

Indians in the Platte Country

The Missouri Indians first came to the attention of Europeans through the account left from the Louis Jolliet expedition in 1673. They were not newcomers to the present-day Platte County area since it is estimated that Native Americans had occupied the area since the 12th century. In 1804, the Lewis and Clark Expedition passed by a large, abandoned village in a large valley near Bean Lake.

As Platte County Historian Doctor R.J. Felling explains in his article in 1983, an interesting narrative of Native American removal because not only were the original inhabitants of the area displaced, but groups from the east were also relocated from Platte County. It is a sad history. The following article was originally published in Discover North.

One of the first contracts to be let by the government after establishing Ft. Leavenworth in 1827, was to cut a road or trails through the unsettled Platte Country, connecting the fort to Liberty, MO by way of Barry, a small settlement on what was then the western border of the state. Few steamboats, except those owned by fur-traders, had ascended the Missouri above Liberty Landing or Wayne City prior to the early 1830s. Many people going West, who did not plan to go down the Santa Fe Trail, would disembark at Liberty Landing and proceed overland from Liberty, through Barry, and across the unsettled Platte Country, to cross the Missouri at the fort. Zadock Martin operated the ferry at the fort as well as at the crossing of the Little Platte at the Falls (Platte City).

Paxton states that the flat boat at the fort had been built at Liberty and towed up the Missouri by steamboat.

The lower part of the Little Platte Country had been relatively free of Indians for many years, although the Iowas, Fox and Sacs, claimed it as their ancestral home. They had been pushed farther north. The Iowas had a town about where Agency is located and also at Blacksnake Hills (St. Joseph). The Sac and Fox lived farther north. This was generally known to travelers crossing the Platte Country to Ft. Leavenworth. It must have been with considerable surprise after crossing the headwaters of Todd Creek just north of our present KCI to find what appeared to be an established Indian village on the west side of the road. This array of bark huts and shacks began to take form early in 1833. There were many weather-beaten wagon tops and dirty canvas drawn between poles and an occasional ragged tent of the white man's type might be seen. Absent were the conical wigwams that distinguished the nomadic tribes of the western plains because these people were of a different culture. They were from the flatlands of Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois.

This segment of humanity was but a remnant of the many tribes of Algonquin culture that had been from half-civilized Indian towns of the Ohio Valley. They had to be moved out, as settlers were taking their lands east of the Mississippi. After resisting for almost 200 years with bloody tomahawk from Kentucky to Canada, the War of 1812 was the breaking point. The eastern tribes began to lose leadership. Ten more years of harassment and they were ready to agree to anything. False treaties and false promises were rampant. By the middle 1820s we find the once powerful tribes of Pottawatomies, Shawnees, Delawares, Ottawas, Weas, Plankeshaws, Peroras, and Kaskaskiarras and some Kickapoose, reduced to a fraction of their once proud status; victims of the white man's disease and treachery. Their chiefs met in Chicago in 1825 and agreed to accept lands across the Mississippi. These unorganized bands headed West, many times led by unscrupulous white men, themselves not sure where they were going.

At last the "Indian Removal Bill" which had invoked bitter Congressional debate before its passage, was signed by President

Jackson on May 28, 1830. For the most part, it was the language of the Commission of Indian Affairs (C.I.A.), and provided “the exchange of lands with the Indians residing in any of the States or territories, and for their removal west of the Mississippi.” Isaac McCoy of Westport said it “was the first efficient step taken by government toward settling the policy of colonizing the Indians.”

This sounded like the question was settled. McCoy soon found himself in for many problems. What

followed for the next five years was wrought with indecision, confusion, and incompetency on the part of the white leaders. First, the Indians did not want to leave their established homes and villages and move to an unknown land where most of their customs and cultures would change. Many tribes had sent representatives west to look over the land, only to return disappointed.

JOHN TIPTON PAPERS Letter to Edward A. Hannegan.

“Much interest is felt here about the Indians’ removal...I say they must go. I will arrive at Plymouth at twelve o’clock on Monday the third of next month and I shall take the responsibility of saying they SHALL go. If you are willing follow my lead, be found on the Laport road 5 miles below Plymouth at three o’clock Monday evening Sept. 3rd. Bring with you six men good and true who will aid in collecting the Indians. Come on horseback or come on foot as may be most convenient. Come unarmed as all things will be provided by me.”

Tipton to Alexia Couquillard, Aug. 28, 1833, from the “Falls” of the Yellow River.

Sir, it is contemplated to affect a peaceful removal of the Pottatowatomi off the land lately owned by them on the Yellow River. I am authorized to accept the services of 100 volunteers to prevent difficulty between the Indians and the whites. (Same letter was sent to several other.)

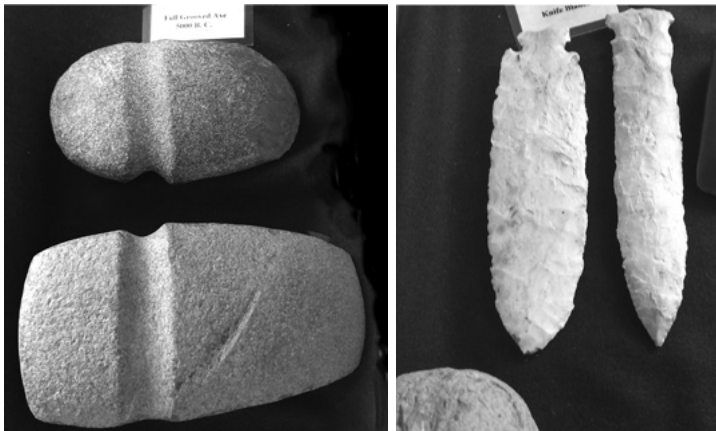
McKee, *Trail of Death*, tells the miserable story of the emigration from the Indians’ point of view. The Kickapoo reservation had been

established in 1831 just north of Ft. Leavenworth in Salt Creek Valley. It had been an orderly transformation. The government had provided a school,

a church, a blacksmith, and farmers to teach the Indians how to grow crops. A mill had been built. But what followed with the other tribes within the next six years was quite a contrast.

Luther Rice to Tipton, April 23, 1836.

“Sir...In the fall of 1835, I accompanied, in the capacity of interpreter in the employment of the Government, an emigrating party of Pottawatamies, from within the Chicago Agency, to the vicinity of Ft. Leavenworth on the Missouri River. I believe there were eight or nine hundred started with us from Chicago and only three hundred reached the place of destination, who stopped within six miles of Ft. Leavenworth, in Little Platte Country. The balance of the number separated from us after a few days journey, preferring to go their own way, as they might hunt as they went. They crossed the Mississippi river in the vicinity of Rock Island, and they were to winter two- or three-days journey from the Mississippi River. After making sugar this spring, they were to go on into the Little Platte Country and join that party who had stopped there last fall.”



Issue House at Beverly

“In the spring of 1835, an exploring party was sent out under the care of Captain William Cordon to examine the country given them by the Treaty of Chicago in 1833. They returned a few days before the emigrating party started from Chicago and reported that the country was not suitable for them because of the timber being so scarce, and the country was more remote than they expected. For the two above reasons,

there was a great deal of unwillingness manifested and expressed both by those who had emigrated and those who contemplated removing thereafter to that country which they obtained by the Treaty of Chicago. Therefore, in a council on the Mississippi River (on our way) it was there agreed to send a delegation to Washington City, the past winter, for the purpose of obtaining permission from the Gen. Government to settle in the Little Platte country for a term of twenty years, till they could an arrangement or find a country suitable for them. The delegation has left Washington with no further encouragement than they might remain in their present encampment for a while.”

Thus in 1836 we find them in a makeshift camp on the west side of the Liberty to Ft. Leavenworth road just north of what is now KCI Airport. Early maps show that they had made a shortcut to Ft. Leavenworth. Instead of crossing the Platte at the Falls, their trail turned west and crossed at what is now the Humphrey Recreation Access and proceeded northwest to their Issue House at Beverly.