

EVENTS LEADING TO THE
BLACK HAWK WAR:
REPORTS TO THE
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

From: National Archives Microfilm Publications, Microcopy No. 234: Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-81; Roll 728, Sac and Fox Agency, 1824-1833.

Explorations in Iowa History Project
Price Laboratory School
University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, Iowa

Selection 1

Superintendency of Indian Affairs,
St. Louis, April 6th, 1830

The Hon. John H. Eaton
Secretary of War
Washington City

Sir,

A few days ago I was visited by a large party of chiefs and braves of the Sac & Fox tribes, among whom was the Stabbing Chief & Keokuck (head chief & brave of the Sac) and the Prince, head chief of the Fox tribe.

I am decidedly of opinion that those Indians would be willing to sell all their lands on the Mississippi & running back some distance if judicious measures were taken to effect this object and with proper arrangement the different bands of those tribes could be brought together, and their future welfare thereby secured. To effect this I would recommend that a respectable delegation, fully authorized by the nation, be permitted to go on to Washington City, at a time when it would best suit the Government to make arrangements therefor.

Yet I would respectfully suggest that the earlier such arrangements could be made (if approved) the better. They are now perhaps better disposed thereto than after they shall have been settled. They are at this time without any settled home, without fields--they having been prohibited from returning to their old villages, & to the fields which they once cultivated (particularly that portion which has hitherto been attached to the British). They are discontented and from every circumstance I have reason to fear some difficulty will occur between them & the whites unless a treaty should be made & a liberal compensation given them for the lands which they may be disposed to sell.

I have the honor to be
With high respect
Your most obt servt
William Clark

Selection 2

February 5, 1831

RESOLUTION BY THE LEGISLATURE OF ILLINOIS

WHEREAS, it has been satisfactorily made known to this General Assembly that certain bands of Indians, and particularly a band of Sauks, commanded by the well known War Chief called "The Black Hawk," have been in the habit of hunting upon ceded lands within the limits of this State, committing trespasses upon the lands of individuals by making sugar and destroying their sugar trees, killing their hogs, stealing their horses, and otherwise so demeaning themselves as to keep up a constant state of alarm among the settlers of the northern part of our State, and which is calculated to prevent others from settling upon lands which they have honestly paid for.

AND WHEREAS the said Black Hawk and his band have forcibly retained possession of lands actually sold by the United States near the mouth of Rock River from the period of the sales to the departure of the said Indians, during the past fall, for their hunting grounds; and the said Black Hawk has announced their intention to resume the possession of the said lands in the ensuing Spring, and to maintain the possession by force of arms, if necessary. Therefore,

RESOLVED, by the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Illinois, that all such transactions on the part of the said Indians are violations of the rights of the Citizens of the State which demand the protecting arm of the Government, and would justify a resort to immediate force, but for a well founded expectation that the President of the United States, when informed of the true state of the case will promptly adopt appropriate measures for relieving our fellow Citizens from grievances so injurious to them, and offensive to the State.

Also, RESOLVED, that our Senators in Congress be instructed, and our Representative requested, to unite in bringing this case before the president of the United States, requesting him to have all the Indians that now reside, or may hereafter attempt to remain on ceded lands within the limits of this State, removed therefrom, and particularly to adopt all proper means of preventing the aforesaid Black Hawk and his band from executing their declared intention of resuming their late possessions.

Wm. Lee D. Ewing,
Speaker of the House of Representatives

Zadok Casey
Speaker of the Senate

Selection 3

Rock Island, May 15th 1831

Genl. W. Clark
Supt. Ind. Affairs
St. Louis

Respected Sir,

I have again to mention to you that the Black Hawk (a Sac Chief) and his party are now at their old village on Rock River. They have commenced planting corn and say they will keep possession.

This is what I expected from their manner of acting last fall, and which I mentioned to you in my letter of the 8th October last. I would not be at a loss were it not for the 7th Article of the Treaty with the Sacs and Foxes of 3d November 1804.

I respectfully ask: would it not be better to hold a Treaty with those Indians and get them to remove peaceably than to call on the Military to force them off? None of this Band have as yet called on me. For information, a few have been at my Agency to have work done at the Smith Shops.

Your Obed't Serv't

Felix St. Vrain
Indian Agent.

Selection 4

Superintendency of Ind. Affairs
St. Louis, May 28, 1831

Major General Edmund P. Gaines
Comdg. Western Department
United States Army

Sir,

I have the honor to enclose to you a copy of a letter of 26 inst. just received from the Governor of Illinois by which you will perceive he has thought it necessary to call out a force of about Seven hundred militia for the protection of the citizens of that State who reside near Rock River & for the purpose of removing a Band of Sacs which he states are now about Rock Island.

The Sacs & Foxes have been counselled with on the subject of their removal from the Lands which they had ceded to the United States. The prospect of collisions with the white settlers who were then purchasing those lands and the interminable difficulties in which they would be involved thereby were pointed out, and had the effect of convincing a large majority of both Tribes of the impropriety of remaining at their old villages. They therefore acquiesced in the justice of the claims of the United States and expressed their willingness to comply with my request to remove to their new village on the loway River west of the Mississippi--all but parts of two Bands, headed by two inconsiderable chiefs who after abandoning the old village have, it appears, returned again in defiance of all consequences.

These Bands are distinguished and known by the name of "The British Party," having been for many years in the habit of making annual visits at Malden in Upper Canada, for the purpose of receiving their presents, and it is believed to be owing in a great measure to the counsels they have there received, that so little influence has been acquired over them by the United States Agents.

In justice to Keokuck, Wapellow, the Stabbing Chief, and indeed all the other real chiefs & principal men of both Tribes, it should be observed that they have constantly and zealously cooperated with the Gov. Agents in furtherance of their views, and in their endeavors to effect the removal of all their people from the ceded lands.

With high respect
I have the honor to be
Your most obt servt.

W/m. Clark

Selection 5

St. Louis, May 28th 1831

Genl. Wm. Clark
Supt. Ind. Affairs
St. Louis

Respected Sir,

I had a Talk with the principal chief and braves of the Band of Indians occupying the Indian village on Rock River near Rock Island. The chief I spoke to is the Black Thunder, who is the principal of that band. The Black Hawk is only a brave but has considerable influence with them. I told them that they had sold those lands to the Government of the United States, and that they ought to remove to their own lands. They then said that they had only sold the lands south of the River. I then procured the Treaties and explained to them that they had relinquished their right as far as the Ouisconsin. Quashquamee (the Jumping Fish) then said that he had only consented to the limits being Rock River, but that a Fox Chief agreed (as he understood afterward) for the Ouisconsin, he (Quashquamee) had been deceived and that he did not intend it to be so.

I had considerable talk with them on this subject and could discover nothing hostile in their disposition unless their decided conviction of their right to the place could be construed as such.

I have the honor to be
Your Obedt Servt

Felix St. Vrain
Indian Agent