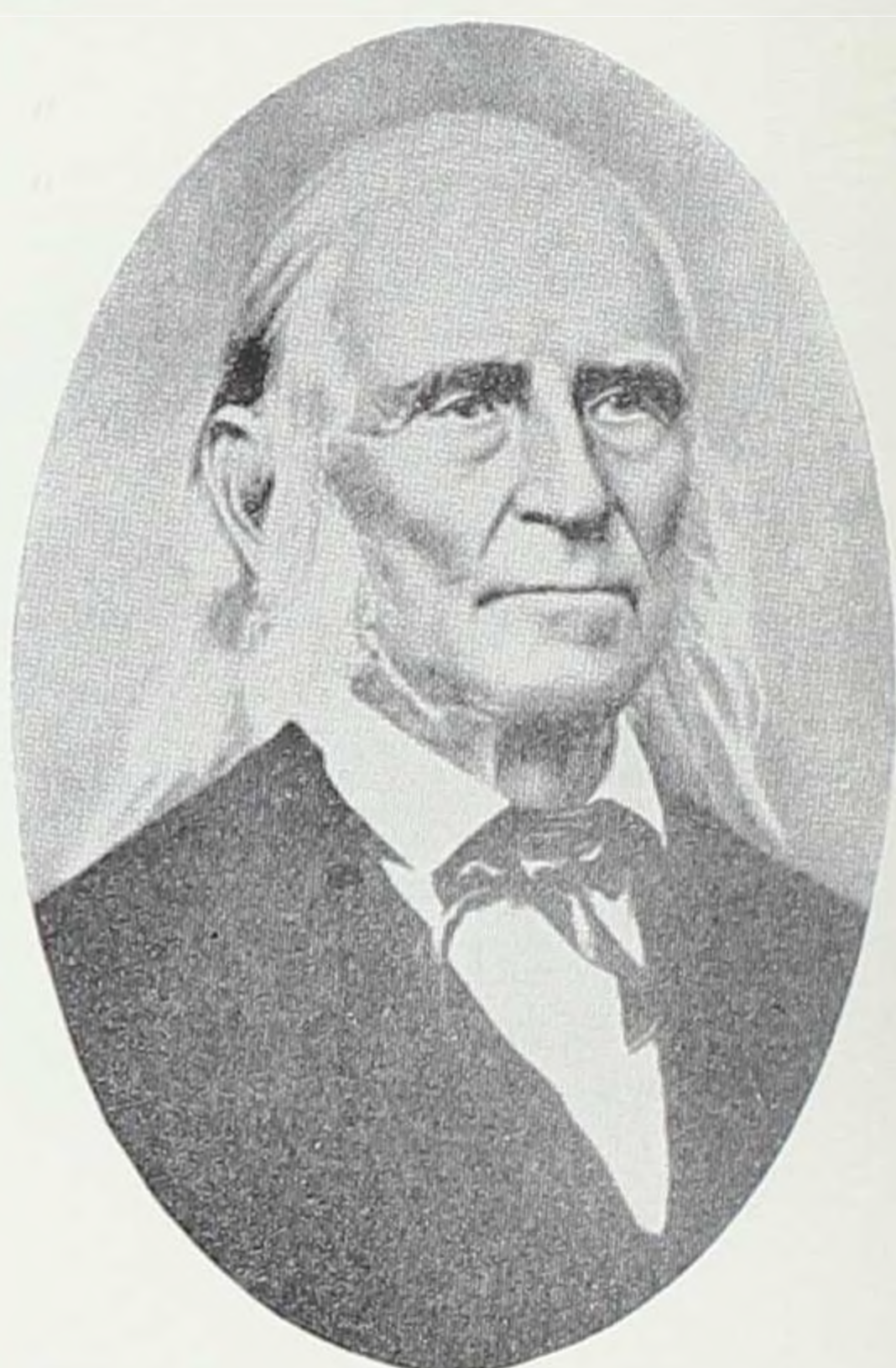
He told President Jackson that General Atkinson seemed unwilling to pursue Black Hawk and preferred waiting for arrival of General Scott and his army.

Of Atkinson's conduct Winfield Scott declared: "The persevering ardor both of the general & the troops under unusual difficulties & privations, richly merited the success which has been won."



ISAIAH STILLMAN

Zachary Taylor later called the battle "that disgraceful affair of Stillman's."



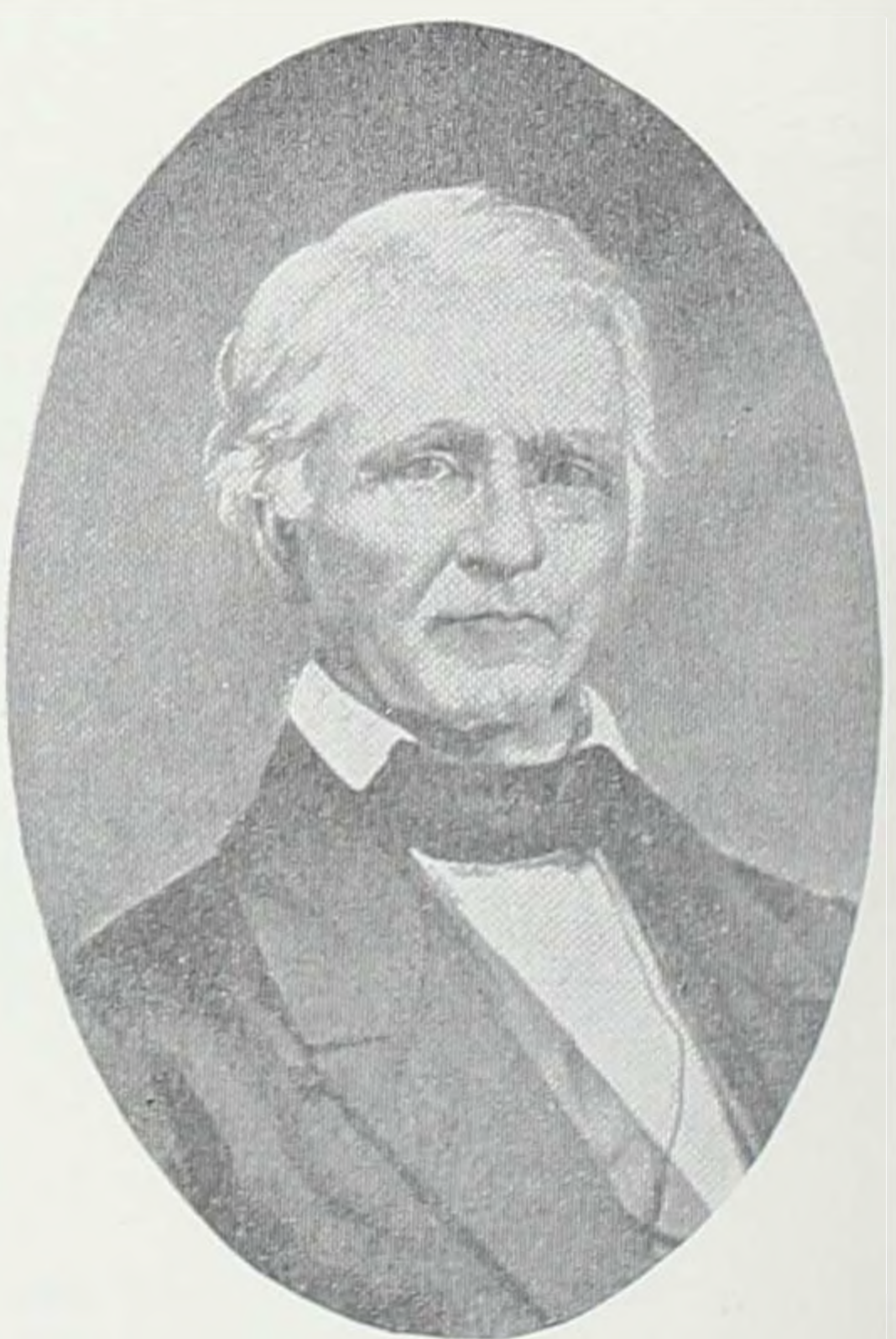
JOHN DIXON

The kind, gentle, honest, and courageous owner of Dixon's Ferry.



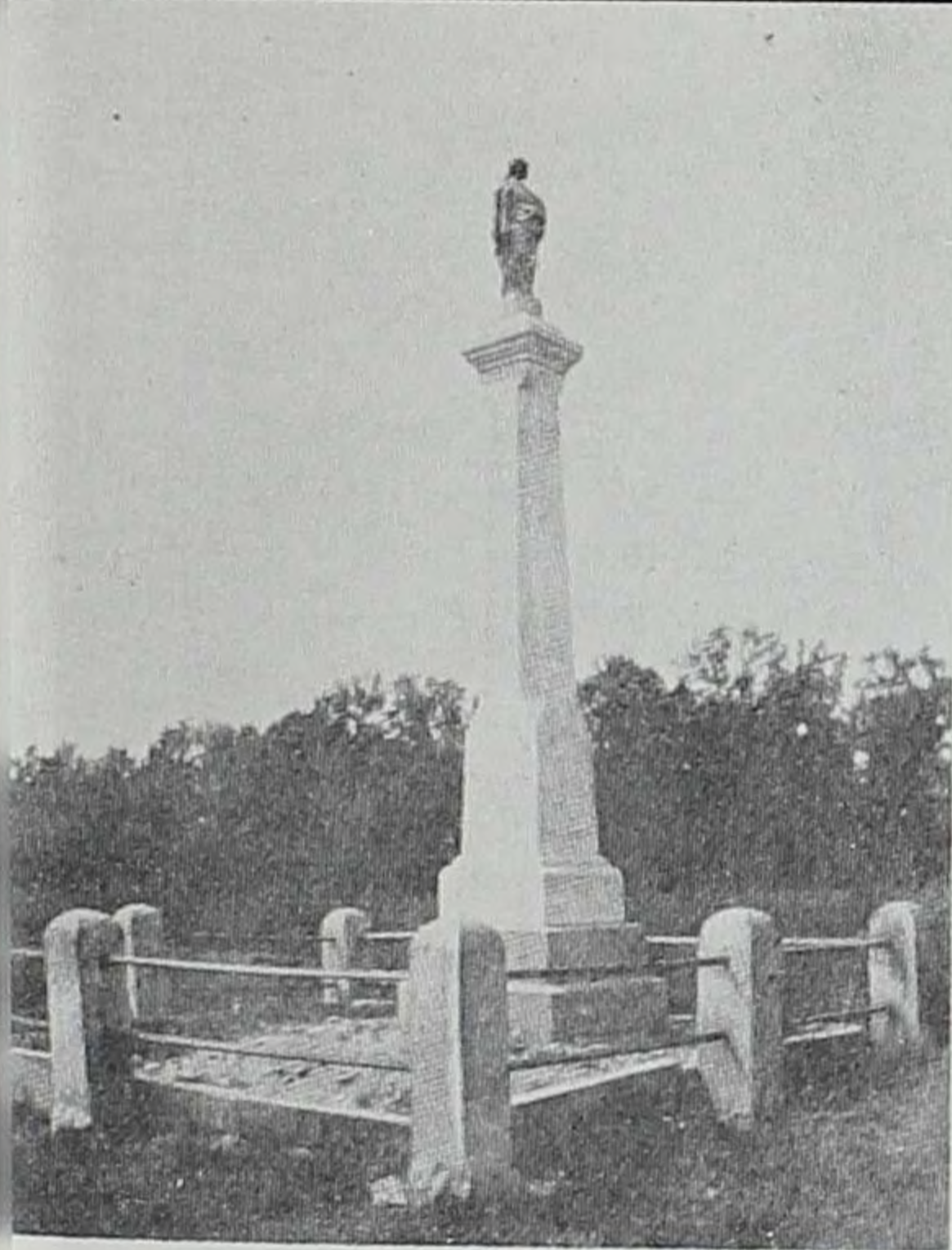
STEVENS T. MASON

Governor of Michigan Territory during the Black Hawk War.



HENRY DODGE

Brilliant Indian fighter and first Governor of Wisconsin Territory.



Top:

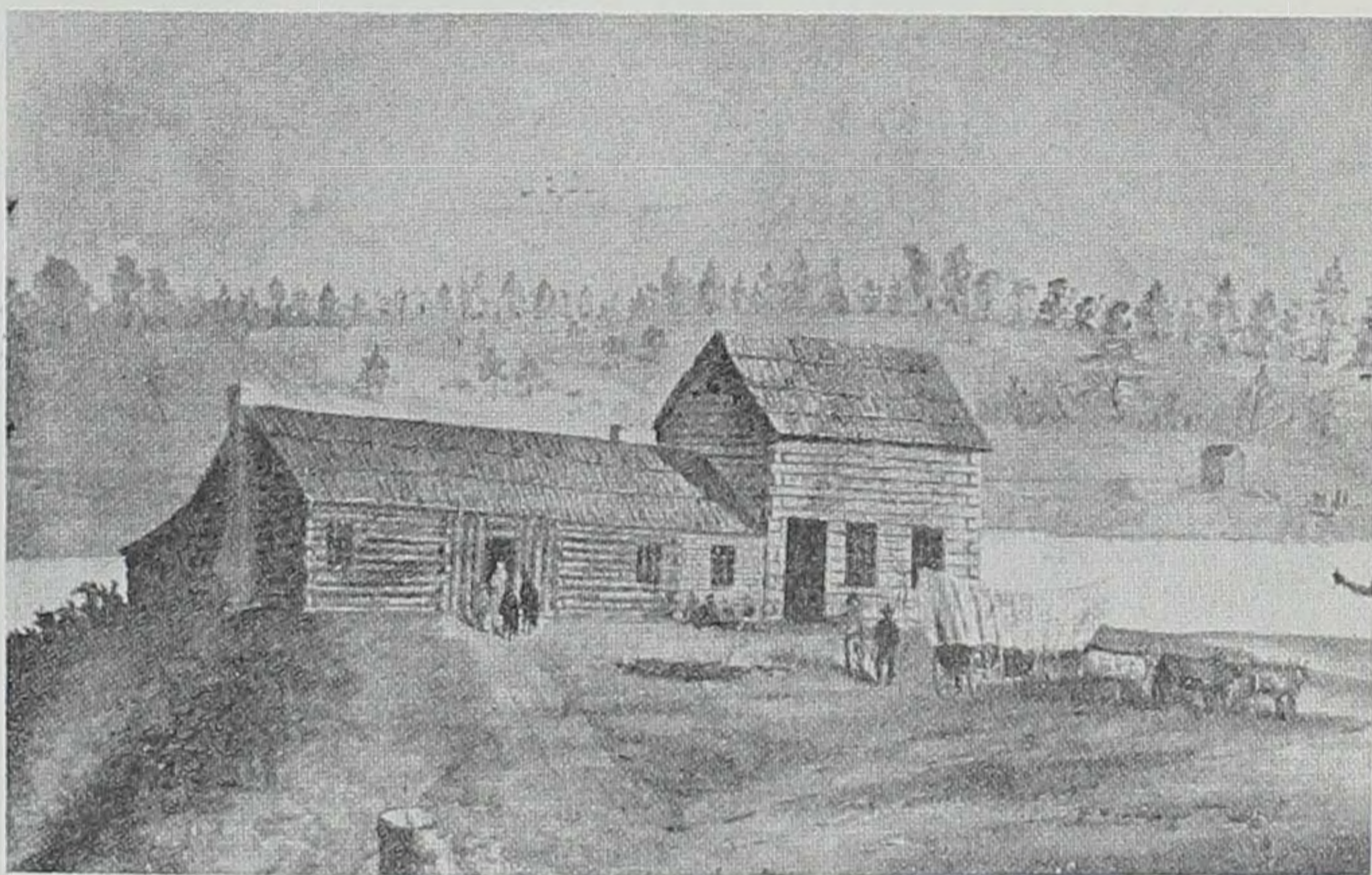
INDIAN CREEK MONUMENT

Fifteen settlers massacred and Rachel and Sylvia Hall abducted by the Sauk and Potawatomi Indians and later released unharmed.

Middle:

DIXON'S FERRY

Simple flat-bottomed ferry and 90-foot log cabin owned by John Dixon and located at what is now Dixon, Illinois. Black Hawk ate here one evening and troops rendezvoused here.



Bottom:

ABDUCTION OF HALL GIRLS

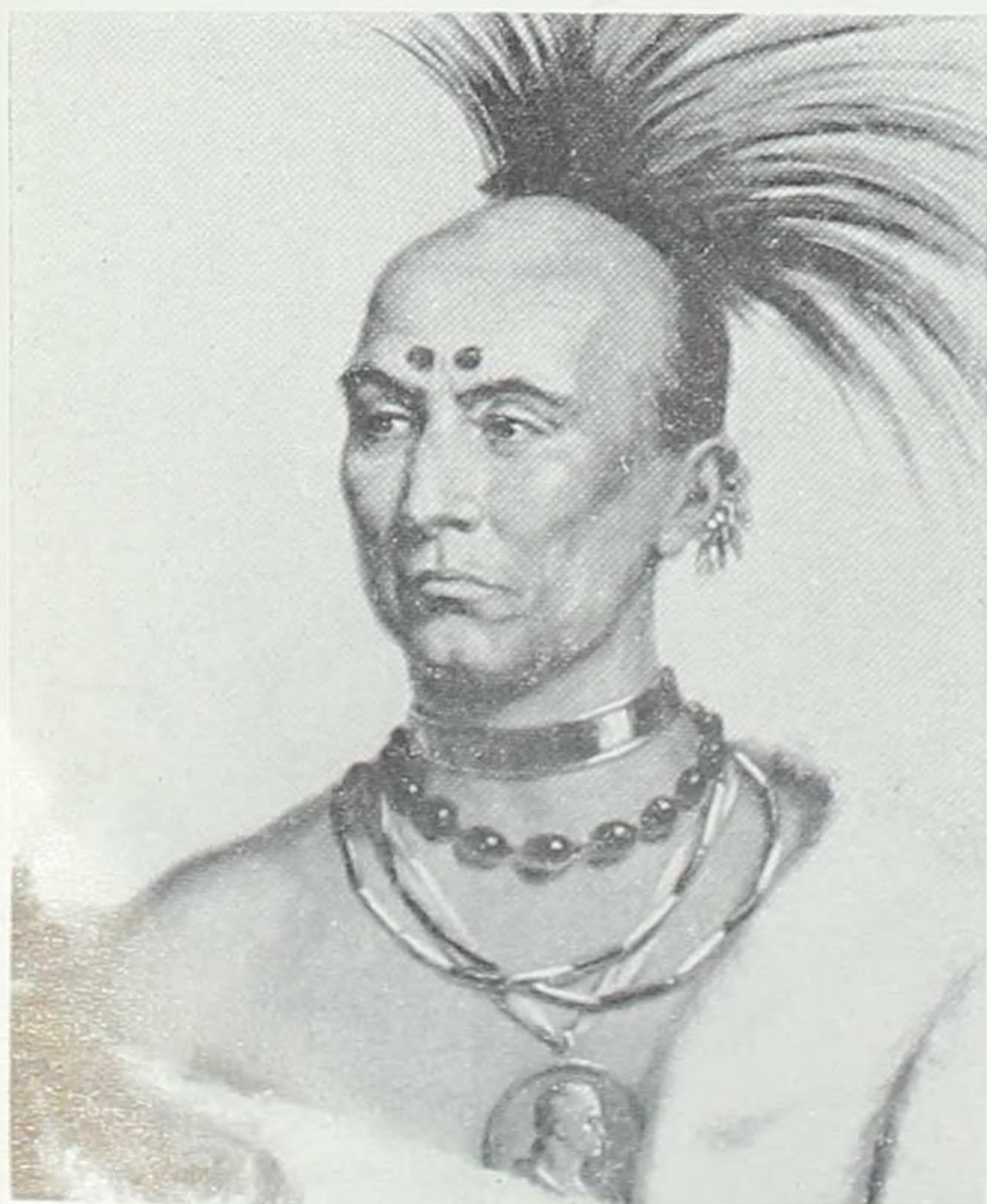
Harper's Weekly
May 1, 1858



PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS
AND
LITHOGRAPHS
OF
CHIEF BLACK HAWK

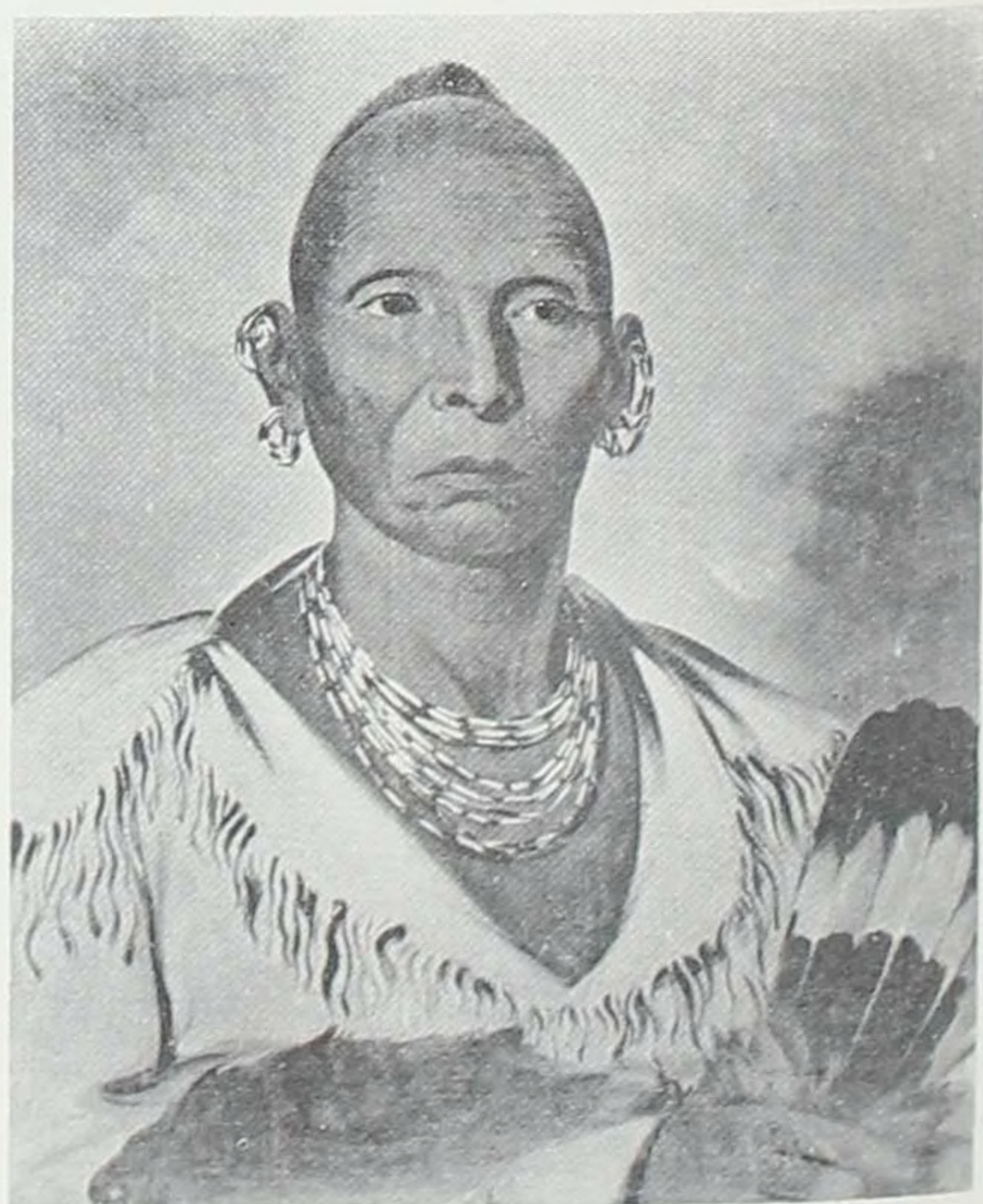


From Drake's "The Life and Adventures of Black Hawk"
BLACK HAWK



Painting by C. B. King

BLACK HAWK
During imprisonment at Fortress Monroe, Vir-
ginia, in 1833.



Courtesy Smithsonian Institute

BLACK HAWK
Painting by famous American Indian artist . . .
George Catlin.



*Goodrich, A Pictorial History of the
United States (1866)*

BLACK HAWK



Family Magazine (1834)

BLACK HAWK: By officer at
Jefferson Barracks



*E. H. Smith, Black Hawk, and
Scenes in the West (1849)*

BLACK HAWK

THE
CELEBRATED
INDIAN CHIEF

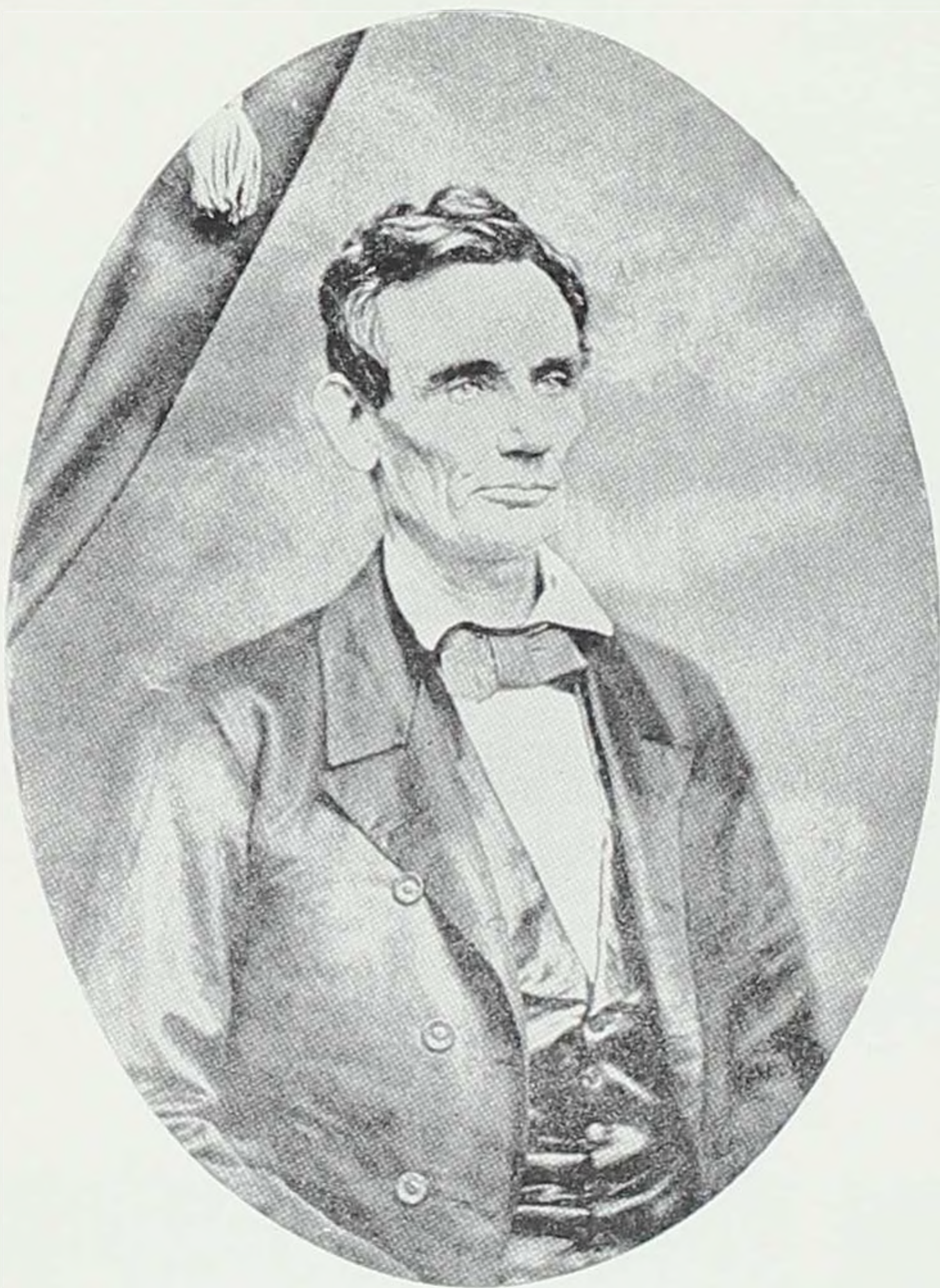


BLACK HAWK.

IN HIS WAR DRESS.

*From an Account of the Indian, Black Hawk
(Phila. 1834)*

BLACK HAWK



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Saw only brief service and fought no hostile Indians. He was truly pleased when his fellow volunteers elected him captain of his company.

Below: Reproduction of top of page 100 of Record of the Services of Illinois Soldiers in the Black Hawk War, 1831-32, and in the Mexican War, 1846-8.

CAPT. ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S COMPANY

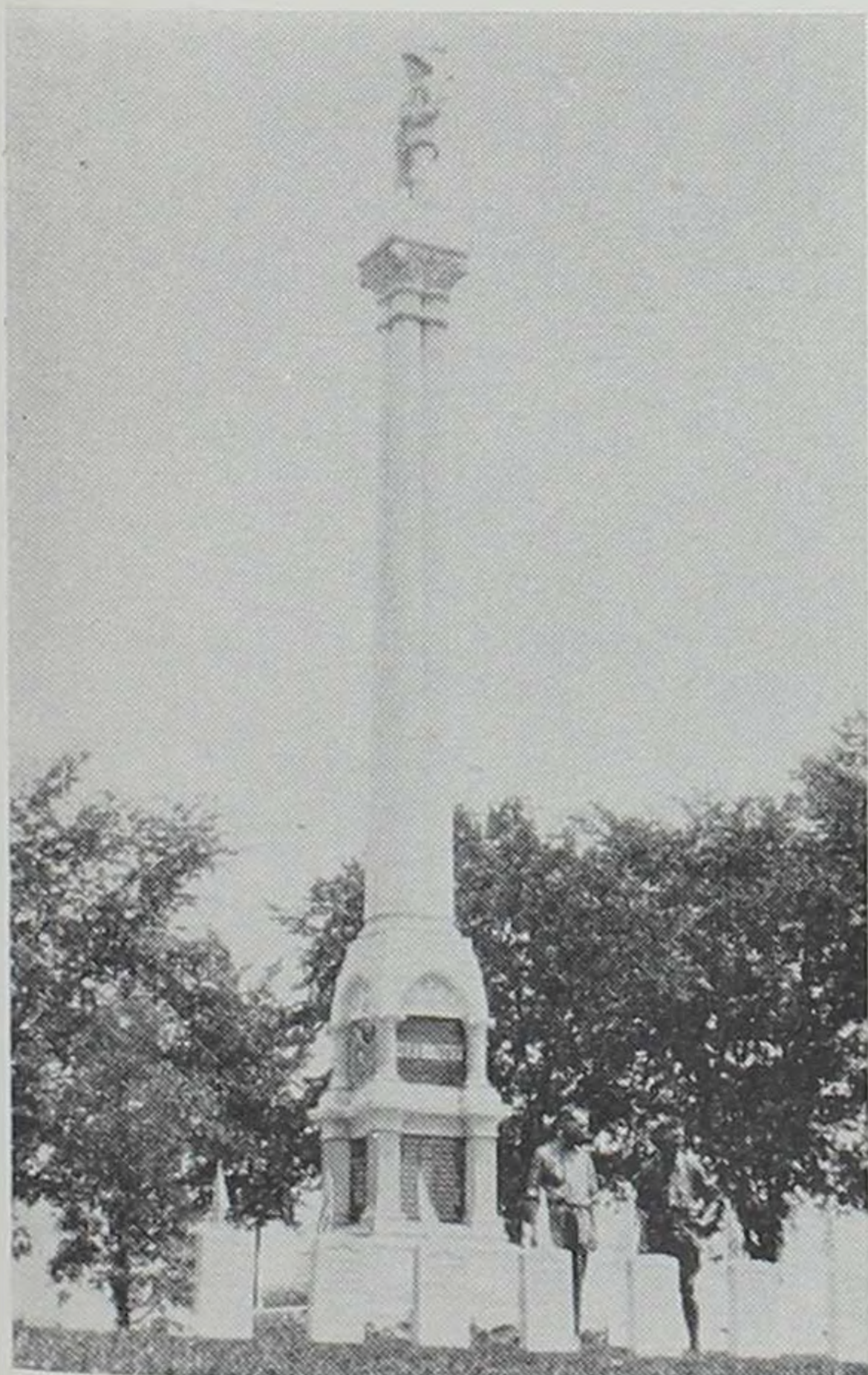
Of 4th Regiment of Mounted Volunteers, commanded by Brig.-Gen. Samuel Whitesides. Mustered out of the service of the United States at the mouth of Fox river, May 27, 1832.

Name and Rank.	Residence.	Enrolled	Remarks.
<i>Captain.</i> Abraham Lincoln...	Sangamon Co	1832 April 21
<i>First Lieutenants.</i> Samuel M. Thomps'n	"	"	Resigned April 30, '32; Col. 4th Regt. Ill. Vol...
<i>Second Lieutenant.</i> John Brannan	"	"
<i>Sergeants.</i> John Armstrong..... Tavner B. Anderson. George W. Foster... Obediah Morgan.....	" " " "	" " " " Transferred to a foot company April 29, 1832...
<i>Corporals.</i> Thomas Comb. John Plasters..... William F. Berry.... Alexander Trent.....	" " " "	" " " " Resigned May 20, and served as private since
<i>Privates.</i> Alexander, Urbin.... Armstrong, Pleasant Anderson, Isaac..... Armstrong, Hugh..... Barnette, Clardey... Crete, Valentine.... Cox, Henry..... Cox, Wm.....	Absent on extra duty..... Promoted to 1st Lieut. April 30

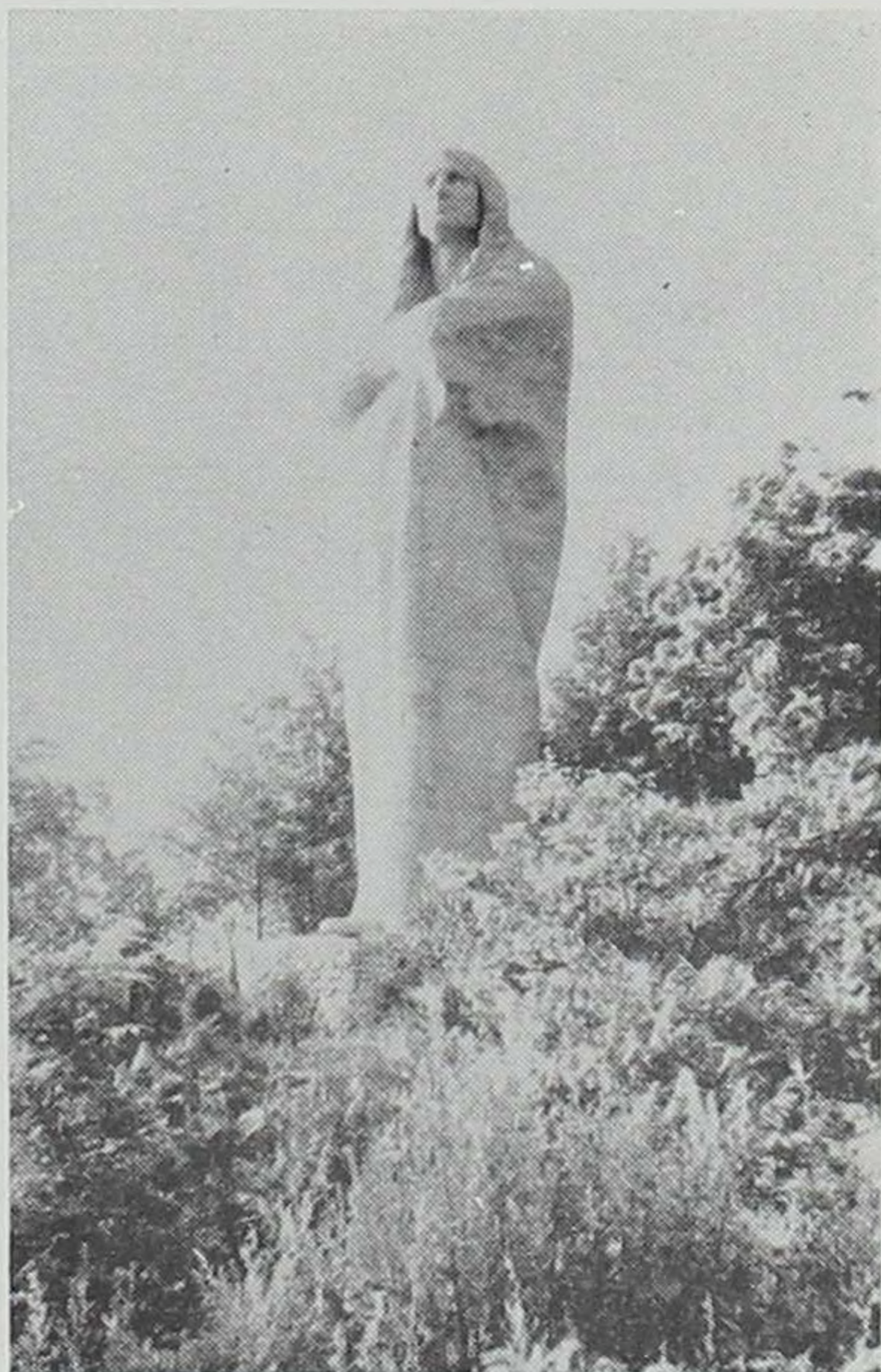


SHABONA

Potawatomi chief who restrained his tribe from joining Black Hawk and warned the whites of impending danger.



Black Hawk Monument at Stillman's Valley



Lorado Taft Monument of Black Hawk at Oregon, Illinois

Courtesy Illinois Historical Society



PRESIDENT ANDREW JACKSON

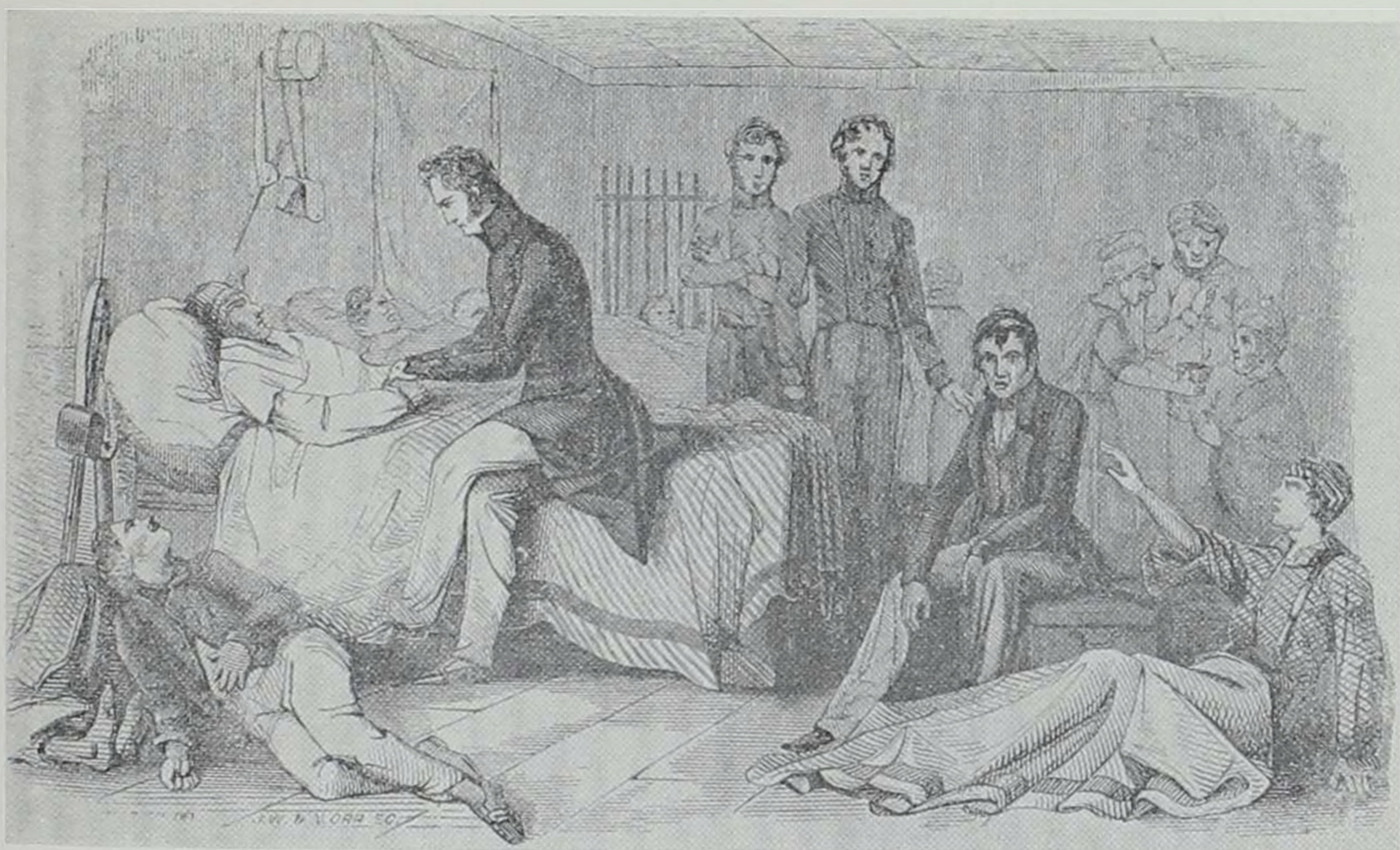


Drawing from Caxton Clubs edition of Wakefield.

BRIG. GEN. HENRY ATKINSON
Indians called him "White Beaver."



From Memoirs of Lieut.-General Scott (1864)
WINFIELD SCOTT



General Scott ministering to soldiers ill from cholera while crossing the Great Lakes on their way to the Black Hawk War . . . "night and day he visited and comforted them, himself always, when near it, laboring under some of the symptoms of the disease."



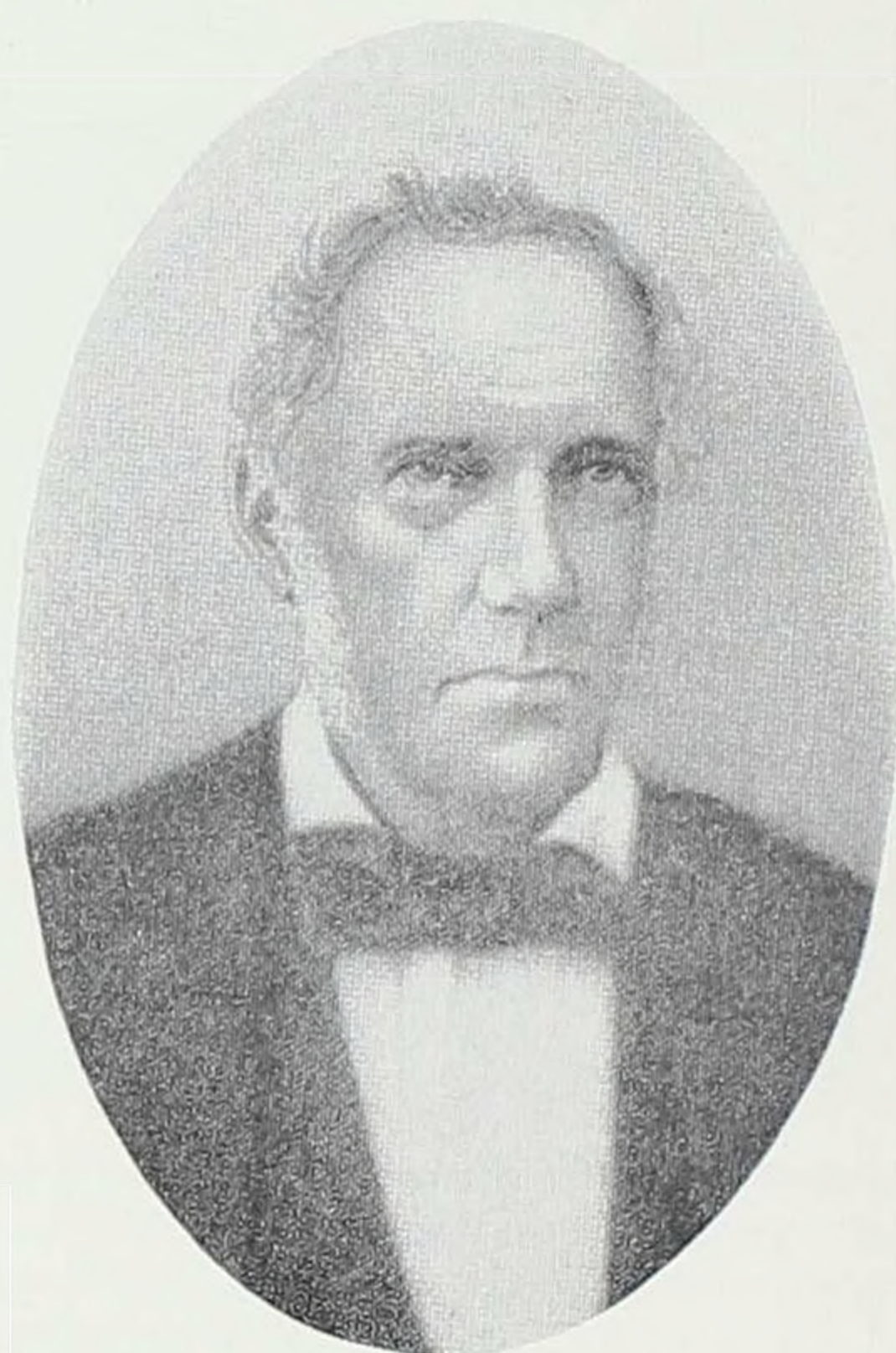
From E. D. Mansfield, Life and Services of General Winfield Scott

Scott describes the Indian conduct at treaty closing the Black Hawk War. "When a council was to meet, they came at a furious charge; suddenly dismounted, arranged themselves in order, and then, between lines of soldiers, entered the pavilion with the firmness of victors, but with all the deep solemnity of a funeral."



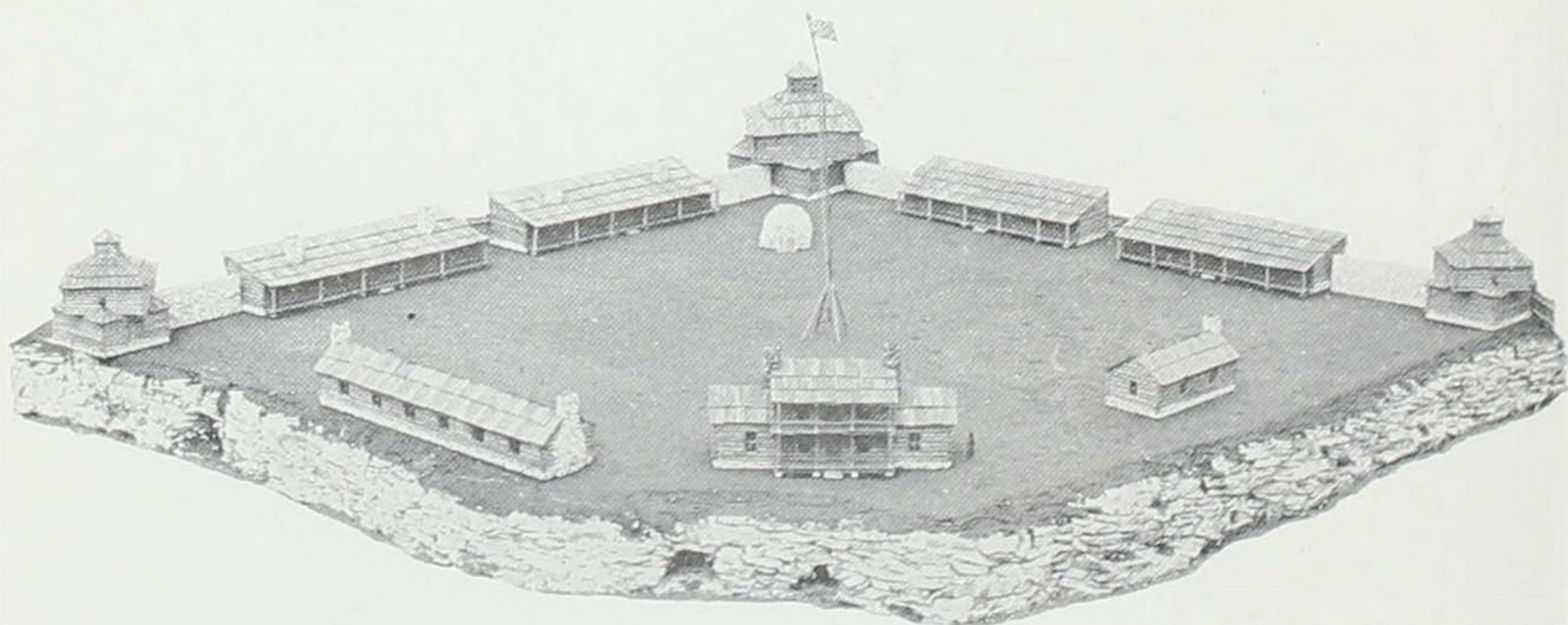
GEORGE DAVENPORT

Treaty negotiated on site of city named for him.



JOHN REYNOLDS

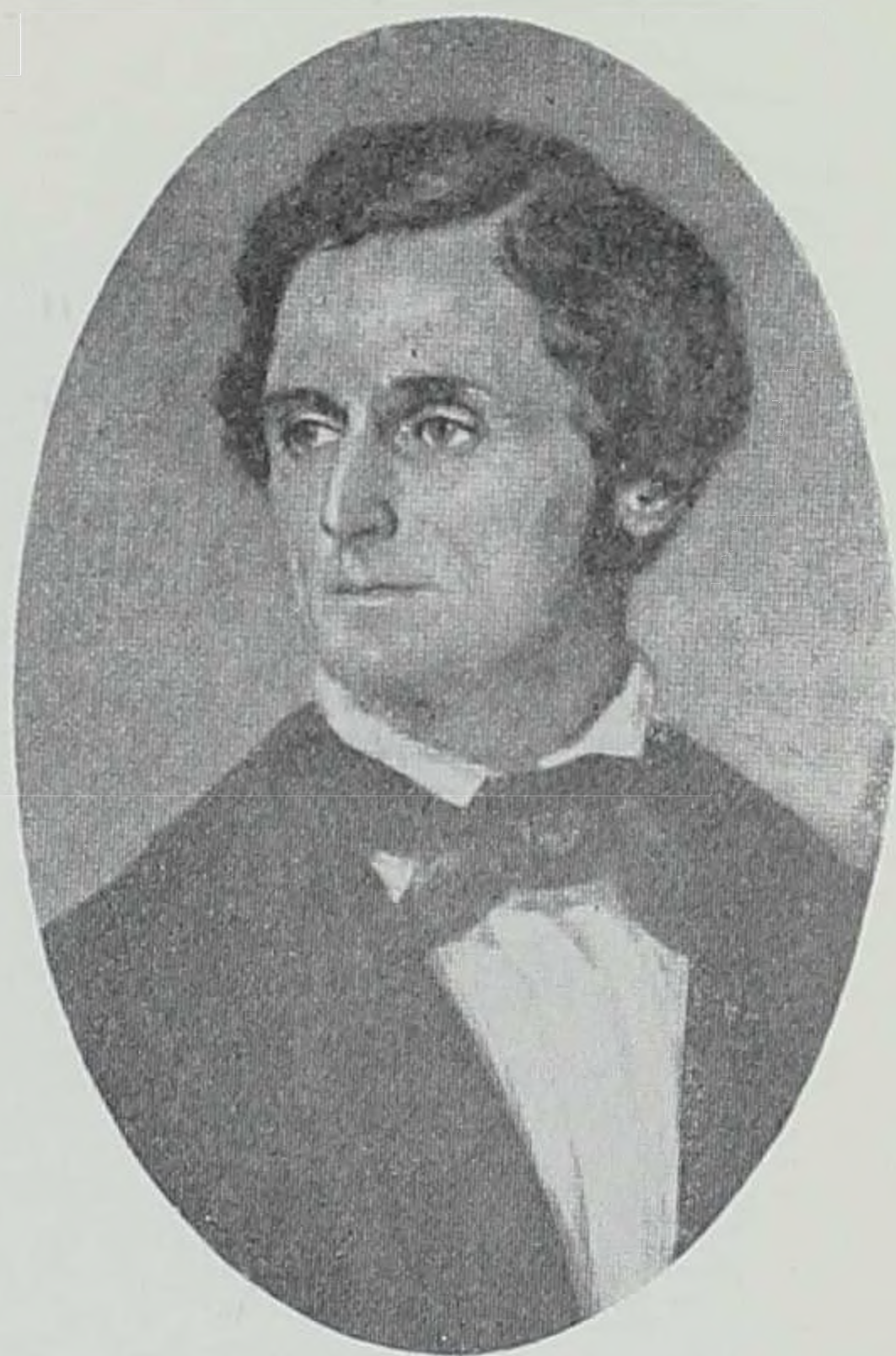
Governor of Illinois helped Scott in Treaty negotiations of 1832.



SCALE MODEL OF FORT ARMSTRONG IN 1819.

Courtesy Rock Island Arsenal

The treaty closing the Black Hawk War was signed at Fort Armstrong on Rock Island on September 21, 1832.



Jefferson Davis had charge of Sauk prisoners after Black Hawk War.

Catlin Painting Courtesy Huntington Library
Sauk Indians in Chains at Jefferson Barracks



From Catlin's North American Indians
Sauk Indians performing the Discovery Dance.



From Catlin's North American Indians

KEOKUK — CHIEF OF THE SAUK

Of him Black Hawk bitterly declared: "Keokuk has been the cause of my present situation."

Other witnesses disputed his figure. An Indian woman who escaped down the river reported that sixty-eight of her kinsmen were killed. In a report written the day after the battle, Henry Dodge estimated that "we must have killed about 40 of them . . ."

Despite the obvious fact that the Indians were now trying desperately to get out of Wisconsin and back where they belonged, the United States army and the Volunteers still pursued them; for the official position was now one of retribution. The Indians must be punished. "Be assured," said Dodge in a report to his superiors, "every possible exertion will be made to destroy the Enemy crippled as they must be with their wounded and families as well as their want of provisions." President Andrew Jackson had earlier stated that he wished Black Hawk taken prisoner, and the office of the Secretary of War had declared that "Black Hawk & his party must be chastized and a speedy & honorable termination put to this war, which will hereafter deter others from the like unprovoked hostilities by Indians on our frontier."

Some members of Black Hawk's band deserted the main party and, while descending the Wisconsin River, were intercepted by a party of regulars which had been sent out from Fort Crawford, at Prairie du Chien. "Some were killed," Black Hawk said, "other drowned, several taken

prisoners, and the balance escaped to the woods and perished with hunger. Among this party were a great many women and children."

The main body of Indians, having no means of traveling by water, continued overland toward the Mississippi. When they reached the river, they encountered what Black Hawk thought was a singular piece of good luck. A steamboat, the *Warrior*, was in sight — and Black Hawk knew the captain. Here was a chance to try the white flag again. Joseph Throckmorton, captain of the vessel, had been operating on the upper Mississippi for four years, but the *Warrior* was new — having been launched a few weeks earlier at Pittsburgh.

The story in Black Hawk's words: "... I took a small piece of white cotton, and put it on a pole, and called to the captain of the boat, and told him to send a canoe ashore, and let me come aboard. The people on the boat asked whether we were Sacs or Winnebagoes. I told a Winnebago to tell them we were Sacs, and wanted to give ourselves up! A Winnebago on the boat called to us, '*to run and hide, that the whites were going to shoot!*' About this time one of my braves had jumped into the river, bearing a white flag to the boat — when another sprang in after him, and brought him to shore. The firing then commenced from the boat, which was returned by my braves, and continued for some time. Very few of my

people were hurt after the first fire, having succeeded in getting behind old logs and trees, which shielded them from the enemy's fire."

Throckmorton was hardly the proper man to receive a flag of truce. He and the military party aboard his vessel had been upriver to a Sioux village, to see if they could persuade the Sioux to guard the shores and prevent the fleeing Sauks and Foxes from getting across. The boat was armed with a six-pounder. Throckmorton later claimed to have killed twenty-three Indians in the battle, after opening fire in the belief that the flag of truce was a hoax. He returned the next day to continue the fighting.

The official report of the Commanding General of the U.S. Army told it this way: "The Indians at first attempted to deceive our party by declaring themselves to be Winnebagoes, and displaying white flags, at the same time inviting them to land. But the officer in command being aware of their intentions fired upon them, and killed twenty-five of their number."

Now decimated by gunfire and weakened by hunger, the Indians were in a hopeless situation. Approaching them from the rear was the whole of the American force, regulars and volunteers, bent on "teaching them a lesson." At this point Black Hawk, the Prophet, and some of the other Indian leaders left the band and went up into west-central Wisconsin. "After the boat left us,"

he said "I told my people to cross, if they could, and wished: that I intended going into the Chippewa country." He went on to explain, in his autobiography, that when he later heard how close the American forces were he decided to return and "die with my people." But he did not return until brought in by Winnebagoes a few days later when the war was ended; whether he was captured or gave himself up is not clear. In testimony given later, one of the Indians who remained behind with the band declared: "None of us liked the Prophet and Black Hawk leaving us as they did. We said 'now they have brought us ruin and lost us our women and children, then have run to save their own lives.'"

The ordeal of those who were still trying to cross the Mississippi on August 2, the day after the steamboat attack, is now known as the Battle of the Bad Axe, having occurred at the mouth of the Bad Axe River north of Victory, Wisconsin. "The Inds. were pushed literally into the Mississippi," reported Indian agent Joseph M. Street, "the current of which was at one time perceptibly tinged with the blood of the Indians who were shot on its margin & in the stream . . ." One soldier eye-witness said that the women and children remained hidden, out of fear, and thus were killed by accidental gunfire. Had they shown themselves, he said, they would have been spared, since "we all knew the squaws and children could

do us no harm, and could not help what the old Black Hawk and other chiefs did." They had been concealed in the reeds and tall grass.

Eight American soldiers were killed during the battle; the Indians lost 150 or more, and forty women and children were captured. Those who were successful in crossing the river had still one more trial to face, for a party of about 100 Sioux warriors attacked the survivors, inflicted heavy losses upon them, and later received the thanks of a United States government official for their help in punishing the Sauks and Foxes.

The Battle of the Bad Axe brought an immediate end to the war. During the series of raids and engagements which had occurred since May 15, from 500 to 600 Indians had been killed or had starved to death. White persons, civilian and military, who were killed during that period totaled about seventy-two.

There was still a treaty to be negotiated, and more days of humiliation were to follow for Black Hawk and his chastened band. By the time the deposed leader had been put in chains, and sent down the river to temporary imprisonment, it could be seen that the war had been a significant turning-point. It marked the beginning of settlement in the area that would later become Iowa. For, with Indian control of the region now broken, white settlers would push rapidly across the Mississippi to take over the farmlands and the mines.

Six years later, on July 4, 1838, settlement had progressed so far that the Territory of Iowa was organized. That same year Black Hawk died.

The closing lines of his autobiography may be a gratuitous addition by Black Hawk's publisher, for literary effect, or they may express the earnest hope of the old man himself. Perhaps by now he saw, like Keokuk, that there was no other way.

The tomahawk is buried forever! — We will forget what has past — and may the watchword between the Americans and Sacs and Foxes, ever be — "Friendship." I am now done. A few more moons, and I must follow my fathers to the shades! May the Great Spirit keep our people and the whites always at peace — is the sincere wish of Black Hawk.

DONALD JACKSON