

THE POTTAWATOMIES AND ALCOHOL: AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE ILLEGAL TRADE

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PROUD of their independence, strong in traditional values, American Indians were a unique people. But this cultural singularity threatened "civilized" society and throughout the Jacksonian era, the United States strove to indoctrinate the "savage" in the "superior" white lifestyle. Instead of elevating the Indians' situation, the national policy degraded the race. The first blow came from forced tribal removal to Western territories. Virtually overnight entire communities lost their ancestral homelands and faced a new life in unfamiliar surroundings. Understandably, the tribes readjusted poorly and relied upon annuity payments and allocated goods for subsistence. Soon thereafter, as part of an official education plan, many children were separated from their

families and unwillingly enrolled in boarding schools. The social consequences and psychological results were tremendous. In effect, these once autonomous natives lost control of their property, livelihood, and offspring.

Slowly, through both red and white reform movements, the Indians regained some of their self-esteem. Nevertheless, certain side effects from contact with whites lingered to plague the tribes into the 20th century. Perhaps the most destructive influence was alcohol. Having no previous moral stigmas against the intoxicant, native Americans drank excessively, both sapping their physical strength and impairing their mental processes. Gradually, whole tribes became indebted to traders because they spent annuity funds on cheap whiskey instead of purchasing needed food and supplies.¹

After 1830 the tribes were concentrated within a single area, thus enabling traders to operate swiftly and regularly. The new Western territories lacked vigorous law enforcement, facilitating the illegal distribution of

Title-page sketch: Originally from Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan, the Pottawatomies had peacefully exchanged their old lands for new territories farther west. One faction, the Prairie Band, relocated at present Council Bluffs, Iowa, in 1837, and remained there for 10 unfruitful years. Liquor was readily available and the Indians began drinking excessively. In 1847 they were relocated on a new Kansas reservation for many reasons, but the move was also considered an expedient to the solution of the alcohol problem. The theory was that removal of the red men farther west would isolate the tribes from injurious white influences. This drawing depicts a Prairie Pottawatomie family on the trail, 1848. Sketch by Rudolph Friederich Kurz, courtesy National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution; reproduced from *The Prairie People* by James A. Clifton, published by Regents Press of Kansas, Lawrence, 1977.

1. Otto Frovin Frederickson, *The Liquor Question Among the Indian Tribes in Kansas, 1804-1881* (Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 1932), p. 13; Richard M. Brown and Wesley R. Hurt, "Social Drinking Patterns of the Yankton Sioux," *Human Organization*, Boston, v. 24 (Fall, 1965), p. 223.

whiskey. And because the many navigable waterways into the frontier eased transportation problems, large quantities of alcohol could be easily imported. In addition, merchants tripled liquor sales and realized great profits by diluting each gallon of whiskey with two gallons of water.²

A few Indian groups, notably the Pawnee Loups and the Sugar Creek Pottawatomes, resisted the "sinful" drink. But the majority of tribes became addicted to liquor and consequently suffered from its overuse. Particularly affected were those close to major transportation routes, such as the Otoes, Omahas, Winnebagoes, and Sacs and Foxes living near the Missouri river. Roaming over the entire river areas, the nomadic Sioux also had easy access to whiskey.³

As a major center of the Missouri river trade, the present Council Bluffs, Iowa-Bellevue, Neb., area served as a "place of deposit" for distribution into the Indian territory. Allegedly alcohol was the *only* plentiful item to be found in this "whiskey capital" of the west, where liquor was always available.⁴

LIVING on the east bank of the Missouri, the Pottawatomes were an easy target for whiskey peddlers. Originally from Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan, the Pottawatomes had supported the British throughout the War of 1812, but in the post-war years they had peacefully exchanged their old lands for new territories farther west. One faction, the Prairie Band, quietly relocated at present Council Bluffs, Iowa, in 1837. Controlled by a govern-

mental subagency, the Indians remained in Iowa for 10 unfruitful years.⁵

In theory, specific legal codes protected these Pottawatomes from the liquor traffic on the Missouri. As early as 1802 a congressional measure restricted the number of whites on Indian lands, required licenses for traders, and authorized the President to limit or terminate whiskey sales. In 1832 the government enacted more stringent controls, declaring that no "ardent spirits" shall enter Indian territory "under any pretence." An 1834 law imposed a \$500 fine for selling, bartering, or even giving "spirituous liquor or wine to an Indian." Merely transporting such products into forbidden areas could result in a \$300 penalty and the loss of trading privileges. Aside from instituting punishments, the statute empowered superintendents, agents, subagents, and military officers to search suspicious vessels and commercial houses, and to confiscate illegal merchandise. If investigators discovered a still, they could destroy it and fine the owner \$1,000. Similarly, government employees or Indians might lawfully demolish contraband alcohol without regard for personal property rights.⁶

However harsh the regulations seemed, they remained unenforced and the liquor traffic expanded. As Rev. Isaac McCoy, a Baptist missionary and treaty agent, asked: "Where are the laws forbidding the introduction of ardent spirits? . . . Where are the officers of Government . . ." responsible for upholding justice and protecting the Indians? Moreover, "where are the bonds which traders give . . ." as assurance of their integrity? "Such mockery of law and justice," he believed, should cause every white citizen to blush in shame. In conclusion, he charged that the uncontrolled liquor trade destroyed the Indians more rapidly than warfare.⁷

To selfish men seeking quick monetary gains through liquor sales, such laws were only a paper threat. The 200 to 400 percent profits were so enticing that the fur companies believed the gains far outweighed the risks of

2. Frederickson, *Liquor in Kansas*, pp. 3-4, 8; Francis Paul Prucha, "American Indian Policy in the 1840s: Visions of Reform," *The Frontier Challenge*, ed. by John G. Clark (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 1971), p. 82; Robert A. Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1975), pp. 3-5; Cyrenus Cole, *Iowa Through the Years* (Iowa City, State Historical Society of Iowa, 1940), pp. 153-154.

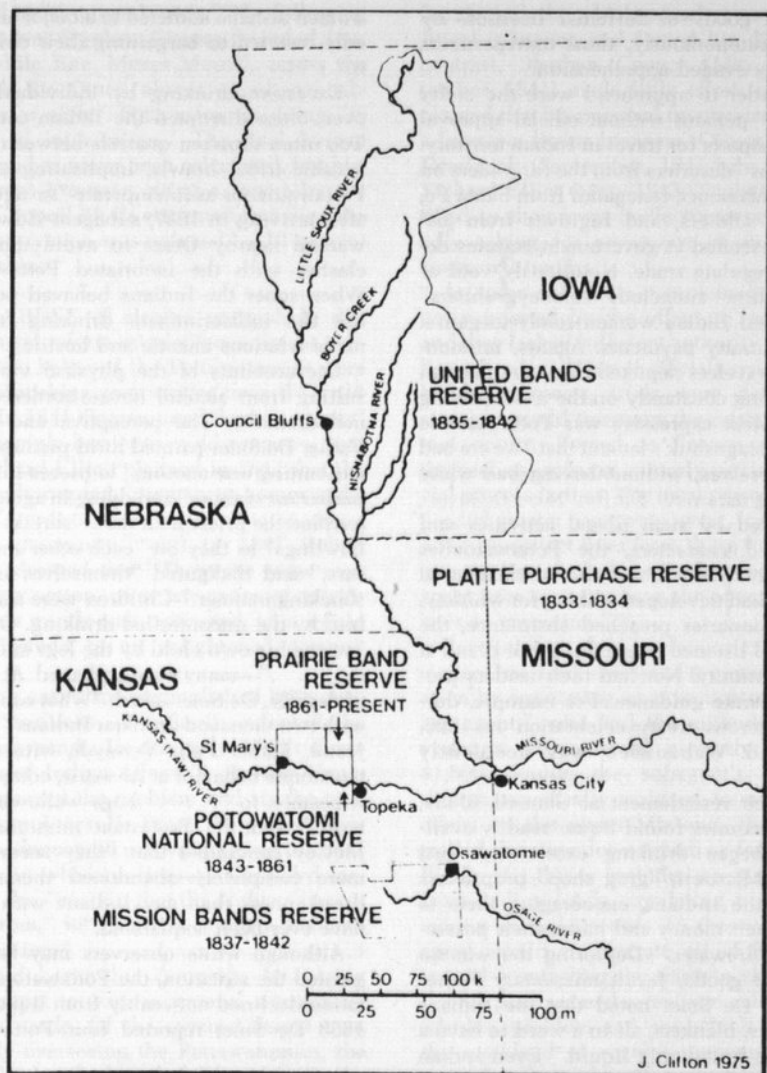
3. John Ely Briggs, "The Indian Cession of 1842," *Palimpsest*, Iowa City, v. 23 (September, 1942), pp. 287, 289; Frank Anthony Mullin, "Father De Smet and the Pottawattamie Indian Mission," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, Iowa City, v. 23 (April, 1925), p. 21; Ray H. Mattison, "The Indian Frontier on the Upper Missouri to 1865," *Nebraska History*, Lincoln, v. 39 (September, 1958), pp. 258-259; Louis Pelzer, *Marches of the Dragons in the Mississippi Valley* (New York, Arno Press, 1975), p. 89; John Ely Briggs, "Indian Affairs in 1845," *Palimpsest*, v. 26 (August, 1945), pp. 236-237.

4. Annie H. Abel, ed., *Chardon's Journal at Fort Clark, 1834-1839* (Iowa City, Athens Press, 1932), p. 350; Briggs, "Indian Cession," p. 287; J. A. Swisher, "With the Indians," *Palimpsest*, v. 22 (September, 1941), p. 283; George A. Schultz, *An Indian Canaan: Isaac McCoy and the Vision of an Indian State* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), p. 196; Isaac McCoy to John C. Spencer, October 25, 1841, "Isaac McCoy Papers," (microfilm) Roll 10, Exposure (Exp.) 777, Kansas State Historical Society, McCoy to Dr. J. Lykins, January 30, 1846, *ibid.*, Roll 11, Exps. 637-638.

5. Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Treaties, 1778-1883* (New York, Interland Publishing Inc., 1972), pp. 402-404, 557-570; Charles H. Babbitt, *Early Days at Council Bluffs* (Washington, D. C., Press of B. S. Adams, 1916), pp. 28-29.

6. Richard Peters, ed., *The Public Statutes at Large of the United States of America From the Organization of the Government in 1789, to March 3, 1845*, eight vols. (Boston, Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1845-1867), v. 2, pp. 139-147, v. 4, pp. 564, 732-733.

7. Isaac McCoy, *History of Baptist Indian Missions* (Washington, D. C., William M. Morrison, 1840), pp. 563-564.



Pottawatomie reservations in the West, 1833-1867, were concentrated in an area accessible to traders because of the navigable waterways. And because the new Western territories lacked vigorous law enforcement, large quantities of alcohol could be easily imported. The present Council Bluffs area was called the "whiskey capital" of the West, because it served as a place of deposit for distribution into the Indian territory. Living on the east bank of the Missouri near Council Bluffs before their further removal to Kansas, the Prairie Band Pottawatomies were an easy target for the whiskey peddlers. Map reproduced from *The Prairie People* by James A. Clifton, published by Regents Press of Kansas, Lawrence, 1977.

confiscated goods or forfeited licenses. By operating autonomously, these entrepreneurs successfully evaded apprehension.⁸

Even harder to apprehend were the crafty "intruders," persons without official approval or valid passports for travel in Indian territory. Described as "deserters from the fur traders on the Upper Missouri, renegades from Santa Fe, discharged soldiers, and fugitives from justice," they scoffed at government statutes designed to regulate trade. Notoriously void of scruples, these audacious "moneygrubbers" often married Indian women solely to gain a share in annuity payments. Agents, missionaries, and travelers depicted them as inhuman scum, preying constantly on the unsuspecting red men. Most expressive was Pottawatomie headman Patagoshuk's lament that "we are bad enough ourselves, without having bad white men among us. . . ."⁹

Surrounded by such illegal activities and unprincipled characters, the Pottawatomes used alcohol freely. Prior to resettlement in Iowa, they had developed a liking for whiskey. While missionaries preached abstinence, the Indians had listened respectfully but drank at every opportunity. Nor had their leaders provided temperate guidance. For example, during a boisterous treaty celebration in 1826, tribal head Wabaunsee was accidentally stabbed.¹⁰

Upon their resettlement at Council Bluffs, the Pottawatomes found liquor readily available and began drinking excessively. Just across the Missouri, "grog shop" proprietors welcomed the Indians, encouraging them to squander their money and barter their possessions for "firewater." Deploing the wanton exchange of goods, Jesuit missionary Father Pierre-Jean De Smet noted that the Indians gave "horses, blankets, all in a word to have a little of this brutalizing liquid." Even Indian

women became addicted to alcohol and reportedly resorted to bargaining their children for it.¹¹

Excessive drinking by individuals, moreover, often disrupted the Indian community. Too often drunken quarrels between kinsmen became tribal brawls, implicating all of the Pottawatomes as intemperate "savages." Soon after arriving in 1837, subagent Edwin James warned nearby Otoes to avoid unnecessary clashes with the inebriated Pottawatomes. When sober the Indians behaved peacefully, but the indiscriminate drinking frequently made relations chaotic and hostile.¹²

The accounts of the physical violence resulting from alcohol abuse bordered on the melodramatic. The perceptive and sensitive Father De Smet painted lurid pictures of Indians cutting one another "to pieces in the most barbarous manner" and dying in agony. Others terrified the priest with their "shreiks [*sic*] and howlings" as they bit "each other's noses and ears," and disfigured "themselves in a most shocking manner." Children were also victimized by the uncontrolled drinking. One father "seized his own child by the legs and crushed it . . ."—many were orphaned. At the point of despair, De Smet asked: "What could one do with two thousand drunken Indians?" Another Jesuit, Father Felix Verreydt, witnessed Pottawatomie behavior at its worst, comparing the tribesmen to ". . . hogs wallowing in the mud." And the Protestant missionary Isaac McCoy concluded that "they seem to have more completely abandoned themselves to drunkenness than any Indians with whom I have ever been acquainted."¹³

Although white observers may have exaggerated the situation, the Pottawatomie population declined noticeably from liquor use. In 1838 De Smet reported four Pottawatomes

8. Brown and Hurt, "Drinking Patterns," p. 223; Frederickson, *Liquor in Kansas*, pp. 6, 9.

9. "Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs," *H. Doc. 2* (Serial 418), 27th Cong., 3d Sess., 1842, p. 424; *ibid.*, *H. Doc. 2* (Serial 439), 28th Cong., 1st Sess., 1843, p. 393; *ibid.*, *H. Doc. 2* (Serial 463), 28th Cong., 2d Sess., 1844, p. 433; W. G. Ewing to T. Hartley Crawford, November 17, 1842, National Archives, Office of Indian Affairs, "Letters Received—Council Bluffs Agency." (microfilm) M-234, Roll 215, Exps. 403-405. Hereafter microfilm materials from the National Archives will be cited by microfilm and reel numbers. Put a go shuck to David D. Mitchell, July 5, 1842, M-234, Roll 215, Exps. 477-478; Hiram M. Chittenden and Albert T. Richardson, eds., *Life, Letters, and Travels of Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, S. J.*, four vols. (New York, Francis P. Harper, 1905), v. 1, p. 175.

10. McCoy, *History of Baptist Missions*, p. 265; James Hall and Thomas L. McKenney, *The Indian Tribes of North America*, three vols. (Edinburgh, Scotland, John Grant, 1934), v. 2, pp. 196-198.

11. Chittenden and Richardson, eds., *Pierre-Jean De Smet*, v. 1, p. 172; Pierre-Jean De Smet, *Western Missions and Missionaries: A Series of Letters* (Shannon, Irish University Press, 1972), p. 322; "Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs," *H. Doc. 2* (Serial 480), 29th Cong., 1st Sess., 1845, p. 553; Thomas Harvey to William Medill, November 6, 1946, M-234, Roll 216, Exps. 520-522.

12. Moses Merrill, "Extracts from the Diary of Rev. Moses Merrill, a Missionary to the Otoe Indians From 1832 to 1840," *Transactions and Reports of the Nebraska State Historical Society*, Lincoln, v. 4 (June, 1892), pp. 185-186; Chittenden, ed., *Pierre-Jean De Smet*, v. 1, pp. 158-159; Robert Mitchell to Thomas H. Harvey, September 30, 1847, M-234, Roll 217, Exps. 100-102.

13. De Smet, *Western Missions*, p. 322; Pierre-Jean De Smet, *The Indian Missions in the United States of America, Under the Care of the Missouri Province of the Society of Jesus* (Philadelphia, King and Baird, Printers, 1841), p. 12; Gilbert J. Garraghan, *The Jesuits of the Middle United States*, three vols. (New York, America Press, 1938), v. 1, p. 445; McCoy to Spencer, October 25, 1841, "McCoy Papers," Roll 10, Exp. 777.

murdered in "drunken brawls." The following year subagent Stephen Cooper recorded four deaths while Rev. Moses Merrill, across the river with the Otoes, almost simultaneously cited "six or eight" Pottawatomies dying "in their fits of intoxication." The total human destruction has never been calculated, but historian Grant Foreman citing a report by the agent at Council Bluffs estimated that the tribe on that reservation was reduced by 10 percent in 1845 alone.¹⁴

THIS ABUSE of alcohol particularly discouraged reform-minded government subagents, who believed the Pottawatomies were capable of making great strides toward "civilization." In 1841 Cooper cited "ardent spirits" as the principle barrier to rapid progress. Similarly Richard Elliott claimed in 1844 that the Indians only needed "permanent homes and a few good words of encouragement to become a thriving community," and in 1847 Robert Mitchell admitted that "There are some men among this nation, of a fair order of intelligence, their minds well cultivated, who would do no discredit to an enlightened community."¹⁵

But such optimism accomplished little until those in positions of authority adopted the temperance cause. In the early 1840's Commissioner of Indian Affairs T. Hartley Crawford recognized the problem and set the tone for official policies. He found the present laws wholly inadequate to prevent, or even to check the traffic in whiskey. Because Crawford saw liquor as the "one sin that the Indians cannot abstain from," he gave the problem his constant attention.¹⁶

Crawford began his campaign by urging each subagent to wage a personal war against the illegal trade. Of the seven different men alternately overseeing the Pottawatomies, the only one who seriously tried to curb the liquor trade served prior to Crawford's administration. Because Dr. Edwin James (summer, 1837-January 8, 1838) had searched diligently

for alcohol, the whiskey traders used their political influence and forced his dismissal. In contrast, Stephen Cooper (May, 1839-September, 1841) made little effort; critics complained that his personal interpreter carried on a lucrative liquor business. Others like James Deaderick (September, 1841-July, 1842) and Richard Elliot (May, 1843-October, 1845) testified to their own ineffectiveness by repeatedly asking for assistance in apprehending suspected traders.¹⁷

As some subagents complained, they were not supported by the office of Indian affairs and they lacked sufficient authority to suppress liquor traders. Even if officials quickly apprehended suspects, trials were delayed until someone could transport the criminals to distant courts. Forced to finance such travel themselves, subagents rarely carried the judicial process farther. The local personnel clearly needed greater coercive powers, for they could not even collect fines from those found openly transporting alcohol. As De Smet verified: "No agent here seems to have the power to put the laws in execution."¹⁸

Recognizing the inadequacies, Commissioner Crawford attempted to remedy the situation by appointing an investigator or "traveling agent," who had the authority to arrest violators. He received a yearly stipend of \$1,500—double the subagent's salary. Although specifically assigned to oversee tribal affairs on the upper Missouri, the agent patrolled the river downstream as far as Council Bluffs. His duties included ejecting intruders from Indian lands, regulating trade, and revoking abused licenses. In theory the special agent would concentrate all of his energies toward eliminating the trade in alcohol.¹⁹

This plan seemed a realistic solution to the whiskey problem and one which would ease the workload of regular personnel. But the powerful American Fur Company expertly

14. Stephen Cooper to Joshua Pilcher, June 17, 1839, M-234, Roll 215, Exp. 219; Grant Foreman, *The Last Trek of the Indians* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1946), pp. 120-121; De Smet, *Indian Missions*, p. 12; Moses Merrill to McCoy, July 8, 1839, "McCoy Papers," Roll 10, Exp. 192.

15. "Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs," *S. Doc. 1* (Serial 395), 27th Cong., 2d Sess., 1841, p. 357; *ibid.*, 1844, p. 443; Robert Mitchell to Thomas H. Harvey, September 30, 1847, M-234, Roll 217, Exp. 102.

16. "Report of the Commissioner," 1841, p. 356; *ibid.*, 1843, p. 277.

17. Crawford to Pilcher, April 4, 1839, National Archives, Office of Indian Affairs, "Letters Sent," (microfilm) M-21, Roll 26, Exp. 111; Crawford to Pilcher, August 1, 1839, M-21, Roll 27, Exp. 067; David D. Mitchell to Crawford, December 10, 1841, M-234, Roll 215, Exp. 359; James Deaderick to Crawford, April 5, 1842, *ibid.*, Exp. 436; Richard Elliott to Commanding Officer at Fort Leavenworth, February 6, 1845, M-234, Roll 216, Exp. 224; Pilcher to Cooper, May 19, 1839, "William Clark Papers," (microfilm) Roll 2, v. 7, Exp. 1213, Kansas State Historical Society.

18. Daniel Miller to David D. Mitchell, July 2, 1842, M-234, Roll 215, Exp. 476; Frederickson, *Liquor in Kansas*, pp. 50, 60; Chittenden and Richardson, eds., *Pierre-Jean De Smet*, v. 1, p. 173.

19. Crawford to David D. Mitchell, April 28, 1842, M-21, Roll 32, Exp. 128; "Report of the Commissioner," 1842, pp. 525-527; John E. Sunder, *The Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri, 1840-1865* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), pp. 49, 83-84.

manipulated the special agent in order to protect its profits. Through political connections the company had a former employee—Andrew Drips—appointed to the position in 1842. As a successful trapper, Drips had made many acquaintances within trading circles and had retained numerous friendships after leaving the business. Consequently, as a special agent in the Indian service he notified company men of impending inspections and advised them as to the best techniques for destroying or concealing whiskey. Although his official instructions were to remain with the Indians at all times, he accepted “shelter and sustenance, cooperation and companionship” from old friends and never slighted company hospitality. When the office of Indian affairs dismissed Drips in 1846, the American Fur Company immediately welcomed him back into their ranks.²⁰

Subagents often requested military assistance to help preserve order but these reinforcements arrived only occasionally. During August, 1839, armed troops from Fort Leavenworth were requested to help Subagent Cooper forcibly remove “disorderly white persons” from the area. Impressed by the effectiveness of such forces, Supt. Joshua Pilcher petitioned Washington to station a company of dragoons at Council Bluffs. In 1842 the government complied and established Camp Croghan within six miles of the subagency.²¹

Headed by Capt. John Burgwin, the troops made a concerted effort to enforce the restrictive trade laws. The office of Indian affairs periodically praised their conscientious work, but they proved to be no match for the elusive whiskey salesmen. In May, 1843, an incident concerning the steamship *Omega* exemplified the techniques used in evading the authorities. Temporarily assigned to inspect all cargo traveling down the Missouri, Captain Burgwin met the vessel at present Bellevue, Neb. (opposite Council Bluffs). On board was noted naturalist John James Audubon who cleverly staged a diversionary tactic, giving the crew time to conceal the liquor. Insistent on exploring the area, Audubon flattered the officer into taking him on a personal two-hour tour. After they

returned and shared a sumptuous lunch, Burgwin was willing to waive the necessary search. But the ship captains demanded an examination, in compliance with the law. Naturally Burgwin found nothing and the *Omega* left quickly, its passengers gleefully relishing the successful ruse.²²

When the soldiers were withdrawn from Council Bluffs late in 1843 the subagents immediately renewed their pleas for military reinforcements. If the dragoons did not stop all of the traders, at least they helped stem the violence of the Indians' drunken brawls. As Elliott expressed it, the days of miracles were long since past and an effective police force was paramount to everyone's safety. Yet the subagency never again received more than temporary assistance.²³

MEANWHILE the Pottawatomies also took measures to control the whiskey traffic. At an 1843 intertribal meeting at present Tahlequah, Okla., Pottawatomie delegates signed a “compact of amity” to regulate and suppress liquor usage among their people. Although this agreement at least expressed concern for their problem, certain tribesmen felt it was hypocritical. A large faction of dissatisfied Pottawatomies registered grievances against their kinsmen for bartering agricultural tools for alcohol, and condemned the “desolate habits” of the tribal leaders. Because they felt the situation was hopeless, 396 dissenters left Iowa in 1844 and resettled among the more temperate Kickapoos near Fort Leavenworth.²⁴

By deserting Council Bluffs, these discontented Pottawatomies forfeited their share in the annual annuity payments. The allotments provided Indians with money for necessary supplies, funds which many used to purchase liquor. After realizing that the payments actually facilitated alcohol sales, Washington offi-

22. “Report of the Commissioner,” 1843, p. 402; Hiram M. Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*, two vols. (New York, The Press of the Pioneers, Inc., 1935), v. 2, pp. 669-674.

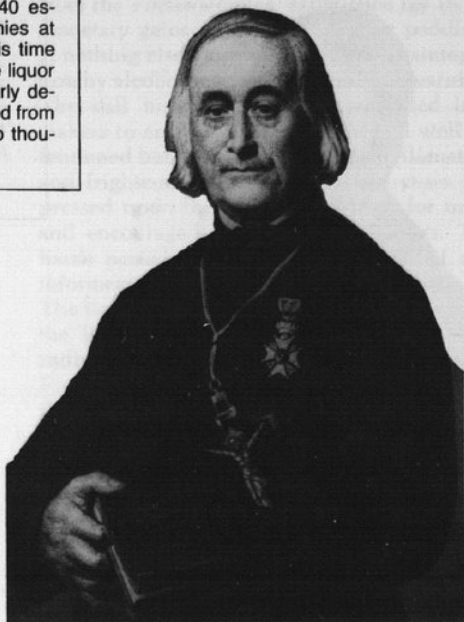
23. Edward Poor to the Secretary of War, December 6, 1843, M-234, Roll 216, Exps. 174-175; Elliott to Harvey, January 27, 1845, *ibid.*, Exp. 221; Elliott to Commanding Officer at Fort Leavenworth, February 6, 1845, *ibid.*, Exp. 224; R. Jones to Lt. Col. G. Warton, August 27, 1847, M-234, Roll 217, Exp. 6; Harvey to Medill, August 9, 1847, *ibid.*, Exp. 70.

24. Prucha, “American Indian Policy,” p. 99; Ronald N. Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1975), p. 229; “Report of the Commissioner, 1841, p. 264; Enclosure to Correspondence, Elliott to Crawford, August 8, 1843, M-234, Roll 215, Exp. 592; Pottawatomies to Harvey, June 8, 1844, M-234, Roll 302, Exp. 247; Pottawatomies to Harvey, June 11, 1844, *ibid.*, Exp. 270.

20. Sunder, *Fur Trade*, pp. 9, 50, 80-81; Mattison, “Indian Frontier,” pp. 260-261.

21. Pilcher to Crawford, August 13, 1839, M-234, Roll 215, Exp. 225; Pilcher to Crawford, November 4, 1840, National Archives, Office of Indian Affairs, “Letters Received—Fort Leavenworth Agency,” (microfilm) M-234, Roll 301, Exp. 671; Babbitt, *Early Days*, pp. 61-62; Pelzer, *Marches of the Dragoons*, p. 93.

Father Pierre-Jean De Smet (1801-1873), Jesuit missionary to the Indians from 1838 to 1840 established a mission among the Pottawatomies at the site of present Council Bluffs. During his time with the tribe, the Belgian priest deplored the liquor trade that impoverished the people and nearly despaired of the physical violence which resulted from alcohol abuse. "What could one do with two thousand drunken Indians?" he asked.



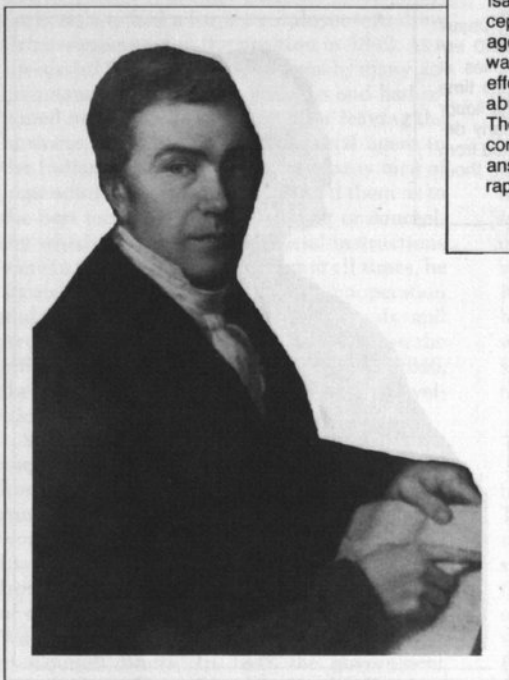
cials proposed alternate plans to nourish and equip their charges. The most popular scheme resurrected the "factory system" of trading posts owned and regulated by the federal government. Crawford called it the ". . . best, and perhaps the only return we can make to the red man for much that was unavoidable, and for all that is irremediable. . . ." He firmly believed that this system would greatly reduce alcohol sales because the Indians would receive their annuities in goods instead of in cash. But such a drastic change required the Indians' approval since their treaties specifically guaranteed a monetary payment. As a result, Crawford ordered the Council Bluffs subagents to secure the Pottawatomies' consent without delay.²⁵

Few of the Pottawatomies eagerly accepted the proposal and the commissioner blamed their reticence on the subagents' insufficient

efforts. In reality the Indians opposed the measure because it severely limited already dwindling tribal autonomy. Forfeiting their cash allocations would have made them completely dependent on the government's judgment of their needs. Reduced to relying on a "benevolent white father" somewhere in the East, the once proud tribe feared jeopardizing its remaining independence. Aside from such philosophical reasons, the Pottawatomies simply wanted to spend the money as they pleased. Yielding to continued pressure, in 1847 the Pottawatomies agreed to receive a portion of their annual payment in goods. While this was a step toward the desired goal, it scarcely solved the problem. The Indians still received some money and many traders would gladly exchange liquor for their personal possessions.²⁶

25. "Report of the Commissioner," 1841, p. 261; *ibid.*, 1844, pp. 306-307.

26. *Ibid.*, 1842, p. 424; Elliott to Crawford, September 4, 1843, M-234, Roll 215, exp. 662; David D. Mitchell to Crawford, September 30, 1842, *ibid.*, Exp. 505; Medill to Robert Mitchell, January 22, 1847, M-21, Roll 39, Exp. 092.



Isaac McCoy (1784-1846), Baptist missionary, accepted in 1830 an appointment as surveyor and agent to assist the Indians in their migration westward. He was convinced that a religious reform effort would more likely solve the Indian alcohol abuse problem than a government program. Though McCoy and his supporters were probably correct in theory, a complete reshaping of the Indians' ethical standards required time and excellent rapport, neither of which the Baptists enjoyed with the Pottawatomies.

CONVINCED that government programs achieved nothing, Rev. Isaac McCoy proposed a religious reform program. He placed the burden of alcohol abuse upon competent Christians who would indoctrinate moral values into the Pottawatomies—values that would help them to resist the temptations of whiskey. Bravely bearing this “awful responsibility” for the Indians’ salvation, true believers would arm the sufferers with the “doctrines and influences of the Bible.” Consequently the Indians “will be rendered invulnerable to those satanic assaults.” Supporters of this noble but naive effort believed that long-lasting change would only result from reshaping the Indians’ ethical standards. Though they were probably correct in theory, this kind of a transformation required time and excellent rapport, neither of which the Baptists enjoyed with the Pottawatomies.²⁷

The tribe needed a swift “cure,” and the only

27. McCoy, *History of Baptist Indian Missions*, p. 564.

agencies with sufficient influence to affect this were the national courts and the legislature. After gathering evidence and securing witnesses against the American Fur Company, in 1846 the United States finally brought it to trial. The government demanded \$25,000 in reparations for the estimated 4,300 gallons of whiskey recently sold in Indian territory. Throughout 1847 and 1848 similar suits were brought to trial because of the company’s questionable business dealings. The proceedings advanced slowly, however, when important witnesses failed to appear—some were bribed by the company or hired and stationed in remote regions. Consequently the government’s case was so weakened that in January, 1849, the secretary of war settled for a \$5,000 penalty and the assumption of court costs. This terminated the prolonged investigation but did not decisively curb the powerful trade company.²⁸

28. Sunder, *Fur Trade*, pp. 90, 113-116.

Concerned over basic controls, congress strengthened earlier, ineffective trade legislation. A new statute, passed on March 3, 1847, imposed a two-year maximum prison sentence on anyone apprehended while selling alcohol and a one-year term if arrested while transporting whiskey into tribal lands. To help secure more convictions, a provision granted Indians equal status with whites as witnesses. Equally important was a stipulation preventing the distribution of annuity payments while the Indians were intoxicated or if officials believed liquor to be nearby the issue grounds.²⁹

As the 1847 statute went into effect the Pottawatomies journeyed toward a new Kansas reservation. Although accomplished for many reasons, the relocation seemed the most expedient solution to the alcohol problem. Reformers justified the action by an old and overworked philosophy. They maintained that by sending the red men further west they would isolate the tribes from injurious white influences. But the alcohol problem accompanied the Indians and continued to hinder their progress. As Isaac McCoy predicted, no matter

where they went, the whites, led by the traders, would follow.³⁰

By all appearances, the only profit gleaned from the Pottawatomies' experience lay in the monetary gains of successful liquor peddlers. If nothing else, however, the tribal disintegration by alcohol served as an ominous warning. The still uncontrolled trade reminded lawmakers to enforce their eloquent and well-intentioned but impotent regulations. Alienating and frightening as they were, the years impressed upon the Indians the need for unity and encouraged suspicion of outsiders. The harsh period cautioned the government and reformers alike against ineffective policies. The stagnation and ever evident decline among the Pottawatomies testified to their need of individual, direct, and concentrated attention. Finally the increased alcoholism demonstrated the detrimental quality of some "civilized" ways. Used as an illustration, the whiskey trade, with all of its ramifications for the Pottawatomies, indicated the increasingly complex and demanding nature of future white-Indian relations.

29. George Minot, ed., *The Statutes at Large and Treaties of the United States of America* (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1853), pp. 203-204.

30. John C. Parish, "Liquor and the Indians," *Palimpsest*, v. 3 (July, 1922), p. 213; Frederickson, *Liquor in Kansas*, p. 37; McCoy to Dr. J. Lykins, January 30, 1846, "McCoy Papers," Roll 11, Exps. 637-638.