

**Corn Moon Migrations:
Ho-Chunk Belonging, Removal, and Return
in the Early Nineteenth-Century Western Great Lakes**

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(History)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN MADISON

2017

Date of final oral examination: 12/13/2017

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Acknowledgements

For my grandmother,
Diane Hazel-Estelle Seward
1935-2017

No one writes alone.

Susan Lee Johnson has been my number one fan. Her attention to detail and her demand for rigor transformed me into a historian. Susan's enduring faith in me is the reason this dissertation exists.

In addition to Susan, UW-Madison surrounded me with many wise and gracious mentors. Ned Blackhawk took a chance on me and I am grateful to have worked with him. Bill Cronon modeled good teaching, good scholarship, and good citizenship in every way possible. John Sharpless was always up for a beer and discussion when I needed someone to argue with. Jim Schlender and Leslie Abadie helped me through the bureaucracies of graduate school, always holding up the light at the end of the tunnel. When my dissertation began to move in a different direction, John Hall convinced me it would be a worthwhile one. Steve Kantrowitz graciously provided invaluable and reassuring commentary and suggestions. Larry Nesper showed me different perspectives and interpretations.

At the University of Wisconsin, I met brilliant, encouraging, and funny people who have been amazing cheerleaders and friends. Many of them were also members of the best dissertation group ever. Thank you, Crystal Moten, Jenn Holland, Doug Kiel, Megan Raby, Meredith Beck Sayre, Andrew Case, and Charles Hughes. I owe you at least three beers, one for each of the dissertations I nearly finished and made you read. Vaneesa Cook helped me hone the final drafts of my dissertation.

I'd also like to thank the supportive people I met at the various Graduate Student conferences sponsored by the Committee on Institutional Cooperation American Indian Studies Consortium (CIC-AISC). Lucy Eldersveld Murphy became a familiar face not only at my CIC-AISC conference presentations but also at other conferences. In every instance, she offered genuine interest in and keen commentary on my research as well as insights about where to go next.

Without the Wisconsin Historical Society, and its patient and talented archivists and other staff, how could anyone write about Wisconsin history? Thank you Harry Miller, Peter Gottlieb, and Jim Danky, John Broihahn, and Rick Pifer.

I received financial help along the way, which I have always also interpreted as recognition for the kind of work I do. My research and writing was supported by the Fort Atkinson Branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), a lively and welcoming group of ladies I now call friends. I also received financial support from the Mellon-Wisconsin Graduate School Summer Fellowship, the CIC-American Indian Studies Consortium (Michigan State University), and the UW-Madison History Department's Genevieve Gorst Herfurth Fellowship along with the UW-Madison Vilas Travel Grants Program.

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater colleagues and students as well as my past professors deserve thanks. UW-Whitewater is where I began my journey to graduate school. I am grateful to the people I encountered there while I was an undergraduate student. They saw a scholar in me long before I did. The history department at UW-Whitewater was my first teaching job while I finished my dissertation. I am so thankful for that opportunity. I won the lottery when I was offered a job in the history department at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois. My students showed me nothing but kindness and patience during my first semester and

my new colleagues cheered me over the finish line on this project. Thank you, Amy Scott, Aurea Toxqui, John Williams, Rusty Gates, John Nielsen, Lynne Swanson, Rob Hawkins, and Brad Brown.

From the hard-to-love TA offices in the Humanities building to the hard-to-leave places of my adopted hometowns—Madison and Fort Atkinson—many wonderful people kept me laughing and loving life over the years: Andrew Erickson, David Rodriguez, Scott Vigil, Kathy Kae, Doug Kiel, Nic Mink, Ari Eisenberg, Crystal Moten, Jenn Holland, Megan Raby, Haley Pollack, Meridith Beck Sayre Mink, Andrew Case, Charles Hughes as well as the gang at the Café Carpe and The Edgewater Supper Club. Fort Atkinson proved to be an amazing community. Everyone, it seemed, was interested in hearing about my work.

My friend and partner Tony Gulig deserves much credit for this completed project. Generous in both his patience and his editing, Tony helped ensure that I would finish this dissertation. Thank you for cooking, feeding the fire, and listening to me talk about my work.

My family asked me many times if “my paper was done.” It is. My mother, Constance, was always supportive even when I provided only vague answers. My brother Aaron challenged and encouraged me as only he could. I am honored and a little surprised that my father, Dean, read in one sitting the entire penultimate draft of this work and provided comments. My grandfather, Henry Seward, a student of history in his own way, helped me far more than he knows. He read portions of my dissertation in its various stages and has always praised my career path in education. His mother, Helen Seward, taught students in one-room school house. My grandfather’s salvage yard generated six-toed cats and I adopted one, of course. Lucy, along with her older feline mentor, Agnes, kept me company on my desk and underneath throughout graduate school. Thank you all.

It is with great sadness and ultimate joy that I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my grandmother, Diane Hazel-Estelle Seward. She passed away just months before I finished this work. I've been told I have a great sense of humor. I get it from her. Without Diane's way of seeing the world, graduate school and the process of producing a dissertation, would have been unbearable.

L.R.T. Peoria, Illinois
December 24, 2017
Light Snow

Abstract

“Corn Moon Migrations” examines Ho-Chunk Indian efforts to maintain their autonomy and homelands as U.S. settler colonialism displaced the British imperial influence in the western Great Lakes and upper Mississippi Valley during the early nineteenth century. Corn, the primary food Ho-Chunks received as a gift from Grandmother Earth, marked Ho-Chunk belonging, defined their sacred history, and underpinned their autonomy. Since their earliest encounters with European newcomers, Ho-Chunks articulated their peoplehood and protected this subsistence history, orienting outsiders to their worldview, territory, and lifeways. Such efforts, however, faltered in the face of U.S. warfare and settler colonialism. Focusing on the Rock River band, which grew out of eighteenth-century Ho-Chunk migrations away from trade centers such as Green Bay and Prairie du Chien, I demonstrate how Ho-Chunk autonomy in their lands was undermined in 1832 during the Black Hawk War. I reveal a story of creative Indian intercession during this crisis, detailing how Rock River Ho-Chunks exercised covert and passive mediation—including guiding both U.S. troops and the Sauk band—hoping to thwart violence and avoid destruction of their crops. Though brilliant in their actions and maneuvers, Ho-Chunks failed on both fronts. As a result, Rock River Ho-Chunks lost their much of their corn crop that year. Then, when they were virtually starving, U.S. officials accused them of violent crimes against whites and of assisting the Sauk band. The Ho-Chunk sought to preserve corn and homeland, and never planned to incite a pan-Indian uprising against Americans. This history has remained muted in previous scholarship. The U.S. forced the Rock River band to cede their southern Wisconsin lands and ordered their removal the following spring. When the federal government failed to provide corn rations in the months before removal, the Ho-Chunks faced starvation. Ignoring Ho-Chunk pleas to remain one more Corn Moon and cultivate one

more crop, federal troops removed the Rock River Ho-Chunk, only to see them return within weeks. Ho-Chunk resistance to removal and their repeated returns underline the human costs of cruel and poorly implemented federal Indian policy, while highlighting Indigenous survivance and sense of place.

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...facts are not created equal: the production of traces is always also the creation of silences. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*

The one thing that all these works [on the Black Hawk War] have in common is that they generally tell the same story. The facts that comprise the main historical narrative of the Black Hawk War have been established for generations. Historians have known the principal events of the war since the guns went silent during the waning days of that sweltering summer of 1832. Patrick Jung, *The Black Hawk War of 1832*

Our certainties are our greatest enemy when we approach the past. Hindsight is always blinding. We know from our living experience that our present moment—this moment—has all the possibilities of the future still in it. None of us prescribes the reality we live in. None of us controls the consequences of our actions. None of us can predict with absolute certainty anybody else's reaction to simplest gesture, the clearest sign, the most definite word. But we have to cope with these ambivalences, interpreting these never-ending possibilities. ...Our imagination to see the past as it actually was has to return to the past its own present, with all the possibilities of its future still in it, with all its uncertainties, with all its inconsequentialities.
Greg Dening, "Empowering Imaginations"

Introduction

Sometime in the summer of 1828, an elderly Ho-Chunk man named Old Grayheaded Decorah led his villagers away from their Baraboo River settlement to escape the violence swelling up around them. A white man had been found murdered inside his cabin in the lead mining district of southwestern Wisconsin (then the westernmost portion of Michigan territory). A posse of local white settlers began hunting down nearby Ho-Chunks whom they believed killed the lead miner. Such violent flare-ups between the white and Indian communities increased with each passing year and the Ho-Chunk decision to run away seemed to be the safest method to protect themselves while not incurring the wrath of a more organized militia or the federal army. In their flight, the Ho-Chunks encountered Pliney Warriner, an American traveler from New England. Warriner was “seeking [his] way through the pathless forests that divide the Portage of the Wisconsin from the whites at Green Bay.” Near the southwestern flowing Wisconsin River and the northeastern flowing Fox, Warriner found himself squarely “between the Winnebago Indians and the adjoining settlements.” But for this extraordinary meeting with Old Grayheaded Decorah, one of the most well-known and respected Ho-Chunk chiefs, Warriner counted himself quite unfortunate to be “within the Indian territory” during the latest of the “border wars” that frequented the frontier.¹

¹ Warriner’s tale of his encounter with Old Grayheaded Decorah first appeared in the *Buffalo Journal*. R. W. Haskins was one of the proprietors and editors of this periodical and, in September of 1829, he met Warriner, “who was just from the country of the Winnebagoes,” and wrote down Warriner’s story to share with his readers. Haskins explained: “I wrote it out from his oral narration, aided by his imperfect notes.” Haskins introduced the tale to the reader in this way, adding that Warriner “assured me that he had added absolutely nothing to the literal facts as they actually occurred, and in reducing his statement to print, I adhered strictly to his narrative, without embellishment.” Haskins attributes the story to Warriner, and so it will be cited as such: Pliney Warriner, “Legends of the Winnebagoes,” in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, ed. Lyman C. Draper and Reuben Gold Thwaites, vol. 1 (1854; reprint, Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1903), 86-93, quotes on 86.

Old Grayheaded Decorah was a principal chief of the Portage (or Wisconsin) band of Ho-Chunks.² Warriner recalled that the chief—an old man “whose locks were bleached by the frosts of some eighty winters”—travelled with about forty Indians, mostly women and children, whom the chief referred to as “my family,” an appellation that Warriner found endearing. Running into a white man in the woods during this tense time startled the Ho-Chunk. A shared smoke from the chief’s pipe eased anxieties over the unexpected encounter, recalled Warriner. “Our courses lay in the same direction” he explained, “and we proceeded together.”³

Warriner claimed he understood Algonquian, the lingua franca of the region, but this was not the language of the Ho-Chunk people. They spoke a Siouan dialect very similar to their ancestral kin, the Oto, Iowa, Omaha, and Osage of the central prairies and plains. Warriner learned much during his travels with the Indians, especially their chief. Warriner noted the old man’s sadness during their brief journey together. Warriner recalled how “the countenance of the old chief, which had been animated, sunk and became dejected” as the group of forty Indians walked eastward toward Lake Winnebago, away from their Baraboo River village and the violence that swelled up around it. “At times a tear stole silently down his furrowed cheek,” remembered Warriner. As the concerns were “all uttered in the Winnebago language, which no white man ever understood, I knew them only to be words of grief.”⁴ Warriner’s sense proved

² Warriner, “Legends of the Winnebagoes,” 86. Warriner did not identify the Ho-Chunk chief in his story, but based on his description of the Indian man’s appearance and the latter’s reference to his home near Portage—“where the two rivers run different ways”—Mark Deidrich as well as the editors of the *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Lyman C. Draper and Reuben Gold Thwaites, believe it was most likely Old Grayheaded Decorah. See Mark Diedrich, *Winnebago Oratory: Great Moments in the Recorded Speech of the Hochungra, 1742-1887* (Rochester, Minnesota: Coyote Books, 1991), 28.

³ Warriner, “Legend of the Winnebagoes,” 91.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

correct when Old Grayheaded Decorah finally explained his sorrows to the inquisitive American traveler, “in the language of the Chippewa.”⁵

My friend—the Winnebagos are not like other men. They came not from the east; they are the only children of the Great Spirit....He gave us the buffalo, the moose, the elk, and the deer, for food, and their skins he taught us to use for clothing. He filled the waters with fish, and covered the land with choice fruits. All these he gave to us.... But, my friend, the Winnebagoes are not now wise. Once they had many thousand fine warriors. But every year we grow smaller....The skins of our game we want for clothes, and we could raise corn for ourselves were we left alone; but soon, my friend, we shall be no more. A few short years and our nation will be unknown. Then, when the stranger shall pass along here, and look upon the scenes of so many battles that have been won by the only children of the Great Spirit, and shall call out, upon every hill, where is the Winnebago? Echo alone shall answer from the west—where is the Winnebago!⁶

Decorah shared his people’s place-story with the American traveler.⁷ Along with the Great Spirit and his sacred Ho-Chunk children, part of that place-story was corn. Decorah’s mention of corn may seem mundane, but that Warriner remembered lends veracity to his recounting of the chief’s speech. Decorah convinced Warriner to hear his words, not record them. Thus, anything Warriner recalled from his time with the chief was from memory. Yet, unlike other more famous “speeches” attributed to nineteenth-century Indian chiefs, Old Grayheaded Decorah’s was recalled and printed within a year’s time.

Corn was at the center of the Ho-Chunk place-story Warriner heard. Likewise, corn is central to this dissertation. Combining cosmology and corn was also commonplace in Ho-Chunk

⁵ Ibid., 90.

⁶ Ibid.,” 91.

⁷ I borrow Coll Thrush’s phrase “place-story” throughout this dissertation to describe, in the simplest terms, a story someone told about a place. In more specific terms, a place-story explains how a place came to be what it is, and who belongs in this place over time. See Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing Over Place* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007). Thrush’s concept for place-story is derived in large part from the work of Keith Basso. See Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996). See also Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).

speeches and storytelling. Nonetheless, nineteenth-century speeches about vanishing Indians attributed to old chiefs by white men are as ubiquitous as they are of questionable authenticity. For example, the speech allegedly given by Chief Seeathl in 1855, at the signing of the Treaty of Point Elliot, remains among the most well-known speeches ever (allegedly) given by an equally well-known chief.⁸ Though Chief Seeathl was known as a great orator among his people and undoubtedly delivered a stirring speech at the treaty signing, his words were not documented. The speech attributed to him emerged nearly three decades after the treaty, and it emulates Victorian trends and popular nostalgia about vanishing Native Americans. While he spoke of disappearing Ho-Chunks, in contrast to Chief Seeathl's speech, Old Grayheaded Decorah's words emerged soon after the encounter. Though it is worth remembering that any document or story tells as much or even more about the person producing or telling it than the story's subject, the temporal proximity of this encounter and this speech as well as the speech's content hints of authenticity.

Ho-Chunk belonging originated from Earthmaker, the creator of earth and life and the central figure in Ho-Chunk cosmology. Earthmaker placed them in the spot where they lived and nowhere else. The land now belonged to the Ho-Chunks: "We own the land where the two rivers run different ways. When that [land] is gone, the Winnebago will have no hope, and he will no longer ask to live."⁹ Decorah expressed a worldview in which all aspects of Ho-Chunk life—their subsistence, their spirituality, their land—defined them and their forever belonging to that place. For Decorah and his family, home was near the confluence of the Baraboo and Wisconsin rivers.

⁸ Thrush, *Native Seattle*, 6-8.

⁹ Warriner, "Legends of the Winnebagoes," 92.

Warriner recalled later how moved he was by the chief's words. Decorah's response to the circumstances—the dark cloud hovering over his people in 1828—was nothing extraordinary for him or his villagers, however. Such an impassioned and stirring place-story reflects the chief's fear over the potential loss of his land, his way of life, and ultimately, the disappearance of his people. Scholar Keith Basso eloquently explains how such “unnerving occasions” or moments cause a sense of place to “come surging into awareness” and awakens people to their profound attachments to place, to the realization that places “are as much a part of us as we are of them.”¹⁰ In the face of real loss, Decorah articulated deep and spiritual attachments to place. From the onset of American presence in the Old Northwest Territory, following the U.S. victory over Britain in the War of 1812, Ho-Chunk leaders and orators deployed their sacred history as warning to the newest imperial sovereign that only Earthmaker possessed authority to claim or assign land ownership. American officials and officers, travelers and settlers who came into or for Ho-Chunk lands in the nineteenth century heard many similar place-stories from the Ho-Chunk people.

The 1820s were an uneasy time for Indians and whites in what is now southern Wisconsin. The previous years had seen deteriorating relations between Ho-Chunk Indians and white miners who encroached on their lands, stole Indian lead, and abused Indian men and women without penalty. When some Ho-Chunk men from a Mississippi River village retaliated violently against Americans in 1827, the federal government called their actions a “war.” The conflict resulted in the U.S. federal government's first attempt to force a massive land cession by the Ho-Chunk nation. The treaty would not be finalized until the Spring of 1829, however, and by the time Old Grayheaded Decorah and Warriner met in the forest, the government was preparing to take ownership of the mineral-rich lands and the Fox-Wisconsin waterway. The

¹⁰ Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, xiii-xiv.

Ho-Chunk did not yet know the extent of the federal government's designs, but they sensed and spoke of a looming dark cloud that threatened their way of life. This was a common metaphor that Ho-Chunks and other Indians associated with Americans in the western Great Lakes region.¹¹ This chance encounter with Warriner coincided with a hard-lesson the Ho-Chunk were learning about the high cost of covering, or offering compensation for, American dead.

When Decorah spoke of his people's homes in the Wisconsin and Fox river valleys he was speaking about the main arteries of his peoples' homeland. It is not insignificant that the chief was leading his people toward Lake Winnebago, a part of Ho-Chunk homeland since time immemorial, when their mythological and physical pasts blended into one origin narrative. Everything they had ever known was there. They were now caught in the American gambit to take ownership of the mineral-rich lands as well as the Fox-Wisconsin waterway. The world where Decorah and his people lived was one in which sense of self and place, spirituality and subsistence, overlapped. And when that world, or any part of it disappeared, so too would Ho-Chunk being and identity.¹² Old Grayheaded Decorah believed that the survival of Earthmaker's original children hinged on the Ho-Chunk living where and as their creator intended. The Ho-Chunk had already suffered from other aspects of interactions with white newcomers. Disease,

¹¹ For examples of this metaphor appearing in Ho-Chunk speeches, see Diedrich, *Winnebago Oratory*. "Black cloud," "dark cloud," "stormy skies," or "stormy weather" were common variations of this metaphor.

¹² Decorah's words need no theory to explain them; nevertheless, the "peoplehood matrix" described by Holm, Pearson, and Chavis clearly reflects this Indigenous worldview and sense of self and community. See Tom Holm, J. Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis, "Peoplehood: a Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies," *Wicazo Sa Review* 18, No. 1 (Spring 2003): 11-15. This is the latest in a genealogical line of scholars attempting to develop a concept of "peoplehood" that better defines or encapsulates group identity but in way that avoids or transcends commonplace ideas of "statehood, nationalism, gender, ethnicity, and sectarian membership." These scholars conceptualize peoplehood according to four factors: language, sacred history, religion, and land, which are "interwoven and dependent on one another." They argue that "the matrix itself is universal to all Native American tribes and nations and possibly to all indigenous groups." One of the key concepts they put forth, and one that Old Grayheaded Decorah's words also convey, is "No single factor is more important than the others and all necessarily support each other as well as a particular group's larger sense of identity." See Holm, Pearson, and Chavis, "Peoplehood," 12.

alcohol, the collapse of the fur trade, and now increased violence as white miners crowded into southern Ho-Chunk lands had taken a cumulative toll on the Ho-Chunk.¹³ But if they were left alone, Decorah's people were certain that they could raise corn and care for themselves as they always had.¹⁴

What Warriner perceived as the extraordinary experience and conversation stemmed from a durable Ho-Chunk worldview and way of belonging to that place. The importance of place and, in particular, of corn in this history of Ho-Chunk belonging and uprooting enhances the significance of Warriner's account. This glimpse of Ho-Chunk peoplehood sheds light on aspects of history we know little about, inviting us to ask more detailed questions. In particular, understanding the sacred importance of corn to the Ho-Chunk, as well as its caloric value, suggests that corn ultimately explains their activities in the spring and summer of 1832, activities that led to the loss of their Rock River lands in Wisconsin. This is the silence of the region's Indigenous past.¹⁵

My dissertation, "Corn Moon Migrations: Ho-Chunk Belonging, Removal, and Return in the Early Nineteenth-Century Western Great Lakes," examines how Rock River Ho-Chunk

¹³ The incidents of violence occurred in a small portion of Ho-Chunk lands near the Mississippi. When it became clear in 1828 that the U.S. government would seek a land cession as punishment, the Ho-Chunk stated their willingness to cede a small portion for the purposes of "covering" the American dead. Since the constant arrival of white lead miners in their southwestern lands, the Ho-Chunk had been migrating further away from these settlements, many of them illegally located on Ho-Chunk lands. So, parting with some of these white-occupied lands seemed logical to the Ho-Chunk. However, they saw no logic in the American push for the Fox-Wisconsin river corridor that connected Green Bay and Prairie du Chien. Americans had desired control over the Fox-Wisconsin waterway, which ran through the center of Ho-Chunk country, since their arrival in 1815. Along the Fox River, from Lake Winnebago to Green Bay, there was sacred and ancestral Ho-Chunk territory.

¹⁴ For overviews of Ho-Chunk relations with Europeans and Americans from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, see Robert E. Bieder, *Native American Communities in Wisconsin, 1600-1960: A Study of Tradition and Change* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹⁵ For examinations of corn cultivation among the Ho-Chunk nation, see William Gustav Gartner, "Raised Field Landscapes of Native North America" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003); and Nancy Oestreich Lurie and Patrick J. Jung, *The Nicolet Corrigenda: New France Revisited* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2009). See also Paul Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970).

Indians of southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois struggled to control and remain in their agricultural homelands after the War of 1812, the period when Americans replaced the British in the Old Northwest, and through the 1830s when removal appeared their singular fate. Focusing on the Rock River band, which grew out of eighteenth-century Ho-Chunk migrations away from trade centers such as Green Bay and Prairie du Chien, I demonstrate how Ho-Chunk autonomy and land tenure was undermined during the Black Hawk War of 1832. Cultivation of corn signaled Ho-Chunk belonging and spirituality, and it underpinned Ho-Chunk autonomy. Corn was the primary food source for these Ho-Chunks and a gift from Grandmother Earth. Since their earliest encounters with European newcomers, Ho-Chunks deployed this sacred subsistence history, orienting outsiders to Ho-Chunk worldview, territory, and way of life.¹⁶ While it illuminated Ho-Chunk peoplehood and worldview, their oratory faltered in the face of American warfare and settler colonialism. The crisis that spilled into their lands in the spring and summer of 1832 forced the Rock River Ho-Chunk to take on much more active roles in resisting American threats to their sovereignty and homelands.

Although scholars often include some discussion of the Rock River Ho-Chunk Indians in their work on the Black Hawk War, the story of this band's role during the conflict, and the centrality of that role, remains untold. The conflict took place almost entirely in lands belonging to the Ho-Chunk nation—between the Mississippi and Rock rivers— but much of the existing scholarship treats the Rock River Ho-Chunk as peripheral to the events unfolding in their country. Their absence is most pronounced when scholars narrate events in June and July of 1832, the period during which Ho-Chunks hid and guided an otherwise lost Sauk band through

¹⁶ Ho-Chunk orators and chiefs are featured throughout this dissertation. For a collection of Ho-Chunk speeches in the nineteenth century, see Diedrich, *Winnebago Oratory*.

the Rock River country.¹⁷ Scholars uniformly acknowledge, however, that the Rock River Ho-Chunk were responsible for inviting the Sauk band to join their villages. White Cloud, the Winnebago Prophet, invited the Sauk band to live in his Illinois village and plant corn. Only a day's travel north along the Rock River from their ancestral home of Saukenuk, the Sauk band's civil chiefs preferred life among their Ho-Chunk kin to a starving and destitute existence on their Iowa reservation. Nearly twelve hundred Sauk, Fox, Kickapoo, and other Indians followed, including an elderly Sauk war leader named Makataimeshekiakiak, or Black Sparrow Hawk. The return of the "Sauk band" ignited American anxiety and hatred toward Native peoples into the war that still bears Black Hawk's name. Because of Black Hawk's youthful history as a pro-British, anti-American warrior, nineteenth-century Americans treated him as a leader of the band. As a result, histories of this conflict have focused on the sixty-six-year-old Black Hawk and forsaken the Rock River Ho-Chunk for their ongoing role in the crisis as well as the consequences they suffered as a result.

Over the years, and since the first histories and accounts of the war were published beginning in 1832, Black Hawk has been absolved from allegations that he was planning to resurrect Tecumseh's pan-Indian confederacy. This confederacy emerged in the early nineteenth century around a young and charismatic Shawnee warrior whose massive nativist alliance of numerous eastern tribes was the largest ever to resist U.S. westward expansion. The malice of the Black Hawk War, however, has only been reassigned to the Ho-Chunks living along the Rock River and its tributaries. Even still, Black Hawk continues to occupy a central role in scholarship as a defiant war chief seeking a measure of sovereignty for his people. While pinning responsibility for the 1832 crisis largely on the Rock River Ho-Chunk, scholars also debate who else is to blame for the violence, some pointing to civil chiefs of the Sauk band, such

¹⁷ Kerry Trask, *Black Hawk and the Battle for the Heart of Americas* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006).

as Neapope, who Black Hawk believed lied or overstated the support the British were willing to offer the fugitive Sauk band.¹⁸ Other scholars lay most of the blame on the region's whites, settlers and politicians whose overreactions resulted, ultimately, in the tragic deaths of nearly the entire Sauk band. When the Rock River Ho-Chunk play a role in this conflict, as they do in two recent publications, it is because scholars view the Rock River band as "playing both sides of the conflict," ready to seize upon any emerging pan-Indian alliance to resist American expansion.¹⁹

These interpretations do not account for Ho-Chunk peoplehood, however—in particular, the importance of Ho-Chunk land and subsistence to their identity and belonging. "Peoplehood," a concept developed by scholars of Indigenous history to do that history in more holistic ways, means treating language, sacred history, cosmology, and land as interconnected.²⁰ When one takes this more holistic view of the Rock River Ho-Chunk in 1832, and their understanding of land as a sacred gift from Earthmaker and corn a sacred gift from Grandmother Earth, casting them as belligerents in a conflict of their own making makes little sense. Peace, not war, underpinned Ho-Chunk belonging and peoplehood. Far from inciting warfare, the Ho-Chunk were peacekeepers interested in preserving their livelihoods in their homelands. My work reveals a story of creative Indian intercession during the 1832 crisis, detailing how Rock River

¹⁸ In his autobiography, Black Hawk blames Neapope for encouraging the Sauk band onward, through Illinois toward Wisconsin and Lake Michigan, and for lying about British support awaiting the Sauk band. However, it is not clear in Black Hawk's account that anyone in his band or anyone representing the British were planning for or desired war. If any British individuals offered support to the Sauk band, it was less likely about a Native resistance movement and more likely a pledge to trade with the Sauk band since the Americans would likely deny the returned Sauk band goods or treaty annuity money as punishment for reversing their removal and migrating east. See Donald Jackson, ed., *Black Hawk: An Autobiography* (Chicago: Illini Books, 1955; reprint Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 120.

¹⁹ Patrick Jung, *The Black Hawk War of 1832* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007); John Hall, *Uncommon Defense: Indian Allies in the Black Hawk War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). Patrick Jung argues that the Rock River Ho-Chunks' anti-American animosity and desire for revenge over the loss of lands in a 1829 treaty with the U.S. remained strong enough to drive their behavior in 1832, undermining the U.S. war against the Sauk band.

²⁰ Holm, Pearson, and Chavis, "Peoplehood," 11-15.

Ho-Chunks exercised covert and passive mediation in their homelands—including guiding both the Americans and the Sauk band—to thwart violence and avoid destruction of their crops.

Though brilliant in their actions and maneuvers, in the summer of 1832, Ho-Chunks failed on both fronts. The well-armed Illinois and western Michigan militias and U.S. Army caught up with the Sauk band and massacred nearly all of them, and the Ho-Chunk lost their corn crop. Then, on the verge of starvation, they stood accused by Americans of violent crimes against whites and assistance to the Sauk and Fox band. These accusations were rooted largely in white hatred for the Ho-Chunk, and the treaty commissioners had little proof to back up most charges. Starved and desperate Ho-Chunk proved less formidable than their ancestors. The Americans set the tone for narrative that emerged from the treaty council. That preservation of corn and homeland motivated Ho-Chunk actions for the previous five months, not dreams of inciting a pan-Indian uprising against Americans, remains muted in our historical understanding of these events. The U.S. forced the Rock River band to cede their southern Wisconsin lands to the federal government and to remove the following spring.

This dissertation opens up a new consideration at the intersection of scholarship on the Black Hawk War and northern Indian removal. Traditionally placed in U.S. history texts books under Indian Removal, the Black Hawk War, as John Bowes puts it, “too often is presented as the northern equivalent of the Cherokee Trail of Tears.”²¹ The most recent consideration of the

²¹ John Bowes, *Too Good for Indians: Northern Indian Removal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 5. Bowes’s critique targets college level text books, which, though more inclusive of Native American perspectives on the past, “continue to encapsulate the northern experience [of removal] in the actions of Sauk warrior Black Hawk and his followers who ‘refused to leave rich, well-watered farmland in western Illinois in 1832.’” Bowes argues not that the Black Hawk War needs revised examination and serious reconsideration of its established primary sources, but rather that the 1832 conflict and its cast of characters, namely Black Hawk and the Sauk people, have obscured other Native communities in the region and their histories of removal. Bowes attempts to resurrect, for instance, a history of Potawatomi removal, which was in part connected to the tribes’ involvement in the Black Hawk War. I argue that the history of the Rock River Ho-Chunk has been largely hidden because of the ways in which the Black Hawk War has been understood. Indeed, the Black Hawk War, and the records and silences it generated, is essential for understanding Rock River Ho-Chunk resistance, removals, and returns.

1832 crisis is Bowes's book about northern Indian removal, though Bowes argues that it is time for historians to look "beyond the Black Hawk War" if they seek to tell more complex histories about northern Indian removals.²² Bowes argues that overemphasis on the Black Hawk War has led to the erasure or overlooked histories of other Native peoples the region: "In many instances the accompanying maps do not even indicate the presence of Indians other than the Sauks north of the Ohio River."²³ I agree with Bowes that the attention given to the Black Hawk War, and in particular, to Black Hawk, has obscured many other histories. However, the solution to this silencing of the past is not to forget the Black Hawk War, but to reimagine it with more Native peoples involved shaping its course and consequences.

Readers may one day find the book version of this dissertation in the military history section of the library or bookstore. Without meaning to be, this is a new history of the so-called Black Hawk War. It is the first of its kind in that it does not say that much about the Sauk war leader Black Hawk or the fugitive band of 1,200 Indians who dared to return to Illinois and plant corn among their Ho-Chunk kin. In fact, whenever possible, I choose not to refer to the events of 1832 as a "war" but rather as a conflict or a crisis. In order to reckon with the peaceful intentions of both the Rock River Ho-Chunk and the Sauk band, choosing the right words matters, since words have the power to silence a people's past as well as speak it. Much of the history and human experiences revealed in the following pages take place during the conflict. Generals, militiamen, and Ho-Chunk scouts as well as an ever-elusive fugitive band of Indians populate this narrative. However, unlike other work on the Black Hawk War of 1832, battles and bloodshed are virtually absent here. Most of the lives lost in the 1832 crisis turn out to be those of horses belonging to American citizens, militiamen, and the U.S. Army. Troop morale

²² Bowes, *Land Too Good*, 5.

²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

also suffered serious blows, especially during the “swamp campaign” of July, during which Rock River Ho-Chunks corralled militia and army troops in Koshkonong swamps and then collectively forgot the location of river fords and how to track “enemies” in their own country. If libraries and bookstores had shelves for peace-keeping history, this story belongs there.

This dissertation contributes to our historical understanding of northern Native American removals. In the case of the Ho-Chunk, their land loss and removal treaty came about precisely because the U.S. provided the dominant narrative for the crisis of 1832. As historian Karl Jacoby writes, “violence may begin as a contest over resources, but it often ends as a contest over meaning, as the participants struggle to articulate what has happened to them—and what they have, in turn, done to others.”²⁴ Examining the Ho-Chunk illuminates their non-violent resistance to removal, a resistance that involved maintaining their subsistence calendar and resources as well as evading removal forces and returning to ceded lands when their new territories provide inhospitable. Exploring Ho-Chunk resistance to forced Indian removal—through actions and words—reveals an indigenous perspective on federal policies of racial and cultural exclusion that, from the start, intended to structure and privilege white settlement of former Indian lands rather than serve the interests of the Indian peoples it displaced.

The 1832 conflict left the Ho-Chunk without corn and vulnerable to a land cession and removal treaty imposed by the federal government in September. The Ho-Chunk faced forced removal the following spring, at the end of a starving time. Several villages evaded American troops charged with removing the Indians. When Ho-Chunks were captured and relocated north of the Wisconsin River or west of the Mississippi, many walked back to the ceded territory and eked out a living as fugitives in former homelands for another hundred years before securing tiny

²⁴ Karl Jacoby, *Shadows at Dawn: An Apache Massacre and the Violence of History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 4.

permanent reservations in their once vast homeland. When troops near Four Lakes (now Madison) observed Ho-Chunks gathering wild rice in September 1833, a frustrated white inhabitant complained: “They have been removed in pursuance of their treaty, but they will not *stay removed*.”²⁵ Challenging the permanence of bordered lands and settler society, returned Indians unsettled whites. The Ho-Chunk chose means of resisting removal other than violence. They evaded removal forces or returned to ceded lands after being removed. Ho-Chunk Indians also disrupted removal policy by staying home.²⁶

Settler colonialism relied on Indian uprooting. In the Rock River Country, Ho-Chunks got in the way of white settlers by staying home, though they also chose to return from lands unsuited for their traditional livelihoods. Ho-Chunks interrupted and undid the work of removal. By staying home, or returning after forced removal, Ho-Chunks shattered the permanence of a policy designed to displace Indian peoples and replace them with white settlers. Ho-Chunks’ ceaseless returns gave rise to what I call a removal landscape, a place where the white work of removing Indians was never finished—that is, until the federal government ceased its attempts to remove all Ho-Chunk people from Wisconsin in the mid-1870s. Continued Ho-Chunk presence in Wisconsin today stands as proof of their resistance and survivance.²⁷

The history of early Ho-Chunk removals and returns remains largely unknown, at least among non-Ho-Chunks, and therefore unappreciated. Though limited in scope, this dissertation

²⁵ *The Mail* (Hagers-Town Maryland), 25 October 1833; (reprinted from the *Galenian* [Galena, Illinois])

²⁶ Here, I reference *Hidden Histories* by Debora Bird Rose, who explores the extreme forms of violence used by Europeans against Aboriginal Australians on the north Australian frontier in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Collected accounts from survivors show that “the first Europeans came with the intent to kill” and as Anzac Munnganyi explained, “People got in the way just by staying at home.” For many Aboriginal people, “there was no place, ultimately, to which people could flee” and whites killed them for it. It is Rose’s analysis of how “staying at home” as a form of Aboriginal resistance applies to Native Americans, such as the Ho-Chunk who resisted forced removal by staying or returning home. Deborah Bird Rose, *Hidden Histories: Black Stories from Victoria River Downs, Humbert River, and Wave Hill Stations* (Sydney: Macarthur Press, 1991), 46.

²⁷ Gerald Vizenor, ed., *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

adds to histories of the Ho-Chunk people.²⁸ It is first and foremost a history of the Rock River Ho-Chunk people. It is a history of their ancestral belonging in Wisconsin, their struggles to maintain their homelands and to protect their autonomy after the arrival of the Americans in the early nineteenth century. By 1832, the majority of Ho-Chunks inhabited dozens of villages in the Rock River country, where they cultivated corn and other crops. Because of a half-century of forced removals, the history examined in this dissertation belongs to both the Ho-Chunk nation of Wisconsin and the Winnebago nation of Nebraska. Distinct in the eyes of the federal government, these tribal nations share ancestral and sacred belonging in Wisconsin and a history of survivance in old and new homelands.

The Ho-Chunk people experienced many trails of tears, generations of removals that lasted half a century. They are one tribal nation among many outside the southeastern United States who experienced their own unique and extraordinary experience of forced removal.²⁹ In

²⁸ Published works that include some history or ethnohistorical information about the Ho-Chunk include Robert E. Beider, *Native American Communities in Wisconsin*; Patty Loew, *Indian Nations of Wisconsin: Histories of Endurance and Renewal* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2001); Nancy Oestreich Lurie, *Mountain Wolf Woman, Sister of Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of a Winnebago Woman* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961); Nancy Oestreich Lurie, "Winnebago," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. Bruce Trigger, 690-707 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978); Nancy Oestreich Lurie, *Wisconsin Indians* 2nd ed. (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2002); Paul Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 18. Unpublished dissertations and masters theses include: Jason Tetzloff, "The Diminishing Winnebago Estate in Wisconsin: From White Contact to Removal" (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, 1991); Nancy Oestreich Lurie, "The Winnebago Indians: A Study in Cultural Change" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1952); Lawrence Onsager, "The Removal of the Winnebago Indians from Wisconsin in 1873-74" (M.A. thesis, Loma Linda University, 1985). Ho-Chunk Indians feature prominently in Jeanne Kay, "The Land of La Baye: The Ecological Impact of the Green Bay Fur Trade, 1634-1836" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1977). For recent works that examine Ho-Chunk survivance in Wisconsin in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the context of tourism and visual representations, see Tom Jones, Michael Schmudlach, Daniel Mason, Amy Lonetree, and George A. Greendeer, *People of the Big Voice: Photographs of Ho-Chunk Families by Charles Van Schaick, 1879-1942* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2011); Steven D. Hoelscher, *Picturing Indians: Photographic Encounters and Tourist Fantasies in H.H. Bennett's Wisconsin Dells* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008).

²⁹ Recent years have seen more publications on northern removals of Native peoples, though most of these focus on the Ohio Country or lower Great Lakes region. See Bowes, *Land Too Good*; Stephen Warren, *The Worlds the Shawnees Made: Migration and Violence in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013). For monographs focused on post-removal communities among Great Lakes Indians, see Craig Miner and

addition to adding diversity to our historical understanding of Indian removals, especially in the north, my research speaks less about top-down policy initiatives in Washington and more about the emotional and physical trauma suffered by Native peoples who experienced repeated forced removals from this region. But this is not a victimization narrative. The painful history of Ho-Chunk removals is also a remarkable story of Ho-Chunk returns to their homelands. This is the gap in most removal histories, the story of those who stayed. Relatively recent works by John Bowes, Kathleen DuVal, Susan Sleeper-Smith, and Stephen Warren, to name a few, examine lesser known Native communities and their experience of removals.³⁰ These and other works move away from emphasizing U.S. political discourse in their analysis, allowing for more discussion of Indian strategies for remaining in homelands and of removal policy as cruel, poorly

William Unrau, *The End of Indian Kansas: A Study in Cultural Revolution, 1854-1871* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990); William E. Unrau, *The Rise and Fall of Indian Country, 1825-1855* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007). As Bowes argues, Native peoples in the Ohio country and western Great Lakes experienced and shaped a wide array of federal attempts to remove them. In the north, the federal government faced unique challenges in its goal of removing tribes west of the Mississippi. First and foremost, federal officials had to treat with multiple tribes and bands, many that had already relocated to lands now desired by white Americans. That the federal government signed nearly ninety treaties, with a third that number of tribal nations in the north between 1829 and 1851, testifies to the complexity and diversity of this region's removal histories. For overview of treaties, see Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Treaties: The History of a Political Anomaly* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994). Though Bowes does not discuss the Ho-Chunk nation in his recent work, he devotes a chapter to the Potawatomi people, who, like their Ho-Chunk friends and neighbors, were punished by the federal government with a land cession and removal treaty for their connection to the 1832 conflict. Bowes points out that that Potawatomis, who in the 1830s lived primarily in Wisconsin and Illinois, signed nineteen treaties, nine in 1836 alone. The history of northern removals also expands our understanding of how the federal government and its white citizens variously envisioned the West, since Indian Territory was not the only destination for removed Native peoples. What became the states of Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, and North and South Dakota first became new and undesired homelands for many northern Native peoples forced from their lands beginning in the early nineteenth century.

³⁰ Bowes, *Land too Good*; Kathleen Du Val, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Stephen Warren, *The Worlds the Shawnees Made*. Among the most significant contributions of this scholarship are unexpected strategies of adaptation and resistance among Native communities. Susan Sleeper-Smith writes, "While encounter changed indigenous communities, it also encouraged the evolution of strategic behaviors that ensured cultural continuity." See, Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes*, 2. Sleeper-Smith argues that the Potawatomis and Miamis endured by employing an array of strategies, hunting and trapping different animals to carry on the fur trade, converting to Catholicism, adapting their agricultural methods and migratory traditions to reflect and respond to European and Anglo-American expectations and ways of life. Because these communities succeed in remaining in homelands in the American era, Sleeper-Smith challenges Richard White's argument that the arrival of the Americans after the war of 1812 dismantled the middle ground.

implemented, and messy in achieving its national objective. Emphasizing Indian pain and trauma as inherent in the project of settler colonialism is among the most significant achievements of recent scholarship.³¹

The Cherokee story of removal is the most well-known and stands out for many reasons. Cherokee political and intellectual leaders' use of U.S. constitutional arguments and legal structures to make the case for Cherokee tribal sovereignty is especially important. That Native nations and bands living elsewhere did not resist removal in this fashion has long been a distinction made by scholars who examine northern Indian removals. It is not, as Bowes reminds us, that northern Indian tribes did not understand tribal sovereignty. "Rather than resist federal and state policies by asserting [their] sovereignty in an American court of law," Bowes argues that Indian communities in Michigan, the Ohio country, and elsewhere "emphasized their desire to retain communal integrity." Others, such as the Miamis of Indiana, pleaded to "live beside their non-Indian neighbors." The Lenape Delaware practiced adaptive relocations, carving out new homes in Mexico, Upper Canada, and finally Missouri, in hopes of maintaining communal bonds if not ancestral territory.³² Indians were adaptive and aggressive in protecting their own interests in the age of removal. This dissertation examines the development of Ho-Chunk diplomacy with, and knowledge of, Americans and their government after 1815.

Like other works on northern Indian removals, this dissertation allocates much space to the Black Hawk War. But unlike Bowes and other recent scholars, I give more space to Ho-

³¹ The historical context of Indian removal intersects with that of settler colonialism in U.S. history. Patrick Wolfe provides foundational framework for understanding factors that shape encounters between indigenous people and newcomer, demonstrating that settler colonialism operates on the "logic of elimination." Wolfe writes, "settler colonialism destroys to replace." See Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (December 2006): 387-409, quote on 388. See also Gary Clayton Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian: The Crime that Should Haunt America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014); Walter Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Bethel Saler, *The Settlers Empire: Colonialism and State Formation in America's Old Northwest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

³² Bowes, *Land Too Good*, 77-79, 149-181.

Chunk voices responding to the threat of removal. Foregrounding Ho-Chunk voices allows for new perspectives, new interpretations that illuminate Ho-Chunk people in a more objective and holistic fashion. Ho-Chunk voices also offer some of the most piercing and perceptive critiques of federal Indian policy.

Every history written about Native American removals fall short in conveying the heartbreak and trauma of forced removals. This dissertation is no different. However, in an effort to allow for as much Ho-Chunk pain to find place on the page as possible, I have limited my examination of white U.S. rhetoric regarding Indian removal policy in favor of Ho-Chunk voices, as well as the voices of non-Indians who bore witness to their removals or to the crises that preceded or followed Native uprootings.³³ The letters and reports of Indian agents, combined with the memoir of an agent's wife, chronicled this past. Leaders among the Ho-Chunk demanded an audience for their grievances. They too generated a record.

Methodology

Over one hundred and fifty years after sharing a smoke with an American stranger, Old Grayheaded Decorah's fears have proved prescient. In much of their nineteenth-century homeland, the history of the Ho-Chunk people is hidden. The echo Old Grayheaded Decorah feared exists because of the silence created in the narrative about the Ho-Chunk people through much of the nineteenth century. That silence diminishes Ho-Chunk belonging and erases the history of the oldest people in the region. This is not because the Ho-Chunk have disappeared

³³ For work by literary scholars and historians on nineteenth-century discourse—from popular novels to works of history—about Indian removal, see Scott Richard Lyons, *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); James Joseph Buss, *Winning the West with Words: Language and Conquest in the Lower Great Lakes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011); Lucy Maddox *Removals: Nineteenth Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

through removal or assimilation. Rather it is because the Ho-Chunks tried to hide themselves in the story—the events of 1832 in particular—in hope that they would protect their crops and thus their independence, in hope that they would be passed over by the vicious federal policy of Indian removal that defined the 1830s. They hid themselves and their actions well, so well, in fact, that Ho-Chunk historical presence has been buried by modern local interest in Black Hawk and the 1832 conflict. Not only did the Ho-Chunk help to suppress records in the 1830s so essential to the work historians today, but also their silence at the 1832 Rock Island treaty council and since has allowed the U.S. narrative to prevail as a place-story, explaining and justifying the transformation of Ho-Chunks into American lands.

In commenting on contests over resources becoming, in time, contests over meaning, Karl Jacoby observes that this “impulse is perhaps most immediately apparent in literate societies with their monuments, museums, books and other visible forms of record keeping.”³⁴ The embedded local stories of this past mislead our modern, collective understanding every day. In Fort Atkinson, and across the surrounding landscape of southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois, names associated with the Black Hawk War of 1832 mark businesses, public art, and historic sites. This plastering of names—most usually Black Hawk’s—commemorate an event that resulted in the U.S.-led massacre of starving Indian people at a place called Bad Axe on the Mississippi River on August 2, 1832. The “war” hardly resembled a war. A tavern, statues, an

³⁴ Jacoby, *Shadows at Dawn*, 4. Jacoby is careful to note that oral societies are peoples with history and they too have the power and motivation to derive meaning from events to serve their interests. However for historians accustomed to working with traditional, written records, the process of making meaning is harder to see among non-document-producing people. Among the more well-known works that address academic resistance to Native American oral culture, see Devon Mihesuah, *Native and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998). For an examination of ethnohistorical approaches to the discipline called history, in particular reconciling Native and non-Native views of the past, see Daniel Richter, “Whose Indian History?” *William and Mary Quarterly* 50 (April 1993): 387-93. For thoughtful discussions of the process of producing narratives about the past, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 1-29; William Cronon, “A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative,” *Journal of American History* 78 (March 1992): 1347-76.

island, and most recently, a giant mural depicting the Sauk war leader, are all visible along the Rock River in Fort Atkinson, where the Sauk man along with hundreds of families followed Ho-Chunk guides in hopes of surviving extermination at the hands of Americans and, eventually, living a happier life away from their Iowa reservation, free from starvation.

Many of the plaques and markers affixed to historic sites and modern homages contain portions of this sad truth arranged in puzzling fashion. Mostly, they speak of Black Hawk's armed resistance to removal while mentioning how the Sauk band was pursued relentlessly, even unjustly, by a well-armed militia and army. Yet all narratives bear the word "war" in describing the events of between April and August of 1832. And all silence the Rock River Ho-Chunk past. The story that is not told in these named places and monuments has to do with the Indigenous people of this region, the Rock River band of Ho-Chunk. In every public statue, every mural towering above, and every plaque affixed to a boulder that marks something to do with Black Hawk, or the war that bears his name, the lives of people who once lived, farmed, and loved this place are made less visible. Among the most pertinent stories missing from this place is that the Rock River Ho-Chunk lost these lands—the Rock River country—because they tried to preserve their control over them. Their struggle to preserve their autonomy and belonging in the spring and summer of 1832 resulted in their forced removal in the spring and summer of 1833.

The Rock River Ho-Chunk people have been reestablishing themselves ever since. The reason why the Ho-Chunk were removed remains unclear and it is certainly not carved into the public narrative through which I have walked, driven, and pedaled on a daily basis for many years. Ho-Chunk removal was stipulated in the 1832 Rock Island Treaty, in which the U.S. federal government forced the Ho-Chunk nation to cede its Rock River country, a territory stretching from Beloit to Lake Winnebago to the Four Lakes (now Madison). The Rock Island

council and the treaty it produced in September 1832 was the immediate consequence of the Black Hawk War. The Americans accused the Rock River Ho-Chunk of conspiring with Black Hawk, even though there is only a single reference, in article nine of the treaty, to any Ho-Chunk wrongdoing. Here, the treaty commissioners accused eight Ho-Chunk Indians of violent crimes—including murder—against white settlers and soldiers during the conflict. The treaty, and these names, provide unsatisfying answers for why the Ho-Chunk lost 2.5 million acres of arable lands in the Rock River country. None of it explains the Rock River Ho-Chunks' relationship to the Sauk band, to the Black Hawk War, or to why so much of this conflict had taken place in Ho-Chunk territory.

I argue that because of the Black Hawk War, the Ho-Chunk people and their history is largely unknown, often unrecognized or misattributed, and almost always unappreciated. Questions about Ho-Chunk activities during the conflict led me to questions about their motivations. Why did they invite the Sauk band into their lands? Why did they travel hundreds of miles in April 1832 to meet Henry Atkinson, the brigadier general and commander of the army force, just as they were preparing to plant their corn that spring? Asking these questions made me realize that I needed to understand a broader, cosmological context for Ho-Chunk sense of place and belonging. In the end, I came to see that corn cultivation among the Ho-Chunk was wrapped up in their sacred history and ancestral belonging.

As I researched the importance of corn to the Ho-Chunk, their connection to the Sauk band and the so-called Black Hawk War became more clear. One silence this dissertation interrupts is around Ho-Chunk actions and motivations during the conflict in the spring and summer of 1832. Their story lies beneath the more visible and well-known violence at Kellogg's

Grove, Stillman's Run, Wisconsin Heights, and Bad Axe. And it is found in the silences in the sources. Speaking of such silences, scholar Greg Denning writes:

the webs of significance of any event, place, or person are fine lined and faint. It takes a lot of looking to see them. And the answers to any question that we have of them are never obvious, because the questions we ask of them are not the questions the people of the past were asking of themselves.... Imagination is the ability to see those fine-lined and faint webs of significance. Imagination is hearing the silence because we have heard some of the sounds.³⁵

The Ho-Chunk story is visible only when we look long enough to see it, and other scholars, I argue, have not done that kind of looking. Patrick Jung asserts a body of knowledge, facts and truths about the Black Hawk War, that historians all have accepted "since the guns went silent" in 1832.³⁶ His truths are indeed shared by writers and historians who have generated published work on the Black Hawk War ever since the nineteenth century. At those publications' core are broad-based assumptions that have led to only slight variations on a traditional and oft-told narrative of the last great Indian war of the Old Northwest. That story has hidden a better one.

The Rock River Ho-Chunks' activities during much of the 1832 crisis are difficult to discern. This is due, in large part, to their own success in deceiving the Americans, especially throughout what has become known as the "Swamp Campaign." Sorting out their activities, motivations, and objectives is difficult because almost everyone involved in the conflict—Indians and Americans—was lying. During the campaign, for example, Rock River guides and scouts consistently lied about true location of the Sauk band. These and other strategic lies—and there is considerable evidence that Americans readily believed them—show up primarily in Indian agent writings and army officer journals and correspondence from the field. But in the

³⁵ Greg Denning, "Empowering Imaginations," *The Contemporary Pacific* 9 no. 2 (1997): 419-429, 421.

³⁶ Patrick Jung, *The Black Hawk War of 1832* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 4.

published accounts, memoirs, and histories of the war written by American veterans after the conflict, when their hindsight altered their memory, the story changed.

The most egregious lies came from militiamen. Unlike members of the standing federal army, those who joined the militia did so temporarily, often out of a desire for adventure or duty in times of crisis, real or imagined. They rarely found either. Militiamen who offered their time and horses to hunt and kill Indians that summer repeatedly found themselves mired in swamps, seeking out non-existent river fords, deflated in spirit at every abandoned Sauk camp, and moving through bad country that left their morale and mounts maimed. Yet, these militiamen, along with their commanding officers, dutifully followed their Ho-Chunk guides and listened to their Ho-Chunk scouts throughout the conflict. Only after partial truths about Ho-Chunk dishonesty came to light in the final days of the conflict did militiamen and army soldiers and officers recognize their own gullibility. Yet, in their recollections of the conflict, especially of their role in hunting Black Hawk, white militiamen outsmarted the Rock River Ho-Chunk. Ever distrustful of a tribe they called a “secret enemy” in their post-war accounts, militiamen claimed to have thwarted at least one ambush planned by their Rock River guides and, in their recollections, militiamen continually mocked the U.S. Army’s Commander, Henry Atkinson, for his unquestioning faith in the Rock River Indians. Those militiamen who came from Wisconsin (at the time part of the western Michigan Territory) claimed that they and their commander, Henry Dodge, had been suspicious of the Ho-Chunk throughout the war, remembering their leader as ever-vigilant about their secret foes’ designs against American troops. These claims are untrue, as the record shows.³⁷ For all the fault these militiamen bear for creating self-

³⁷ Ellen Whitney’s multi-volume set of correspondence related to the Black Hawk War has proven an invaluable resource for comparing letters and journals written during the 1832 conflict to those written or edited after the war ended. Ellen M. Whitney, ed., *The Black Hawk War, 1831-1832, Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library*, 3 vols. (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1973-75).

affirming fictions about their service in the war, they alone did not write the history of this conflict. The trouble is that in most histories written about the Black Hawk War, historians not only privilege the numerous post-war accounts of American veterans, they believe them.

Ho-Chunk history is at the core of the events that unfolded in the summer of 1832, but it has been largely hidden from view because the emphasis had been so keenly focused on the military events that constituted the “war.” This is what happens when humans confront a violent past. “As one of the most elemental of human experiences,” Karl Jacoby argues, “violence also spawns a vast outpouring of explanations, accusations, and justification from its survivors and perpetrators alike.”³⁸ Yet just as violence generates records, so did peacekeeping efforts by the Rock River Ho-Chunk. Ho-Chunk voices are present in records related to the Black Hawk War. One might even say that they are prolific. This is because the Ho-Chunk sought an audience with Indian agents and military officers throughout the crisis. Ho-Chunk orators and chiefs delivered a consistent message to the Americans: We do not want war in our country; we want to raise our corn in peace.

Silence is an issue when it comes to available sources that include Ho-Chunk voices, but not for lack of records. Ho-Chunks often silenced themselves, never fully explaining their

³⁸ Karl Jacoby, *Shadows at Dawn: An Apache Massacre and the Violence of History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 4.

band's actions or objectives.³⁹ They faced an audience—white Americans—who possessed the capacity to take Indian lands and impose systems of justice and structures of white belonging in ways that previous empires could not. Even when given an opportunity to speak their minds after the conflict, at the treaty council in September 1832, the Ho-Chunk leaders chose to remain silent on many matters pertaining to their activities in the war. When they stood accused of high crimes in September 1832, why would they admit their other misdeeds, such as stealing horses or misleading troops? As Jacoby explains, “Intimidation can render storytellers mute or confine their narratives to the margins of society.” As a result, he writes, “The denial of materials can inhibit the creation of the records so essential to the historical enterprise.”⁴⁰ Ho-Chunk silences in records related to the Black Hawk War were, then, often self-imposed.

This dissertation also probes the silence in the American sources, the gaps where mundane as well as strange events are left unexplained. As it turns out, unexplained or poorly explained events often fit into a pattern of unfortunate coincidence, such as timely horse stampedes delaying troop movements and thwarting violence in Ho-Chunk lands. Just because

³⁹ Out of nearly twelve hundred who crossed the Mississippi in April 1832, fewer than two hundred people from the Sauk band survived the conflict. Hundreds were killed trying to re-cross the Mississippi in August 1832. Most of those who survived wound up at Fort Armstrong on Rock Island as prisoners and eye-witnesses in the government's case against the Ho-Chunk nation. Even though federal officials coerced Sauk band prisoners to provide testimonies, the questions put to them by their American examiners dealt only with incriminating the Ho-Chunk and locating Black Hawk, who had not yet been captured. Americans did not collect testimonies from these Indians regarding the massacre they had just survived. This generated a silence around an American massacre of Indians, a commonplace occurrence in the history of westward expansion. One recent trend in the field of Native American history is the examination of trauma and violence so central to American and Indian relations. Violence can rupture history and our ability to understand it. Drawing on the work of literary critic Elaine Scarry, historians such as Karl Jacoby and Ned Blackhawk remind us that “psychological horror and physical pain inherent to violence can...lead to a ‘shattering of language,’ as lived experience comes to exceed the limits of human description.” Jacoby, *Shadows at Dawn*. See also Ned Black Hawk, *Violence Over The Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006) and Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁴⁰ Jacoby, *Shadows at Dawn*, 3-4.

Ho-Chunks did not speak of their actions does not mean they did not decide on and then execute them.

To ignore the voices of Ho-Chunk people during this crisis and the subsequent removals in the 1830s is to ignore their lived experiences and their understanding of an event that threatened to (and ultimately did) reorder their world.⁴¹ Inserting Indian perspectives is not about giving Ho-Chunk people “agency.” The notion of agency falls short of conveying the actions and motivations of the Rock River Ho-Chunk Indians.⁴² Their actions during the spring and summer of 1832, and their resistance to and ultimate refusal of removal, demands more reverence. Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor offers the term “survivance” to describe such sophisticated, remarkable, and enduring acts of Native self-preservation. Survivance, explains Vizenor, “is more than survival, more than entrance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence.”⁴³ The Rock River Ho-Chunk, in their efforts to keep the peace, to prevent bloodshed for the sake of their kin, their corn, and their homeland, exemplify survivance. Vizenor’s critique of Native histories is that they too often come off as tragic and Native peoples as the victims of a dominant force. Until we suspend our certainties about the past, about what we think we know, some Native histories of survivance will remain invisible. To tell this story anew is to empower our imagination. Vizenor believes that stories of survivance run through every Native community and evidence of this is in the Native presence today, in spite of the “vanishing race” ideology that pervaded nineteenth-century white lawmakers’ vision of North America’s future. The Ho-Chunk nation of Wisconsin and the Winnebago nation of Nebraska already embody survivance—they do not need this history to affirm their past and present

⁴¹ Denning, “Empowering Imaginations,” 420.

⁴² For a thoughtful critique of historians’ overemphasis on agency, see Walter Johnson, “On Agency,” *Journal of Social History* 37 no. 1 (Fall 2003): 113-123.

⁴³ Vizenor, *Survivance*, 4-6.

struggles and survival. White Crow, Whirling Thunder, Little Priest, Sister of Man-eater, and every unnamed Rock River Ho-Chunk Indian who lived through the tumultuous and traumatic decades of the early nineteenth century, and who did their part to shape their people's fate, deserve nothing less than an opportunity to tell their story.

Chapter Organization

The first chapter outlines Ho-Chunk peoplehood, or the ways in which Ho-Chunk language and stories as well as sacred history and subsistence rooted this Indian nation in their Wisconsin homelands. Highlighting the importance of corn cultivation to Ho-Chunk sovereignty, this chapter examines how Ho-Chunks responded to non-Native newcomers—the French, the British, and the Americans—up to the first land cession treaty with the United States in 1829.

Seeing the impact of the recently implemented removal policy on their Sauk and Fox kin in 1831, the lower Rock River Ho-Chunk invited a portion of these nations to come live among them and raise corn along the river. Chapter two traces how Ho-Chunk leaders responded to the panic among white Americans in the region sparked by the Sauk band's return in April 1832. Ho-Chunk leaders from several Rock River villages traveled hundreds of miles, initiating councils with Americans as well as the Sauk band, attempting to quell regional fears of a pan-Indian uprising against whites. Challenging longstanding interpretations by scholars that the Ho-Chunk secretly hoped for a large-scale uprising, this chapter makes clear that Rock River Ho-Chunks desired peace. Peace, not war, underpinned Ho-Chunk subsistence, sovereignty, and their ability to remain in their homeland. This peace-keeping mission did not change even after the Rock River Ho-Chunk reluctantly granted the Sauk band refuge in May as it fled from a

militia force intent on exterminating it. Through June, the Rock River Ho-Chunk sheltered and fed over a thousand Indians of the Sauk band.

When words and councils could no longer keep the army and militia from invading their lands in search of the Sauk band, Ho-Chunk leaders changed tactics. They turned to direct action and manipulative involvement in the 1832 conflict to ensure that the American mission would fail and that Ho-Chunk corn might survive. Chapter three details a range of tactics employed by Rock River Ho-Chunks, with help from Portage Ho-Chunks as well as Potawatomi Indians. It tracks numerous Rock River Ho-Chunk Indians, and some *Métis* traders, as they guided the Americans around the Sauk band's location in southern Wisconsin and away from Ho-Chunk cornfields. Knowing the cost of American blood spilled on Indian lands from their 1829 land cession treaty, countless members of the Rock River band of Ho-Chunks took control of army and militia movements in their territory for several weeks in the summer of 1832. Serving as guides and scouts to both General Henry Atkinson and his officers and to Black Hawk's people, the Ho-Chunk kept both the Sauk band and Americans from harm as best they could. Only after two militiamen accidentally stumbled on the trail of the Sauk band in mid-July did Ho-Chunks lose control of events in their lands. The conflict concluded, leaving the Americans in the dominant position to make meaning of it.

Chapter four examines the fallout from the 1832 American war against the Sauk band and the U.S. invasion of Ho-Chunk lands. As the Ho-Chunk had feared, the conclusion of the crisis led to their removal from their Wisconsin homelands. At Rock Island, the Rock River Ho-Chunk faced allegations of criminal activity against Americans and, combined with the loss of their corn crop, they proved vulnerable to a land cession and removal treaty after the conflict ended. As early as June, Rock River and Portage Ho-Chunks, as well as their Indian agents,

began making requests for corn from the federal government, yet none arrived until the following spring. As a result of government inaction, these Ho-Chunk suffered a deadly starving time in the months before their June deadline for removal. Hunger increased Ho-Chunk anxiety over removal and their leaders pleaded with U.S. officials to remain in their homelands one more season to plant corn and provide for themselves. U.S. officials forced the removal. Some Ho-Chunk evaded removal efforts, while others returned to ceded lands within weeks of relocating north and west of the Wisconsin River, or to their Iowa reservation. Ho-Chunk Indians became fugitives in familiar lands, seeking survival through traditional subsistence activities, unsettling government officials and white settlers.

Chapter One

*Deploying Sacred History:
Ho-Chunk Subsistence and Belonging in Ancestral Homelands*

The Ho-Chunk people of what is today Wisconsin are descendants of earlier Mississippian and Woodland peoples. The Ho-Chunks called themselves “Ho-tshung-rags,” or “The People of the Big Voice.”¹ That name conveys a sacred and ancestral belonging of the Ho-Chunks. Their history in their homeland derives from time immemorial. Unlike many other Native people of the upper Great Lakes region, with the notable exception of the Menominee, Ho-Chunk history locates them in this place from their beginnings. They have no migration story. This was their land since it was created—their home since their creator placed them here. Their ancestors, they believe, were the first human children of their principal spirit, Ma’una, or Earthmaker. Hocak, their language, was the first human language. That language and the Ho-Chunks’ history began at place called Red Banks, likely on the Door County Peninsula near Green Bay.² Their home has always been in what is today Wisconsin. It is in that homeland that they learned to thrive—in a landscape of varying ecosystems and terrains, using fire to manage

¹ This spelling comes from, Juliette Kinzie, *Wau-bun: The Early Day in the North West* (1873; reprint, Philadelphia: Bibliobazaar, 2006), 63. Other spellings include *Hotcangara*, *Otchagras*, and *Wau-chou-gra*, though the official federal tribal designation today, for the Wisconsin community, is Ho-Chunk. Slight variations in regard to the meaning of the Ho-Chunk have included The People of the Sacred Voice, The People of the Original Voice, and The People of the Parent Speech. For more extensive discussion of the origin and meaning of the terms “*Hotcangara*,” or “Ho-Chunk,” and “Winnebago,” see Paul Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970); Nancy Oestreich Lurie and Patrick J. Jung, *The Nicolet Corrigenda: New France Revisited* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2009).

² There is a debate among the Ho-Chunk community and among scholars regarding the location of this original fortified village. Some believed that there were numerous large villages at the same time. Both archaeological evidence and Ho-Chunk oral history point to Doty Island on Lake Winnebago and Aztalan on the Crawfish River in Jefferson County as possible pre-contact Ho-Chunk villages. Father Claude Allouez, a Jesuit missionary and explorer, first placed the Ho-Chunk near Red Banks on the east side of Green Bay in 1670. See J. A. Jones, *Winnebago Ethnology*, in ed. David Agee Horr, *American Indian Ethnohistory, North Central and Northeastern Indians* (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 1974), 16-17. Nancy Lurie and Patrick Jung detail the difficulty faced by the French in mapping the region and the errors they may have made in locating the Ho-Chunk in their actual homelands. See Lurie and Jung, *Nicolet Corrigenda*, 49-70.

and create large game habitat and improving the soil for agriculture, and their ingenuity to develop methods for cultivating wetlands and swamps. Sacred history, subsistence knowledge, and long-established ways of life tied the Ho-Chunks to their homeland. These ties proved foundational in shaping the ways Ho-Chunk communities responded to outsiders, Native and non-Native, as early as the seventeenth century. The importance of their land, their crops, and their cosmological identity even defined their approach to the Americans, the Long Knives, who represented a direct existential threat to Ho-Chunk peoplehood.³ Their ties to the land, however, would prevail in shaping key nineteenth-century events, including the Black Hawk War of 1832 and Ho-Chunk resistance to their forced removals beginning in 1833.

Newcomers' interest in documenting interactions with Native peoples provided a broader, if skewed, archival view into the Ho-Chunks' world. To most of their Native neighbors, the Ho-Chunks were known as the "Ouinepigou" or "the Vile" ("Ouinepigou" is the source of the later term "Winnebago"). The French misinterpreted the Ottawas' hatred and fear of the Ho-Chunks to mean that the Ho-Chunk people smelled bad, and thus the French called them the Puans, the Stinkards, for the next one hundred and fifty years.⁴ The Ho-Chunks seemed intrigued by the French newcomers but remained less than eager to incorporate them into the Ho-

³ Tom Holm, J. Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis, "Peoplehood: A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies," *Wicazo Sa Review* 18, 1 (Spring, 2003): 7-12.

⁴ In his 1640 *Jesuit Relations* account of Nicolet's voyage, Father Paul le Jeune tried to alter the meaning attached to the Puans, or the Winnebago, to one that reflected his understanding of them as the "people of the sea." Father le Jeune said that the Winnebago, the Puans, should not be referred to as the "nation of stinkards" but the "nation of the sea." Le Jeune's interpretation, however, misunderstood the intended meaning of the Algonquian Indians' word for the Ho-Chunk. "Winnebago," he believed, referred to bad smelling water, not the people. See Jones, *Winnebago Ethnology*, 11-13. For a recent consideration of the published life of the *Jesuit Relations*, in particular, their transformation from religious to ethnographic texts in the late nineteenth-century and their use by historians and other scholars thereafter, see Meridith Beck Sayre, "The Process of Conversion: A Biography of the *Jesuit Relations*" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison: 2014).

Chunk world. For nearly three decades after their first encounter, the Ho-Chunks had almost no sustained contact with the French.

Ho-Chunks encountered their first European, Jean Nicolet, in 1634, but it was not until the late 1660s that they began trading regularly with the French.⁵ In the thirty years after their first meeting with Nicolet, the Ho-Chunks suffered military defeats, displacements, famine, and epidemic disease that reduced their numbers from an estimated five thousand people or more to fewer than one thousand. The violence, economic collapse, and displacement that characterized the mid-seventeenth century in the western Great Lakes was caused primarily by Native competition for land and resources.⁶ The Ojibwa drove the Fox, or Mesquakie, people west of Lake Michigan in the early seventeenth century, but the Beaver Wars of the mid-seventeenth century forced many other Algonquian-speaking people, including the Ojibwa and Potawatomi, to flee westward. To meet the demands of the eastern fur trade controlled by the Dutch, the Iroquois invaded territories to the west and north, driving countless Native communities into Wisconsin from the Ohio Valley, Michigan, and Ontario. Throughout the seventeenth century, the Ojibwa, Sauk, Fox, Potawatomi, Mascouten, and Kickapoo, among others, spilled into Wisconsin lands already occupied by the Menominee and the Ho-Chunk people. The sudden presence of so many communities in the region stressed the resources and brought violence over competition for food and furs to Ho-Chunk lands. To survive the chaos brought about by Native migrations and Iroquois wars, the Ho-Chunkd formed what Richard White has termed multi-ethnic refugee centers in the *pays d'en haut*, the upper country of the western Great Lakes,

⁵ In a recent publication, Nancy Lurie and Patrick Jung challenge this historical memory of the Ho-Chunk, suggesting that Ho-Chunk oral histories of meeting the French likely refer to the arrival of Nicolas Perrot in the 1660s. Lurie and Jung also question Nicolet's purported landfall in Ho-Chunk lands and argue that he may have landed in Menominee territory. See Lurie and Jung, *Nicolet Corrigenda*.

⁶ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1-49.

during the second half of the seventeenth century. They began intermarrying with indigenous newcomers.⁷

Like all Native peoples who clustered in the region at that time, the Ho-Chunks underwent massive changes to their traditional culture in the second half of the seventeenth century. Over time, and only after near-total social collapse, the Ho-Chunks established a beneficial relationship with most of the Algonquian newcomers as well as the French, but on their own terms as much as possible. Together with the more numerous and powerful Fox people, the Ho-Chunks regulated and even prohibited trade and travel through their country in the early decades of the eighteenth century. This alliance broke down only when Fox intractability toward the French threatened Ho-Chunk subsistence and survival. For the remainder of the eighteenth century, the Ho-Chunks reclaimed their dominant status in much of their ancestral homelands, expanded their territory and increased their population. Though they did not revert back to their total isolationist ways, the Ho-Chunks protected what was theirs—the land, resources, and cultural practices that formed their peoplehood.⁸ The history Ho-Chunks have remembered and recounted since the seventeenth century and that documented by non-

⁷ Ibid., 11. Anthropologists such as Nancy Lurie and Paul Radin argue that during this period of instability beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, the Ho-Chunk shifted from matrilineal to patrilineal clan lineage. Other scholars, such as White, attribute this shift to the fur trade's higher valuing of Native men's labor and the marginalization of women's work. Among the Ho-Chunk, women gardened and cultivated crops, an indicator of matrilineal societies where domestic crop cultivation was highly valued labor. See also Lurie and Jung, *Nicolet Corrigenda*, 104; and Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 75.

⁸ For an overview of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ho-Chunk history, see Nancy Oestreich Lurie, "Winnebago," in Bruce Trigger, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 15: *Northeast*, William C. Sturtevant, gen'l. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 690-707; Robert E. Bieder, *Native American Communities in Wisconsin, 1600-1960: A Study of Tradition and Change* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995). For elaboration on peoplehood, see Holm, et al., "Peoplehood: A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies," 7-24.

Native peoples tells a story about Ho-Chunk survivance, a struggle focused on their survival and subsistence in Wisconsin homelands.⁹

Through an examination of Ho-Chunk oral tradition and sacred history, their cosmological origin stories, as well as their seasonal rounds and cultural lore, this chapter explores the role of cultivation in Ho-Chunk place-making and place-stories about their ancestral belonging.¹⁰ This chapter also relies on the observations by non-Native newcomers to the region, beginning with the French in the mid-seventeenth century. When Europeans and Americans described the Ho-Chunks, their cultivation practices were frequently the dominant feature. The Ho-Chunks adapted to the presence of Europeans and the impact of the fur trade in the western Great Lakes, and all the while, their adaptations, which included migrations and territorial expansion, took shape around their reliance on corn cultivation.

Corn possessed both cosmological and caloric significance in the Ho-Chunk world. Non-Indians observed their intense focus on crop cultivation, especially corn, which became a defining feature of Ho-Chunk culture and way of life as outsiders grew to understand them. The importance of corn to the Ho-Chunks became clearer, too, as their leaders engaged outsiders in dialogue, particularly Americans in the nineteenth century who represented an existential threat to Ho-Chunk peoplehood. Indeed, across two centuries of encounters and relations with outsiders, protecting their homeland and their corn became a crucial factor in Ho-Chunk choices and actions and their resulting history. The Ho-Chunk people's understanding of their ancestral and sacred origins in present-day Wisconsin is fundamental to this history.

⁹ For a recent collection on the concept of "survivance," see Gerald Vizenor ed., *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

¹⁰ I borrow the phrase "place-story" from historian Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing Over Place* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 10.

Origins

Most Ho-Chunks, as well as scholars of their history, locate their original village of Red Banks on the Door County Peninsula, though this is difficult to verify since much of the peninsula underwent development in the twentieth century without thorough excavation by archaeologists.¹¹ Many Ho-Chunks believe they once occupied a single fortified village, though some also imagine there was more than one Red Banks, a name derived from the red clay soil of the region. In 2006, the tribal nation of Wisconsin purchased lands considered part of the historic Red Banks along the eastern shore of Green Bay. Whether original or not, other village sites that Ho-Chunk ancestors likely called home include Doty Island on Lake Winnebago and Aztalan, a Mississippian site on a Rock River tributary, the Crawfish, in present-day Jefferson County.¹² All of these sites support what the Ho-Chunks have always known: Wisconsin is their ancestral and sacred home.¹³

According to lore, the first people at Red Banks were four brothers who arrived as Thunderbirds.¹⁴ After morphing into humans, they became the chiefs of the sky or upper clans

¹¹ Lurie and Jung, *Nicolet's Corrigenda*, 49-70.

¹² For a thorough overview of theories about Red Banks' location, see Lurie, and Jung, *Nicolet Corrigenda*, 49-69.

¹³ Nancy Lurie has long argued that the Ho-Chunk are not only descendants of the Mississippian people who built and inhabited Aztalan, but that the fortified village in Ho-Chunk oral history refers to the fortified village at this site. Over a period of 400 years, following Aztalan's collapse around 1200 C.E., the Ho-Chunk spread out, eventually occupying the Door County Peninsula and other sites in central and eastern Wisconsin. Lurie and Jung locate the primary Door County Peninsula village of the Ho-Chunk in the vicinity of Sawyer Harbor on Sturgeon Bay. Lurie and Jung, *Nicolet's Corrigenda*, 72, 60, 71-73, 95, 109-110. Henry Schoolcraft also suggested that Aztalan might be the fabled fortified village, see Schoolcraft, *History of the Indian Tribes of the United States*, ed. Francis Drake (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co. 1884), 374. See also Robert Hall, "Red Banks, Oneota, and the Winnebago: Views from a Distant Rock," *Wisconsin Archeologist* 74, no. 1-4 (1993): 10-79. David Smith, tribal historian of Nebraska's Winnebago people, argues that the Ho-Chunk or Winnebago people migrated from Middle America, specifically from the Gulf of Mexico. See David Lee Smith, *Ho-Chunk Tribal History: The History of the Ho-Chunk People from the Mound Building Era to the Present Day* (n.p.: 1996), 5. For discussion of Smith's historical interpretations, see Linda M. Waggoner, *Fire Light: The Life of Angel De Cora, Winnebago Artist* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 13-14.

¹⁴ This version is derived from the Thunderbird Clan origin story, the most prominent among the Ho-Chunk people of Wisconsin and the Winnebago people of Nebraska and also the clan that has, historically, produced civil

of the Ho-Chunk people. The eldest brother became the chief of the Thunder clan, which has produced Ho-Chunk civil or peace chiefs throughout history.¹⁵ The other brothers became chiefs of the Eagle, Hawk, and Pigeon clans. Earthmaker soon realized he had not given the brothers any power or prepared any food for them. So Earthmaker created animals for them to hunt and eat and as he created the beasts, the four brothers gave them names. Food was so plentiful that when a brother was ready to eat, he merely reached out and found an animal in his hands.¹⁶ Earthmaker also showed the four brothers how to make fire and instructed them to share this knowledge with others.

The four brothers were soon visited by spirit-animals representing the earth and water clans and these beings desired fire for themselves. The brothers gave fire to Bear, Wolf, Waterspirit, Buffalo, Deer, Elk, Fish, and Snake and told them: "Each of you must now make fire for yourselves, as we shall not always lend you some."¹⁷ The spirit-animals then became human beings and the chiefs of their clans. The People of the Big Voice thereafter comprised the *wangeregi herera*, "those who are above," and *manegi herera*, "those who are on earth," and all made their home at Red Banks.¹⁸ In time, each of the four brothers married a woman from a lower clan, an exogamous marriage custom the Ho-Chunks would maintain through time. The population at Red Banks grew.

Lore is difficult to historicize. Paul Radin, one of the earliest anthropologists to work with the Ho-Chunk people of Wisconsin and Nebraska, expressed this frustration regarding Ho-

chiefs and leaders. Each of the twelve clans have their own origin story, all of which locate their ancestors' original home in Wisconsin. See Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 2.

¹⁵ Lurie, "Winnebago," 693.

¹⁶ Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 169.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 137-142.

Chunk oral tradition.¹⁹ Their stories, he said, varied by clan and they readily mixed fairytale and fact. He complained, “it is utterly impossible to determine whether we are here dealing with a myth pure and simple or with a vague memory of some historical happening.” If Radin found little truth or value in ancient tales involving spirit-beings morphing into human beings, he regarded with more interest the Ho-Chunks’ “recollection of their separation from their kindred Siouan tribes.”²⁰ Ho-Chunk oral tradition claims that the Red Banks population grew so large that food became scarce, forcing many to migrate elsewhere in search of sustenance. These groups became the Siouan-speaking tribes we recognize today, such as the Missouri and the Iowa. Similar stories exist among many of these communities. In 1893, Iowa chiefs told J.O. Dorsey, a researcher for the Bureau of American Ethnology, that they along with the Oto, Missouri, Omaha, and Ponca “once formed part of the Winnebago nation” and that they grew tired of fish and left to hunt buffalo.²¹ The Ho-Chunks believe that the Quapaw people, whom the French encountered at the confluence of the Mississippi and Arkansas rivers in 1673, are descendants of an estranged Ho-Chunk lodge that left a hunting party long ago.²² Many of these Ho-Chunk claims are supported by linguistic, anthropological, and archeological records.²³ The Ho-Chunks’ closest linguistic and cultural Siouan-speaking kin are the Oto, Iowa, Omaha, and Osage of the central prairies and plains.²⁴

¹⁹ Though the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska is recognized by that name by the federal government, I will not distinguish them from their Wisconsin Ho-Chunk kin in the text when referring to shared sacred history and any historical events that preceded forced removals from Wisconsin lands. These removals began in 1833 resulted in two distinct Indian communities known as Treaty and non-Treaty abiding factions. See Lurie, “Winnebago,” 690-707.

²⁰ Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 2. For all the clan origin myths, see 159-202.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²² *Ibid.*, 2, 135.

²³ For linguistic and archaeological analysis, see Alice C. Fletcher and Francis La Flesche, *The Omaha Tribe*, 2 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press: 1992) 1: 36-38. For a compilation of various scholarly connections among Siouan-speaking people, see Publius V. Lawson, “The Winnebago Tribe,” *The Wisconsin Archeologist* 6, no. 3 (1907): 77-162.

²⁴ Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 1, 27, 133.

While non-Native people dismiss the Indians' myths, the Ho-Chunks insist on their significance. Ho-Chunk oral traditions account for the creation of everything, often with great specificity. Particular landscape features are often seen as the work of specific supernatural beings. The Mississippi River, for example, is largely obstacle-free thanks to the work of Wakjākága, or Trickster, and Lake Winnebago was formed, in part, from Trickster's tears after he was injured by arrows.²⁵ Answering Ho-Chunk prayers for new hunting grounds, Earthmaker created a green Waterspirit and sent it to the land of snow and ice, where otherwise not a living thing could be found.²⁶ With its body heat, the Waterspirit melted the ice, and as it crawled southward, the meltwaters filled the groove worn by his wiggling body, creating the winding Wisconsin River. When the Waterspirit encountered the place where the rock came together, it bit and clawed through, forming the deep gouges and side channels that we now call the Dells. Finally, the Waterspirit used its body to churn up an abundance of game and wild foodstuffs for the Ho-Chunks. From their faraway land, the Ho-Chunks heard the Waterspirit's final dive down into the earth and followed this sound, along a meandering river to a deep and beautiful lake.

To the Ho-Chunks, this seemingly bottomless lake was a channel to the center of the earth, a conduit between them and a powerful and somewhat fickle Waterspirit who lived at the earth's core. Indeed, the Ho-Chunks had reason to fear the same Waterspirit that fashioned them new homelands. The boulder-strewn landscape that surrounds the lake, according to the Ho-

²⁵ Trickster was trying to see Earthmaker and a Bear told him the only way to do so was to die. Trickster invited several warriors to kill him with their arrows, but he was unsuccessful in dying. Waukon G. Smith (Thunderbird Clan), "Origin Story of Lake Winnebago, Wisconsin," in Smith, *Folklore of the Winnebago Tribe*, 25. For an extended examination of the Ho-Chunk Trickster cycle, see Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1956).

²⁶ Norton William Jipson, *Story of the Winnebagoes* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1923), 397. Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 240. Paul Radin determined that many water spirits existed and that some were good and some are bad. According to his Ho-Chunk informants, a Waterspirit's color was one way to determine whether it might use its powers to benefit the Ho-Chunk or punish them.

Chunks, is the debris from an epic battle between the Thunderbirds and the Waterspirit. Thunderbirds flew over the lake, hurling huge eggs, and possibly lightening, at the Waterspirit inhabiting the waters to drive it back to the earth's center.²⁷ Many Ho-Chunks claim that their ancestors called it a holy or sacred lake, but whites misunderstood its original name, calling it the "devil's lake."²⁸ The Ho-Chunks have repeated versions of Devil's Lake, Dells, and Wisconsin River stories to numerous researchers over the years, and in virtually every instance, these stories blended Ho-Chunk spirituality and subsistence.

That places referenced in origin stories stretch from what is now Door County to Lake Winnebago and even further west to the Mississippi River suggests either that the original homelands of the Ho-Chunk people were more vast than the single large village near Red Banks or that Ho-Chunks expanded their sacred history to account for territorial conquests. Whether reoccupying original homelands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries or expanding their territory over time, the Ho-Chunks have long told stories that established their occupation and belonging. Ho-Chunk place-making through story-telling was not reserved for distinctive landscape features. Much less striking places, such as the Rock River and Lake Koshkonong in southcentral Wisconsin, became sites for Ho-Chunk sacred history as well as dwellings for spirit-beings. According to a Ho-Chunk living in the early twentieth century, a particularly ferocious Waterspirit "ranged over the whole length of the [Rock River's] mouth to the foot of Lake

²⁷ Charles E. Brown, *Lake Mendota Indian Legends* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1927), 5; Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 239; Dorothy Moulding Brown, *Indian Legends of Historic and Scenic Wisconsin* (Madison: Wisconsin Folklore Booklets, 1947), 60-61; David Lee Smith (Thunderbird Clan), "How Valleys and Ravines Came to Be," in Smith, *Folklore of the Winnebago Tribe*, 100-101.

²⁸ Albert Yellow Thunder narrated this story to Don Saunders, see Don Saunders, *When the Moon is a Silver Canoe: Legends of the Wisconsin Dells* (Wisconsin Dells: Don Saunders, 1947), 4, 5-6.

Koshkonong.”²⁹ It swallowed deer whole, antlers and all, and would frequently take Indians at the fording places or tip them from their canoes. Ho-Chunks incorporated new lands and waters into their sacred history through storytelling, imposing on these features their worldview, inserting or acknowledging a Waterspirit or some other spirit-being dwelling there. To appease the spirit-beings’ wrath, Ho-Chunks made offerings of tobacco and red feathers in all the waters they traversed, and they often warned outsiders to do the same.³⁰ Capricious Waterspirits posed threats to Ho-Chunk cultivation, another facet of their peoplehood and belonging.

Ho-Chunk seasonal patterns highlight the significance of corn to their everyday existence. Tracing Ho-Chunk seasonal activities, then, creates another sort of place-story, one with corn rooting people in place. Indigenous knowledge of homelands brings into relief the most intimate relationships people have with their land. Ho-Chunk knowledge can be seen in their moon names, each designated by the primary subsistence activity during that month. For example, during “Raccoon Mating Moon,” or March, as the days warmed, Ho-Chunks hunted raccoons and other small game near their villages. In April, the “Fish Moon,” Ho-Chunks used spears and triangular weir traps to take fish from nearby rivers and streams, once they could be easily seen and taken as they made their runs through the thawed waters. Ho-Chunks hunted and gathered wild foods throughout the year, but corn cultivation dominated their calendar from May through August, a time of year Ho-Chunks often referred to as the “Corn Moon.”³¹

²⁹ Charles E. Brown, *Wisconsin Indian Place Legends* (Madison: Works Progress Administration, 1936), 15-16; Dorothy Moulding Brown, *Wisconsin Indian Place-Name Legends* (Madison: Wisconsin Folklore Booklets, 1947), 11-12; Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 193-195; Saunders, *When the Moon is a Silver Canoe*, 34-42.

³⁰ In 1766, Jonathan Carver took a Ho-Chunk warning about the Lake Winnebago Waterspirit to mean that a crocodile once lived the lake. Carver, *Travels through the Interior Parts of North America, in the Years 1766, 1767, and 1768* (1784; Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1956), 37.

³¹ Janet Spector, “Winnebago Indians, 1634-1829: An Archaeological and Ethnohistoric Investigation” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1974), 59; Jeanne Kay, “The Land of La Baye: The Ecological Impact of the Green Bay Fur Trade, 1634-1836” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1977). Some moon calendars for the Ho-Chunk refer to April as the “Planting Corn Moon,” and so the beginning of the Corn Moon. See Dee Brown and

In May, Ho-Chunks hunted deer along the streams nearest their villages, but Ho-Chunks called May the “Earth Drying Moon” or “Earth Digging Moon,” a name indicative of gardens and fields emerging from under winter snow and of early planting activities in southern lands with longer growing seasons. By June, the “Cultivating Moon,” hunters would be called upon by their families and villages to help prepare and plant the fields, keeping them close to home. Once the planting was complete, it was time for many Ho-Chunks to leave the village and hunt larger game, such as buffalo, further away. Ho-Chunks hunted buffalo in the prairie lands of western Wisconsin and Illinois as well as west of the Mississippi River, often with other Native communities. During the warm days of summer that stretched into July, the “Corn Tasseling Moon,” large hunting parties might be gone from the villages for weeks at a time.

August, the “Corn Popping” moon, marked the return of Ho-Chunk hunters to their villages as well as a time of gathering for ceremonies, harvests, and feasts. Families tended to the fields and gardens nearest their dwelling, marking them with earthen replicas of their clan totem.³² However, harvests often demanded a community effort. Fields belonging to the occupants of a multi-fire, or multi-family, dwelling frequently produced a crop so bountiful that they required help from others. According to one Ho-Chunk man in the early twentieth century, “If anyone had more corn planted than he could take care of, he gave a feast to which he invited all who had hoes.”³³ After the host provided a feast of dried corn, perhaps a favorite dish of boiled corn mixed with bear’s rib or fruit, all would assist the family with their fields. The corn harvests provided opportunities for social gatherings but also for ceremonies celebrating the appropriate spirit-beings. A favorite feasting activity among Ho-Chunks in August was

Amy Ehrlich, *Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1974), 183-185.

³² Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 67-68.

³³ Radin’s primary Ho-Chunk (and Winnebago) informants were Jasper Blowsnake and Sam Carley of Black River Falls, Wisconsin, and John Rave, of Winnebago, Nebraska. See Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, xvi.

skewering a cob and holding it over the fire—the distinctive and familiar popping sound of corn over a flame became the moon’s namesake.

Though corn was always the staple food, the Ho-Chunk gathered additional wild foods throughout the year. They dug and harvested roots and tubers such as artichokes, wild potatoes, ground nuts, prairie turnips, and beans. Ho-Chunks fed their sweet tooth all year round, picking seasonal fruits and berries including wild strawberries, blackberries, plums, blueberries, cranberries, whortleberries, and wild currants. Sugar from maple trees lasted from one sugaring season to the next.³⁴

Ho-Chunk hunters provided the meat that thickened the savory stews their people relished. In the early twentieth century they recalled that their ancestors preferred bear meat and venison, but men and older boys also hunted buffalo, elk, raccoon, and other small animals throughout the year. Waterfowl, having grown fat on ripened wild rice, were taken regularly in the fall. During the summer Ho-Chunk hunting parties traveled greater distances to the Illinois, western Wisconsin, and Iowa prairies seeking buffalo. Ho-Chunks often joined with the Fox, Sauk, and Iowa on their summer hunts, in part for protection in case of a chance encounter with enemies. Dedicated warriors went with the hunters, traveling in front to spy enemies first and in the rear near the women on whose labor the hunters depended for butchering game and preparing the food and other products. Women cut the flesh into large chunks and dried it on the grass. When the group determined that they had enough, they returned home, the women carrying the majority of the dried meat.³⁵ Successful or not, Ho-Chunk hunters went home when the crickets wept in August. The sound of crickets “weeping” signaled to Ho-Chunk people that their corn was green and ripe. As the story goes, long ago, spirit chief Cricket owned all things green on

³⁴ Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 217, 298, and for use of maple syrup in ceremonies and as offerings to spirit-beings, see 390, 411, 419.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 64-66.

earth. More powerful spirit-beings believed humans should possess green things and they took Cricket's power away and gave it to the humans, killing the spirit chief. Every August since, crickets have wept for their spirit chief and for the loss of their green possessions.³⁶

Spring and summer were festive times when Ho-Chunks gathered in larger villages to enjoy social events and religious or clan-specific ceremonies and to participate in the rituals that reaffirmed their peoplehood. One Ho-Chunk recalled that summertime "was a season of rejoicing because the chief fed the tribe."³⁷ At the "chief's feast" the entire village, members of every clan, honored the Thunder clan chief and made offerings of food to Earthmaker as well as other spirit-beings. Though spring was often a time of minimal food and much fasting for Native peoples, Ho-Chunks told anthropologist Paul Radin that meat, vegetables, berries and "all sorts of edibles" were always abundance at the chief's feast. Everyone reserved a portion of their dish for the spirit-beings as they ate. The annual chief's feast was a reminder, too, of the civil or peacetime chief's duty to his villagers: to be selfless and giving so that he might nurture and enrich his people.³⁸

Summer games also brought together Ho-Chunks from different villages and bands. Lacrosse was a favorite among both men and women. More than providing enjoyment and leisure, lacrosse trained male participants for agility in battle. Games played between different Native nations no doubt boosted sense of pride and unity among the participating teams. Though intended as athletic competition and not combat, Indians who met on the lacrosse field for

³⁶ Richard L. Dieterle, "Maize (*wa*)," *The Encyclopedia of Hocak (Winnebago) Mythology*, 2005, <https://hotcakencyclopedia.com/ho.Maize.html> (accessed August 10, 2016).

³⁷ Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 273.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 270-271. Mountain Wolf Woman, a Ho-Chunk woman born in the late nineteenth-century who lived much of her life near Black River Falls, Wisconsin, remembered several chief's feasts during the year. See Mountain Wolf Woman, *Mountain Wolf Woman, Sister of Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian*, ed. Nancy Oestreich Lurie (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), 18-19. According to other Ho-Chunks, in times of crisis, such as disease outbreaks, villagers would hold a chief's feast to facilitate collective offerings to their spirit-beings. See Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 271-72.

intertribal matches often hurt or even killed one other. In the seventeenth century, Jesuits and other French observers remarked on the ferocity with which Indians played. Nicolas Perrot, a late seventeenth-century French explorer and envoy, claimed that that “fierce intertribal matches broke arms, legs, heads, and even killed some of the players.”³⁹ Ho-Chunks attended an intertribal game near Green Bay in 1667 that drew more than two thousand Indian players from the area. More than a century later, in 1806, the early American explorer Zebulon Pike was impressed by the sight of “two or three hundred naked savages contending on the plain” in western Wisconsin, where he observed “a great game of the crosse” played between “the Sioux on the one side and the Puants [Ho-Chunk] and Reynards [Fox] on the other.”⁴⁰ Pike claimed that the Indians played with such skill that the ball was “sometimes kept in the air for hours.” Victory went to the Dakota, but Pike “thought the Puants and Reynards the swiftest runners.”⁴¹ Undoubtedly, the Ho-Chunk players boasted of their talents too.

Intermixed with fall harvests, some Ho-Chunks gathered wild rice in September, though unlike most of their Algonquian neighbors, most Ho-Chunks who lived in regions with long growing seasons did not rely on this wild grain for their diet. Those bands for whom the September moon was named for the return of the bobolink, a rice-eating bird, undoubtedly harvested more rice (and ate more rice-eating birds) than other bands who named this moon for the bull elk’s mating bugle.⁴² By October most Ho-Chunks departed their primary villages and relocated to winter hunting grounds in Wisconsin’s northern uplands, between what are today Wisconsin Dells and Wausau. Ho-Chunks lived in smaller dwellings, round wigwams with what

³⁹ Mark Wyman, *The Wisconsin Frontier* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 52.

⁴⁰ Elliott Coues, ed., *The Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike: To Headwaters of the Mississippi River Through Louisiana Territory, and in New Spain, During the Years 1805-6-7*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper, 1895), 207-08. The date in Zebulon Pike’s journal is April 20, 1806.

⁴¹ Coues, *Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike*, 208.

⁴² Nancy Lurie argues that that wild rice was not an important resource for the Ho-Chunk and that assuming it was obscures the significance of corn and other domesticated crops to the Ho-Chunk. See her most recent work, Lurie and Jung, *Nicolet Corrigenda*, 66-69.

an early nineteenth-century settler described as “comfortable berths of poles and grass mats and fire at the center.”⁴³ Ho-Chunks covered their dwellings with “heavy grass mats,” woven by women, as well as skins of large animals.⁴⁴

Ho-Chunks hunted during the first part of the Winter Moon, the Deer Digging Moon and Deer Antler Shedding Moon, but by January, snow and freezing temperatures drove them into their warm homes, but for occasional hunts. As they did in August, Ho-Chunk hunters returned to their villages where they rejoined families and feasted on corn and other dried foods. Food was parceled out in bags made from squirrel hides or woven vegetable fibers, often decorated with distinct clan symbols.⁴⁵ When Ho-Chunks were together with their families, they prepared and consumed ceremonial feasts using dried corn from the previous year’s harvest. Cached corn made homes—summer or winter wigwams—into places of comfort and reliable nourishment.⁴⁶

After the late fall harvests, the Winter Moon gave way to less physically demanding activities as the weather turned cold. Yet it was a social time. Speaking with anthropologist Nancy Lurie in 1958, seventy-four-year-old Mountain Wolf Woman recalled that the winter feasts she attended as a child followed the hunting season, one of several seasonal feasts and ceremonies that brought Ho-Chunk people together to make offerings to the spirits.⁴⁷ The winter feast was also known as the war bundle feast. These bundles were sacred objects passed down through families that contained blessings from spirits who controlled the fate of warriors but also

⁴³ Recollections of Satterlee Clark, in *The History of Dodge County, Wisconsin* (Dodge County, WI: Western Historical Company, 1880), 477.

⁴⁴ For a lengthier description of Ho-Chunk wigwam styles and building materials, see Bieder, *Native American Communities in Wisconsin*, 37-39.

⁴⁵ Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 70.

⁴⁶ Bieder, *Native American Communities in Wisconsin, 1600-1960*; 43; Nancy Oestreich Lurie, *Wisconsin Indians* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1980), 13.

⁴⁷ Mountain Wolf Woman, *Mountain Wolf Woman*, 18-19.

protected entire families.⁴⁸ The ceremonies accompanying these feasts differed in particulars depending on the clan of the person or family hosting, but all demonstrated and imparted a cognizance of spirit-beings associated with war through songs, orations, and other rituals. Though a wide-spread tradition across many Native communities, according to Paul Radin, its “distinctive peculiarity among the Winnebago is that it has developed into a general ceremony of thanksgiving to the spirits.”⁴⁹ This is how Mountain Wolf Woman remembered the feasts she attended as a child.

Mountain Wolf Woman recalled the large feasts that her father hosted in long wigwams that he built annually for that purpose.⁵⁰ Her father took pride in gathering the community and feeding them and one year, he and his nephews built a wigwam that held eight fires and her father also provided ten deer for the feast. More food, Mountain Wolf Woman explained, meant that her people could make offerings to more spirit-beings. The winter feast dazzled Mountain Wolf Woman. Orators delivered speeches and the people prayed, danced, sang, and made ceremonial offerings throughout the night. Ceremonial gatherings such as the winter feast were opportunities for children to learn about their people’s rituals and history. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings and parents as well as villager elders shared the responsibilities of raising and educating children.⁵¹ These feasts left Mountain Wolf Woman joyful for being part of a large family group.⁵²

The Winter Moon was also time for stories and contemplation. Ho-Chunks passed the coldest weeks of the year warming themselves around fires, riveted by their elders’ storytelling.

⁴⁸ For more information on Ho-Chunk spirit-beings associated with war-bundle feasts and related ceremonies, see Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 381-386.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 379.

⁵⁰ Mountain Wolf Woman’s father was Charles Blowsnake, a member of the Thunder clan. Blowsnake hosted feasts and ceremonies as a chief would, but he did not occupy that official position among his Black River Falls Ho-Chunk community.

⁵¹ Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 118-133.

⁵² Mountain Wolf Woman, 18-19, 118.

Tales of Trickster's misadventures conveyed wisdom on many matters. In at least one story set on the eve of the Winter Moon, Trickster, or Wakjakaga, and his three younger spirit-brothers, Little Fox, Blue Jay, and Nit (a louse-egg) found themselves with no place to live and nothing to eat. Wakjakaga conjured a plan to prevent them from starving. He would trick humans into sheltering them for the winter. Wakjakaga transformed himself into a woman and seduced a Ho-Chunk chief's son. Smitten with Trickster, the son married him and boiled bear ribs with dried corn for Wakjakaga. Before too long, Wakjakaga gave birth to his three brothers and the chief's son sheltered and fed them all until spring.⁵³

"Trickster's Pregnancy" is an entertaining story full of intrigue, but a Ho-Chunk audience would know it to be an allegory about corn. Trickster symbolized many things in relation to corn cultivation. In the story Wakjakaga embodied the Corn or Maize Spirit and his brothers represented earlier stages of corn growth. For example, Nit was the youngest and represented a kernel. In the story, Nit cried from the moment of his birth and required the most care from the humans. The Ho-Chunk understood that during the Winter Moon, the seed corn must be protected and preserved for spring planting.⁵⁴ Corn was the most important food to the Ho-Chunk, evidenced by its prevalence in their cultural lore, oral history, and that five out of twelve moons or months concerned Ho-Chunk corn cultivation.⁵⁵ While entertaining, Ho-Chunk stories also reminded that spirit-beings remain dynamic parts of subsistence cycles. Often in these tales, it is corn, or the Corn Spirit, that tricks humans into caring for it. The sacred and ancestral history as well as cultural lore passed down through generations among the Ho-Chunk

⁵³ Radin, *The Trickster*, 7-46.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 79-85.

⁵⁵ Lurie and Jung, *Nicolet Corrigenda*, 68-69.

acknowledge that one cannot live without the other.⁵⁶ Ho-Chunk lore includes many tales warning of a starving time if they consume their seed corn instead of preserving and planting it, or famine if they anger a waterspirit and floods ruin their fields.⁵⁷ Ho-Chunks, like their most cherished crops, originated from Earthmaker, who intended a specific relationship among Ho-Chunks, their cultivation of corn and tobacco, and the spirit-beings living in their homeland. Tales about lice and hunger, seed kernels and survival, reveal that Ho-Chunks understood their vulnerability to fluctuation in seasons, in their harvests, and in the good will of their spirit-beings. These tales also show how spiritual- and subsistence-based belonging was, in part, cultivated through storytelling.⁵⁸

Ho-Chunk tales and traditions also reflected core values of Ho-Chunk society and peoplehood. Ho-Chunk children learned to be considerate of others, especially their parents and elders, and to be generous, like the hunters were with their feasts after a hunt.⁵⁹ In stories as well as straight-talk, parents warned their children against idleness and foolishness and encouraged them to be both generous and industrious. Ho-Chunk lore reflected their humbleness in reverence to their spirit-beings as well as their pride as Earthmaker's first children, Ho-Chunks, The People of the Big Voice. Tales of Trickster's misadventures often served all these ends.

⁵⁶ For an examination of Ho-Chunk lore, in particular, the interplay between folk literature and the natural environment, see Beatrice A. Bigony, "Folk Literature as an Ethnohistorical Devise: The Interrelationships Between Winnebago Folk Tales and Wisconsin Habitat," *Ethnohistory* 29, no. 3 (1982): 155-180. Bigony examines Ho-Chunk lore for references to landscape and topography, fauna, flora, weather and climate, subsistence activities and medicinal foods. Bigony writes, "Undoubtedly, both the orators of these tales and their audiences were very familiar with a territory within which there was a variety of environmental niches and in which there were four major climatic seasonal changes." Bigony, "Folk Literature," 161.

⁵⁷ Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 239-241, 421.

⁵⁸ Holm, Pearson, and Chavis discuss the importance of sharing stories and belonging. "A group's sacred history is told in the vernacular not only to give each member of the group an understanding of where they come from but also to impart to them proper behavior and the ways in which they maintain group cohesion through ritualism and ceremony." As examples of Ho-Chunk sacred history, these stories about corn instruct or remind the community about its importance, in both a caloric and cosmological sense. See Holm, et al., p. 14.

⁵⁹ Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 65.

Listening to stories and attending various ceremonies and feasts taught children to respect and defer not only to parents and elders, chiefs and spirit-beings, but also other leaders in Ho-Chunk society, such as village police or soldiers. Civil chiefs of the Thunder Clan selected their village police from the Bear Clan. Despite not being hereditary chiefs, village police wielded much power and authority in Ho-Chunk society and often became wartime chiefs.⁶⁰ They enacted justice and dispensed punishment in their communities according to sacred and secular laws. One Ho-Chunk in the early twentieth century described how police had “complete control of everything concerning discipline” in the village and during seasonal migrations.⁶¹ Bear Clan members managed hunts, setting the pace and preventing overly eager young men from spooking game. Young men who struck out on their own during hunts faced severe punishment from the police since such selfishness could jeopardize the hunt and food security for the entire village. They watched over wild rice beds, ensuring fair distribution and harvesting.⁶² Like peacetime chiefs, village police earned respect for their ability to safeguard food sources and ensure just allocation. Ho-Chunk police whipped and shamed violators. In cases of severe transgressions or unrepentant violators, police killed members of their village.⁶³ The Ho-Chunk communities described by European and American outsiders as organized, courteous, and industrious no doubt owed some degree of these traits to their clan-specific duties, such as those filled by members of

⁶⁰ Lurie and Jung, *Nicolet Corrigenda*, 101.

⁶¹ The Ho-Chunk had twelve clans, each with its own specific obligation to the village community and reciprocal relationship to other clans. As late as 1840, clans exerted great influence on social structure. For clan roles in Ho-Chunk society, see Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 133-159. Some scholars argue that traditional Ho-Chunk clan roles broke down significantly long before the nineteenth century because of disease and warfare or because of the diffuse existence of the Ho-Chunk nation in the eighteenth century. See Robert Hall, “Red Banks, Oneota,” 10-79. Others, such as anthropologist Nancy Lurie, think that breakdown of Ho-Chunk cultural traditions and social structure was not apparent until 1840 and actually began during the 1820s, as white settlement increased and land cessions and removals disrupted and displaced Ho-Chunk communities. See, Lurie, “Winnebago,” 690-707; Bieder, *Native American Communities in Wisconsin*, 38.

⁶² Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 178-79.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 152, 170, 177-190. Radin gives the Bear clan significant attention in part because one of his informants was a member of the Bear clan but also because it was the most populous and powerful lower or earth clan of the Ho-Chunk nation.

the Thunder and Bear clan.⁶⁴ Indeed, Ho-Chunk reverence for their chiefs and police and other influential roles such as orators would prove indispensable to Ho-Chunk unity and preservation of autonomy in their homelands in the post-contact era.

An accounting of Ho-Chunk seasonal rounds of planting, harvesting, migrating, hunting, and fishing, like the one provided here, may seem to transmit a timelessness that obscures the Ho-Chunk as a product of history, of the sequence of events and experiences that shaped Ho-Chunk sense of self and belonging as well as their territory. Yet many of those experiences occurred in deep time, which the Ho-Chunk recount as their sacred history. Ho-Chunks were adjusting to new circumstances long before the arrival of Europeans, and they have continued to adapt ever since.

Corn played a crucial part in Ho-Chunk life and their ability to adapt throughout time. In addition to its caloric value and the labor demands its cultivation created, corn possessed cosmological significance in the Ho-Chunk world. The ceremony during which Ho-Chunks received corn and tobacco as gifts from the spirit-beings became what they call the Medicine Rite. The ritual originated in deep time, when humans were very new to the earth. Wastcingega, or Hare, one of four spirit-beings sent by Earthmaker to transform the earth and protect its inhabitants from evil spirits, had become troubled by human weakness and death. Hare wanted humans, whom he called his aunts and uncles, to have longer lives and more power against evil spirits. Earthmaker listened to Hare. He promised a holy teaching to his Ho-Chunk children, a ceremony during which humans would receive gifts of sacred knowledge that would improve them. Earthmaker instructed Hare to build a lodge and teach the ceremony to the humans. And

⁶⁴ Bieder, *Native American Communities in Wisconsin*, 39.

so, Hare built the lodge for the first Medicine Rite, after which the good spirit-beings gathered there.⁶⁵

In the Medicine Rite, each of the good spirit-beings offered something that would help the humans overcome the evil spirits. Grandmother Earth offered her gifts last. She first “opened that part (of her body) where her heart was” and out of the left breast grew the leaves of the tobacco plant.⁶⁶ Tobacco was the one gift all the spirit-beings desired for themselves, including Earthmaker. They craved its aroma. Ho-Chunks called it “spirit-food.” With the gift of tobacco, Ho-Chunk people were no longer weak because they had the means to seek power and protection from the spirit-beings.⁶⁷ Ho-Chunks cultivated tobacco ever after. Out of Grandmother's other breast grew another plant that no one had ever seen before. It emerged from her nipple into a full stalk with ripe ears of corn ready to eat. “This, grandson, is maize,” explained Grandmother, “The two-legged walkers may eat its corn forevermore.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Oliver LaMère and Harold B. Shinn, *Winnebago Stories* (New York, Chicago: Rand, McNally and Co., 1928), 104-105. Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 309; Walking Cloud, “Narrative of Walking Cloud. In an Interview with the Editor,” in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, vol. 13, Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed. (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1887), 466-467.

⁶⁶ Dorothy Moulding Brown, “Wisconsin Indian Corn Origin Myths,” *Wisconsin Archeologist* 21, no.1 (1940): 19-27, 22.

⁶⁷ The moment when spirit-beings gave various gifts to the earliest Ho-Chunks has become central to Ho-Chunk lore, ceremony, and sacred history. The Medicine Rite celebrates the gift of knowledge from Earthmaker and the work by generations of Ho-Chunks passing on this knowledge to other Ho-Chunks. As discussed above, two of the most prized possessions among the Ho-Chunk—corn and tobacco—have their origins in the Medicine Rite. See Paul Radin, “The Culture of the Winnebago: As Defined by Themselves,” *International Journal of American Linguistics Memoirs* 3 (1950): 67-68, and *The Road of Life and Death: A Ritual Drama of the American Indians* (1945; reprint, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 85-86, 323-324. The Medicine Rite was guarded knowledge among the Ho-Chunk people. That Jasper Blowsnake explained the rite to Paul Radin, an outsider, proved controversial among the Blowsnake’s community. Blowsnake felt, however, that his partnership with Radin “must be the work assigned to me by the Creator” and that “telling the translation of the Medicine Rite is my mission in life.” See Robert L. Hall, *An Archaeology of the Soul: Native American Indian Belief and Ritual* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 69.

⁶⁸ Radin, *The Road of Life and Death*, 323-324. In Radin’s unpublished notes, which include Jasper Blowsnake’s full version of maize origins, Radin links Grandmother Earth’s breasts in the maize origin myth to the physical corn hills built by many Winnebago and Ho-Chunk farmers. The metaphorical or symbolic relationship between Grandmother’s breast and the corn hills was obvious to Radin. For an online version of Blowsnake’s story,

The Medicine Rite is one of many dramatic depictions of the ideological structure of the Ho-Chunks' world. This story, like other myths, expresses the values and ideals around which Ho-Chunk society has organized over time. Ho-Chunk cosmology is full of stories that explain how the universe was created, its many components, and the relationships and rituals that sustain this world. That Ho-Chunks became excellent farmers and gardeners is owed to the Medicine Rite, or more generally speaking, to the shared sacred origins of the Ho-Chunk, corn, and tobacco. Ho-Chunk narratives tend to begin with the words, "this is the story that was handed down to us."⁶⁹ Growing corn and tobacco rooted Ho-Chunks in place and intertwined their subsistence and spirituality. The Medicine Rite and other tales accounting for Ho-Chunk origins were (and remain) sacred histories as well as place-stories that illuminate how Ho-Chunk people's spiritual beliefs and subsistence practices intertwined to root them in their homelands. Such stories connect Ho-Chunks to their elders, their dead ancestors, and their offspring.⁷⁰

Corn, Being, and Crisis

Corn processing was labor intensive, keeping many Ho-Chunks close to their villages and fields for much of the year. Ho-Chunk women gardened and cultivated, and so they remained home with children and the elderly. Women were diligent in protecting their fields from crows and other predatory animals. The corn hills, raised garden beds, and ridged fields Ho-Chunk women built protected their crops from weather extremes, especially flood and drought. Innovative farming methods demanded time and labor.⁷¹ When preparing a new field for

see Jasper Blowsnake, "Grandmother's Gifts," *Hotcak Encyclopedia*, ed., Robert Dieterle <http://www.hotcakencyclopedia.com/ho.HT.GrandmothersGifts.html>, (accessed March 20, 2013).

⁶⁹ Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 18.

⁷⁰ See Radin, "The Culture of the Winnebago," 67-68 and *The Road of Life and Death*, 85-86.

⁷¹ For a thorough and interdisciplinary examination of Ho-Chunk corn cultivation, see William Gustav Gartner, "Raised Field Landscapes of Native North America" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003).

planting, the work of creating corn hills required Ho-Chunks, usually women, to cut away long grass so that they could then dig and soften the soil for the corn hills to be laid in rows. The women were careful to place the corn hills several feet apart to ensure bountiful growth and pollination. If the plants were crowded, they would produce only a few small ears and their stalks would become dry and weak. In the nineteenth century, in response to the American efforts to buy lands and limit their planting and hunting grounds, Ho-Chunks protested that they could not be too crowded or they would grow weak and perish.

Corn determined when Ho-Chunks stayed home to plant, when they traveled to hunt, and when they returned to harvest. Cultivating corn connected them to permanent villages. Unlike their Algonquian-speaking neighbors, for whom hunting, fishing, and gathering were primary activities that kept them on the move throughout the year, Ho-Chunks practiced a horticultural-based subsistence that located them in and around distinct villages. Ho-Chunk cycles of planting, weeding, harvesting, and hunting were intimately tied to the seasons and spiritual ceremonies and feasts. All of these activities took place in a world bounded by ritual. Rituals sanctioned their subsistence cycles by invoking the assistance of spirit-beings who shaped so many variables otherwise beyond the Ho-Chunks' control. Prior to a hunt, Ho-Chunk men practiced *wanatce're*, or "concentration of the mind." During this ceremony, the hunter prepared a favorite meal of corn and dried fruit and readied an offering of tobacco. It was a meaningful feast, though the hunter never consumed it. This meal was intended to lure the animal—a bear, deer, or raccoon—to the hunter. Such ceremonies also involved corn and often took place during months beyond the Corn Moon. Even in January or March, the importance of corn to Ho-Chunk

substance and spiritual rituals manifested itself. That the hunter prepared this feast of corn and did not eat it showed his reverence for both corn and the spirit-world in which he lived.⁷²

It was in this cosmology, and the physical world that supported it, that the first encounter between the French and the Ho-Chunk near Green Bay took place. That meeting was defined by creative misunderstandings as people of different cultures and worldviews attempted to make sense of one another.⁷³ Jean Nicolet traveled to Ho-Chunk country in 1634, ostensibly on a peace-making mission to quell violence between Ho-Chunks and the French-allied Indians, most notably the Ottawa and the Huron. As Nicolet and his companions approached the shore near Green Bay, Ho-Chunks gathered at water's edge. They had seen the strangers coming. Seeking either to salute Ho-Chunks or shock them, Nicolet fired his guns into the air. Stunned, Ho-Chunks believed the strangers to be Thunderbirds, the only spirit-beings who wielded lightning as a weapon. As the French extended their hands in friendship, Ho-Chunks poured tobacco over the newcomers' heads. The French brought metal tools as gifts, but despite their efforts to demonstrate the usefulness of an axe, Ho-Chunks refused to touch it, believing it to be divine.⁷⁴ Unfamiliar with Ho-Chunks' process and purpose of tobacco consumption, which generated a lot of smoke as a way of communicating with the spirit-world, one of the French newcomers

⁷² For a more detailed description of this ceremony, see Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 63.

⁷³ I borrow the phrase "creative misunderstanding" from Richard White. In the French and Algonquian middle ground, people on both sides tried to justify their action in terms of what they believed the other side would understand or even approve of. Numerous examples can be found throughout his book, though he revisits the concept in detail in the preface to the twentieth anniversary edition. See White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* "Preface to the Twentieth Anniversary Edition," (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), xi-xxiv.

⁷⁴ Louise Phelps Kellogg, *The French Regime in Wisconsin and the Northwest* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1925). According to oral tradition, the Ho-Chunk believed that inanimate as well as animate objects had powers. See Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 229-243.

dumped water on a Ho-Chunk man who was enjoying his pipe.⁷⁵ Only the strangeness of Nicolet and his companions saved them from a violent response.⁷⁶

When Ho-Chunks encountered the French in 1634, they were living in numerous villages near Green Bay, along the Fox River, and on the shores of Lake Winnebago. By 1659, when they encountered French traders again, Ho-Chunks had been nearly exterminated by disease and warfare.⁷⁷ Fiercely territorial, Ho-Chunks resisted encroachments on their lands by Fox Indians who were fleeing Ojibwa raids in the early seventeenth century, and they expanded their aggression toward multiple other Algonquian-speaking Indian groups pushing west of Lake Michigan in the decades that followed.

The traumatic events of the seventeenth century were documented by Nicolas Perrot, Jesuit explorer Claude-Jean Allouez, and other French in the *pays d'en haut*, related to them by the Ho-Chunk or their Algonquian neighbors. Baqueville de La Potherie, a chronicler of New France, published Perrot's narrative.⁷⁸ Naturally, Perrot and La Potherie were interested in explaining the massive power shifts in the region and the fall of the "vile" Indian nation—the Ho-Chunks—so many had feared and who had so troubled expansion of French trade.

In former times, the Puans were the masters of this bay, and of a great extent of adjoining country. This nation was a populous one, very redoubtable, and spared no one;...If any stranger came among them he was cooked in their kettles. The Malhominis [Menominee] were the only tribe who maintained relations with them,...they did not dare even to complain of their tyranny. [The Ho-Chunks] believed themselves the most powerful in the universe; they declared war on all nations whom they could discover, although they had only stone knives and hatchets. They did not desire to have commerce with the French. The Outaouaks [Ottawa], notwithstanding, sent to them envoys, whom they had the cruelty to eat.

⁷⁵ Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 19.

⁷⁶ Lurie and Jung, *Nicolet Corrigenda*, 49-69.

⁷⁷ Kay, "Land of La Baye," offers a thorough overview of data on disease outbreaks in the Green Bay region.

⁷⁸ For this reason, historians often cite Perrot in place of La Potherie since it appears that the latter published Perrot's accounts almost verbatim. This dissertation will cite La Potherie and Perrot as separate sources.

This crime incensed all the nations, who formed a union with the [Ottawa], on account of the protection accorded to them by the latter under the auspices of the French, from whom they received weapons and all sorts of merchandise. They made frequent expeditions against the Puans, who were giving them much trouble.⁷⁹

Ho-Chunks who murdered and ate the Ottawa envoys drew severe condemnation from other Ho-Chunk villagers angry about a missed opportunity for trade. This division might have resulted in a civil war among the Ho-Chunks had it not been for the allied Algonquian attacks on them. The Ho-Chunks “were compelled to unite all their forces in one village, where they numbered four or five thousand men; but maladies wrought among them more devastation than even the war did.”⁸⁰ Like all Indigenous peoples in the New World, Ho-Chunks lacked immunity to the numerous diseases Europeans and their animals carried. After living apart from human populations of other continents for thousands of years, Indian populations were devastated by Old World diseases such as measles, smallpox, typhus, and other infectious illnesses. Though it is not always clear to which diseases various Native communities succumbed, or even how many people died, the demographic, social, and cultural destruction always left its mark. Estimates of those who died range between 25 percent to over 90 percent of the population between 1630 and 1730.⁸¹

Disease and the increased death toll among Ho-Chunks in the mid-seventeenth century caused social collapse. It is no mere coincidence that disease crushed the Ho-Chunk population

⁷⁹ La Potherie, *Savages of New France*, in *Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley and the Region of the Great Lakes*, ed. Emma Helen Blair, vol. 1 (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1911), 293-300, quote on 293.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁸¹ For Ho-Chunk disease epidemics, see La Potherie, *Savages of New France*, 293-300. In her dissertation, Jeanne Kay offers a thorough overview of existing data on disease outbreaks in the Green Bay region during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Much of this data comes from the Jesuit Relations. For a shorter, published version, see Jeanne Kay, “The Fur Trade and Native American Population Growth,” *Ethnohistory* 31 (1984): 265-287.

in the years immediately following their first contacts with the French. According to Ho-Chunks, the epidemic, or perhaps several, they suffered sometime in the 1630s or 1640s, killed their people with such speed and volume that they were prevented from even burying the dead.⁸² According to La Potherie, “The exhalations from the rotting corpses caused great mortality.” Ho-Chunks estimate that their population may have been reduced to as few as 1,500 people by the 1650s. Not understanding the causes of disease and death visiting them, Ho-Chunks looked outward in efforts to avenge their losses and cover their dead with the lives of their enemies. “Despite all these misfortunes,” La Potherie explained, “they sent a party of five hundred warriors against the Outagamis [Fox], who dwelt on the other shore of the lake; but all those men perished, while making that journey, by a tempest which arose.”⁸³ Their enemies took pity on the Ho-Chunks, believing “the Gods ought to be satisfied with so many punishments” and they refrained from killing the survivors.”⁸⁴ The Ho-Chunks’ tragedy brought them some compassion from their enemies.

Once the allied Algonquians agreed to cease their war against the debilitated Ho-Chunk nation, a large Illinois delegation brought food to the village of their vanquished enemy. Ho-Chunks massacred them. Perhaps the Ho-Chunks chose to gamble their own extermination by

⁸² For Native response to disease in the western Great Lakes, see White, *The Middle Ground*. Perhaps the best work of history on Native survival following seventeenth and eighteenth-century epidemics is James H. Merrell, *The Indians’ New World: Catawbas and their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

⁸³ La Potherie, *Savages of New France*, 295. Scholars debate whether this large body of water was Lake Michigan or Lake Winnebago. La Potherie only mentions that a large flotilla of Winnebago warriors in canoes were lost as they attempted to reach the Foxes “who dwelt on the other shore of the lake.” No contemporary source generated at or near the time names this body of water. More recent scholars believe the Ho-Chunk were crossing Lake Winnebago. For example, R. David Edmunds and Joseph Peyser convincingly assert that “neither the Winnebagos nor any of the other tribes indigenous to the region were foolish enough to risk a crossing of Lake Michigan in open ... canoes.” This analysis supports the claim that the Fox were already living in Wisconsin by the time of this accident, in the 1630s and 1640s. R. David Edmunds and Joseph L. Peyser, *The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France*, The Civilization of the American Indian Series (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 225.

⁸⁴ La Potherie, *Savages of New France*, 295.

the Illinois than risk the spiritual consequences of not “covering” their dead.⁸⁵ After a period of mourning, the Illinois led an allied attack on the Ho-Chunks and killed or captured nearly all of them, almost silencing forever The People of the Big Voice. La Potherie estimated that only 150 Ho-Chunks survived in the mid-seventeenth century.⁸⁶

Again, however, Ho-Chunks were spared by the generosity of their enemies. The Illinois returned to their country with Ho-Chunk women and children as captives. Some captives were eventually freed by their captors, and the Ho-Chunks returned home, where they reunited with a warrior who had survived the Illinois-led attack and evaded capture. This warrior became their chief, according to what Ho-Chunks told the French. While living among the Ho-Chunks near Red Banks in 1670, Allouez heard and documented virtually the same history from the Ho-Chunk about their near destruction. Ho-Chunks indicated to Allouez that these events occurred around 1640. Their near-extinction remained part of their oral tradition.

In the early twentieth century, Ho-Chunks recounted this history to Paul Radin, presenting a version virtually unchanged from the stories they told the French in the seventeenth century.⁸⁷ Amid the violence, for which they bore much responsibility, Ho-Chunks suffered “the despair and the cruel memory of their losses, and the destitution to which they were reduced,” their suffering made worse because “the frequent raids of their enemies had even dispersed the game; and famine was the last scourge that attacked them.”⁸⁸ Their brush with extermination forced Ho-Chunks to accommodate Algonquian outsiders, and for a time, to rely on them for

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 293-300.

⁸⁶ Population estimates for Native communities in the seventeenth and eighteenth century are unreliable for many reasons. As Kay points out, however unreliable La Pother’s sources and calculations might be, his claims of an 80% population loss among the Ho-Chunk offer an effective impression of the demographic disasters visited upon the Ho-Chunk in the mid-seventeenth century. Kay, “Land of La Baye,” 89.

⁸⁷ Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 55.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

survival. Ho-Chunks pursued a more measured isolationism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Writing at the turn of the eighteenth century, La Potherie and Perrot cast the Ho-Chunk people as their own worst enemies and, by then, virtually a ruined people:

These savagues have no mutual fellow-feeling; they have caused their own ruin, and have been obliged to divide their own forces. They are naturally very impatient of control, and very passionate; a little matter excites them; and they are great braggarts. They are however, well-built, and are brave soldiers, who do not know what danger is; and they are subtle and crafty in war. Although they are convinced that their ancestors drew upon themselves the enmity of all the surrounding nations, they cannot be humble. Their women are extremely laborious; they are neat in their houses, but very disgusting about their food.⁸⁹

Such blended critiques by the French frequently and accurately acknowledged that the Ho-Chunk considered themselves the center of their world and its history. Ho-Chunks seemed boastful to outsiders, but French observers failed to see that the Ho-Chunk had reason to boast; they had survived and demonstrated their ability to adapt to new circumstances to ensure their survival.

By the eighteenth century, Ho-Chunks had modified their isolationist policies and incorporated the Fox and other Algonquians into their lives and homeland, while they established more stable relations with the French. The Ho-Chunks also dispersed into multi-ethnic villages in the northeastern *pays d'en haut* during the second half of the seventeenth century, intermarrying with other Algonquian-speaking people and forging kin ties that undoubtedly demanded cultural conciliation and social and political restructuring.⁹⁰ Following their near extinction, the Ho-Chunks chose a more peaceful path forward. This shift would have opened up, even necessitated, other paths for individual Ho-Chunk men to distinguish themselves. The elevation

⁸⁹ La Potherie, *Savages of New France*, 300. For compilation of French accounts of the Ho-Chunk in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, see Lawson, "The Winnebago Tribe," 77-161. For his discussion of La Potherie, see p. 90.

⁹⁰ For overview of Ho-Chunk cultural change and adaptation in the seventeenth century, see Lurie and Jung, *Nicolet Corrigenda*, 100-106.

of orators and civil chiefs of villages and bands became a distinguishing characteristic of the Ho-Chunk people as the tribal nation engaged in formal councils more frequently with French, British, and American newcomers after the mid-eighteenth century.⁹¹

La Potherie estimated only 150 Ho-Chunk warriors survived the violence, disease, and famines of the 1640s. He may have counted only warriors, but nonetheless, the Ho-Chunk nation enjoyed nothing of its former dominance in the early era of the French fur trade. Their numbers diminished, they sought refuge among their Algonquian neighbors, including their oldest friends and neighbors, the Menominee. When Allouez began proselytizing in 1669, he found the Ho-Chunk living in multi-ethnic villages along with the Fox, Sauk, and Potawatomi along the western shores of Green Bay.⁹² Sometime in the early eighteenth century, as violence subsided and populations rebounded, Ho-Chunks began leaving refugee centers and forming distinct Ho-Chunk villages.⁹³

Ho-Chunks also made kin of their former adversaries. When Ho-Chunks could no longer repel the Fox as invaders, they chose to intermarry and cohabit with them.⁹⁴ East and west of Lake Winnebago, the Fox spread out along the river bearing their name. These were, of course, traditional Ho-Chunk homelands and Ho-Chunks still occupied them as well. French maps show distinct tribal villages between Lake Winnebago and Green Bay, but Ho-Chunk oral history and

⁹¹ Diedrich, *Winnebago Oratory*, 9-11. Historian Barbara Alice Mann edited a volume that considers Native speeches in historical context, something she argues is lacking in the field of American Indian history. The contributing scholars, Mann writes, are “Mindful of the political issues they addressed and considerate of the social, economic, and partisan agendas of the various speakers.” See Barbara Alice Mann, ed., *Native American Speakers of the Eastern Woodlands: Selected Speeches and Critical Analyses* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), xiv.

⁹² David R. Edmunds and Joseph L. Peyser. *The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 10.

⁹³ Bieder, *Native Communities of Wisconsin*, 48-58.

⁹⁴ For a thorough study of the Fox or Mesquakie migration into Wisconsin and their opposition to the French fur trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Edmunds and Peyser, *The Fox Wars*. Wisconsin and Illinois became home to many Algonquian-speaking peoples by the late seventeenth century. The Potawatomi, Ottawa, Petun (Tobacco Huron), Mascouten, Miami, Kickapoo, Fox, and Sauk all made new homes west of Lake Michigan in hopes that it might buffer them from Iroquois raiding.

French records indicated that they lived in mixed villages with the Fox as well as the Sauk, who had also fled their homelands east of Lake Michigan by the mid-seventeenth century. Because the Fox, whom the French called “Renards,” were the dominant tribe by the time the French established themselves in the region, the name “Renards” replaced “the Puans,” or Ho-Chunk, on French maps of the area.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, along the Fox River and on Lake Winnebago, Ho-Chunks cultivated crops and, from a high drumlin, kept a vigilant eye on travelers through their country. The Fox-Wisconsin River corridor was the primary route connecting the French fur trade post at Michilimackinac—an island in the straits connecting Lake Huron to Lake Michigan—to the Mississippi, and therefore essential to fur trade commerce.⁹⁶ Their decision to make love, not war, with the Fox probably saved the Ho-Chunk nation.

Friendship between the tribes did not always hold. For example, the Ho-Chunks likely contributed to deteriorating relations between the Fox and the French and their Algonquian trading partners. Both the Fox and the Ho-Chunk nations pillaged, refused passage to, or exacted tolls from Europeans who attempted to travel by way of the Fox River. The Fox and Ho-Chunk blocked the French fur trade there as part of what may have been a Fox effort to prevent the French from trading guns to the Dakota or the Sioux, as the French called them.⁹⁷ Fox resistance to the French fur trade drew attacks mostly from French-allied Indians, but the French ventured

⁹⁵ The geographical references of the French in the late seventeenth century are confusing because of the lack of uniformity in place names. In 1688, Baron Lahontan still referred to the Fox River as the River of Puans. By the second half of the eighteenth century, after the Ho-Chunk helped the French and allied Algonquians push the Fox west of the Portage, onto the Wisconsin River and eventually west of the Mississippi, some French as well as British and Americans began referring to the Fox River as the River of the Puans.

⁹⁶ Kay, “Land of La Baye,” 94.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 141; Kellogg, *The French Regime in Wisconsin*. The Ho-Chunk appear with enough frequency to suggest their collusion with the Fox people during much of this period. For example, Constant Marchand de Lignery, a French military officer leading campaigns against the Fox in the 1720s, reported burning Fox villages and cutting down their cornfields along the Fox River and then retreating all the way to Michilimackinac for fear of Fox and Ho-Chunk retribution. Edmunds and Peyser, *The Fox Wars*, 115; Lignery to Beauharnois, 30 August 1728, in *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 17: 31-35.

into eastern Wisconsin, too, building Fort La Baye in 1717. Fort La Baye stood as a French military and trading post near Green Bay for many years. The French and Indian attacks against the Fox aimed to exterminate them, but by 1734, they succeeded only in pushing the Fox further west, to the lower Wisconsin River. By this time, Ho-Chunks had ceased their neutrality and taken up arms against the Fox.⁹⁸ To Ho-Chunks, Fox hatred of the French and Algonquin Indians undoubtedly echoed their own history of violence and near annihilation. Also, in August 1728, French troops burned the Ho-Chunk village on Doty Island, and as Constant Marchand de Lignery documented, “ravag[e]d their fields of Indian corn, which is their principal article of food.” The Ho-Chunks’ alliance with the Fox threatened their own survival, so they shifted to the French shortly thereafter.⁹⁹

If Ho-Chunks sought to reassert their dominance in their original homelands along the Fox River and on Lake Winnebago, the plan worked. The Fox Wars had also worked to isolate the Ho-Chunks and thwart heavy traffic through their lands. This pattern of using existing circumstances to their advantage and exerting control over their homelands runs through Ho-Chunk history. By the 1740s, Ho-Chunks had expanded their lands beyond the long-established villages in the Fox River Valley and Lake Winnebago area to include villages in the Wisconsin River Valley below Portage, in the upper tributaries of the Rock River Valley, and in the upper Mississippi River Valley, where they established around forty villages. Ho-Chunks undoubtedly realized the benefits of scattering their settlements and avoiding concentrated villages: fewer

⁹⁸ Edmunds and Peyser offer a thorough discussion of shifting Ho-Chunk alliances during the Fox Wars. The Ho-Chunk chose neutrality at first, even fleeing to western Wisconsin to avoid being drawn into the conflict. They eventually joined the Fox in blockading the fur trade on the Fox River and carrying out attacks on French allied Indians. After the French destroyed their villages and fields in 1728, the Ho-Chunk shifted allegiance to the French, the more powerful of the two main belligerents. Uncertain Ho-Chunk alliances throughout the Fox Wars no doubt contributed to their reputation as untrustworthy allies, a reputation that persisted into the American era and added to American bias against the Ho-Chunk. See Edmunds and Peyser, *The Fox Wars*, 60-133.

⁹⁹ In 1729, the Ho-Chunk, Ottawa, Menominee attacked and burned a Fox village, killing over 300 people. See Edmunds and Peyser, *The Fox Wars*, 129-133.

disease epidemics and less strain on local resources. Spread out, the Ho-Chunks were healthier and they enjoyed a more secure, diverse and abundant subsistence.¹⁰⁰

Ho-Chunks expanded their territory for some of the same reasons other Native communities did, but the Ho-Chunk dependence on domestic crop cultivation played a far greater role in their territorial expansion than historians have recognized. Scholars have attributed this expansion mostly to the fur trade and Ho-Chunks' desires for European goods.¹⁰¹ They have emphasized the degree to which the fur trade reshaped Ho-Chunk social, cultural, and economic structure, including the shift from a matrilineal to patrilineal society and the abandonment of winter fishing villages to hunt fur bearing animals in the west. The Ho-Chunks certainly relied more on hunting and trapping than they had prior to contact with Europeans, but bands of Ho-Chunks continued to cultivate crops, especially corn, for their staple food.¹⁰²

Cultivated corn remained the most important food source for the Ho-Chunk. Obscuring this fact has led to many misunderstandings about Ho-Chunk isolationism as well as their territorial expansion and choice of village location. Some scholars have alluded to the role of agriculture in Ho Chunk decision-making, however. For example, in their recent work examining the time and place of the initial encounter between the French and the Ho-Chunk, Nancy Lurie and Patrick Jung observe a unique trend in the location of Ho-Chunk villages in the region, not only in the seventeenth century, but in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well. Ho-Chunk village locations along the Fox, Wisconsin, and Rock river systems "appears to have been determined by climate for gardening far more than the presence of wild rice" or other

¹⁰⁰ Bieder, *Native American Communities in Wisconsin*, 56-58; Lurie, "Winnebago," 692-695.

¹⁰¹ White, *The Middle Ground*, 94-142.

¹⁰² For a discussion of how arable lands for corn cultivation shaped the seventeenth-century flood of refugees into Wisconsin, see White, *The Middle Ground*, 40-49. For a detailed graphic representation of village locations in relation to climatic zones, see Helen Hornbeck Tanner, ed., *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 20-21.

wild foods and game.¹⁰³ Eighteenth-century Ho-Chunk village locations fell within “the contours of the zone of 120 consecutive frost-free days required for Indian corn.” Thus, while it is true that Ho-Chunks wanted durable metal traps, tools, guns, cloth, and ornaments offered by Europeans, Ho-Chunk territorial expansion was driven by their desire to cultivate corn.¹⁰⁴

Eighteenth-century Ho-Chunk migration expanded the number of Ho-Chunk villages over millions more acres. While many Ho-Chunks left ancestral homes, many remained in large villages on Lake Winnebago and along the Fox River, working familiar corn fields, hills, and garden beds. The Ho-Chunk people became a decentralized tribal nation made up of numerous villages constituting several bands, distinguished according to their geographic locales and, in particular, by rivers. By the nineteenth century, for example, there were Fox River Valley Ho-Chunks and Lake Winnebago Ho-Chunks, as well as Portage, Rock River, Turtle Creek, and Wisconsin River Ho-Chunks. With the establishment of U.S. Indian agencies, Ho-Chunks incorporated these distinctions into their community identities, too. As a diffuse tribe consisting of multiple bands controlling a larger territory, Ho-Chunks increasingly resembled their Algonquian neighbors. Yet, their Siouan language and their reliance on domestic crops

¹⁰³ Scholars’ assumptions about Ho-Chunk subsistence in the seventeenth century have led not only to the underestimation of corn and other domesticated crops in the Ho-Chunk diet but also to inaccurate claims about ancestral Ho-Chunk villages. Scholars have long lumped the Ho-Chunk in with their Algonquian neighbors, the vast majority of whom relied on wild rice as their main food. For the Ho-Chunk, however, Lurie and Jung argue, “Literally and figuratively, wild rice is a weak reed to lean on to establish a Ho-Chunk presence anywhere.” Lurie has long argued that the ancient Mississippian site at Aztalan is the original ancestral and sacred village of the Ho-Chunk. Recognizing that the Ho-Chunk relied on corn more than wild rice as a staple food would makes this location a more likely site than the Green Bay area, where wild rice abounds. Since Ho-Chunk people were corn people, not wild rice people, this assumption has misplaced and displaced Ho-Chunk people. For a terrific discussion of this phenomenon, and its implications for other famous Wisconsin stories (e.g., Nicolet’s landfall), see See Lurie and Jung, *Nicolet Corrigenda*, 52.

¹⁰⁴ Patrick Jung is more well known as a scholar of the 1832 Black Hawk War. When one compares Jung’s collaborative work with Nancy Lurie with his publications on the 1832 conflict, one sees that emphasis on Ho-Chunk corn cultivation all but disappears from his scholarship and conclusions regarding Ho-Chunk actions during that conflict. See Patrick Jung, *The Black Hawk War of 1832* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007). See chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation for consideration of how corn’s importance to the Ho-Chunk shaped their actions during the spring and summer of 1832.

distinguished the Ho-Chunk nation throughout the French and British eras and into the American era.

Newcomers arriving in Ho-Chunk and Menominee country beginning in the seventeenth century frequently remarked upon the abundance of the region and the foods indigenous people ate. Many were impressed by the quantity of wild rice around Green Bay and in the Fox River Valley. They documented Indigenous methods of harvesting, preserving, and consuming it, particularly among the Menominees, whose name means “People of the Wild Rice.” Ho-Chunks harvested and stored wild rice too, but English explorer Jonathan Carver noted the inclination of Ho-Chunk people to harvest the game birds that fattened themselves on the grain.¹⁰⁵ According to Carver, wild rice “attracts an infinite number of wild fowl of every kind, which flock from distant climes, to enjoy this rare repast; and by it became inexpressibly fat and delicious.”¹⁰⁶ In his report, Carver noted his belief that wild rice would feed future English colonies in the region, a vision of the surrounding landscape without Native peoples, only their resources. As Carver embarked on his task of mapping waterways, up the Fox River into Ho-Chunk country, domestic crop cultivation defined the Native communities he encountered.

¹⁰⁵ Perrot in the 1670s and Carver in the 1760s noted the abundance of wild rice. Both described how the wild rice fattened the waterfowl and other birds that Ho-Chunks hunted. At Green Bay, Perrot observed, “The bay and the rivers abounded with game, which fattened on the wild rice. So plentiful were the ducks that the Indians caught them in nets and snares as they alighted to feed.” Quoted in Kellogg, *The French Regime in Wisconsin*, 124. Speaking of the geese, ducks, and teal he witnessed on Lake Winnebago, Carver wrote that they, “resort to [the lake] in great numbers, are remarkably good and extremely fat, and are much better flavoured than those that are found near the sea, as they acquire their excessive fatness by feeding on the wild rice, which grows so plentifully in these parts.” Quoted in Norman Gelb, *Jonathan Carver’s Travels Through America, 1766-1768: An Eighteenth-Century Explorer’s Account of Uncharted America* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley 1993), 72. Americans in the early nineteenth century also documented the endless wild rice in the region, particularly along the Fox River, near Lake Winnebago, and around Green Bay. Though Native methods of corn cultivation differed from those used by American farmers, the abundance of wild rice combined with Native methods of harvesting it—paddling through patches in canoes and beating the stems to cause the grains to fall in the boat—were perhaps more striking to newcomers. See Dr. William Henry Hening’s letter to his father in 1816, written while Hening was stationed at Green Bay (Fort Howard) after the War of 1812, in *Niles Weekly Register* (Baltimore) 1812, 2, no. 8, 119-120.

¹⁰⁶ Carver, *Travels through the Interior Parts of North America*, 523.

Non-Native newcomers recognized the Ho-Chunk people as farmers. Corn and crop cultivation among the Ho-Chunks permeated the earliest accounts by Europeans who visited the region in the seventeenth century. French explorer Nicolas Perrot traveled down the Fox River between 1665 and 1670 and took copious notes on the cultivated landscape he encountered. In the area around Green Bay, inhabited by Ho-Chunks, the Menominee, and Algonquian newcomers, Perrot noted, “The soil produced large crops of maize, of beans, and of squashes.”¹⁰⁷ In September 1766, Carver described the country inland from Green Bay as “a beautiful one, and [Ho-Chunks] have fertile fields planted with Indian corn.”¹⁰⁸ Robert Dickson documented the same a year later when he noted the Ho-Chunks near the Portage growing “Indian corn, squash, potatoes, melons, and cucumbers in great abundance, and good tobacco.”¹⁰⁹

Carver was perhaps the best observer of Ho-Chunk corn cultivation. When Carver arrived at Lake Winnebago in 1766, he wrote that “the Winnebagoes raise on it a great quantity of Indian corn, beans, pumpkins, squashes and watermelons, with some tobacco.” The prevalence of corn in the Ho-Chunk diet and the variety of ways they prepared and consumed it impressed Carver. Ho-Chunks roasted green corn, dried and boiled it with tallow or meat, pounded it into meal, or ground it to make bread. Carver claimed he had never eaten a better flavored bread than the cornbread cake given him by Ho-Chunks: “While their corn is in the milk, as they term it...just before it begins to ripen, they slice off the kernels from the cob ...and knead them into a paste,” moistened only “by the milk that flows from them.” Carver found it “very agreeable to the palate, and extremely nutritive.”¹¹⁰ Carver also was impressed by Indian corn. He claimed to have seen corn as high as six to ten feet tall, with strong stalks like reeds

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Kellogg, *The French Regime in Wisconsin and the Northwest*, 124.

¹⁰⁸ Lawson, “The Winnebago Tribe,” quote on 122.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Carver, *Travels through the Interior Parts of North America*, 17, 18.

and the flowers “grow like the ears of oats, and are sometimes white, yellow, or of a purple color.” He added, “This corn is very wholesome, easy on digestion, and yields as good nourishment as any other food.” Ho-Chunk dried, shelled, and cached a great deal of corn in storage pits. Travelers like Carver depicted a landscape of human cultivation and the Ho-Chunk people as farmers (and, later in his journey, the Sauk and Fox as well).¹¹¹

American newcomers made similar observations in the early nineteenth century. In 1823, Sarah Collins Doty, wife of land speculator and future Wisconsin governor James Doty, travelled through the region with her husband in a canoe en route to Prairie du Chien. They passed by two Lake Winnebago villages. The first belonged to Four Legs (Hujopka) an elderly village chief with influence among the eastern Ho-Chunks. His village was on what would later be named Doty Island, a place that many Ho-Chunks and some scholars believe may have been an original home of the Ho-Chunk. Sarah Doty noted in her journal, “we coasted along the west shore of Lake Winnebago to Garlic island, on the opposite point to which is a Winnebago village of fine permanent lodges and fine cornfields.”¹¹² Doty observed Four Leg’s village from afar, but its established character was not lost on her. The lodges she saw were built with vertical sides and arched roofs accented with strips of bark. Juliette Kinzie captured a similar view of Four Leg’s village in 1830.¹¹³ To build this style wigwam, which was large enough to house an entire extended family, the Ho-Chunk dug poles firmly into the ground and linked them together with strips of bark.¹¹⁴ A frame of thick willow branches connected the upright poles and the entire structure was then covered with bark and grasses. Lodge construction was a carefully planned process. The Ho-Chunks invested much time and energy in these lasting structures. Judge

¹¹¹ Ibid, 25.

¹¹² Quoted in Publis V. Lawson, “Summary of the Archeology of Winnebago County, Wisconsin,” *Wisconsin Archeologist* 2 no. 2 (1903): 40-88, quote on 60.

¹¹³ See Lawson, “The Winnebago Tribe,” 80.

¹¹⁴ Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 56-57.

Morgan L. Martin made the same journey in 1828, stopping at Wild Cat's village on Garlic Island for food: "There was a Winnebago village there of about the same size as that over which Four Legs (Doty Island) presided." Martin estimated there were as many as two hundred of these lodges at Wild Cat's village, meaning that well over a thousand Ho-Chunks made their home there.¹¹⁵ These lasting structures reflected subsistence patterns whereby Ho-Chunk bands north and west of the Wisconsin River had shifted to less permanent oval wigwams.¹¹⁶

Though a decentralized Indian nation consisting of many bands and villages, Ho-Chunk people derived unity, stability, and security through their cultivation of corn. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Native trapping had depleted fur-bearing animal populations in the eastern region surrounding Green Bay, forcing Native communities into difficult dilemmas. Lumping Ho-Chunks in with their Menominee and Ojibwa neighbors, scholars point to difficult decisions these Indian communities made to give up winter fishing villages in their eastern homelands in order to hunt and trap in western lands near the Mississippi River.¹¹⁷ By this time, however, the Ho-Chunk had established settled villages all the way to the Mississippi. If eastern bands traveled west to hunt, they remained among kin. Historical overviews of western Great Lakes and Wisconsin Indian history tend to lump Ho-Chunks and their Algonquian neighbors together, a trend that obscures how being an agricultural people shaped Ho-Chunk decisions and experiences.

These hard times further draw attention to the importance of corn cultivation for the Ho-Chunk people. In the late seventeenth century, Perrot aptly described Native people's reliance on corn:

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 56-57.

¹¹⁷ White, *The Middle Ground*, 94-141.

The kinds of food the savages like best and which they make the most effort to obtain are the Indian corn, the kidney bean, and the squash. If they are without these, they think they are fasting, no matter what abundance of meat and fish they have in their stores, the Indian corn being to them what bread is to the French.¹¹⁸

By the time western Great Lakes Native communities trapped out animals in their eastern homelands, Ho-Chunks had established their villages along various rivers and tributaries between Lake Winnebago and the Mississippi in places where growing seasons and soils suited their cultivation needs. Like other Native communities in the region, Ho-Chunk Indians wanted to continue in the fur trade with the French and the British, and some bands may have shifted their seasonal rounds in order to do so. But Ho-Chunks never subordinated their primary subsistence practices to the fur trade. They continued preparing fields and cultivating corn and other crops.

Corn cultivation rooted the Ho-Chunk people in a particular place, in both sacred and physical ways, but it also underpinned Ho-Chunk autonomy in their expanded homelands. Hunting parties of eastern Ho-Chunk bands not only relied on their western kin nearer the Mississippi River, they may also have relied on their cached corn when their own supply ran out. Because Ho-Chunks never subordinated the needs of their corn to that of the fur trade, corn cultivation remained a bulwark against dependency and served as a centerpiece of Ho-Chunk autonomy in their homelands.¹¹⁹ According to Richard White, Algonquians moving into the western Great Lakes also sought out pockets of lands where they could cultivate corn. Among

¹¹⁸ Nicolas Perrot, *Memoir on the Manners, Customs, and Religion of the Savages of North America*, in Emma Helen Blair, ed., *The Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley and Region of the Great Lakes*, 2 vols. (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1911), 1: 102.

¹¹⁹ Richard White argues that “In the final stages of the fur trade, Indians depended on European manufactures and food supplies to survive, and Europeans dictated the terms of an exchange that reduced them to poverty,” but that this was the result of a long process. By the end of the French fur trade, Native peoples desired European goods, and many goods, such as metal tools, were integral to Native lifeways, but material dependence did not yet exist. “In an emergency,” White claims, Indians in the western Great Lakes “remained able to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves without European assistance.” White, *The Middle Ground*, 96, 140.

Indian peoples in this region, White explains, “Culturally, the consumption of corn and the idea of security were closely intertwined.”¹²⁰ Though White rarely distinguishes the Siouan-speaking indigenous Ho-Chunks of Wisconsin from the Algonquian-speaking refugees who resettled in the *pays d’en haut* beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, Ho-Chunks protected their fields and subsistence traditions at the time when newcomers sought them. Corn’s importance shaped Ho-Chunk encounters and relations with Americans, including their decision to join a multi-tribal confederation opposed to American westward expansion and settlement beginning in 1809. This alliance was organized and led by Tecumseh and his brother, the Shawnee Prophet. Though perhaps the greatest and most diverse pan-Indian alliance ever formed, it crumbled with British retreat from the Ohio country and Tecumseh’s death in 1813. Ho-Chunks approached the triumphant Americans with trepidation.

Encounters after the War of 1812

A village chief named Tahnicksieka, or The Smoker, visited Green Bay in 1816 to address the Americans upon their victory over the British in the War of 1812. A few miles up the Fox River from the bay, The Smoker found American military officers and soldiers at work building Fort Howard. The Smoker spoke on behalf of his villagers, who lived near present-day Fond du Lac, and perhaps for more Ho-Chunks along the Fox River and Lake Winnebago. He told the Americans that his people were disappointed in them for their martial showing, that their cannons ruined an otherwise serene landscape. Nevertheless, he said the Ho-Chunk wished to become friends with the Americans and trade with them.¹²¹

¹²⁰ White, *The Middle Ground*, 42-44.

¹²¹ “The Smoker’s Speech,” in Henry Hening, “Arrival of American Troops at Green Bay, in 1816,” *Wisconsin Historical Collections* 13: 444-449.

The Smoker's visit to Green Bay was neither an inevitable nor immediate outcome of the American victory over the British and their Indian allies. The Ho-Chunk nation had been unified in their resistance to U.S. territorial expansion. Soon after the British made peace with the Americans in the spring of 1814, American officials began pressing Native peoples of the western Great Lakes and upper Mississippi Valley to make peace with the U.S. and trade only with them. The unity of the Ho-Chunk nation fractured as leaders of various bands improvised a number of responses to the Americans' requests. Ho-Chunks living in villages nearest the bustling Creole community and trade hub of Prairie du Chien submitted to U.S. demands much sooner than the Ho-Chunk living south and east of the Portage. These Ho-Chunk bands chose to continue trade with the British and rejected formal peace treaties with the Americans—that is, until The Smoker's visit.¹²²

In the previous two centuries, Ho-Chunks had helped build and maintain a “middle ground” with European and thousands of Algonquian-speaking Indian newcomers.¹²³ Ho-Chunks had shaped their economic and military alliances with these communities over time according to their subsistence and security needs. By 1815, the Ho-Chunk had proven themselves invaluable partners in trade and warfare as well as formidable foes in the eyes of Europeans and Indians. Though accustomed to alliances with mighty empires, Ho-Chunks viewed the new sovereign United States of America as a menace, not a friend. American

¹²² John Hall, *Uncommon Defense: Indian Allies in the Black Hawk War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 35-44; Lurie, “Winnebago,” 692-693. For collection of correspondence between Indian agents and the Secretary of War regarding failed U.S. efforts at making peace with the Ho-Chunk of the Rock River and eastern bands, see United States, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, vol. 2. 8-9.

¹²³ This phrase was popularized by Richard White in his groundbreaking 1991 publication. Both a process and a place, the middle ground of the western Great Lakes emerged when and where neither Native groups nor European empires could exert military or political control over the other. Communities forged alliances out of necessity, seeking and being compelled toward accommodation. White, *The Middle Ground*, 50-93.

conquest and control over the western Great Lakes region heralded a different kind of colonialism, one in which Native peoples existed as obstacles to national expansion.¹²⁴

Indian policy in the new republic was predicated on the well-established British processes of treaty-making. In the American model, however, emphasis was placed on treaties of land acquisition. Land was a commodity for the Americans, and wresting it from Indian control and occupancy through the business of treaty-making was believed to be the cheapest and most honorable way of expanding the new American nation.¹²⁵ The Americans certainly considered more overtly violent means of colonizing Indian lands, but treaty-making was the least expensive. It was also deemed the most just and equitable method of acquiring a clear American title to Indian land. Though that may have been true, at least in theory in the 1780s, the actual methods of American treaty-making over the coming decades would have very different consequences, especially for the Ho-Chunks.¹²⁶

The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 structured the process by which western lands would ultimately become organized federal territories, and later, the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. The ordinance reflected a moral and legal obligation that the United

¹²⁴ White, *The Middle Ground*, 469-517.

¹²⁵ Ronald N. Satz, *Chippewa Treaty Rights: The Reserved Rights of Wisconsin's Chippewa Indians in Historical Perspective* (Madison: Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, 1991), 3-5.

¹²⁶ In addition to unruly frontier communities violating federal Indian policy and law, states often ignored them, too. States such as Georgia grew resentful after ceding western land claims to the U.S. for the good of the young republic, only to be restricted in their westward expansion by that same government. States also violated the sole authority of the federal government to engage in land cessions and other treaties with Native nations by making their own treaties with Indian peoples. For a classic consideration of U.S. national expansion and federal Indian policy, see Reginald Horsman, *Expansion and American Indian Policy, 1783-1812* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967); Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years: The Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts, 1790-1834* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970). For recent consideration, see Stuart Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

States would observe “the utmost good faith” in its dealings with Indian people.¹²⁷ Native lands would not be invaded or taken except in “just and lawful wars authorized by Congress,” or by Indian consent. But such lofty proclamations by American politicians were hollow by the time the actual business of interacting with Indian people played out in the Old Northwest.¹²⁸ American land-lust and the economic and social status brought by land ownership proved too powerful a force when compared to justice and honor. Justice and honor were especially scarce in the Old Northwest, where many Indian people had supported the British during the relatively recent American war for independence, and remained connected, both militarily and economically, to their British allies.¹²⁹ A confederacy of northwestern tribes emerged in response to American methods of extinguishing Indian title to land. The vast majority of Native people united in resisting American expansion and rejected treaties aimed at chipping away at the Indian estate in the Old Northwest, a position several tribal nations made official in their signing of a 1786 petition to Congress.¹³⁰ The petition had some impact on the future of Indian policy and the nature of the federal-Indian relationship because, as historian Dorothy V. Jones explains, by 1787 the U.S. reevaluated a policy “for Indians” to a future of governmental relations “with Indians.”¹³¹ In the years immediately following the American Revolution, well

¹²⁷ The Land Ordinance of 1785 also encouraged white settlement since it established a system for the survey and sale of lands Native peoples still claimed and occupied. The first survey crews began in Ohio in the summer of 1786. A recent consideration of this ordinance as structuring settler colonialism is Bethel Saler, *The Settler's Empire: Colonialism and State Formation in America's Old Northwest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 13-82.

¹²⁸ Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land*, 146. Banner argues that the transfer of land from Indians to the colonial governments and later the U.S. government was neither entirely forced nor entirely voluntary. It contained aspects of both.

¹²⁹ White, *The Middle Ground*, 406.

¹³⁰ Saler, *The Settler's Empire*, 41-82. For petition, see Colin G. Calloway, *The World Turned Upside Down: Indian Voices from Early America* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1994), 175-76.

¹³¹ Dorothy V. Jones, *License for Empire: Colonialism by Treaty in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 147-148.

aware of the importance of Indian allies and the dangers of Indian enemies, the U.S. focused policy around Indian relations around trade.

From the perspective of Indian people in the upper Great Lakes region, the War of 1812 was far less a struggle for Anglo control of the continent than it was an immediate test for Indians to retain control of their lands and maintain their authority, though they were willing to share with European newcomers, on their own terms. Indian revitalization movements like those fueled by Handsome Lake and the Shawnee Prophet, Tenskwatawa, that began further east a decade earlier took on more militant forms in the western Great Lakes before the War of 1812 began. Tenskwatawa's brother, Tecumseh, had resisted the Americans in Ohio in the 1790s and had refused the American overtures of treaty-making. Until his death in 1813, Tecumseh remained allied with the British, and worked at every turn to broaden his pro-British, anti-American, pan-Indian western-door alliance from Upper Canada to Louisiana. Among Tecumseh's strongest allies in this resistance were the Ho-Chunk.¹³² Though the Ho-Chunks contributed to Tecumseh's resistance plan, which depended on British assistance, they never subjugated themselves either to the British or to their Indian allies. After defeats in 1811, many Ho-Chunks returned to their villages in Wisconsin and Illinois.

At the close of the War of 1812, the Ho-Chunk Nation was the most powerful military and economic force occupying present-day southern Wisconsin and northwestern Illinois. Numbering more than 5,000 people and laying claim to millions of acres of land, Ho-Chunks presented a major obstacle to American settlement, even after the British evacuated the region. Ho-Chunks drew on a vast and diverse resource base. Along the Mississippi and lower Rock rivers, they mined lead and made their own ammunition and maintained an extensive lead trade among various bands and other Native communities. Doing so made them less reliant on British

¹³² White, *The Middle Ground*, 514-517.

or American traders for ball and shot.¹³³ They controlled or otherwise shared access to the main river corridors that connected Green Bay to Prairie du Chien and the Mississippi River. They continued to hunt and trap and worked fields and gardens across varying ecosystems. According to historian Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, Ho-Chunks “were well positioned for economic autonomy” at the end of the War of 1812, yet their unease over the U.S. threat grew as American presence in the region increased.¹³⁴ Ho-Chunks understood that maintaining control over and access to their traditional range of natural and cultivated resources underpinned their independence and rootedness in their homelands.¹³⁵

For Ho-Chunks, the most critical issue following the War of 1812 was the loss of an important ally in the British. The transition from the British to an American presence meant something more to the Ho-Chunks than a simple shift from one group of Anglos to another. The British were trading partners and military allies, but not settlers. The Americans, however, would soon be competitors for the soil. Ho-Chunks had joined the recent war, encouraging

¹³³ Kay, “Land of La Baye,” 286- 287; Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, *A Gathering of Rivers: Indians, Métis and Mining in the Western Great Lakes, 1737-1832* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 80. Murphy states that by the second decade of the nineteenth century, Native lead miners—Ho-Chunk, Sauk, and Fox—were exporting hundreds of thousands of pounds of galena annually. She adds, “This was a large amount of lead to produce at a time when the United States was importing about two million pounds per year.” Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, 201n4.

¹³⁴ Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, 29. Murphy traces how the diverse economy that emerged in a place she calls the Fox-Wisconsin Region and that incorporated Native and non-Native people was undermined by American settlement in the region in the 1820s and 1830s. What Murphy captures is the progression from Native and non-Native relations of accommodation and adaptation to Indian, *Métis*, and white relationships defined by conflict and ultimately the displacement of Indian peoples.

¹³⁵ Due to their isolation and protectionism, the Ho-Chunk did not experience the degree of negative impacts from European and American encounters as other Native communities in the western Great Lakes. All Native communities in the region experienced altered environments, anxiety over the loss of land and resources, disease epidemics and alcohol abuse, both from addiction and by non-Native traders who exchanged it readily. Social pressures came with political factionalism, and in some cases, starvation, malnutrition, poverty—all of which undermined traditional cultural, political, economic, and spiritual structures. But because Ho-Chunks cultivated much of their food, unlike their Menominee and Ojibwa neighbors, the disappearance of large game animals and increased competition for fish and wild rice in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had less impact on Ho-Chunk people’s ability to feed and care for themselves. For overview of Wisconsin Indian history during this long period of change and adaptation, see Bieder, *Native American Communities in Wisconsin*, and Lurie, *Wisconsin Indians*.

British attacks on American forts at Prairie du Chien and Mackinac. They had seen Tecumseh's alliance as a fight against American expansion and a struggle to preserve Indian lands and autonomy. That struggle would continue into the mid-1800s for the Ho-Chunks, but without the support of the British, a situation the vast majority of Ho-Chunks were loath to accept.¹³⁶

At the treaty site of Ghent in 1814, the British sought assurances from the Americans that their Indian allies would not be punished, but the treaty did nothing to prevent American expansion into the western Great Lakes Indian lands. Though the Americans agreed to make peace with Indians formerly allied with the British and restore to them "all possessions, rights and privileges" they enjoyed prior to the war, provided these "tribes or nations" ceased their hostilities against the United States, such promises soon evaporated.¹³⁷ After all, in the years leading up to the War of 1812, the Ho-Chunks had seen evidence of American interests all around them.

Ho-Chunks viewed the Americans as untrustworthy. Ho-Chunk orator He Who Walks Naked conveyed this view to the British in 1815: "[the Americans] have so often deceived us that we cannot put any faith in them."¹³⁸ He Who Walks Naked could not imagine the people Ho-Chunks called "Big Knives" as allies and trading partners, "for we hate them," the orator explained.¹³⁹ He Who Walks Naked lamented that the British Great Father, the king "beyond the

¹³⁶ For an overview of Ho-Chunk relations with Europeans and Americans from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, see Bieder, *Native American Communities in Wisconsin*.

¹³⁷ Scholars deem article IX of the Treaty of Ghent largely meaningless since the Americans "had no intention of restoring anything to the tribes of Tecumseh's old confederacy, especially to the roaming warriors of the Northwest." Robert S. Allen, *His Majesty's Indian Allies: British Indian Policy in the Defence of Canada, 1774-1815* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1993), 169.

¹³⁸ "Papers of Capt. T.G. Anderson," *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 10, 143-44.

¹³⁹ Native peoples in the western Great Lakes and Ohio Valley called Americans Big Knives or Long Knives. One explanation for this name is that Native peoples needed to distinguish Americans from the French and British, and perhaps derived the moniker from the swords worn by American soldiers. See "Race Names" in Frederick Webb Hodge, ed. *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, Part 2, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1912), 350.

great salty lake,” had not considered the Ho-Chunks before signing the treaty with the Americans. Ho-Chunk peace with the United States was not for the British king to make. He Who Walks Naked could not even speak for the Rock River band of Ho-Chunks. He warned, “Our nation has not yet taken the Big Knives by the hand, and it is a doubt to us here present, if our brethren who are in the interior of the country will agree to bury the hatchet.” The Rock River Ho-Chunks comprised the villages along the upper and lower Rock River and its tributaries in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. Over the years, Rock River villages ballooned, drawing in the Ho-Chunk who desired the greatest distance from trading centers and corridors. Well more than half of the Ho-Chunk nation belonged to this isolated band.

The band’s hostility to Americans was known to authorities. In correspondence between Indian agents and military officers in 1815, Rock River Ho-Chunks were described as “indignant” “intractable” and “inveterate enemies” of the Americans.¹⁴⁰ Though he distinguished the Rock River band for their stubbornness, He Who Walks Naked was well aware of his people’s reputation among outsiders. “Our nation has always been considered as a turbulent set; it is owing entirely to our being an independent people, who have made our enemies always feel that weight of our anger,” the orator explained. That was the dilemma, He Who Walks Naked maintained, “We have in this, and in the former war, done our duty as warriors, which is well known to the rest of your red children. The Big Knives hate us more than the other nations on that account.”¹⁴¹ The Americans would not forgive the Ho-Chunks their violent attacks on them during the second decade of the nineteenth century.

Americans who knew something of Ho-Chunk history, their reputation, or the alleged atrocities they committed against Americans in the recent conflict remained firm in their

¹⁴⁰ John C. Fredriksen, ed., *The War of 1812 U.S. War Department Correspondence, 1812-1815* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2016), 81.

¹⁴¹ “Papers of Capt. T.G. Anderson,” *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 10: 143-44.

suspicious view of them. Fur trader-turned-writer William Snelling, son of Colonel Josiah Snelling, considered the Ho-Chunk the most vindictive Indians he had ever known. “No tribe considered revenge a more sacred duty than the Winnebagoes. It is their ancient custom to take five lives for one,” an infamous fact known across the frontier, Snelling claimed, and “no blood of theirs has been shed, even in modern days, that has not been fully avenged.”¹⁴² While Ho-Chunk isolationism and aggression epitomized by the Rock River band and poisoned relations with the Americans from the start, their actions also limited Ho-Chunk dependence on European allies and goods. This, as historian John Hall notes, kept them powerful: “This bellicose policy appears to have served the Ho-Chunks well; once on the verge extinction, they had no natural enemies when—or until—the Americans arrived.”¹⁴³

Still, Ho-Chunk standoffishness toward Europeans and Americans meant that few *Métis* people lived among them, which undercut attempts on both sides—Ho-Chunk and American—to establish lasting peace and trade in the nineteenth century. Unlike of their Algonquian neighbors, the Ho-Chunk preferred not to intermarry with the French or British. The drawbacks of this, as many scholars point out, were a weak kinship network and inconsistent communication with regional Creole communities and non-Native neighbors.¹⁴⁴ Even if Ho-Chunks had been more receptive to outsiders as kin, they worried for their lives and livelihood, not future marriage partners. The Rock River Ho-Chunks often intermarried with Sauk, Fox, and Kickapoo people who lived along the lower portion of the river.

¹⁴² William J. Snelling, “Early Days at Prairie du Chien, and Winnebago Outbreak of 1827,” in *Report and Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, for the years 1867, 1868, and 1869*, ed. Lyman C. Draper, vol. 5, Collection of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin (Madison: Atwood & Rublee, State Printers, 1868; reprint, Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1907), 143.

¹⁴³ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 57.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 42, 123, 248; for focused study on Indian, Creole, and white relations in the western Great Lakes, see Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, esp. 145-136 and *Great Lakes Creoles: A French-Indian Community on the Northern Borderlands, Prairie Du Chien, 1750-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

With these fears now omnipresent, the Ho-Chunk delegation departed Mackinac at the top of Lake Michigan disappointed and uneasy. The Treaty of Ghent, they understood, was irreversible, and British departure from their forts and posts within U.S. territory was imminent. Their adversarial past with the Americans did not bode well for future peace. But the leaders of this Ho-Chunk delegation seemed uninterested in continuing a war with the Americans on their own. Theirs would be a non-violent struggle to protect Ho-Chunk peoplehood.

Over the next year, the American Indian agent at Prairie du Chien, Nicholas Boilvin, worked to convince the region's Indians to make peace with the United States and, finally, accept Americans as their friends. Peace would bring the Ho-Chunk and their Native neighbors the perceived opportunities and benefits of civilization, including farming and schooling. These initiatives would be implemented by the officers, soldiers, and officials garrisoned at several existing and imagined forts in the Mississippi, Rock, and Fox river valleys. By the spring of 1816, American commissioners in St. Louis had made significant headway, signing treaties with the more reluctant tribal groups. After the Sauk of the Rock River signed a peace and friendship treaty in May, other leaders of equally anti-American Indian nations followed suit. The Dakota bands, and a portion of the Ho-Chunk nation, were willing to accept peace in exchange for protection from the U. S. Old Nawkaw Caramani was the principal signatory of this 1816 treaty.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Onsager writes that in 1816, the U.S. made peace with "Winnebago living on the Wisconsin and Fox Rivers" and that "No treaty was made with the Winnebago on the headwaters of the Rock River." See Onsager p. 30; Onsager cites Jones, "Winnebago Ethnology," pp. 103-104. Onsager does not cite the original treaty. See Treaty with the Winnebago, June 3, 1816, in Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2, 130-131, <http://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers/id/17482/rec/1> (accessed November 25, 2017). It is likely that only the Wisconsin River Ho-Chunks signed this treaty, as the treaty itself suggests in its text and in its signatories. Martin Zanger claims that Choukeka (Spoon or Ladle) Decora signed the June 3, 1816 treaty of amity at St. Louis, but Spoon was too young to have done so. Zanger, "Red Bird," 65.

These treaties did not include the negotiation of new land cessions, but nevertheless, the U. S. soon violated article IX of the Treaty of Ghent by invading Indian lands and building a chain of forts in the west, including forts on Ho-Chunk lands well outside any approved by Old Nawkaw.¹⁴⁶ In the years after the War of 1812, the American government was less interested in the fur trade or forming military alliances with bands and tribes than in squeezing out British influence and keeping the peace with the region's native peoples. The Americans continued reoccupying forts or building new ones in the region. Old Nawkaw no doubt viewed the 1816 treaty, an alliance with North America's most powerful empire, as the best means of preserving Ho-Chunk authority and life-ways. His son saw things differently.

Old Nawkaw's son, Rice-Eater Caramani, a stubborn man in his early twenties, viewed such treaties as an act of sacrilege against Earthmaker's designs for his Indian children. Rice-Eater's nativist rhetoric nevertheless was infused with anti-American and pro-British sentiments; he proclaimed never to have received from Americans "a glass of whiskey nor a [sewing] needle."¹⁴⁷ In 1815, as American officials pressed Native peoples for peace and strong-armed them for permission to construct forts in Indian lands for trade, protection, and education, Rice-Eater and other Ho-Chunk leaders traveled throughout Illinois and Wisconsin seeking assurances from multiple bands and nations that they would not allow the American to possess any part of their lands. During the 1815-1816 winter, Rice-Eater "did not remain," as he put it, "ten days

¹⁴⁶ Allen, *His Majesty's Indian Allies*, 170.

¹⁴⁷ "Indian Council, June 1816," *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections (MPHC)*, vol. 16 (Lansing: Robert Smith & Co., State Printers and Binding, 1890), 483-85. Mark Diedrich points out that the original document credits Old Nawkaw Caramani with the speech, but since Old Nawkaw was near St. Louis at this time signing a "peace and friendship treaty" with the United States on behalf of the Wisconsin River Ho-Chunk bands with the United States, the speech was likely given by his son, Rice-Eater Caramani. It is not clear which village Rice-Eater lived in, though a map showing Ho-Chunk villages c. 1810 shows a Caramani village on the Fox River, close to Lake Winnebago. But later maps show Caramani's (probably Old Nawkaw's) village on the Wisconsin River. Perhaps his son remained in a village east of the Wisconsin River and Portage and so was not a member of the Wisconsin River band. See Tanner, *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History*, 98, for 1810 map, and 144, for 1830 map.

quiet at home.” As a result of his efforts, the Sauk, Fox, Iowa, Kickapoos, Menominee, Ojibwa, and Ho-Chunks “entered into a league not to suffer any encroachments to be made on our lands.”¹⁴⁸ The vast majority of western Great Lakes Indians detested the U.S. propensity for ignoring shared claims and making treaties with individual tribes and bands. Rice-Eater’s decision to go to the British may have been in response to his father’s decision to make peace with the Americans, telling the British that he would not recognize any American “Father.”¹⁴⁹ Still, the Americans did not cease their efforts, and by the spring of 1816, American influence was undermining Rice-Eater’s plans, as more bands signed peace and friendship treaties.

Out of desperation and fear that American encroachments would bring about war, Rice-Eater Caramani sought British advice on the Americans’ divide-and-conquer tactics. While his father was in St. Louis signing a peace treaty with the Americans, Rice-Eater and several Ho-Chunks and more than one thousand Indian delegates from various tribal nations in the western Great Lakes and upper Mississippi Valley convened at Drummond Island, the new British fort and post.¹⁵⁰ Though the spring rendezvous had been an annual affair where the British offered trade as well as gifts to their Indian allies, this occasion marked a tense moment in the region’s history. Rice-Eater and representatives of other bands and tribes used the event to air their

¹⁴⁸ “Indian Council, June 1816,” *MPHC* 16, 484.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 485.

¹⁵⁰ The great majority of Native nations who aligned with the British (and Tecumseh) against the Americans in the War of 1812 felt betrayed and abandoned by the British after the Treaty of Ghent. That Ho-Chunks and these other nations sent diplomatic delegations to Drummond Island is telling of their anxiety over American victory. For a focused examination of the responses among Native communities in the broader Michigan region to the War of 1812 and the victory of the Americans, see Charles E. Cleland, *Rites of Conquest: The History and Culture of Michigan’s Native Americans* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992). For an examination of Native communities in Wisconsin, see Reginald Horsman, “Wisconsin and the War of 1812,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 46 (Autumn 1962): 3-15; and Alice E. Smith, *The History of Wisconsin*, vol. 1, *From Exploration to Statehood* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1985). Other excellent scholarship that includes social, economic, military, and political historical analysis of western Great Lakes Native responses to Americans in the early nineteenth century includes Murphy, *A Gathering of Rivers*; Hall, *Uncommon Defense*; Saler, *Settler’s Empire*.

grievances and concerns regarding the Americans. The divergent paths taken by Old Nawkaw and his son, Rice-Eater, show more than the fault lines in the Ho-Chunk nation. Rice-Eater teetered on the edge of resorting to violence should the Americans keep intruding.

Rice-Eater called the Americans bad people, “the authors of our misery, as well as that of all our brethren of every nation.” From Rice-Eater’s speech at Drummond Island, the core of Ho-Chunk ire toward Americans became more discernible. The Americans ignored indigenous worldviews and remained blind to the ways that Native lands and culture were inextricably linked. Americans had already made demands on Ho-Chunk lands: “The Big Knives talk of taking possession of some part of our country to erect forts, which we will not suffer,” Rice-Eater explained. Distrustful of the Americans and desperate for guidance, Rice-Eater sought advice from the British on how to handle his new “Fathers.”¹⁵¹ But first, Rice-Eater oriented the British to his people’s worldview, a worldview the Americans refused to understand, evidenced by their relentless pressures for indigenous lands:

Father, the Master of Life has given us hands for the support of our men, women, and children. He has given us fish, deer, buffalo, and every kind of bird and animal for our use: they abound in our lands . . . when the Master of life, or Great Spirit, put us on this land, it was for the purpose of enjoying the use of the animals and fishes; but certain[ly] it never was intended that we Should sell it, or any part thereof which gives us wood, grass, and everything.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ The language of white “fathers” and Indian “children” had its roots in the seventeenth century, when the French, perhaps unwittingly, assumed the role of “fathers” and helped reduce and mediate conflict in the western Great Lakes among a diverse group of Native “children.” U.S. government officials adopted the paternalistic language of “father” and “children” in their dealings with Native Americans, but Americans perceived the meaning of these terms quite differently than the French, or even the British, who also assumed roles as “fathers” in the western Great Lakes. For U.S. government officials, treating Indians as “children” was a form of paternalism, a “determination to do what was best for the Indians according to white norms,” as Francis Paul Prucha explains. The father-and-children analogy also reinforced the dominant position of power enjoyed by the U.S. government. See Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great White Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), xxviii. In *The Middle Ground*, Richard White explains this language and traces the changing relationships among Native peoples and their French, British, and American fathers over time.

¹⁵² “Indian Council, June 1816,” *MPHC* 16, 485.

Rice-Eater's words conveyed a simple truth about his people's relationship with their territory. More than a commodity, land was "everything" to the Ho-Chunks. Rice-Eater was desperate for the Americans to acknowledge this essence of Ho-Chunk peoplehood. Without their land, they were nothing. As Americans saw it, they had already claimed lands from the British and now just needed to extinguish Indian ownership through the process of treaty-making, just as they had done in the Ohio country.¹⁵³

Americans began militarizing the region, occupying old forts to the south and east of Ho-Chunk territory and constructing new ones at Green Bay and Prairie du Chien.¹⁵⁴ At Green Bay, the Americans sought permission from the Menominee to construct a fort at or near the mouth of the Fox River, a few miles from the Creole community of Green Bay. The Americans understood that the Ho-Chunk also claimed territory where the fort would be, but were undeterred. Army engineer Samuel Starrow admired the mouth of the Fox River for its strategic worth, a value that surpassed Indian claims: "At no part of the Indian frontier could a fortress be more useful or indispensable. It is in the chain of connection with the Indian settlements between the Mississippi and the Lakes. It opens a way to their retreats in the West, and commands their thoroughfare towards the East." Starrow added that "the Menominee, Ottawa, Potawatomi and dangerous Winnebagoes consider this place their accustomed and privileged haunt."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ The United States had already purchased land from the Sauk and Fox, Native peoples living to the southwest of the Ho-Chunk along the Mississippi. Sauk and Fox people also cultivated corn, and this staple crop, which had anchored them in their homelands for generations, would become the center of their resistance to the treaty and to removal, and finally to their returns in 1832, which sparked the so-called Black Hawk War.

¹⁵⁴ Wyman discusses the symbolism of military forts as representations of American power but also the economic and political opportunities they offered Indigenous nations. See also Louise Phelps Kellogg, *The British Regime in Wisconsin and the Northwest* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1935); and Smith, *The History of Wisconsin*. For more on dynamics between soldiers and settlers on the frontier, see Hall, *Uncommon Defense*.

¹⁵⁵ Samuel A. Starrow, "The NorthWest in 1817," *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 6: 154-187 quote on 167.

Starrow's comments were an early indication of how the Americans would devalue Ho-Chunk land tenure.

In June or July of 1816, the Americans at Mackinac Island received a delegation of Ho-Chunks and spoke with their leader, The Smoker. Though his audience was American and not British, The Smoker delivered a message quite similar to the one Rice-Eater Caramani delivered at Drummond Island shortly before. The Ho-Chunks dreaded the Americans' arrival and believed they "had come to injure the Red Skins." It behooved the Americans to prove the Ho-Chunk wrong. In response to The Smoker, the Americans pledged peace, trade, and friendship on the condition that Ho-Chunks did the same and renounced their former British allies. The Smoker and his delegation represented yet another response to the Americans, this one acknowledging their inevitable presence and influence west of Lake Michigan and taking action to ensure that presence served Ho-Chunk interests. No formal treaty was signed, but The Smoker and his fellow travelers returned to their homes along the Fox and Lake Winnebago, presumably confident of their position in their talks with the Americans.¹⁵⁶

When the Americans arrived in Green Bay a month later, they hardly honored The Smoker's pledge of Ho-Chunk goodwill. On August 7, three schooners and a sloop entered the mouth of the Fox River carrying 500 American troops from Mackinac, including an artillery unit, engineers, riflemen, and four infantry companies. Their orders, as one regimental surgeon recalled, were to build a fort quickly and to "look down all expected opposition from the Indians residing in this country."¹⁵⁷ Soon after the engineers picked the site for Fort Howard and began construction, they saw a familiar Ho-Chunk face. The Smoker had made a second trip to speak with the Americans and inspect their fort, this time just thirty miles from his home.

¹⁵⁶ "Arrival of American Troops at Green Bay," *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 1: 441-443.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 441.

The Smoker was a young man, son of the chief of Taycheeda village on the south shore of Lake Winnebago. His father, Sar-ro-chau, was a well-known and well-liked man in the Green Bay community. Augustin Grignon, a Creole fur trader, described him as “one of the best of Indians,” though Americans would likely have challenged this assertion given Sar-ro-chau’s enthusiastic alliance with the British Colonel McKay and his role in the attack on Americans at Prairie du Chien just two years earlier.¹⁵⁸ Now, in 1816, Sar-ro-chau was ailing, and his son had assumed the responsibilities of village chief. Foremost among these duties was keeping the peace in and around his community. The end of the war was a significant turning point, and after more than a year of contemplation and undoubtedly many councils with various Ho-Chunk leaders, including Rice-Eater, Four Legs, and Black Wolf, The Smoker had decided that his people’s best path forward was alongside the Americans in peace. There were few if any other options. The Smoker met the Americans near the mouth of the Fox River on August 23 and immediately sought an audience with Colonel Miller from Mackinac, and the newly appointed Indian Agent at Green Bay, John Bowyer.¹⁵⁹

Through an interpreter and with a secretary present, The Smoker engaged Miller and Bowyer: “you fancy, father, that I am of a nation who are in the habit of telling lies.” He was upset by Colonel Miller’s display of force after he made clear his people’s fear of American retribution. “When at Mackinaw,” The Smoker reminded the Colonel, “I told you the general thought of the Indians and that they were in dread of you. We are afraid that your intention in coming here to build forts was with a view to do us harm.” The Smoker had hoped the Americans would make a different first impression. The purpose of his journey to Mackinac had been to help groom the Big Knives for a non-threatening arrival so close to Ho-Chunk country.

¹⁵⁸ Lawson, *Wisconsin Archeologist*, vol. 13-15; *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 3: 251.

¹⁵⁹ Hening, “Arrival of American Troops at Green Bay, in 1816,” *Wisconsin Historical Collections* 13: 444-449.

He had clearly failed.¹⁶⁰ If the Americans intended his people harm, or if they doubted The Smoker's fidelity and friendship, he again tried to convince them otherwise. Drawing on Ho-Chunk cosmology and historical experience, The Smoker proceeded to tell the Americans how to be friends with and, momentarily, good "fathers" to the Ho-Chunks.

If they were to coexist in this place, The Smoker urged, the Americans must concede that the world they shared with Ho-Chunks was governed by a higher power. "You know that the Master of Life governs us all. It is him who placed us on the earth and is our Master," The Smoker explained. "Should your intentions be to destroy us, I doubt if you could succeed, because he *protects us as well as you.*"¹⁶¹ Pointing to the cannons, and fixing on the officer's failure to hear and trust the Ho-Chunks, The Smoker chided the Americans once more for bringing so many "big guns," a feat that The Smoker reasoned, "must have been with a view of using them against us." The Ho-Chunks did "not like to see them in the country" for they could have no other purpose, now that the British were gone, but to kill Indians.¹⁶²

Now The Smoker appealed to the Americans to be good fathers to the Ho-Chunk, "to take them under their wing," and offer them advice. Speaking to Bowyer, The Smoker praised the French, implying that the Americans should look to them, not the British, as models.¹⁶³ Creole traders such as Augustin Grignon, a son of the French era, remained integral to the economic happiness of the Ho-Chunks. The Smoker applauded the American agent's French predecessor, who made the Ho-Chunk "comparatively happy" when he "treated us with victuals and clothed us."¹⁶⁴ French as well as British officials understood the importance of giving

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 443

¹⁶¹ "The Smoker's Speech," in Henry Hening, "Arrival of American Troops at Green Bay, in 1816," *Wisconsin Historical Collections* 13: 444 [emphasis in original].

¹⁶² Ibid., 445.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 447.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 445.

presents to the Indians and the kinds of goods they desired. They and the Creole traders who remained, he insisted, “are acquainted with us, and . . . assist us in our wants.” Should the Americans drive the local traders out, he concluded, it “would reduce us to charity.”¹⁶⁵

The recent war had disrupted trade routes and reduced availability of food and manufactured items. Warfare also drained Indian villages of young men, diminishing the ability of the Ho-Chunks to cultivate crops let alone to hunt, fish, and gather. British Captain Andrew Bulger was the commander of Fort McKay at Prairie du Chien during much of the War of 1812 and took charge of shoring up Indian support for the British in the region. His gifts and promises came with requests for Indian warriors.¹⁶⁶ In November 1814, he made his concerns known to his superior, Lieutenant-Colonel Robert McDougall at Mackinac, regarding debts owed by the British to their Indian allies:

I understand that there are at least 20,000 persons, whose existence during the approaching winter, will entirely depend upon hunting; formerly they had Traders to resort to for assistance, and they were also in the habit of planting and securing a supply of corn; but this year they are deprived of both resources, the latter chiefly from being so often called from home.¹⁶⁷

When the British failed to deliver on their pledges, their Native allies starved. Bulger saw them on his December journey along the Fox and Wisconsin rivers: “it was a distressing sight; men,

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ For Captain Bulger’s correspondence during the war, see *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 13: 10-153. The correspondence reprinted by the Wisconsin Historical Society covers the period between October 1814 and September 1815. In December 1814, Bulger held a council with the Ho-Chunks and Menominee to secure their warriors for another campaign. Bulger told the Ho-Chunks (and Menominee) gathered at a council that “their service would again be required at Mackinac in the coming spring.” The Indians agreed, but “expressed great dissatisfaction with their treatment at Mackinac last summer.” “They said they had been starved, whilst the stores are full of provisions for they saw them, they said, with their own eyes.” Bulger attempted to explain that the British rationed even with ample supplies on hand since the arrival of more was uncertain. For description of this council, see Bulger, 26-27.

¹⁶⁷ Bulger papers, *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 13: 21.

women, & children, naked and in a state of starvation.”¹⁶⁸ And in 1816, the British still owed them two-thirds of promised goods for the previous three years. When The Smoker told the Americans at Green Bay in 1816 that the Ho-Chunk “have abandoned the red coats because they cheated us,” his words fell short of conveying the misery the British failures caused his people.

By 1816, then, the Ho-Chunks were tired. They were desperate for an uninterrupted Corn Moon, which would lead to a Winter Moon without starvation. Bowyer’s and Miller’s promises that their Great Father and the American government would provide Indians with consistent and fair trade through a regulated factory system appealed to The Smoker.¹⁶⁹ The Smoker’s words suggest that among at least some eastern Ho-Chunk communities, former enemies of the Americans now envisioned good relations with them, largely because peace would bring stability, and stability meant time to plant, cultivate, and harvest their corn. This was how Earthmaker shaped a world in which the Ho-Chunk could live out their lives happily, even in close proximity to the Long Knives.

This stability meant no more war. The Ho-Chunks’ shared desire to avoid becoming embroiled in future imperial wars kept most Ho-Chunk bands from making formal pledges of military alliance with the U. S. They wanted fair trade, not the liability of military alliance. The Americans, however, took this as evidence of Ho-Chunk enmity. In its efforts to assert control over the region, the U. S. demanded unequivocal allegiance from Native peoples. With the exception of Old Nawkaw’s western band, most Ho-Chunk communities resisted signing such

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 25-26. Bulger’s correspondence with British officers and local traders details the extent of Native famine during the War of 1812 as well as its causes. Throughout his letters, he expresses regret for not having the authority or supplies to relieve their suffering. Bulger’s letters also include complaints over how Native peoples survived the winters. For example, Native people killed British-owned cattle at Prairie du Chien and Green Bay. See Bulger papers, 21, 100-101.

¹⁶⁹ “The Smoker’s Speech,” in Henry Hening, “Arrival of American Troops at Green Bay, in 1816,” *Wisconsin Historical Collections* 13: 447. Throughout his speech, the Smoker often references promises made by the Americans, either at Mackinac or as part of the dialogue at Green Bay.

agreements with Americans. The Smoker, for example, offered spoken pledges of peace and signed no treaty. Americans seemed to understand this fractured tribal nation and did not assume that Old Nawkaw spoke for all Ho-Chunks. Military alliances with powerful empires, the Ho-Chunk had learned, led to turmoil, war, and abandonment at war's end. "Now, our determination is not to listen [to any father]," The Smoker told Americans at Green Bay in 1816." Should you have any shock among you," by which he meant conflict among rival empires, "we shall remain neutral."¹⁷⁰ Such resistance to a more formal alliance with the U. S. made the Americans suspicious of the Ho-Chunk, which would contribute to misunderstandings and unnecessary bloodshed in the coming decades. The Smoker assured the Americans that his people welcomed American counsel, just as they had from the French and the British: "Our eyes are now opened. We are to reside among you." However, that residence did not mean alliance.

Though Ho-Chunks grudgingly accepted that they would cohabit the region, the American view of Native peoples as savage and uncivilized, and therefore lesser beings, deeply troubled The Smoker: "You see me almost naked, and because I am not as well dressed as you are, you no doubt fancy me an object of pity. It is him [Earthmaker] who has willed it so." The differences between Indians and whites were, at least to the Ho-Chunk, both consequential and by design. The Smoker urged Americans to stop trying to change Native people's lifeways. He acknowledged that Earthmaker "has put something in your heads, to give you more ideas and intelligence than we possess." Rather than make Native peoples wear more clothes and less face paint, however, The Smoker believed that the Americans should observe Earthmaker's logic. Native nations were "painted in different colors," The Smoker explained, "to show the whites that we are objects of charity, and that they are to assist us." In the same way that Earthmaker offered his original Thunderbird sons fire and instructed them to share their knowledge with the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 445.

other clans, the creator provided whites with the ability to fashion metal tools and weapons and expected them to share this technology with Indians. To amplify his point, The Smoker challenged the Indian agent and colonel to imagine dressing themselves as Indians: “can you, like us, bore your ears, and suspend bobs to them? Can you put bands of silver on your arms, or bedaub your faces as we do? No, you cannot; because the Master of Life would punish you were you to do it.”¹⁷¹ It would be equally foolish, he implied, for Indian people to behave as whites. No one could fool Earthmaker, the Smoker reminded: “The master of life is present—he listens to us . . . he is on earth, in the Heavens . . . he fills all matter.”¹⁷²

The Smoker’s decision to engage the Americans in this way was no doubt driven by the hardships his people had experienced in the recent war. Even so, Ho-Chunks did think of themselves as a needy or dependent people: “We are not, as other tribes, in the habit of incommoding our father at every moment.”¹⁷³ The Ho-Chunks preferred to keep to themselves, and they privileged their autonomy and way of life over all else. Ho-Chunks sought trading partners who would respect their isolation. While they would not trouble the Americans for their every desire, Ho-Chunks also would not subordinate their autonomy to American demands. The Smoker insisted that the Americans prove that they wanted only “Peace and Friendship” with the region’s Indians, and nothing more. The Ho-Chunk people would only know the “real character of their father” in Washington through his actions. The Smoker urged the Americans to follow through with their promise, so “you will cause our hoes and hatchets to be mended, that our

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 443.

¹⁷² Examples of Native leaders and orators challenging Euro-centric notions of their superiority and attempts to assimilate Native Americans are vast in the historical record. In addition to pointing out what they saw as American arrogance and hypocrisy, Native leaders often argued that whites and Indians shared a God and that creator had made his white and Indian children different by design. For examples of Native peoples making these arguments to European and American audiences, see Peter Nabokov, ed., *Native American Testimony* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

¹⁷³ “The Smoker’s Speech,” in Henry Hening, “Arrival of American Troops at Green Bay, in 1816,” *Wisconsin Historical Collections* 13: 445.

wives may cultivate their fields without difficulty,” and Native men would find more time to hunt and trap for the trade.¹⁷⁴ If the Americans provided the goods his people desired, both sides, he assured, would benefit.

The Americans, however, showed themselves again to be poor listeners. In correspondence from 1816 and in latter reminiscences, it is clear that the Americans continued to view Ho-Chunks as untrustworthy, as likely enemies of the United States. American descriptions, the Ho-Chunk continued to be painted as “a bold and warlike tribe.”¹⁷⁵ Thomas Biddle arrived in October or November of 1816 and heard of The Smoker’s visit, only by then, the American narrative underscored the success of U.S. intimidation. As Biddle understood the event, an unnamed Ho-Chunk chief showed up and “remonstrated with Col. Miller against what they termed an “instusion [sic].” When Miller explained “his purpose, though armed for war, was peace,” the chief pointed out that the colonel brought too much firepower for peace and not enough for war. To disabuse the chief of any notion that Americans were weak, Miller “invited him down to the river bank, among the grass of which he showed him some ten or twelve large cannon.” Now convinced that the colonel’s force could wage war, the chief “broke up the conference, and gave no further trouble.”¹⁷⁶ In Biddle’s version of an event he did not witness himself, The Smoker became an anonymous, squabbling chief whom Colonel Miller easily cowed into submission.

American views of Ho-Chunks as dangerous and militant eclipsed The Smoker’s portrayal of his people at Green Bay. A regimental surgeon garrisoned at Green Bay enclosed a copy of The Smoker’s speech in a letter home to his father in Richmond, Virginia. The surgeon believed violence between whites and Indians, Americans and Ho-Chunks, was inevitable. He

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 443.

¹⁷⁵ James W. Biddle, “Recollections of Green Bay in 1816-17,” *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 1: 52.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 52.

had not heard The Smoker's message and wrote "that our frontiers once again, will witness the horrors of savage warfare" because the "Winnebagoes, it is manifest, are decidedly opposed to our making any establishment in this country." The surgeon believed that only the presence of the several hundred troops at Green Bay "keeps them quiet."¹⁷⁷

A Richmond newspaper printed this letter and the newspaper's editor introduced The Smoker's speech as "marked with that peculiar vein of thought and expression, which distinguishes the *long talk* of the Indians" in the west.¹⁷⁸ But "long talk" was necessary for The Smoker to share his people's sacred history, especially when those origins served as the foundation of Indigenous belonging and a potential bulwark against the threat Americans represented to Ho-Chunk ways of life. Americans were often impatient with Indian speakers, and more problematic, they listened with closed ears. The source of American comfort and control in the region and the source of Ho-Chunk fear and anxiety was the same—the presence of a fort and soldiers. Many times, Ho-Chunk orators and village leaders travelled to meet and speak with the Americans to clear away dark clouds over Ho-Chunk country, and many times Americans would pretend to still hear a "storm ... murmuring at a distance," as Hening claimed he did.¹⁷⁹ Violence, as often as stilted treaties, brought about American acquisition of Indian lands.

Militarily, the Ho-Chunks could not stand up to the Big Knives or force them into an accommodating relationship. Still, the Ho-Chunk nation had a sizable population and homeland, and, as their leaders and orators would make clear over and over again, Ho-Chunks enjoyed a sacred and ancestral belonging in the region. In June 1816, The Smoker spoke not for a defeated people

¹⁷⁷ "American Troops at Green Bay," *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 8: 443

¹⁷⁸ "The Smoker's Speech," in Henry Hening, "Arrival of American Troops at Green Bay, in 1816," *Wisconsin Historical Collections* 13: 441.

¹⁷⁹ "American Troops at Green Bay," *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 8: 443

nor from the margins of the U.S. national territory, but from the center of the Ho-Chunk world where his people and their neighbors—the Menominee, Ojibwa, Sauk and Fox, Dakota, and Potawatomi—still held sway over daily events. The Smoker provided the American officials and troops at Green Bay with an authentic introduction to the Ho-Chunk nation, the character of its people, and a sample of their oratory. He hoped a show of strength and fearlessness might draw the Americans toward a “middle ground” of shared understanding. Peace with the Ho-Chunks, The Smoker made clear, would be forged on civil, if not equal, terms.

The Smoker’s use of Ho-Chunk sacred history was nothing new. It echoed what Indian orators and leaders had been telling American officials for decades: “Our lands are our life and our breath,” Creek Chief Hallowing King told Americans in 1787, “if we part with them, we part with our blood.”¹⁸⁰ Where Americans emphasized maps and boundaries and clear title to facilitate Indian land cessions, Native peoples interjected their more lengthy views. More than merely diminishing an estate, land cessions reduced mobility and decreased range and access to resources. Land cessions also alienated Indian people from burial and sacred grounds, places, stories, events, and rituals that regenerated communal bonds with their ancestors and their lands.

Speaking to political as well as spiritual matters required a unique set of skills and, therefore, was often not the responsibility of Ho-Chunk civil or war chiefs. Only the most eloquent and impassioned speakers occupied roles as orators among the Ho-Chunk people.¹⁸¹ Ho-Chunk orators used words as well as their bodies to convey meanings and emotions. Because Ho-Chunks did not have a written language, they placed great importance on the spoken word and its delivery. On occasion, Ho-Chunk leaders reminded Europeans and Americans of

¹⁸⁰ Creek Chief document, in *The World Turned Upside Down: Indian Voices from Early America*, ed. Colin G. Calloway (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994), 159-160.

¹⁸¹ Mark Diedrich’s compilation of Ho-Chunk speeches spanning from the mid-eighteenth to the late nineteenth century offers several examples of Ho-Chunk orators and chiefs articulating their ancestral belonging in and attachments to their Wisconsin homelands. Diedrich, *Winnebago Oratory*.

this, pointing out the difficulty of carrying out their business in this way with Europeans and Americans who employed pen and paper. Ho-Chunks, however, initially considered writing a less sincere form of communication. At councils, the orator's village, band, or perhaps tribe relied on a one-time performance in which the orator had to speak his people's mind accurately and thoroughly.¹⁸² Ho-Chunk orators carried the burden of articulating for outsiders their worldview, explaining how a people's identity, spirituality, and subsistence intertwined in a single place, a homeland. Such nuances and matters of significance should never be rushed. Moreover, Ho-Chunk leaders and orators, such as He Who Walks Naked, Rice-Eater Caramani, and The Smoker, did not share their cosmology with the British and the Americans to better acquaint themselves. Ho-Chunks correctly believed that American newcomers intended to replace the region's Indigenous population as occupants of the land, so Ho-Chunks deployed sacred history in defense of their peoplehood and longevity in their homelands.

The Smoker's visit to Green Bay in 1816 was followed by a period of mixed relations between his people and the Americans. The Ho-Chunks chose to continue their trade with the British whenever possible, a decision that made them appear even more suspicious to the Americans. Also, Americans interpreted Ho-Chunk assertions of their sovereignty as affronts to that of the United States. In some cases, Americans viewed Ho-Chunk actions as confrontational. Ho-Chunks along the Fox River and on Lake Winnebago routinely fired across the bow of American vessels, reminding them whose lands they were traveling through. Sometimes, Ho-Chunk musket balls met their targets. As army officer John Whistler's men rowed their boat by a Ho-Chunk village near the entrance of Lake Winnebago, a musket ball passed through the awning. "I immediately Ordered my boat to stop," Whistler stated, "and directed my Interpreter to enquire the cause of this unexpected Attack on the American Flag,

¹⁸² Deidrich, *Winnebago Oratory*, 9-11.

which was hoisted on my approach to the Village; in reply I was given to understand that they commanded the passage and required all Boats to stop and report to them.” Ignoring the Ho-Chunks’ demand, Whistler “ordered my men to proceed, which [the Ho-Chunk] permitted without further molestation.”¹⁸³

Whistler chose not to engage the Ho-Chunks more directly because no one had been harmed, and nothing had been damaged by their attack. That the Ho-Chunk warriors outnumbered his men also likely factored into his decision. Moreover, Whistler’s primary role was running the military store at Jefferson Barracks, not fighting Indians. For Ho-Chunks, such encounters became typical, a departure from their earlier reputation as merciless warriors. The Ho-Chunks would prove themselves adept in the coming years at resisting, disrupting, and unnerving Americans without resorting to deadly violence. Firing over boats carrying American goods and traders was a clear form of resistance, however.

The Ho-Chunks’ passive-aggressive response to Americans in their lands did not improve their image, however. A breveted major during the recent war, Whistler had received reports of Indian atrocities against Americans, many of which were blamed on Ho-Chunks avenging their losses at the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811. The particularly violent murder of Liberty White probably entered Whistler’s mind from time to time during his travels through Ho-Chunk country. White’s body was found with two musket ball wounds, nine stab wounds to his chest, his throat cut from ear to ear, “his nose and lips ... taken off in one piece, and his head ... skinned almost as far round as they could find any hair.”¹⁸⁴ A French Canadian named Debou was murdered along with White, shot once and scalped. If the murderers intended their victims’ corpses to signal their hatred for Americans, the message was clear and unforgettable.

¹⁸³ Joseph L. Smith to J. Brown, 5 January 1820, *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 20: 143.

¹⁸⁴ Joseph Kirkland, *The Chicago Massacre of 1812: With Illustrations and Historical Documents* (Chicago: Dibble Publishing Company, 1893), 81.

Despite the violence perpetrated by members of other Native communities, American officials saw the Ho-Chunk as the existential threat to the colonial project of the United States of America.¹⁸⁵ For example, an officer named Joseph Smith who was stationed at Green Bay in 1820 wrote:

The Winnebagos who are reputed to be vicious and are an active tribe, previously to the misconduct which I have detailed, passed this Fort, where they made many expressions of friendship to the United States, and received some presents, being then on their way, as they said, to Mackinac: They however proceeded to Drummond Island; obtained British presents—and returned passing up Fox river, without halting at the Fort, as they had led me to expect they would do.¹⁸⁶

As late as October 1820, Smith also claimed to have seen and then destroyed a British flag “erected and flying” within a few miles north of Lake Winnebago. Whether or not there was a flag, Smith tried to frame the encounters as a British-Indian threat to American economic and national interests. Smith’s complaints, in essence, detailed the Ho-Chunks’ success in circumventing the Americans to get what they wanted: continued trade with the British, all the while isolating themselves along the upper Fox River, at the Portage, and on the upper Wisconsin River as well as south in the Rock River Valley. For several years following American occupation of Green Bay, Ho-Chunks made annual trips to Drummond Island for British goods.¹⁸⁷

Ho-Chunk isolationism and brashness irritated Americans because Americans could rarely return the insults they suffered in Ho-Chunk country. Instead, the Americans exacted justice on their own turf. When The Smoker—whom some Americans at Green Bay arbitrarily considered “the principal chief of the tribe”—visited Fort Howard at the mouth of the Fox River

¹⁸⁵ Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., “Fur Trade in Wisconsin,” *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 20: 139-144.

¹⁸⁶ Joseph L. Smith to J. Brown, 5 January 1820, *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 20: 141.

¹⁸⁷ Colin G. Galloway, “The End of an Era: British-Indian Relations in the Great Lakes Region after the War of 1812,” *Michigan Historical Review* 12, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 9-20; Robert S. Allen, *His Majesty’s Indian Allies: British Indian Policy in the Defence of Canada, 1774-1815* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1993), 168-194.

in August of 1820, the Indian agent and commanding officer arrested him, citing the attack on Captain Whistler's boat. The Smoker pleaded ignorance of the incident. Bowyer held The Smoker for several days at the fort's jail and "liberated him" only after the chief promised to bring the responsible Ho-Chunk individuals to Fort Howard. If what Bowyer told him was true, The Smoker agreed to find and return the head culprit "before the ice [was] made." The chief made clear, however, that the accused were innocent until proven guilty. Bowyer pressured him further: "If [The Smoker] did not bring me the chief who fired on the United States Flag...I would send the first chief, that came to Green Bay in Spring, to the Fort, and hold him in confinement." Bowyer felt justified in detaining and bullying The Smoker and in imprisoning other Ho-Chunks if necessary, and he intended to continue such treatment unless instructed otherwise by President James Monroe or by Governor Lewis Cass. American justice, so The Smoker learned, required retribution regardless of Indian innocence or independence.¹⁸⁸

Ho-Chunk actions have long been portrayed by historians as "inimical" toward the American project of territory and state building.¹⁸⁹ But scholars have glossed over or ignored the significance of Ho-Chunk policies toward outsiders, chiefly in regard to their consistency over one hundred and fifty years as affirmations of Ho-Chunk sovereignty. Ho-Chunk protectionism and isolation from Americans did prevent Americans from learning much of anything about Ho-Chunk population or territory. U.S. officials were eager to know more about the Ho-Chunk nation. In 1818, Illinois gained statehood, and Michigan's Territorial Governor Lewis Cass anticipated future statehood for Michigan and lands to the west. In this Ho-Chunk lands would be vital. Cass, along with Henry Schoolcraft and a twenty-one-year-old James Doty (future

¹⁸⁸ John Bowyer to Lewis Cass, 15 January 1820, *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 20: 144.

¹⁸⁹ For examples of reminiscences and historical accounts published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see *Wisconsin Historical Collections*. "Winnebago inimical" in the index provides a categorization of Ho-Chunk policing on the Fox River, a central corridor into and through their territory. See *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 21: 484.

governor of Wisconsin), took part in an expedition to learn about Native peoples in the upper and western Great Lakes region and their attitude toward Americans.¹⁹⁰ The expedition also documented potential sites for forts and settlement. Though the party would travel the Fox and Wisconsin rivers, Cass seemed to anticipate finding out very little about Ho-Chunks. The map Schoolcraft produced shortly after the expedition showed that Ho-Chunk country was *terra incognita* to the Americans. In 1819, Cass instructed the Indian agent at Green Bay, John Bowyer, to conduct a census of the Ho-Chunk nation. Cass cared less about understanding Ho-Chunk peoplehood than about knowing the number of Ho-Chunk warriors, the nation's subsistence habits, and the locations of their principal villages. Given the reports from Green Bay's Indian agency and officers over the years, Cass may have been concerned that the Ho-Chunks would resist the Americans.¹⁹¹

John Bowyer, whom Cass placed in charge of collecting this information, conveyed what he learned in January 1820: "Sir—I have made every exertion, to furnish you with the Strength of the Winebego [sic] tribe of Indians." Bowyer had been assisted by a Ho-Chunk village chief named Black Hawk, whom Bowyer described as "the most intelligent chief of the tribe."¹⁹² Bowyer sent Black Hawk with different colored beans and instructed the chief "to go through the nation and bring me a Red Bean, for every man, a Yellow one for the grown women, and a White one for the children." Black Hawk's census estimated the Ho-Chunk nation to have

¹⁹⁰ James Duane Doty, "Official Journal, 1820: Expedition with Cass and Schoolcraft." James Duane Doty Papers, Box 1, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=134> (accessed August 5, 2017). Another primary objective of this expedition, which Secretary of War John Calhoun requested, was to locate the source of the Mississippi River and to survey and map the topography and natural resources of the Great Lakes region. A map of this expedition, generated by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, can be found in this collection and box as well.

¹⁹¹ John Bowyer to Lewis Cass, 15 January 1820, *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 20: 144.

¹⁹² Bowyer called this man Blue Hawk, but Thwaites believes this to be a mistake. A Ho-Chunk man named Black Hawk (Jay-ray-tshon-sarp) appears as a signer on the 1829 and 1832 treaties. See John Bowyer to Lewis Cass, 15 January 1820, *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 20: 144.

around 1,000 warriors and between 1,200 to 1,500 women. Black Hawk returned no white beans, claiming he did not know the number of children. Bowyer reported on, “This tribe in Summer resides, on the Ousconsin and head waters of the Fox and Rock rivers, they plant corn, pumpkins, Beans, potatoes, etc, the Winebego Lake furnishes them with large Quantities of Rice, they are good hunters, and their women Industrious.”¹⁹³ As governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs for that region, Cass could put such information to many uses. Ho-Chunks, like most Indians in the region, had been experiencing steady population growth since the myriad epidemics of the mid-eighteenth century. Moreover, knowing how Indians subsisted said much about their health as well as the soils on which they lived.

The Ho-Chunks shared labor in their villages. Calling women “industrious” likely conveyed their primary responsibilities for cultivating crops, gathering wild plants, preparing and preserving foods, and fashioning clothing and shelter. Bowyer provided Cass with “the best information, I have been able to Obtain of the Situation [of] this Tribe,” but felt it was incomplete. Absent specific geographical locations for villages and a low estimate of the Ho-Chunk population testifies to Ho-Chunk efforts and capacity to remain enigmatic to the eyes of the United States federal government. Though lacking requested information, Bowyer’s report conveyed much about Ho-Chunk autonomy: how they fed and clothed themselves. This sustained Ho-Chunk peoplehood no matter how many red, white, and yellow beans the Ho-Chunk chief returned to Bowyer.

Despite their mutual mistrust, the Ho-Chunks and the Americans demonstrated their capacity for coexistence and accommodation. Good relationships between the Ho-Chunk and Americans formed when and where whites demonstrated respect for Ho-Chunk people, their culture, and their land and resources. Relations soured or turned violent when the Ho-Chunks

¹⁹³ John Bowyer to Lewis Cass, 15 January 1820, *Wisconsin Historical Collections* vol. 20: 144.

felt their world was vulnerable to outside dangers. Events in the 1820s demonstrate this pattern clearly. Only when whites threatened Ho-Chunk peoplehood by trespassing on their lands, mining their lead, abusing their women, or murdering them, did relations break down. And only in rare instances, after U.S. authorities failed to address complaints, did the Ho-Chunks respond with violence. As long as the Ho-Chunks felt that their autonomy and peoplehood were intact, they maintained good relations with Americans, and exhibited patience when American actions fell short of those explained by *The Smoker* in 1816.¹⁹⁴

Keeping the peace in the lead region in the 1820s took work, and the Ho-Chunks bore the brunt of that effort. As historian Lucy Murphy shows, Ho-Chunks “made special efforts to observe and befriend” the lead rushers, “monitoring their activities as they established relationships.”¹⁹⁵ Ho-Chunks occasionally prospected for whites, choosing mines for them to work and, one might imagine, steering them away from others while also protecting other valuable resources, such as crop fields. As Murphy makes clear, understanding the outsiders helped Indians police them.

In an extraordinary response to white lead prospectors on their lands in 1825 and 1826, the Ho-Chunks reached out to two brothers from St. Louis who were interested in establishing a mining town near the Sugar River. John and Henry Gratiot were heirs to the Chouteau family’s fur trade fortune. With the help of interpreter Catherine Myott, the daughter of Nicholas Boilvin and Wizak Kega, a Ho-Chunk woman, the Ho-Chunks brokered a deal with the Gratiot brothers recognizing their right to mine and smelt and live in Ho-Chunk lands. The official price the brothers paid was 300 dollars, but Lucy Murphy thinks that the Gratiot family agreed to additional terms—namely, to accept Ho-Chunk lead, furs, and other products in trade for higher

¹⁹⁴ Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, 79-136

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

quality merchandise they hoped the brothers could provide. Ho-Chunks' respect for and familiarity with the French and Creole ancestry of Gratiots and Catherine Myott undoubtedly opened a door for this agreement. The Ho-Chunks' objective went beyond this connection and a desire for high quality goods, however. As Murphy reasons, the Sugar River agreement "may be seen as a decision to accept these powerful elite French Creoles in hopes that the Gratiots would be able to maintain peaceful relations with the Anglos and control the white young men."¹⁹⁶ The Gratiots would be a buffer, of sorts, between the Ho-Chunks and other white mining interests in their lands.

A significant number of Ho-Chunks chose to leave the lead district when white lead rushers showed up in greater numbers in 1822. Jeanne Kay claims that the federal government's 1822 decision to issue permits to lead rushers to mine and smelt in the district triggered "an avoidance reaction" among Ho-Chunks living along the lower Rock River and its tributaries.¹⁹⁷ To avoid increased contact and competition with whites, many Ho-Chunks migrated north and joined their kin in western Wisconsin villages and upper Rock River villages. But some Ho-Chunks continued mining and smelting lead between Lake Koshkonong and Turtle Creek (Beloit).¹⁹⁸ These Ho-Chunks were not abandoning their lands to whites, but creating a buffer between themselves and corrupting influences and the likelihood of a violent incident. Meanwhile, village leaders pleaded with Indian agents at Prairie du Chien, Rock Island, and Galena to help keep the whites out of Ho-Chunk lands.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 108. The Ho-Chunks' nickname for Henry Gratiot was "Chouteau," the maiden name of his mother whose family the Indians of the region knew well and liked. His good rapport with the Ho-Chunk as well as his political connections led to his appointment as an Indian sub-agent for the Rock River band of Ho-Chunks in 1831.

¹⁹⁷ Kay, "Land of La Baye," 276.

¹⁹⁸ "Rock County as Represented on Early Maps," *The History of Rock County, Wisconsin* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1879), 359.

¹⁹⁹ Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, 101-136.

These population shifts were not without consequences for Ho-Chunks. The shifts limited their access to hunting and cultivation grounds in the southwestern Rock River valley, though they expanded cultivation elsewhere.²⁰⁰ Many eastern Ho-Chunks had already shifted westward, migrating away from villages and hunting grounds where beaver, white-tailed deer, and other game had become extinct or nearly so. The Rock River band grew in population and number of villages as the Ho-Chunk also expanded and established villages west and north along the Wisconsin, Baraboo, La Crosse, Yellow, Mississippi, and Black rivers.²⁰¹ By 1820, bison had already retreated west of the Mississippi, driven by the inability of Native peoples to maintain a suitable habitat in the face of white encroachment in Illinois.²⁰² Elk herds were also dwindling. Accordingly, more Native hunters targeted white-tailed deer for meat and skins, and over the course of the 1820s, white travelers and traders reported fewer deer along the Fox and Wisconsin rivers and between Chicago and Prairie du Chien.²⁰³

The increasingly competitive fur trade and the burgeoning white presence all but ensured a renewal of inter-tribal violence among Native communities in the Upper Mississippi Valley. Willing to risk warfare with neighboring tribes in order to maintain access to manufactured goods, the Sauk, Fox, Dakota, and Ojibwa clashed with growing frequency between the lower Chippewa and Des Moines rivers. The Dakota and Ojibwa had over-hunted their territories, and

²⁰⁰ Kay, "Land of La Baye," 276.

²⁰¹ Kay states that these villages became known as the Mississippi or Black River band of Ho-Chunks in the 1820s. See Kay, "Land of La Baye." By 1810, the Ho-Chunk had a village on the Mississippi near the mouth of the Black River called Big Canoe and another along the Wisconsin, midway between the Portage and Prairie du Chien. See Tanner, *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History* "Indian Villages c. 1810," map 20, 98-99.

²⁰² Two Dakotas claimed to have killed the last Wisconsin bison in 1832 on the Trempealeau River. Kay, "Land of La Baye," 309.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 255. Kay acknowledges that concrete numbers for deer populations and deer kills do not exist for this era. Little is known about the Green Bay region deer population, and almost nothing about the deer population of the Rock River Valley. See Kay, 256-258, for discussion of white-tailed deer populations. Some nineteenth-century whites accused Wisconsin Indians of over-hunting deer intentionally in anticipation of whites moving into their lands.

the Sauk and Fox pushed north into contested hunting grounds in response to white miners and settlers invading their lands and disrupting subsistence activities along the lower Rock River.²⁰⁴

Continued white settlement of the region depended on a stable and secure frontier. These skirmishes caught the attention of the U.S. War Department when it was reported that a hundred Indians had been killed or wounded in a single year. Congress, however, saw no immediate crisis and rejected the War Department's request for peacekeeping troops.²⁰⁵

Federal Indian policy advocated peace among Native peoples because, as Indian agents told the Indians, civilization efforts required men to take up plows, not weapons. Behind this benevolent view was the logistical nightmare of removing warring Indian nations to shared Indian Territory.²⁰⁶ Though Congress would not approve the Indian Removal Act until 1830, lawmakers and officials had been discussing the idea of removing Indians west of the Mississippi for some time. Separation of Indians and whites had always been the foundation of federal Indian policy.²⁰⁷ In pushing the civilization program on Indians, federal officials often exaggerated the precariousness of Native societies engaged in warfare. As John Hall explains, Native people viewed warfare as “neither unnatural nor inhumane, but instead a vital component of their culture and the basis for many society structures.” Moreover, Hall writes, because their “fragile, subsistence economies dependent on regular production from every hunter, Indians were averse to inflicting, as well as sustaining, large numbers of casualties.”²⁰⁸ Most federal

²⁰⁴ Gary Clayton Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650-1862* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1997), 106-107. Clashes among these Native communities destabilized peaceful relations with western villages of Menominee and Ho-Chunk.

²⁰⁵ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 76-81; Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind*, 106-107.

²⁰⁶ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 55; Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind*, 119.

²⁰⁷ Historical geographer D.W. Meinig is explicit about this point in his chapter entitled “Shoving Indians Out of the Way.” See D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History* vol. 2, *Continental America, 1800-1867* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 78-102.

²⁰⁸ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 55.

officials cared less about Indian suffering and casualties than about creating a peaceful frontier for white settlement.

Civilizing Indians was good for the U.S. and its frontier economy. Intertribal violence threatened American economic interests by turning hunters into warriors and by shutting down trade routes. Violence also slowed the settlement process and diminished land sales. These were serious concerns for the land-rich, cash-poor republic.²⁰⁹ To address the problem of violence in the upper Mississippi Valley and western Great Lakes, the federal government commissioned Lewis Cass and Superintendent of Indian Affairs William Clark to meet with all the region's tribal nations and bands for the purpose of making a general treaty of "Peace and Friendship." In August 1825, thousands of Dakota Sioux, Ojibwa, Sauk and Fox, Ioway, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Menominee, and Ho-Chunk were summoned to Prairie du Chien at the request of the Great Father. It was the largest inter-tribal gathering in a generation.

On August 6, Clark welcomed the Indian delegations and commenced the treaty council that would last two weeks. Resolution of inter-tribal violence was the stated goal, but the method by which Clark and Cass sought peace in the region served the expansionist interests of the government and American settlers. The treaty commissioners were instructed to produce a general peace treaty among the Native peoples living in the Upper Mississippi Valley while defining territorial boundaries for and between each tribal group.

In his opening address at Prairie du Chien, Clark assured the region's Indian people that the Great Father had not sent him there to acquire land from his "red children," but rather to ensure inter-tribal peace.²¹⁰ Clark pointed out that violence among Indian people was to blame

²⁰⁹ Prucha, *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years*; Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land*.

²¹⁰ United States, *Documents Relating to the Negotiation of Ratified and Unratified Treaties With Various Indian Tribes, 1801-1869*. Record Group 75 MicrocopyT494, (Washington D.C.: National Archives Microfilm). *Ratified treaty no. 139, documents relating to the negotiation of the treaty of August 19, 1825, with the Sioux*,

for their decline in power and population, not the presence of Americans. Hostilities between Indian groups, Clark continued, “have resulted in a great measure from your having no defined boundaries established in your country. Your tribes do not know what belongs to them.” At Prairie du Chien, Clark crafted a narrative about violence in the region that attributed it to widespread ignorance among Native communities about where one people’s homeland ended and another began. Mutually agreed upon boundaries, Clark promised, “will enable you all to live in peace” and would improve relations between white settlers and Indians as well. Several Indian representatives of the various nations present spoke in response. Peace was desirable, all agreed, but none spoke of territories or boundaries. The boundaries that Clark and Cass urged would bring peace were not so eagerly embraced by Indian people.

Three days into the council, orator Little Elk Caramani uttered the first words about Ho-Chunk lands. Designated a chief in the treaty journal, Little Elk was actually a prominent orator from Lake Winnebago but had been living on the Wisconsin River since 1822.²¹¹ Before the end of the 1820s, Little Elk would relocate to a Rock River village, farther from the growing white population. His voluntary relocations throughout Ho-Chunk country speak to the fluidity of Ho-Chunk band and village boundaries within in his tribal community. Based on his words at Prairie du Chien, such boundaries were fluid across tribal nations in the region as well. Little Elk was openly perplexed by the treaty commissioner’s request: “My fathers, I did not know that any of my relations had any particular land. It is true everyone owns his own lodge and the grounds he may cultivate. I had thought the rivers were common property of all red skins, and

Chippewa, Sauk and Fox, Menominee, Iowa and Winnebago Indians and part of the Ottawa, Chippewa, and Potawatomi of the Illinois Indians (Washington, D.C.: National Archives, August 19, 1825), Treaty Journal. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/History.IT1825no139> (accessed July 27, 2017), (hereafter cited as PDC Treaty Journal).

²¹¹ For an extended discussion of Little Elk’s life, see Murphy, *A Gathering of Rivers*, 137-140.

not used exclusively by any particular nation.”²¹² Little Elk only mentioned that the land of the Ho-Chunk commenced at Lake Winnebago and made clear that what he considered the Ho-Chunk homeland overlapped in many places with claims by his brothers from many of the other nations gathered at Prairie du Chien. While commissioners focused on the end product, a map of lands divided among the tribes gathered, the council offered Ho-Chunk leaders and orators another venue to articulate their belonging in place and time.

Commissioners nevertheless pressured Native peoples to conform to American understandings of tribal nations with clear boundaries, and they were frustrated when Indian speakers refused or hesitated. In a report to his superiors in Washington, Cass explained that because the Ho-Chunks were “without any influential chiefs,” the map remained unfinished.²¹³ It would remain incomplete for the next few years until Ho-Chunk and Ojibwa leaders finally formalized and agreed upon identifiable boundaries. The resulting map produced geographically specific but arbitrary homelands. The boundaries marked were divorced from sacred origins and subsistence patterns that connected Indigenous peoples to place, ceremonies, and season.

Mapping tribal territories served the interests of the federal government and the region’s territorial officials working to open western lands. Americans paid little attention to what Indigenous peoples said about “home” or “place” or “season” even though the treaty secretary strained to document every word accurately. The council allowed Americans to define Indian homelands in legal, political, and geographical terms. The commissioners cared less for how a Ho-Chunk Indian described his home as surrounded by the fields and gardens that his family cultivated than they did for the rivers and other features that marked Ho-Chunk lands. The treaty

²¹² Treaty with the Sioux and Chippewa, Sacs and Fox, Menominie, Ioway, Sioux, Winnebago, and a portion of the Ottawa, Chippewa, and Potawattomie, Tribes, signed at Prairie du Chien, Michigan Territory, August 19, 1825. Online facsimile at: <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=1620>.

²¹³ Lewis Cass to Secretary of War, 1 September 1825, Office of Indian Affairs (OIA), Letters received (LR), Michigan Superintendency, roll 419, cited in Diedrich, *Winnebago Oratory*, 20.

overrode Ho-Chunks' hesitance to describe land ownership in this way. The Old Northwest had not yet been surveyed, so treaty commissioners relied on Indian descriptions of their homelands. Little Elk's mundane but singular reference to what counted as a "home" among his people—a dwelling amidst family, fields, and gardens—went missing in the report.

Such meanings of home did not appear on the map or in the treaty. Nor did they appear in the narratives that underpinned federal Indian policy during the first half of the nineteenth century.²¹⁴ Indians with permanent villages surrounded by agricultural fields presented a great inconvenience for the expanding republic. Even though policy sought to make Indians into agriculturalists, their land-use patterns and the absence of defined boundaries were at odds with the American model of land tenancy.²¹⁵

Only when forced to do so at Prairie du Chien in 1825 would Ho-Chunks and other Indian nations at the council allow the commissioner to note boundaries between their several homelands. Native people expressed continued concern over the government's method and justification for establishing inter-tribal peace. While many Indians traveled to Prairie du Chien in 1825 out of concern that intertribal violence was on the rise, Ho-Chunks also hoped to bring

²¹⁴ See James Merrell, "Second Thoughts on Colonial Historians and American Indians," *William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (July 2012): 451-512.

²¹⁵ The council at Prairie du Chien council fell on the cusp of changing Indian policy. Though civilization policies and forced removal signaled two eras of federal Indian policy, both relied on narratives of race, civilization, and superiority, and also of national expansion with honor. Both policies relied on dispossessing Native peoples of their lands. This early nineteenth-century narrative took shape around the convenient idea that too much land prohibited Native peoples from becoming "civilized." Ignoring the role of agriculture among Native communities of the Eastern Woodlands, policy makers, presidents, and the American public claimed that if Indians were not divested of their vast lands, they would continue hunting and never take up farming, the essential labor of civilized folk. President Thomas Jefferson's words to William Henry Harrison, governor of Indiana Territory, conveyed this: once Indians became farmers, "they will perceive how useless to them are their extensive forests, and will be willing to pare them off from time to time in exchange for necessaries for their farms and families." This was part of Jefferson's plan to use American traders and trading houses to plunge Native peoples so deeply into debt that only land cessions would buy them out of it. For Jefferson's ideas on implementing federal Indian policy with the expressed goal of buying out Indian lands, see Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Documents of United States Indian Policy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 22-23.

more order to the lead region. The treaty itself and the words and overtures of the Indians and the Americans did little to resolve violence in the region. Within a year of the treaty council, Dakota and Ojibwa peoples renewed their violent contest over hunting grounds.²¹⁶ Long before then, however, Americans were rushing into Ho-Chunk lands.

The Ho-Chunk and their Sauk and Fox neighbors faced a rapid demographic transformation in a relatively short time. Between 1825 and 1827, the mining boom brought an increase of whites in the region from 200 to 4,000. Even in the summer of 1825, Ho-Chunks probably saw the Prairie du Chien council as an opportunity to affirm their territorial boundaries in hopes of keeping whites out. They believed they had little to lose by making their mark on a treaty that would, as the commissioners promised, recognize Indian ownership and Indian control of what everyone could now call Ho-Chunk lands. As the Ho-Chunks quickly learned, neither the treaty nor American authorities would stem the tide of lead rushers. If peace and tranquility—the federal government’s stated goals at the Prairie du Chien treaty council—came from clear and mutually recognized tribal territorial boundaries, that same government, its regional officials, and its frontier settlers cared little for keeping the peace when presented with economic opportunities in the form of Indian lands and resources. “Anglophone lead rushers brought different ideas about equality and hierarchy,” Lucy Murphy explains, young men who were “impatient with authority and anxious to earn some quick money.”²¹⁷ As lead rushers became more numerous and bold, they threatened Ho-Chunk peoplehood as they occupied Indian land and mines.²¹⁸ Whites spread out in lands near the Fever River (now Galena River),

²¹⁶ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 70-97; Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 47-49. For a thorough examination of Dakota relations with Americans and other tribes, see Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind*.

²¹⁷ Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, 102.

²¹⁸ Native American owners of lead mines and furnaces were compensated on occasion in the early 1820s when an agent or other authority intervened on their behalf. For examples of tensions and mediations among whites, *Métis*, and Native peoples of the Fox-Wisconsin region, see Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, 79-136.

an eastern tributary of the Mississippi in northwestern Illinois. They squeezed the Ho-Chunk out of a living in other ways, too. Miners brought a social and economic network with them. More than just miners, “lead rushers” included smelters, storekeepers, hostlers, families, and laborers.²¹⁹ The material demands of the lead rushers increased, while white reliance on Indians to fish, hunt, and trade waned.

Federal policies and frontier practices encouraged white exploitation of Indian resources and ensured violence. Despite calling for the council at Prairie du Chien and approving the subsequent treaty, Congress never allocated funds to mark or otherwise enforce the boundaries established. Furthermore, the War Department’s 1824 appointee, Lieutenant Martin Thomas, continued to sell permits to whites to mine and smelt within Ho-Chunk lands despite the 1825 treaty. He issued permits not only to encourage mining, but to draw Ho-Chunk violence against white miners. If Ho-Chunk Indians spilled white blood, the government would have cause and leverage to buy out mineral-rich lands owned by the Ho-Chunks and evict them from the region.²²⁰

As the Ho-Chunk relied more on their Indian agents, the Indians learned a hard lesson: Indian agents wielded too little power. Authorities turned a blind eye to white crimes against Indians, even murder, rape, and theft.²²¹ When Ho-Chunks murdered whites and Creoles, however, the perpetrators ended up in prison at Fort Snelling. Ho-Chunk leaders appealed to Thomas Forsyth, the Indian agent for the Sauk, for help, reporting that “some of the white people

²¹⁹ The first mining towns established in northwestern Illinois and southwestern Wisconsin were Galena, Mineral Point, Hardscrabble, and New Diggings. Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, 104, 111-14.

²²⁰ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 73-4, 282fn13.

²²¹ In November 1827, Prairie du Chien Indian Agent, Joseph Street, learned of a lethal assault on a Ho-Chunk woman in Galena. The white miner responsible for her murder was not charged even after Street urged local authorities to take action and complained to William Clark. See Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, 123.

are insulting to the Indians and take liberties with their women.”²²² Forsyth wrote to William Clark but did nothing more. American indifference to Ho-Chunk rights destroyed pockets of coexistence in the region. Early in 1827, village chief Winneshiek asked the Galena Indian sub-agent John Connolly to go with him to ward off dozens of white miners digging near his home on the Pecatonica River (at present-day Freeport, Illinois).²²³ When Winneshiek saw that Connolly had no will and no power to remove the miners, Winneshiek harangued the agent for his government’s duplicity and threatened to deal with the white trespassers his own way.²²⁴ The Ho-Chunk had put faith in the power of treaties and their Indian agents, but they learned in the 1820s that they had overestimated the Americans and their promises.

When they felt they could not rely on the Americans, the Ho-Chunks took matters into their own hands. Along the Mississippi and north of Prairie du Chien, Ho-Chunks from the Prairie La Crosse village took part in two separate attacks on white and *Métis* victims. On June 24, 1827, four Ho-Chunk men attacked the home of the Gagnier family of Prairie du Chien, killing two men and severely wounding a young child. The accused Indians claimed to be seeking revenge against whites for invading their lands and responding to rumors that two of their imprisoned brethren at Fort Snelling would soon be executed.²²⁵ A few days later, on June 30, Ho-Chunk men attacked a U.S. Army keel boat on the Mississippi, killing two soldiers. Just days before, American soldiers had forced several Ho-Chunk women aboard their keel boats northbound for Fort Snelling. On their return trip, Ho-Chunk men recognized the boats and

²²² Ibid., 124-25.

²²³ N.W. Jipson, “Winnebago Villages and Chieftains of the Lower Rock River Region,” *The Wisconsin Archeologist* 2, no. 3 (July 1923): 131-133. The Winneshiek referenced in text is the Elder Winneshiek, also known as Ma-wa-ra-ga.

²²⁴ Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, 128.

²²⁵ These events in 1827 have been linked to other mysterious murders, those of a Creole family west of the Mississippi in the spring of 1826. Though Ho-Chunks were implicated in these murders, it is more likely no Ho-Chunks were involved. See Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, 79-166.

attacked them from the shore, killing two Americans.²²⁶ The unabashed abduction and apparent rape of Ho-Chunk women by American men had drawn reprisals from at least one village chief and his warriors. However, what Red Bird of the Prairie La Crosse village felt was justified retribution for the harmed women, the U.S. considered an act of war.

Contemporaries, such as Joseph Street, the Indian Agent at Prairie du Chien, as well as historians attribute these incidents to the tensions caused by the unchecked flood of white squatters and miners onto Indian lands during the early 1820s. While neither the federal nor local governments took action to protect Indian land and resources, both mounted a retaliatory force several days after the events. By late summer, General Henry Atkinson converged on the Portage with a force of 600 American soldiers, 100 militiamen, and over 100 auxiliary Indian fighters (mostly Menominee, Oneida, and Stockbridge people) to demand the surrender of the guilty Ho-Chunks. Red Bird and three or four warriors surrendered themselves immediately in the hopes of avoiding further conflict in the heart of Ho-Chunk country.²²⁷

Local settlers called these events the “Winnebago Fuss,” but the federal government eventually called it a “war.”²²⁸ A “fuss” would not meet the standard set by the Northwest

²²⁶ Ibid., 124-125. The Ho-Chunk alleged that the soldiers abducted and raped six or seven Ho-Chunk women. No charges were filed and no official resolution was reached on this matter. William Snelling, son of Colonel Josiah Snelling, was on one of the boats and denied the allegations. According to John Hall, “The studious historian-archivist Lyman Copeland Draper endorsed Snelling’s account after reviewing all available facts.” Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 80, 284n44. See also, Snelling, “Early Days at Prairie du Chien,” 144. Allen F. Lindsey was in charge of the two keelboats and the soldiers accused of these crimes. In 1832, Lindsey was commissioned justice of the peace in Morgan County, Illinois, in an effort to bring justice in regard to Indian victims and white perpetrators. See also, *Black Hawk War, 1831-1832*, ed. Ellen M. Whitney, vol. 2, bk. 1, *Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library* (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1973-75), vol. 2, bk. 2, 793n3.

²²⁷ For more information about this uprising, its causes, and its role in Native land dispossession, see Murphy, *A Gathering of Rivers*; Hall, *Uncommon Defense*; and Martin Zanger, “Red Bird,” in *American Indian Leaders: Studies in Diversity*, ed. R. David Edmunds (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), pp. 64-87; Wyman, *The Wisconsin Frontier*.

²²⁸ In his history of Grant County, Castello Hoiford refers often to the “Winnebago fuss” and attributes its origin to the white settlers of the lead region. Hoiford, *History of Grant County, Wisconsin: Including Its Civil, Political, Geological, Mineralogical, Archaeological and Military History, and a History of the Several Towns*

Ordinance to transform Indian land into U.S. territory, whereas a “war” would. Though limited in both its culprits and casualties, the uprising, or “war,” paved the way for government officials to begin transferring Indian lands to U.S. ownership. The government attempted to force a land cession the following summer “in order to remove the difficulties which have arisen in consequence of the occupation, by white persons, of the part of the mining country which has not been heretofore ceded to the United States.”²²⁹ As many as thirty Ho-Chunks present at Green Bay in August 1828, representing all the bands, rejected any cession of land but agreed to a temporary boundary for the purpose of stopping the lead rushers’ further advance.²³⁰ For those Native communities, it did not make sense to cede lands to the federal government to solve the problem of white trespass.

The Ho-Chunks understood the logic of remuneration for use of property and resources, however, and they demanded payment accordingly. Kau-ree-kau-saw-kaw, or White Crow, said to Commissioner Lewis Cass: “You recollect the line we drew at the council of Prairie du Chien. Some of your young men perhaps have not seen it. They come over it, and now they are upon us

(Lancaster, Wisconsin: The Teller Print, 1900; Grant County, Wisconsin: Walsworth Publishing Company, 1900), 16, 17, 27, 456, and 563. Most recent scholarship challenges the term “Winnebago War.” Zanger argues that the conflict “hardly qualified for designation as a war” due to its limited scale and isolated incidents of violence perpetrated by a few Ho-Chunk warriors from a single village. See Zanger, “Red Bird,” 64. Over time, the conflict has also been called the “Winnebago Outbreak” and the “Winnebago Revolt.” However, the Winnebago War remains the conflict’s official and most commonly used name.

²²⁹ Treaty with the Winnebago, August 25, 1828, Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2 (Treaties) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904), 292-297, <http://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers/id/18045/rec/2> (accessed November 25, 2017). For Treaty Journal, see “Ratified Treaty no. 153, Documents Relating to the Negotiation of the Treaty of August 25, 1828, with the Winnebago, and the United Potawatomi, Chippewa, and Ottawa Indians,” August 25, 1828, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/History/History-idx?type=turn&entity=History.IT1828no153.p0002&id=History.IT1828no153&isize=M&pvview=hide> (accessed November 25, 2017).

²³⁰ The 1828 treaty states that the “united tribes of the Potawatomaies (sic), Chippewas, and Ottawas” were present and apparently claimed portions of land wanted by the U.S. but refused to cede any lands. According to Jason Tetzloff, the tribes were “actually ‘united’ only by the government for the ease of negotiation.” Jason Tetzloff, “The Diminishing Winnebago Estate in Wisconsin: From White Contact to Removal” (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, 1991), 55-56.

and are driving us from our camps . . . if you had a piece of land and a stranger should take possession of it, would you like it? Would you not expect payment?”²³¹ Already a renowned orator among the Rock River Ho-Chunks, White Crow would become familiar to local Americans in the coming years for his biting criticism of federal policies and broken treaty promises. The Americans agreed to pay, but the ultimate cost to the Ho-Chunks would prove to be much higher than anticipated.

At Green Bay in the summer of 1828, the U.S. agreed to pay the Indians for costs related to white occupation of Indian lands in the lead region. The agreement, which White Crow and many other prominent Ho-Chunk men signed, established a provisional boundary between the Ho-Chunk and the U.S., and another recognizing territory belonging to the “United Tribes.” The treaty granted the U.S. use of a portion of the lead region roughly bounded by the Mississippi River, the Wisconsin River to its nearest approach at Blue Mounds, and from there south to the main forks of Pecatonica Creek, thence back to the Mississippi. The boundary line ran very near the village of Spotted Arm and that of Winneshiek further south. The Ho-Chunks claimed that too few of their people were present to negotiate a land cession. Whether Ho-Chunks limited their attendance on purpose or because the council met during the month when they harvested corn and held feasts is unclear, but the commissioners went ahead and drafted the treaty as a precursor to what would become a land cession treaty. The treaty’s language indicated a future land cession based on the proposed boundaries to be finalized when an appropriate number of Ho-Chunks could be present. Moreover, the payment the commissioners offered the Ho-Chunks and United Tribes—“twenty thousand dollars, in goods”—to cover “all the injuries and damages sustained by [the Indians] in consequence of the occupation of any part of the mining country by

²³¹ Tetzloff, “Diminishing Estate,” 49-50. Treaty Journal for 1828 Treaty with the Ho-Chunk, Potawatomi, Ottawa, and Ojibwa can be found here: Treaty Journal, 1828, RG75, T494, roll 2.

white persons” would be forthcoming at “the time and place when and where the said treaty may be held.”²³² The government’s recompense hinged on a future council with more Ho-Chunk representatives.

Ho-Chunks never intended to sell lands west of the provisional boundary—west of the Sugar River and south of the Wisconsin River. White Crow brought a copy of the 1828 treaty to Prairie du Chien in 1829, arguing that it committed the U.S. to paying his people compensation for white trespasses and thefts of Indian lead, nothing more. Kayrahtshokan, or Clear Sky, reiterated White Crow’s point, saying that “the lead we are speaking of is our own; we are one of the Nations of Indians who have never sold.”²³³ Lewis Cass knew the serious nature of their claims. So, too, did Secretary of War John Henry Eaton and President Andrew Jackson.²³⁴ Though Congress would not appropriate funds for another year, Jackson deferred to Cass to settle the issue. Eaton urged swift action and directed the treaty commissioners to understand “the importance of the object to be obtained” and that it would be “far more difficult to obtain” if the federal government waited.²³⁵ Eaton and Jackson rushed the treaty council, holding it in 1829 instead of delaying until 1830, which Congress had preferred. Rather than securing compensation for white trespasses, however, the Ho-Chunks were forced to cede lands in question.²³⁶ All of what had transpired since 1827 had irrevocably altered Indian and white relations in and around the lead region. At the Portage, Henry Atkinson and Old Grayheaded Decorah, a prominent chief from a Baraboo river village, agreed to a provisional boundary between the lands of the United States and the Ho-Chunk: “The Wisconsin river, from its mouth

²³² Tezloff, “Diminishing Estate,” 56.

²³³ Ibid., 56, see n45.

²³⁴ Secretary of War John Henry Eaton to Treaty Commissioners, March 30, 1829, Treaty Journal, 1829, RG75, T494, roll 2, frame 151-152. For discussion of this correspondence see, Tezloff, “Diminishing Estate,” 41-60.

²³⁵ Tezloff, “Diminishing Estate,” 55.

²³⁶ Treaty with the Winnebago, July 29, 1829, in Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2, 300-302, <http://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers/id/18071> (accessed November 25, 2017)

to its nearest approach to the Blue Mounds; thence southerly, passing east of the said mounds, to the head of that branch of the Pocatolaka creek which runs near the Spotted Arm's village."²³⁷

Unhappy with the continued influx of miners and settlers in their lands, Ho-Chunks exacted financial retribution individually against trespassers. Several complaints by whites emerged in 1828, accusing the Ho-Chunk of robbing them of provisions, breaking their cooking utensils, and threatening to kill them if they did not leave. Most of these encounters took place near the area that General Henry Atkinson and the Ho-Chunks had agreed would be reserved for Indian miners after Red Bird's uprising.²³⁸ In April, fifty to seventy-five mounted Ho-Chunks intercepted two young men from southern Illinois making their way to the lead mines. Then 14 years old, Solon Langworthy recalled that the Indians "made a thorough examination of our equipment and person." The young men were scared off, but later that evening, ten more Indian men entered their new camp and seated themselves at the fire. Langworthy and his companion had the wherewithal to offer the men tobacco. The Indians accepted it and lit a pipe to share. Langworthy was surprised when the visitors gave the two young men some venison and allowed them to continue on their way to the mines.²³⁹ The greater message was clear to the miners; the Ho-Chunk would control activity in the region, where the American government would not.

²³⁷ Mark Diedrich lists "Old Gray" as one of many names by which Old Grayheaded Decorah was known. Others include Kenokah or Kunuga (Eldest), Hicawazsepskaga (White War Eagle), and Warrahwikoogah (Bird Spirit). Old Grayheaded Decorah was born in 1747 and lived until 1836. His village on the Baraboo River, near Portage, remained until the forced removal of the entire Ho-Chunk nation west of the Mississippi in 1840, after the 1837 treaty that ceded all remaining Ho-Chunk lands east of the Mississippi. The Decorah family is among the most famous in Ho-Chunk history. Members are descendants of a French man named Sabrevior DeCarrie and a Ho-Chunk woman named Glory of the Morning (Hopockaw), who met sometime in the early-to-mid eighteenth century. The spellings of the name vary—I have chosen to use "Decorah." See Diedrich, *Winnebago Oratory*, 102.

²³⁸ Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, 126.

²³⁹ Solon M. Langworthy, "Autobiographical Sketch of Solon M. Langworthy," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 8, no. 3 (July 1910): 327. Lucy Murphy points out that Langworthy's original claim that the men were Fox Indians is probably incorrect. Langworthy's route ran proximate to Rock River Ho-Chunk villages. See Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, 127-128.

Then, in June of 1828, a group of mounted Ho-Chunks stopped a cattle drive headed to the newly constructed Fort Winnebago. The Ho-Chunks stampeded over a hundred cattle and chased off the driver, a white man named Thomas P. Clark. When Clark and his colleague Esau Johnson returned to the Sugar River area in search of their animals, a man they called Chief Old Spotted Arm charged out of his village, shouting at the top of his lungs at the two men to get out of his country and stay away from his lead mines. After a brief conversation, in which Johnson conveyed what he and Clark were after, Spotted Arm told them where they would find their cattle. The chief guided them the four miles himself, where, Johnson recalled, “he stopped and stayed watching us to see if we went the way we said we were going.” Johnson claimed that he and Clark traveled another four or five miles before they finally left Old Chief Spotted Arm’s gaze.²⁴⁰ The Ho-Chunk were serious about maintaining authority over their lands.²⁴¹ They showed great patience, relying on the authorities in the region to enact justice, but they took matters into their own hands when they deemed such action necessary.

In this increasing though negotiated co-occupation of their lands, Ho-Chunks reminded the Americans of treaty obligations. In 1828, Old Grayheaded Decorah and other Ho-Chunk leaders complained to American officials about unfulfilled treaty promises. Three summers earlier, Ho-Chunk leaders and orators had gathered with thousands of Native peoples at Prairie du Chien and, reluctantly, accommodated Anglo-American notions of tribe and property. At the end of that long process, it was the Americans who had failed to abide by the treaty they made. Nevertheless, Old Grayheaded Decorah had surrendered the accused Ho-Chunks—Red Bird and others—to the Americans in order to “keep our nation from a war, our women and children from

²⁴⁰ Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, 127.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

slaughter, and to save our country to live and hunt in.”²⁴² Old Grayheaded Decorah did not condone Red Bird’s actions, but he also did not openly blame the warriors. The violence, the chief concluded, resulted from the failure of the U.S. government to control its people. He sought to protect Ho-Chunk habits of subsistence, for his people’s autonomy and future in their homelands depended on it. In doing so, Decorah used a familiar Ho-Chunk reference to “home”—home was “where they have so long raised corn,” the place to which they returned for the Corn Moon.²⁴³

Defending in favor of Indians the boundaries of the 1825 Prairie du Chien treaty, however, was not the federal government’s primary objective, especially as the U.S. government prepared to buy the lead region from the Ho-Chunks. Immediately after the so-called Winnebago War, white miners and settlers invaded Ho-Chunk lands in far greater numbers. By January of 1828, an Indian agent estimated around 10,000 miners illegally mining and living in Ho-Chunk lands.²⁴⁴ Old Nawkaw and the Indian agent, Joseph Street, confronted one of these squatters that same year, a Missouri man named Henry Dodge who had entrenched himself and well over one hundred armed men working for him at a site locally known as Dodge’s Diggings.²⁴⁵ Some of his workers were slaves. From his stockade, Dodge and his workers defied the Ho-Chunk and Street’s calls for him to remove himself from Indian lands. Knowing they could not win a war against the Americans, nor rely on their Indian agent or nearby army troops to protect Indian sovereignty and territory, the Ho-Chunk yielded under duress by treaty in the interest of keeping the peace.

²⁴² Diedrich, *Winnebago Oratory*, 26.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁴⁴ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 88-9.

²⁴⁵ Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, 129-130. Dodge’s Diggings was near present day Dodgeville, Wisconsin. Henry Dodge was born in Vincennes, Indiana, in 1782, raised in Kentucky, and moved to Missouri with his family in 1796. When he moved to the lead region in 1827, he brought with him his wife, nine children, and several slaves. William Salter, “Henry Dodge, Governor of the Original Territory of Wisconsin,” *Iowa Historical Record* 5, no. 4 (October 1889): 337-61.

That the previous summer's violence continued to disturb Ho-Chunk life portended bad things to come. Whites disliked Indians and desired Ho-Chunk lands. Old Grayheaded Decorah feared he would lose his home. Ho-Chunks became the scapegoats for unsolved crimes, including murder and theft. In the early spring of 1828, a miner named John Bonner was found murdered in his home and area whites immediately suspected Ho-Chunks. "For a considerable time," a traveler to the region reported, the miners "carried on a most desolating crusade against these sons of the forest," targeting the Ho-Chunks whites believed perpetrated the murder. Bonner was among the first miners in the region and among the most successful, no doubt mining stolen lead on Ho-Chunk lands. Ho-Chunks were innocent of this crime, however. Bonner's longtime business partner, a white man named David D. McNutt, was convicted of the murder later that summer. So vicious were the miners' retaliations that a visitor to the region called it a "border war." The Ho-Chunks, "not prepared to repel the invasion [of miners], which was wholly unprovoked . . . were driven to seek safety in flight."²⁴⁶ Ho-Chunks relocated themselves away from the possibility of further conflict in the lead region.

The Ho-Chunks had long feared, and now had evidence, that the Americans would undermine their sovereignty and territorial claims. Ever since the U.S. displaced the British after the War of 1812, Ho-Chunks spoke about a dark cloud hanging over their country, while the Americans saw only clear skies. 1827 brought the storm. Michigan Governor Lewis Cass successfully convinced the War Department to garrison troops at Chicago, Green Bay, and Prairie du Chien forts and to construct a fort at the Portage.²⁴⁷ Moreover, white miners continued their invasion of Ho-Chunk lands and theft of Ho-Chunk lead, but in far greater numbers. By

²⁴⁶ Pliney Warriner, "Legends of the Winnebagoes," in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, vol. 1, 86.

²⁴⁷ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 86.

January of 1828, over ten thousand miners illegally occupied and mined Ho-Chunk lands.

Moreover, Ho-Chunks found guilty of murder during the 1827 uprising languished in prison.

In the fall of 1828, a delegation of Ho-Chunk Indians traveled to Washington D.C. in hopes of securing the release of their warriors still imprisoned for the murder of whites and *Métis* people the year before. The federal government wanted the Ho-Chunks' southern Rock River lands in the lead region, and so began informal negotiations with the delegates in Washington. Led by Old Nawkaw Caramani, the Ho-Chunk had brought with them their best interpreters: their newly appointed Indian agent John Kinzie and Pierre Paquette, the son of a Ho-Chunk woman and French-Canadian man. The Ho-Chunks would make the president hear their words. Old Nawkaw offered John Quincy Adams the customary ritual greeting from his now-distant homeland: "Father, the Great Spirit gave to his children, the Winnebagoes, a pleasant plant. It is good to smoke. I have it here [touching with his fingers the bowl of the pipe]. I give it to you in peace."²⁴⁸ One can only image how the five-foot, seven-inch Adams received Old Nawkaw, who, at nearly one hundred years of age, stood over six feet tall, adorned with medals from former presidents, the top of his bald head marked with a single patch of hair, and several plumes sticking out of the band he wore. Neither the chief's kind gesture nor his appearance dissuaded the president from pressing for more Ho-Chunk lands. The Ho-Chunks travelled far to secure the release of Ho-Chunk prisoners and were surprised with the president's request for land as a *quid pro quo*. Perhaps seeing no other way to clear the skies over his country and his people, Old Nawkaw offered "a small portion" of land to the Great Father. He could give no more, he

²⁴⁸ *National Intelligencer*, 6 December 1828. For collected excerpts of Ho-Chunk speeches in response to federal government's push for land cession after 1827 violence, see Diedrich, *Winnebago Oratory*, 22-35. See also Herman J. Viola, *Diplomats in Buckskins: A History of Indian Delegations in Washington City* (1981; reprint, Bluffton, South Carolina: Rivilo Books, 1995), 97-99. Viola offers more of Old Nawkaw's speech and more vivid descriptions of the encounter. Viola also explains that the Ho-Chunk delegation was stunned by President Adam's request for their lands. See also Louise Phelps Kellogg, "The Winnebago Visit to Washington in 1828," *Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters* 29 (Fall 1935): 347-353.

explained, because his people felt bound to hold “in perpetuity the soil which the Great Spirit had given them.”²⁴⁹ The Ho-Chunks indulged the Great Father by promising, upon returning home, to convince the warriors to allow white settlers some of the lands they now occupied. Federal commissioners and Ho-Chunk leaders would formalize the agreement in a land cession treaty at Prairie du Chien the following summer.

When the Ho-Chunk delegation arrived at Prairie du Chien in July 1829 to sign the treaty, the commissioners presented them with a document ceding a far larger portion of land than the Ho-Chunks had imagined. Expecting to cede a “small portion” of their mining land, Ho-Chunks now discovered that the cession stretched through the Fox-Wisconsin waterway, thereby taking from Ho-Chunks their navigational artery and the Great Carrying Place, or the Portage. Little Elk, an orator but also a member of a lower or Earth clan with authority to speak on his people’s behalf, desperately tried to make the Americans understand the crisis their proposed treaty would create: “You ask us to sell all our country and wander off into the boundless regions of the west. We do not own that country, and the deer, the elk, the beaver, the buffalo, and the otter, now

²⁴⁹ *National Intelligencer*, 6 December 1828. A common tactic to coerce land cession and removal treaties in the nineteenth century, Native delegations were summoned to Washington numerous times. The federal government intended to awe Native peoples with their cities and populations, to impress upon them the futility of resistance. These delegations were often detained by federal officials until they agreed, formally or informally, to a treaty council. In addition to Viola, *Diplomats in Buckskins*, see Katherine C. Turner, *Red Men Calling on the Great White Father* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951).

there, belong not to us....we have no right to kill them.”²⁵⁰ The Ho-Chunks had no interest in relocating further west, or any great distance from their villages.

American politicians and officials had been promoting the idea of removing all Indians then living east of the Mississippi for years, an idea that President Andrew Jackson would sign into law the following year. Americans promised good farming and good hunting, but Little Elk demurred. Such beliefs came not from a treaty, nor from a distant Great Father. Little Elk posed this question to the Americans: “Where in the name of God shall we and our families live if we give more [land]?” An incredulous Little Elk eventually shifted from cosmological expressions of belonging to more comprehensible ideas about homelands shared by both Americans and Indians. “Our wives and our children now seated behind us are dear to us,” Little Elk said, “and so is our country where rest in peace the bones of our ancestors.”²⁵¹

When invocation of Ho-Chunk cosmology and buried ancestors both failed to provoke compassion and concession from white officials, another respected chief of the Rock River band, Whirling Thunder, offered an even more down-to-earth plea; he spoke about subsistence. “Fathers, there are many of us here,” he began, with clear impatience. “We want to finish and go home,” he explained. The Ho-Chunks had come with the expectation of signing a treaty, getting their goods, and returning home without delay. Now the Americans had gotten greedy:

²⁵⁰ *National Intelligencer*, 6 December 1828, quoted in Diedrich, *Winnebago Oratory*, 31. Little Elk impressed Americans with his oratory. Henry Clay singled out Little Elk as the Ho-Chunk “possessing the greatest talent” when it came to speaking. Clay shared his thoughts with Little Elk, telling the orator that among all the Ho-Chunks, he was the most talented speaker. Little Elk was pleased to hear this and embraced the notion that he was “decidedly superior in abilities to any other individual of the tribe.” Caleb Atwater, one of three treaty commissioners at Prairie du Chien in 1829, described Little Elk’s style after hearing him speak: his “gestures were very graceful, but, in those parts of his speech, where he felt deeply what he said, his gesticulation was violent and his whole soul appeared to be agitated to the highest degree.” But for the interpreter, Atwater and the other commissioners may have missed the meaning of Little Elk’s speech as they observed the artistic orator. See Juliette Kinzie, *Wau-bun: The Early Day in the North West* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1856, Reprint, Philadelphia: Bibliobazaar, 2006), 75. Caleb Atwater, *Remarks Made on a Tour to Prairie du Chien* (Columbus, Ohio: Isaac N. Whiting, 1831), 121-23.

²⁵¹ Diedrich, *Winnebago Oratory*, 34.

If you get the land to where you ask, what can you do with it? If you can get all our country where can we go? We cannot get our living like the whites. We cannot live and work as they do. We must not be too crowded. What answer do you want? What can we say more than we have? What can we say tomorrow? We do not work the land as you do. We wish to raise our own lead in our own way on the piece left.²⁵²

Ho-Chunks knew better than to build their corn hills too close together or to crowd themselves too closely to their neighbors. But Americans had no regard for this Indigenous logic. Corn was undoubtedly on Whirling Thunder's mind. Knowing the Ho-Chunks would not be successful in reducing U.S. demands, he wished to return home before the Corn Moon.

Losing land disrupted the cultural, physiological, and spiritual ties that bound Ho-Chunk people to their Rock River lands. When Little Elk explained to the treaty negotiators in 1829 that his people had no right to the game outside of the place where Earthmaker put his people, he was expressing the spiritual and subsistence crisis that would arise if outsiders disrupted any part of Ho-Chunk existence. Those who lived in a watchful world could not help but ponder such dilemmas even while others ignored them. Perhaps Ho-Chunks living in villages along the lower Rock River wondered if their spirit-beings would follow them to new lands or if Earthmaker would give them permission to live, hunt, and cultivate someplace else. Such crises could not be resolved by touching pen to paper. Whereas Ho-Chunk people sought a balance between the visible and the invisible worlds—which they practiced by planting corn in the spring and harvesting it in late summer and dotting their landscape with tobacco fields—whites could not see the spirit-beings and their relationships with the Ho-Chunks, which structured the Ho-Chunks' world.²⁵³

²⁵² Ibid., 35.

²⁵³ Anthony Chennells eloquently conveys a similar idea in his work on how whites and blacks related to one another during sustained colonial encounters in Africa: "What Africans saw as places crowded with ancestral associations and spiritual presences, the whites saw as empty spaces waiting to be shaped by their creative will.

Ho-Chunk peoplehood and yearnings to keep their land were often lost on white officials. Whites dismissed Indigenous talk of spirit-beings and tobacco offerings as irrational and impractical, even as they deployed their own rhetoric linking divine provenance and national expansion. Ho-Chunk concerns over alienation from traditional resources met with simplistic responses: Could Ho-Chunks not hunt deer elsewhere, or take fish from a different lake or river? Even when Ho-Chunks articulated their multiple, overlapping attachments to places, as Son of Caramani and The Smoker did in 1815 and 1816 and Little Elk and Old Grayheaded Decorah did in the 1820s, whites ignored these cosmological complexities or looked past them toward their objectives of transferring Indian lands to the federal government.

The vast majority of American officials and settlers interested in Ho-Chunk lands did not take seriously the watchful world of their indigenous owners. But a few white newcomers showed kindness and empathy. Indian agent John Kinzie began his appointment at the Portage in 1828, and his wife, Juliette, joined him in the agency house in 1830, where they lived for three years. During this time, they both developed an intimate understanding of and appreciation for Ho-Chunk culture and life in the Rock River country. In her memoir, Juliette Kinzie reflected upon her time among the Ho-Chunks and discussed their place-based spirituality; she called it a “natural religion”:

The Indians appear to have no idea of a retribution beyond this life. They have a strong appreciation of the great fundamental virtues of natural religion—the worship of the Great Spirit, brotherly love, parental affection, honesty, temperance, and chastity. Any infringement of the laws of the Great Spirit, by a departure from these virtues, they believe will excite his anger and draw down punishment. These are their principles. That their practice evinces more and more a departure from them, under the debasing influences of a proximity to the whites, is a melancholy truth, which no one will admit with so much sorrow as those who

What to blacks structured space was to the whites wilderness.” See Chennells, “Reading Doris Lessing’s Rhodesian Stories in Zimbabwe,” in *Pursuit of Doris Lessing*, ed. Claire Sprague (London: Macmillan, 1990), 25.

lived among them, and esteemed them, before this signal change had taken place.²⁵⁴

Juliette Kinzie understood the Ho-Chunk ceremonies, offerings, and prayers she observed to be necessary practices among the Indians, who linked these activities to good harvests and good hunts. They were a matter of subsistence and survival. Kinzie's observations offer unique glimpses into Ho-Chunk life, even while they also overlook the capacity of the Ho-Chunks to adapt to and incorporate aspects of non-Indian society.

Like his wife, John Kinzie found intrinsic value in Ho-Chunk lifeways and beliefs. As an Indian agent, John Kinzie exercised influence over protecting Ho-Chunk culture and interests. While Joseph Street, the main agent for the Ho-Chunks, pushed to impose elements of civilization policy on the entire Ho-Chunk nation, John Kinzie listened when the Indians of his agency pushed back. He did try to convince the Ho-Chunks that Euro-American education would benefit Indian children. Old Grayheaded Decorah responded, explaining to Kinzie why he did not want to send his Ho-Chunk children to American schools: "we do not wish to do anything contrary to the will of the Great Spirit . . . Father, we think that if the Great Spirit had wished us to be like the whites, he would have made us so."²⁵⁵ John Kinzie respected Old Gray's decision not to send his people's children away from their ancestral lands.

In the face of profound loss, Old Grayheaded Decorah articulated deep and spiritual attachments to place. American officials who came for Ho-Chunk lands heard many similar place-stories from Ho-Chunk orators and chiefs. The Americans had their own place-stories, of course. The potent narrative underpinning the federal policy of Indian removal—the one that told of its benevolence and justified its morality—manifested itself in Andrew Jackson's many

²⁵⁴ Kinzie, *Wau-bun*, 283.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

speeches and addresses throughout his presidency. Jackson's removal narrative, however, ignored an indigenous worldview and recast agricultural peoples as roaming savages, thereby diminishing Native attachments to their homelands.²⁵⁶

Conclusion

Speeches given by Old Grayheaded Decorah and other Ho-Chunks, their talk of Ho-Chunk moons, lore, and sacred history, told a powerful place-story and illuminated Ho-Chunk peoplehood. This place-story tells us that Ho-Chunks knew their environment and how to survive in it. It tells us what resources the Ho-Chunk people valued most. It says much, in short, about Ho-Chunk identity. If people are what they eat, this place-story tells us that the Ho-Chunks were corn people. They were farmers and gardeners. In contrast to non-Native misunderstandings and misapplied notions of nomadism that underpinned nineteenth-century federal policies aimed at "civilization" and "removal" of Indians, Ho-Chunk seasonal migrations reveal Ho-Chunk meanings of home, a homeland of permanent villages surrounded by fields and gardens.

Understanding Ho-Chunk people as farmers runs contrary to widespread misunderstandings among nineteenth-century whites about subsistence-based peoples. The policy of Indian removal, a cornerstone of federal Indian policy for over two decades beginning in 1830, relied on popular and pernicious perceptions of Native people as roaming hunters without fields, nomads without established homes. Ho-Chunks' moon calendars, corn and

²⁵⁶ A classic study on discourse around Indian removal is Anthony F.C. Wallace, *The Long, Bitter Trail: Andrew Jackson and the Indians* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993). For an excellent and focused study, see Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green, *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2007). For discussion of Indian removal rhetoric and discourse in the north and western Great Lakes, see Bowes, *Land Too Good For Indians*; Saler, *The Settlers' Empire*; Jean O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasing: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

tobacco origin stories, and old Gray's desire to "raise corn as we always have" together form a counter-narrative about Ho-Chunks as farmers with deep-rooted attachments to their homelands. Not only did Ho-Chunk people live in permanent villages, a necessary feature of that permanence was their gardens and fields. Their subsistence landscape, their hinterland, existed beyond these villages. And so survival required Ho-Chunks to move from their primary village sites at certain times of the year. These villages were never emptied, and large hunting parties traveling great distances did so intending to return and only in deference to the demands of the Corn Moon. Removal narratives relied on Native American mobility as an essential and inferior trait to undermine Indigenous sense of place and belonging. Ho-Chunk seasonal migrations only reinforced their longing for home, to return to their villages, because home was where dried corn was cached, family waited, and dwelling fires burned. When Old Grayheaded Decorah spoke to Pliney Warriner about his people raising corn, he was speaking of all this.

Chapter Two

Keeping the Peace:

Rock River Ho-Chunks and the 1832 Crisis of Black Hawk's Return

In April of 1832, around 1,200 people from the confederated Sauk and Fox tribes returned east of the Mississippi River, acting on an invitation from White Cloud, a Rock River Ho-Chunk village chief. The Sauk and Fox had been removed to Iowa the previous year and the harvest there had not gone well. White Cloud invited them to live and plant corn among his people, who still lived in Illinois. White response to the return catapulted the event into a crisis and, ultimately, the Black Hawk War. Contemporary accounts of the 1832 crisis from white settlers and officials, often the product of rumors or hearsay, dwelled on recent events, specifically Ho-Chunk violence against white and *Métis* people in the lead region. They argued that Black Hawk's return east of the Mississippi stemmed from the Ho-Chunks' desire to avenge the Americans for their earlier trespasses as well as the 1829 land cession. However, this viewpoint, dominant in both the nineteenth century and in modern scholarship, overlooks more significant factors that guided Ho-Chunk policies during this 1832 crisis: war and violence held no advantage for the Ho-Chunks. In fact, turmoil undermined Ho-Chunk peoplehood and autonomy by threatening their corn crop, the key to their survival, as well as control over their lands. These were the lessons of Tecumseh's death and of the failed pan-Indian alliance that he and the Shawnee Prophet began building in the first decade of the nineteenth century. That alliance, with British support, focused on protecting western Indian lands from white incursions. More proximate, this was the lesson of the so-called Winnebago War, which cost the Ho-Chunks millions of acres of resource-rich lands.¹

¹ For brief overview of dialog between Major John Bliss and White Cloud in April 1832, in which the Winnebago Prophet denounces American interpretations that his invitation to the Sauk band was anything more than

Historians have focused on Indian desires to resurrect a pan-Indian alliance and resist the Americans, but for the Sauk band, White Cloud's villagers, and his Rock River Ho-Chunk brethren, the invitation to the Sauk band was about caring for kin and strengthening Ho-Chunk presence in their sacred ancestral homelands. The Ho-Chunks sought to make up for the failures of the federal government, which designed policies to displace Indian peoples, but not place them in fertile regions. As Black Hawk complained about his people's Iowa relocation, "The corn that had been given us, was soon found to be inadequate to our wants."² Black Hawk's understanding of these failures was acute, and quite present in his 1833 autobiography. The Sauk band made their suffering in Iowa known to their agent and to the Great Father: "I anxiously hoped that something would be done for my people, that [starvation] might be avoided. But there was bad management somewhere, or the difficulty [the Black Hawk War] that has taken place would have been avoided."³ In the months preceding the Sauk band's desperate migration eastward to Ho-Chunk lands in April 1832, their civil chiefs begged to visit the Great Father in Washington so he could see their suffering. The Sauk band was ignored, however, and their corn rations remained insufficient. As the Rock River Ho-Chunks would learn in the winter and spring of 1832 and 1833, during their own more intense starving time, the federal government implemented cruel policies poorly and did not seek dialogue.

When military officer John Bliss and agent Felix St. Vrain accused White Cloud in early April of attempting to make trouble with the Americans, White Cloud rebuked the men with a clear message of peace. As concerns grew among the Sauk leaders that Americans were gearing up for a fight, Black Hawk recalled White Cloud's unwillingness to believe that the Americans

a kind invitation to starving kin to plant corn among the Ho-Chunk, see Donald Jackson, ed., *Black Hawk: An Autobiography* (Chicago: Illini Books, 1955; reprint, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 119n91.

² Ibid., 114.

³ Ibid., 118.

could be so unwise: “The prophet said he would not listen to this talk, because no war chief dare molest us as long as we are at peace. That we had a right to go where we pleased peaceably.”⁴ Understanding that a chance for warfare might excite the younger men of the Sauk band, the prophet urged Black Hawk to keep quiet about rumors of a large American force convening at Rock Island, not to share this with the warriors of the Sauk band, lest they become excited to fight. White Cloud and Black Hawk, in short, desired peace, not war.

In virtually every history written about the so-called Black Hawk War, leaders among the Rock River Ho Chunks are portrayed as the instigators of the crisis and Black Hawk is described as the leader of his band. Together they supposedly waged war on the Americans. All the Native bands and tribes who refused to fight actively against the Sauk bands are characterized as naïve, misled by their former British allies, hoping to revive a long dead pan-tribal alliance. Most historians view the Black Hawk War as another episode in the “Indian struggle to retain lands east of the Mississippi in the face of white expansion,” as John Hall puts it.⁵ Hall, Patrick Jung, and Kerry Trask have published the three most recent books on the Black Hawk War, and all see the events of 1832 as the finale in the regional struggle that began with Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa nearly a quarter century earlier.⁶

Patrick Jung, for example, directly compares the Winnebago Prophet, or White Cloud, to Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee Prophet, who helped build the Nativist revitalization among Tecumseh’s followers. He places a great deal of blame on the Winnebago Prophet’s followers,

⁴ Ibid., 119. Black Hawk suggests the Prophet thought the Indian alliance was not “yet ready” to make war on the Americans, that they needed to nurture their alliance more. This may have been Black Hawk’s attempt to place blame on the Prophet for the war, or if the Prophet told Black Hawk these things, the Ho-Chunk village chief may have desired only to help ensure that the Sauk band’s warriors would remain peaceful.

⁵ John Hall, *Uncommon Defense: Indian Allies in the Black Hawk War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 8.

⁶ Patrick Jung, *The Black Hawk War of 1832* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 3-9; Kerry Trask, *Black Hawk: The Battle for the Heart of America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007), 1-7.

arguing that Rock River Ho-Chunks waged their own limited war against the Americans in 1827.⁷ According to Hall, many Rock River Ho-Chunk sympathized with Black Hawk in 1832 on “the basis of shared experience” as well as intermarriage and “in several instances,” Hall writes, “joined his war against the Americans.”⁸ Jung reinforces this narrative of war, in which the Ho-Chunk, in order to become legitimate actors in the story, are forced onto one side or the other. The Rock River Ho-Chunks, Jung argues, had “several reasons why they supported the British Band during the Black Hawk War.”⁹ One of these, as Jung argues, was Ho-Chunk ignorance about the power of the United States. “Chiefs from the Wisconsin River, Mississippi River, and Fox River bands predominated” in the fifteen-member delegation to Washington in 1828, Jung explains, while only one leader from the Rock River band attended. This leader, “surprisingly, was White Crow,” Jung writes. According to Jung, the trip cowed the other tribal leaders who understood the power of the United States and size of its citizenry but White Crow did not heed the same lesson or least did not allow his knowledge of US might to suppress his support for Black Hawk, whom the orator supported “covertly rather than openly.”¹⁰ Denying the Ho-Chunks their lesson from the 1827 violence, Hall places the Ho-Chunks in a conflict with two main belligerents—Black Hawk and the United States—but he allows them some degree of forethought. Ho-Chunks, he says, “effected a measured alliance with the Americans by offering

⁷ Jung *Black Hawk War*, 5-7, 56-57. For Jung’s examination deep-rooted anti-Americanism among the Rock River Ho-Chunk, see Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 39-50. Jung explains that contemporary white Americans “tended to see [White Cloud] as a latter-day equivalent of the Shawnee Prophet” and adds that this perception may have been exaggerated for a couple reasons. Most important is that White Cloud “played a less influential role than his predecessor,” Tenskwatawa, among the region’s Indians and he “failed to park a widespread interest in militant nativism.” Only then does Jung explain that White Cloud, the Winnebago Prophet “talked little of resistance and instead preached mostly a message of healing an salvation.” See Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 56.

⁸ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 8.

⁹ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 78.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

scouts.”¹¹ The Ho-Chunks, he also says, provided a non-violent service to the Americans, “to demonstrate fealty to the Great Father while avoiding direct confrontation with the Sauk band.”¹²

What is missing in most recent histories of the 1832 crisis and conflict is the suspension of assumptions that might allow for a different narrative. First, neither Black Hawk, White Cloud, or even the bitter Rock River Ho-Chunks wanted a war with Americans, nor did they believe they could win one. The Sauk band was not a war party. Second, to assign a malicious form of agency to the Ho-Chunks, citing their offering of scouts to the Americans to put on a good show of loyalty, is to overlook the day-to-day events in April, May, and June of 1832, during which the Ho-Chunk desperately tried to avert disaster. Many Ho-Chunk identified with the Sauk war leader’s cause, but Ho-Chunks had a longer struggle and longer view. Still, in their relations with U.S. government representatives, Ho-Chunks have been portrayed as dishonest in their pledges of peace, and in relation to their Sauk and Fox kin. The same scholars characterize the Ho-Chunks as naïve in their belief that another pan-Indian alliance could take on the United States in another war. Arguments like these, however, have not taken into account how representatives of the Rock River Ho-Chunks prioritized land tenure and corn cultivation above all else. To paint the Ho-Chunks as a vengeful and shortsighted people in the 1830s is to ignore their sophisticated understanding of the world, a world they had helped shape. In this chapter, I argue that scholars overlook the importance of corn to the Rock River Ho-Chunks. Ho-Chunks were not naïve and simple, but rather sophisticated and diplomatic in their dealings with U.S. authorities. Unlike whites, whose actions escalated the conflict, the Ho-Chunk, and White Crow in particular, were not malicious in their intent. The Ho-Chunks of the 1830s had developed

¹¹ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 8.

¹² *Ibid.*

ways of dealing with whites—and their empires and nations—who had been encroaching on their turf for decades.

Yet the Ho-Chunk people—chiefs, orators, and villagers—responded to the 1832 crisis as well as encroaching white settlement differently in the 1830s than their ancestors had responded to outsiders in the past. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Ho-Chunks had retreated to the interior of their lands, isolating themselves from white newcomers and centers of trade. In contrast, Ho-Chunk leaders in the spring of 1832 inserted themselves into the center of American military and diplomatic developments surrounding the April crisis that developed into the Black Hawk War. A particular village chief bore responsibility for inviting the Sauk Band to his village, but the Ho-Chunks' response to the crisis that followed stretched from his lower Rock River village near present-day Dixon, Illinois to the villages of the upper Rock River, Four Lakes, Horicon Marsh, and the Portage in Wisconsin. The vast majority of the Ho-Chunk nation believed that keeping peace in the region and preserving their homelands required their leaders to neutralize the crisis in its early stages through dialogue and negotiation. The Ho-Chunks, in short, needed to prevent an invasion of their lands by American troops. Convincing the Americans—especially the militiamen and officers commanding enlisted soldiers—that neither they nor the Sauk band intended harm to whites would be a tall order. Neither Black Hawk nor many of the civil chiefs leading the Sauk band wanted to return to the dire conditions of their Iowa reservation. Moreover, it seems likely that Rock River Ho-Chunk leaders, including the Winnebago Prophet and White Crow, believed that the Americans would calm down and allow the Sauk band to remain among their kin. This early decision by some Ho-Chunk leaders was likely challenged by others which undoubtedly helped to cast the Ho-Chunks as instigators of the conflict that would result. However, upon closer examination of the available evidence, mainly

accounts of meetings among Americans, Sauk band leaders, and Ho-Chunks, decisions and motivations on all sides were complex; they were often miscast or misinterpreted, sometimes intentionally, in ways that all but ensured bloodshed.

This chapter examines numerous councils held in April, May, and June of 1832 between the Americans and the Ho-Chunks as well as meetings that included leaders of the Sauk band. Inconsistencies in the message Ho-Chunks conveyed to the Americans were sometimes the fault of Ho-Chunk leaders, and sometimes intentional. But inconsistencies in the Ho-Chunk message frequently stemmed from misunderstandings, too. Indian agents, militia, and army officers almost always failed to recognize the bigger picture of Ho-Chunk actions and words, their motivations and objectives. This chapter demonstrates that across many councils and meetings in the spring of 1832, what seems like a cacophony of Ho-Chunk voices actually harmonized into rational and uniform goals: keep the peace and plant corn.

The Gathering Storm

The storm that would eventually erupt into the Black Hawk War began innocently enough, as 1,200 removed Indian people returned east of the Mississippi River on April 5, 1832. Among the families of Sauk, Fox, and Kickapoo people who followed many leaders was the elderly Sauk war leader Black Hawk. The majority identified as Sauk, though many were related by blood or marriage to different tribal groups among the Sauk, Fox, Ho-Chunk, Kickapoo, and Potawatomi peoples. Settlers and soldiers in 1832 called them the “enemy band” and historians since have referred to them as either “Black Hawk’s band” or “the British Band,” harkening to the Sauk and Fox tribal past as military allies to the British against the Americans in the War of

1812.¹³ None of these terms reflect the mixed identities, complex social structure, or peaceful intentions of these people. I will call them the “Sauk band.”

In 1829, the fields at Saukenuk, at the confluence of the Mississippi and Rock rivers, were thrown open to American settlement. When this happened, most of the Sauk followed the lead of Keokuk, a civil chief who preferred accommodation of American demands to resistance, and established new villages on the west bank of the great river. A faction resisted removal until the summer of 1831, when a force commanded by General Edmund Gaines persuaded Black Hawk and his fellow villagers to leave their homeland.¹⁴

The Sauk and Fox had been the earliest victims of the federal government’s removal policy in the Upper Midwest. In 1831, federal troops pushed them west into Iowa from Saukenauk, their ancestral village in Illinois, which they had occupied since the mid-eighteenth century. The move brought great hardship and much deprivation among the Indians, especially because in their newly granted lands, they were increasingly dependent on government provisions. A once strong and independent people who chose their own allies, made their own decisions, and lived their lives as they had for generations by planting corn, hunting, fishing, and subsisting on their own terms, they now seemed to be prisoners of policy, confined on land they did not know and could not cultivate.¹⁵ These needless hardships led at least one Rock River

¹³ Virtually all historians of the Black Hawk War use the term “British Band” to refer to the Sauk band. John Hall locates the origin of the term to the tribal factions among the Sauk that emerged in 1829 after the federal government issued removal orders based on the 1804 treaty. Those who resisted were seen by Americans as pro-British and anti-American. See Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 88-91, and Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 23-24, 56. For an early example of military officers referring to the Sauk band as the “British Band,” see John Bliss to Henry Atkinson, 6 April 1832, *The Black Hawk War, 1831-1832*, ed. Ellen M. Whitney, vol. 2, bk. 1, *Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library* (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1973-75), 227. For the Sauk and Fox alliance with the British against the Americans, see Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 14-17, 27-39.

¹⁴ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 98-115.

¹⁵ Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 104, 113n86, 114; Roger L. Nichols, *Black Hawk and the Warrior’s Path* (Wheeling, Illinois.: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1992), 88-100.

Ho-Chunk village chief to take pity on them when they decided to return to more familiar and productive terrain.

The Ho-Chunk chief Wabokieshek, also known as White Cloud or the Winnebago Prophet, invited members of the Sauk nation to return to Illinois and join his village in 1831. Instead of suffering in Iowa, Sauk people could plant corn in Ho-Chunk fields and hunt in familiar lands that the Native communities had shared over the years. There was no malice in this invitation. As John Hall explains, the Ho-Chunks offered the Sauk band “an alternative vision of alliance, one that fulfilled their needs far better than that offered by the Great Father.”¹⁶ The Ho-Chunks’ invitation in 1831, and the decision by several civil chiefs of the Sauk band to accept it in 1832, demonstrated the agency of these Native groups in the age of removal.

Contemporaries and historians, however, have suspected White Cloud’s motives. Early historians, such as Reuben Thwaites, cast him as a primary provocateur for the war. The prophet’s visit to the Sauk and Fox Indian agent and the major highlight the precarious position his own village was in. Wabokieshek had promised Indian agent Henry Gratiot that his villagers would relocate north of the Illinois border and had yet to do so.

Historians agree, generally, that the Sauk band’s intentions for returning are unclear. This analytical ambiguity stems in large part from scholars’ focus on the Sauk band and the identification of Black Hawk as its leader.¹⁷ Despite claims in numerous historical accounts, the

¹⁶ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 110.

¹⁷ For example, John Hall writes, “No one knew exactly what Black Hawk intended to do. His own followers entertained divergent thoughts about their captain’s designs, ranging from the reoccupation of their old village at Saukenauk to waging a pan-Indian war against the United States with British backing. In all likelihood, Black Hawk was looking for an opportunity to restore some modicum of Sauk sovereignty, first by simply reentering Illinois and later by planting corn or making war as the circumstances allowed.” Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 129-30. Patrick Jung writes, “In his autobiography, Black Hawk does not clearly state what he and his lieutenants hope to accomplish with this plan to cross the Mississippi in 1832. The available evidence strongly suggests that Black Hawk and the Winnebago Prophet hoped that by attracting the support of the regional tribes and the British in Canada, they would be able to produce a strong show of force. Then the United States, wishing to avoid an Indian war, would be compelled to reconsider its policy and let the British Band remain on the east side of

Sauk band did not intend to reestablish themselves in their Saukenuk homes. Their destination was the lower Rock River village of Wabokieshek, or present-day Prophetstown. The village of Wabokieshek was multi-ethnic, its inhabitants reflecting the long history of intermarriage among the Ho-Chunk, Sauk, and Fox people, and the Sauk band intended to seek temporary help among kin.

The Americans viewed the situation differently. Illinois Governor John Reynolds considered the Sauk band's presence in Illinois a hostile invasion. Reynolds also identified the war chief Black Hawk as the band's leader. Such designations labeled the band as a "war party" instead of what it was: a band of over a thousand migrants made up of extended families. It is this initial misunderstanding, handed down by generations of historians, that clouds the events surrounding the so-called Black Hawk War. In response to a perceived threat, Governor Reynolds called out the Illinois militia, and Brigadier General Henry Atkinson mobilized companies of enlisted army soldiers and out-of-state militiamen from his post at Fort Armstrong, at Rock Island, which were former Sauk homelands.¹⁸

The Rock River Ho-Chunks and the Sauk band were not prepared for such extreme reactions on the part of the Americans, especially since the Ho-Chunks had invited the Sauk band to live with them and raise corn that summer, not make war.¹⁹ The immediate and visceral American reaction to Black Hawk's return unsettled many people in the Rock River band. Some

the Mississippi." See Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 73. Black Hawk states several times the reasons for his return, however. In one of his most simple expressions, he writes that his hope was "that my people would be once more happy. If I could accomplish this, I would be satisfied." He explains that returning east of the Mississippi to live among the Ho-Chunk, cultivate sufficient corn, and enjoy British if not American support, would accomplish this. "I am now growing old, and could spend the remnant of my time anywhere. But I wish first to see my people happy ... This has always been my constant aim." With assurances from White Cloud, Black Hawk began "to hope that our sky will soon be clear." See Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 116.

¹⁸ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 129-132.

¹⁹ Black Hawk's return to Illinois to plant corn and live with the Ho-Chunks at the Winnebago Prophet's village is well documented in the historical record and acknowledged by historians of the conflict. See Jackson, *Black Hawk: An Autobiography*, 88. The Winnebago Prophet was questioned by an American military officer in May 1832. See Felix St. Vrain to William Clark, 6 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 230.

leaders spoke out, preferring that the Sauk band stay away from their country to avoid attracting unwanted attention from federal authorities, while others believed violence would be averted so long as the band's actions remained peaceful.²⁰ However, violence would soon occur. And, in the eyes of many observers, the Americans were at fault for drawing first blood. After the first violent encounter between white militiamen and members of the Sauk band, for instance, Wabokieshiek blamed the Americans for provoking war on a community of peaceful Indians. Several weeks after the end of the 1832 conflict, Thomas Forsyth, the Indian agent for the Sauk and Fox until 1830, chastised federal officials and military men for their aggressive approach to the Sauk band's return and blamed William Clark for mishandling the situation (as well as for dismissing him as an Indian agent).²¹ At the time, however, Forsyth did little to defuse the situation. That April, he opined that because "the Winnebago Prophet spoke his mind very freely to major Bliss... blood will be shed before an end of the difficulties."²² Forsyth wrote to a former sub-agent of the Sauk and Fox sharing early criticisms suggest that some understood the Indian reunion as harmless.²³

If anything, the decision to reunite the Sauk band with the Ho-Chunks can be considered as defensive, not offensive. Though averse to open warfare, the Rock River Ho-Chunks living adjacent to recently-ceded lands may have regarded the returning kinsman as part of a strategic move to build strength and deter further white settlement in the region. Whatever their

²⁰ White Cloud believed that conflict was only likely if the Americans desired it. See Whitney, ed., *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 230-31.

²¹ Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 190n82.

²² Thomas Forsyth to John Connolly, 16 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 262. Connolly was a former sub-agent to the Sauk and Fox, though his position or career in 1832 is unknown. Forsyth also estimated that the Sauk band had the support of Indians in the area to wield a fighting force of 2,000 warriors, which Henry Atkinson's force would not be able to contain. It is reasonable to assume that Forsyth shared his opinions about imminent frontier warfare with others.

²³ See Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 118-120. See also correspondence between John Bliss and Henry Atkinson between April 3 and April 9, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 222-223, 227-229, 237. See also, George Davenport to Henry Atkinson, 13 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 247.

motivations for inviting the Sauk back, however, the Rock River Ho-Chunks did not foresee the American response to their return, in particular, the Americans' focus on Black Hawk, a sixty-six-year-old Sauk man who enjoyed no hereditary power or influence among his people. Once the reality of mounting conflict became clear, and the federal military presence threatened peace in the region, the Rock River Ho-Chunks took immediate actions to defuse the situation and thwart a potential frontier war that would jeopardize their autonomy in and access to their homelands.

Scholars overlook this unified response among the Rock River Ho-Chunks and fail to assess how inviting their kin, the Sauk band, to join their villages served their long-term interests in peace and remaining in their ancestral lands. Patrick Jung, for instance, views actions among Rock River Ho-Chunk leaders in April 1832 as “contradictory,” despite their collective message advocating peace.²⁴ This is not to say that White Crow did not lie; he lied a lot. But historians have not covered the deeper meaning and consistent message behind his untruths. Because White Crow may have told the Sauk band leaders one thing and the Americans another, historians dismiss the orator as unreliable and duplicitous in his dealings with the Americans.²⁵ White Crow, however, was performing a delicate balancing act aimed at maintaining peace and protecting cornfields. In fact, at the core of Ho-Chunk strategy was the lesson they had learned from the violence of 1827 and the punitive treaty of 1829; they must prevent American blood from being spilled on their lands, especially by members of their band or nation.

The Ho-Chunks in 1832 wanted no more fighting with the Americans. The costs were too high, likely resulting in the further loss of their homelands. As seasonal people rooted to their cornfields during each growing season, the Ho-Chunks needed peace to produce a healthy

²⁴ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 77-79.

²⁵ *Ibid.*; Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 152-154, 163-165, 169-171, 173-174, 176-178, 209, 110, 211, 248-249. Whitney, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 323n2 and vol. 2, bk. 2, 1331, 1332n8.

crop. During their Corn Moon—May through August—everything was subordinated to this crop’s needs. 1832 was no different. As much as Ho-Chunk women kept weeds from their crops, their leaders also needed to keep human intruders from disturbing their fields and labor. One pass of a marching army or a mounted militia would lay a season’s work to ruin, assuring starvation in the coming winter. This was precisely the fate from which they had hoped to save the Sauk people. Now, Ho-Chunk subsistence depended on their deft handling of mounting tensions with the American forces mobilizing in the area as well as members of the Sauk band, most of whom had no desire to return to their reservation. The responsibility of diffusing the impending crisis fell largely to the Ho-Chunk orator, White Crow, and civil chief, Whirling Thunder, though other village chiefs and orators engaged in peacekeeping early on, too.

The primary headmen or civil chiefs of the Rock River Ho-Chunks included Spotted Arm, the fierce watchdog for his Sugar River village, Man-Eater, and Little Priest, as well as Whirling Thunder. White Crow, the Rock River band’s orator, seems to have traveled with and spoken for Little Priest and Whirling Thunder in 1832.²⁶ White Crow’s village was home to over a thousand Ho-Chunks and extensive corn fields. Whether that village was located on the northwest shore of Lake Koshkonong (present-day Carcajou Point) or on the west end of Lake Mendota (present-day Middleton) is unclear.²⁷ It is likely that White Crow called both villages home between 1828 and 1832, and that he and numerous occupants moved between these locations, preparing, planting, and cultivating fields of corn and other crops.

By the end of April 1832, White Crow and Whirling Thunder traveled first to the Portage agency house, then to Turtle Village (present-day Beloit), to the Prophet’s village in Illinois, and

²⁶ Some sources indicate that White Crow carried the title of War Chief, as did Little Priest. See Whitney, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 469n4.

²⁷ For White Crow’s village locations, see A.B. Stout, and H.L. Skavlem, “The Archaeology of the Lake Koshkonong Region,” *Wisconsin Archeologist*, 7, no. 2 (April-June 1908): 74-90.

finally to Fort Armstrong at Rock Island, Illinois, where the Rock River joins the Mississippi. At every location, and at every council they convened, the two Ho-Chunk men spoke of peace and friendship with the Americans, and placed the utmost priority of their people on being left alone to care for their fields. More councils between the Americans and Ho-Chunk people would follow in May and June at Blue Mounds, Gratiot's Grove, Porter's Grove, and Four Lakes as the conflict evolved. In every instance, Ho-Chunk speakers and leaders pleaded for their corn, and by extension, their survival. Though this message persisted throughout the spring of 1832, it has been marginalized or ignored by many historians.

The Ho-Chunk, accustomed to following the dictates of the corn season, would not have wanted to interrupt their rigorous and precise planting schedule with warfare. Always during the spring and summer months, Ho-Chunks subordinated all other subsistence activities to the demands of planting and cultivating corn, beginning with building and repairing corn hills and beds and rows for planting. This work began in April. Abel Rasdell, a Kentucky-born fur trader who had been living and working near Lake Kegonsa (present-day Pleasant Springs, north of Stoughton) since 1831, estimated that Ho-Chunk fields in the Four Lakes, or Madison area, produced "a minimum annual yield of 3,000 bushels of maize."²⁸ White Crow's Fourth Lake village would have produced a great deal more corn than his Koshkonong village due to its location on the more arable prairie. But even in the swamps of Koshkonong, the villagers cultivated some fifteen contiguous acres of raised fields and a scattering of other corn hills.²⁹ As the official orator of the Rock River Indians, White Crow bore the burden of making the

²⁸ Charles Brown, "Lake Monona," *Wisconsin Archeologist* 1 (December 1922): 125. Rasdell's estimate is accepted by William Gartner in his study of raised fields in Wisconsin, see William Gustav Gartner, "Raised Field Landscapes of Native North America" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003), 340. For description of Abel Rasdall's fur trade business, his connection to the Ho-Chunk people, and his role in the Black Hawk war as a scout, see David V. Mollenhoff, *Madison, A History of the Formative Years* (1982; reprint, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 16-20.

²⁹ Gartner, "Raised Field Landscapes of Native North America," 335-337.

Americans understand the importance of corn for all Rock River Indians, and he did so in impassioned pleas, over and again. Events in the spring of 1832 increased this burden.

Historians have tried to paint a portrait of White Crow, a man often mistakenly referred to as a Ho-Chunk chief. The task is not easy, since White Crow, unlike many of his contemporaries, never sat for a portrait artist. According to recollections of him, White Crow stood just under six feet and his stature was, in the words of one militiaman in the Black Hawk War, “straight and erect; and of a mild and pleasant countenance for a savage.”³⁰ Peter Parkinson’s few words comprise nearly all the positive statements made about the orator by militiamen, most of whom uniformly disliked White Crow and his people. Rock River Ho-Chunks had suffered the most from abuses by lead region whites that led to Red Bird’s uprising in 1827, and they experienced the greatest displacement after the 1829 treaty that resulted. These events shaped the militiamen’s opinions of White Crow.

White Crow was a well-respected elder among his people, but he filled the role of orator, not chief, in the Rock River band. In 1832, White Crow was about 50 years old, having been born into a Lake Winnebago village around 1780. He eventually married a woman from a Rock River village and lived among the upper Rock River Ho-Chunks from that point on. He claimed that as young man, the Rock River band had asked him to be their speaker, and he boasted that ever since, he had been their voice and that he was “the head of all the chiefs” when in council. Ho-Chunks’ reverence for their orators and the demands made by orators for Americans to treat them as chiefs no doubt contributed to the confusion regarding his position in the tribe. The orator’s Bear clan origin made him an unlikely candidate for a chiefly role traditionally filled by

³⁰ Peter Parkinson, Jr., “Notes on the Black Hawk War,” in *Report and Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin For the Years 1883, 1884, and 1885*, vol. 10, ed. Lyman C. Draper (Madison: Democrat Printing Company, State Printer, 1888), 189-190.

members of upper or air clan, but his lower, or earth-clan, status suited him well for speaking about issues of land and subsistence on behalf of the Rock River Ho-Chunks.³¹

Parkinson, who witnessed White Crow speak in the late spring of 1832, understood his role perhaps better than most white observers. White Crow, he wrote, was a “fine and fluent speaker, and the spokesman of his band on all important occasions.”³² Though Parkinson would grow suspicious of White Crow by the end of the conflict, he considered the orator “a Cicero of Indians.”³³ Aside from his oratory, White Crow’s most distinguishable feature was a black handkerchief he wore over the empty socket of his missing eye, which he had lost in a fight. As a result, White Crow was also known as “The One Eye” or “The Blind.”³⁴

Other than White Crow, Whirling Thunder also took on the responsibility for communicating Ho-Chunks’ intentions to white authorities. In 1832, Whirling Thunder was a village chief and influential leader of the Rock River band. He was especially well-positioned in negotiations because he had connections to more than one village in the early 1830s, and was well-known from the Portage on the Wisconsin River to the Turtle Creek village, the present site of Beloit on the Wisconsin and Illinois border.³⁵ The Ho-Chunks’ April mediation of the impending conflict was spearheaded by both Whirling Thunder and White Crow, and they shared the objective of maintaining peace in the interest of their people and their corn.

Both men could draw upon past experience with federal authorities. White Crow was an effective negotiator, and had experience dealing with the Indian office.³⁶ In 1828, for example,

³¹ Mark Diedrich, ed., *Winnebago Oratory: Great Moments in the Recorded Speech of the Hochungra, 1742-1887* (Rochester, Minnesota: Coyote Books, 1991), 104.

³² Parkinson, Jr., “Notes on the Black Hawk War,” 190.

³³ *Ibid.*, 185.

³⁴ Whitney, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 323n2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Peter Shrake, “A Trip to Washington,” in *The Silver Man: The Life and Times of Indian Agent John Kinzie* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2016); Louise Phelps Kellogg, “The Winnebago Visit to

he manipulated the federal commissioners, including Lewis Cass, at Green Bay, successfully delaying the post-“Winnebago War” land cession for a year. The delay gave the Ho-Chunks time to plan a future in which more and more newcomers would flood into Ho-Chunk lands. White Crow’s worldview was also shaped by his recent visit to Washington, DC. Lewis Cass, the former Michigan territorial governor, recommended in 1828 that a party of Ho-Chunks “be permitted to visit our cities to impress them with our power; it may tend to quiet their restlessness and tame their ferocity.”³⁷ White Crow went as the only representative of the Rock River band. He and several other Ho-Chunks made the journey via steamboat to Detroit and on to Buffalo. By coach, he traveled across New York state, passing through Utica, Schenectady, and Albany, and finally by river steamer to New York City, arriving in Washington on October 19, 1828.³⁸ Juliette Kinzie, the wife of Fort Winnebago Indian Agent at the Portage, John Kinzie, felt that the trip also made a lasting impression on White Crow’s daughter, Washington Woman: “She had a pleasant, old-acquaintance sort of air in greeting me, as much as to say, ‘You and I have seen the world.’”³⁹ White Crow had reason to believe that he understood the Americans.

The Americans, however, did not seem to understand the Ho-Chunk people and the importance of the coming corn season. The approaching Corn Moon undoubtedly weighed on the mind of White Crow in April 1832. A successful corn crop meant life, autonomy, and security. This provided more than ample motivation for White Crow and Whirling Thunder on

Washington in 1828,” *Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters* 29 (1935): 347-354. Ellen Whitney places White Crow at several significant councils and treaty signings, e.g. Butte des Mort, 1827; Green Bay, 1828; Rock Island, 1832. Whitney, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 323n2. White Crow does not appear in historical records for the 1825 and 1830 treaties mentioned, or the 1829 land cession treaty signed at Prairie du Chien.

³⁷ Kellogg, “The Winnebago Visit to Washington in 1828,” 347-8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 350.

³⁹ Juliette Kinzie, *Wau-bun: The Early Day in the North West* (1873; reprint, Philadelphia: Bibliobazaar, 2006), 83-4.

their hurried travels through the region that month. If the Ho-Chunks could not control the narrative of Black Hawk's return, they knew only disaster and land loss lay ahead for them. The stakes could not have been higher.

Historians underestimate the ability of Rock River Ho-Chunks to comprehend and deal with the developing crisis. For example, John Hall argues that because Rock River Ho-Chunks withdrew from Americans following the 1827 conflict and had historically avoided intermarriage with whites, they lacked crucial cross-cultural connections to American society. In particular, there were few *Métis* or mixed-heritage members of the Ho-Chunk community who might have offered the band advice or guidance during these troubled times.⁴⁰ However, Rock River Ho-Chunks did not wait on their agents nor did they rely on people Hall calls "cultural brokers" to tell them what to do. Black Hawk's return ignited a fury among the region's white settlers that Rock River Ho-Chunks feared would drive conflict into their country. White Crow and Whirling Thunder assembled a delegation of Rock River Indians on horseback, as well as over twenty warriors and representatives from the Rock River band. The delegation traveled hundreds of miles throughout southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois to hold councils with civil and military American officials as well as Potawatomi and Ho-Chunk band and village leaders, and with leaders of the Sauk band. They wanted more than anything to preserve peace in and over their lands.

Among the few cultural brokers the Ho-Chunks could rely on were the Portage and Rock River Indian sub-agents, John Kinzie and Henry Gratiot. Most Rock River Ho-Chunks from villages in Four Lakes and along the Rock River were assigned to Henry Gratiot's agency on the Sugar River some sixty miles southwest of White Crow's Koshkonong village. But White Crow and Whirling Thunder sought the assistance of John Kinzie at the Portage first. White Crow was

⁴⁰ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 122.

no stranger to Fort Winnebago or to the sub-Indian agent and his wife Juliette; he had been there many times before.⁴¹ John Kinzie had accompanied White Crow and other Ho-Chunks to Washington on their four-month tour of eastern cities in 1828.⁴² Ho-Chunk Indians appreciated that John Kinzie was fluent in their Siouan dialect, and most Ho-Chunks viewed the agent as a fair and just civil servant based on his dealings among the Indians representing the federal government, as well as his earlier employment with the American Fur Company. Kinzie, they knew, was a needed ally in the spring of 1832.

Henry Gratiot was also well-liked among the Ho-Chunk people, and Gratiot shared Kinzie's past as an employee of the American Fur Company. However, Gratiot did not speak the language of his Indian charges, nor did he share John Kinzie's unique view about the region's future. Whereas most federal officials and white settlers desired or at least anticipated Indian removal, Kinzie hoped to "preserve the Old Northwest as an Indian hunting ground protected from the encroachment of white settlement and even culture," a vision embraced by the Ho-Chunk people and one that may explain, in part, why the Rock River Indians invited so many Sauk and Fox families to live and plant corn among them.⁴³ It was a rare Indian agent in the 1830s who did not pressure Indians to adopt the federal government's assimilation policies. John Kinzie was extraordinary in this regard, and the Ho-Chunks knew it.

Thus, when White Crow and Whirling Thunder arrived at the Fort Winnebago agency house, they were disappointed to find Kinzie gone. The Ho-Chunks no doubt wished to invite Kinzie on their journey as an interpreter. Kinzie's presence with them would have also served to demonstrate their peaceful intentions. The Ho-Chunks' only option was to leave their message with the agent's wife, Juliette Kinzie. According to her, White Crow conveyed his nervousness

⁴¹ Kinzie, *Wau-bun*, 75, 272-3, 355.

⁴² Kellogg, "Winnebago Visit," 1.

⁴³ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 125.

about the “troops being raised down among the whites in Illinois,” and he “begged that their Father [John Kinzie] . . . would see that the soldiers did not meddle with them, so long as they remained quiet and behaved in a friendly manner.”⁴⁴ The orator and chief wanted his people to go about their everyday lives, planting corn and cultivating their fields, without provoking the Americans.

Juliette Kinzie promised to relay White Crow’s message to her husband upon his return. When John Kinzie learned of Henry Atkinson’s call for Indian allies to fight on the side of the Americans against Black Hawk and his band some weeks later, he echoed White Crow’s sentiments to Michigan Territory Governor George Porter. Kinzie hoped that Atkinson would “not invite the Winnebagos, as they are perfectly neutral, and have a desire to remain quiet.”⁴⁵

Juliette Kinzie, too, was well-respected among the Indians. In turn, she displayed a positive view of the Ho-Chunks, and White Crow in particular. She considered him a noble Indian and friend of the Americans. In her memoir, *Wau-bun*, she recalled being comforted by White Crow’s words: “White Crow seemed particularly anxious to impress it upon me that if any danger should arise in Shaw-nee-aw-kee’s absence he should come with his people to protect me and my family.” Kinzie “relied upon his assurances, for he had ever shown himself an upright and honorable Indian.”⁴⁶ Written long after the Black Hawk War ended, and after the publication of numerous other memoirs and histories less flattering to White Crow and the so-called treacherous Ho-Chunk, Juliette Kinzie’s work on the Rock River orator stood apart.⁴⁷ A

⁴⁴ Kinzie, *Wau-bun*, 273.

⁴⁵ Kinzie to George Porter, 31 May 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 495n. For a more nuanced discussion of how different Ho-Chunk villages and bands reacted to Atkinson’s need for warriors and the conflict’s opportunities for battle, see Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 145-179.

⁴⁶ Kinzie, *Wau-bun*, 273.

⁴⁷ For contrasting scholarly treatment of White Crow, see Jung, *The Black Hawk War*, 77-9, 106-8, 129, 132; *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 143-44; Trask, *Black Hawk*, 239-261.

closer reading of sources such as Kinzie's helps to repaint the Ho-Chunks, and White Crow in particular, in a more positive light.

Keeping the Peace in the Rock River Country

Events in the spring and summer of 1832 unfolded rapidly, and disastrously. From the Portage, White Crow and Whirling Thunder traveled a hundred miles south, following a well-worn trail through the Four Lakes to Turtle Creek Village. The Rock River Indian agent, Henry Gratiot, was also making his way to Turtle Creek under orders from General Atkinson to inform the Ho-Chunk there about the Sauk band's return and related developments. But military correspondence conveyed false intelligence, misreporting on Black Hawk's band, exaggerating the number of warriors and the Indian allies with him.⁴⁸ Reports of these "allies" and the American response alarmed Gratiot, who immediately worried for the Ho-Chunk people along the Rock River near the Wisconsin and Illinois border.⁴⁹ He feared they might get mixed up in the crisis, either by choice or by mistaken identity.

At the same time, Atkinson knew the local Indians would be valuable informants. The Ho-Chunks would provide the agents with any information they had about the "location and conduct of the disaffected Sacs" as well as their "views and intentions."⁵⁰ A matter of concern to the general and whites in the region was the intention of the Ho-Chunk people. John Kinzie and Henry Gratiot were ordered to report on "the temper and feelings of the Winnebagoes in relation to the subject."⁵¹ In nearly identical letters to Gratiot and Kinzie, Atkinson conveyed his concern about hostility, which he believed was sure to follow. "They say they will not strike

⁴⁸ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 126.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 125-132.

⁵⁰ Atkinson to John Kinzie, 16 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 257-58.; Atkinson to Gratiot, 15 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 257.

⁵¹ Atkinson to John Kinzie, 16 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 257-58.

first,” Atkinson explained, “but it is believed by some well informed men they will strike as soon as they secure their women and children in the fastness of the swamp” in northern Illinois.⁵²

Atkinson estimated the military strength of the band based on information from his officers, which both emphasized and over-estimated the military component of the peaceful band. Local Indian agents learned that five hundred warriors accompanied the band, and this number included a hundred Kickapoo and some Potawatomi allies. Atkinson’s misrepresentation of the Sauk band’s intentions was rooted in misunderstandings, but the general also needed Gratiot and Kinzie to convey the severity of the situation to their charges. Atkinson demanded the Portage and Rock River Ho-Chunks were to “hold no intercourse with them [the Sauk band]” when they “apprise the inhabitants residing towards Rock River of the apparent hostility of those [Sauk] Indians.”⁵³ In his letter to the commanding officer at Fort Winnebago, Atkinson seemed confident that Americans would be the ones starting this war, not the Sauk. He wrote: “Their feelings are decidedly hostile, yet it is probable they may not make a hostile stroke until an attempt is made to force them back to the West of the Mississippi. This the Government will no doubt order.”⁵⁴ Atkinson, then, predicted the coming war as a foregone conclusion if and when the Americans intervened. He did not expect or fear Ho-Chunk hostility otherwise.

It is unclear whether White Crow and Whirling Thunder anticipated a rendezvous with Henry Gratiot and his interpreter at Turtle Creek, Catherine Boilvin Myott, but they likely learned from them that Atkinson was on his way to Fort Armstrong. They realized the benefits of speaking with the general directly. Consequently, the delegation soon decided to travel all the way to the fort to meet him. An Indian gathering was then taking place at the village, as it did

⁵² Atkinson to Henry Gratiot, 16 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 257.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Atkinson to the Officer Commanding Fort Winnebago, 16 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 258-59. Captain Joseph Plympton was the acting commanding officer at Fort Winnebago. See *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 259n.

every April. Ho-Chunks and Potawatomes came together for a ceremonial medicine feast and to collaborate on cultivating corn in the lands east of the Rock River.⁵⁵ American mobilization and the impending crisis were certainly topics of discussion at that gathering. White Crow and Whirling Thunder's arrival is not recorded, but Gratiot arrived on 19 April. Gratiot "found [the Indians] at the exercise of their religious ceremonies, and consequently could not have a hearing till the 22d."⁵⁶ Gratiot's ascertaining of information on the "movements and intentions of the Saukees" that Atkinson desired, as well as the agent's own concerns regarding his Ho-Chunk charges, were subordinated to matters of subsistence and ceremony.⁵⁷

The impending conflict was complicated even more by mixed messages about the Sauk band's preparations for war. Gratiot's alarm grew when he learned at Turtle Creek that the Rock River Ho-Chunk had received wampum from the Sauk on three different occasions, and at least one wampum was painted red, the color of war.⁵⁸ Whether the Sauk intention was to ask the Ho-Chunk to join them in war against the Americans, or to aid in Sauk defense in case of an American assault, is unclear. Nonetheless, the Ho-Chunks insisted to Gratiot that they rejected the Sauk band's request for warlike assistance.⁵⁹ The Ho-Chunks' objective, along with that of

⁵⁵ Henry Gratiot, "The Record of Proceedings and Events...", *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1302-1306. Gratiot offers a detailed description of the same ceremony one year later, April 1833, in which he calls the gathering at Turtle Village a "Medicine Feast." Gratiot explains that replaced the corn lost in the destruction of his agency house during the Black Hawk War, and that it reflects "only circumstances which can be recollected with certainty..." See Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 219-220. For his description of Gratiot's April 1833 visit, Hall cites Gratiot to George Porter, 12 April 1833, transcripts, Indian Office Files, Box 65, 1.

⁵⁶ John A. Wakefield, *Wakefield's History of the Black Hawk War* (1834; reprint, Chicago: Caxton Club, 1904), 37.

⁵⁷ Atkinson to Henry Gratiot, 15 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 257.

⁵⁸ Firsthand accounts as well as scholarly interpretations do not agree on the color or meaning of the wampum exchanged between the Sauk band and the Rock River Ho-Chunks. See Jung, *Black Hawk War*.

⁵⁹ For Gratiot's account of his visit to Turtle Creek Village in April 1832, see Henry Gratiot, "The Record of Proceedings and Events...", *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1302-1306. Wakefield offers a more colorful narrative of Gratiot's visit, though the nature of his sources is unclear. See Wakefield, *Wakefield's History*, 37.

their Potawatomi neighbors, was to remain at peace and plant their corn. Still, the council at Turtle Creek left Indians there, as Gratiot reported, unsettled.⁶⁰

White Crow and the other leaders knew Black Hawk's band was camped on the lower Rock River a short distance away from Wabokieshek's, or the Winnebago Prophet's, village. It was a logical place for the Sauk band to remain because the two groups shared familial connections. It was Wabokieshek, Prophetstown's half Sauk and half Ho-Chunk chief, who opened his village and fields to the Sauk band.⁶¹ Some time had passed since the Prophet last promised Henry Gratiot he would remove his people north of the Illinois border and integrate among rest of the Rock River Ho-Chunks. Other Ho-Chunk leaders had been pushing the federal government to dissolve this village out of concern that it attracted the most disaffected Indians from their tribal nation as well as others in the region, and as a result threatened peace. White Crow informed Gratiot that his delegation planned to travel farther south, to the Prophet's village and "once more invite him and his band, to come and live with them."⁶² White Crow understood the stakes if any Ho-Chunk Indians should involve themselves with Black Hawk at this point and in this place. The Ho-Chunk delegation, therefore, worked hard to convince the villagers at Prophetstown to distance themselves from the Sauk band.

Henry Gratiot also attempted to deter the burgeoning crisis. He accompanied the Ho-Chunk delegation south, and supported their choice of neutrality as well as White Crow's mission to bring lower Rock River Ho-Chunks into this realm of peaceful influence. Gratiot and

⁶⁰ Gratiot, "The Record of Proceedings and Events...", *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1302.

⁶¹ The Winnebago Prophet, Wabokieshek, or White Cloud, has received little attention by scholars of the Black Hawk War. For diverse treatment of Wabokieshek, see Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Prelude to Disaster: The Course of Indian-White Relations Which Led to the Black Hawk War of 1832," in *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 278-285; See generally, Whitney, *BHW* 35, vol. 2, bk. 1, 37 for primary sources related to Wabokieshek. Wabokieshek finds varying consideration in recent scholarly works on the Black Hawk War, see Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, Jung, *Black Hawk War of 1832*, and Trask, *Black Hawk*.

⁶² Gratiot, "The Record of Proceedings and Events...", April 21, 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1302.

the Ho-Chunk leaders were well aware of the growing anti-Ho-Chunk sentiment among whites in Illinois, consistently made worse by regional anti-Indian publications, such as the *Galenian* newspaper. The agent and Indians alike shared the goal of eliminating suspicions about Ho-Chunks' reducing tensions. This could be best accomplished, they collectively thought, by upholding the policy of neutrality in the Ho-Chunk villages. Virtually all of the Ho-Chunks preferred neutrality, but, as John Hall argues, given the American view of the Sauk band's movement as an invasion, neutrality proved increasingly elusive for any Native community in the area. "With few enlightened exceptions," Hall writes, "most Americans failed either to understand or to accept the divided, diffuse authority of the 'tribe' as a political entity. Divergent courses by bands of the same tribe suggested duplicity, and any activity hostile to the United States, furnished a pretext for punishing the tribe as a whole."⁶³

The Ho-Chunks tried to follow proper protocol and facilitate clear communication with the Americans, an indication that they hoped to avoid war. For instance, the Ho-Chunk delegation recognized that it was good politics to work with and through Indian agents. More important, however, White Crow and Whirling Thunder enlisted the help of Gratiot's interpreter, Catherine Boilvin Myott. The daughter of Prairie du Chien's former Indian agent, Nicolas Boilvin, and his Ho-Chunk wife, Wizak Kega, Myott was among the few skilled interpreters of the Ho-Chunk language. White Crow once said of Myott, "when she speaks to you of us, or to us for you, we perfectly understand each other."⁶⁴ But this was White Crow and Whirling Thunder's journey, not Gratiot's. It seems White Crow kept Gratiot in the dark about the

⁶³ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 125. In mid-April, following a council between Americans and the "friendly" Sauk and Fox people, where Atkinson urged Keokuk and other leaders to keep their Indians on the west side of the Mississippi away from the fugitive Sauk band, local officials and citizens complained. Ninian Edwards wrote Illinois senators as well as Governor Reynolds criticizing the military's policy of treating one half of the Sauk and Fox tribal nation as friendly while the other half invaded Illinois. Edwards as well as others who shared his feelings opposed the request made by federal officials to help the friendly Sauk and Fox people subsist. See Whitney, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 649n.

⁶⁴ Porter's Grove Council, 3-4 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 509.

delegation's itinerary. White Crow and Whirling Thunder intended to meet with the Sauk leaders and, if the Sauk were not ambivalent about having Gratiot and Myott along for the visit, together they would work out a plan to use his presence.

The Ho-Chunks had little time to get their message out and take control of events swirling up around them. On April 22 or 23, White Crow, Whirling Thunder, and more than twenty-five Ho-Chunks departed Turtle Creek village for the Prophet's village, a journey of just under a hundred miles if they followed the Rock River. When the delegation arrived on April 24, as many as three Ho-Chunks greeted them warmly, having already constructed "a large lodge, eighty feet long" for the occasion.⁶⁵ The villagers, it seemed, were ready for the visit.

The village had not been isolated completely from the crisis. Earlier that day, the Sauk leaders received a message from Henry Atkinson, which he addressed to "to Black Hawk and the Chiefs & Braves of his Band." The general wrote: "I am sorry to learn that you have taken your Band across the Mississippi and carried them upon Rock river contrary to the treaty you made last year....Your great father will be angry with you for doing so. ...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."⁶⁶ The Sauk leader, Neapope, responded to Atkinson with the same explanation he had given Felix St. Vrain and Major John Bliss in the previous weeks: the Sauk band had been invited to live among the Ho-Chunk Indians, they did not wish to return to Iowa, and, finally, they held "no bad feelings" toward the Americans. The Sauk story mirrored that being spread by the Ho-Chunks.

Black Hawk found Atkinson's message both condescending and perplexing. In his autobiography, Black Hawk rejected Atkinson's right to demand that the Sauk band return. In his

⁶⁵ Wakefield, *Wakefield's History*, 39.

⁶⁶ Henry Atkinson to Black Hawk, 24 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 301-302.

response, however, Black Hawk echoed Neapope's message about having no bad feelings. But he also reminded the general that he was not in charge of the Sauk band and could make no demands of his people. "I do not command the Indians," Black Hawk stated in his reply, "the Village belongs to the Chiefs."⁶⁷ The elderly war chief saw himself in an insignificant role: "Why do they want to know my feelings. I have no bad feelings. My opinion goes with my Chiefs. I will follow them up the Rock River, and my braves are all of the same mind."⁶⁸ By accepting the invitation to live with the Ho-Chunks, Black Hawk and his band were integrated into the political structure of the Rock River people. The Sauk band was already "structured not as a war party but as a tribal band with the requisite civil chiefs and war leaders," according to historian Patrick Jung. When it accepted the Winnebago Prophet's invitation, it accepted him as a high ranking civil chief.⁶⁹ Atkinson assumed, however, that Black Hawk was being self-effacing for the sake of subterfuge, or else that the local Ho-Chunks were covering for Black Hawk and his true intentions to lead a war party against the settlers. Rather than allay Atkinson's fears, then, Black Hawk's clarification of his status only heightened Americans' suspicions. This distrust expanded to the Ho-Chunk, who local whites believed were covering for the war chief, Black Hawk, until his warriors and theirs combined into a formidable force.

Black Hawk believed he was doing nothing wrong and was not in violation of any treaty. The Ho-Chunk delegation that arrived on April 24 agreed. The Winnebago Prophet had also made this case in early April 1832 to Felix St. Vrain, agent to the Sauk and Fox. White Cloud told St. Vrain that the returning Sauk band violated no articles of their treaties with the United

⁶⁷ See summary of Black Hawk and Atkinson's correspondence in Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 121n93. See also "Answer of Black Hawk and His Band to Henry Atkinson," 26 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 312-14.

⁶⁸ Answer of Black Hawk and His Band to Henry Atkinson, 26 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 313.

⁶⁹ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 74.

States.⁷⁰ Simply put, the Indian guests were coming to live with the Ho-Chunk, not to exact violence or retribution against the Americans. Since then, American animosity and suspicious toward the Sauk band the Rock River Ho-Chunks had grown. The meeting among the Sauk band's leaders, the Ho-Chunks, and Gratiot offered them an opportunity at a crucial moment to assess the tense circumstances. The Ho-Chunks remained optimistic that the Americans would calm down so long as the Indians kept the peace.

The events that resulted from this journey are recounted in almost every history of the 1832 conflict and are derived from Henry Gratiot's letters and journals and Black Hawk's autobiography. Of particular importance in these sources is the Ho-Chunk delegation's first meeting with the leaders of the Sauk band and White Cloud near the Winnebago Prophet's Village on April 26. Also significant is the delegation's meeting with Brigadier General Henry Atkinson April 28. The third consequential event is the second meeting between the Ho-Chunk delegation and the Sauk band leaders, which probably occurred on April 30 or 31. White Crow and Black Hawk both recalled this meeting, but it has been ignored or misunderstood by scholars.⁷¹ The dynamics and discussions in these gatherings and how they were remembered (or ignored) by participants and scholars now matter for how we understand the role of the Rock River Ho-Chunks early on in the conflict.

⁷⁰ See Felix St. Vrain to William Clark, 6 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 230. See also, John Bliss to Henry Atkinson, 6 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 228-229.

⁷¹ See Whitney, *BHW* vol. 1, bk. 2, 323n2. For Black Hawk's recollection of this meeting, see Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 121. Hall narrates only the first meeting among Gratiot, the Sauk leaders, and Rock River Ho-Chunk as well as the council at Fort Armstrong between the Rock River Ho-Chunk and Henry Atkinson, leaving out the second meeting between White Crow and the Sauk band leaders. See Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 127-132. Trask overlooks the second meeting as well; see Trask, *Black Hawk*, 160-162. Jung either overlooks the second meeting involving the Sauk band and Rock River Ho-Chunk on April 30 or 31, or he conflates this and the first meeting on April 26. In any case, he interprets the conflicting messages from the Ho-Chunk delegation as evidence of "deep cleavages" among the Ho-Chunk and states that the some members of the delegation were already acting on the Sauk band's behalf. See Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 77-83.

The Ho-Chunks were joined in their journey by Henry Gratiot. They were also accompanied by Catherine Myott, a skilled *Métis* interpreter of her mother's Ho-Chunk language. Neither she nor Gratiot understood the Algonquian dialect of the Sauk band. The only interpreters for Algonquian speakers, then, were members of the Ho-Chunk delegation who could speak Algonquian, among them White Crow. The Indians spoke freely in the Algonquian dialect preferred by the Sauk band, with White Crow translating for Myott, who relayed the information in English to Gratiot. This meant, of course, that White Crow also controlled what the Sauk leaders heard and understood. Gratiot's understanding of the dialogue and events, then, came from what he gleaned from the Indian participants' body language and inflection while speaking, and what White Crow and others explained to the Rock River Indian agent.⁷² This matters because scholars rely on his accounts and Black Hawk's almost exclusively. According to Black Hawk, White Crow told him and his chiefs that the Indian agent Gratiot was there to convince the Sauk band to return to their Iowa reservation.⁷³ White Crow, however, encouraged the Sauk band not to give up their hopes for resettlement among the Ho-Chunk villages.⁷⁴

As the Ho-Chunks worked to preserve their message of peace, Gratiot labored tirelessly in the early weeks of the 1832 crisis to convince the region's white settlers of the Rock River Indians' goodwill. His correspondence and journal show that Gratiot believed the Ho-Chunk delegates he traveled with were ambassadors of peace, just as they claimed. It was the idea of White Crow and Whirling Thunder to go to the Prophet's town and to relocate into Wisconsin as

⁷² Scholars such as Jung and Trask rely almost exclusively on Gratiot's accounts and those of Black Hawk in his autobiography.

⁷³ Black Hawk seems to confuse or conflate Gratiot's mission with General Henry Atkinson's second letter that arrived shortly before Gratiot and the Ho-Chunks did. Black Hawk had already responded to Atkinson's first letter, assuring the general that his band meant no harm and that he was not their chief and could not command them. The second letter from Atkinson, which demanded the Sauk band return to Iowa, angered Black Hawk because it all but ignored his previous message. Gratiot insisted on reading the second letter to the Sauk band leaders so they understood Atkinson's wishes, that the Sauk band return to their Iowa reservation immediately, or else suffer the wrath of the U.S. military. Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 120. See also, Wakefield, *Wakefield's History*, 39.

⁷⁴ Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 120.

they had been promising to do since 1829. The Ho-Chunks brought a white flag and hoisted it, immediately upon the group's arrival, atop a large lodge seemingly built just for the occasion of the visitors.⁷⁵

Scholars, however, dispute Gratiot's understanding of the Rock River Ho-Chunks' intentions. Drawing on Black Hawk's autobiography and Neapope's testimony, given in August 1832 after his surrender, most historians agree that the Rock River Ho-Chunks lied to Gratiot about the delegation's true mission to Prophet's town and then lied over and over again to other Americans, professing they were on a peace-keeping mission. Scholars point to Black Hawk's memory of the Prophet's town mission, and in particular, the message delivered by Rock River Ho-Chunks to the Sauk band leaders: "they advised us to go on—assuring us, that the further we went up Rock river, the more friends we would meet, and our situation be bettered."⁷⁶ There was a consensus among the Sauk band to continue north. The Ho-Chunks, Black Hawk noted, continued to beckon him northward.

The Corn Speeches

At the time of the combined delegation's first peace conference near the Prophet's village, the Ho-Chunk and Sauk band leaders remained optimistic about reducing Americans' doubts and fears. It is true that the Indians involved did not understand the extent of their white neighbor's ire. Aware of American anxiety over Indian activity in the region, however, the Rock

⁷⁵ Gratiot, "The Record of Proceedings and Events..." April 21, 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1302.

⁷⁶ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 78; Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 120-121. Black Hawk's continues, talking about receiving reinforcement "sufficiently strong to repulse any enemy!" But in the context of the conversation and what Black Hawk, White Cloud, and others had been saying all along to American officials, the policy and belief among the Sauk band's civil leaders, White Cloud, and the Rock River Ho-Chunks was that the Americans would not attack the Indians unless the Indians gave them reason to do so. This was the message of the civil chiefs to Americans. It was also their message to the Sauk band's warriors: do not give the Americans any reason to feel threatened or to attack. Black Hawk's recollection may indicate that the Americans would be even less likely to attack if the Native community of the Rock River country was strong and capable of defending themselves of repelling attackers.

River Ho-Chunk leaders informed Black Hawk that they would continue down the river to Fort Armstrong and meet with “White Beaver,” or Henry Atkinson.⁷⁷ In council with Atkinson, they assured him that the Sauk and Ho-Chunks were linked in peace, and intended no ill-will toward the Americans. Though the Rock River Ho-Chunks indeed left the Sauk band encouraged by their words and support, they kept their promise and returned sometime before May 1 with news that overtures for peace might not be received as they hoped. Before departing toward Fort Armstrong, however, the Rock River Ho-Chunk delegation felt they needed to lay groundwork for their next mission. More than keeping some of their conversation secret from Henry Gratiot, the Rock River Ho-Chunks seem to have involved Gratiot more directly in their plan.

The gathering with Atkinson in late April, is important in understanding the Ho-Chunks’ process in the spring of 1832. Historians place much emphasis on this meeting, in particular, on White Crow’s insistence that the Sauk band not surrender to the Americans.⁷⁸ As both Black Hawk and White Crow recounted in their separate versions later, the Rock River Ho-Chunk leaders promised the Sauk leaders that they “would go down with their agent [to Fort Armstrong] to ascertain the strength of the enemy, and then return and give us the news.”⁷⁹ The use of the term “enemy” is probably insignificant. It likely reflects how Antoine LeClair, the U.S. interpreter for the Sauk and Fox who helped Black Hawk write his autobiography, understood and transcribed the war leader’s speech in reference to Americans. In any case, White Crow, Whirling Thunder, and the rest of their delegation departed the next day with Gratiot and Myott, intending to see for themselves whether rumors were true that the Americans were preparing for war. In this region, rumors of frontier violence were endemic and often proved exaggerated or

⁷⁷ See Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 120-121.

⁷⁸ As the orator of the Rock River people and of the peace delegation, White Crow spoke for the chiefs including the well-respected Whirling Thunder.

⁷⁹ Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 120.

untrue.⁸⁰ For American officials to confuse a group of Indian families for a war party (which would not have traveled with women, babies, or elderly people) undoubtedly seemed absurd to the Rock River Ho-Chunks who invited the Sauk band to return. At the same time, the Ho-Chunk wanted to make sure that reports of American military preparations were as accurate as possible to prevent further overreactions. The Ho-Chunks' mission at this point was two-fold. They wanted to provide assurances that the Sauk band had nothing but peaceful intentions. They were also gathering intelligence on the American military presence in their lands.

Before their departure for Rock Island, however, events turned chaotic and menacing while the Sauk, Ho-Chunk, and Americans gathered inside a lodge for their council. As Gratiot recalled, Sauk warriors on horseback suddenly encircled the lodge, making "war-whoops" and firing their guns in the air, taking down the white flag put up by Gratiot's Ho-Chunks and hoisting a British one—a clear reference to Black Hawk's earlier allegiance to the British during the War of 1812. Several of the warriors barged into the lodge, "holding their spears and other implements of war, evincing, by their actions and countenances, an unfriendly feeling."⁸¹ The commotion continued, causing Gratiot and his American companion, George Cubbage, concern, until White Crow stood and presented one of the Sauk warriors with tobacco.⁸² The orator seemed to elicit calm, and his effort worked. All the warriors left the lodge except Black Hawk,

⁸⁰ For examples from 1820s and early 1830s, see Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 78-79, 120-124, 129.

⁸¹ Wakefield, *Wakefield's History*, 38-9.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 37-40. Wakefield based his history on newspapers and public records, as well as his own experiences as a militiaman in the war. Though he does not say so, he appears to have interviewed officials and veterans of the conflict. Gratiot hired George Cubbage in the late winter of 1832 to administer small pox vaccinations among the Rock River Ho-Chunk. See Gratiot, "The Record of Proceedings and Events..." February 21, 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1302.

who, along with White Cloud, seemed to stand guard for the Americans as a further sign of their peaceful intentions.⁸³

Much to his surprise, Henry Gratiot learned a few days later at Rock Island that he had been the Sauk warriors' hostage and owed his life to White Crow.⁸⁴ Gratiot learned this from two "friendly" Sauk Indians who had been at the Prophet's village during the agent's brief captivity and had departed for Rock Island ahead of him and the Ho-Chunk delegation. Given the "decidedly hostile" actions on the part of the Sauk warriors, Gratiot believed it.⁸⁵ Gratiot's understanding of the events was limited since the Indians "transacted all of that business in the Saukee language and my Interpreter not understanding that language, I was ignorant of the circumstance at the time."⁸⁶

Gratiot's imprisonment by the Sauk band was, in fact, fiction. It was a performance planned out by White Crow and the Rock River Ho-Chunk in which the Sauk war leader and his warriors agreed to take part. Though he did not understand the Ho-Chunks' objective, Black Hawk states this explicitly in his autobiography. According to Black Hawk, after the Rock River Ho-Chunks promised to return with news from Fort Armstrong about American activities and intentions toward the Sauk band, they asked the Sauk band for help. Black Hawk recalled that they "had to use some stratagem to *deceive* their agent, in order to *help* us!"⁸⁷ As instructed, Black Hawk led his warriors in a martial showing outside the lodge with the Ho-Chunk and Americans inside. Black Hawk explained, "a number of my braves hoisted the British flag,

⁸³ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 78. Jung cites Gratiot's version of events. Gratiot to William Clark, 12 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 577.

⁸⁴ Gratiot to William Clark, 12 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 578.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 577.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 578. Black Hawk also recounted this language barrier in a way that suggested it created an advantage for the Ho-Chunk. "[Gratiot] had no interpreter," Black Hawk wrote, "and was compelled to talk through his [Ho-Chunk] chiefs." Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 120.

⁸⁷ Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 120.

mounted their horses, and surrounded the council lodge!” Rock River Indians wanted to startle Gratiot, but when Black Hawk “discovered that the agent was very much frightened,” he told one of the Rock River Indians to “tell him that he need not be alarmed” and “went out and directed my braves to desist,” thus ending the stunt.⁸⁸

Scholars of the conflict seem to overlook that this incident was an orchestrated event. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians used the Sauk hostility toward Gratiot as proof of their bad intention, while historians writing about the Black Hawk War in more recent decades find it suggestive of incoherent policy among the Rock River Ho-Chunks themselves.⁸⁹ Citing Black Hawk’s autobiography, at least one historian argues that Rock River Ho-Chunk enmity toward Americans was on display here, evidenced by some of their leaders encouraging the Sauk band to continue north and to ignore Atkinson’s warnings.⁹⁰ At the same time, other Rock River Ho-Chunks protected Henry Gratiot.⁹¹ What is overlooked is that the Ho-Chunks were sending a message between the words of the councils. While the words were those of peace, the demonstrations were those of autonomy and integrity of the relationship between the Sauk band and the Rock River Ho-Chunks. In general, Gratiot’s experience at Prophetstown in April 1832 has been treated as a genuine Sauk warrior response to the Americans. When the accounts of Henry Gratiot, Black Hawk, and White Crow are brought together, however, White Crow emerges as the central figure in each of these versions of events.

On behalf of the Rock River Ho-Chunk chiefs, for whom he acted and spoke, White Crow had enlisted the Sauk band in a ruse without revealing to them its specific objective. Nor

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 120-21. Black Hawk’s account differs from White Crow’s and Gratiot’s, since the Sauk war leader suggests that he put a stop to the commotion and makes no mention of White Crow’s offering of tobacco. Whatever the case, it seems likely that Black Hawk’s regret over the stunt was sincere since at least one witness remembered that the Sauk war leader and some of his warriors shook Gratiot’s hand afterward. Wakefield, *Wakefield’s*, 38.

⁸⁹ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 78-79; Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 131.

⁹⁰ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 78-79.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

did he reveal to Henry Gratiot its purpose. That Gratiot learned he was the Sauk band's hostage not from White Crow, but from two "friendly," or treaty-abiding, Sauk Indians, suggests that the Rock River Ho-Chunks may not have known exactly how they would use the coordinated spectacle. Creating confusion in the mind of Gratiot may have been their primary objective, an ambiguity the Ho-Chunks could exploit later on. Soon after arriving at Fort Armstrong, White Crow himself told the story to General Henry Atkinson about how he saved Gratiot from captivity and death. Whether it was the story the orator intended, or a response to the Rock River Ho-Chunks' realization that the Americans were building a military force to pursue the Sauk band, White Crow's claim of saving Gratiot's life painted the orator as a trusted ally of the Americans. At the same time, the story demonstrated that the Rock River Ho-Chunk leaders could exert influence and authority over the Sauk band, especially its warriors. If White Crow successfully suppressed Sauk violence against an American once, surely he could do it again. The orator would recount this story several times over the coming months, emphasizing different meanings depending on the context and the outcome the Ho-Chunks were pursuing.

While the Ho-Chunk leaders did not divulge to Gratiot all that was said between them and the Sauk leaders near Prophetstown, and they likely misled and exploited their agent in other ways, their actions were not rooted in malice. The strategy reveals the agency of a skilled orator, White Crow, whose people were caught between kin and a powerful settler nation.⁹² As an American and an Indian agent, Gratiot represented the eyes and ears of the federal government. The Rock River Ho-Chunks needed him to understand their desire for peace so that, should

⁹² Moments like these April meetings among the Sauk, Ho-Chunk, and Americans, at Prophetstown as well as Fort Armstrong, are key events in the development of this conflict. It is clear that the Rock River Ho-Chunks were the central actors shaping these encounters as well as the dialogue among the different groups. While some historians misunderstand Rock River Ho-Chunks' motivations or the logic that explains their actions, and admittedly, their dishonesty, other historians manage to narrate these events without mentioning Rock River Ho-Chunks at all. For an example of this, see Trask, *Black Hawk*, 159-162.

conflict break out, he could attest to Ho-Chunk neutrality and the efforts of the Rock River band to disassociate themselves from the Sauk band. The Rock River Ho-Chunk took seriously the possibility of violence—Americans seemed predisposed to it, if not openly interested in it. This is what drew White Crow and Whirling Thunder on their journey in April away from their villages on the eve of planting. The stakes for the Ho-Chunk people made their next stop the most significant of their journey. At Fort Armstrong, Gratiot and Myott would play indispensable roles in White Crow's address to General Henry Atkinson, known by most Native peoples as White Beaver.

Hearing the Ho-Chunks' Voice

Historians have privileged Black Hawk's recollections over those of White Crow in large part because they have learned to distrust the Rock River orator. They view the behavior of the Rock River delegation, in particular that of White Crow who secretly urged the Sauk band to remain east of the Mississippi, as evidence of Ho-Chunks' secret support of a Sauk-led war against the Americans.⁹³ White Crow indeed offered the Sauk band hope, but that hope was short-lived. The orator, along with Whirling Thunder and others, returned to visit leaders of the Sauk band, as promised, and they brought the bad news that Atkinson would not allow the band to remain, even as guests of the Ho-Chunks.⁹⁴ Despite Black Hawk's best efforts in his autobiography to explain a difficult series of conversations between the Sauk band and their Rock River Ho-Chunk kin, historians have focused only on what Patrick Jung terms the "contradictory actions of the Winnebago delegates who accompanied Gratiot" and on White

⁹³ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 77-79; Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 120-27.

⁹⁴ Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 121.

Crow's initial acts of deception at Prophetstown to condemn as well as blame them for what would become the Black Hawk War.⁹⁵

On 26 April, a portion of the Rock River Ho-Chunk delegation set out for Rock Island from Prophetstown. They explained to Gratiot their wish to speak in person with Atkinson, commander of U.S. troops in the region. Gratiot accepted their invitation to join them. They were, in any case, borrowing Gratiot's interpreter, Myott. The meeting held at Rock Island on April 28, 1832, may have been White Crow and Whirling Thunder's intent all along. Though they respected their Indian agent, the Rock River Ho-Chunk possessed keen insight into the military and civil power structures of the federal government. If anyone could ensure that their planting season would not be interrupted by American troops, it was Brigadier General Henry Atkinson.⁹⁶

By most historical accounts, largely drawn from Gratiot's brief recollection, White Crow and the Rock River Ho-Chunk delegation at Rock Island "declaired [sic] their intention to remain at peace."⁹⁷ The dialogue between White Crow and Atkinson contained meaning and nuance beyond this simple yet important commitment. White Crow's speech made an impression on Atkinson and showed the orator's sophisticated understanding of the broader dynamics at play. On April 9, Fort Armstrong's commanding officer John Bliss had written to Atkinson, claiming a "friendly Indian" told him "That [Sauk] allies are the Pottowattomies, Kickapoos, Winnebagoes & Menominees."⁹⁸ Citizens in the region picked up on these fictions and manufactured worry. Three days later, Bliss explained that a number of these white people had "embraced my offer to

⁹⁵ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 79, 183. Jung successfully and accurately absolves Black Hawk and the Sauk band from historical claims that the Sauk war leader intended to lead a pan-Indian resistance to American settlement in the region. However, Jung shifts blame for the war onto the Rock River Ho-Chunk (as well as Henry Atkinson).

⁹⁶ Hall explains how Native Americans came to trust American military officers over civil officials and settlers. See Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 48-50.

⁹⁷ Henry Gratiot, "The Record of Proceedings and Events..." *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 37, 1303.

⁹⁸ John Bliss to Henry Atkinson, 9 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 238.

receive their families into the garrison.”⁹⁹ White Crow and Whirling Thunder, then, were working to address the manufactured allegations and fears of the region’s white settlers and the concerns of the Ho-Chunks all at once.¹⁰⁰

Gratiot himself served as a symbol of Ho-Chunk fidelity. White Crow presented Gratiot and Myott as personal references, proof of Rock River Ho-Chunk favor toward the Americans. White Crow, after all, had just saved Gratiot’s life. The orator’s commitment to the Americans, as friends and “orderly children,” could be seen in their deference toward Gratiot, who had advised them well during their troubled time at the 1829 treaty council, which had forced them to cede three million acres of land. Parting with their southern farmlands and rich lead mines to appease the United States after Ho-Chunk warriors from Prairie La Crosse attacked and killed white and Métis settlers near the Mississippi was a difficult choice for the Ho-Chunk nation. In addition to spiritual and subsistence-based connections to the land, lead mining had been central to the lower Rock River Ho-Chunks’ economy. White Crow explained, “I mention this Father, to let you know that when our Agent speaks, we listen to him.”¹⁰¹ Despite claims of peace, Ho-Chunks were immediately among the Sauk band’s suspected allies in the eyes of those Americans who interpreted the Sauk band’s return as a hostile act. Few up the chain of command questioned this assumption.

The orator directly addressed allegations of Ho-Chunk treachery and other American notions that his people planned vengeance against the white settlers. He assured Atkinson that whites should not worry about a secret pan-Indian alliance against them. White Crow also explained that his people now believed the “Great Spirit made the land for the whites, and the

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 238.

¹⁰⁰ Minutes of a Talk between Henry Atkinson and Whirling Thunder and White Crow, 28 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 321-24.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 321.

Indians.” This shift had allowed them to let go of their southern lands in 1829. In this view, his people had no reason to go to war with the Americans over land they now inhabited. White Crow even held harmless former lead region squatter, Henry Dodge of Missouri, who was at that time raising a citizen militia to destroy the Sauk band and its hopes of joining the Ho-Chunk: “I have taken General Dodge who is my friend by the hand, he is like a father.”¹⁰² According to historian Lucy Murphy, “Dodge was among the worst of the Anglos to violate the law, trespass on Indian land, and provoke confrontations between Indians, Anglo miners, and U.S. government officials.” She wryly adds, “He later became governor of Wisconsin.”¹⁰³ In 1827 and 1828, Dodge constructed a stockade near present-day Dodgeville and armed his workers as a bulwark against his own removal by federal troops. In 1827, he led a militia to quell a small Ho-Chunk uprising against white settler abuses. White Crow insisted that the Ho-Chunks had forgiven Americans their trespasses.

White Crow’s maneuvers, combined with Gratiot’s presence at the address to General Atkinson, demonstrate White Crow’s understanding of the civil leadership and military structure of the federal government. White Crow involved everyone he could imagine who might be called upon to help keep peace, or at least prevent open war—Gratiot, Atkinson, even Henry Dodge. In his speech to Atkinson, White Crow also exhibited keen insight into the many challenges the Ho-Chunk faced.¹⁰⁴ He highlighted how the negative, distrustful view the region’s settlers held toward his people put the whole region at risk. Knowing that the stability of the region and the security of white-owned lands amounted to significant leverage with federal

¹⁰² Ibid., 321.

¹⁰³ Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, *A Gathering of Rivers: Indians, Métis, and Mining in the Western Great Lakes, 1737-1832* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 100.

¹⁰⁴ Minutes of a Talk between Henry Atkinson and Whirling Thunder and White Crow, 28 April 1832, *BHW vol. 2, bk. 1*, 321-324.

authorities, White Crow and Whirling Thunder exuded confidence in their stance toward the Americans. They were there to insist that they were no enemies of the United States.

White Crow's most important message to Atkinson came in these words: "My father, there is very often great many fools among us, [but] there never has been any blood shed on our river yet." White Crow reminded the general of past pledges of peace, citing the 1825 and 1830 councils for peace and friendship at Prairie du Chien. He expressed his people's understanding that the price of bloodshed was land. It was a painful history lesson his people would not soon forget. "Father, my tomahawk has been buried, the great God who hears, knows that I tell the truth, and it shall never be raised, we love our Country. We Love our Father you have given us, he gives us good advice, we wish to raise our corn in peace."¹⁰⁵

The general responded well to the meeting, and it appeared as though White Crow had gained a new ally in Atkinson. Atkinson was convinced by the orator's words and seemed genuinely pleased that the Rock River Ho-Chunks took it upon themselves to meet with him at Rock Island. Understanding the urgency of the Corn Moon, Atkinson told the delegation: "you must go back to your Villages, plant your corn, and keep all your people together, young men and old men, women and children." Here White Crow asked for something more concrete: "I wish you when we go to give us a passport to show to your children, that we are friendly."¹⁰⁶ White Crow also requested food and supplies: "Father, you see me, I am poor, I have no provision, no powder, I hope you will not tell me to go away without any."¹⁰⁷ Atkinson gave White Crow and Whirling Thunder the "passport" they requested.

This passport permitted White Crow and other Rock River Ho-Chunks safe passage through the region and back to their villages. The document affirmed that its Indian bearers were

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 321.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 322.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

friends of the Americans. Perhaps even more important, through this affirmation of peace and friendship, Atkinson openly acknowledged the Ho-Chunks' deepest desires—maintaining peace and cultivating a corn crop that would feed them through the year. The passport and Atkinson's orders—stay home and cultivate corn—would become a central part of White Crow and other Ho-Chunks' speeches over the coming weeks and months as they faced increasing pressure from the Americans to abandon their country and their fields and get out of the way of the conflict.¹⁰⁸ Atkinson's act testifies to his kind disposition toward the Ho-Chunk people, but also to White Crow's foresight in bringing his own capable interpreter. Catherine Myott's presence was indispensable in translating White Crow's rather lengthy oratory, so revealing of Ho-Chunk goals to protect their homeland, preserve their autonomy, and plant their corn. On April 29, Gratiot and the Ho-Chunks parted ways, and the Ho-Chunk delegation led by White Crow and Whirling Thunder traveled north on the Rock River with the passport and the provisions Atkinson had provided the Indians.¹⁰⁹

The meeting, however, was only partially successful. The Rock River Ho-Chunks were affirmed in their belonging, but the welcome had not been extended to their Sauk kin. In the Ho-Chunk delegation's first meeting with Black Hawk, White Crow conveyed hope to him and other Sauk leaders that his people might still make a new home among the Ho-Chunks. But what the orator's delegation learned at Fort Armstrong changed things. While they had invited Black Hawk to join them, Rock River Ho-Chunks could not ignore what they had seen and learned at Rock Island. Responding to rising tensions among the white settlers, the Americans were

¹⁰⁸ Passport for Whirling Thunder and White Crow, 28 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 322.

¹⁰⁹ Minutes of a Talk between Henry Atkinson and Whirling Thunder and White Crow, 28 April 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 324n5.

gathering armies. White Crow and Whirling Thunder understood that the Sauk band could not openly stay in Ho-Chunk territory without provoking violence. White Crow returned to the Prophet's village to share the bad news with Black Hawk and his band. Nonetheless, he attempted to convince Ho-Chunks from the Prophet's village to relocate to the upper Rock River lands.

White Crow and Whirling Thunder caught up with the Sauk band now camped just north of Prophetstown. The delegation explained to the Sauk leaders that General Atkinson would not permit them to remain in Ho-Chunk territory. Black Hawk received the news poorly. He recalled this meeting in his autobiography:

Having ascertained that White Beaver would not permit us to remain where we were, I began to consider what was best to be done, and concluded to keep on up the river, see the Pottowattomies and have a talk with them. Several Winnebago chiefs were present, whom I advised of my intentions, as they did not seem disposed to render us any assistance. I asked them if they had not sent us wampum during the winter, and requested us to come and join their people and enjoy all the rights and privileges of their country. They did not deny this; and said if the white people did not interfere, they had no objection to our making corn this year, with our friend the prophet, but did not wish us to go any further up.¹¹⁰

Against the wishes of these Rock River Indians, Black Hawk and his band continued north. If the Rock River Ho-Chunks no longer welcomed them on their lands, Black Hawk hoped the Potawatomi might offer his people a home.

Unlike his less optimistic Rock River kin, Black Hawk still believed in the Winnebago Prophet's vision of peace. He assumed that the Americans did not want a frontier war and would not attack the band full of women carrying seed for planting corn. The Sauk war leader traveled

¹¹⁰ Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 121.

with families, not a war party. But neither Black Hawk nor the Prophet anticipated the unpredictable actions of militiamen who roamed the Illinois countryside in search of Black Hawk and an Indian fight.

Black Hawk was not looking for a fight. Nevertheless, on May 14, near the mouth of Sycamore Creek in present day Ogle County, Illinois, Black Hawk's scouts spotted several hundred militiamen. Black Hawk had anticipated that General Atkinson might catch up with him first, but seeking truce and a peaceful encounter, Black Hawk and the other Sauk band leaders decided to surrender to these men. The small unit of around 275 men was led by Major Isaiah Stillman. Though Black Hawk could not have imagined Stillman's men intended to exterminate his people, the encounter reinforced Black Hawk's realization that he and his people could not remain east of the Mississippi.¹¹¹

By this time, the Sauk band learned that Potawatomis, formerly friendly to them, would not allow them into their country or render assistance. Potawatomis, too, had grown fearful of the American response to Black Hawk's presence. Until that point, Black Hawk and other leaders of the band had kept secret from their followers what the Rock River Ho-Chunks had told them in April, namely that Atkinson would not allow them to stay with their Ho-Chunk kin. Having no more food, and nowhere to go, Black Hawk now decided to tell his people the truth.¹¹² In the meantime, a small number of unarmed messengers from the Sauk band traveled to the militiamen's camp bearing a white flag. Clearly, Black Hawk was not acting as an aggressor.¹¹³

Nonetheless, Stillman's militiamen fired on Black Hawk's messengers, killing at least two, and pursued the survivors back to where Black Hawk and a small number of his men were

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 122.

¹¹³ Ibid., 122.

camped. At this point, Black Hawk ordered his warriors to charge the Americans so that his people might escape. The mounted militiamen outnumbered the Sauk and Fox warriors seven to one, and Black Hawk expected his warriors to be killed in their defensive strike. To Black Hawk's astonishment, virtually every militiaman fled at the sight of the Sauk and Fox warriors running at them.¹¹⁴

This attack against the Sauk band, known as Stillman's Run, and the assumed inevitability of further violence, served to bring the Rock River Ho-Chunk peoples into even closer unity. The Rock River leaders had told Black Hawk and his band not to come north into their country. However, in their time of need, hundreds of Sauk families were welcomed by their Ho-Chunk kin when they reached the head of the Kishwacokee River in the third week of May. According to Black Hawk, "It was worse than folly to turn back and meet an enemy where the odds were so much against us" and doing so would mean sacrificing "ourselves, our wives and children, to the fury of an enemy who had *murdered* some of our brave and *unarmed* warriors."¹¹⁵ Facing a force intent on Sauk and Fox extermination, Black Hawk and his people found themselves at the mercy of Rock River Ho-Chunks, for the sixty-six year-old Sauk warrior "did not know where to go to find a place of safety for my women and children." This is the story Black Hawk told, but it is not the story scholars tell. While critical of Stillman's actions, historians claim that Stillman's Run transformed the crisis into a "war" and Ho-Chunk assistance to the Sauk band made them enemies of the U.S. Black Hawk remembered his band fleeing north and finding a band of Ho-Chunks near the head of the Kishwaukee River, near Illinois's northern border. They "seemed to rejoice at our success," and told Black Hawk "that they would

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 122-123. John Hall offers the most nuanced consideration of events and dynamics that led to Stillman's Run as well as the complicated consequences for the Ho-Chunk, Potawatomi, and Sauk band. See Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 120-144.

¹¹⁵ Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 127.

send two old men with us to guide us to a good and safe place.”¹¹⁶ Rock River Ho-Chunks led the Sauk band fifty miles into the trackless marshes and swamps near a widening of the Rock River called Koshkonong, a hideaway that kept them out of immediate danger from American forces.

Difficult Choices

Scholars have viewed Whirling Thunder and White Crow’s offer to aid the Sauk band following the violence of Stillman’s Run—hiding, sheltering, feeding, and guiding them as more than poor decision making.¹¹⁷ Patrick Jung writes, “persistent anti-Americanism that had manifested itself in the region for over a quarter-century brought other Indians to Black Hawk’s standard,” though he adds, “it was a limited and qualified support that made virtually no difference in the end.”¹¹⁸ Jung and John Hall both see a unified pan-tribal alliance taking shape among the Potawatomi, Ho-Chunk, and Sauk in the wake Stillman’s Run. Jung describes how they “launched a series of raids in northern Illinois and present-day southwestern Wisconsin that spread a tremendous amount of panic among the white settlers in the region.” Hall states that “disaffected Ho Chunks and Potawatomis lashed out at their American tormentors”—white settlers who stole land and lead, raped Indian women, and whipped Indian men—but Ho-Chunk betrayal of the Americans came when, “hoping to disguise their role, some Ho Chunks resorted

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 127. Black Hawk makes clear his lack of knowledge about the Rock River country, where his band took refuge. The Sauk band relied on Ho-Chunk guides and scouts for several weeks, yet the activities and motivations of these Rock River Indians are marginalized or misunderstood in scholarship on the Black Hawk War.

¹¹⁷ John Hall, for example, notes that on May 19, Ho-Chunk Indians killed a courier named William Durley near between Buffalo’s Grove and Kellogg’s Grove and a few days after that, Ho-Chunks also murdered Sauk and Fox agent Felix St. Vrain and three other Americans traveling with him near the same area. See Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 135.

¹¹⁸ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 91, 94. Jung may also be referring to the food and guidance Ho-Chunks offered to the Sauk band, though his explicit claim here is that a pan-tribal alliance formed among the Ho-Chunk, Potawatomi, and Sauk band.

to duplicity.”¹¹⁹ Jung does not interpret raids by the Sauk warriors or their Ho-Chunk and Potawatomi allies to be party of Black Hawk’s “original goal of making a stand against removal,” however. These raids sought to cover their own dead, those killed at Stillman’s Run.¹²⁰ As their peace overtures fell on deaf ears, the mounting frustration among the Ho-Chunks and Potawatomis is evident in these events.

That a group of Ho-Chunks rejoiced at news of the militia’s defeat by Black Hawk’s warriors suggests to many scholars that this was the moment when the Rock River Ho-Chunk unequivocally sided with the Sauk band against the Americans. Citing murders of whites in different events over the next three weeks—with Ho-Chunks allegedly perpetrating raids and killings in the lead region and Potawatomis killing settlers to the east—Jung argues that these Indians “generally used the advent of the war as an excuse to settle old scores with local whites to achieve objectives other than those of the British Band.”¹²¹ Jung applies his understanding of the logic of Native warfare explicitly to the Sauk band’s raids on settlements—that is, that Indian warfare was often a matter of covering or avenging their dead kin, punishing bad behavior by their enemies, and allowing “individual initiative” for warriors.¹²² This combined with Black Hawk’s recollection of Ho-Chunk praise over his warriors’ routing of the Illinois militia leads most scholars to presume that the Rock River Ho-Chunk cast their lot with the Sauk band as early as May, even if secretly. It is worth remembering, though, that the Ho-Chunk warriors did not offer to go to war with Black Hawk at this moment, but instead offered to guide his party to safety. Ho-Chunks’ glee over the Illinois militia’s embarrassing showing against so few Sauk

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 94; Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 121.

¹²⁰ See Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 94-95; see also R. David Edmunds, “Indian-White Warfare: A Look at Both Sides,” *North West Ohio Quarterly* 61 (Spring-Fall 1989): 35-45. Black Hawk recounted a speech he delivered to his warriors shortly after Stillman’s Run, which echoed this logic for native warfare. See Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 128.

¹²¹ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 95

¹²² Ibid., 94-95.

warriors was nothing out of the ordinary for Indians who had suffered displacement by this same community of Indian-hating white settlers. Knocking an American militiaman off his high horse from time to time was undoubtedly a dream of most Indians in the western Great Lakes. Ho-Chunk cooperation after Stillman's Run does not mean that Ho-Chunks were intent on war.

The events of May 14, 1832, at Stillman's Run—the deaths of twelve Americans and five Indian warriors from the Sauk band—obscured Black Hawk's true intentions.¹²³ The Rock River Ho-Chunks could no longer turn the Sauk band away as they had recently discussed. To do so would consign the Sauk band to certain destruction. White Crow and Whirling Thunder's difficult choice to harbor the Sauk band after Stillman's Run is overlooked by scholars. John Hall acknowledges that "Stillman's Run placed the Potawatomis and Ho Chunks in an extremely awkward position," but his claim rests on Illinois Governor John Reynold's reaction to the bloody encounter, not Ho-Chunk compassion for their kin. This avoidable, bloody encounter would, by August, bring about the near-annihilation of Black Hawk's band, and by September, the loss of Rock River Ho-Chunks' homelands. For the militia and settlers in the region, the so-called battle proved to them that the Sauk band had returned to make war. When Governor Reynolds declared that both the Potawatomi and Ho-Chunk Indians had joined the "hostile Sacs and all may be considered as waging war against the United States," he all but ensured that the peaceful Indians would now be targeted as subversives.¹²⁴ Militiamen, even beyond those commanded by Stillman, had something to prove to a nation familiar with the story, thanks to eastern newspapers that reported on the militia's embarrassing rout by the Sauk band.¹²⁵ General

¹²³ The May 14, 1832 engagement known as Stillman's Run has also been called the Battle of Sycamore Creek and the Battle of Old Man's Creek.

¹²⁴ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 133-39.

¹²⁵ For Isaiah Stillman's account of events and claim that his men fought bravely but were outnumbered and routed by an Indian warrior force of 500, see Stillman to a Resident of Springfield, June 13, 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 584-85. Stillman sent his brief account as an open letter to the *Sangamo Journal* (Springfield, Illinois), June

Atkinson's federal troops critiqued Stillman's men for attacking and pursuing the Sauk band "without any regard to discipline," but still, militiamen sought to regain their reputations through Indian scalps.¹²⁶

The conflict, however, need not have escalated into prolonged warfare. As far as Atkinson was concerned, Isaiah Stillman and his men had undermined the general's plan for bringing the tense situation to a quick end through diplomacy. Writing to Henry Dodge on May 17, Atkinson said that the battle had "not only encouraged the Indians, but closed the door against settling the difficulty without bloodshed."¹²⁷ After Stillman's dishonorable attack, Black Hawk, the Sauk band, and the rest of the region's Indian people came to the same conclusion. The Americans were bent on waging a war of extermination against the Sauk band, leaving no option for them but to flee north, terrified and desperate for refuge.

News of Stillman's Run prompted a scathing letter from the former Indian agent to the Sauk and Fox, Thomas Forsyth. In his view, Atkinson was to blame for allowing the Sauk band to remain unfettered in these lands, to the militia for its poor leadership and behavior in the field, and to federal officials for ignoring Sauk and Fox hardship west of the Mississippi. Forsyth scoffed at what Atkinson saw as the necessary next step. Knowing something of the upper Rock River region, the agent found the idea of American soldiers pursuing Black Hawk into the Koshkonong swamps as folly and predicted such a campaign would be short lived. "It is said here that very many of the [militia] volunteers are returning home and are already sick of the Campaigning [sic]," Forsyth wrote. He queried, "what will be the consequence when the flies and

21, 1832. For examples of Stillman's defenders attempting to shape the narrative around the events of May 14, 1832, see "To the Missouri Republican," May 23, 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 424-25, and "War News from Galena," May 23, 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 425-29.

¹²⁶ Trask, *Black Hawk*, 189.

¹²⁷ Atkinson to Henry Dodge, 17 May 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 378. For Atkinson's full report on the Black Hawk War, see Atkinson to Roger Jones, 19 November 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1204-1212. For discussion of Stillman's Run, see 1206.

mosquitoes arrive in next month, how are the horses & men to stand flies, mosquitoes, heat, rain, thunder, lightning and God knows what all which occasionally happen in the Swamps & marshes on or near Rocky River?"¹²⁸ In just over a month, several thousand militiamen and regulars would suffer these hardships. Ho-Chunks made sure of this.

Stillman's Run also unified white settler opinion against the region's Indians. But while anti-Indian, and especially anti-Ho-Chunk, fervor dominated the region in the wake of the skirmish, army and militia commanders were not keen on vilifying all Ho-Chunks and their Indian allies. This was partly because of practical considerations. Henry Atkinson, as well as commanders of militia units like Henry Dodge, knew the Americans would need Indian allies in their search for the now-missing band. Atkinson faced mounting pressure from the War Department and President Andrew Jackson to bring a quick end to the now-full-blown war. The tragic events of May pushed Atkinson to reverse his earlier pledge to White Crow and his people. The general had told them to "return to their villages and plant their fields," but now Atkinson needed them to get out of the way of his troops. Through the Indian agents, Americans sent word to the Ho-Chunk to leave their villages and gather at the forts. This would be, for the Americans, the ultimate expression of Indian neutrality. American calls for the Rock River Ho-Chunks were met with silence, however.¹²⁹

On May 26 and 28, at Four Lakes and Blue Mounds, respectively, Dodge and Gratiot met with several Ho-Chunks representing villages assigned to the Rock River and Portage agencies. Ho-Chunks from the Rock, Wisconsin, and Fox river valleys attended as well as Ho-Chunks

¹²⁸ Thomas Forsyth to George Davenport, 23 May 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 413-14.

¹²⁹ In his speech at Four Lakes, Little Black, a village chief, acknowledges he knew of and ignored the Americans' request for Ho-Chunks to leave their lands and gather near their Indian agency. Four Lakes Council, 26 May 1832 & Blue Mounds Council, 28 May 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 454-56, 467-69. Dodge and Gratiot made the same speech to the gathered Ho-Chunks at both councils, so I cite them together as Four Lakes/Blue Mounds Council below. For Little Black's speech, see 456.

from Four Lakes, Green Lake, Lake Winnebago, and the Portage. That Ho-Chunks had not heeded Atkinson's and the agents' requests to leave their villages and distance themselves from the renegade Sauk band only added to their perceived guilt. Lacking any real leverage to force the Ho-Chunks off their lands, Dodge could only threaten Ho-Chunks if evidence surfaced of their wrongdoing. At both councils, Dodge raised Stillman's Run, stating that the "Sauks have shed the blood of our people." And he spoke of the rumors that many Ho-Chunks had joined Black Hawk.¹³⁰ "Whither or not you intend to aid, harbor, or conceal the Sauks in your country," Dodge warned, the Americans would interpret such acts as war against them. "[I]f you make war on us," he continued, "you will have your country taken from you, your annuity money [from the 1829 treaty] will be forfeited, and the lives of your people lost."¹³¹ The message was clear.

Little Black, representing his village on the Rock River, was among several Ho-Chunks who spoke on behalf of his people: "My Fathers, we have been advised to leave our country, but we have not listened." Little Black articulated the difficult position his people were in: "we consider you our friends and we will do what you tell us," but, he argued, the Ho-Chunks had good reason to ignore the American requests. Obeying them would mean abandoning their fields and losing their crops.¹³² As he spoke, Little Black held in his hands the passport General Atkinson had given White Crow and Whirling Thunder. To him, it answered the dilemma the Ho-Chunk and Americans faced: "Fathers our young men do not travel much, for they are afraid of the Sauks, and afraid that they would be mistaken for Sauks by your people. My Fathers, we

¹³⁰ Ibid., 454-56, 467-69.

¹³¹ Ibid., 455.

¹³² Ibid.

wish you to give us a paper like this which Gen. Atkinson gave us, that we may show it to the whites whom we meet that they may know that we are friends and for peace.”¹³³

The Rock River Ho-Chunks desperately wanted to be perceived as friends of the Americans while remaining neutral in the conflict. Little Black understood the power of the document he held. This passport allowed Ho-Chunks to cultivate their subsistence while shielding them from harm and suspicion. Little Black reasoned that another passport would enable Ho-Chunk villagers to stay and work their fields as well as allow their hunters and gatherers to move through their lands safely. Another village chief from the Wisconsin River also pressed Dodge to distribute more passports: “I wish you would give us a paper for each of our villages that the whites who come there may see that we are friendly.”¹³⁴

Requests made by Ho-Chunks at both councils suggest a calculated effort to keep conflict out of Ho-Chunk country while protecting their corn. In this time of conflict, passports offered mobility to Rock River Ho-Chunks, who were pondering what to do about the 1,200 Indians from the Sauk band now in their lands. Passports would have enabled Ho-Chunks to move about and make contact with whites in the region. If Ho-Chunks intended to move the Sauk band through their country, toward the Mississippi by whatever route necessary to avoid American troops, passports would be indispensable.

If Dodge intended to intimidate the Ho-Chunks into obliging his requests to leave their villages, he did not succeed. His final words to the Ho-Chunks were, “your actions will determine your allegiance.” The Ho-Chunks clung to these words, reiterating their intent to keep quiet and plant their fields. Their objective at these councils was to reaffirm their right to stay in their villages. Whether Dodge provided additional passports is unclear, though Ho-Chunks

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 467.

listened to the militia commander's concluding warning: "don't let your actions deceive us." The council ended with Ho-Chunks returning to their homes with the intent to remain throughout the Corn Moon. Silver, one of the Rock River Indians, said to Dodge and Gratiot, "Fathers our women and young men will be glad to hear what you have told us today, for now they will not be afraid to plant corn and hunt."¹³⁵ The interest of the Ho-Chunks in their cornfields prevailed at these councils.

These meetings, however, were not between familiar parties, which complicated communication. Dodge and Gratiot had anticipated talks with the principal chiefs from the bands, and instead met with Ho-Chunks unaccustomed to speaking in councils—they saw new faces and heard unpracticed voices. Anticipating a principle chief of the Rock River Ho-Chunk named Man-eater, Dodge remarked on his absence, as well as the absence of so many other influential Rock River Ho-Chunks from the Koshkonong area, including Little Priest, Whirling Thunder, and White Crow.¹³⁶ A month earlier, White Crow and Whirling Thunder would not stay home. They had covered hundreds of miles over several days bearing the same message about the importance of corn and homeland. They had secured Atkinson's approval to remain in their villages, but that deal was now in jeopardy. When the message arrived to meet Dodge and Gratiot at Four Lakes following the disappearance of Black Hawk's band, White Crow, Whirling Thunder, and the Little Priest stayed away.

Their choice was no doubt connected to their dealings with the Sauk band, but also the Americans' bludgeoning diplomacy, which made hostages of village and band leaders to get what they wanted. At the moment, the Americans wanted the Sauk band, which was hiding in Rock River country. Ho-Chunks learned of the Americans' proclivity for hostage taking in the

¹³⁵ Ibid., 456.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 454-55.

years immediately following their arrival at Green Bay in 1816.¹³⁷ More recently, following violent episodes in the lead region in 1826 and 1827, agents and military officers made a practice of seizing Ho-Chunk Indians until the accused surrendered.¹³⁸ The Ho-Chunks' familiarity with the American's practice of seizing Indian leaders in order to coerce Indian people into cooperating may have factored into the decision among so many chiefs and their orator to stay home. They needed freedom and mobility to protect their peoples' interests.

The Ho-Chunks who stepped in for their usual leaders defended their absences. Little Priest stated that Man-Eater was sick. He carried a message from White Crow, Gratiot, and Dodge ahead of the council explaining that they "were prevented from attending the 'Talk,' in consequence of the Saukees being in their country, it being necessary for them to watch their movements."¹³⁹ These unfamiliar messengers brought big news. Little Snake and another messenger arrived at Four Lakes on May 27 with word that the Sauk band held two white girls in their camp.¹⁴⁰ These were the Hall sisters, Rachael and Sylvia, taken captive in a raid.

Perhaps White Crow took a gamble when he told the Americans that Black Hawk was near his Koshkonong village. But he knew well, as did Dodge and Atkinson, that the Americans would need Rock River Ho-Chunks to guide soldiers through their country should the Americans

¹³⁷ For example, when the Ho-Chunk fired on American military and trade vessels traveling along the Fox River and on Lake Winnebago in the years between 1816 and 1820, The Smoker, a young village chief from Lake Winnebago, was arrested until he pledged to seek out the hostile Indians on behalf of the Americans. See John Bowyer to Lewis Cass, 15 January 1820, in Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., "Fur Trade in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, vol. 20 (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1911), 144.

¹³⁸ For 1826 Ho-Chunk hostage incidents, see Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 78-79. For 1827 hostages, see Martin Zanger, "Red Bird," in R. David Edmunds, ed., *American Indian Leaders: Studies in Diversity* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 64-87.

¹³⁹ Henry Gratiot, "The Record of Proceedings and Events..." *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1303. Silver, a Rock River Ho-Chunk, repeated this information at the Blue Mounds council on May 28. Four Lakes/Blue Mounds Council, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 468.

¹⁴⁰ Four Lakes/Blue Mounds Council, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 467-469. Gratiot and Dodge learned of the Hall sisters' abduction and location on May 27, the day after the Four Lakes council and the day before the Blue Mounds council. Little Snake (also known as Wacanca) delivered this news from the Koshkonong area and spoke the next day at the Blue Mounds Council, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 467.

decide to pursue Black Hawk. In sharing this information with Gratiot and Dodge, White Crow initiated a narrative in which he and the Rock River Ho-Chunks stood with the Americans and were keeping a watchful eye over the enemy band. Rock River Ho-Chunks were engaged in their own strategic diplomacy, too, since White Crow positioned his people between the Americans and the Sauk band. Moreover, White Crow had created the opportunity to assist the Americans in retrieving the Hall sisters. All the Americans had to do was ask.

Through the councils at Four Lakes and Blue Mounds and amidst the emerging news of the Hall sisters' captivity, Ho-Chunks continued to speak about their subsistence, especially their corn. Another Rock River orator, Silver, pledged his people would keep quiet, mind their business, and stay out of the conflict, as the Americans had asked. Minding their business meant minding their fields: "I notify you that my wife and children are making corn on that piece of land where the Sacks are now upon and that we shall not let [the Sauks] remain there, Fathers, all the chiefs & Braves ask nothing but peace."¹⁴¹ The most impassioned plea for leniency toward Ho-Chunks came from Sister of Man-Eater. Speaking for Man-Eater, who was too ill to attend the council at Four Lakes, she addressed Dodge and Gratiot on behalf of her Koshkonong villagers:

My Fathers, I take you by the hand—we ask you to pity us: I am old and shall soon leave this world. I shall leave my children to your care. Fathers, we are now planting corn and we do not want the troops to come among us for we are your friends & think nothing bad.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Four Lakes/Blue Mounds Council, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 468. Whitney writes "nothing more is known of... Silver." 456, n2.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 455-56. Many militiamen also expressed concern over the timing of the conflict. William Orr arrived at Dixon's Ferry ready for immediate engagement with Black Hawk's invasion army only to find himself bored and wondering whether the Sauk warrior's actions necessitated such a response: "I could not then have been made to believe that at so important a season of the year, particularly to the farmer, we would have been *prematurely*, if not *unnecessarily* called from our homes." Orr shared these thoughts in a letter published in the *Illinois Advocate* (Vandalia, Illinois) July 20, 1832.

The timing of these councils eclipsed the planting of their cornfields. When Sister of Man-Eater spoke, the Digging Moon was ending and the time for building up fields, beds, and corn hills, the Cultivating Moon, was beginning, the time when Ho-Chunk women planted their seed corn. Though away from her village's fields, Sister of Man-Eater thought of her people's corn as she talked about the future. One was necessary for the other.

Whites who knew the Ho-Chunks could attest to the structure of the farming community. Juliette Kinzie, for one, had encountered Man-Eater's Koshkonong village in the early summer of 1831 and described it as "a collection of neat bark wigwams, with extensive fields on each side of corn, beans, and squashes, recently planted, but already giving promise of a fine crop."¹⁴³ Kinzie also noted that marshy open land began immediately south of the village and "that no fields were prepared nor any crops planted in this place." Such was the land of the Rock River Ho-Chunks—a checkerboard of marsh and swamp, forest and prairie, thickets and tamarack, crop beds and corn hills. Only those who possessed knowledge of its terrain could have created refuge for a large band of Indians fleeing extermination without damaging the crop. Black Hawk needed the Rock River Ho-Chunks to guide his band to safety, and the Americans needed them to guide them to Black Hawk. The Rock River Ho-Chunk were well aware of their importance to actors on both sides of the conflict.

Taking Control

Indeed, the councils at Blue Mounds and Four Lakes reveal that the Ho-Chunks, particularly the Rock River band, were actively shaping the way the conflict would unfold. They understood what would happen if the Americans engaged the Sauk band on their lands. After explaining that White Crow and Whirling Thunder were trying to get the Sauk band off their

¹⁴³ Kinzie, *Wau-Bun*, 254.

lands, Wacanca, or Little Snake, said to Gratiot and Dodge, “think Fathers if I was to come back here [to his home] & find the soil stained with the blood of my white Brethren what would be my feelings? They have always been kind to me!”¹⁴⁴ Neither Little Snake nor his people wanted harm to come to Americans—not the Hall sisters nor area white settlers Ho-Chunks considered friends—for the Rock River Ho-Chunks knew well that only land cession treaties and removal would cleanse American blood from Indian lands. This was the lesson they took from the 1827 Ho-Chunk uprising against American miners. The Ho-Chunks conveyed to the Americans that they all wanted the same thing—the Sauk out of their country. Ho-Chunks made clear that there was no need for the Americans to come into Ho-Chunk country. As Silver told Dodge and Gratiot: “we have two hundred men watching the movements of the Sacks at this moment.”¹⁴⁵ Silver wanted the Americans to know the Ho-Chunks were in control of events and were there to keep the peace in the region.

When viewed from the perspective of Ho-Chunks whose primary concern was protecting their autonomy and homeland, the Ho-Chunk speakers at the councils as well as the actions of White Crow and other Rock River leaders point to consistent objectives among the Ho-Chunks most threatened by the evolving conflict between the Americans and the Sauk band. By the end of May, preventing a direct engagement between the Americans and the Sauk merged with the principal concern of the Rock River Ho-Chunks: keeping soldiers out of their lands and away from their fields. Sister of Man-Eater’s plea for her people’s corn and their future was sincere, but corn was doing double-duty by this point in the conflict. If Americans respected Ho-Chunks’

¹⁴⁴ Four Lakes/Blue Mounds Council, *Black Hawk War vol. 2, bk. 1*, 467. Ellen Whitney determined that this speaker is also known as Little Snake and belonged to Gratiot’s Rock River agency. See *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 468n1.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 468.

wishes by staying out of the Rock River country, then that season's corn would preserve Ho-Chunk autonomy in their homelands as well as the lives of hundreds of Sauk families.

Unfortunately, the Americans insisted on tramping across the region in search of the Sauk band and their white captives. On May 27, immediately after learning of the Indian attack on Illinois settlers and of the missing sisters, Atkinson sent word to Gratiot, imploring him to enlist the help of the Ho-Chunks to "ransom the Prisoners." Atkinson offered between 500 and 1000 dollars for each sister. Gratiot and Dodge learned of these events on the same day from Wacanca, or Little Snake.¹⁴⁶ Gratiot and Dodge also reached out to the Rock River Ho-Chunks for help, sending a Rock River Indian with their request for assistance from White Crow and the other missing, influential headmen.¹⁴⁷ That the Americans immediately sought the help of the Rock River Ho-Chunk was the outcome White Crow anticipated. White Crow, as well as Little Priest and Whirling Thunder, had established themselves as *de facto* go-betweens for the Americans. In addition to the material benefits they would reap from the rescue, they secured important diplomatic gains for their people.

Within a week, White Crow, Whirling Thunder, and Little Priest arrived at Blue Mounds with the two white sisters. On this occasion, Rock River headmen and warriors chose not to stay away and accompanied the girls to the fort.¹⁴⁸ Instead of giving them the money and horses he promised, however, Dodge arrested and jailed the entire Ho-Chunk delegation. Recent events likely contributed to the militia's poor treatment of the Ho-Chunk rescue party. Several Americans in the lead region had been killed by Indians as recently as May 24, and news of the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 467; Atkinson to Henry Gratiot, 27 May 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 457-58; Gratiot to Henry Atkinson, 6 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 531-32.

¹⁴⁷ Henry Gratiot, "The Record of Proceedings and Events...", May 26 or 28, 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1303, 1305n16.

¹⁴⁸ Spotted Arm, Broken Shoulder, Son of Broken Arm, Little Priest, Old Soldier, and Swallow were among the Rock River Ho-Chunks who traveled to Blue Mounds along with Whirling Thunder, White Crow, and the Hall sisters.

murders had reached Blue Mounds. Though individual Ho-Chunks would later be implicated in these killings, early reports blamed the attack on Sauk Indians. In any case, the tribal and band identity of the Indian murderers mattered little to the American militiamen at Blue Mounds, since many believed all Indians were natural enemies of the Americans.¹⁴⁹ The militiamen, having mustered into service in 1827, and who now called home recently owned Ho-Chunk lands, undoubtedly felt themselves historical enemies of these Rock River Indians.

The story the militiamen at Blue Mounds put forth defending their actions came from Henry Gratiot's brother, Bion Gratiot, one of Dodge's militiamen. According to Bion Gratiot, the Rock River Ho-Chunks behaved suspiciously at Blue Mounds when they moved from their sleeping shelters to the woods during the night to hold a council. Bion Gratiot snuck out to observe them and saw White Crow telling a story, exciting his fellow Ho-Chunks around a fire. Bion Gratiot immediately woke his commanding officer and warned that White Crow and his warriors were about to attack the sleeping militiamen. Dodge reportedly thanked his officer and arrested the Rock River orator along with all twenty Ho-Chunks traveling with him. Henry Gratiot believed Dodge had needed "to do what he did to silence the universal clamour of his undisciplined officers and men, and, probably, to prevent them from proceeding to extremities." Bion Gratiot also claimed that he overheard White Crow insult Henry Dodge, calling him "no great shakes of a fighter." Reflecting on the incident, Henry Gratiot "attributed this misfortune mostly to the want of a good interpreter," suggesting that his brother had misunderstood White Crow.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Numerous examples of this anti-Indian sentiment among militiamen from the lead region and Illinois exist. See *Galenian* war news for April, May, and June 1832. See also William Campbell to Andrew Jackson, 13 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 788. For role of Ho-Chunk in these murders, see Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 135 and 164. See also Council with the Rock River Winnebago, 11 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1133.

¹⁵⁰ For Trask's account of this debacle at Blue Mounds, see *Black Hawk*, 227-229. Much of Trask's version relies on Peter Parkinson, Jr., "Notes on the Black Hawk War," 241-286. For Henry Gratiot's response, see,

Such misunderstandings had a long history. Ho-Chunks had first encountered Dodge when he was an illegal squatter on their lands in the late 1820s. Carymaunee, a prominent Ho-Chunk chief, complained about Dodge to his Indian agent Joseph Street in 1828, hoping the federal government, its army, or civil officials might help remove the trespassing Missourian. Dodge and 130 well-armed men turned away the messenger and the eviction notice. The stockade Dodge erected soon afterwards withstood the half-hearted attempts by the army to remove him. William Clark, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for that region, devised a legal solution to the matter; he commissioned a team of investigators to determine whether Dodge's Diggings were on Ho-Chunk or U.S. land.¹⁵¹ Under pressure by the federal government to cede all their lead-rich lands, the Ho-Chunk Indians passively acknowledged Dodge's claims by reluctantly ceding their title to the region in August 1828.¹⁵² From the Indians' perspective, Dodge was little more than a thief of Ho-Chunk lands and lead mines. But he had powerful friends.

The events of the recent past, then contributed to the tensions in the summer of 1832, as outside parties mediated the release of the Ho-Chunks. Upon arriving at Blue Mounds, Henry Gratiot convinced Dodge to release the Ho-Chunks, whom the agent placated with apologies and gifts. Scholars describe White Crow and the other Ho-Chunks as "hostages," first under Dodge, and then under Gratiot upon their release.¹⁵³ But they were not hostages. The Ho-Chunk party

Gratiot to William Clark, 12 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 579n2. Jung argues that Dodge took the Ho-Chunk party hostage because he "continued to harbor doubts" about Rock River Ho-Chunks' allegiance to the Americans and "to further antagonize the Rock River Winnebagos." However, Jung fails to acknowledge the extent to which Henry Dodge and all other army and militia commanders relied on the Rock River Ho-Chunk for intelligence up to that point and would continue to for nearly all of July. All the while, neither Dodge nor his men indicated any such doubts. See Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 106-110.

¹⁵¹ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 87-88.

¹⁵² Murphy, *A Gathering of Rivers*. For a concise narrative of Dodge's past in the lead region, see Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 87-89.

¹⁵³ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 106; Trask *Black Hawk*, 229; Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 153-54.

chose to remain and demanded a council with Dodge and Gratiot because it was to their advantage to do so. The Ho-Chunks had not been paid for their services, nor recompensed for the corn and horses they gave up securing the Hall sisters. White Crow had yet to narrate the rescue of the Rachael and Sylvia Hall and now needed to defend the character of the Rock River Ho-Chunks in light of their treatment by the lead region militiamen. White Crow and the others stayed to set the story straight.

The Ho-Chunks wanted the Americans to know who was in control of events in their country. As White Crow told it, he, along with Little Priest and Whirling Thunder, traveled to the Sauk camp, though it seemed a great many Rock River Ho-Chunks took part in the successful ransom of the sisters. White Crow told Dodge and Gratiot that they saved Sylvia and Rachel Hall from certain death at the hands of the Sauk band. What the Americans had provided for the ransom was not enough, however. The Sauk threatened to keep one of the sisters. White Crow and Whirling Thunder “gathered all our people that was round us, and we made them turn out all their Wampum, & trinkets, and we made each of our Chiefs here turn out a horse, and the women, turned out all their corn to buy [the sisters].”¹⁵⁴ In the end, White Crow even surrendered his own horse to the Sauk. White Crow believed the safe return of the Hall sisters would prove that the Ho-Chunks were “the friends of the Americans.” His generosity and that of his people—giving up corn and horses—was a great sacrifice, the orator made clear, but it was a small price to pay for the trust and friendship of the Americans.¹⁵⁵

Black Hawk’s account of the Hall sisters differs from that offered by White Crow. According to Black Hawk, Sylvia and Rachel Hall were taken during the Indian Creek Massacre on May 20, 1832, a raid perpetrated by Potawatomi Indians over a personal grievance with a

¹⁵⁴ Porter’s Grove Council, 3-4 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 509. See also, Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 152-53.

¹⁵⁵ Porter’s Grove Council, 3-4 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 508-509.

white settler.¹⁵⁶ Where White Crow claimed that he saved the sisters from certain death at the hands of Sauk warriors, Black Hawk claimed that his warriors had saved the sisters from the Potawatomis. Their entire family was dead, “except two young squaws, whom the Sacs took up on their horses, and carried off, to save their lives.” Black Hawk’s warriors brought the girls to his hidden encampment. The Sauk leader then sent a messenger to the Rock River Ho-Chunks, “as they were *friendly on both sides*, to come and get them, and carry them to the whites.”¹⁵⁷ A Sauk Indian from Black Hawk’s band later told the Americans that that the Sauk willingly gave the girls over to the Rock River Ho-Chunks, who promised them corn, sugar, and a horse in return of the girls, but never kept that promise.¹⁵⁸ Rachel and Sylvia Hall’s own recollection of their captivity and ransom was that both the Sauks and the Ho-Chunks were kind. What they understood of White Crow’s version they deemed true. When newspapers reported on the safe return of the Hall sisters, Henry Dodge received credit.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, in June of 1832, White Crow controlled the narrative locally.¹⁶⁰

The Ho-Chunks were growing nervous and increasingly unhappy with the Americans’ response to their actions. White Crow’s reaction to his imprisonment at Blue Mounds was to rely on his oratory and storytelling skills. Standing firm and collecting his payment from the Americans mattered at this juncture, lest the lead region militiamen respect the Rock River Ho-Chunk even less. Patrick Jung’s history of the Black Hawk War routinely marginalizes White Crow and his people. Jung’s erroneous allegations of crimes committed against Americans

¹⁵⁶ Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 131-32, also 132 n.105 & 106.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁵⁸ The speaker was a 30 year old Sack chief named Ioway. See his testimony in Minutes of an Examination of Prisoners, 27 August 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1055-1056 [emphasis in original].

¹⁵⁹ Trask, *Black Hawk*, 227-29. Trask discusses how Henry Dodge involved himself in the rescue efforts.

¹⁶⁰ Wacanca or Little Snake delivered news about the Hall sisters in the Sauk camp to Gratiot and Dodge on 27 May 1832. See Whitney, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1296, 1296n2, 1297n3, 1305n10.

denies Rock River Ho-Chunks agency, as he does to White Crow in this instance.¹⁶¹ According to Jung, Dodge retained White Crow, Whirling Thunder, and three other Ho-Chunks as hostages for the month of June to ensure the good behavior of their people. “Because they were Dodge’s hostages,” Jung states, “White Crow and Whirling Thunder were forced against their will to serve against Black Hawk for the next month as spies.”¹⁶² They were not spies but rather actors set on preserving peace and safety for their families and their Sauk kin.

White Crow had a keen sense of where he and his people stood in the eyes of the Americans. He understood that his imprisonment at Blue Mounds was connected to the recent murders of Americans. He called out the whites for their irrational anti-Indian feelings and for turning against all of the Rock River Ho-Chunks instead of giving them the benefit of their doubt. White Crow, of course, understood the deeply entrenched white distrust. He realized he had a lot of bad blood to overcome. Therefore, for nearly the entire first day’s meeting at Porter’s Grove on June 3, following his return of the Hall sisters and subsequent imprisonment, he recounted everything that the Rock River Indians had done to preserve peace in the region and to help the Americans.¹⁶³

White Crow repeatedly reminded his American audience of his efforts to separate his people from the Sauk and Fox at the Prophet’s village in April, showing his awareness that the Indians needed to do the work of discerning between tribes for white settlers. White Crow retold the story of how, on that same visit, the Sauk band had intended to harm Henry Gratiot, but

¹⁶¹ The 6 June 1832 murder of William Aubrey at Blue Mounds, probably by another Ho-Chunk, is one example of Jung falsely assigning guilt as well as motive to Rock River Ho-Chunks. Jung links this murder and other crimes to the broader, secret war of revenge he argues the Rock River Ho-Chunks hoped to and, according to him, did wage against the Americans in the spring and summer of 1832. See Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 106-7. For why Jung’s accusation and analysis is misguided, see Robert Birmingham, *Life, Death, and Archaeology at Fort Blue Mounds: A Settler’s Fortification in the Black Hawk War* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2012), 31-32.

¹⁶² Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 106-7.

¹⁶³ Porter’s Grove Council, 3-4 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 507-513.

White Crow intervened and saved his agent, his “Father.” White Crow had also warned Black Hawk to keep out of Ho-Chunk country; it was Black Hawk who did not listen, White Crow insisted. Ever since the Sauk band had come into Ho-Chunk lands, White Crow explained, “they are still pushing on me and I cannot drive them off.”¹⁶⁴ The Rock River Ho-Chunks were not aggressors, White Crow said, but victims, just like the white settlers. White Crow brought up Dodge’s superior officer, Henry Atkinson, speaking of the general’s original pledge to the Ho-Chunk: “The White Beaver told me to go home and have my corn planted and not interfere between the whites and the Sauk and that I should have a clear sky, and no weeds would grow in our corn fields.”¹⁶⁵ Following White Crow’s speech, the meeting adjourned for the remainder of the day. At 8 a.m. the following morning, Dodge finally addressed the Ho-Chunk.

Dodge’s relationship with the Ho-Chunks, as we have seen, was both fickle and fragile. After thanking the Rock River Ho-Chunks for their “noble kind and humane” act of saving and delivering the Hall sisters to the Americans, Dodge accused the Rock River Ho-Chunks of aiding the enemy. For example, he said a Rock River Indian had sold a horse to a member of Black Hawk’s band. The Sauk band was camped near the Ho-Chunks, or perhaps among them, Dodge said, speaking to White Crow: “you selling horses to them, for Cash taken from our people murdered by the Sacks [sic] on the high way will be considered by us as aiding and assisting the Sacks to continue the war against us.” Dodge reprimanded the Rock River Indians for rejecting American requests to clear out of their country, to get away from the Sauk band. Now, Dodge insisted, they had no choice but to comply: “We advise you to bring your families immediately within the range of our settlements that all communication between you and the Sacks should be

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 508.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

cut off otherwise suspicion will rest upon you.”¹⁶⁶ Dodge informed White Crow and the others of the size of the American military force—militiamen, army regulars, as well as Indian war parties comprised of Menominees and Dakotas—preparing to enter Ho-Chunk lands and make war against the Sauk band. If the Ho-Chunks wished to live, they should remove themselves immediately. Otherwise, Dodge warned, “it will be difficult to discriminate between you and our enemies.”¹⁶⁷ White Crow replied by explaining to Dodge that the wife of the Ho-Chunk man who sold his horse had died and that the exchange was integral to a mourning ceremony. He produced the forty dollars from the sale later that day and gave it to Dodge.¹⁶⁸ The orator’s gesture, however, was lost on the militia commander, since the sale served as evidence of collaboration with the Sauk band, thus giving additional leverage against the Ho-Chunks.

White Crow finally capitulated to Dodge, but not quietly or passively. He said: “Fathers you invite us to come and stay with you and we will do so.” Then the orator made clear his people’s terms:

Fathers, You are now writing to our Great Father the president. We wish you to tell him that we shall withdraw entirely from our country until this war is ended, but in so doing we shall lose all our corn. We shall raise nothing when the country is cleared of the Sauks and, we shall return to our villages but shall have nothing to eat. Ask our Great Father to give us something for our women and children.¹⁶⁹

In the face of Dodge’s grave accusations, and the knowing that he and his people must quit their villages and allow the American invading force to sweep in and locate the enemy band, White Crow’s concerns remained steadfast: he asked for corn to replace what would be lost, and he demanded that his people would return to their homes after Black Hawk’s band was apprehended.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 509-10.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 507-513.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 511.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., vol. 2, bk. 1, 510.

Caught between a rock and a hard place, the Rock River leaders had secured a measure of respect for their people. White Crow and Whirling Thunder had turned their imprisonment into a tale of Sauk aggression and Ho-Chunk peacekeeping. Even if white settlers and most militiamen had it in for the Rock River Ho-Chunks, White Crow still had the ears and respect of Dodge and Gratiot, as well as Atkinson. White Crow continued to worry about the fate of the Sauk band, and what it would mean if they engaged the Americans in battle in the Rock River country. As a result of that concern, White Crow devised a way for his people to remain near their villages and fields without drawing suspicion from the Americans. Before the council at Porter's Grove ended, White Crow made the Americans an unexpected offer: he pledged aid to the Americans seeking to locate the Sauk band.¹⁷⁰

Adapting to the mounting anti-Ho-Chunk sentiment, White Crow seized an opportunity that would allow him and the Rock River Ho-Chunks to take more active roles in the struggle, roles that would also demonstrate Ho-Chunks' allegiance and faithfulness to the Americans.

White Crow explained:

I do not want blood spilt on our ground.... The Sacks want us to give them a piece of Land and we are willing to lay them off a piece in the prairies, and when they go to it, we will come and tell you where they are, and you may then go and off with them as you please. Tell us fathers it is right for us to entrap them in that way.¹⁷¹

This plan would exclude the Americans from his lands and put control of events in the hands of the Rock River Ho-Chunks. Preventing direct military engagement in the Rock River country remained White Crow's primary objective. He did not want the Americans to go where Black Hawk then was, in the heart of Rock River country, where troops would certainly damage the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., vol. 2, bk. 1, 512.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 511.

crop. Instead, he wanted the Americans to allow him to relocate the enemy band to the western Wisconsin prairies.

White Crow's plan also secured his own freedom and mobility. He stated: "My Father, I want to go back and arrange the business with the Sacks." White Crow appointed himself the go-between. He promised, once he had taken the Sauk band to a new place, that he would meet the troops and allow them to surrender to the Sauks. White Crow continued, "I will take you to them and you can kill them all." If he intended at this point to carry out his plan, White Crow was careful to excuse his people from killing their Sauk kin. Only after Dodge's enthused endorsement of the plan and his insistence that White Crow and his people join the battle did White Crow add that the Rock River Ho-Chunks would "raise the tomahawk" against the Sauk. White Crow offered to have his warriors attack from the opposite direction. He was careful to avoid placing his warriors under the command of white officers.¹⁷²

Henry Dodge liked White Crow's plan. Dodge immediately suggested that White Crow place the Sauk "on high ground, where we could surround and take them." But White Crow expressed misgivings, drawing Dodge to assure the orator that he and his people were engaged in moral behavior. Dodge argued, "when any people come on your ground and drive you from your villages you have a right to kill them."¹⁷³ If Atkinson also approved, Dodge assured White Crow that the Americans would soon "have 2000 men mounted and all the people of this country to move against [the Sauk]."¹⁷⁴ Hours earlier, Dodge had all but ordered White Crow and the Rock River Ho-Chunks to distance themselves from and cut off all communication with the Sauk band. That the militia commander now viewed continued interactions between the Rock River Ho-Chunks and the Sauk as not only worthwhile but potentially instrumental in bringing the

¹⁷² Ibid., 511-12.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 512.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

conflict to an end testified to White Crow's powers of persuasion, not to Dodge's military prowess or decisive action.¹⁷⁵

The decision Whirling Thunder, Little Priest, and White Crow made to leave their villages and fields challenges historians' arguments that the Ho-Chunks were waiting for the "tide to turn" against the Americans before making their alliance with Black Hawk public.¹⁷⁶ Scholars convinced of White Crow's duplicity, of the secret military alliance between the Rock River Ho-Chunks and Black Hawk, of the Ho-Chunks' intent to carry out a war against the Americans, have overlooked the importance of White Crow's words at the Porter's Grove council on 3 and 4 June, 1832. As White Crow made clear to Dodge and Gratiot, walking away from their cornfields meant that Ho-Chunks would be entirely dependent on the Americans for winter and spring subsistence. White Crow's primary concern remained the preservation of his people in their Rock River homelands. In that moment, gaining American trust and a sufficient supply of corn from the federal government in place of a crop grown by Ho-Chunks, was only the means to these ends. In giving up their corn, the Rock River Ho-Chunks were taking a risk they hoped would pay off with enduring peace and a lasting connection to their lands.

If White Crow was naïve, it was in his belief that he could turn the sentiments of white settlers and soldiers in favor of the Rock River Ho-Chunks. While the orator and other Ho-Chunk leaders traveled to councils and pleaded for their corn, correspondence among officials and officers condemned them without evidence of their wrongdoing. For example, in the week after the return of the Hall sisters, when White Crow's pledged to clear his village and help the

¹⁷⁵ Trask, *Black Hawk*, 219-238.

¹⁷⁶ John Hall claims that "White Crow's upper Rock River Ho Chunks adhered to a policy of studied duplicity, keeping all options open until the outcome of the war was clear." See Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 209. Patrick Jung claims that the Rock River Ho-Chunks, as well as villagers from other bands, covertly supported Black Hawk and his band throughout the conflict until it became clear in the final massacre at Bad Axe on August 2, 1832, that the Sauk band was defeated. See Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 178.

Americans ambush the Sauk band, Colonel J. M. Strode of the militia forwarded a transcript of the Porter's Grove talk to General Atkinson, saying only, "I enclose you also a talk which Genl. Dodge & Mr. Gratiot had lately with the Winnebagoes but they are perfidious and faithless."¹⁷⁷ The militia's broad distrust of the Ho-Chunks frustrated Gratiot to no end.

Atkinson seemed dismissive of Strode's commentary on the Rock River Indians. Atkinson felt that he understood the Indians and Strode did not. On June 11, upon reading the transcript from the council at Porter's Grove, Atkinson approved of White Crow's plan and dispatched messages to officials and officers. Atkinson addressed a message to the Ho-Chunk, specifically to White Crow and Whirling Thunder and "other Chiefs and Braves of the Winebago Nation," instructing them to maintain their connections with the Sauk band. Atkinson instructed the Rock River Ho-Chunks to "promise the Sacs a piece of land to deceive them," just as White Crow had proposed to Dodge, and, Atkinson reminded, "Keep the Sacs deceived about every thing till we are ready to strike them."¹⁷⁸ It appeared White Crow had the Americans buying into his plan.

By the end of June 1832, the situation continued to look difficult, even grim, for the Ho-Chunk and the Sauk. On June 27, White Crow expressed his fatigue to Henry Gratiot and other American officials gathered at Gratiot's Grove, a mining property owned by the agent in southwestern Wisconsin. "Father," began the Rock River orator, "I am weary of speaking, my very lungs are tired."¹⁷⁹ White Crow was weary because he had been talking and traveling since April. Black Hawk's return two months earlier had ignited a fury among the region's white settlers and militias that Rock River Ho-Chunks feared would bring conflict to their country. Ho-Chunks desired peace, and most of all, they wanted to be left alone to prepare their fields,

¹⁷⁷ James M. Strode to Henry Atkinson, 10 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 568.

¹⁷⁸ Henry Atkinson to the Winnebago Indians, 11 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 572.

¹⁷⁹ Oliver Emmell and White Crow, report, 27 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 695.

plant their corn, and cultivate their crop. As the orator of the Rock River Ho-Chunk band, White Crow bore the burden of articulating this desire to American officials. White Crow, almost always accompanied by Rock River village chiefs Whirling Thunder and Little Priest, traveled hundreds of miles throughout southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois to hold councils with civil and military American officials as well as Potawatomi and Ho-Chunk band and village leaders, and even with Black Hawk. White Crow and other Ho-Chunks hoped to stem the growing crisis and keep violence out of Ho-Chunk country out of deference for the Corn Moon, the spring and summer months devoted to that crop. White Crow's words and actions reveal him as a warrior for the Ho-Chunks' interests.

Historians have not seen him that way. The White Crow preserved in ink by virtually every nineteenth-century contemporary who wrote about his experience in the Black Hawk War described him as a wicked, naïve, conniving, and selfish Ho-Chunk leader whose lies cost his people their land. Nineteenth-century officials, settlers, and veterans of the conflict believed that White Crow and the Rock River Ho-Chunks hoped the Sauk band's return would be the beginning of a pan-Indian war against Americans. The Ho-Chunks, according to their stories, not only sanctioned this hoped-for uprising, they secretly supported Black Hawk, biding their time and playing both sides until they could see whether the Indians or the Americans would emerge as victors. Few modern scholars have challenged this interpretation, a distorted view that grew out of anti-Ho-Chunk sentiments and settler desires for their southern Wisconsin lands. This interpretation has held sway for nearly two hundred years. What is more, historians have not revised White Crow's negative image. This image deserves reexamination in order to ascertain both his motivations and those of the Rock River band on whose homelands much of this conflict was soon to play out.

According to most American veterans of the Black Hawk War, White Crow was an untrustworthy Indian. Accounts written by militiamen as well as veterans-turned-historians portray White Crow in a negative light, while those who knew White Crow, including traders as well as Indian agents, thought quite highly of him. For example, Oliver Emmell, a half Ho-Chunk, half-American trader who grew up among the Ho-Chunk people, found himself in danger when members of the Sauk band encountered him and thought he was an American. Emmell believed he owed his life to White Crow, who intervened and prevented the Sauk Indians from harming him.¹⁸⁰ On the other hand, E. B. Washburne's characterization of White Crow reflects the views of militiamen based on their recollections after the conflict: "White Crow was an Indian of bad character, tall, slim, with a hawk nose, and with as much of a sinister look as a man could have who had only one eye." To further denigrate White Crow, Washburne added what could only be the stuff of rumor: "He was addicted to gambling, fighting, drinking, and other disreputable practices."¹⁸¹ In contrast, Whirling Thunder enjoyed high praise and respect from Americans throughout the conflict, and later still from historians of the war. Likely drawing on militia recollections and army officer correspondence, Washburne calls Whirling Thunder a "man of great repute for his sagacity and wisdom in council."¹⁸² That White Crow spoke for Whirling Thunder, and the hearts and minds of the vast majority of Rock River Ho-Chunks, seems to have been forgotten in 1832 and in history books since. What is problematic about these selective interpretations is that they ignore or diminish the meaning of White Crow's actions in 1832. He was a peacekeeper whose method that has not been understood.

¹⁸⁰ Oliver Emmell and White Crow, report, 27 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 694.

¹⁸¹ E.B. Washburne, in *Report and Collections of the Historical Society of Wisconsin For the Years 1883, 1884, and 1885*, vol. 10, ed. Lyman C. Draper (Madison: Democratic Printing Company, State Printer, 1888), 253.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 253.

While anti-Ho-Chunk feelings intensified among the region's white settlers, manifested outwardly among militiamen in the month of June, General Atkinson's trust of and reliance on the Rock River Ho-Chunks grew. The Ho-Chunks saw themselves as coequals in controlling the conflict that summer. Neither White Crow nor any other Rock River Ho-Chunks were pawns of the United States. Dodge and Atkinson's support for White Crow's plan in early June legitimized Ho-Chunk collaboration with Black Hawk's band as an act of pro-American espionage. That legitimacy would serve the Ho-Chunks well, at least in the short term. The Ho-Chunk plan held promise as the direct result of White Crow and Whirling Thunder's actions.

White Crow continued to strengthen American support for his plan. It is worth noting that all chiefs but White Crow traveled to and remained at Gratiot's Grove under Gratiot's watch in June 1832. Between June 5 and June 27, White Crow's exact whereabouts and actions are unknown, though he was likely near his Koshkonong village and communicating with the Sauk band, just as he promised. On June 14, after Dodge confirmed Atkinson's approval of White Crow's plan, the Rock River Indians were no longer "hostages" but rather spies for the Americans. Their instructions were to gather information about the strength and location of Black Hawk's band.¹⁸³ Atkinson was preparing the army and militia for an invasion of Ho-Chunk lands based on White Crow's plan and any intelligence he and other Rock River Ho-Chunks provided. White Crow remained in control of events as a result.

On June 25 or 26, the "spies" returned with intelligence on the Sauk band's whereabouts and recent activities. They returned to Colonel William Hamilton's home at present-day Wiotia, Wisconsin, but traveled to Gratiot's Grove on June 27, where Henry Gratiot awaited them. White Crow was again with Oliver Emmell and the other Ho-Chunk spies. Emmell, a French trader married to a Ho-Chunk woman, disclosed that he had seen "eighty tents" belonging to the Sauk

¹⁸³ Gratiot, *BHW* vol.2 bk. 2, 1304.

band: “the camps of the Saukee [extended] from lake Koshkenon [sic] along catfish river to its mouth, a distance of six or seven miles.”¹⁸⁴ If Emmell’s location of the Sauk band was correct, it contradicts information conveyed by Rock River Indians to John Kinzie and the Fort Winnebago commanding officer, Joseph Plympton, earlier in June, which placed the Sauk Band north of Koshkonong.¹⁸⁵ Wherever the Sauk band was camped by the end of June, it was not the destination the Ho-Chunks intended for the Americans. Emmell and White Crow also reported to Gratiot on finding several families of Ho-Chunks hiding in the swamps around Koshkonong: “Their women and children are in a state of starvation living on grass and roots.”¹⁸⁶ White Crow seized upon this moment to plead for corn. He reminded Gratiot what his people had given up for the Americans in their pursuit of the Sauk band. The orator again asked for food to feed his people, for corn from the federal government.¹⁸⁷ This was all part of the complex and delicately balanced plan in which the Ho-Chunks were engaged. They worked to maintain peace at the expense of their corn.

Conclusion

Numerous other councils took place in April, May, and June of 1832. Consistent in all these councils were the closely related Ho-Chunk goals of establishing and maintaining peace in the region and of protecting the cornfields, which were not yet planted that spring. War and violence held no advantage for the Ho-Chunks. While it was increasingly obvious to them that the Americans were encroaching into their land, as they had had been for over twenty years, it was equally apparent that the Ho-Chunks had to manage those interventions and the coming

¹⁸⁴ The Catfish River is now known as the Yahara River.

¹⁸⁵ June 4 and June 5, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 520-28.

¹⁸⁶ Oliver Emmell and White Crow, report, 27 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 694.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 694-696.

(hopefully gradual) settlement of their ancestral lands by whites. Only by taking control of these immediate tensions through dialogue and negotiation could the Ho-Chunk people hope to achieve their goals. The efforts of White Crow, Whirling Thunder, and other Ho-Chunks at these councils, as well as their speeches about corn, were significant. While scholars have often branded the Ho-Chunks as duplicitous, deceitful, or treacherous for their actions in shielding the Sauk band while negotiating in the spring and summer of 1832, Ho-Chunks were a people trying desperately to broker a settlement between the Sauk band and the Americans. Such brokerage often required a shaped narrative, shielded evidence, and directed outcomes. Postwar testimony frequently places White Crow and other Rock River Ho-Chunk with the Sauk band, no doubt facilitating Sauk movements through the land and their access to food, horses, and guides. These were not actions of deceit or treachery, but rather of Native agency. The Rock River Ho-Chunks were acting in their own best interests, in their own lands, and on their own terms. White Crow wanted a quick and peaceful end to the conflict that was displacing his people and preventing their planting that spring. The Ho-Chunks had to control the story as well as the movements of all parties involved in the conflict to achieve that peaceful end. It was their only hope for remaining in their lands in the years to come.

Chapter Three

*Creating a Shadow: How Ho-Chunks Hid Black Hawk
and Mired the Army in the Summer Swamp Campaign of 1832*

On July 3, 1832, General Henry Atkinson and his regular troops, along with over 1,000 militiamen, met their first real disappointment of what would soon become known as the “swamp campaign” of the Black Hawk War. Atkinson’s American and Potawatomi scouts had inspected the area south of Lake Koshkonong in southern Wisconsin, where Rock River Ho-Chunks had located the Sauk band. Scouts found an empty camp, though evidence suggested a recent and rushed departure by its inhabitants. For the next several days, scouting parties searched in vain for more signs of the Sauk band but found nothing of substance. Illinois Governor John Reynolds was there, and he recalled the scenes of July 1832 in his later memoir-style history of Illinois:

The main Army lay on the banks of Lake Koshkonong . . . and experienced a melancholy and sadness of feeling indescribable. The provisions wasting away - almost gone - and the enemy not chastised. Two or three thousand fine soldiers under arms and nothing done, caused reflections in the breasts of the officers, and many privates, that were extremely mortifying and painful. But what could be done? We were almost hunting a shadow.¹

Though a significant portion of Illinois militiamen, as well as Reynolds, would quit the swamp campaign in the coming days, his words rang true for the troops who remained mired in the lands around Koshkonong for much of July. They would suffer many more disappointments in their hunt for the Sauk band and the man they imagined leading it: Black Hawk.² For much of the

¹ John Reynolds, *Reynolds’ History of Illinois: My Own Times* (1855; reprint, Chicago: Fergus Printing Company, 1879), 251.

² With help from interpreters and messengers, Black Hawk exchanged correspondence with Henry Atkinson throughout the month of April. Since American misperceptions of Black Hawk as a chief or leader of the band contributed to their misunderstandings of the Sauk band’s return, Black Hawk attempted to explain to the General of the Army of the Frontier that he was not in charge. The Sauk band had returned in peace, reminded Black

nineteenth and twentieth centuries, historians of the war dwelled on Black Hawk's frequent narrow escapes and, quite often, Henry Atkinson's failures as General of the Army of the Frontier to capture the Sauk war leader.³ For most scholars, then and now, Reynold's phrase, "hunting a shadow," has come to define this conflict. Like the American troops in the midst of the conflict, some historians fail to recognize that it was the Rock River Ho-Chunks who turned Black Hawk and over a thousand Sauk, Fox, and Kickapoo Indians into the shadow the militia and army struggled to locate in July 1832. Among the scholars who acknowledge Rock River Ho-Chunk actions in this regard, virtually all see Ho-Chunk actions in guiding, sheltering, and feeding the Sauk band as evidence of Ho-Chunk duplicity, shallow character, and naïveté about the power of the United States of America.⁴ However, the Ho-Chunks had motives for playing cat and mouse with the Americans. The decision by Ho-Chunk leaders to direct the massive American force into the Koshkonong Lake and swamp region was designed to keep the Americans away from the Sauk band, protect Ho-Chunk corn fields, and show their country to be treacherous and uncultivable place where Americans would not want to settle more permanently in the years to come.

Hawk, and he, a war leader, traveled with civil chiefs. The Sauk band had planned to incorporate into the social and political structure of White Cloud's village at Prophetstown, Illinois. See Black Hawk to Henry Atkinson, 26 April 1832, in *Black Hawk War, 1831-1832*, ed. Ellen M. Whitney, vol. 2, bk. 1, *Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library* (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1973-75), 313. Chapter 2 of this dissertation examines of communication among Black Hawk, Henry Atkinson, Indian agents, and influential Rock River Ho-Chunks in the spring of 1832 as well. See also, Donald Jackson, ed., *Black Hawk: An Autobiography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1955), 118-122.

³ Publications on the Black Hawk War are numerous. For an examination of the historiography of the conflict, see Roger L. Nichols, "The Black Hawk War in Retrospect," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 65 (1982), 244-245, and Roger L. Nichols, *Black Hawk and the Warrior's Path* (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1992), 160-168. The reader will encounter numerous references to and discussions about scholarship of this conflict published since the 1830s throughout this chapter as well. Much of the bias in these histories has to do with whether their authors were veterans of the conflict and whether they served in the militia or the army.

⁴ That Ho-Chunks guided both American troops and the Sauk band has long underpinned scholarly presumptions of Ho-Chunks' guilt in regard to their actions in the summer of 1832—in other words, historians have consistently viewed the Rock River Ho-Chunk as untrustworthy.

Ho-Chunks intentionally mired the American troops along with their wagons, horses, and livestock in swamps, marshes, and bogs in a small-scale war of attrition aimed not at taking American lives, but at slowing troop movements, reducing supplies, and lowering morale. Except for one isolated event, no Indians harmed Americans in this place. During the swamp campaign, Rock River Ho-Chunks, under the guidance of influential orator White Crow as well as other important village chiefs and headmen, such as Whirling Thunder, developed and deployed a plan to protect their corn and maintain their place in their homelands.⁵ Historians have misunderstood these actions. The Rock River Ho-Chunks, and no doubt the Sauk band, hoped the Americans would quit the campaign and leave their lands.

Since 2006, three books about the Black Hawk War have been published. In these, the role of Rock River Ho-Chunks ranges from virtually invisible to one in which they played both sides of the conflict until they could determine which one to fight for: Indians or Americans. Scholars who marginalize or erase the role of Rock River Ho-Chunks in this conflict, however, produce confusing and misleading interpretations of the past. In Kerry Trask's *Battle for the Heart of America*, the Sauk band's Ho-Chunk guides are virtually non-existent. Trask endows Black Hawk with trickster-like powers to explain how he and his people stayed one or two steps

⁵ As explained in the introduction, this dissertation emphasizes the agency of Native Americans over that of Europeans and Americans and looks beyond Euro-American failures to Indigenous motivations and actions to explain Native American power and influence in the past. Extending scholarly trends in borderlands studies and the "new Indian history," rather than asking what Indians did when Americans grappled for political control or claimed Indian lands, my research asks how Indians created the conditions that preserved or allocated power and influence among themselves. As this chapter demonstrates, Rock River Ho-Chunks continuously adapted their strategies and tactics, inventing "creative misunderstandings" and confusions to safeguard their ability to shape, limit, and interpret the conflict as it unfolded in their lands. Whatever analytical framework most aptly encompasses this past—borderlands history, a "middle ground" of forced and troubled accommodations, or a "native ground" where Indians possessed more control and power in a defined geographic space—Ho-Chunks engendered and shaped it. For discussion of how Native peoples and European newcomers bridged "creative misunderstandings" and established rocky yet mutually beneficial relationships, see Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians and Empires in the Western Great Lakes, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), For discussion of how Native peoples deployed or manufactured misunderstandings to benefit themselves, see Kathleen DuVal, *Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). For examinations of Native territoriality and power, see Brian Delay, *War of a Thousands Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), and DuVal, *Native Ground*.

ahead of the American force hunting them in unfamiliar lands. “Throughout most of June and July of 1832,” Trask writes, Black Hawk “appeared and disappeared, fought and fell back, changed appearances, strategies, locations, and at times seemed to vanish altogether.”⁶ But Black Hawk was no morphing spirit-being. His Ho-Chunk guides exhibited cunning in their efforts to disguise his band’s whereabouts. Without an account of the Rock River band’s orator White Crow and numerous other band members directing General Atkinson’s strategy and moving both the American troops and the Sauk band through Ho-Chunk lands in July 1832, history gives way to fantasy.

Those familiar with the oft-told story of the Black Hawk War will not recognize the tale I tell of Ho-Chunk involvement in the crisis. Historians have not seen Rock River Ho-Chunks as central actors in this conflict even though their lands (which they would ultimately lose as one consequence of the war) served as its stage, and they provided most of the intelligence and guidance to both the Americans and the Sauk band. Their efforts left a rich but convoluted trail of evidence. Historians have overlooked this trail or gotten lost trying to follow it. Indeed, this trail is not apparent unless one is looking for it. As this chapter shows, signs of Ho-Chunk agency emerge in the silences and gaps found within army and militia correspondence, field reports, and later accounts.

In recent works on the war by Patrick Jung and John Hall, the Rock River Ho-Chunk play more profound roles in the 1832 conflict.⁷ Hall especially examines the bands of the Ho-Chunk nation. However, where evidence surfaces of Rock River Ho-Chunks misleading Americans or assisting the Sauk band, scholars too easily pass it off as sympathy for Black Hawk or enmity

⁶ Kerry A. Trask, *Black Hawk: The Battle for the Heart of America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 241.

⁷ John Hall, *Uncommon Defense: Indian Allies in the Black Hawk War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Patrick Jung, *The Black Hawk War of 1832* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007).

toward Americans. The Rock River Ho-Chunks end up portrayed in most histories as duplicitous foes of the United States who secretly supported the “British Band.”⁸ Historians presume the guilt of the Rock River Ho-Chunks because that was the narrative crafted by troops and the treaty commissioners back in the 1830s. Shortly before the conflict ended in early August 1832, American troops learned that their Ho-Chunk guides had also helped the Sauk band. Federal officials, intent on using the war to justify widespread Indian removals from Illinois and Wisconsin, urged the treaty commissioners to dig up concrete evidence of Ho-Chunk crimes against Americans to use as leverage in council. Americans interrogated surviving members of the Sauk band in August and September and found what they sought.⁹ Many members of the Sauk band confirmed that they had received assistance from Ho-Chunks, though their testimony proved too vague to be useful. The interrogations, however, turned up evidence implicating a small number of Ho-Chunks in violent crimes against Americans. For the alleged transgressions of individual Ho-Chunk Indians identified in the treaty as “accused of murdering, or of being concerned in murdering” five Americans, the Ho-Chunk nation was forced to cede three million acres to the United States in September 1832, to turn over the wanted men, and to remove themselves from the ceded territory the following spring.¹⁰

⁸ John Hall explains that Black Hawk, and those who followed him, “garnered the epithet of ‘British Band’ on account of their idle hope that the British would aid them in a war against the Americans.” I choose not to identify the families that made up the Sauk band as the “British Band.” By 1832, then in his sixties, Black Hawk had shed the warrior identity he cultivated earlier alongside Tecumseh during the War of 1812. Historians who continue to use the phrase privilege Black Hawk’s youth, thereby perpetuating a “war” narrative and diminishing Black Hawk’s own motivations and those of the Ho-Chunks’ in the events that summer.

⁹ Testimonies given by members of the Sauk band implicated Ho-Chunks in violent crimes against Americans, including the murder of Felix St. Vrain, the Sauk and Fox Indian agent, and in attacks against the western Wisconsin settlement of Blue Mounds. See Minutes of Examination of Prisoners, 19 August 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1029-1032.

¹⁰ Treaty with the Winnebago, 1832, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, ed. Charles J. Kappler, vol. 2 (Treaties) (Washington, DC.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904), 346. Eight Ho-Chunk Indians are named in Article 9 of this treaty, accused of crimes and wanted for trial by the federal government. American officials failed to draw out enough information from members of the Sauk band to charge more Ho-Chunks with crimes, but the commissioners claimed that Ho-Chunks’ actions during the war had produced widespread distrust by Americans. This mutual unfriendliness between whites and Indians became grounds for Indian removal. See General Winfield

For most historians, White Crow bears the blame for the Ho-Chunk loss of the Rock River country. At the treaty council held at Rock Island, Illinois, White Crow defended his people's fidelity to the Americans during the conflict. Though it failed to stop the treaty, his speech so moved General Winfield Scott that Scott presented a peace medal to the orator. But historians since have dismissed White Crow. This treaty, John Hall claims, "was better than the Ho-Chunks had reason to expect" given their wide-spread "cooperation with the British Band."¹¹ Patrick Jung concludes that the Ho-Chunks' secret support of the Sauk band proves White Crow lied when he "publicly professed peace many times throughout the war."¹² Likewise, Hall states that "White Crow resigned himself and his people to the dangerous path of duplicity" when he and other leaders chose to support Black Hawk covertly while offering assistance to the Americans.¹³ In the southern Wisconsin lands inhabited by the Rock River Ho-Chunks, that support came in the form of corn and canoes as well as guidance and assistance moving terrified, hunted families from one safe camp to another.

While committing these crimes of compassion, Rock River Ho-Chunks in fact kept their pledge of peace. But for one incident of violence, no Indians harmed Americans in Rock River Ho-Chunk lands. Yet White Crow and his people remain the villains of the Black Hawk War, the bad Indians who almost incited a pan-Indian war against the United States while they tried to play both sides of the conflict and lost. Ho-Chunk guilt persists in scholarship even as Black

Scott's comments as treaty commissioner, Council with the Winnebago from the Fort Winnebago, Rock River, and Prairie du Chien Agencies, 12 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1136-1138.

¹¹ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 209, 213. Patrick Jung offers similar conclusions regarding Rock River Ho-Chunk guilt in light of their actions during the conflict. See Jung, *Black Hawk War*.

¹² Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 79. Jung refers to the peace delegation led by White Crow and Whirling Thunder in April, which traveled to Rock Island.

¹³ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 152. Hall's book stands out for its inclusion of various Native perspectives on the crisis in the spring and summer of 1832 and discussion of Native motivations in the conflict.

Hawk himself has become the elderly Sauk war leader returning to plant corn in peace, absolved of ill intent by historians.¹⁴

Like the treaty commissioners in September 1832, historians since have mischaracterized Ho-Chunk assistance to the Sauk band as evidence of their enmity toward Americans. The commissioners forced the Rock River Ho-Chunks to cede and remove from their homelands. Historians uphold these convictions and deny Ho-Chunk descendants a history that was first silenced at the treaty council. Alternative ways of imagining this past have proved rare because of the emphasis scholars place on the events of 1832 as a “war” between two belligerent sides. As a result, the Rock River band’s efforts remain hidden, rather than at the center where their narrative belongs.

Helen Tanner’s *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History*, for example, provides a stark and unequivocal, though mistaken, illustration of Ho-Chunk guilt (see fig. 1). Her map of the Black Hawk War assumes an “Area of Indian Disaffection” in a shaded circle covering the Rock River country, a geographical condemnation of Ho-Chunk actions during the conflict.¹⁵ Tanner contends, “For nearly two months the British Band hid in the marshes of the upper Rock River, north of Lake Koshkonong,” and all the while, Black Hawk’s warriors raided forts and homes for food and supplies, killing about thirty settlers and militiamen. She states, “some of the depredations were the responsibility of Indians living in areas of suspected disaffection shown on

¹⁴ Jung offers the most striking example of this trend in scholarly analysis of the Black Hawk War. Jung (and Hall, to a lesser extent) implicates the Rock River Ho-Chunk band in a separate, small-scale war against Americans. Regardless of the Sauk band’s peaceful intentions, Jung asserts that the Rock River Ho-Chunks remained “more interested in seeking revenge against white miners,” the population of settlers who illegally displaced them from their lower Rock River lands during the 1820s lead rush and officially through the 1829 treaty. This claim not only dismisses Ho-Chunk efforts to keep the peace in the spring of 1832, but it also reinforces the inaccurate portrayal of Ho-Chunk leaders as naïve in their attempt to resist American expansion into their lands through violence. To the contrary, White Crow and Whirling Thunder repeatedly referenced the 1829 land cession treaty in their pleas for peace. For quote, see Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 79.

¹⁵ Helen Hornbeck Tanner, ed., *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 153. Tanner’s map reflects existing scholarship on the Black Hawk War at that time.

the map.”¹⁶ Indicated X’s to the south and west mark battle sites at Blue Mounds and Kellogg’s Grove, incidents in which a handful of Ho-Chunks took part and five Americans were killed. Tanner’s map, however, indicts the entire Rock River band (and a portion of the Potawatomi tribe) for violent actions committed mostly by members of the Sauk band.¹⁷ Moreover, as the map shows, all of these depredations occurred outside the Rock River country. In this chapter, I tell a different story about what unfolded in Ho-Chunk lands in 1832. In place of Tanner’s “area of Indian disaffection,” the Rock River country becomes an area of creative Indian intercession, where Ho-Chunks exercised covert and passive mediation to prevent violence between Indians and whites.

That some Ho-Chunk Indians committed violence acts against Americans has been proof enough for historians to make the inaccurate claim that White Crow and other Rock River Ho-Chunk leaders desired and even attempted to incite a pan-Indian war against Americans in 1832. In this narrative, White Cloud (the Winnebago Prophet), White Crow, and Whirling Thunder were naïve, shortsighted men who failed to understand the power of the United States.¹⁸ Such claims rest on a misreading of key documents as well as miscomprehension of the Ho-Chunks’ worldview and what they valued most—corn and homeland. As the previous chapter demonstrates, in the weeks following the Sauk band’s return in April, Ho-Chunks spoke about their desire for peace, for freedom to cultivate their fields, for troops to stay out of their lands, and for the Sauk band to return to Iowa. White Crow and Whirling Thunder also pleaded early on with the leaders of the Sauk band, warning them that if Black Hawk’s warriors got reckless

¹⁶ Tanner, *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History*, 153.

¹⁷ Potawatomi Indians proved more violent than Ho-Chunks toward Americans during the conflict of 1832. On 20 May 1832, eighty Potawatomi warriors led attacks on white settlements in northern Illinois, killing fifteen settlers and kidnapping two sisters, Sylvia and Rachel Hall, an event known as the Indian Creek massacre. See Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 120-144.

¹⁸ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 78.

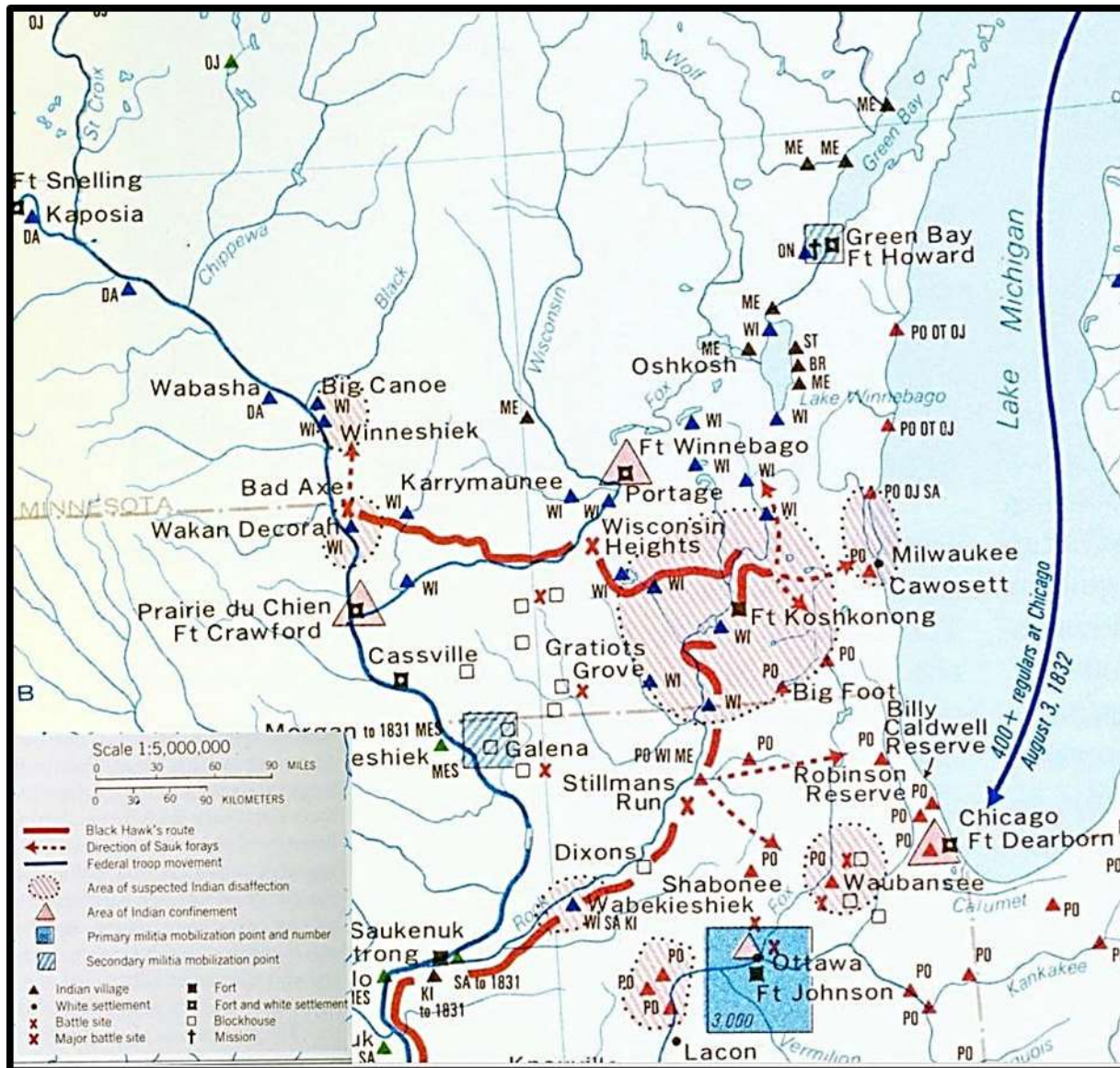


Fig. 1. Area of Suspected Indian Disaffection. Detail of “Black Hawk War 1832,” in Tanner, ed., *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History*. Indicated X’s locate sites of violent clashes between Indians and whites during the conflict. Note the absence of X’s in the “Area of suspected Indian disaffection.”

and spilled American blood, it would be the Ho-Chunk who would pay.¹⁹ Americans, invaders of Ho-Chunk lead-rich lands and abusers of Ho-Chunk people, especially women, looked for any

¹⁹ Porter’s Grove Council, 3-4 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 512-513. White Crow and Whirling Thunder claimed to have warned the leaders of the Sauk band of in April 1832, and, according to White Crow, made them

reason to take action against the Ho-Chunks, and sought justice only when it served their claims on Indian lands and resources.

Far from a naïve people with foolish leaders, Rock River Ho-Chunks knew the price of war with Americans and the cost of American blood spilled on their lands. Forty-four Ho-Chunks representing all the bands had signed the 1829 treaty, which was their punishment for Red Bird's Uprising, or the Winnebago War of 1827, as Americans called it.²⁰ For Ho-Chunks, short of giving up the Sauk band to those who would massacre them, preventing destruction of lives and fields in their country and somehow distancing themselves from the violence outside their lands promised the best possible outcome.

In their quest for incriminating evidence against the Rock River Ho-Chunks, scholars have simplified or even misrepresented moments that the Rock River Ho-Chunk people saw as difficult and complex. We know from Black Hawk's autobiography and testimonies given by surviving members of the Sauk band that White Crow and the Rock River Ho-Chunks guided them to safety in their lands in May and sheltered, fed, and guided them for the next two months while the Americans hunted them. Ho-Chunk actions should raise questions about their motives, but how historians have gone about answering those questions has produced an inaccurate view of this past. Their future survival in the Rock River Valley depended on preventing bloodshed and being able to feed themselves in the coming fall, winter, and spring. They almost succeeded.

Understanding Rock River Ho-Chunks' activities in 1832 requires an inclusive historical inquiry with all the "possibilities of its future still in it," and, as historian Greg Dening suggests,

also understand the boundaries of "all the country which they the Winnebagoes had sold to the americans [sic]" so that the Sauk band would respect the Ho-Chunks' desire for peace in ceded and unceded lands.

²⁰ Most recent historians agree with Martin Zanger's position that the events of 1827 "hardly qualified for designation as a war." See Martin Zanger, "Red Bird," in *American Indian Leaders: Studies in Diversity*, ed. R. David Edmunds (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 64-87. For more information about this uprising, see Hall, *Uncommon Defense*; Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, *A Gathering of Rivers: Indians, Metis, and Mining in the Western Great Lakes, 1737-1832* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); and Mark Wyman, *The Wisconsin Frontier* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

“all its uncertainties.”²¹ “Our certainties are our greatest enemy when we approach the past,” Denning reminds us; “Hindsight is always blinding.” Imagining the summer of 1832 as Rock River Ho-Chunks lived it means letting go of what we think we know about their motivations, choices, and actions during the conflict that cleaved their country.

While generations of writers and historians have maintained Ho-Chunk guilt for the events of 1832, primary sources, especially those from the time of the war, tell a different story. Historians have relied largely on troop accounts composed years later—blinded by hindsight—more than on letters and journals produced at the time of the conflict. Correspondence from the field contains, of course, all the uncertainties of its present as well as all the possibilities for its future. Only when the past is restored with all its doubts and potentials for the Americans, the Ho-Chunks, and the Sauk band, and only when actions of the Rock River Ho-Chunks also become privileged lenses into this past, does a messier though more accurate version of the 1832 crisis appear. When Ho-Chunks themselves emerge as central actors in the spring and summer of 1832, this history makes more sense. For the Ho-Chunk people, the crisis was not a war. The only side they chose was their own. The most accurate story one can tell about July 1832 is not about the Ho-Chunks as disaffected, treacherous enemies of the Americans. The Rock River Ho-Chunks were calculating diplomats and warriors for their people’s sovereignty and homelands. This was no war, but rather a game of hide and seek with decidedly high stakes. For the Rock River Ho-Chunks, those stakes included their kin, the Sauk band, and their remaining lands.

Ho-Chunk agency, or their power to shape the campaign, stemmed from what they knew and the Americans did not. The first section of this chapter examines how Ho-Chunk knowledge of the Sauk band’s location and the local terrain allowed them to cultivate trust among, or at the least reliance of, the American troops they guided while simultaneously depleting the military’s

²¹ Greg Denning, “Empowering Imaginations,” in *The Contemporary Pacific* 9, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 419-429.

power—the troops’ means of travel, their supplies, their health, and their morale. The second section considers Ho-Chunk strategies for protecting their lands as the Americans spread out in their territory in mid-July, hunting the Sauk band from Koshkonong toward Fort Winnebago and ultimately into the upper Rock River. The last section relates the Ho-Chunks’ interim successes as they moved Americans around their corn, as well as the significance of those successes.

Searching and Miring at Koshkonong

There was no better place to assist the Ho-Chunk in their work thwarting the American search for the Sauk band than Koshkonong. An amalgamation of Algonquian words, Koshkonong means “Place of Heavy Fog” or “Place Where the Fog Closes It In.”²² Throughout June, as Americans prepared to invade Ho-Chunk homelands, military officers and civil agents gleaned intelligence concerning the Sauk band’s whereabouts. This information came almost entirely from willing Rock River Ho-Chunk Indians working as “spies” for the US military. General Henry Atkinson’s certainty regarding the Sauk band’s location rested on information provided by White Crow, many villagers, and one or two local traders connected with the Ho-Chunk people. That certainty led to the convergence of his army and several local militia units at Koshkonong in early July. And Koshkonong was no easy place to be.

The Ho-Chunks’ plan would be no simple undertaking. American troop levels in Ho-Chunk lands were between 2,500 and 3,000 in early July 1832.²³ General Henry Atkinson began mobilizing a military force in April, intending to overwhelm or overawe the Sauk band. His ultimate goal was to force the renegade Sauk families west of the Mississippi River, back to their Iowa reservation, through intimidation if possible. By the end of June, Atkinson commanded

²² Frederic G. Cassidy, *Dane County Place-Names* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 87.

²³ For more detailed information on troop levels and different divisions of the army and volunteer forces, see Jung, *Black Hawk War*, esp. 93-126.

this massive force, which relied heavily on militiamen from Illinois and western Michigan territory (now southwestern Wisconsin).²⁴ Those who volunteered often did so out of fear and anger over Black Hawk's return to Illinois. Few were interested in a peaceful outcome. Based on many of their own accounts, in fact, the militia wanted members of the Sauk band back in Iowa or dead, whichever was easier and brought a taste of military action.²⁵ Such was the violence upon which settling the Old Northwest had been predicated. But bloodshed or no, the Americans first needed to locate the Sauk band. For this initial objective, Atkinson and his men relied on the Indigenous people familiar with the area. Several dozen Rock River Ho-Chunk Indians served as guides and scouts, and they were joined by about eighty Potawatomi Indians. Until Atkinson dismissed them in the second week of July, the Potawatomis worked primarily with Atkinson, while the Ho-Chunk guides worked and shifted among numerous smaller militia units and mounted army spy battalions as well as with Atkinson and his regulars.²⁶

The Potawatomis traveling with Atkinson posed almost no threat to the Rock River Ho-Chunks' plans, and even may have assisted their Rock River neighbors in thwarting American designs.²⁷ Like the Rock River Ho-Chunks, the Potawatomi Indians of Illinois and southeastern Wisconsin preferred peace in their lands. In its quest to define tribal boundaries in 1825, the United States had designated the Rock River as the boundary between Ho-Chunk and Potawatomi territories. Ho-Chunks inhabited and cultivated the lands immediately east of the river, however, and bands belonging to both tribes collaborated in subsistence activities there.²⁸

²⁴ For the most comprehensive discussion of dynamic between the army and militia officers and troops, see Hall, *Uncommon Defense*.

²⁵ William Campbell to Andrew Jackson, 13 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 788. Several historians document Indian hating and Americans advocating extreme violence against the Sauk band as well as other Indians in the region. See Hall, *Uncommon Defense*.

²⁶ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 93-159; Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 120-179,

²⁷ For the best overview of Potawatomi involvement in the crisis of 1832 and their view of the Sauk Band, see Hall, *Uncommon Defense*.

²⁸ See Tanner, *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History*, "Map 22: Indian and White Settlements c. 1830," 123.

The Potawatomi also had friendly relations with the Sauk and Fox people. Like the Ho-Chunk, though, they had refused refuge to the Sauk band before to the first bloodshed in May at “Stillman’s Run” in hopes of convincing the Sauk band families to return to Iowa.²⁹ Unlike White Crow and the Rock River Ho-Chunks, Potawatomis had been mustered into the federal army as “warriors.” Yet few if any of the Potawatomi men wanted to fight the Sauk band. As John Hall demonstrates, after the recent massacre at Indian Creek perpetrated by a few Potawatomi with a grudge against some of their white settler victims, several leaders and influential *Métis* from Potawatomi communities offered military assistance to the Americans as a way of mending the damage done earlier that spring. According to Hall, “It was clear from their demeanor that their business was more diplomatic than military,” noting the absence of traditional war paint, garb, and ceremonies that always preceded battle. Atkinson was happy to have them, if not for their services in battle, then for their knowledge of the Rock River country, which they shared with the Ho-Chunk (see fig. 2).³⁰

Not all Native groups involved in this unfolding crisis shared Potawatomi and Ho-Chunk concerns and kinship with the Sauk band. Two-dozen Menominee warriors accompanied western Michigan territory militiamen as they made their way toward the Rock River. While the Menominee shared centuries of kinship with the Ho-Chunks, as the only two tribes to call the region home since time immemorial, the Menominee people considered the Sauk and Fox tribes their enemies. The bitter rivalry, born from their competition during the French era fur trade,

²⁹ See Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 122-124.

³⁰ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 157. Jung also singles out the Potawatomi Indians for their fidelity to Americans during the conflict in contrast to the Rock River Ho-Chunk, crediting better Potawatomi leadership. At best, Potawatomi leaders “were squarely within the American camp” and effectively policed tribal members’ activities during the war. At worst, Potawatomi warriors “served the United States in an indifferent manner.” Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 136-37.

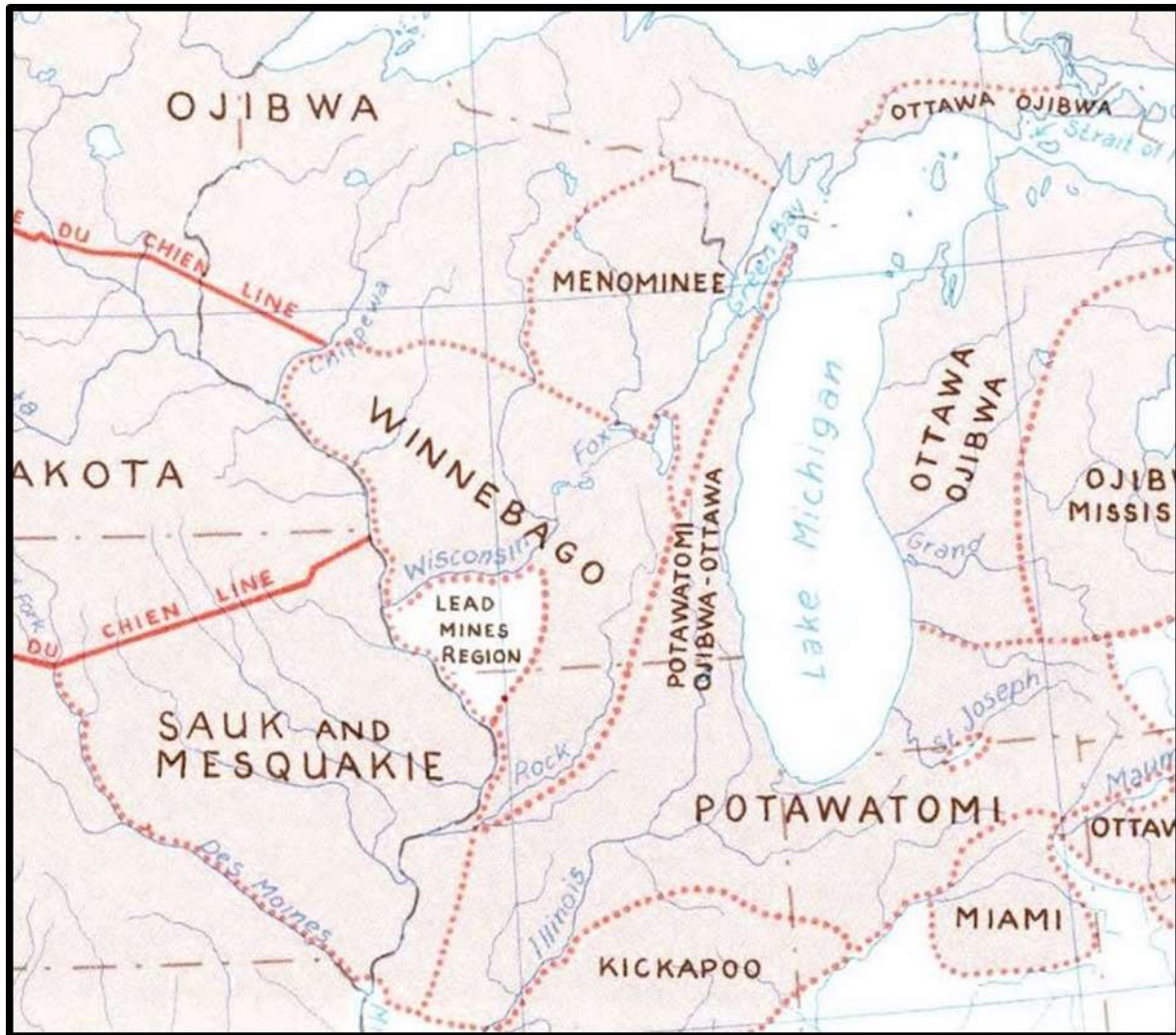


Fig. 2. "Indian Lands, c. 1830." From Tanner, *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History*.

remained salient in the spring and summer of 1832.³¹ These warriors wanted the opportunity to make war on the Sauk band.³² Making matters worse, the western, or Mississippi band of Menominees was heavily intermarried with the Dakota people, also ancestral enemies of the Sauk and Fox. Fortunately for the Ho-Chunks, Menominees shared the same disadvantage as the Sauk band and the Americans. They were lost without Ho-Chunk guides.

³¹ In recent years, blood had been shed between the Menominee and Sauk and Fox and the dead had not been "covered." Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 180-205.

³² *Ibid.*, 145-179; David R. Edmunds and Joseph L. Peyser, *The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993).

Ho-Chunks had American advocates for their cause, too. Indian sub-agents assigned to the Portage and Rock River agencies worked diligently to convince the region's whites—settlers and politicians—that their Ho-Chunk “children” were not at war with the United States.³³ John Kinzie and Henry Gratiot depicted them in positive terms; however, they found anti-Ho-Chunk sentiment virtually impossible to dislodge from the region's white residents even as they touted Ho-Chunk service as spies, scouts, and guides. John Hall views regional sentiment similarly, calling Prairie du Chien “perhaps the most anti-Indian settlement in the United States,” with residents “inclined to believe that all Indians were allied with Black Hawk” and advocating “Indian policies ranging from removal to genocide.”³⁴ Further south, Illinois settlers had been destroying Sauk and Fox villages, tearing their crops out of the ground, and beating them for trespassing.³⁵ Ho-Chunks knew well how lead region and Illinois volunteers felt about Indians and understood their capacity to perpetrate and justify violence against Native peoples and their property.

One of the volunteer units from the western Michigan Territory was a battalion led by Henry Dodge. Dodge and the Ho-Chunks were old foes. In 1827, for instance, Dodge had led a militia to quell a small Ho-Chunk uprising against white settler abuses of Ho-Chunk sovereignty. While Rock River Ho-Chunks had not forgotten nor likely forgiven American trespasses and state-sanctioned violence against them, they cultivated a delicate trust among Dodge and his men

³³ Hall explains the history of relationships among various Potawatomi bands, the Sauk band that returned east of the Mississippi in 1832, and the Americans, as well as how this history informed Native policies and alliances during the Black Hawk War. See Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 120-179.

³⁴ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 158.

³⁵ Adam John Waterman, “The Price of Purchase: Black Hawk’s War and the Colonization of the Mississippi River Valley” (PhD diss., New York University, 2008), 105-106.

as a matter of necessity. Lead region militiamen posed a real threat to Ho-Chunk subsistence and sovereignty.³⁶

The Rock River Ho-Chunks needed to keep this potential powder keg of rivals from erupting on their land. White Crow's actions in the final week of June, accordingly, reflected his efforts to assemble the disparate militia regiments and regulars in one region of his people's country, making them easier to manage and monitor. After delivering their final intelligence report at Gratiot's Grove, which located the Sauk band along the Catfish, or Yahara, River at the south end of Lake Koshkonong, White Crow and dozens of other Ho-Chunk Indians as well as Oliver Emmell, a trader and interpreter, divided themselves and departed on June 29 to become guides and scouts for the American invasion force already en route to Koshkonong.³⁷ On July 3, Emmell and several Ho-Chunk Indians intercepted Milton Alexander's brigade of Illinois militiamen just before his troops reached Lake Koshkonong.³⁸ On July 5, White Crow and thirty-one Ho-Chunks joined Henry Dodge's (Michigan Territory) Iowa County mounted battalion, Alexander Posey's Illinois Militia brigade, and Billy Hamilton's contingent of two-dozen western Menominee warriors somewhere near Lake Kegonsa, twenty miles east of

³⁶ For the history of Henry Dodge and the Ho-Chunk people, see Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 88-89, 95 and Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, 101-136. For Dodge's role in the Black Hawk War, see Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 145-205. In the historiography of the Black Hawk War, Dodge is typically portrayed as the more competent, aggressive, and decisive commander compared with Brigadier General Henry Atkinson. For an overview of this debate among scholars and writers since the conflict, see Hagan, "Dodge-Henry Controversy," 377-384. Patrick Jung and Kerry Trask share this view of Dodge, see Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 142-143 and Trask, *Black Hawk*, 219-238. Trask's view of Dodge is apparent in this chapter's title: "A Hero Arose." John Hall is more critical of Dodge, and in general, he offers a nuanced view of the primary commanding officers of the army and militia units during the 1832 conflict. For contrasting treatment of Henry Atkinson, see Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 70-179 and Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 70-159.

³⁷ Henry Gratiot, Journal, 29 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1304.

³⁸ Nineveh Shaw, Journal, 4 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1334. Shaw served in Milton Alexander's Illinois Militia brigade. His journal appears to be a compilation of his and those of two other volunteers, likely all from Clark County, Illinois. See *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1338-1339n. On 29 June, Gratiot noted eleven Ho-Chunks with Oliver Emmell, but only ten arrived with him on 3 July. See Gratiot, Journal, 29 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1304. When Gratiot encountered Emmell and the Ho-Chunks he traveled with again on 7 or 8 July at Koshkonong, he noted eleven Ho-Chunks. See Gratiot, journal, 8 July 1832, 1304. These inconsistencies proved common during the swamp campaign, and Americans unsure of the exact number of Ho-Chunks working as their guides and scouts suggests an ambiguity the Ho-Chunks may have exploited.

Koshkonong.³⁹ In the intervening days, some of these Ho-Chunk guides and scouts, and probably White Crow, traveled to where the Sauk band was encamped either to facilitate its move or hide them from the Americans.⁴⁰

Guided by Potawatomi Indians, General Henry Atkinson was a day ahead of Posey's brigade and approaching Koshkonong from the south. Around eighty Potawatomi Indians camped in northern Illinois, near the Rock River, for several days, waiting for Atkinson. During the Ho-Chunks' final June spying mission, they likely communicated with these Potawatomis. In his report to Gratiot, Emmell informed the agent that "Whirling Thunder's son" broke off from the group and went "into the Potawatamy country to see what they were doing."⁴¹ Some scholars assume that Emmell oversaw the actions of the Rock River Ho-Chunks, ensuring their fidelity as they gathered intelligence on the Sauk band.⁴² However, Emmell's trust in or perhaps collaboration with them allowed individuals such as Whirling Thunder's son to meet with Potawatomi Indians and convey as well as collect much needed information about the army's plans and movements. If White Crow's initial goal was to assemble the militia groups and regular army units in the lands around Koshkonong, numerous Ho-Chunks and Potawatomis made that happen in the first week of July.

³⁹ Gratiot, Journal, 5 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1304.

⁴⁰ About eighty miles separated Gratiot's Grove from Koshkonong, a distance easily traveled in three days by horse, leaving just enough time for some of the Rock River Ho-Chunks to alert the Sauk band that the American invasion had commenced. Piecing together a history of Ho-Chunk agency during the Black Hawk War relies on patterns of silences in the documents. One of these silences is the whereabouts of White Crow and other Ho-Chunks after they left Gratiot's Grove on 29 June. Black Hawk's autobiography as well as testimonies extracted from Sauk band prisoners by Americans in August and September 1832 identify White Crow and other Rock River Ho-Chunks as frequent visitors to Sauk camps and their guides during the crisis. See Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 122-132; Gratiot, Journal, 5 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1304.

⁴¹ Mark Diedrich, ed., *Winnebago Oratory: Great Moments in the Recorded Speech of the Hochungra, 1742-1887* (Rochester, Minnesota: Coyote Books, 1991), 102, 104. Two possible identities for "son of Whirling Thunder" include Dandy and He who Walks on Iron or Iron Walker. Diedrich claims that Dandy was also known as Young Whirling Thunder, Roaring Thunder, and Bluff or High Rock.

⁴² Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 107. Jung refers to White Crow and other Rock River Ho-Chunks as Henry Dodge's "hostages" and under Emmell's watch during spying missions. The historical record suggests that White Crow and other Rock River Indians offered their services to the Americans willingly.

Despite the help of numerous Indian guides, however, the Americans were lost in the wilderness. The guides often added to that confusion, and did so purposefully. During Atkinson's march toward Koshkonong, for example, his Potawatomi guides and scouts exhibited some odd behavior. As the troops neared the spot identified as the Sauk band's camp, Potawatomis excited the troops by pointing out "fresh signs of the Sac Indians," suggesting the "enemy band" had been fishing earlier that day in the very place where the troops stood. This was unlikely. Atkinson's troops were somewhere north of Turtle Creek village (present-day Beloit, Wisconsin), and the Sauk band's southern-most alleged camp after fleeing into Ho-Chunk lands was at least twenty miles away.⁴³ Then, on July 1, just two days away from Koshkonong, Potawatomi scouts fired their muskets. Atkinson, certain that Black Hawk's warriors were preparing to attack, ordered his men into action. Militiaman John Wakefield remembered the excitement among the troops and then their disappointment when no attack came. This sequence of events played out over and over again according to Wakefield, who recalled that "sentinels fired several times, and we were as often paraded, and prepared to receive the enemy, but they never came."⁴⁴ Repeated false alarms from Potawatomis likely contributed to a friendly fire incident. One unlucky regular wrapped in a blanket for warmth took a musket ball from a volunteer who mistook him for an Indian.⁴⁵ Men's nerves got the better of them when they "expected every step to be fired upon from the thickets," as Wakefield explained.⁴⁶ Potawatomis did not always blame the Sauk specter, however. Atkinson readied his men for battle on July 2 after hearing musket fire in the distance only to find out that the Potawatomis had taken aim at deer.

⁴³ John A. Wakefield, *Wakefield's History of the Black Hawk War* (1834; reprint, Chicago: Caxton Club, 1904), 77. The camp locations and route for Atkinson's regulars and James Henry's brigade are shown by date on Edwin Rose's map, which is referenced later in this chapter.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

Wakefield explained, “it was soon ascertained that these children of the forest, had been at what their whole race seems to have been born for, tradesmen to shooting at the beasts of the forests.”⁴⁷ It is not clear whether deer drew fire from Potawatomi scouts; however, it is clear that Potawatomi actions disclosed their position, and that of the Americans they were guiding, daily. Such loud behavior by Indian scouts would not have been inadvertent. Anyone within earshot of their musket volleys, would know the American force had arrived. The Potawatomi seemed to be helping protect the Sauk band, warning them, and thus keeping the peace in the region.

Warned away by such actions, or by more proximate Ho-Chunk Indians, the Sauk band kept on the move. Early on July 3, an Indian and white reconnoitering unit shared the disappointing news that Black Hawk had abandoned his camp south of Lake Koshkonong. The enemy had not gone far, it seemed. The scouts found five recent Indian graves and determined that the camp had been empty fewer than three days. Soldiers unearthed the corpses. Though some had died of wounds, the dead bodies showed that members of the Sauk band were exhausted and starving.⁴⁸ Troops found an elderly Indian alive later that same day. Atkinson’s aide-de-camp and assistant adjutant general, Lieutenant Albert Sidney Johnston, called him “perfectly imbecile, from age and suffering” and believed nothing he said regarding Black Hawk’s location.⁴⁹ Twice in his journal, Johnston identified the man as a “Winnebago” and twice he crossed it out and wrote “Sac” instead. He was unsure of the man’s identity.⁵⁰ To

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁸ The nature of these wounds is unclear, so how or where the recently buried Indians suffered them is not known. See Albert Johnston, *Journal, BHW* vol. 2, bk.2, 1316.

⁴⁹ Johnston, *Journal, BHW* vol. 2, bk.2, 1316. Two diaries are attributed to Albert Johnston. He kept a field diary during the war and produced a second, more detailed version after the conflict ended at the request of Henry Atkinson. Johnston’s revisions and additions to the second diary show his bias toward Atkinson, his commanding officer, as he attempts to justify actions taken by the general during the war that drew criticism from Atkinson’s superiors as well as his subordinate militia officers and volunteers. Ellen Whitney includes Johnston’s second diary in her edited volumes and offers notes indicating where and how it deviates from Johnston’s original diary. See *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1307-1322.

⁵⁰ Johnston, *Journal, BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1316n64.

many troops in the field, Indians were indistinguishable from one another. In fact, many of the Ho-Chunk and Potawatomi allied with the Americans wore white handkerchiefs to distinguish their status. Regulars left the old man with some food to die on his own, but militiamen would not extend him this kindness. Members of Alexander Posey's unit killed the Sauk man a couple of days later.⁵¹ The defenseless Indian's murder surely reminded White Crow and other Ho-Chunks present what was in store for their Sauk kin if the militiamen caught up with them.

The Sauk band left no single, clear trail for the Americans to follow. The Rock River Ho-Chunks, who led the refugee families away from their camp, had split them up into smaller groups, creating light small trails that led in different directions. Awaiting the arrival of militia units, Atkinson and the main force stayed in their camp near Koshkonong for the next three days while Potawatomi and American scouting parties followed what they believed to be recent Indian-made trails and expanded their search around Koshkonong for more signs of the Sauk band's presence.⁵²

By July 5, virtually the entire force of regulars and militiamen, between 2,500 and 3,000 strong, were camped near the shores of Lake Koshkonong. Untroubled by news that Ho-Chunk intelligence had led the Army of the Frontier to an abandoned camp, White Crow redirected the American force to a new destination north of the lake that *Métis* Catherine Myott interpreted to mean "the island." None of the other guides, Ho-Chunk or Potawatomi, refuted White Crow's new and conveniently timed intelligence.⁵³

White Crow's tidings suggested American success was at hand, but Atkinson's excitement was dulled by a letter from War Department. The letter conveyed President Andrew Jackson's deep disappointment over Atkinson's lackluster progress in bringing an end to the

⁵¹ Ibid., vol. 2, bk. 2, 1316.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

conflict.⁵⁴ Jackson himself had chased Indians through swamps in Florida and Alabama almost twenty years earlier.⁵⁵ The president now had little patience for Atkinson's situation, and he sought results by providing an additional 1,000 troops and a new commanding general, Winfield Scott, who was then en route to take command. Scott had more experience fighting and killing Indians and the president was sure he would bring order to the scene at Koshkonong. Atkinson kept news of his demotion quiet, a move that would prove advantageous since a cholera outbreak among Scott's soldiers ultimately prevented him from relieving Atkinson of command.⁵⁶

Needing something to show for his efforts, Atkinson made preparations to move his force toward what Myott had called the island. White Crow's confidence about the Sauk band's new location emboldened Atkinson. However, none of the Rock River Ho-Chunks had the general's career at heart. Even with the addition of several dozen Ho-Chunk guides who arrived with the militia

⁵⁴ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 167-170; Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 96-126; Trask, *Black Hawk*, 143-44, 154-57, 174, 272-73, 275-76. Jung is critical of Atkinson's decisions and strategy throughout the conflict. Atkinson often wasted time looking for the Sauk Band, according to Jung, who considers this evidence that Atkinson had "not planned for every contingency," namely that the Sauk band would retreat from the approaching army, not dig in and fight. Jung claims that Atkinson counted on this and was at a loss when battle did not materialize in those early days of July. Jung also suggests that Atkinson's poor decisions resulted from his desperation to achieve some success before losing command. The general had received from the War Department a message notifying him that General Winfield Scott would arrive shortly and assume command of the campaign. What Jung misses, however, is how influential the Rock River Ho-Chunk, and likely their Potawatomi allies, were on Atkinson's decisions. For Jung's critique of Atkinson's response to the abandoned Sauk Camp south of Koshkonong, see Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 129-135. John Hall stands apart for his balanced treatment of Henry Atkinson and careful use of sources relating to the general's actions and motivations. In particular, Hall examines Atkinson's historical relationships with the region's Indian peoples, who called the respected general "White Beaver." While critical of certain missteps that added tension to the conflict, Hall details Atkinson's efforts to resolve the crisis peacefully and traces his evolving understanding of how different Native groups perceived the crisis. Hall's assessment suggests that Atkinson was not anticipating conflict nor did he desire it. Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 129-135.

⁵⁵ Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815*, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, 109th Series (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 186-90.

⁵⁶ For an excellent overview of the cholera outbreak of 1832, see Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 139-142. This cholera outbreak began in Europe in the fall of 1831. By early June 1832, the outbreak reached Montreal and soon thereafter, New York state. Before July, cholera was in New York City and departing for the western Great Lakes along with soldiers in General Winfield Scott's army.

units coming from the west and south, Atkinson's fortunes would not improve.⁵⁷ On July 6, however, American troops were eager to follow their guides to the island camp.

Because of successful Ho-Chunk isolationism, this part of Ho-Chunk country was literally off the Americans' map. Knowing nothing about the myriad alluvial meanders of multiple converging rivers and creeks—chiefly the Bark, Rock and Whitewater—or the more varied low and high grounds in the area, Atkinson and his militia commanders held only the vaguest notion of where their Ho-Chunk guides were leading them, or what an Indian trail or encampment might look like in this place. Ho-Chunks depended on this ignorance because it made the Americans entirely dependent upon them. Troop dependence on Ho-Chunks and their perpetual confusion about the lands they traversed is apparent in their journals, letters, and later memoirs. Among the most confusing locations to decipher was and is “the island” on which the Sauk band hid, according to White Crow.

As a geographical definition, an island conjures up a distinct image of a piece of land surrounded entirely by water. It is likely that “the island” was not at all an island, however. Given the nature of this land, and the geographical environment described in maps and prose by the Americans then and in the years following, the more likely location of this “island” is the

⁵⁷ Historians do not know much about the exact locations of the Sauk band in June and July. Given the size of the Sauk band, 1,200 people, the Ho-Chunks probably divided them into smaller groups in order to leave a less obvious trail, and to ease movement of Black Hawk's people, especially as the Americans drew near. American maps and accounts of their locations and movements, as well as those of scouting parties, are riddled with confusion, no doubt a product of Ho-Chunk misguidance. Beyond placing American camps near Koshkonong and the Rock and Bark rivers, more specific locations simply cannot be determined. Little if any meaningful archaeological evidence exists to clarify or support the location of specific camps allegedly inhabited by Black Hawk, or even the makeshift fort constructed by Atkinson's men between July 10 and 17. In some cases, historians have simply guessed at locations. They have corrected, as they saw fit and to support their own assertions, contemporary descriptions of locations, routes, and rivers and streams. For example, historians have corrected soldiers' references to Whitewater River or Creek to the Bark River, though it seems possible that the Ho-Chunks led the Americans in such a manner that they would not have realized the true Bark River was not the main Rock River. Such geographical confusion would explain substantial distance miscalculations by Americans throughout the swamp campaign. See “Bark River,” in Whitney, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 3, 1411.

area between the Rock and Bark rivers.⁵⁸ Here was a large, low wetland that did not rise to drier terrain for a dozen or more miles to the north. Within this area were many parcels of higher ground—glacial drumlins—that may have hosted encampments surrounded by mud, quicksand, and mossy marshes. The mire of this place was the perfect spot to hide a camp, if camp there was. White Crow presented the Americans with the perfect *ignis fatuus*, a false hope or goal, knowing the Sauk band was probably not there and the American force would waste time and supplies trying to reach it nonetheless.⁵⁹ Leading troops to another empty camp, however, served the Ho-Chunks’ dual purpose of convincing the Americans they were indeed on the trail of the Sauk band while preventing a real battle on Ho-Chunk lands.

The Bark River stood in the way of troops seeking the island destination. This winding tributary of the Rock was low and flat, making it a worthy obstacle in a wild goose chase.⁶⁰ The Rock River above and below Koshkonong is full of meanders and adjacent swamps left behind as shallow oxbow lakes or ponds evaporated over time when the river changed course. Furthermore, heavy rainfall that season would have flooded the tamarack swamps north along the Bark River toward what is today called Johnson Creek, especially on the east side, preventing Atkinson and his army from crossing it easily to reach the “island” lands between the Bark and

⁵⁸ For fluctuating descriptions of “the island” and its location in primary sources, see Joseph Street to Henry Atkinson, 6 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 535-38; Joseph Street to Andrew Hughes and Jonathan Bean, 28 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 706-709; and Map 8, *BHW* vol. 2, bk.1.

⁵⁹ *Ignis fatuus* is also known as a bright spot, an illusion, appearing over a marshy or swampy area, likely the product of methane or other gas escaping from decomposing vegetation below. It is, as the reminiscences of various soldiers intimated, a perfect dual description of the real and imagined landscape of the swamp campaign and illusive Sauk band presence within it.

⁶⁰ For discussion of name variants and possible confusion among troops and subsequent historians related to the Bark River, see *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 513n10. Historians seem to agree that the Whitewater River or Creek that troops frequently mentioned in their field journals, map sketches, as well as later writings, actually referred to what is today the Bark River (formerly known as Peel Bark River). Given the confusion generated by Ho-Chunk Indians about the terrain, however, this correction and consensus among scholars may not be correct. Nevertheless, whether troops understood where they were in the summer of 1832 matters little to the claims made in this chapter, specifically that the Ho-Chunks mired the Americans in the swamps and marshes and bogs around Koshkonong to keep them from catching the Sauk band and from destroying Ho-Chunk fields.

Rock rivers.⁶¹ Nonetheless, struggling to get to where they believed Black Hawk was, American troops found themselves moving through muck and water up to their armpits over the next several days, as their Indigenous guides could find no ford across the Bark.

Not all troops faced the Bark River challenge. Atkinson split up his force to approach the island camp from two directions. While Potawatomi and Ho-Chunk Indians led some of the troops up the east side of Koshkonong and the Rock River, White Crow and over thirty other Ho-Chunks led militiamen commanded by Dodge and Alexander, as well as the western band of Menominee warriors, along the west shore and bank. Weeks earlier, White Crow and Henry Dodge had laid the groundwork for this pincer approach. In early June, when Americans forced the Rock River Ho-Chunks to leave their villages or risk being drawn into the war, White Crow offered to help the Americans ambush the Sauk band. Dodge (and Atkinson) eagerly accepted and suggested to White Crow that he place the Sauk band on an elevated piece of land that the Americans and their Indian allies could easily surround. White Crow's island camp seemed to be exactly what Dodge desired and, by all accounts, Dodge was eager to find it.⁶² The Menominee warriors were also eager to locate the island encampment. On the night of July 6, while camped just above Koshkonong, militiamen witnessed "the friendly Indians [having] a war dance."⁶³ Menominee warriors dancing proved to the troops as well as later historians how convinced these warriors were that the Sauk band was nearby. The "war dance" made the Ho-Chunks' ruse complete.

Meanwhile, east of the Rock, Atkinson's force camped near a place they called Burnt Village, an abandoned Ho-Chunk settlement either at the confluence of the Bark and Rock rivers,

⁶¹ Crawford B. Thayer, ed., *Hunting a Shadow: The Search for Black Hawk: An Eyewitness Account of the Black Hawk War* (Menasha, WI: Banta Press, 1981), xxix-xxxi.

⁶² Parkinson, "Notes on the Black Hawk War," 207.

⁶³ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 169; Ninevah Shaw, Journal, 6 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1334.

or four miles further up the Bark, depending on different troop accounts. Here, Ho-Chunks indicated to the general that the island camp was nearby, just across the river.⁶⁴ In response to Atkinson's query about how his men might reach the island, the Ho-Chunks pledged to find his troops a safe place to cross. Atkinson's force included supply wagons, a cannon, pack horses, and livestock. The ford, he insisted, must be passable for his troops' supplies. One year earlier, Rock River Ho-Chunks had guided John and Juliette Kinzie, the Portage Indian agent and his wife, through the region on their return journey to Fort Winnebago. Ho-Chunks used "Two long wooden canoes...securely lashed together" to float the Kinzies' wagon across the Rock River.⁶⁵ They seemed unwilling to do the same for General Atkinson.

American and Indian scouting parties ranged ahead of the main force searching for a place to cross the Bark. One party returned late in the day on July 6 with news not of a ford but of a trail possibly left by the Sauk band, large enough to be seen from the opposite side of the river.⁶⁶ It was fresh and, the American scouts claimed, only three miles from where Atkinson's men were making camp for the night. If the trail belonged to the Sauk band, they were not camped on the nearby island as White Crow had insisted. They instead were on the move. Daylight was fading, and Atkinson elected to reconnoiter along the apparent trail in the morning. The Ho-Chunks resolved to prevent this. Whether or not it was left by the Sauk band, the trail led somewhere the Rock River band did not want the Americans to go.

⁶⁴ *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 751n1, 1323, and Map 15. Troop accounts disagree on where "Burnt Village" was located. Some place it at the mouth of the Bark; others place it several miles to the east on the Bark River, near the mouth of Whitewater Creek. The historic site known as Burnt Village today is located at the latter of these two places.

⁶⁵ Juliette Kinzie, *Wau-Bun: The Early Day in the North West* (1873; reprint, Philadelphia: Bibliobazaar, 2006), 258.

⁶⁶ The spy party referenced here was Captain Jacob Early's Spy Battalion, a unit of the Illinois Militia in which future President Abraham Lincoln served as a volunteer until 10 July 1832. Little has been written about then 23-year-old Lincoln and his role in the Black Hawk War. For an overview, see Shirley Samuels, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 101-104.

On the morning of July 7, at Burnt Village, American troops and their Indian allies awoke to dense fog, common to Koshkonong that time of year. Hoping to redirect Atkinson's focus to the island, a small number of Ho-Chunks using cover of fog snuck across the river. From there, one or more of them fired their guns toward the American encampment. Whether or not he was their intended target, an American soldier, David Dobbs, was struck by a musket ball as he fished along the southeast bank on that morning. Dobbs survived, though historians have insisted that he died.⁶⁷

This sole act of violence against an American soldier by a Ho-Chunk during the swamp campaign convinced Atkinson and his men that the Sauk band was on the island and that Black Hawk's warriors had attacked them. That act of violence was the perfect ruse. Despite the heavy fog, regular soldier E. Buckner claimed there were several witnesses to the Sauk band's presence, that "their spies were seen on the opposite bank."⁶⁸ John Wakefield called it "a hard case, for the enemy to come within one hundred and twenty yards of our encampment, and wound one of our men, and we not able to help ourselves, for this dismal stream."⁶⁹ At such a

⁶⁷ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 131, 136; for Jung's sources, 232n9. At least three times, Jung asserts that Ho-Chunk Indians killed one of Atkinson's regulars. He is mistaken. David Dobbs did not die from his wounds. See Thayer, *Hunting a Shadow*, 105. Here, Thayer excerpts accounts from Albert Johnston, John Wakefield, and John Reynolds, who all documented both Dobb's shooting and his recovery. Jung relies on accounts written or revised after the conflict by two militiamen, Peter Parkinson, Jr. and James Justice. Jung is not alone in assigning malice to the Ho-Chunk Indians involved in this incident. Most scholars argue or at least imply that the Ho-Chunk intended to kill Americans. Such analysis is derivative of the larger historiography of the conflict that presumes Ho-Chunk guilt in inciting the conflict and carrying out secret attacks against Americans. Kerry Trask also relies on sources written or revised by militiamen after the conflict ended to assign malice or intent to a handful of Rock River Ho-Chunk Indians in the Koshkonong shooting incident. Trask, *Black Hawk*, 249-250. Though Rock River Ho-Chunks admitted later the involvement their young men in this incident at a treaty council in September 1832, they did not claim malice toward or intent to harm Americans. Dialogue between the Ho-Chunk and the Americans at Rock Island in September 1832 is discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. See Council with the Winnebago from the Fort Winnebago, Rock River, and Prairie du Chien Agencies, 10-12 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1130-1152.

⁶⁸ E. Buckner, "A Brief History of the War with the Sac and Fox Indians in Illinois and Michigan, in 1832, with Twenty-One Letters and Orders," in *Michigan Historical Collections*, vol. 12 (Lansing: Thorp & Godfrey, State Printers and Binders, 1888), 430. Bucker dated his written account 1 March 1860.

⁶⁹ Wakefield, *Wakefield's History*, 107.

distance, in heavy fog, American witnesses to Sauk spies must have possessed an impossibly good eye.⁷⁰

While Atkinson paused to consider his next move, Lieutenant Meriwether Lewis Clark, Atkinson's messenger and aide-de-camp, finished a letter to his father, William Clark. Like Atkinson, the lieutenant was thoroughly convinced "the Indians are near us." He explained, "they have just shot but not killed" a soldier.⁷¹ Clark's letter unwittingly revealed other tactics deployed by the Ho-Chunk. He reported, for example, on his lost horse: "We have had some firing near the creek, in a thick fog, and where the horses were grazing. My horse cannot be found & I fear the poor fellow is sacrificed."⁷² By then, missing horses were a recurring annoyance for the troops. A similar incident occurred two days later when horses panicked and ran at the sound of musket fire, again from the Ho-Chunks. This time, the Indians apologized and claimed they heard noises from across the river and thought the Sauk warriors might be attacking the Americans at that moment.⁷³ Nonetheless, like other soldiers, Lieutenant Clark bore no ill-will toward or suspicion of the Rock River Ho-Chunks for the loss of his horse or the wounding of the soldier on 7 July. He wrote that the incident would "only make me add one to the few scalps I am going to take from Black Hawk."⁷⁴ That American troops—militia and army—did not voice suspicion of their Ho-Chunk guides and scouts in the letters and journals they wrote from the field testifies to the skill of the Rock River Ho-Chunks in carrying out their

⁷⁰ Buckner, "A Brief History," 430. Given the fog and distance between the Americans and Indians firing from across the Bark River, the regular's wounding may have been an accident. It certainly was an aberration when one looks at the otherwise peaceful strategy deployed by Rock River Ho-Chunks. In her memoir, *Wau-Bun*, Juliette Kinzie indicates that both she and her husband, the Portage Indian agent John Kinzie, felt that all nine Ho-Chunks (save one, though she did not explain why) who stood accused of crimes against Americans, including the wounding of the regular on 7 July, were probably innocent. See Kinzie, *Wau-Bun*, 356.

⁷¹ Meriwether Lewis Clark to William Clark, 7 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 745.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Shaw, *Journal*, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1334. Later that day, the camp on the island was discovered deserted, and Shaw documented how the Ho-Chunks reasoned that the noise they had heard was not the Sauk warriors preparing to attack but the Sauk band fleeing the camp.

⁷⁴ Meriwether Clark to William Clark, 7 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 745.

policies and persisting in their performance as helpers. No small feat, this unacknowledged Ho-Chunk agency has undermined scholars' ability to understand how Ho-Chunks managed the conflict in their lands.

The shooting of the regular put the troops further on edge. Later that same evening, a jumpy sentinel put a musket ball in the groin of an officer merely trying to relieve the watchman for the night.⁷⁵ This was the second injury in one week resulting from nervous, friendly fire. Tensions were high. From their entry into the Koshkonong lands, American troops remarked about their uneasiness. "The facility of conveying information in this open country is so great, especially to those perfectly acquainted with it," Johnston wrote, "that we despair of bringing the Indians to battle unless they choose to do so with great advantage." Years later, Johnston edited his journal for publication, and he changed that particular sentence to "we almost despair," as if to reassert some of the courage he had given up in that moment as a young man deep in Indian country.⁷⁶ Two Ho-Chunk men would eventually be blamed for the shooting, but on that morning, where fog closed them in, Americans imagined their Sauk enemies just out of reach.

Lieutenant Clark also noted General Atkinson's newfound desperation to find a way onto the island. Clark reported to his father that the Americans, either by building a bridge there or finding a natural ford somewhere up the river, were fixing to "break into the swamps of what is called 'The Shaking Ground.'" This was Clark's translation for how Indians described the island, the land between the Bark and Rock rivers. The Ho-Chunks had achieved their goal, refocusing American attention on the island and the specter of the Sauk band.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Whitney, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1246n2, 1281n1, 1334. The injured man in this case was Illinois militia Captain Charles Dunn. He also survived.

⁷⁶ Johnston, *Journal*, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1316n.

⁷⁷ Meriwether Clark to William Clark, 7 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 745.

But, they also wanted to portray the Sauk as difficult to subdue, perhaps hoping to convince Americans to give up the search entirely. For one thing, Ho-Chunks seem to have exaggerated the strength of the Sauk band's force, thus adding to American anxiety. Atkinson wrote to Winfield Scott, warning him, "the enemy are represented to be from seven to eight hundred strong, well-armed and provided with Powder and ball."⁷⁸ Atkinson expressed concern for his disadvantage, that his own force of 450 regular troops was inadequate and the majority of militiamen were "fresh from their homes" with no fighting experience.⁷⁹

It would take the Americans another two days to break onto the shaking ground, a place undoubtedly planned by the Ho-Chunks as the next obstacle to slow the troops down. It was a place, Wakefield recalled, that "when trod by man or beast, a trembling movement or sensation was observed, attributed to the surface being supported by muck or water instead of a subsoil." What is more "wagon wheels of their loaded wagons cut through as if the surface had been merely paper."⁸⁰ Much of this area, shown on militiaman Edwin Rose's map as swamp, was really a bog of significant expanse (see fig. 3). As decades of dead plant material accumulated to peat where each spring's flood carried flotsam to rest, the floating bog grew thicker and thicker, to the point where, by 1832, it would even support foot traffic and, at least for a brief moment, horses. But traces of human movement, trails or other impressions vanished overnight as the surface of the bog reabsorbed water from below very quickly.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Henry Atkinson to Winfield Scott, 9 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 753. In April, the Sauk band included around 500 warrior-aged men, and estimates of 700 to 800 warriors would have inflated the band's population to 1,500, a very difficult number of people for the Ho-Chunk to move through their country and keep hidden.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Wakefield, *Wakefield's History*, 84. See also Perry A. Armstrong, *The Sauks and the Black Hawk War, with Biographical Sketches, etc.* (Springfield, Illinois: H.W. Rokker Printer, 1887), 442.

⁸¹ A common pitfall historians make writing about the Black Hawk War, especially about the swamp campaign, is that they mistake the land and environment in 1832 for that of today with the houses, farms, roads, and powerlines removed. See, for example, Thayer, *Hunting a Shadow*, 127. Thayer includes a photograph of the "Bark river [sic] near Burnt Village." He invites the reader to imagine there an Indian village during the summer of 1832. The photo, taken from Jefferson County Road M looking north and east, shows the river as it is now. Such

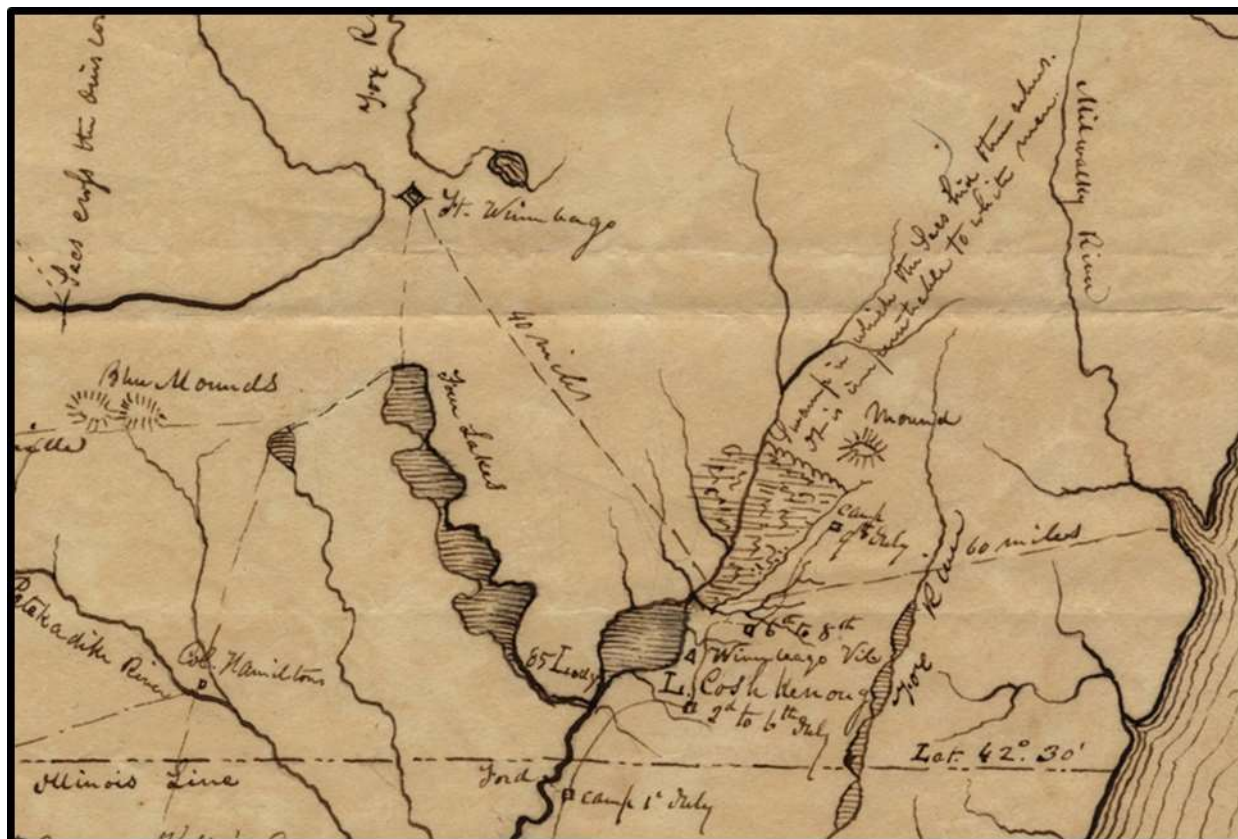


Fig. 3. Swamp Campaign 1 July to 10 July 1832. Detail from Edwin Rose, “Indian Campaign of 1832, in “Mapping Chicago and the Midwest, 1688–1906,” Newberry Library, Special Collections <http://dcc.newberry.org/items/indian-campaign-of-1832-map-of-the-country> (accessed 1 July, 2015). This segment of map depicts Lake Koshkonong (bottom center) and some of General Atkinson's June 28–July 9 route from Dixon's Ferry northeast along the Rock River, picking up at the 1 July 1832 camp near Indian Ford, Wisconsin.

In the two days before the Americans found their way onto the shaking ground, Atkinson unwittingly took steps that benefitted both the Sauk band and the Rock River Ho-Chunks.

“Enemy fire” from a growing number of imagined Sauk warriors had rattled Atkinson.

Anticipating an attack yet again, Atkinson called for Dodge and Alexander to rejoin the main force, relying on a Ho-Chunk messenger to deliver the call. Atkinson’s Indian messenger caught

presentism ignores a century of land reclamation activities in the region that drained hundreds of thousands of acres and made the region into the modern agricultural landscape it is today. Between the 1870s and World War II, residents engaged in herculean efforts to drain lowlands, swamps and marshes by installing hundreds of thousands of miles of drain tile. Few, if any, of today’s farms in this region have escaped this process. The result is a much different land- and river-scape today than that on which the Ho-Chunks lived and farmed, and the American troops mired. See Jerry Apps, *Wisconsin Agriculture: A History* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2015).

up with Dodge and Alexander west of the Rock River on July 7, still following White Crow toward the island.⁸² Several militiamen recalled the heated exchange between White Crow and Dodge that ensued once the orator understood Atkinson's new order. As Catherine Myott translated, White Crow urged the militia to press on toward the island, to engage the Sauk band in battle. This, White Crow reminded Dodge, was the plan they had agreed to. Standing in the way of Dodge following orders, however, the orator refused to conduct the militiamen to General Atkinson's camp.⁸³ "It was only by the use of severe language on the part of Col. Dodge," Iowa County volunteer Peter Parkinson remembered, "that White Crow was prevailed on to continue with us."⁸⁴ With their pilot, Dodge and Alexander reversed course and marched their men three miles along the Rock River to cross over at the nearest ford, north of Lake Koshkonong, away from where the Sauk band was resting.⁸⁵

Meanwhile, his focus no longer on the previous day's trail discovery, Atkinson redoubled his men's efforts to find a ford across the Bark River. When Dodge and Alexander rejoined his force, Atkinson wanted to be ready with a path to the island. He ordered his men to build a bridge at Burnt Village in case no ford was found. Ho-Chunks, and probably Potawatomis, expressed confidence in Atkinson's orders and indicated that the nearest ford could be found several miles away at a creek branching off the Bark. Given troops' as well as historians' subsequent confusion over the exact location of Burnt Village and the site of Atkinson's camp on

⁸² Gratiot, Journal, 8 [7] July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1304, 1306n22. Ellen Whitney thinks the correct date is 7 July. No official order from Atkinson exists, or if it does, it is missing from Whitney's volumes. In a rush, Atkinson may have given verbal orders, relying on Emmell, the French trader, to translate the general's words to an Indian messenger, who would in turn have relied on Catherine Myott to translate the order to Dodge on the other side of the Rock River.

⁸³ Daniel Parkinson, "Pioneer Life in Wisconsin," in *Report and Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin For the Years 1883, 1884, and 1885*, vol. 10, ed. Lyman C. Draper (Madison: Democrat Printing Company, State Printer, 1888), 353-354.

⁸⁴ Peter Parkinson, Jr., "Notes on the Black Hawk War," in *Report and Collections of the State Historical Society*, ed. Lyman C. Draper, 206-207. In later years, militiamen would use this exchange, and the discovery of the uninhabited island shortly thereafter, to make false accusations against White Crow.

⁸⁵ Shaw, Journal, 7 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1334.

July 7, Ho-Chunks may have been leading the force to Whitewater creek or the Scuppernong River, south of present-day Hebron. For Ho-Chunks, and the American troops they led, the tiring journey may have mattered more than the real destination.⁸⁶ The immediate objective for the Ho-Chunk was to manage the massive military force and, if possible, keep them in a contained area. For now, the Ho-Chunks did not want to facilitate Atkinson's access to the land north of these rivers and creeks.

Pushing further up the Bark River, troops encountered increasingly difficult terrain. Philip Cooke, one of Atkinson's regulars, described what it was like to move along the Bark: The men "marched as near [to the river] as swamps, bogs, and some very difficult miry branches would permit."⁸⁷ The course required "much labor to render them passable" and "if not bridged, the banks are dug, and much brush and long grass deposited." Men carried scythes and cut tall grass to define horse paths. Upon reaching the first creek (probably the Whitewater) where Ho-Chunks insisted there was a ford onto the island, the Americans and their horses attempted to cross. Wakefield recalled the disaster that followed: "it was with much difficulty, as many a horse mired down, and threw his rider into the water, where he and his gun were literally buried in mud and water."⁸⁸ Another man recalled swimming a creek only to find it was the first of three branches ahead of them.⁸⁹

It seemed Ho-Chunks presented one stream and promised one ford after another. The streams were deep, Cooke recalled, and "with abrupt quicksand banks, covered to the verge with sod." Unlike virtually all his fellow soldiers, Cooke found humor in his experience traveling

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Phillip St. George Cooke, *Scenes and Adventures in the Army: Or, Romance of Military Life* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1857), 165. The miry branches Cooke mentions can be seen in Edwin Rose's map, which show where Atkinson's men camped (see fig. 3).

⁸⁸ Wakefield, *Wakefield's History*, 82.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

over the shaking ground where “each horse seems to consider his passage an adventure.”⁹⁰ Cooke thought that the troops’ “their awkward mishaps repay in amusement the pioneers for their extra work” to move through the country. Henry Smith, a captain in Atkinson’s brigade, documented more clearly the toll their search for a river crossing took on the force and its supplies: “Our marching had become exceedingly disagreeable and difficult, wading through swamps and morasses our provisions and baggage on pack-horses, frequently damaged, and the former of course falling short by the horses sinking in the swamps.”⁹¹ The loss of these provisions and horses (due to injury) would prove significant in the days ahead.

After more than a day of searching, Atkinson still had no ford. The general regretted recalling the militia and sent a hurried and puzzling message to Dodge, who received it at the mouth of the Bark River. In the message, Atkinson stated that he hoped the courier would find Dodge still west of the river where he could “join in the excursion” as previously planned. Dodge and his men had already crossed over, however. In any case, Atkinson’s seemingly unedited message switched gears again. Regardless of where his courier found Dodge, Atkinson thought it best for him to rejoin the general’s main force. In particular, Atkinson asked for White Crow: “upon reflection it is best you should return, because I want your Winebago’s [sic] to guide us to the position occupied by the sacs.”⁹² Atkinson’s letter suggested an uneasy state of mind. White Crow, however, would not bring intelligibility to the terrain or any of the results Atkinson desired.

Still, Atkinson believed his good fortunes rested with White Crow, and he welcomed the orator’s arrival along with the militia. His troops’ morale rose upon viewing the size of the

⁹⁰ Cooke, *Scenes and Adventures*, 165.

⁹¹ Henry Smith, “Indian Campaign of 1832,” in Lyman Draper, ed., *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. 10 (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1887), 160.

⁹² Henry Atkinson to Henry Dodge, 8 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 751.

force, now that the regulars and volunteers all set camp east of the Rock River. “On this evening,” Wakefield wrote, “the whole forces got together, and camped together for the first time. Our forces looked like they were able to whip all the Indians in the north western territories.”⁹³ Whether or not this was their intended outcome, the Ho-Chunks who fired from the island toward the Americans had corralled the Army of the Frontier along the Rock and Bark rivers.⁹⁴

Keeping the troops below the Bark seemed the common goal among all Atkinson’s Indian guides. On July 9, they accompanied Americans on one more push up the Bark. Smith reported, “after a perplexing march of twelve or fifteen miles, we arrived where the friendly Indians assured the General with one voice, that further advance was impossible, having arrived, as they said and as it appeared, at a *wilderness* of that description of morass called by the French, *terre tremblante*.”⁹⁵ Ho-Chunks assured as well as showed the army that beyond the Bark, the terrain was impassable. White Crow echoed this warning and attempted to redirect Atkinson’s force south, as Wakefield recalled: “The old blind or one eyed chief, told [Atkinson] that the Indians that we were in pursuit of, were still down on the Island opposite the Burnt Village, where they shot the regular.”⁹⁶ Having resisted Atkinson’s orders to return east of the Rock River, White Crow had the general’s ear and seemed determined to turn Atkinson’s force around back toward the village. White Crow promised Atkinson “that if we did not find [the Sauk band near Burnt Village] he would give General Atkinson leave to take his life.”⁹⁷ Atkinson marched his force back several miles toward Burnt Village and the Rock River. The letter he began that

⁹³ Wakefield, *Wakefield’s History*, 83.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Henry Smith, “Indian Campaign of 1832,” 154. See Edwin Rose’s map (fig. 3), which shows this camp on 9 July.

⁹⁶ Wakefield, *Wakefield’s History*, 83.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

morning to General Scott complained of the “perplexing and difficult Indian war” in which he was engaged, where “many parts of the country for miles is entirely unpassable, even on foot.”⁹⁸ Remarkably, Atkinson conveyed as fact what White Crow and other Rock River Ho-Chunk guides told him about the wilderness beyond the Bark.

Because Americans continued to believe their Indian guides, the Ho-Chunks’ plan continued to work. Americans still did not know the true location of the Sauk band nor did they suspect the Ho-Chunks for their troubles in tracking the band. Instead they remained convinced that Black Hawk’s band was nearby, located somewhere on the other side of the Bark River. “As yet the hostile Indians have eluded my pursuit,” Atkinson told Scott, “altho’ I have been for several days in a few miles of a part or the whole of them. The country is so cut up with Prairie, wood and swamp, that it is extremely difficult to approach them.”⁹⁹ The army struggled to cross the Bark River for three days and it used up not only supplies but also troop morale. Atkinson informed Scott that his men were building a bridge over Whitewater Creek, which would bring the force close to the “enemy, who is represented to be only five or six miles before us.”¹⁰⁰ For the time being, White Crow had convinced Atkinson to focus his men’s attention and energy on accessing the island. Atkinson was not the Ho-Chunks’ only susceptible victim. His subordinate officers and troops as well as the militia found the terrain just as challenging. Like Atkinson the, troops generally understood Black Hawk’s choice of battlefield.

White Crow’s island ruse was coming to an end, however. As Atkinson was completing his letter to Scott on July 9, he learned that one of his scouting parties had made it onto the island. Ranging along the Bark River, a mounted spy company and Billy Hamilton’s Menominees found a passable spot in the river, and soon thereafter, signs of a recently

⁹⁸ Henry Atkinson to Winfield Scott, 9 July 1832, in *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 752.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

abandoned camp. If the Sauk band had been there, they had narrowly escaped. The troops were disgusted. Colonel Fry's regulars, who had been constructing Atkinson's bridge, responded to the news by destroying their unfinished work.¹⁰¹

Troop disgust eventually gave way to despair of never finding Indians to fight. And whether born of boredom or dejection, tall tales emerged from Koshkonong as volunteers and regulars tried to make sense of their experiences in the swamp. Though no official report exists detailing the alleged island encampment of the Sauk band, its features became the stuff of army camp rumors. Troops exaggerated its mucky borders, elevated position, and heavily forested terrain. It was, they determined, a "very advantageous" encampment and took to calling it "the fortress."¹⁰² Soldiers later turned the Sauk band's imagined escape into their own narrowly avoided deaths, claiming that White Crow had tried to lead Dodge and Alexander's men into an ambush planned by both the Ho-Chunk orator and Black Hawk. The heated exchange recalled by so many militiamen between Henry Dodge and White Crow suddenly became evidence that the Indians had planned to kill them all.¹⁰³

News of the empty "fortress" and the men's realization that they "now had been marching through swamps for a considerable length of time without success," no doubt gave rise to paranoid and angry anti-Indian rants. As Wakefield recalled, after White Crow's heartfelt promise proved false, the men "found that there was no dependence to be placed on those treacherous Winnebagoes."¹⁰⁴ Troop anger toward Indian guides who failed time and again to lead them to the enemy or even a river ford seems justified. If troops talked about a failed ambush, none took it seriously. If they had, *The Galenian* newspaper would have heard about it.

¹⁰¹ Wakefield, *Wakefield's History*, 84.

¹⁰² Smith, "Indian Campaign," 157.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Wakefield, *Wakefield's History*, 84.

One of Dodge's volunteers worked as the editor for this well-known, anti-Indian newspaper, and both he and Dodge routinely crafted reports on the war's progress and sent them to the paper for publication.¹⁰⁵ If the editor or Dodge believed White Crow and Black Hawk had planned to murder Americans, neither mentioned it.¹⁰⁶ Writing later, Captain Smith commented that "Every exertion was made to procure guides, but in vain." He continued, "Such Winnebagoes or Pottawatomies as joined us or could be taken, were either ignorant or treacherous."¹⁰⁷ During the campaign, the Ho-Chunks delivered a convincing performance of their inability to locate the Sauk band.

As for American certainty regarding Ho-Chunk fickleness and double-dealing, none accused their Indian guides of taking part in shooting the regulars, nor did they openly ponder the coincidence of recent horse panics and runs caused by Ho-Chunks firing their muskets. Instead, the abandoned island camp affirmed the Ho-Chunks' explanation that they fired and shouted on the morning of July 9 to alert the Americans of a Sauk attack. But now, the Americans reasoned, the noise Ho-Chunks heard came from the Sauk band fleeing the camp, not launching an attack from it. American troops may have disliked White Crow and the Rock River Ho-Chunks, but they knew nothing of their guides' actions during the swamp campaign nor of their grander scheme of keeping the peace.

Troop ignorance has proved troublesome for historians trying to interpret the events of 1832, however. Accusing White Crow and Black Hawk of attempting to ambush Americans was just one of many baseless claims made by militiamen who eventually learned that their trusted guides had misdirected them. Virtually every veteran-authored memoir or history of the war

¹⁰⁵ Trask, *Black Hawk*, 260-261; Thomas Ford, *A History of Illinois, from its Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847* (New York: Ivison, Pinney, 1854), 152.

¹⁰⁶ For a list of all *Galenian* publications published in the Whitney volumes, see Whitney, *BHW* vol. 2, bk.3, 1445.

¹⁰⁷ Smith, "Indian Campaign," 160.

asserts that its author and his fellow soldiers doubted the fidelity of the Rock River Ho-Chunks from the beginning of the campaign around Koshkonong. Over the course of the nineteenth century, these claims became historical truths. In his 1903 history of the war, Frank Everett Stevens asserted that White Crow had attempted to lead the militia “to Black Hawk’s camp which was singularly strong,” which would have brought “certain death” to the militiamen had they followed. For Stevens, White Crow’s attempt “conclusively proved that White Cloud [sic] designedly sought to have the party annihilated.”¹⁰⁸ The historical record stands in direct contrast to such claims. Sources produced by troops and officers still mired in the Koshkonong region or shortly after their discharge contradict these later narratives.¹⁰⁹

Over time, historians have acknowledged and dismissed some baseless claims made by militiamen in their post-war published accounts, including those about White Crow’s attempted ambush.¹¹⁰ It is generally accepted that the Sauk band was not in the vicinity at this time, and, as Patrick Jung observes, Black Hawk makes no mention of plotting an ambush in his autobiography.¹¹¹ However, historians have not exonerated White Crow or his people from their mischaracterizations of him as disloyal and untrustworthy, nor have scholars expanded their analysis to explain why Ho-Chunk guides worked tirelessly to thwart American designs. They simply fault White Crow for choosing a “dubious path of duplicity.” Thus, scholars still rely

¹⁰⁸ Frank Everett Stevens, *The Black Hawk War: Including a Review of Black Hawk’s Life* (Chicago: NP 1903), 209.

¹⁰⁹ In addition to orders and letters produced by Henry Atkinson throughout July 1832, see the following letters and journals, which contain no allegations against Rock River Ho-Chunk Indians: Meriwether L. Clark to William Clark, 6 July and 25 July 1832, 745-746, 877-879; Henry Gratiot, Journal, 1302-1306, Albert Johnston, Journal, 1307-1322; James Justice, Journal, 1323-1327; Nineveh Shaw, Journal 1332-1341, all in *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2; William Campbell to Andrew Jackson, 13 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 788; *Galenian*, 18 July 1832. Because historians have privileged troop-generated sources written after the conflict, their claims, made in hindsight, have essentially shaped the history of the Black Hawk War. And in that history, Rock River Ho-Chunks are either misunderstood or simply overlooked.

¹¹⁰ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 170-171.

¹¹¹ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 132. Historians miss other historically significant factors that made the troop’s ambush story unlikely. Ho-Chunks would not have led even a small contingent of their Menominee allies into an ambush and risked intertribal warfare. Moreover, an ambush ran counter to the Ho-Chunks’ overall objective: peace.

heavily on accounts by veterans of the Black Hawk War instead of considering, or foregrounding, a Ho-Chunk perspective, which is more easily accessed in sources produced during the conflict. The latter tells a story of a peace-keeping mission.

Upon closer reading, the oft-used veteran-authored sources betray the claims they advance, claims repeated by the conflict's historians. For example, in Wakefield's 1834 history, immediately after he condemned the treachery of the Ho-Chunks, he showed the limits of his and other troops' understandings of the role their Indian guides had played in shaping their experiences. After discovering the empty island camp, Wakefield stated, "We now plainly saw that Black Hawk knew we were in his neighborhood. He knew all the passes between those swamps, and could evade our pursuit for some time; which discouraged our men very much."¹¹² Black Hawk and the families of the Sauk band knew little or nothing of the Rock River country, where they hid. This was lost on the soldiers tracking them, however. For all, the anti-Ho-Chunk accusations asserted by American troops in later years, Black Hawk's shadow-makers—the Ho-Chunk—remained undetected during these early forays into the Wisconsin wilderness.

In 1885, Henry Dodge's last surviving volunteer wrote a final reminiscence about the Black Hawk War. Peter Parkinson, Jr. had cast suspicions on the Rock River Ho-Chunk in accounts he wrote and published in the 1850s. However, in his final recollection he qualified his claims about White Crow: "Whether White Crow was justly chargeable with intended treachery may be a debatable question. I think, however, he was." But, Parkinson added, "not, perhaps, in trying to mislead the army to Black Hawk, but in pretending friendship to the whites, when, in fact, it was quite clear that his sympathies were for Black Hawk."¹¹³ For Parkinson, White Crow's guilt was not in murderous plots against whites, but in his insincere amity toward

¹¹² Wakefield, *Wakefield's History*, 84.

¹¹³ Parkinson, "Notes on the Black Hawk War," 206-207. Parkinson also called White Crow, "a Cicero among Indians for his powers of oratory and [e]lloquence" (190).

Parkinson and his fellow troops. Parkinson may have acquitted White Crow of attempted murder, but the nobler cause in which the orator and his people engaged during the swamp campaign still eluded him.

Hand-drawn American maps created during the conflict offer another window into Ho-Chunk methods and motivations that spring and summer. One of Atkinson's mapmakers was Meriwether Lewis Clark. Clark arrived at Lake Koshkonong on July 4 and immediately set to work mapping the American search area as it expanded through July 20. While Atkinson requested Clark because he was "well acquainted with this part of the Rock River country/having been thro' it several times," his map shows that Clark relied far more on Indian informants than on his own knowledge (see fig. 4).¹¹⁴ As it turned out, Clark mapped both real and imagined geography, sketching the course of rivers as well as Ho-Chunk stories about what lay beyond them.¹¹⁵

Taking the Rock River as the central feature of the map, anchoring everything else, Clark's sketch offers clear evidence of Ho-Chunks diverting the Americans from the real trail of the Sauk band. As we have seen, the Ho-Chunk successfully stalled American entry into the shaking grounds for several days. They also focused Atkinson's attention on the island camp as the only habitable, traversable spot in the area and informed Meriwether Clark that the surrounding terrain was "swampy" and covered in "wood impassable to horses," so noted on the map. However, one day after reaching the island camp, Atkinson's men found two more abandoned camps near the Rock River, one a few miles north of the other (both labeled as "Sac

¹¹⁴ Johnston, Journal, 8 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1317; Map 13, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2. Clark produced at least two maps, which he sent to his father, the first on 6 July and the second on 25 July. Only the latter map is reproduced in Whitney's volumes.

¹¹⁵ Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 132.

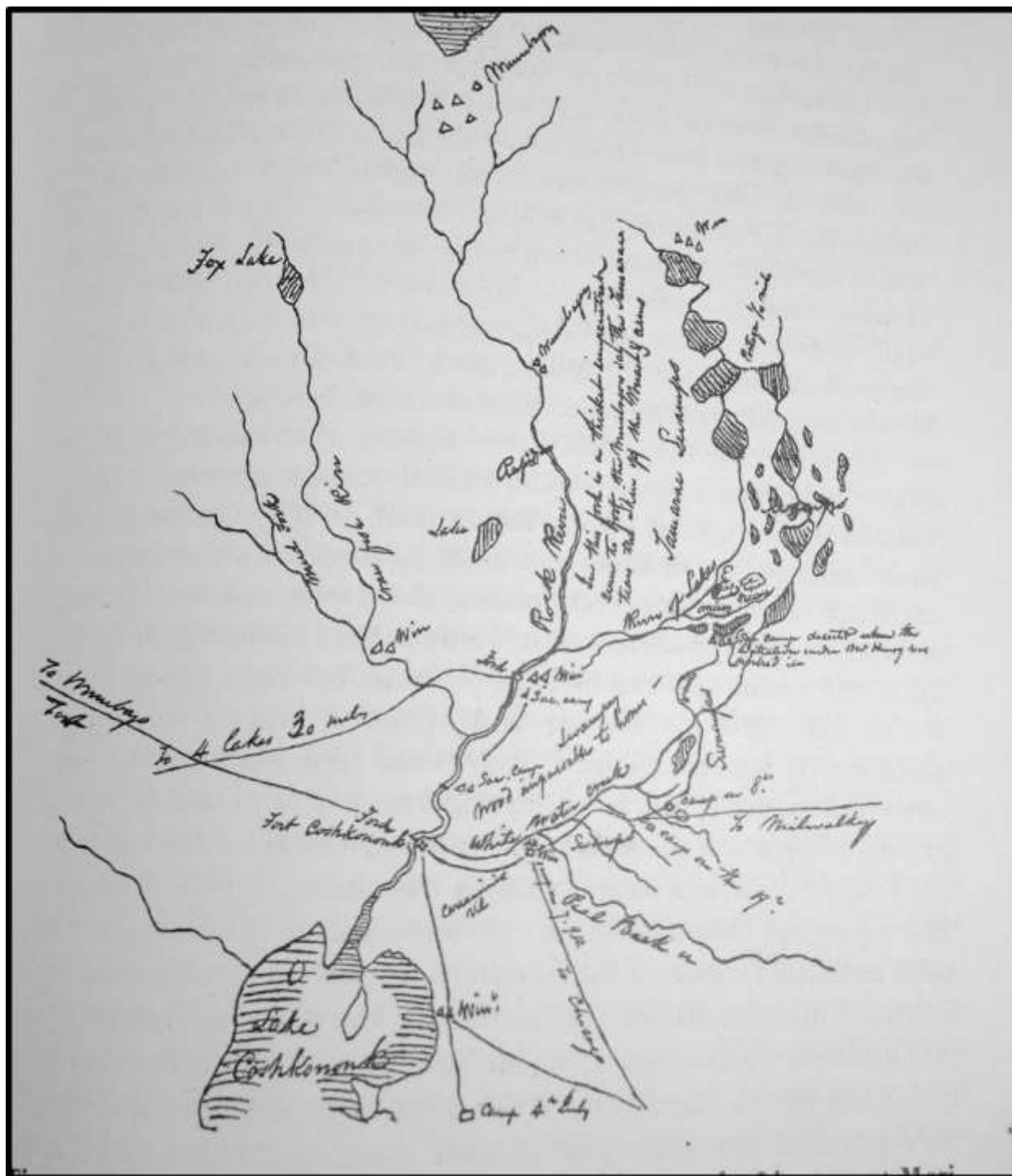


Fig. 4. "Map of the Search Area" by Meriwether Lewis Clark. From Meriwether Lewis Clark to William Clark, 25 July 1832, Map 13 in Whitney, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2. Sketch of the area around Lake Koshkonong by Lieutenant Meriwether Lewis Clark, 1832.

Camp” on Clark’s map). Americans believed these had also been occupied recently by the Sauk band, and the camps’ locations suggested their inhabitants headed north, following the river. A militiaman named Edwin Rose also produced a map of the Koshkonong area (see fig. 3). In reconciling the new camp discoveries with earlier Ho-Chunk information regarding the impassable terrain north of the Bark River, Rose wrote in the space above this river: “Swamp in which the Sacs hid themselves. It is impenetrable to white men.”¹¹⁶

Following the discovery of two camps along the Rock River, Ho-Chunks actively prevented American scouts from crossing north of what Clark labeled “River of Lakes.” By this time, the Sauk band was likely encamped at least thirty miles to the north, near the Rock River “rapids” (so labeled on Clark’s map). Here, in the space on the map between the “River of Lakes” and Rock River, and between the Sauk band and the Americans, Clark wrote: “In this fork is a thicket impenetrable even to foot the Winnebagos say the Tamarack tears the skin off the mounts & arms.”¹¹⁷ Though lacking in other areas, Clark’s map may accurately shows the sequence of rivers, tributaries, and key landmarks, since his Ho-Chunk informants and those guiding spy battalions would have wanted to prevent troop deviation from a set course. Clark, in short, mapped a journey defined by his Ho-Chunk guides.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Edwin Rose, “Indian Campaign of 1832: Map of the Country” [ca. 1832], Mapping Chicago and the Midwest, 1688-1906 and Rudy Lamont Ruggles Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago. Digital version available here: collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/ref/collection/nby_chicago/id/1348 (accessed 8 August 2016). On reverse of the original, Rose wrote: “Map of Indian war of 1832, made by one who was there, Col. Edwin Rose.”

¹¹⁷ Map 13, in *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2. Clark may have written “mounts & asses.”

¹¹⁸ Elements of maps otherwise common in Native cartographic depictions are readily apparent as well. Cardinal directions, scale and overall relational layout are far less important than the sequential connections between places on a route. The map’s “big picture” and navigational accuracy is sacrificed in favor of the connection between two places—the place coming from, and the place going to. Clark’s map was created with a decidedly lineal flow, much like knots on a string or a narrative along wampum. For an overview of Native American map making, see G. Malcolm Lewis, “Maps, Mapmaking, and Map Use by Native North Americans,” in *The History of Cartography: Cartography in the Traditional African, American, Arctic, Australian, and Pacific Societies*, vol. 2, book 3, David Woodward and G. Malcolm Lewis, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 51-182.

Going a different route, American scouts ultimately found a third “Sac Camp” on July 11, near the head of what Clark labeled “White Water Creek.”¹¹⁹ Still to the north, however, were the tamarack swamps, which Americans observed for themselves from afar.¹²⁰ Ho-Chunks made clear that going further, deviating from their map, would prove painful and dangerous to the men and their horses. Atkinson heeded the advice of his Indian guides and marched his force back to Burnt Village. Over the previous week, the swamps and thickets depicted on Clark’s map, as well as Edwin Rose’s, as “impenetrable to white men” grew in size and became located, always it seemed, squarely between the Americans and the Sauk. Likewise, it held terrain unfit for horses. Geography, whether real or invented, served the Ho-Chunks’ plan to redirect Americans around precious cornfields.

Whether any or all of the camps found had been used by the Sauk band, the Americans edged ever closer to concrete evidence of the Sauk band’s movements through the region. The large areas that Ho-Chunks insisted were covered in impenetrable wood and thicket were in fact penetrable, as Atkinson’s men discovered over time. The vast area labeled “Tamarack Swamp” on Clark’s map did contain much tamarack swamp as well as prickly ash vines. But land surveyors visiting the area just a couple of years later also found most of the region between the Bark and present-day Horicon Marsh to be “rolling” and “second rate” farm land, with stands of white and black oak, elm, and ash.¹²¹ In July 1832, Ho-Chunks said these areas were impassable for Americans undoubtedly because they contained evidence of the Sauk band’s most recent movements.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Johnston, Journal, 11 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1317.

¹²⁰ Smith, “Indian Campaign of 1832,” 154.

¹²¹ John Brink, “Sketch Map (July-August 1836),” and “Interior Field Notes” for Townships 10 and 11 North, Range 16 East, in “Wisconsin Public Land Survey Records: Original Field Notes and Plat Maps,” <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/SurveyNotes/>.

¹²² Surveyors never looked for a trail here, thrown off perhaps by interpretations of Clark’s map locating the third camp 20 miles east at Lac la Belle (Oconomowoc, Wisconsin). However, land surveyors certainly showed

The Ho-Chunk did not want open warfare on their lands, but they also did not want Americans making accurate maps of their ancestral territory. Clark's mapmaking thus ran counter to Rock River Ho-Chunks' penchant for isolation and protection against outsiders moving through their country. Ho-Chunk efforts to isolate themselves as well as patrol their waterways, especially the Fox-Wisconsin corridor, had been well documented over the previous two hundred years.¹²³ Helping Clark meant literally putting Ho-Chunk lands along the Rock River on the map. Given the region's long history of European and American encounters, including explorers and mapmakers, Indians in the western Great Lakes had been informing non-Native maps for two centuries.¹²⁴ By 1832, Ho-Chunks undoubtedly understood the imperial power inherent in geographical and navigational knowledge. As historian Ned Blackhawk puts it, explorer's notes and maps "produced the knowledge from which conquest could flow" and thus were "the most critical tools of empire."¹²⁵ Blackhawk's analysis about the power of maps and journals to aid conquest speaks to much of human history, but his claims focus on the American West in the early nineteenth century, and specifically the expedition led by America's most famous explorers: Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. In 1832, the mapmaking of William Clark's son, Meriwether Clark, was tied to a specific wartime purpose: finding Black Hawk. But any map had the potential to transform Ho-Chunk lives. The Ho-Chunks essentially

traversable land through here. For examples, see "Interior Field Notes" for Townships 6 and 7 North, Range 14 East, and Townships 8 North, Range 15 East, and Townships 9, 10, 11 North, Range 16 East, "Wisconsin Public Land Survey Records: Original Field Notes and Plat Maps," <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/SurveyNotes/>.

¹²³ Murphy, *A Gathering of Rivers*, 19-43; Jeanne Kay, "The Land of La Baye: The Ecological Impact of the Green Bay Fur Trade, 1634-1836" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1997).

¹²⁴ Nancy Oestreich Lurie and Patrick J. Jung, *The Nicolet Corrigenda: New France Revisited* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2009).

¹²⁵ Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 148.

used Clark's pen to draw the map they wanted.¹²⁶ On that map, certain places were impassable to whites.

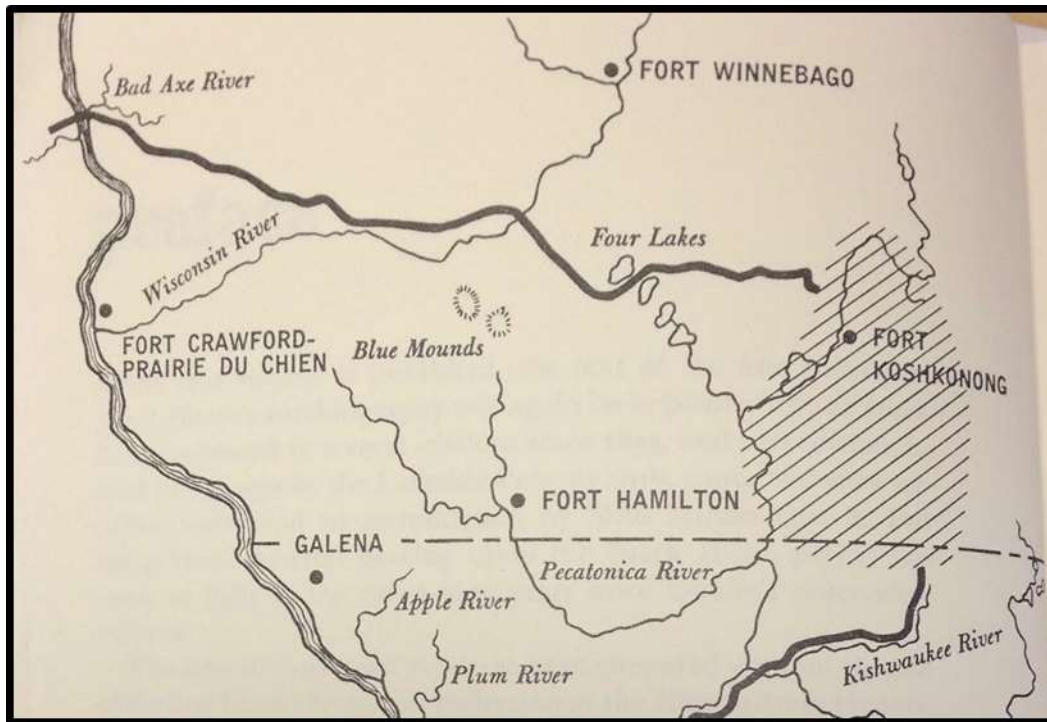


Fig. 5. Unknown Route of the Sauk Band, 1832. From Black Hawk: An Autobiography, ed. Donald Jackson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1955). The lined region indicates the area in which the Sauk band's location and routes are unknown, spanning the time period between 20 May and 18 July, 1832.

For all the work of Atkinson's scouting parties and mapmakers, historians know almost nothing about the Sauk band's routes and camps after Stillman's Run. Historian Donald Jackson offers a rare admission of ignorance about the Sauk band's location during the crisis of 1832 in his edited edition of Black Hawk's autobiography (see fig. 5), labeling a large area "unknown route of the Sauk band." Meanwhile, military historians dig deep into the American search for the Sauk band because determining the location of the band helps establish the military prowess of the troops.¹²⁷ Some rely on Meriwether Clark's map as the definitive source for the swamp

¹²⁶ The value of this map is not in its use for navigation or knowledge of Black Hawk's whereabouts but in what it reveals about the Rock River Ho-Chunks' role and methods in shaping the American search for the Sauk band in 1832.

campaign, while others dismiss it as “rather inaccurate,” in part, for its lack of clear orientation.¹²⁸ Virtually all historians of the conflict rely on the same intelligence that was available to Atkinson and his officers in their attempts to track down the Sauk band that summer. The trouble with this approach is the source of that intelligence—Rock River Ho-Chunks. Until scholars rethink the role Rock River Ho-Chunks played in this conflict, they will be led astray by information provided by the Ho-Chunks just as Henry Atkinson, Henry Dodge, and every other commanding officer in the Army of the Frontier was led astray nearly two-hundred years ago. The Ho-Chunks undermined American mapmaking during that summer while also depleting American resources, another of their objectives in the plan to keep the peace.

By the second week of July’s swamp campaign, the effects of Ho-Chunk efforts to thwart the Americans’ search were everywhere. Entire brigades went without food, men suffered from dysentery, and horses had gone missing, suffered injury from falling through bogs, or developed “sick foot” due to constantly wet hooves. Adding to Atkinson’s burdens, the decreasing horse herd led volunteers to accuse one another of stealing horses, allegations that Atkinson dealt with

¹²⁷ For example, see *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 741n1. Whitney attempts to piece together the Sauk band’s movements in June and July 1832. Most scholars treat her conclusions as fact. However, she relies on the same intelligence Americans had in 1832, most of which came from Rock River Ho-Chunks, who intended to mislead the Americans about the Sauk band’s location. Moreover, the lands invaded by Americans in the swamp campaign were heavily inhabited by Ho-Chunks, meaning any evidence discovered by American scouting parties indicating human occupation and movement may not have been left by the Sauk band.

¹²⁸ William T. Hagen, *Black Hawk's Route Through Wisconsin: Report of an Investigation Made by Authority of the Legislature of Wisconsin* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1949), 23. Other than Ellen Whitney’s later contributions, Hagen’s work has long been the definitive source on the Sauk band’s trail as well as the army’s various routes during the Black Hawk War. Using Meriwether Lewis Clark’s map, Hagen locates the third Sauk camp in Summit Township (Township 7 North, Range 17 East) near Oconomowoc. Patrick Jung openly dismisses this map as “rather inaccurate.” See Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 146, n37. While “finding” the Sauk band’s camps and trails is not the project of this chapter, my interpretation of Clark’s map shifts both American troops and the alleged Sauk band camps west of Hagen’s designation by about 20 miles. Troops either followed Deer Creek (a minor tributary of the Rock River) to its head and found the third Sauk camp just southeast of present-day Jefferson Tamarack Swamp State Natural Area, or they wandered inland from the east side of the Rock River, eventually reconnecting with the northern portion of the Bark River before locating the third Sauk camp somewhere between present-day Rome and Hebron, Wisconsin. The possibility remains that Ho-Chunks and Potawatomis used these camps, not the Sauk band, or Ho-Chunks created them to mislead Atkinson into believing the Sauk band was fleeing toward Lake Michigan and, ultimately, Upper Canada.

through field trials to determine rightful ownership.¹²⁹ Troop morale was low, as were prospects for a real Indian fight, and many volunteers wanted to quit the campaign and return home. Reducing the American force as much as possible, if not dissolving it all together, seems to have been the objective of the Rock River Ho-Chunks. The plan nearly worked. Atkinson discharged several regiments, and would have discharged nearly all volunteers, but left that decision to his forthcoming replacement, General Scott.¹³⁰ Atkinson sent nearly all the remaining militia units away from his camp near Burnt Village to draw provisions from nearby forts. In his 1887 history of the war, Perry Armstrong lamented this moment: “Thus was the numerous Army which had been brought so recently together at the Burnt Village, scattered and broken into fragments by the universal foe to the human race—hunger—never again to be united.”¹³¹ Atkinson had run out of food. Whether the Sauk band was five miles away, as Atkinson believed they were, or fifty, mattered none. The Army of the Frontier was stuck starving at the Bark River.

Through manufactured delays and forced marches through swamps and bogs, Rock River Ho-Chunks created the hunger that stalled the Americans, but soldiers and their officers viewed the terrain, not the Ho-Chunks, as the primary obstacle in their search for the Sauk band. In the correspondence exchanged among military officers, their superiors, and federal officials, one finds ample evidence of the degree to which the Ho-Chunks, in alliance with the lowlands, stalled the American effort to find the Sauk band. Few letters, however, even mention the Ho-Chunks, and never were they acknowledged as the primary architects of the failed campaign.¹³²

¹²⁹ Henry Atkinson, “Order No. 50,” 8 July 1832 and “Special Order No 32,” 9 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 751-52, 755.

¹³⁰ Henry Atkinson to Winfield Scott, 11 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 762-763.

¹³¹ Armstrong, *The Sauks*, 444.

¹³² William Campbell to Andrew Jackson, 13 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 788. Campbell’s letter reflects the complaints he heard from John Reynolds and his officers (of the 27th Regiment of Illinois Militia). In the history Reynolds wrote later, he incorporated complaints about Rock River Ho-Chunks and, in particular, General

Blame for the war's lack of progress was spread all around. Illinois Governor John Reynolds and many other mounted volunteers blamed the slow regulars who traveled on foot. The regulars, in return, believed undisciplined militiamen hindered their progress, using up food and other supplies. Even Atkinson's scholarly critics acknowledge that the militia brigades consumed resources far faster than anticipated during the first week of the swamp campaign.¹³³ Poorly trained volunteers knew little of rationing. Henry Dodge touted his battalion as experienced from its actions in the Winnebago War of 1827, but his men used up all their provisions by July 8 and began drawing on Atkinson's supply.¹³⁴ Regulars noted that they, "who march with the same supply [as the militiamen] were [not] in want, until the full period had expired."¹³⁵

Few soldiers blamed Ho-Chunk Indians for their depleted supplies. Regular E. Buckner, did, alleging that, in an effort to relieve the starving Sauk band, Ho-Chunks took food from the army: "The last five beeves in our camp were stolen in the night by our allies, the Winnebagoes, and driven directly to the Sac Camp, in the muddy triangle above us."¹³⁶ Other than occasional glimpses of Rock River Ho-Chunks displacing both the Sauk band's hunger and their own onto the American force, Americans engaged in the search for the Sauk band mostly blamed the terrain, or each other, for their failures.

What Atkinson and his contemporaries failed to see in the summer of 1832 is that the Rock River Ho-Chunks set the Americans up to fail. It was a strategy so well deployed that Ho-

Atkinson's reliance on White Crow (whom Reynolds called the "wicked savage") for guidance. Reynolds states explicitly that if Atkinson had not listened to White Crow and "pushed up the river, by forced marches for a day or two" immediately after the regular was shot on 7 July, the Americans would have found the Sauk and the war would have ended. Reynolds, *My Own Times*, 251.

¹³³ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 134.

¹³⁴ Wakefield, *Wakefield's History*, 81.

¹³⁵ Buckner, "A Brief History of the War," 431. Wakefield, a militiaman under James Henry, appreciated being well-supplied with provisions by Atkinson, for which the general "had been famous from the commencement of the campaign." See, Wakefield, *Wakefield's History*, 125-126.

¹³⁶ Buckner, "A Brief History of the War," 431.

Chunks remained nearly invisible, and the regulars and militiamen were left pointing fingers at one another for Black Hawk's many escapes. In some of these accusations, which continued for decades after the war ended, the specter of Indian agency exists, even if Americans overlooked it. For instance, in this army officer's complaint, undisciplined militiamen are to blame, but Ho-Chunks were the actual architects:

The militia convoys were incredibly timid and unmanageable; provision trains could not be got on; one was abandoned by guards and drivers, within two or three miles of our position here, in consequence of their having imagined that they had seen an Indian or two.¹³⁷

What became of the provisions on the lost wagon is anyone's guess, but their mostly likely destination was with Ho-Chunk people or their Sauk kin. General Atkinson took part in the finger pointing, too. He called out the militia for their carelessness with supplies, but he acknowledged that the terrain played no small part: "It is but fair to remark here, that but for the waste of provisions by the volunteers, and unavoidable losses in swimming rivers, and the miring down of horses in creeks and swamps, the supply would have been ample until the train of wagons arrived."¹³⁸ It was Atkinson's Ho-Chunk guides, however, who made these losses unavoidable.

Tormented by the terrain and his lack of progress, Atkinson wrote Winfield Scott on 11 July with updates on his position and more disappointing news. His spy battalions had found empty Sauk camps running north along the Rock River but nothing more:

This, as I have before observed to you, is the most difficult country to operate in imaginable and the enemy the most uncertain to find. He has no home or residing place. Every part of the Country, from the Mississippi to the Lakes is equally familiar and habitual to him and his mode, and speed of Traveling such as to elude apprehension, as the openness of the Country affords his spies an

¹³⁷ Philip St. George Cooke, *Scenes and Adventures in the Army: or Romance of Military Life* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1857), 166-67.

¹³⁸ Henry Atkinson to Roger Jones, 19 November 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1209.

opportunity of discovering us, before we can get within a day or two's journey of him.¹³⁹

Atkinson believed that unless Black Hawk stopped and confronted the Americans, what the Sauk saw no advantage in doing, the band's escape north could extend the war into winter: "I look more to a defeat by his flight than any other apprehension."¹⁴⁰ The Rock River Ho-Chunks facilitating this flight, however, hoped Atkinson and his force would quit the chase and depart from the Koshkonong country long before winter, bringing a peaceful end to the crisis in Ho-Chunk country.

Tales of woe regarding the hunt for Black Hawk made their way further up the chain of command. In a letter to Governor Lewis Cass, Scott wrote, "The character of the country and the enemy, have lengthened out the war." Scott added that with "These considerations being taken into view...I cannot flatter myself that I might have done better."¹⁴¹ William Clark also wrote to Cass in mid-July, reporting on events of the swamp campaign as he understood them from his son: "the enemy had again disappeared at the approach of our force."¹⁴² William Clark and Winfield Scott reproduced a narrative of the swamp campaign virtually unchanged from the versions written by Meriwether Clark and Henry Atkinson. The Americans seemed to take it for granted that Black Hawk, who was hundreds of miles from his homeland of Saukenauk, where the Rock flows into the Mississippi, was now oddly at home in the lands of the Rock River Ho-Chunk, using some mysterious familiarity with the region to outsmart the Americans. Scott, and perhaps Clark, sympathized with Atkinson and the regulars, who faced the impossible task of hunting a shadow.

¹³⁹ Henry Atkinson to Winfield Scott, 11 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 763.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Thayer, *Hunting a Shadow*, 141; original citation is William Clark to Lewis Cass, 19 July 1832, National Archives and Records Administration, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, Microcopy 234, Letters Received, Prairie du Chien Agency.

¹⁴² Thayer, *Hunting a Shadow*, 141.

Tales of American defeat were, of course, tales of Ho-Chunk success, even if Ho-Chunks and their actions are nearly absent in the sources. When taken as literal accounts of his challenges, Atkinson's correspondence and that of other Americans obscures the central roles White Crow and other Ho-Chunks played in shaping July's swamp campaign and the awful experiences of American troops. What is undeniable this: without Ho-Chunk guidance, Black Hawk and his people could not have maneuvered through the region as Reynolds, Atkinson, Scott, and so many others said he did.

As militiamen returned home, their stories from the field offered more unwitting accounts of Ho-Chunk successes. After hearing stories of the mire and mystery of the swamp campaign from John Reynolds's discharged volunteers, William Campbell, a volunteer stationed in Galena, immediately penned a letter to President Andrew Jackson criticizing Atkinson's command of the campaign:

Our Armies march too slow for them on foot. Genl. Atkinson believed he had them penned up in a Swamp at the junction of the [Bark] & Rock River: he made a bridge to cross on & when they got there not an Indian was to be found. The Indians shot at & wounded one man while fishing: they have out-generaled *US*.¹⁴³

What Campbell heard from his fellow soldiers, not five days after finding the abandoned island camp, was far from a tale of Ho-Chunk treachery and deceit. It was, rather, a tale of troop hardship. In Campbell's retelling, militiamen departed Koshkonong on 10 July, thoroughly convinced that Black Hawk and the Sauk band had narrowly evaded them yet again and that the slow regulars were to blame.

Unfortunately for the Ho-Chunk, the American commanders were not quite ready to give up. Despite American failures, the swamp campaign continued. Back in the swamps and among

¹⁴³ Campbell to Andrew Jackson, 13 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 789. Campbell was a personal friend of Andrew Jackson's and was appointed by the president to serve as the assistant superintendent of the lead mines on the Mississippi River in 1829. See *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 359n1 [emphasis in original].

the mosquitoes of Koshkonong, Atkinson and company were still camped several miles above the lake, on the east side of the Rock River along the Bark. As supplies dwindled, the risk of pilfering grew. Hoping to cultivate a sense of security and imminent success, Atkinson put his regulars to work constructing a “small fort.” Atkinson later described this effort in more dismissive terms, explaining that his regulars “threw up a stockade and temporary block houses” to shelter incoming provisions and to accommodate “the sick, who were accumulating on our hands.”¹⁴⁴ Among the illnesses, dysentery was taking the greatest toll on men mired in the mud.¹⁴⁵ Though it provided brief shelter for the sick and supplies, the fort was as much a project to keep troops busy and provide the illusion of security as it was a military fortification. The fort would be abandoned and forgotten by the time November snows arrived.

In an attempt to reduce pressure on his waning supplies, Atkinson discharged several companies of Illinois militia, and for the same reason, he dismissed most of his Indian allies on 10 July.¹⁴⁶ Atkinson’s faith in the Potawatomi and Ho-Chunk had not faltered, as the general made clear with complements toward them in his correspondence with Scott. The Menominee warriors simultaneously excused themselves from the campaign, their hopes of fighting the Sauk band by now sufficiently diminished. Seeing that Atkinson was reducing the number of Indians allies because of dwindling supplies, White Crow and his son, White Pawnee, asked to remain as guides. Several dozen more Ho-Chunks seemed to have continued working as guides and scouts, too, though in an unofficial capacity. Since no Rock River Ho-Chunks were mustered into

¹⁴⁴ Henry Atkinson to Henry Jones, 19 November 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1210.

¹⁴⁵ Trask, *Black Hawk*, 250-51.

¹⁴⁶ In one of his letters to Winfield Scott, Henry Atkinson warns him about the voracious appetite of Indian allies. See, Atkinson to Scott, 11 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk.2, 763.

federal service, all but a few of these people remain anonymous in the historical record.¹⁴⁷ Their anonymity endures even as their actions to thwart conflict in their lands come to light.

Making History at Fort Winnebago

General Atkinson sent 2,000 militiamen to Fort Winnebago for more supplies on 10 July. His orders set in motion a coincidental series of events that would lead to the end of the conflict and the near extermination of the Sauk band on 2 August. While Atkinson's orders proved a turning point in the crisis, historians who narrate the process by which the conflict ended do so in different ways. Most historians view the militia's journey to Fort Winnebago as a significant moment for Henry Dodge. For example, according to Patrick Jung, "Whereas Atkinson simply planned to resume the same ineffectual operations along the Bark River Dodge had other ideas." Upon arriving at Fort Winnebago, Dodge "aggressively sought out intelligence concerning the location of the British Band."¹⁴⁸ Dodge wanted to make his own way in the conflict, and was growing tired of his subordination to Atkinson.

Dodge's departure from Koshkonong on July 10 did not free him from Atkinson's ineffective command nor did it signal his independence from the grasp of White Crow and the Rock River Ho-Chunk. As I show, White Crow, his son White Pawnee, and other Ho-Chunks from both the Rock River and Portage bands continued exercising a surprising level of control over the militia's movements and its capacity as a fighting force. Sometime between July 10 and July 18, Ho-Chunks friendly to the Sauk band also began facilitating its escape from their Rock

¹⁴⁷ Henry Gratiot, Journal, 10 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1304. Gratiot states that White Crow and his son remained the only Ho-Chunk guides serving Americans after 10 July, but Atkinson's orders to one or two spy battalions on 10 and 11 July included unidentified Indian guides. See Henry Atkinson to William S. Harney, 11 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 764; Johnston, Journal, 9-12 July, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1317-1318. Furthermore, Rock River Ho-Chunks seemed to come and go from army camps as they pleased, usually when there was food readily available. See, Gratiot, Journal, 15 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1304.

¹⁴⁸ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 142.

River country, and its movement toward the Mississippi. One can see the Ho-Chunks' effects on the campaign from this point forward in two ways: they worked to undermine American military force, targeting their horses and causing a massive stampede, and they continued to keep the military away from the Sauk band. I begin with the commonplace history of how Henry Dodge and his Iowa County volunteers helped to catch the Sauk band and, finally, Black Hawk. But I show that Dodge and his men constructed this version; it is a fabricated history unrecognized as such by scholars and one that continues to preclude critical treatment of Rock River Ho-Chunks as central actors in the events of 1832.

What comes next, then, is the traditional and oft-told narrative of the events that unfolded starting July 10, which derives largely from published accounts that begin appearing in the mid-nineteenth century. The foundational sources for this common-place history were generated by veterans of the conflict in the 1850s, chiefly militiamen who had served under Henry Dodge in 1832. Theirs remain the lens through which historians see this version of the past.

Under Atkinson's orders, Dodge was to secure provisions from Fort Winnebago for the entire military force and return to Koshkonong without delay. Dodge and his men had other plans. Once at Fort Winnebago, "The militiamen were interested in more than food," John Hall writes, "No longer willing to follow White Crow, they also sought new guide and reliable intelligence" about Black Hawk's hiding place.¹⁴⁹ With the help of Pierre Paquette, a *Métis* trader who spoke the language of his Ho-Chunk mother fluently, Dodge learned from Ho-Chunks at the Portage that Black Hawk's band was encamped at the rapids on the Rock River. "Armed with this intelligence," Hall explains, "Dodge convinced the militia brigade commander James Henry that they should pursue Black Hawk rather than return to Atkinson's camp with

¹⁴⁹ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 173-174. Hall cites Dodge's July 14 letter to Atkinson, which informs the general that Dodge is seeking a different route back to Koshkonong because his men suffered so much on the route to Fort Winnebago.

provisions.”¹⁵⁰ Milton Alexander and his militia contingent alone returned to Fort Koshkonong with the much-needed provisions, guided by White Crow. Dodge, as the story goes, stole off for the rapids.

At the rapids, Dodge encountered a small village of Ho-Chunks. He interrogated them, and learned of Black Hawk’s location twenty miles further north. Dodge immediately sent two messengers south to Atkinson’s camp, providing an update on his whereabouts and the new intelligence. But these messengers instead found the Sauk band’s actual trail near present-day Watertown, the trail away from which the northern Ho-Chunk tried to misdirect troops. The messengers returned to Dodge’s camp, and the following morning, 19 July, Dodge and his battalion along with James Henry’s brigade pursued the Sauk band west. The troops caught up with the enemy at the Wisconsin River on 21 July and at Bad Axe on the Mississippi River on 2 August, where Jung argues that Dodge “assumed virtual control of the war,” adding, “his actions did much to insure [sic] that the fate of the British Band would be sealed.”¹⁵¹ With help from Dakota allies, the Americans massacred nearly the entire Sauk band.

Much of this well-worn Black Hawk War yarn is simply false. I tell it here because it has been told as history for the better part of two centuries. This is the narrative that Dodge crafted some years later with help from former battalion volunteers. By his second term as Wisconsin’s territorial governor from 1845 to 1848, Dodge’s version of events during the Black Hawk War ran up against Thomas Ford’s. Ford, who served as Illinois governor from 1842 to 1846, wrote a history of Illinois that was published in 1855, five years after his death, but in the late 1840s, Ford delivered numerous lectures on the Black Hawk War.¹⁵² Dodge did not like the story Ford

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 174.

¹⁵¹ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 160.

¹⁵² Thomas Ford, *A History of Illinois, from its Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847* (New York: Ivison, Pinney, 1855), 198-199. Ford had volunteered in the Illinois Militia in previous years though he did not do

was telling because in the lectures, Illinois militiamen, especially James Henry, became the war's heroes. Ford also called out Dodge for manipulating public understanding of events during the war, providing evidence that he and Addison Phileo, an editor of the *Galenian* newspaper, had conspired to elevate Dodge's role in the conflict by emphasizing only his actions (and leaving out mention of other officers, including Henry Atkinson). Their myth-making traveled beyond the *Galenian's* readership, as Ford noted, when their "letters were copied into all other newspapers throughout the United States" and taken as "the authentic news of the war." "This delusion," Ford argued, "was of immense advantage to Gen. Dodge," and facilitated his military and political appointments in the years that followed. As far as Ford was concerned, and the evidence before him showed, Dodge "has been for the last fifteen years wearing the laurels due to James Henry."¹⁵³

When Governor Ford rebuffed Dodge's challenge to this version of history, Governor Dodge called on his former volunteers for help. Dodge first reached out to his former aide and adjutant of the regiment, Charles Bracken, "as one familiar with those events, to make a statement of them in writing." Dodge specifically asked Bracken to write:

as to the means used by him at Fort Winnebago, to ascertain precisely the whereabouts of Black Hawk and his warriors and to induce Generals Henry and Alexander to disobey the orders of General Atkinson . . . as by returning to Rock River in a more northerly direction, they would place the enemy between Atkinson and themselves, and thereby force them to battle.¹⁵⁴

so in 1832. His speeches and published history about the conflict in the late 1840s and 1850s focused on the exploits of the Illinois militia, including James Henry. Ford's historical account drew the ire of Henry Dodge who felt that Ford ignored or marginalized Dodge's efforts and those of the western Michigan militia while Ford praised those of the Illinois militia. As a result, Ford's history became the target of public (and published) criticism by a handful of Dodge's volunteers, who wrote at the request of their former commanding officer and former Territorial Governor, Henry Dodge. While Kerry Trask ultimately upholds Dodge's narrative, he also critiques Dodge for making no mention of the other militia officers. Trask, *Black Hawk*, 261.

¹⁵³ Ford, *A History of Illinois*, 152.

¹⁵⁴ Charles Bracken, "Further Strictures on Gov. Ford's History of the Black Hawk War," in *Second Annual Report and Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for the Year 1855*, ed. Lyman C. Draper, vol. 2 (Madison: Calkins & Proudfit, Printers, 1856), 402-403. The first published account of Bracken's recollections of the conflict appeared in 1854. See William Rudolph Smith, "Events of the Black Hawk War," in *The History of Wisconsin*, part 2, vol. 3 (Madison, Wisconsin: Beriah Brown, Printer, 1854), 215-223. An unprincipled man,

Bracken, a territorial legislator from 1839 to 1840, initially refused Dodge's request for reasons he did not give. He saw fit to answer Dodge's call only in 1856, the year after Ford's history was published.

Two years earlier, however, in 1854, Peter Parkinson, Jr. answered Dodge's call to rewrite history. Parkinson's recollection of Dodge's decisive actions at Fort Winnebago were similar to Bracken's, but Parkinson added his own flourishes. Henry Atkinson may have been the commanding general of the Army of the Frontier, but, as Parkinson claimed, "Gen. Dodge was certainly the main-spring, the life and energy of the army, suggesting and planning all its movements."¹⁵⁵ Whereas Bracken openly discussed the request he received from his former commanding officer, Parkinson stated in unequivocal terms that Dodge had never asked him to write his history. Yet both Parkinson and Bracken told the same lies and achieved the exact objectives that Dodge desired: giving him the "credit and honor of that expedition [to the rapids] and its consequent results," the destruction of the Sauk band, the capture of black Hawk, and the triumphant end to the conflict.¹⁵⁶

Virtually all histories that follow Bracken's and Parkinson's accounts, including recent scholarship on the Black Hawk War, testify to the Iowa County militia men's success in elevating Henry Dodge's actions in the war and manufacturing his heroism. Historian Kerry

Bracken perpetuated many fictions related to the crisis of 1832. In November of that year, he urged Michigan Territory Governor George Porter to act quickly on Rock River Ho-Chunk removal, citing a false report that claimed Ho-Chunks were inciting a war against the Americans by spreading war wampum throughout the region. See Charles Bracken to Micajah T. Williams, 24 November 1832, *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, ed. Clarence Edward Carter (Washington: National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, 1972), vol. 12, 535; Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 244.

¹⁵⁵ Parkinson, "Strictures Upon Ford's Black Hawk War," in *Second Annual Report and Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for the Year 1855*, ed. Lyman C. Draper, vol. 2 (Madison: Calkins & Proudfit, Printers, 1856), 394. Parkinson dated his account 10 September 1854.

¹⁵⁶ Peter Parkinson, Jr., "Strictures Upon Ford's Black Hawk War," 393-401. Henry Dodge most certainly requested the same of Parkinson as of Bracken. Moreover, in 1855 Parkinson and Bracken co-authored another short account of their experience in the war in 1855. See Charles Bracken and Peter Parkinson, Jr., "Pekatonica Battle Controversy," in *Second Annual Report and Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for the Year 1855*, ed. Lyman C. Draper, vol. 2 (Madison: Calkins & Proudfit, Printers, 1856), 388-89.

Trask even engages in the debate first raised by Ford in the 1850s, arguing that Dodge deserves the appellation of “hero” for his actions during the swamp campaign and specifically at Fort Winnebago. In his chapter “A Hero Arose,” Trask states that throughout the conflict, “only Dodge had raised the hopes of the people, and only he had set an admirable example of personal courage.”¹⁵⁷ As this and similar conclusions by other scholars demonstrate, Ford published his efforts to dismantle the delusional narrative crafted by Dodge and his volunteers, but the task is unfinished.

Inaccurate stories, whether told by veterans, territorial governors, or more recent historians, do not just get the facts wrong. However inadvertently, they collectively deny the agency of the Ho-Chunks, who continued to shape the course of events through July 1832, even as the circumstances around them grew more unmanageable and dangerous. The historical record, including diaries and journals, oral histories of Ho-Chunk Indians at the Portage, and Dodge’s own letters to Atkinson tell a more accurate story. Here, I take up Ford’s unfinished work, but to a different end. Instead of shifting accolades from one force to another, the evidence I present shows the vulnerability of the American military force in contrast to the vigilance of the Ho-Chunk people.

An ever-vigilant White Crow weighed the risks of staying with Atkinson’s men, chaperoning Dodge’s militiamen to Fort Winnebago, or quitting the Americans all together. Like most Rock River Ho-Chunks, he understood the threat these militiamen posed to the Sauk band and to Ho-Chunk sovereignty. In particular, White Crow held misgivings about Dodge and his lead region volunteers, the same men who had falsely imprisoned him and twenty other Ho-Chunks at Blue Mounds in early June when they had returned the two young sisters taken by

¹⁵⁷ Trask, *Black Hawk*, 261.

Potawatomis in a raid. Militiamen had acted brashly, and White Crow had been compelled to go with them, leaving Atkinson and his regulars to their fort-building.

The stakes were higher now, as again the Americans fixed, accidentally this time, to move closer to the actual Sauk location. White Crow probably wanted to move the 2,000 militiamen through the area quickly since their route to Fort Winnebago intercepted nearly all possible escape routes for the Sauk band, if its leaders decided to flee west toward the Mississippi. White Crow knew that escape attempt was not only likely but imminent for two reasons: Atkinson's men would soon discover trails running further north along the Rock River that pointed to the Sauk band's hiding place, and the Sauk band was starving to death.¹⁵⁸

Between Koshkonong and Fort Winnebago lie prairie grasslands pockmarked with swamps. Indian trails crossed this generally treeless expanse. It was the kind of terrain through which a well-guided mounted militia could move quickly. By some accounts, they did. Dodge's battalion covered over sixty miles in two days and arrived at Fort Winnebago on the night of 11 July.¹⁵⁹ Alexander's and Henry's brigades arrived the following morning, their men and horses famished. The march was not as easy as hoped. One of Henry's volunteers complained, "we were compelled to go through the most swampy country that an army ever was marched through." Henry himself wrote to Atkinson from the fort about "passing over some Verry [sic] bad road . . . and traveling sixty miles or more."¹⁶⁰ The men had not anticipated such a long journey. Based on a map of Indian trails by early twentieth-century archaeologist Charles Brown, the most direct routes between Lake Koshkonong and Fort Winnebago would have

¹⁵⁸ Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 132-33.

¹⁵⁹ Henry Dodge to Henry Atkinson, 14 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 791.

¹⁶⁰ James D. Henry to Henry Atkinson, 14 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 793.

traversed sixty-five miles.¹⁶¹ It is clear that Dodge's force had grossly underestimated the distance to the fort. If Edwin Rose's map is any indication, Americans believed only forty miles separated Fort Koshkonong and Fort Winnebago.¹⁶²

Traveling a route half-again longer than Rose's map suggested took a toll on the volunteers and their mounts, animals that suffered more than their riders for want of food and water. Nowhere, however, did Dodge or his men leave record of this arduous journey souring them on their Ho-Chunk guides. Dodge did not question the Ho-Chunks' trustworthiness in his July 14 letter to Atkinson. "I found the distance at least sixty miles," he explained, "the White Crow our pilot stated the direct route would be covered with swamps," thus justifying the less direct route.¹⁶³ The problem, as the record shows, was not White Crow. Having little loyalty to an Indian war that saw scarce combat, and suffering from what should have been a simple supply run, Dodge's volunteers threatened to quit the campaign and return home if the commander tried to force them back to Koshkonong along the same path.¹⁶⁴ Their complaints, rooted in American geographical ignorance of the region and perhaps poor preparation, have led historians to claim, falsely, that they believed White Crow and his son had led them on a "circuitous route." Instead, it seems likely that the two Ho-Chunks took the troops over the most direct course.¹⁶⁵ Moreover,

¹⁶¹ Charles Brown, "Wisconsin Indian Trails Map," (Madison: Wisconsin Archeological Society; electronic publisher, Wisconsin Historical Society, 1930) <http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/cdm/ref/collection/maps/id/883> (accessed November 30, 2017).

¹⁶² Edwin Rose, "Indian Campaign of 1832." See fig. 3.

¹⁶³ Henry Dodge to Henry Atkinson, 14 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 791.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Having generated a narrative around growing troop distrust of Ho-Chunk Indians, especially White Crow, historians incorrectly interpret the militia's complaints and turn them into a referendum on White Crow. For example, John Hall explains that White Crow's round-about way to Fort Winnebago raised the suspicions of the volunteers, because "on several occasions in the preceding month, they suspected the Ho-Chunk chief of treachery, and they now interpreted every suspicious circumstance as affirming evidence." However, White Crow did not lead the troops on a circuitous route and troops did not suspect White Crow of doing so during the journey nor at Fort Winnebago. See Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 173. Henry Dodge to Henry Atkinson, 14 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 791.

militiamen did not reject their Ho-Chunk guides, as scholars also assert; the soldiers simply refused to return to Koshkonong by the same way they had come.

In his 14 July letter from Fort Winnebago, Dodge explained to Atkinson that he had found his men “unwilling to return by the rout [sic] we came,” adding that “I was in danger of lossing [sic] them.”¹⁶⁶ The troops did not distrust White Crow, nor did they interrogate the Ho-Chunks at Fort Winnebago. In Dodge’s correspondence with Atkinson, however, there is evidence of mutinous, ill-trained, and poorly prepared lead region volunteers threatening to leave Dodge’s battalion if the commanding officer did not find a different way back to Koshkonong. Furthermore, Dodge did not blame or disparage White Crow. Though he caved to his troops’ demands, Dodge continued to trust and rely on White Crow.

White Crow was sincere in wanting to divert the men around some swamps, and Dodge’s calculation of a sixty-mile journey was accurate. In fact, White Crow’s path was anything but circuitous. The land being what it was, however, White Crow’s route to Fort Winnebago represented the only time during the swamp campaign when Rock River Ho-Chunk guides took Americans over the easiest route possible. Satterlee Clark, the sutler at Fort Winnebago, knew the region well and offered an explanation for why the militia had such a difficult journey. In the region between Koshkonong and Fort Winnebago, Clark claimed that one moved faster on foot than on horseback because “the whole country was a wilderness” and roads and trails could not accommodate mounted travel. Heavy rainfall made travel even more difficult: “the marshes were very wet at that time.” Clark added that while he “jumped into a stream and waded through

¹⁶⁶ Henry Dodge to Henry Atkinson, 14 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 791.

or walked across the marsh, the troops had to build bridges and causeways,” or go around the wetlands.¹⁶⁷

Dodge was less concerned about White Crow than his volunteers’ talk of quitting the campaign. At Fort Winnebago, he had just received word of his promotion by President Andrew Jackson; he would command a new federal dragoon unit of mounted rangers.¹⁶⁸ Fearful that a mutiny would reflect poorly on him, Dodge took his men’s threat seriously, and he enlisted the help of the fort’s interpreter and *Métis* resident of the Portage, Pierre Paquette, in finding a different way back to Koshkonong.

Dodge’s decision to go to the Rock River rapids, rather than follow the route he had taken to the fort, came when he met up with Billy Hamilton, who stopped at Fort Winnebago on 14 July. Hamilton was headed with his men to Fort Howard, carrying out Atkinson’s recent order to organize and command a group of Menominee warriors at Green Bay to close any northern door through which the Sauk band might escape. Atkinson now believed the Sauk band intended to flee to British-controlled Canada. On 10 and 11 July, Atkinson’s spy battalions had located trails and camps in the trembling grounds indicating that the Sauk band had “fled precipitately up through the swamps on Rock River” and were hiding somewhere in the “impenetrable swamps” mapped by Merriweather Lewis Clark.¹⁶⁹ With fewer Rock River Ho-Chunks controlling the movement of the army’s regulars and volunteers, the Americans traveled more freely and their scouting parties soon turned up evidence of Black Hawk’s whereabouts. Hamilton made it clear to Dodge, Henry, and Alexander that Atkinson planned to move his force north along the Rock River as soon as the militia returned from Fort Winnebago with provisions.

¹⁶⁷ Satterlee Clark, “Early Times at Fort Winnebago,” in *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, ed. Lyman C. Draper, vol. 8 (Madison: Democrat Printing Company, State Printer, 1879), 313-14.

¹⁶⁸ Henry Dodge to Henry Atkinson, 14 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 791.

¹⁶⁹ Atkinson to Scott, 11 July 1832, 763; Johnston, Journal, 11-13 July 1832, 1317-18; Atkinson to Nathan Clark, 12 July 1832, 772, all in *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2.

Dodge seized upon new intelligence gleaned from Atkinson's efforts as another excuse to take a different route back to Fort Koshkonong. Dodge conveyed this to Atkinson in a letter written from the rapids on 18 July: "Col. Hamilton on his arrival stated you would probably march up the Rock River with the army and from the information through him Genl Henry & myself concluded we would proceed to this place and await your orders."¹⁷⁰ Paquette told Dodge that he and Ho-Chunk guides could get the militia to the rapids within two days.¹⁷¹ Dodge would arrive there well ahead of Atkinson's regulars, Paquette predicted, because many of them traveled on foot and the general was waiting on the militiamen and the supplies they carried. Dodge, so as not to appear eager to displace the regulars' role in flushing out the Sauk band, which Hamilton suggested might be at the rapids, assured Atkinson that he would wait at "the rapids of Rock River" for the general's orders adding, "we could march Either way as you might Direct."¹⁷² When Dodge left Fort Winnebago, he did not know the exact location of the Sauk band, only that the new route quelled his men's insubordination and salvaged his reputation among them. His subsequent discovery was, therefore, due more to chance than design.

Ho-Chunk narratives also explain much about Dodge's motivation, the events that transpired between Fort Winnebago and the rapids, and the condition of the Ho-Chunk people caught in the crisis. The militia's arrival at Fort Winnebago revealed how much Ho-Chunk Indians were already suffering. Once at the fort, it surprised Wakefield to be "still surrounded by Winnebagoes."¹⁷³ Hundreds, perhaps thousands of Indians camped near the agency house occupied by John and Juliette Kinzie, adjacent to the fort. According to Portage band Ho-Chunk Spoon Decorah, "Nearly the whole tribe was camped about Portage," spread out in three large

¹⁷⁰ Henry Dodge to Henry Atkinson, 18 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 820.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 14 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 791.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Wakefield, *Wakefield's History*, 85.

camps on both sides of the Wisconsin River. These were the refugees of the war, displaced from their villages and fields. They were demonstrating their neutrality to Americans by staying close to the fort and agency. Wakefield's surprise was John Kinzie's and Henry Gratiot's success. In continued effort to keep the Ho-Chunk out of the conflict, Kinzie had been distributing provisions to all Ho-Chunks of the Portage and Rock River agencies, whom the agent described as in a "state of "demi-starvation" by July, the month of their Corn Tasseling Moon.¹⁷⁴

Conditions only worsened with the arrival of 2,000 mounted militiamen at Fort Winnebago. Henry Dodge took the food out of the mouths of the Ho-Chunk to feed his men, and, a day later, Milton Alexander and James Henry did the same. Then they took more provisions to feed Atkinson's Army of the Frontier at Koshkonong. Seeing this and the trouble it could cause, Kinzie sent a request to George Porter, his agency's Superintendent of Indian Affairs, for emergency provisions to replace the food and goods taken by the militia. He asked for 3,000 bushels of corn, a fraction of the quantity that the combined bands of Portage and Rock River Ho-Chunks could have cultivated on their own in the absence of the American invasion of their lands. Kinzie conveyed the extraordinary circumstances: "the Winnebagos of Rock River, and others near here, have been required to leave their villages" and "they are not well acquainted with the country to subsist by hunting."¹⁷⁵ Further complicating the situation, game was scarce, so hunting provided little relief from hunger. And now, militiamen camped within sight of the fort denied Ho-Chunks their survival rations.

Spoon Decorah recalled other problems that arrived with Henry Dodge at Fort Winnebago. Decorah attributed to Dodge a rumor that Black Hawk was planning to attack the fort. The rumor caused Spoon Decorah and other Ho-Chunks who were off hunting to return

¹⁷⁴ John Kinzie to George Porter, 12 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 774.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

quickly to the Portage. Over time, Decorah and others came to view Dodge's rumor as a ploy to push the Ho-Chunks past their neutrality, forcing them to join the search for Black Hawk. Ho-Chunks gathered at Portage preferred neutrality and resisted helping the Americans.

Nonetheless, Paquette and Nahheesanchonka, or Man Who Thinks Himself of Importance, managed to convince a small number of Ho-Chunks to guide the militia to the rapids. Even so, none were willing to deliver Dodge's or Henry's letters to Henry Atkinson informing him of their alternative route.¹⁷⁶ Helping the militia find its way back to Fort Koshkonong, according to Decorah, would earn the "good opinion of White Beaver and the Big Father at Washington." The Ho-Chunk people declined because, Spoon Decorah recalled, "there was still among us a strong feeling of friendliness toward the Sacs." The Ho-Chunks would not betray their Sauk kin, no matter the cost.

Like White Crow, Spoon Decorah has been misunderstood by scholars who, in viewing this crisis as a two-sided conflict between the Americans and the Sauks, fail to imagine alternative Native perspectives on these events and their alternative outcomes. Patrick Jung, for example, interprets Spoon Decorah's words as evidence that the Portage Ho-Chunk, "like their Rock River kin...sided with Black Hawk."¹⁷⁷ Decorah was 80 years old when Reuben Thwaites interviewed him in 1887. Decorah's account suggests his awareness of the Sauk band's location at the Rock River rapids, but not necessarily the Americans'. Spoon Decorah remembered, "only six young men, none of them chiefs, went with Paquette as guides" to the rapids in July 1832. Undoubtedly, many Portage Ho-Chunks knew where the Sauk band was hiding. The intermingling of Rock River and Portage Ho-Chunks all but assured their sharing of this information. The Portage Ho-Chunks operated under a policy of neutrality during the conflict,

¹⁷⁶ *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 791n1.

¹⁷⁷ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 143.

but as Spoon Decorah suggested, his people counted the Sauk band as friends. Portage Ho-Chunk knowledge of the Sauk band's location near the Rock River rapids explains their widespread reluctance to guide the militia in this direction. Even if guiding the American militiamen might help the reputation of the Ho-Chunks, doing so heightened the risk for an unintended military engagement between the Americans and the warriors of the Sauk band. In recalling his people's decision about whether or not they would take the Americans to the rapids, the dilemma of the Portage Ho-Chunks relationship to the Sauk band resurfaced. Still, Spoon Decorah remained conscious of his interviewer and his audience in the 1880s, adding, "This feeling [toward the Sauk band] was of friendly pity, not a desire to help them fight" the Americans.¹⁷⁸ Spoon Decorah offers a rare Ho-Chunk perspective on the events of 1832. Resisting martial loyalty to either the Americans or the Sauk band, Spoon Decorah's recollection instead seems in line with a broad-based Ho-Chunk strategy of thwarting violence in their lands.

When scholars attempt to pin down on which side—American or Sauk—to put the various bands of the region's tribal nations, they distort Indigenous understandings of the crisis as well as their motivations and actions. For the Rock River Ho-Chunks, remaining intertwined in the conflict, literally shaping its course, thwarting bloodshed, and preserving their fields offered the best chance for managing the aftermath and protecting their future. For the Portage Ho-Chunk, Decorah's people, remaining neutral and camping out at Fort Winnebago and the agency house offered the best chance for a hopeful future. John Hall acknowledges these diverse approaches, not only among different Indian nations, but across bands and villages within tribes. He points out that the "majority of both the Ho Chunks and the Potawatomis favored neutrality" and that this policy proved virtually impossible to maintain as the conflict wore on, because "most Americans failed either to understand or to accept the divided, diffuse authority" that

¹⁷⁸ Spoon Decorah, "Narrative of Spoon Decorah," in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 452-53.

existed within these tribal nations. The problem was Americans and their tendency to lump Indians together as a monolith. “Divergent courses by bands of the same tribe,” Hall concludes, “suggested duplicity.”¹⁷⁹

More than complicating how nineteenth-century Americans viewed the conflict, scholars must do away with analytical frameworks that categorize Indian agency as either for or against the Americans. White Crow and the Rock River Ho-Chunks chose to shape the course of the conflict unfolding on their lands. Spoon Decorah and the Portage Ho-Chunks chose a policy of neutrality. They believed their actions offered their people the best chance of retaining their homelands. The militia’s march toward the rapids, toward the Sauk band, was an imminent threat to this shared goal.

Undoubtedly, that imminent threat drew a few reluctant Ho-Chunks from the Portage into service as guides and scouts for the Americans. White Crow likely urged them to such action, as he did his son, White Pawnee.¹⁸⁰ White Crow elected to return with Alexander’s men and the provisions and sent White Pawnee with Dodge and Henry. If Dodge and his men distrusted White Crow to the point of prohibiting his services as a guide, as scholars claim, the militia would not have placed the orator’s kin—his nephew, Paquette, and his son, White Pawnee—at the helm of their expedition.¹⁸¹ Resupplied with food, the militia departed on divergent routes from Fort Winnebago on the morning of 15 July. In the preceding three days, however, yet more troubles and confusion had challenged the Americans.

¹⁷⁹ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 125.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁸¹ Pierre Paquette was the son of White Crow’s sister. In addition to Paquette and White Pawnee, these were the other Ho-Chunk guides who joined the expedition to the Rapids: Naheesanchonka (Man Who Thinks Himself of Importance), Paneewaksaka (Pania Blanc, or White Pawnee, but not White Crow’s son), Notsookega (Bear that Breaks up the Brush), Ahmegunka, Tahnichseeka (The Smoker), and Rascal Decorah, Spoon Decorah’s older brother. See Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 174.

On the evening of July 12, Dodge's troops turned out their exhausted horses "to graze and refresh themselves upon the succulent sage grass."¹⁸² While the horses grazed, Dodge dealt with his fractious volunteers, waited for meals, and packed provisions for the return trip to meet Atkinson's army. Around midnight, the horses bolted. Without warning or obvious cause, the loosed horses stampeded through the camp and scattered onto the prairie north of the fort. James Justice, a militia, recalled how he and the other troops "were soon Roused from our slumber the Running of the horses which had taken a fright and were Runing [sic] through our encampment with a nois [sic] equal to thinder [sic]."¹⁸³ Likewise, from inside Fort Winnebago, Satterlee Clark heard and felt the stampede and compared it to "the heavy rumble of thunder."¹⁸⁴ A sentinel, who heard the horses before he saw them, could do nothing to stop or divert them.¹⁸⁵ Suddenly, the once mobile militia was without means of transportation.

The timing and toll of the stampede on the militia suggest that it was deliberately incited. At "the noon of night," according to late nineteenth-century historian Perry Armstrong, the horses "rushed on directly for the camp, overturning tents, breaking camp stools and fixtures without halting, and away with the speed of the wind, still snorting and running like the wild horse of Mazeppa, through the woods, prairies and swamps in the direction of Fort Winnebago."¹⁸⁶ Though it harmed no Americans, the stampede's path and the ferocity of the run assuredly harmed a great number of horses. The nearby swamps and forests provided many obstacles for the panicked animals. The most devastating feature of the local landscape for the horses was a nearby causeway. When the horses struck the causeway, which was, according to

¹⁸² Armstrong, *The Sauks*, 445.

¹⁸³ James Justice, Journal, 12 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk.2, 1323.

¹⁸⁴ Satterlee Clark, "Early Times," 313-14.

¹⁸⁵ Justice, Journal 12 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk.2, 1323. Numerous accounts claim no serious injuries occurred. However, John Reynolds, who was not present at Fort Winnebago for the stampede, contradicts this claim in his memoir, stating that some men were seriously injured. See Reynolds, *My Own Times*, 67.

¹⁸⁶ Armstrong, *The Sauks*, 445.

Armstrong, “some three miles in length leading to the fort,” many horses “broke their legs or necks.”¹⁸⁷ Between one and two thousand horses stampeded. As many as two hundred horses lay dead or lame the next morning.¹⁸⁸

American horses had been targets for the Ho-Chunks from the start of the swamp campaign. Even in mid-June, when Atkinson began mobilizing men to invade Ho-Chunk territory, militia and army units encountered frequent horse troubles. In addition to increasingly difficult terrain, a number of thefts, shootings, and smaller runs reduced available horses and slowed travel. Wakefield, who witnessed the 12 July stampede, prefaced his discussion of the event in his 1834 history by alluding to these kinds of incidents and reflecting on how common horse flights had been throughout the swamp campaign: “Our horses were given to fright and running in a most fearful manner,” Wakefield wrote, “the Army was constantly in danger of suffering great damage by their taking those frights.” Moreover, this recurring problem had “very much troubled” the progress of the war. For Wakefield, the stampede at the Portage stood apart from these: “This night they got more scared than common.”¹⁸⁹ Even after reaching the Wisconsin River, the horses did not stop but rather broke into small groups and ran north and south. Horses traveled as far as thirty miles from the Portage; one militiaman estimated that some ran for fifty miles.¹⁹⁰ Wakefield and the troops were also more frightened than usual: “There is no one can tell what a horrid sight it is, to see two thousand horses coming at full speed toward an encampment in the dead hour of night.”¹⁹¹ It was an event none would soon forget.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Satterlee Clark offers specific numbers of horses killed in his brief history. Between the Wisconsin River and the fort, 37 horses were found dead, and for 16 miles between the fort and prairie lands to the south, another 60 dead horses were located. Clark’s numbers do not include the number of injured horses found or those never recovered. See Satterlee Clark, “Early Times,” 314.

¹⁸⁹ Wakefield, *Wakefield’s History*, 85-86.

¹⁹⁰ Justice, *Journal*, 1323. Justice states that some of the horses ran all the way back to Koshkonong. See also Armstrong, *The Sauks*, 445.

¹⁹¹ Wakefield, *Wakefield’s History*, 85.

This extraordinary stampede immobilized the militia and bought the Sauk and Ho-Chunk time to plan. Wakefield and other veterans who later wrote about the stampede unwittingly acknowledged the objectives Ho-Chunks achieved in panicking the horses. One militiaman wrote, “on account of our horses taking the fright in the night of the 12th, our brigade was very much weakened.”¹⁹² Wakefield explained, “This circumstance caused us to stay here two days, trying to recover our horses, but all could not be found.”¹⁹³ Militia search parties spent July 13 and 14 tracking and recovering as many of their mounts and draft horses as they could. Beyond those killed and injured, still more horses were never seen again. Most of the mounts recovered were injured and unfit for service. The impact of the stampede was obvious to the militiamen at Fort Winnebago, though its cause was not.

A particularly vivid account of the stampede’s effect on the volunteer fighting force comes from Major William Ewing, who blamed it for disabling his spy battalion. Such battalions were a brigade’s most mobile unit, used for scouting and tracking missions. As its commanding officer, Ewing wrote a long letter to General Atkinson on 14 July requesting an official discharge for himself and his men following the Portage incident.¹⁹⁴ Citing sickness as well as “lost and disabled horses,” Ewing informed Atkinson that his battalion was “rendered utterly unfit for service.” He added that after a “vigilant search of a day & a half” for his battalion’s horses, he found that thirteen were “irrecoverably lost” and those “recovered from the flight are more unfit for service than such as refused to join it.” Ewing’s own horse had been among the earliest victims of White Crow’s route to Fort Winnebago. Somewhere on the journey, his mount went lame, which set him walking along with many other troops, adding

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ As Ewing crafted his letter to Atkinson, he reported “my horse and two others belonging to the Corps have been brought in, but unfit for service.” William Lee D. Ewing to Henry Atkinson, ca. 14 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 792.

nearly a full day's travel to their trip. Yet, so panicked were the horses on the night of 12 July that even Ewing's lame horse ran with them and was lost. Ewing and his men would be among those who escorted provisions back to Koshkonong on foot while the healthiest horses carried supplies, not men. "The consequence," Ewing wrote, "is that the great part of the Corps are compelled to walk—at least Two thirds." Ewing hoped that upon arrival at Koshkonong, his battalion would be discharged. "In a word, I regard the Corps as useless."¹⁹⁵ Atkinson discharged many of Ewing's volunteers, but left the major in command of James Henry's now-reduced spy battalion.

The militia felt losses elsewhere. Fifty of Dodge's two hundred men quit the campaign at Fort Winnebago. Thirty-five had lost their horses in the stampede and more simply lost interest in the fight. Upon returning to Fort Koshkonong, Milton Alexander's aide-de-camp, William Archer, prepared a General Order on behalf of his commanding officer, prompted by the events at Fort Winnebago. "It being interesting to those who loose horses and other property in the service of the United States," the order began, "be careful to note down in a book to be kept for that purpose the description time when and place where the property is lost and other remarks."¹⁹⁶ The stampede had personal as well as military costs, and volunteers hoped to receive compensation from the federal government for the former, since the stampede seemed an act of God.

Americans could not see the stampede for what it was—a deliberately planned tactic that would benefit both Portage and Rock River Ho-Chunks and, of course, the Sauk band. Americans missed small clues. On their return walk to Fort Koshkonong, Alexander and over one thousand volunteers encountered Ho-Chunks camped "at the Lakes" and found they had

¹⁹⁵ William Lee D. Ewing to Henry Atkinson, ca. 14 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 792.

¹⁹⁶ Milton K. Alexander: Orders, 19 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 822.

twenty-two horses belonging to American troops.¹⁹⁷ Militiamen reclaimed the horses from the Ho-Chunks and considered the matter closed, uttering not a word implicating the Indians in the stampede or inquiring how the horses had ended up in their camp.¹⁹⁸ No one at the time of the stampede openly blamed Ho-Chunk Indians. It was the perfect covert action.

No Indians, either from the Rock River or Portage bands, ever claimed responsibility. At the Rock Island treaty council in September, White Crow, Whirling Thunder, and other Ho-Chunks responded to many queries by American officials about their actions during the conflict. Virtually all questions the Americans posed to the Rock River Ho-Chunks came as allegations of criminal behavior, such as assisting Black Hawk's band. Facing criminal accusations and complaints of enmity against the United States and its citizens, claiming responsibility for the impressive stampede at the Portage made little sense to White Crow and Whirling Thunder. Though likely part of a larger scheme among Rock River Ho-Chunks to maintain their sovereignty and the integrity of their homelands by preventing direct conflict between the Americans and the Indians, such a plan would have been lost on the treaty commissioners as well as the region's white settlers and soldiers.

Firsthand accounts of the Portage stampede provide a vivid scene but do not explain it. Few historians speculate about its causes either; most see it as a coincidental, untimely event for the militia. Perhaps mistaking eyewitnesses' comparisons of the stampede to the sound of thunder for an actual storm, historian William Hagen blamed the running of the horses on a

¹⁹⁷ "The lakes" probably referred to the Four Lakes at present-day Madison. Juliette and John Kinzie made the same trek between Koshkonong and Fort Winnebago during the summer of 1831, passing near the Madison area. See Juliette Kinzie, *Wau-Bun*, 26.

¹⁹⁸ Shaw, *Journal*, 1335. Rumors may have surfaced among some volunteers, since both Perry Armstrong's 1886 history of the conflict and John Reynolds's 1855 history speculated that Indian thieves may have sparked the horse run. "While it was supposed that this stampede was caused by the appearance among them of some skulking Indian or Indians with intent to steal some of the horses," Armstrong wrote, "the real cause of the stampede is a mystery to the present time." Armstrong, *The Sauks*, 445; Reynolds, *My Own Times*.

“violent storm.”¹⁹⁹ There was no thunderstorm, however. The Fort Winnebago weather diary reported clear skies that night. Furthermore, the northwest winds and clear skies in the days before and after indicate no chance of even isolated storms in the area. Having nothing to report in the way of weather, the diarist at Fort Winnebago made this note: “some hundred horses lost on the night of the 12th.”²⁰⁰ If the cause of the stampede was unclear to the Americans, the result served the outcome the Ho-Chunks intended all through the swamp campaign—delay military action and diminish its force.

The largest horse stampede in Wisconsin history has all but disappeared in contemporary scholarship on the Black Hawk War. It was considered extraordinary by militiamen who witnessed it, and “a calamity worse than an ordinary battle with the Indians” in later nineteenth-century historical accounts.²⁰¹ Since then, it has devolved into a non-story; and with it, scholarly insight into Ho-Chunk agency. The link between the Ho-Chunks and the stampede was more than circumstantial, however. Only one eyewitness mentioned the possibility of Indian thieves among the horses that night.²⁰² If a rumor is not enough to place Ho-Chunks among the horses before the stampede, then their motives and higher cause are. Ho-Chunk refugees at the Portage had no interest in seeing Dodge, Henry, and Alexander leave with the supplies, which were otherwise feeding them. What’s more, delaying the militia could only delay violence on their land. The stampede served the Ho-Chunk plans perfectly, and explaining it away as mere coincidence ignores the entirety of Ho-Chunk activity in the swamp campaign, if not since April.

The success of the ruse, however, was short-lived. The Americans remained intent on sweeping the area, and the Ho-Chunks had to think of other means of diversion. After it became

¹⁹⁹ William T. Hagen, *Black Hawk's Route Through Wisconsin*, 24.

²⁰⁰ United States, Army, Hospital Department, “Diary of Weather at Fort Niagara, 1823-1826, and Fort Winnebago, 1828-1842.” Online facsimile at <http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/u/?tp,56407> (accessed 1 July 2017).

²⁰¹ Reynolds, *My Own Times*, 67.

²⁰² Satterlee Clark, “Early Times,” 314.

apparent that the militia would head to the rapids, some Ho-Chunks covertly traveled to Black Hawk's camp and devised a plan to help the band escape. Black Hawk recalled this meeting: "Learning that the Army had commenced moving, and fearing that they might come upon and surround our encampment, I concluded to remove our women and children across the Mississippi, that they might return to the Sac nation again."²⁰³ Black Hawk continued, "Accordingly, on the next day we commenced moving, with five Winnebagoes acting as our guides, intending to descend the Wisconsin." Still camped near the Rock River rapids, and in light of news brought to him by Ho-Chunk messengers, only then did the Sauk band make a decision to flee west. Their success hinged on reliable, clear, and covert communication between those Ho-Chunks traveling with Dodge and Henry's troops and those serving as Black Hawk's guides.

The Rock River Rapids

Dodge's group departed for the rapids on 15 July. Paquette and the Ho-Chunk guides had promised to get the militia to the rapids within two days, but the journey took almost twice as long even though travel was fast-paced. In contrast to the trip to Fort Winnebago a week earlier, on this journey the militiamen offered few complaints. Along the route and in camp, dialogue with the Indians proved awkward. The Ho-Chunk guides did not speak English, and the troops did not speak the Ho-Chunk language. Paquette was the prime medium. Through him, the Indian guides explained the landscape, flora, and fauna of the region to the Americans. The rapids, they stressed, were a prime fishing spot. If the Sauk band was in the area, one Indian

²⁰³ Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 133.

guide suggested, the Americans might find some of them there. Hopes were high when the troops made camp near the rapids on 18 July.²⁰⁴

Only on approach to the river did the Ho-Chunk guides inform Dodge and Henry about a Ho-Chunk village located nearby.²⁰⁵ Two Indians requested permission to go ahead to the village to warn its inhabitants about the imminent arrival of several hundred militiamen. With tensions already high in the region, the Ho-Chunk guides did not want the militia to startle the villagers. The commanders agreed. But the Ho-Chunks had strategic reasons for their vanguard. The advance party could more easily control the situation if indeed the Sauk were nearby. Doing so without Americans involvement was critical. When the Ho-Chunk guides returned, militiamen did not need Paquette to interpret their disposition. They were “much dejected and serious, indicating that they had heard bad news,” a volunteer recalled. Ho-Chunk villagers at the rapids confirmed that Black Hawk had been in the area, but now had moved up the river to a place called Cranberry Lake, now called Horicon Marsh. The Sauk band, it appeared, had once again slipped away as the militia drew near.²⁰⁶

Despite the new guides (except for White Crow’s son who had served in that capacity before), it seemed the swamp campaign was repeating itself. Black Hawk and the Sauk band remained a shadow. The Ho-Chunk guides nonetheless assured the American troops that the Sauks were still within reach. They advised Dodge and Henry to march their men north toward Cranberry Lake. As the militiamen remembered, the guides strongly urged them to “go on foot”

²⁰⁴ Charles Bracken estimates that the rapids were “three fourths of a mile long” and it is not clear from troop accounts or later surveys exactly where the Ho-Chunk village was located in relation to them. See Whitney, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 791n2.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Rock River Ho-Chunks traveled to Fort Koshkonong to deliver the same false intelligence to Atkinson, prompting him to prepare his march north along the Rock River toward the same lake. See Meriwether Clark to William Clark, 25 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 877.

and leave the horses because of the marshy terrain into which Black Hawk had retreated.²⁰⁷ Stalling in a moment of uncertainty, Dodge asked to be brought to the Ho-Chunks' village.

The village was well hidden. Wakefield felt that its inhabitants "had tried to hide from all the world," describing its location as "in the midst of a very large growth of timber, in the bend of the river," a place where the "earth was covered in an almost impenetrable undergrowth."²⁰⁸ Given the heavy rains of the season, the river would have been swollen and the rapids noisy. Paquette facilitated a conversation between Dodge and the villagers about Black Hawk's location and movements in the area. They repeated what they told the Indian guides: The Sauk band had been there days earlier, but had moved further north along the Rock River. The villagers told Dodge that the new camp was only a half a day's journey away.²⁰⁹

The Ho-Chunk villagers tried to convince the militia to continue their march north while controlling or curtailing the militia's movements through the area. One militiaman recalled how they "begged us not to cross the river, on account of their crops of corn on the opposite side, which they feared would be injured by our horses."²¹⁰ Given the thick cover where the village was located, and the river's many oxbows, the Americans would not have easily seen the raised-bed cornfields so precious to the Ho-Chunk. Seeing little obvious evidence of a corn crop, Dodge pressed the Ho-Chunk villagers further: "The question then was asked in such a manner by Gen. Dodge, as to admit of no evasion—which side of the river their [fields] were." The

²⁰⁷ "The Indians," *The Republican Compiler* (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania), October 18, 1832 (reprinted from the *Galenian*). American volunteers never questioned the integrity of Paquette or their new Indian guides. Indeed, when John Reynolds and Thomas Ford later posed the idea that these guides, and perhaps Paquette, may have intentionally misled the militia, volunteers who marched to the rapids vociferously rejected the thought in published accounts. All the guides, including White Crow's son, enjoyed the full confidence of their American friends, especially Paquette, who achieved folk hero status in the memories of many Americans. See Bracken, "Further Strictures," 405; Satterlee Clark, "Pierre Paquette," *The Portage Democrat*, March 28, 1879, 2. Reynolds, *My Own Times*, 405-412; Ford, *A History of Illinois*, 136-155.

²⁰⁸ Wakefield, *Wakefield's History*, 103-104.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

²¹⁰ "The Indians," *The Republican Compiler* (Gettysburg, PA), October 18, 1832 (reprinted from the *Galenian*).

militiamen observed a period of hushed discussion in the absence of Paquette, “When after a good deal of talking among themselves, it was answered, that the corn was all on the side we then were.”²¹¹ Every season, Ho-Chunks repaired and rebuilt their raised fields and corn hills, and they often expanded planting grounds through labor-intensive burning and digging stumps. They would not have forgotten where they planted and tended their corn. Only when all the Ho-Chunks had consulted about the whereabouts of Black Hawk, where he was or was not, were they clear with Dodge about the location of their cornfields.

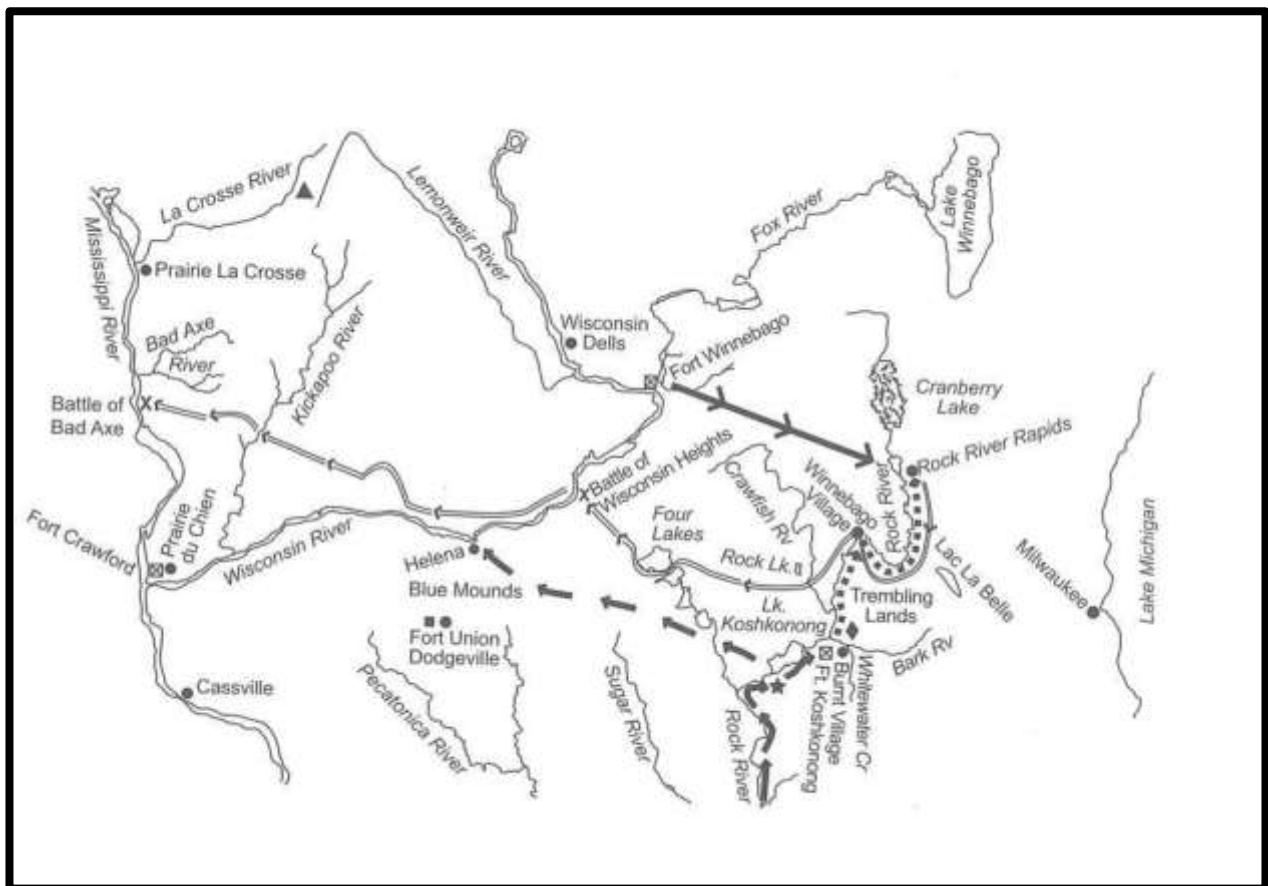


Fig. 6. “Sauk Band’s Escape, July 1832.” From Jung, *Black Hawk War*. The double line that begins at the Rock River Rapids depicts the route taken by Black Hawk to the Wisconsin River, creating the trail discovered on 18 July. The solid black line from Fort Winnebago to the rapids represents Dodge and Henry’s Routes.

²¹¹ Ibid.

Ho-Chunks had good reason to be less than forthcoming about the location of their corn. At the very moment of the hushed discussion, Black Hawk and his followers were making their way south of the rapids, likely just a mile or two from the militia (see fig. 6). Already reduced in number since April, the Sauk band and their draft horses still could not help but carve an obvious trail through the landscape whenever they moved. Once revealed, the Sauk band's route would have been obvious to the Americans, and the Ho-Chunks' plan exposed. Whether the villagers knew exactly where Black Hawk and his people were at that moment, they told stories about cornfields, and about a Cranberry Lake camp, in hopes of preventing the militia from discovering the trail and ultimately the Sauk band itself.²¹²

As Dodge challenged the Ho-Chunks about the location of their cornfields and of Black Hawk, the villagers grew more desperate to convince the militia that Black Hawk and his band were north of them. One of the Ho-Chunk men admitted to Dodge "that he had come from Black Hawk only two days before." When Dodge questioned him about why he had been among the "enemy band," the Ho-Chunk man replied that "he had two sisters married to Sac men, and that each of his sisters had six daughters, who were also married to Sac men, and that he had been up to see them." The story worked. "It may not be considered a digression to state, here, the reason we had for believing that the Winnebagoes were telling us the truth," Wakefield later explained. Wakefield and the other militiamen thought the man told "a very reasonable story, and we thought that it might be true."²¹³ It was certainly true enough to spur Dodge to take action. Though the Ho-Chunk claimed Cranberry Lake was only a short journey away, Dodge and Henry agreed waited another day before departing.

²¹² At the head of Cranberry Lake was another small Ho-Chunk village, whose villagers would have likely misdirected the Americans as well. See *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 821n3.

²¹³ Wakefield, *Wakefield's History*, 104.

Unable to prod the militia further north that day, Ho-Chunks guided them to a camp for the night. One militiaman described the arduous trek to get there: “We then crossed [the river] into a thick wood, and were conducted to a place to encamp for the night. Instead, however, of taking us to high ground, we were reconducted across the river, through a bad country, and taken to a miserable place for our encampment.”²¹⁴ As Dodge prepared for the march north, the Ho-Chunk guides again repeated their earlier advice about leaving behind the horses: “the only way to get to [the Sauk band] was to go on foot, near the river.”²¹⁵ It would be a slow and muddy trek.

While some 750 troops settled into their “miserable place” late in the day on 18 July, no doubt securing their horses with extra care, Dodge prepared a message for Atkinson to be delivered that night. The villagers informed him that Atkinson’s camp was only a half-day’s journey distant.²¹⁶ The real distance was closer to forty miles, which would take at least a day and a half. In his letter to Atkinson, Dodge repeated his reasons for traveling to the rapids rather than Koshkonong, and added: “the Winnabagoes here state the [Sauks] are at cranberry Lake not to exceed 20 miles above this place.” Dodge further explained, “they are raising Corn near this place they must know where [sic] the [Sauks] are.” Dodge was at last catching on to the Ho-Chunks’ priorities.

Dodge and Henry requested a pilot from the rapids village to guide the two messengers he wanted to send south to Atkinson. Wakefield recalled, “After some Indian chat among themselves, they reluctantly consented that Little Thunder should go.”²¹⁷ At two p.m. that

²¹⁴ “The Indians,” *The Republican Compiler* (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania), October 18, 1832 (reprinted from the *Galenian*).

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Dodge to Henry Atkinson, 18 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 820. The two most likely routes between the Rock River rapids and where Atkinson was camped were between 38 and 40 miles in length.

²¹⁷ Wakefield, *Wakefield’s History*, 105.

afternoon, with less than seven hours of daylight left, E. H. Merryman and W. W. Woodbridge departed for Fort Koshkonong on horseback, guided by Little Thunder. The messengers sped south, intending to make it to Fort Koshkonong that night. It was this journey that brought Black Hawk's luck, and that of the Ho-Chunk, to an end. About ten miles south of the rapids, the messengers happened upon the Sauk and Fox trail, near present-day Watertown. Instead of pushing on to Fort Koshkonong, the messengers returned to the rapids camp with news of their discovery. Virtually every piece of information the Americans relied upon during the swamp campaign to lead them toward the "enemy camp" seemed instead to lead them in other directions. But on 18 July 1832, Ho-Chunk information accidentally led two militiamen to stumble on the actual trail. If Dodge and Henry had not communicated the new information to General Atkinson, Black Hawk and his emaciated followers may have made it safely to the Mississippi. They had crossed the Rock River near Iron Walker's village (Watertown) within a day of when the militia messengers and Little Thunder found the trail.

Before sunrise on 19 July, the militiamen at the rapids were ready to chase down the Sauk band. They were slowed, however, by the mucky, forested, lowland campsite chosen for them. To move quickly, the troops left behind their heavy gear including baggage, wagons and tents. Still ahead, however, was a twelve-mile march through what Wakefield called "Thickets and swamps of the worst kind," but with "something to stimulate" the troops this time.²¹⁸ The Sauk band's trail to the south suggested the Ho-Chunk villagers had lied. But clearer evidence that these villagers misled the troops presented itself in the morning light on 19 July. Militiamen noticed more signs of recent, large-scale movement through the region, including fresh trails

²¹⁸ Ibid.

running directly to the Ho-Chunks' Rock River rapids village.²¹⁹ It appeared to the militiamen that Black Hawk and his band had skirted by them, undetected, sometime during the previous day or two. Though troops would not forget the Ho-Chunk deceit at the Rock River rapids, their eagerness to chase down the Sauk band overpowered their anger and humiliation for the moment.

A couple of hours later, they reached the Sauk band's trail. They had found, finally, the real route of Black Hawk. Two massive trails ran together, made of desperation by terrified, starving Indians who tore bark from trees and dug roots for food as they moved.²²⁰ A clear blaze though the landscape, it was easy for the militia to follow. James Justice estimated the Sauk trail "to be about a day and half or two days old," adding that it was a "much better guide than the Winebagoes were."²²¹ For perhaps the first time since April, the militia was directly on the trail that would lead them to Black Hawk.

Atkinson knew nothing of these events until 20 July.²²² The day before, he received a message from an unidentified "friendly Indian" that the Sauk band was camped at Cranberry Lake.²²³ Soon after White Crow's return on 17 July, Atkinson employed him to guide his army there.²²⁴ By the time two messengers sent by Dodge and Henry with news of the actual trail's discovery and the militia's pursuit reached Atkinson on 20 July, White Crow had moved the general and his men fifteen miles up the Bark River. If things went wrong for the Sauk band at the rapids—and they did—White Crow had worked to slow communications between the militia

²¹⁹ "The Indians," *The Republican Compiler* (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania), October 18, 1832 (reprinted from the *Galenian*).

²²⁰ Dodge details this evidence from the trail, see Dodge to Henry Atkinson, 19 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, p. 826.

²²¹ Justice, Journal, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1323.

²²² Johnston, Journal, 20 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1318. Merryman and Woodbridge departed the rapids on the morning of 19 July.

²²³ Shaw, Journal, 19 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk.2, 1335; Meriwether Clark to William Clark, 25 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 877.

²²⁴ Johnston, Journal, 19 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1318.

commanders and Atkinson, while also putting more distance, and the Rock River, between the fleeing band and the Army of the Frontier.

In the meantime, whether luck, the Ho-Chunks, or the fierce storm that rolled through the region on the night of 19 July was to blame, Atkinson's men's horses panicked and ran. The horses, reported one militiaman, "broke into a stampede, rushing over wagons tents and men."²²⁵ Atkinson ordered a reduced spy battalion on to the rapids with unidentified Indian guides, while he made plans to march the remainder of men back to Fort Koshkonong the next day. En route, Atkinson received news of Dodge's and Henry's pursuit of the Sauk band, while his spy battalion, some thirty miles north, learned the same from Ho-Chunks near the rapids. The next day, 21 July, Atkinson's force headed west, abandoning Fort Koshkonong.²²⁶ A hundred miles to the west, Dodge and Henry caught up with Black Hawk's warriors at the bluffs on the Wisconsin River, shattering the peace created by Rock River Ho-Chunks during the previous three weeks.

The force traveling with Atkinson caught up with Dodge and Henry in time for the final massacre at Bad Axe on the Mississippi River, despite White Crow's attempts to slow them down. One regular, E. Buckner, attempted to turn the work of the Rock River Ho-Chunks into an army success story. The Sauk band had found refuge in lands "difficult of access, and little known by white people," Buckner explained, but in time, the army's actions drove the Indians to starvation: "Our delays, our marchings and counter-marchings had misled and deceived them, and had prevented them from separating to hunt or fish." Hence, Buckner stated, "their supplies were exhausted, and they were actually in a state of starvation." Dodge and Henry's militiamen

²²⁵ John Russell, "Skeleton History," Russell Family Papers, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield, Illinois. Russell's writings on the war are included in Crawford Thayer's compilation; see Thayer, *Hunting a Shadow*, 234.

²²⁶ Johnston, Journal, 21 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1318.

found the trail and caught up with the Sauk band first, but, Buckner reasoned, referring to Atkinson's force, "Our masterly inactivity, occasioned by treacherous advice and want of stores, had already conquered them."²²⁷ The Americans were simply lucky to have discovered the Sauk trail.

As every militiaman then, or historian now tells it, news of the trail revived a demoralized American force and proved a major turning point in the war. John Hall writes, "with a well-trodden path before them, the militiamen set their own course and speed. This time, Black Hawk's band would not elude them." It took the militia two and a half days and some sixty miles to catch up to Black Hawk's warriors at Wisconsin Heights. Then, just ten days later, on 2 August, the militia—flanked by a gunboat on the Mississippi River, Atkinson's troops, and more Indian allies—dealt a death blow to the Sauk band at the confluence of the Bad Axe and Mississippi rivers.²²⁸

Historians readily agree that the 18 July discovery of the Sauk and Fox trail was a turning point. As Kerry Trask puts it, "the discovery of that trail changed everything."²²⁹ It led to an American "victory" in what would be called the last Indian war of the Old Northwest, paving the way for white settlement. Its discovery also led to the deaths of hundreds of people belonging to the Sauk band. Of the twelve-hundred people who followed Black Hawk east of the river in April, roughly two hundred survived and returned to Iowa. Black Hawk and most other men

²²⁷ Buckner, "A Brief History of the War," 431.

²²⁸ West of the Mississippi, Dakota warriors tracked the survivors of the Bad Axe massacre and claimed to have killed two hundred more members of the Sauk band. The numbers of Sauk band members killed or who died between April and September 1832 are unknown. Some members of the band undoubtedly stayed among the Rock River Ho-Chunk while others found homes among Ottawa, Ojibwa, and Potawatomi villages nearer Lake Michigan. Between 150 and 200 members of the Sauk band returned to the Iowa reservation. See Tanner, *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History*, 153.

²²⁹ Trask, *Black Hawk*, 256.

were imprisoned.²³⁰ The shell-game involving the Sauk band and the Americans was over. The Ho-Chunks now had to minimize the damage to their own position in their own lands.

Remarkably, Ho-Chunks got the Sauk band to within a hundred miles of the Mississippi River before the militia caught up with them at Wisconsin Heights. In the weeks before, countless Ho-Chunks had helped turn Black Hawk and all the members of the Sauk band into shadows. Some led the militia down false trails, others mired American soldiers, horses, and supplies in swamp lands, and still more told confusing stories about cornfields. Preserving peace in their lands was a collective effort. Events at the Rock River rapids highlight how Ho-Chunk individuals as well as villages took part in shaping the course of events in the summer of 1832.

The militia's detection of the Sauk band's trail south of the rapids carried solemn and serious consequences for the Rock River Ho-Chunks as well. On 18 July, Ho-Chunks lost control over the conflict in their country as well as their influence over the fate of their kin. In the eyes of the troops who uncovered their failed efforts near the rapids, Ho-Chunks were an irredeemably faithless people, hostile toward Americans, and deserving of forced removal, west of the Mississippi.

Moving Troops Around Corn

It did not take long for news of the Ho-Chunks' deceit to spread. Upon his return to Galena from his part in the military action and to his job as editor of the *Galenian*, Addison Phileo set to work vilifying the Rock River Ho-Chunk and calling for their removal. The September treaty council between the Americans and the Ho-Chunk nation was looming. If anyone questioned whether Ho-Chunks had undermined the American efforts during the swamp

²³⁰ For final days of the conflict, see Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 180-205; Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 155-184; Trask, *Black Hawk*, 253-271.

campaign, Phileo wrote, “we need only mention at this time what happened near the rapids of Rock river,” making his first concrete allegations against the Ho-Chunk: “We are now satisfied that we should have come across the Sacs much sooner if our guides had proved, true and had not variably led us from, instead of to the Sac's Camp.” Phileo continued, asserting that the Ho-Chunks had “taken Army over the worst country they could find, and for no other purpose than of rendering our movement more tardy to prevent us from coming upon the Sacs during their stay in their country.”²³¹ Phileo was, of course, correct in his allegations, but he failed to see the Ho-Chunks’ primary objective. Most members of the Rock River band abandoned their villages in June, but they never abandoned their crops. Ho-Chunk guides took several thousand Americans, their horses, wagons, and cannon through “the worst country” they could find because that was where Ho-Chunks did not plant their corn.

The Rock River Ho-Chunks occupied verdant lands, beautiful by nineteenth-century settler standards, but one would not gather this from American troop descriptions of the lands they traversed under the direction of their Ho-Chunk guides. Phileo’s characterization of the terrain was no exception. Militiamen and soldier accounts from the summer swamp campaign of 1832 depicted a landscape of impenetrable thickets and forests and low-lying marsh and swamplands. The maps sketched by Meriwether Clark and Edwin Rose illustrated this. Mentions of upland prairie or other open country in troop journals were aberrations; they appeared only in rare, gleeful entries by soldiers who were relieved to find food for their horses or simply to travel across clear, dry land. Even when freed from the Koshkonong swamps in mid-July, while chasing the Sauk band across present-day Madison’s isthmus between the lakes, some soldiers viewed the lush area with skepticism and cautioned against whites settling there.

²³¹ “The Indians,” *The Republican Compiler* (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania), October 18, 1832 (reprinted from the *Galenian*).

Unconvinced by Madison's otherwise alluring landscape and "the most beautiful bodies of water [he] ever saw," John Wakefield wrote: "If these Lakes were any where else except in the country they are, they would be considered among the wonders of the world. But the country they are situated in is not fit for any civilized nation of people to inhabit. It appears that the Almighty intended it for the children of the forest."²³² This was, of course, exactly the impression the Ho-Chunks wanted to impart. One rhetorical logic underpinning the policy of forced Indian removal in the early 1830s was Americans' belief that most lands in the West (including the Old Northwest) were too good for Indians, prime farmlands on which too few Indians subsisted by hunting, gathering, and limited cultivation.²³³ Ho-Chunks wanted Americans to believe otherwise, and led them through tough terrain in part toward this end.

Troops made little or no mention of Ho-Chunk agriculture in their writings—no fields, no corn, no farming. They were silent because they did not see these things. Their blind spots were by Ho-Chunk design. But simply moving troops through lowlands would not have kept them from seeing or destroying Indian corn. Ho-Chunks cultivated crops in all kinds of landscapes, from upland to lake shore to river valley to floodplain to wetland, including marsh and swampland.²³⁴ Ho-Chunks farmed the varied environments around Lake Koshkonong. In that moist landscape, they seemed to prefer floodplains to upland prairies for agriculture, relying on raised fields, ridged rows, and corn hills.²³⁵ The region's varied landforms and elevations also offered the best chances for Ho-Chunks to obscure their scattered raised fields and hills, of which there were many, while wearing down the American force.

²³² Wakefield, *Wakefield's History*, 109.

²³³ Bowes, *Land Too Good*.

²³⁴ William Gustav Gartner, "Raised Field Landscapes of Native North America" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003), 335.

²³⁵ Gartner, "Raised Field Agriculture," 335-37. Only thirteen different sites of raised field agriculture have been documented and surveyed around Lake Koshkonong. Surely more sites of raised and perhaps plain field or unraised agriculture existed in the region but were missed by archeologists. Ho-Chunk agriculture was widespread.

Troop accounts produced during the campaign as well as afterward point to Ho-Chunk success. Between 3 July and 10 July, when several thousand troops converged at Koshkonong and scouted for signs of Black Hawk, few if any noticed crops or even unplanted fields, and only rarely did they see large Indian villages. Peter Parkinson, a member of Dodge's mounted battalion, was one of hundreds of militiamen guided by White Crow. Parkinson was among the troops who followed White Crow along the west shore of Koshkonong and the Rock River in search of the Sauk band's phantom island camp: "[White Crow's] village, I think, was on the western side of Kosh-ko-nong Lake," Parkinson explained, "but the troops did not pass in sight of it."²³⁶ The troops had passed very near the orator's village, known today as Carcajou Point. The village was large, though most of its twelve hundred Ho-Chunk inhabitants had fled to the Portage agency house by July 1832. Parkinson and hundreds of mounted militiamen also passed by numerous areas of raised field agriculture. They could not see, or did not recognize, the value of these agricultural activities for the Ho-Chunk.

The Americans were so focused on capturing the Sauk band they paid little attention to land through which they traveled. Following the path set by White Crow, troops skirted ridged fields and "several acres of pronounced corn hills" on 6 and 7 July.²³⁷ A few miles south of Carcajou, White Crow appears to have led Dodge's battalion and Alexander's brigade around (or threaded them through) several sites of ridged fields and corn hills, or "Indian hills," as whites called these eye-catching features (fig. 7 and 8). Taking the high ground, the orator's route passed between ridged fields to the west and the lake to the east, somehow hiding from view three extensive sites of corn hills built in lowlands that extended inland some distance from the

²³⁶ Peter Parkinson, "Notes on the Black Hawk War," 207.

²³⁷ A.B. Stout and H. L. Skavlem, "The Archeology of the Lake Koshkonong Region," *Wisconsin Archeologist* 7, no. 2 (1908): 47-102, specifically 79-80. Gartner, "Raised Field Landscapes," 335. These corn hills were located between the Rufus-Bingham and LeSellier mound groups.

marshes bordering the shores of Lake Koshkonong (fig. 7 and 8). The largest of these plots covered fifteen acres.²³⁸ The Ho-Chunk had a vigorous and wide-spread agricultural system.

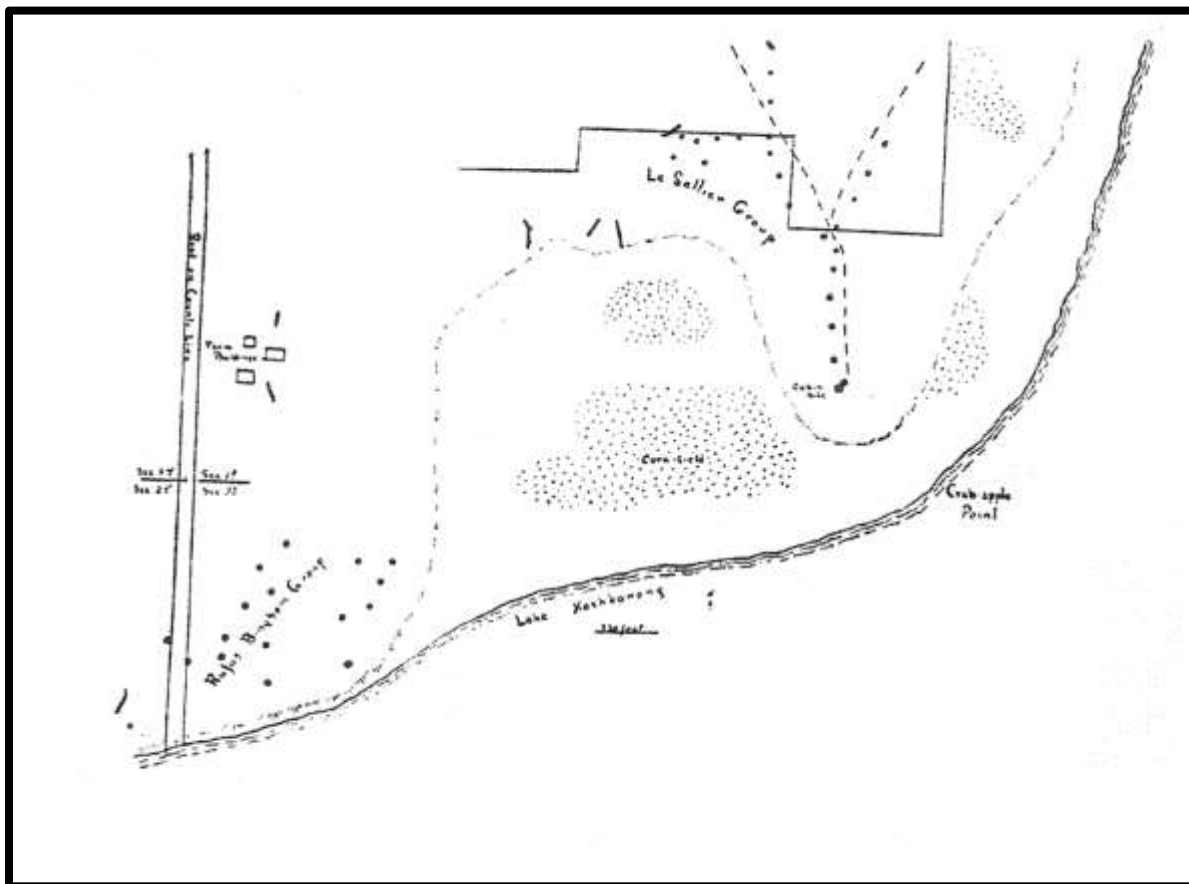


Fig. 7. Koshkonong Shoreline with Ridged Fields and Corn Hills. From A.B. Stout and H. L. Skavlem, "The Archeology of the Lake Koshkonong Region," *Wisconsin Archeologist*, 7 no. 2 (1908), 47-102. Corn hills are located just below Carcajou Point, or White Crow's village (shown in fig. 8). Three distinct and extensive tracts of corn hills built on low ground are mapped between the Le Sellier and Rufus Bingham conical and effigy mound groups. A fourth site is located on high ground, northeast of Le Sellier group.

²³⁸ Stout and Skavlem, "The Archeology of the Lake Koshkonong Region," 79-80. Gartner, "Raised Field Landscapes of Native North America," 335.

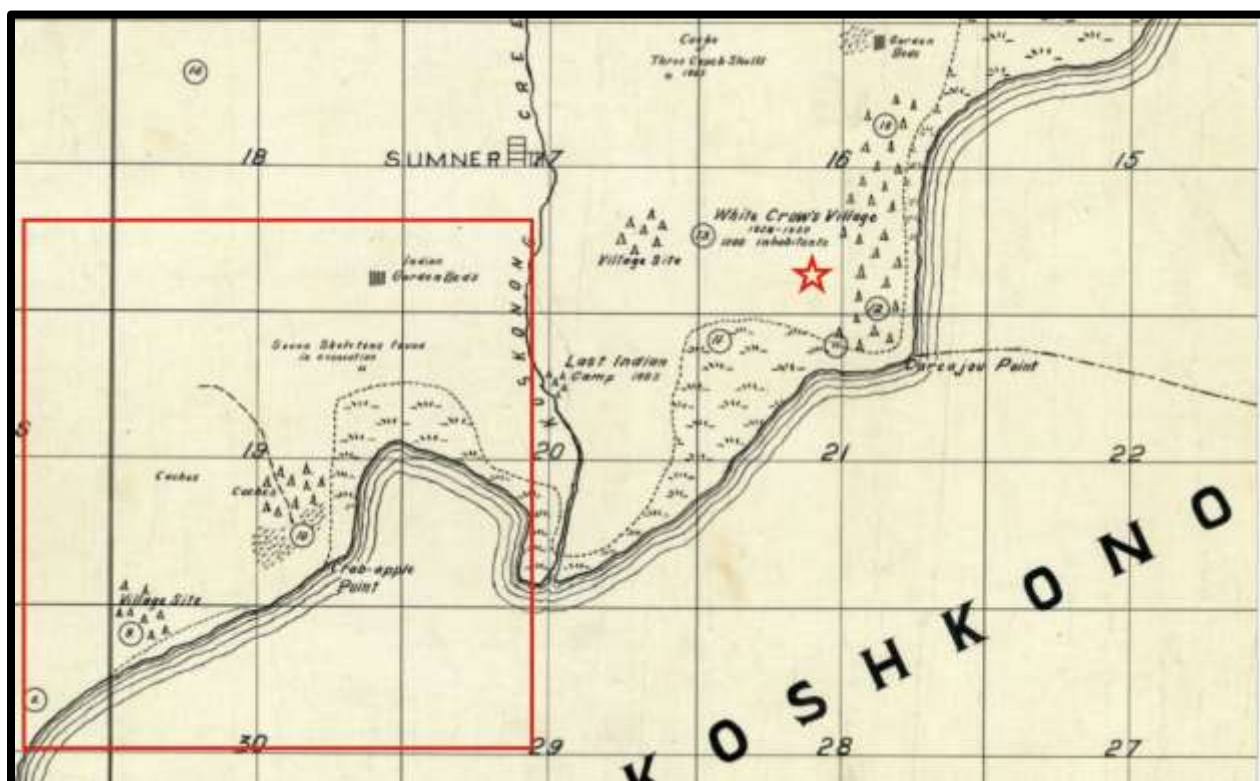


Fig. 8. White Crow's Village and the Northwest Shore of Lake Koshkonong. From H.G. Skavlam, "Archeological chart of Koshkonong Lake, Wisconsin," Wisconsin Historical Society, <http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/cdm/ref/collection/maps/id/5476> (accessed 17 June, 2016). White Crow's village is marked by the star. The square indicates the area shown in fig. 7.

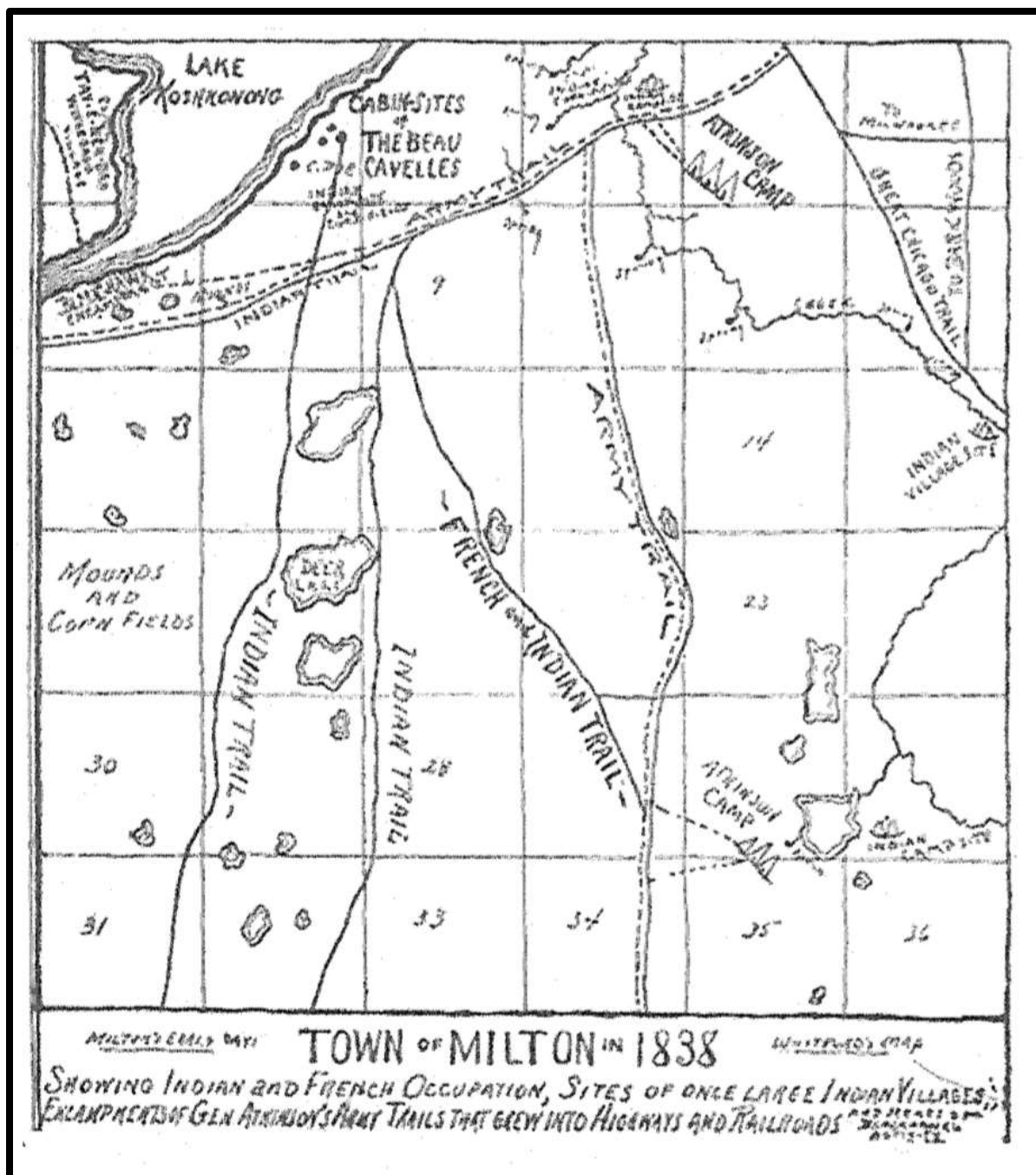


Fig. 9. "Trails, 1832." From W.C. Whitford, "Town of Milton 1838," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 25 February, 1900. The map shows Indian trails, villages, and agricultural fields located in Rock County at the time of the Black Hawk War. Note the words "corn fields" in sections 19 and 5 where irregularly-spaced corn hills were located, between two springs in section 3. The "Army Trail" is distinctly separate and distanced from the "Indian Trail." The Americans were guided clear of Ho-Chunk agriculture, notably in sections 3 and 5, in the first week of July 1832.

Though extraordinary, White Crow's efforts were not unique during the swamp campaign. Ho-Chunk and Potawatomi Indians guiding Atkinson's regulars and militiamen on the east side of the lake and river similarly skirted villages, fields, and corn hills. Indian guides made or relied on well-placed trails as much as the terrain for moving troops while concealing and avoiding fields. In the early twentieth century, W. C. Whitford sketched the location of five Indian corn fields near the mouth of Lake Koshkonong as well as known army and Indian trails from the Black Hawk War (see fig. 9).²³⁹ It is apparent in this map, and in land surveys from the 1830s, that Indian guides chose or created trails for the Americans that stayed clear of Indian fields and villages. In controlling the geographic narrative of the swamp campaign, Ho-Chunks hoped to control their fate in their lands.

In the summer of 1831, Juliette Kinzie visited Man-Eater's Koshkonong village near the lake's northeastern shore, a short distance from where the Rock River widens into the lake (see fig. 10).²⁴⁰ The "cut-up terrain," so difficult as described by Kinzie and bemoaned by Atkinson allowed Ho-Chunks some control over how outsiders moved through their lands and what they saw. In the summer of 1832, Ho-Chunks hid their fields from view, while performing their faithfulness to the Americans as dutiful guides and scouts.

²³⁹ Gartner, "Raised Field Agriculture," 336, 686, 868. W.C. Whitford's map was originally published in the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 25, 1900. Charles Brown also confirmed the locations of these fields. See Charles Brown, "Additions to the Record of Wisconsin Antiquities II," *The Wisconsin Archeologist* 7, no.1 (1908): 23. Gartner indicates that these were "relict" fields that were abandoned by the Black Hawk War, but the source for this determination is unclear. Gartner, "Raised Field Agriculture," 336-37.

²⁴⁰ Kinzie, *Waubun*, 257. Juliette and John Kinzie were among a party of travelers making their way from Chicago back to Fort Winnebago sometime in the summer of 1831.



Fig. 10. Man-Eater's Village. From Wisconsin Historical Society, H.G. Skavlam, "Archeological Chart of Koshkonong Lake, Wisconsin," Image ID 101564, available at <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM101564> (accessed 25 November 2017).

Subsequent land surveys starting in 1834, as well as later archaeological assessments, show that the land north of Koshkonong and east of the Rock River—the primary search area for the Sauk band between 1 July and 20 July—offered the Americans more difficult terrain to traverse and the Ho-Chunks fewer agricultural areas to hide than lands west of the river. For example, just six miles north of the Bark River's mouth, or a day's journey on horseback from White Crow's village, Ho-Chunks built "a large number of well-formed corn hills" on the west

shore of the Rock River and its tributary, the Crawfish River.²⁴¹ Archaeologists have confirmed at least eleven distinct raised field sites in this area, which is present-day north-central Jefferson County.²⁴² The largest of these was a ridged field covering twenty acres and set in open, elevated lands where even the most talented Ho-Chunk guide could not have masked it from mounted troops. By concentrating American troops on the east side of the Rock River during their search for the Sauk Band, Ho-Chunks protected hundreds of acres of raised field agriculture later known to surveyors and archeologists. Although there is no survey or archeological data of it, it is likely that they also skirted a good deal of plain field cultivation as well.

Ho-Chunks were not alone in their agricultural concerns. The vast majority of men who volunteered in the Western Michigan and Illinois militia in 1832 were farmers, who complained of the conflict's timing and expressed their desire to return home to plant or plow. In June, for example, William Orr shared his annoyance with the editor of the *Illinois Advocate*: "I could not then have been made to believe that at so important a season of the year, particularly to the farmer, we would have been *prematurely*, if not *unnecessarily* called from our homes."²⁴³ In this way, the soldiers were no different than the Ho-Chunks who worried for their corn as the crisis escalated that spring.

Indeed, volunteers used farming analogies, as James Justice did when he described the excitement of the men at the rapids upon learning that the real Sauk trail had been found: "The soldiers were seen gathering their horses and saddling [sic] them with as much cheerfulness as if at home and gearing them to go to plowing after a fine season of Rain."²⁴⁴ They commented on

²⁴¹ Gartner, "Raised Field Agriculture," 335-37.

²⁴² *Ibid.*," 330, 889. See also Gartner's atlas of raised fields of southeastern Wisconsin, p. 655.

²⁴³ Report of William Orr to John Sawyer, 1 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 727. Orr was an immediate critic of the war against the Sauk band. He believed they had crossed the Mississippi to plant corn and should not have been made the target of the army or militia.

²⁴⁴ Justice, *Journal*, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1324.

good soil and prime farmland when they saw it, noted whether it was level or rolling, and, where they noticed them, Indian fields and crops. The last “good land” Illinois farmer Nineveh Shaw saw for weeks was on 3 July, the day his brigade encountered Oliver Emmell and ten Ho-Chunk guides leading Alexander’s brigade into Koshkonong. Shaw’s first and only mention of corn was nearly a month later, on 31 July, as he marched toward Fort Hamilton, exiting the campaign with a lame horse.²⁴⁵ While firmly mired in the Koshkonong region, taking direction from White Crow and other Rock River Ho-Chunks, Shaw and others did not see the agricultural prospects of a place where they were repeatedly compelled to “cross the worst bogs [they] ever crossed with a horse.”²⁴⁶

Where and when troops commented on fertile lands in July 1832 it was because Ho-Chunks were not able to lead them away. During the Americans’ search for Black Hawk, they only mentioned good lands when the number of Rock River Ho-Chunk guides was reduced or when they were absent. Only then did the Americans find the corn fields the Ho-Chunks sought to conceal. While White Crow and his son were away at Fort Winnebago with Henry Dodge, for example, a handful of troops traveled to his village on the northwest bluffs of Koshkonong and uprooted the corn from his people’s fields, perhaps thinking the corn would be of value to the Sauk band.²⁴⁷ Then, after Atkinson’s improvised orders to resupply, only the orator and his son were in a position to manage two thousand impulsive militiamen on a mission to Fort

²⁴⁵ Shaw, Journal, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1334, 1336.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1334.

²⁴⁷ Memo of a Talk held with the Winnebagos [at Fort Winnebago], 8 November 1832, OIA, LR, Prairie du Chien Agency, roll 696. White Crow and Little Elk were among the Ho-Chunks who spoke with George Porter, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs and Michigan’s territorial governor, when he visited Fort Winnebago. An excerpt of this talk is available in Diedrich, comp., *Winnebago Oratory*, 46. In his journal, Albert Johnston states that on 12 July, three Americans traveled down the river by canoe and found “a small camp, which they plundered.” However, they were discovered and chased by Indians, which caused the troops to “abandon their canoe & spoils of war.” The camp location is not known, nor does Johnston identify the Indians involved, but it seems likely that this event and the one White Crow described to Porter in November may be the same event, or if separate events, committed by the same troops.

Winnebago. The landscape the troops saw between Koshkonong and the fort proved nothing like what they had seen before. Militiamen documented prairie, good land, “[rolling] and hilly,” and plenty of timber.²⁴⁸ This was the only occasion when White Crow intentionally led troops around swamps rather than through them.

On their return trip to Fort Koshkonong, when most of the militiamen walked instead of rode, they found the “soil good in places” and saw at least one creek that they deemed “beautiful.” On this long walk, Americans observed “springs of the best water to be found in abundance.”²⁴⁹ Ho-Chunks considered springs sacred places, sources of life as well as passageways for water spirits, or water panthers. Ho-Chunks as well as their corn depended on these spirit beings for good rain (and not floods).²⁵⁰ For the Americans, springs provided clean water, which made them valuable, though not sacred. Before the marsh, troops had seen only a landscape of unquenched thirst and bad water, and the sickness and dysentery that always accompanied it. They now looked at land that would hold much value for white settlers.

The journey to Fort Winnebago signaled the first of many failures on the part of the Rock River Ho-Chunks. For much of July, the Americans had seen only what the Ho-Chunks wanted them to see. And most Americans, in their correspondence at the time and their reflections for years afterward, wrote about and remembered the lands as Ho-Chunks intended: the impenetrable swamps, dangerous bogs, and deep rivers difficult to ford. With rare exception, the Ho-Chunks did this navigating quietly, so as not to draw any attention to their corn, their way of living in their land.

²⁴⁸ More fields undoubtedly existed than were surveyed or accounted for through oral and written history. Archaeological records for this area are lacking. In 1907, Charles Brown documented at least ten acres of raised fields at the Scheffelbein farm in Columbia County. Brown, 1880-1946, Wis Mss HB, Box 19 Folder 1; Gartner, “Raised Field Agriculture,” 349.

²⁴⁹ Nineveh Shaw, Journal, July 11, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1334

²⁵⁰ Birmingham, *Mounds*, 122.

In the historical record of the swamp campaign, only once did Ho-Chunks ask that troops not trample their fields; they made this request at the Rock River rapids in mid-July. Because the troops soon discovered that Ho-Chunk villagers were screening the trail of the escaping Sauk band, their pleas have been drowned out by Americans who pronounced the Ho-Chunks treacherous deceivers. The villagers may have thwarted the militiamen one last time, but their deception was an act of survival as well. Three distinct sites of corn hills were within a few miles of the river rapids: one on the same side as the village and the other two immediately east of the river, the very place where Ho-Chunks had informed Meriwether Lewis Clark that the land was impenetrable tamarack swamps.²⁵¹ Americans were now recognizing the value and diversity of Ho-Chunk lands.

Conclusion

The conflict precipitated by the Sauk band's return in April was over by the first week of August 1832. The Americans satisfied their bloodlust at Wisconsin Heights and in the shallow, muddy waters where the Mississippi and Bad Axe rivers join above Prairie du Chien. There was nothing more the Ho-Chunks could do now except wait for the very aftermath they had worked four months to avoid. The Rock River Ho-Chunks and others from bands further west, as well as Potawatomis to the east, had labored all spring and summer to convince the Americans that the Sauk band was not worth their efforts, even as the Indians also worked to preserve their corn, their lifeblood. Their ancestral homelands—the soil containing the bones of their ancestors—meant everything to the Ho-Chunks. They risked their integrity in the eyes of the Americans by placing themselves at the center of the conflict that was cleaving their country. They had no

²⁵¹ Gartner, "Raised Field Agriculture," 372. One of these was a ridged field and it existed in lowlands, amidst sugar maples, basswood, and sentinel oaks. Archaeologists estimate it at 100 feet in length.

choice. If the Sauk paid for the conflict with their lives, as so many of them did, the Ho-Chunk would pay now with their land, three million acres of it east of the Mississippi River.

Historians have written volumes about the so-called Black Hawk War. Much of that history has been sensationalized into stories of a great chase across what would soon become southern Wisconsin. The place of the Ho-Chunks in this history, and their impact on them, is missed, however, when the “Black Hawk War” is cast as a struggle between armies and renegade Indians. We cannot understand Ho-Chunk removal and the impact of that life change upon them without recognizing their place in the crisis and their attempts to keep the peace in their lands during the summer of 1832.

Summoned to a treaty council just weeks after the end of the conflict in September 1832, the same Ho-Chunk people who had stood between the Sauk and the Americans since April now were forced to listen as the federal commissioners told them of their coming eviction to foreign lands west of the Mississippi. Heartbroken at the prospect of losing their home, hungry after losing their corn crop that summer, they had no choice but to cede their land and depart for the west. A starving time was upon them. They no longer served a purpose for the Americans. They were no longer needed as guides or allies. By September 1832, they were simply in the way of white settlement and land speculation. Risking everything to keep peace that summer, they would lose everything in the coming winter.

Chapter Four

Starving and Removing: The Rock Island Treaty of 1832 and the Removal of the Rock River Ho-Chunk

Summoned to Fort Armstrong at Rock Island by General Winfield Scott soon after the events of early August 1832, Ho-Chunks from the three agencies—Prairie du Chien, the Portage, and Rock River—had all arrived by September 9. The troop presence was low due to an ongoing cholera outbreak in the region and Scott’s resulting orders to officers and their soldiers to stay away.¹ John Reynolds, the other treaty commissioner, had fled Rock Island. So too had the Prairie du Chien Indian agent, Joseph Street, and his delegation of western Ho-Chunks. The council’s commencement and the subsiding epidemic required the return of Reynolds and the Prairie du Chien Ho-Chunks, though not increased troop levels. The federal government was in control of events now, and there was no need to rekindle the tensions of recent months. When the council began three days later, General Scott, along with Illinois Governor John Reynolds, addressed representatives from the Prairie du Chien, Portage, and Rock River agencies. Scott proposed that the Ho-Chunks gathered cede the Rock River lands to the United States. Speaking to the “whole Winnebago Nation,” Scott stated, “We have smoked together the pipe of peace. We are friends with all present, except the Rock River band.”² Divide and conquer was Scott’s method.

¹ Cholera appeared on Rock Island on August 28. Four hundred troops were reported at Rock Island on August 31, but due to illness, orders to disperse, and deserters panicked by the outbreak, that number was greatly reduced by the time Ho-Chunk delegations arrived. See Joseph Gallagher to Benjamin B. Gallagher, 31 August 1832, in *Black Hawk War, 1831-1832*, ed. Ellen M. Whitney, vol. 2, bk. 1, *Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library* (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1973-75), 1085.

² Council with the Winnebago from the Fort Winnebago, Rock River, and Prairie du Chien Agencies, September 12, 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1136.

White Crow, Whirling Thunder, and the whole Rock River delegation were stung by Scott's words, a hostile greeting from the commissioners, who claimed to speak for the president of the United States, Andrew Jackson. White Crow and Whirling Thunder had received Scott's summons with enthusiasm, reported Rock River agent Henry Gratiot. They "declared themselves highly pleased at the prospect of meeting with you," Gratiot wrote, "when they will have an opportunity, they say, to explain and justify all of their conduct in relation to the Sacs."³ Once at Rock Island, however, it became clear to the Rock River Ho-Chunk that the Americans did not convene them to hear their story or negotiate any sort of settlement in the wake of the summer's events. Winfield Scott and John Reynolds framed the council's narrative around Ho-Chunk guilt and made their misbehavior, however amorphous in the commissioners' minds, the main cause for removal.

This chapter examines the fallout from the American war with the Sauk band in 1832, a conflict in which the Rock River band of Ho-Chunks played a central but misunderstood role. Though successful in managing the massive American force of several thousand soldiers for much of July, the Ho-Chunk eventually lost control of the conflict and with it, the ability to define its meaning and its consequences. September would deliver to the Ho-Chunks what they most feared: loss of their Rock River lands. The meaning that U.S. officials drew from the conflict led to the 1832 land cession and removal treaty at Fort Armstrong on Rock Island. There, the Rock River Ho-Chunks faced allegations of crimes against Americans. White Crow and Whirling Thunder spoke in council, but their interpretation of the crisis that spilled into their country and their explanation of their actions were suppressed.

³ Henry Gratiot to Winfield Scott, 30 August 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1084.

Having lost their corn crop, the Ho-Chunks now proved vulnerable to a land cession and removal treaty. Their hunger grew deadly in the months before their June 1833 removal deadline. Federal officials ignored pleas for corn from the Ho-Chunks and their Indian agents, contributing to Indian starvation. However, Ho-Chunk dependency on the U.S. government for food the following spring did not expedite their removal as officials had hoped. Ho-Chunk leaders begged Americans to allow their people to stay one more season so that they could prepare for removal, with seed corn in their pouches and boiled corn in their stomachs. U.S. authorities held fast to the removal deadline only to have their efforts thwarted by some Ho-Chunk villagers simply remaining in their homes. Other villagers returned a few months after relocating. As fugitives in familiar lands, Ho-Chunks eked out their survival through traditional subsistence activities while evading removal forces, revealing the limitations of federal policy to permanently remove Indian peoples from ancestral homelands as well as its failures to reestablish them in potential new ones.

The narrative generated at Rock Island—in both council and the subsequent treaty—privileged Anglo-American meanings of the conflict.⁴ What Americans took from the Black Hawk War was concrete evidence implicating several Ho-Chunks in the murder of white settlers and soldiers. Widespread distrust of Ho-Chunks among white settlers led to one solution: their removal. Treaty commissioners silenced Rock River Ho-Chunk voices and muffled their anxiety and desperation over the loss of their corn. Justifying a land cession and Ho-Chunk removal relied on these silences, for what they contained—a story of the Ho-Chunks' ancestral belonging rooted in both cosmology and cultivation with corn at their center—undermined a national

⁴ For a thoughtful examination of how one dominant understanding about the meaning of conflict or violence overwhelms and even erases others, see Karl Jacoby, *Shadows at Dawn: An Apache Massacre and the Violence of History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008).

removal narrative about white farmers making use of lands otherwise occupied by wandering savages. Such silences allowed for celebratory national narratives about the 1832 treaty and its promise of the Ho-Chunks' eviction. Those same silences persisted, buffering more distant Americans and officials from the horrors of the Ho-Chunk starving time through the winter of 1832 and the spring of 1833, which was a direct result of the destruction of the Ho-Chunks' corn crop during the war and the failure of the federal government to provide emergency winter and spring rations in time.

Survivors of the starving time faced imminent removal in the spring of 1833 but, without corn, most were unwilling to go. Ho-Chunk leaders and orators made this clear to officials charged with their removal. Their people yearned to remain one more Corn Moon—one more season to plant their fields and cultivate their corn—lest they face another starving time in new lands. Instead of compassion, their yearnings provoked intensified calls among white settlers, officials, and soldiers, for their removal. Ostensibly, white Americans wanted Native Americans to engage in agriculture. But those whites who knew Ho-Chunks to be corn farmers equated planting seed corn and cultivating fields with Ho-Chunk belonging. This sense of place—cultivated through corn farming—had to be destroyed permanently. Whites preferred starving Indians to farming Indians in this case, though this preference—and the broader goals of Indian removal—would be undermined by Ho-Chunk decisions to return to ceded lands in order to survive.

This chapter examines the origins and core tensions of what I call a “removal landscape” in ceded Ho-Chunk lands. The removal landscape was a place of hunger and fear. Ho-Chunk trepidation about the future was palpable. While newspapers depicted Ho-Chunk removal as

quick work for highly trained troops and reported the removal as complete in August 1833, Ho-Chunk returns to ceded lands in the months and years after demonstrated otherwise.

The Rock Island Treaty Council

To build a case against the Ho-Chunks ahead of the treaty council, Scott preyed upon the traumatized members of the Sauk band, survivors of the militia's and army's attempt to exterminate their band. The testimonies demanded by Americans had nothing to do with recounting a massacre for the sake of preserving eyewitness accounts for justice, acknowledgement, or reconciliation. Rather, Americans intended to use the words of Sauk band survivors against the Ho-Chunks in their attempt to remove them and gain their land. Officials wanted evidence of Rock River Ho-Chunk wrongdoings. The examination intended to draw out crimes committed by the Ho-Chunk, either by name specifically or by village generally. In either case, Scott hoped to expand the quilt of guilt as much as he could. Members of the Sauk band resisted his leading questions.⁵ The majority of the Sauk band survivors remembered eating corn but did not know where it came from. They travelled in canoes, but did not know their origin. The first group of prisoners from Bad Axe simply lied to Scott, telling him all their leaders, including Black Hawk, were dead and that any other survivors had been carried off by the Dakota.⁶ In an effort to minimize the damage of their words, prisoners offered a range of answers in response to the Americans' queries regarding Ho-Chunks' involvement in the

⁵ Interrogation questions can be found in *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1033. Sauk band prisoners' replies to interrogations can be found in *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1024-1038.

⁶ *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1030, 1035.

conflict, effectively denying Scott the easy task of charging White Crow and the Rock River band with specific crimes.

However, damaging testimony against the Ho-Chunks did come from Neapope, the civil chief of the Sauk band. Perhaps hoping to gain his freedom, Neapope provided the American commissioners with the answers they desired. He confirmed that some Ho-Chunks had taken part in the May 1832 murders of Felix St. Vrain and several others near Kellogg's Grove, referencing scalps brought into villages by Ho-Chunk warriors. Neapope also claimed that he and others had taken refuge at a village on the Rock River belonging to a "one eyed man on the waters of the Rock river." The Ho-Chunk sheltered and provided his people canoes and guidance, and the Sauk band traded gun powder and other goods to the Ho-Chunk for corn and potatoes.⁷ Pressed for more information about the "one-eyed" Ho-Chunk, Neapope told the Americans that White Crow had instigated the entire conflict from the start, first by encouraging the Sauk band to move further up the Rock River and later by urging the band, unsuccessfully, to attack the Americans at Fort Koshkonong.⁸ Neapope's testimony positioned White Crow and his villagers as coconspirators.

Similar to Black Hawk's autobiography, published a year later, Neapope's testimony is difficult to follow and contains contradictions and no clear chronology. Members of the Sauk band, after all, were foreigners in unfamiliar terrain. Despite Neapope's inability to explain clearly the who, when, and where as he listed Ho-Chunk misdeeds, General Winfield Scott

⁷ Minutes of Examination of Prisoners, 20 August 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1034-1035.

⁸ If Neapope was telling the interrogators the truth, he may have misunderstood White Crow's request to attack Fort Koshkonong. If the Ho-Chunks encouraged some members of the Sauk Band to fire at Fort Koshkonong, it was likely a ploy to draw pursuit of the troops in one direction while the rest of the band traveled in another direction. This was, in essence, what occurred on the morning of July 7, when Sauk band warriors, so Ho-Chunk Indians led Americans to believe, fired a musket across the Bark River in the direction of the army. It was on this occasion that an enlisted soldier was injured. See *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 745-754.

treated it as sound evidence to Ho-Chunk betrayal. Neapope's claim that White Crow encouraged the Sauk band's warriors to attack Fort Koshkonong seems unlikely to be true. American troop levels would have made any attack foolish, but more to the point, such an act would have run counter to the broader strategy of the Ho-Chunks to preserve their homelands by preventing bloodshed.⁹ Neapope's bitterness toward the Ho-Chunks may have been sincere if he believed what he told Scott next: the Ho-Chunks had turned on his people. Neapope claimed that "when the Winnebagoes discovered that the Sacs would be whipped, they turned their faces and went back, and turned against the Sacs."¹⁰ What led Neapope to this conclusion is unclear, and his assertion is puzzling since he hid among the Rock River Ho-Chunks after the July 21 fighting

⁹ Rock River Ho-Chunk leaders had well over one thousand warriors among them. If the Ho-Chunk wanted to make war on the Americans, they would not require help from Sauk band warriors. If Neapope believed his testimony, then it is plausible that he confused a scheme by the Rock River Ho-Chunk to misdirect American troops, a tactic used frequently in July 1832.

¹⁰ Minutes of Examination of Prisoners, 20 August 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1035. If Neapope felt the Rock River Ho-Chunk turned on his people at the Wisconsin River on July 21, militiaman Charles Bracken offered supporting evidence. Indeed, the actions in the final two weeks of the conflict are perplexing even still. Some of the warriors who volunteered to guide Henry Dodge and James Henry to the Rock River rapids in July helped the Americans pursue the Sauk band to the Wisconsin River after their trail was uncovered. Pierre Paquette, who was White Crow's nephew, and the orator's son, known as White Pawnee were seen by some militiamen firing on the Sauk band. Bracken later wrote that Paquette and the two Ho-Chunk Indians "fought uncovered like white men." Bracken, however, compared them with the rest of the Ho-Chunk Indians present who sheltered in place until the fighting at the Wisconsin River ended, and the Sauk band had fled. Charles Bracken, "Further Strictures on Gov. Ford's History of the Black Hawk War," in *Second Annual Report and Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for the Year 1855*, ed. Lyman C. Draper, vol. 2 (Madison: Calkins & Proudfit, Printers, 1856), 410. Bracken's commentary on Pierre Paquette was not coincidental. He was responding to Thomas Ford's recent insinuations that Paquette may not have been as transparent with the Americans or aligned with their interests during the 1832 conflict as many had believed. Another militiaman complained that Ho-Chunk warriors either showed up late or crawled out of hiding to take scalps from dead Sauk band warriors only after the fighting stopped. See *Galenian*, September 27, 1833. A complete reproduction of this article also appears in *American Railroad Journal*, and *Advocate of Internal Improvements: July 1833 to January 1834* (New York: D.K. Minor, 1834), vol. 2, bk. 2, 685. Still, most scholars view White Crow's son "fighting uncovered" against the Sauk band as evidence of the Rock River Ho-Chunk abandoning their Sauk kin. Taking Bracken's version of events as accurate, Hall states that "it is unlikely that [White Crow's son] would have so actively and decidedly cast his lot against Black Hawk without his father's approval," arguing that by this point in the conflict, "the outcome of the war was finally clear to White Crow, and he no longer deemed it necessary to hedge his bets." John Hall, *Uncommon Defense: Indian Allies in the Black Hawk War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 177.

near the Wisconsin River.¹¹ Historians tend to agree with Neapope on many things, primarily that the Rock River Ho-Chunks played both sides of the conflict until a clear outcome of the conflict emerged.¹² Black Hawk repeated none of Neapope's condemnations of White Crow or other Ho-Chunk leaders, save the Winnebago Prophet.¹³ And Black Hawk considered Neapope a coward and a liar.¹⁴

The stories of the Bad Axe massacre survivors are virtually absent from the historical record. The only eyewitness accounts that Americans deemed important in the days immediately following Bad Axe were those that implicated Ho-Chunks in the conflict and denounced violence against Americans. Testimonies taken at Rock Island were never intended to bring about justice for the Sauk band, but to harm their kin, the Rock River Ho-Chunks. This cruelty, perpetrated by Reynolds, Scott, and other interrogators, assured that eyewitness accounts of the extraordinary violence visited upon Sauk band women, children, and elders would come largely

¹¹ For an extended discussion of the engagement between American troops and warriors from the Sauk band at Wisconsin Heights, as well as the internal dynamics of the Sauk band's leaders, see Patrick Jung, *The Battle of Wisconsin Heights, 1832: Thunder on the Wisconsin* (Charleston, South Carolina: History Press, 2011).

¹² This assertion appears in virtually all publications in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Recent works that interpret Rock River Ho-Chunks' actions in this way, albeit with more analytical nuance and compassion for Native concerns for their future in their homelands, include Jung, *Black Hawk War*; Hall, *Uncommon Defense*.

¹³ The Ho-Chunk delegation met with White Cloud's villagers, hoping to convince them to move out of Illinois, away from increasing white settlement in the state. It makes sense that they would have encouraged the Sauk band, whom the Ho-Chunks had invited to live with them, also to retreat into northern lands of Wisconsin. Historians neglect to mention White Crow's second meeting with the Sauk band's leaders a few days later, when he reported on the massive military force the Americans were building at Fort Armstrong to pursue Black Hawk. At this time, the Rock River Ho-Chunks made clear to Black Hawk that they could not, in good conscience, allow him to come among them. Too much was at risk. See chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation for a revised interpretation of Black Hawk's autobiography as it relates specifically to events pertaining to Black Hawk War, including the year or two leading up to it. See Donald Jackson, ed., *Black Hawk: An Autobiography* (Chicago: Illini Books, 1964; reprint Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 100-144.

¹⁴ Since scholars of the conflict use Black Hawk's 1833 autobiography as well as Neapope's testimony from August 1832 to reinforce their analysis of White Crow as duplicitous and as evidence of his people's dishonesty toward the Americans. For Black Hawk's recollections and critiques of Neapope, see, Jackson, *Black Hawk*, 115-17, 122, 127, 134, 136. Neapope claimed to have become separated from the band during the final days of the conflict, while Black Hawk believed Neapope fled to save himself, since nearly all of Neapope's rearguard warriors rejoined the Sauk band after the July 21 fighting at the Wisconsin River. See Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 153. As late as September 10, the first day the commissioners held a council with Fort Winnebago agency Ho-Chunks, Black Hawk had not yet shared his story or version of events with the commissioners. Black Hawk would only speak with General Scott, but fearing cholera, Scott refused to board the steamship carrying the Sauk war leader. *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1120-22.

from the perpetrators themselves. Militiamen bragged about their Indian killing at Bad Axe. One man in particular took great pleasure in targeting and shooting children and babies. Another volunteer remarked, “Kill the nits, and you’ll have no lice.”¹⁵ A rare Indian voice, filtered through an Indian agent’s white mother, breaks this silence and speaks to trauma and terror endured by those who died as well as those who survived.

Eleanor Lytle McKillip Kinzie, the mother of Portage Ho-Chunk Indian agent John Kinzie, happened to be at Prairie du Chien in August 1832 as Indian survivors of Bad Axe passed through and were taken into American custody. One woman told Eleanor Kinzie her story and she, in turn, told it to her son and his wife, Juliette Kinzie. This is the tale she recounted: Early on in the crisis, soon after the Sauk band began hiding for its survival in the Koshkonong area, her people became desperate for food. They ate horses if they could spare them, and relied on acorns, elm-bark, and grass. Many starved, especially in the final weeks as the band made its desperate flight toward the Mississippi. Troop accounts confirmed this, documenting numerous dead or dying Indians along their trail of pursuit in late July. This much of the story was gruesome enough. But Eleanor Kinzie learned that at Bad Axe on the Mississippi, “This poor woman had lost her husband in battle, and all her children by the upsetting of the canoe in which they were, and her only wish now was, to go and join them.”¹⁶ Such was the mental state of people Winfield Scott and other officials interrogated for the purpose of taking Ho-Chunk lands. Eleanor Kinzie was left shaken by the sight and stories of the Indian prisoners at Prairie du Chien. She informed her son and daughter-in-law, “their

¹⁵ Quoted in Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 174.

¹⁶ Juliette Kinzie, *Wau-Bun: The Early Day in the North West* (1873; repr., Philadelphia: Bibliobazaar, 2006), 230. Following this story, Juliette Kinzie added, “Poor Indians! who can wonder that they do not love the whites?”

condition was wretched and reduced beyond anything she had ever witnessed.”¹⁷ The Sauk woman’s return to Illinois, to live out what Black Hawk hoped would be a “happy life,” was met with American fury and musket balls. Her family gone and her life shattered, the woman told her story to a compassionate civilian, not for the historical record or the justice it might bring, but rather to share the burden.

Winfield Scott compiled a narrative that muted this Sauk woman’s pain for the purpose of punishing her kin, the Rock River Ho-Chunks. Long before he called the Rock River Ho-Chunks to Rock Island, Scott was ensuring that they would not be seen as friends of the Americans. His interrogations of the Sauk band survivors allowed Scott to manufacture a story of Ho-Chunk complicities in the recent violence. While the Americans pieced together their narrative of events in the weeks before the Rock Island treaty council, leaders among the Rock River Ho-Chunks awaited an opportunity to tell theirs. By late August, Scott was ready to engage the entire Ho-Chunk nation in council, with a land cession treaty in mind. He sent out messengers to ensure that representatives from all the bands and agencies would be at Fort Armstrong by September 10. Upon receiving General Scott’s message, White Crow and other headmen appeared relieved and willing to attend the council. Indeed, as Henry Gratiot informed Scott, the Rock River leaders welcomed the opportunity to tell their story. A week before they were due at Rock Island, Captain Gideon Low met with chiefs Whirling Thunder and Little Priest and their orator White Crow, before the Ho-Chunk men departed down the Rock River. Low provided them with food for the journey. Low informed Scott that the three men “all appear well satisfied as yet,” and gave no indication of dreading the treaty council. The composure of these Ho-Chunk men struck Low since he, like so many other officers and

¹⁷ Kinzie, *Wau-bun*, 230.

officials, had no doubt that the treaty commissioners would uncover evidence that Rock River Ho-Chunks “have aided their friends in the conflict.” The Ho-Chunks, he correctly guessed, would be forced to cede land.¹⁸

Had White Crow, Whirling Thunder, and Little Priest explained more about their conduct that summer they would have only given the Americans more evidence to manipulate against them. And Winfield Scott was looking for just such evidence. As much as the Ho-Chunks wielded control during the recent conflict, they would exert agency, often through silence, afterward. External factors beyond their control shaped the council and conversation as well as its outcome. But the Ho-Chunks still shaped the removal landscape, into one of process, not necessarily permanence, especially because many Ho-Chunks refused to leave or else returned to familiar lands to survive. In September 1832, however, the Rock River Ho-Chunks traveled toward an arena where factors aligned to privilege American meanings of the “war” over Ho-Chunk ones.

Not all was assured for head commissioner Winfield Scott, however. The cholera outbreak that emerged in the western Great Lakes in July—and prevented him from assuming command from Henry Atkinson—suddenly showed up at Rock Island among troops. Mindful of Americans’ health as well as that of the Indians, Scott feared cholera would delay the council. The other commissioner, John Reynolds, fled to avoid the epidemic. Reynolds had constituents

¹⁸ Gideon Low to Winfield Scott, 3 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1100. Whether the Rock River Indians knew of the coming land cession, it seemed most everyone else understood that the Rock Island council would result in a land cession treaty between the U.S. and the Ho-Chunks. On August 31, one New York soldier wrote home to his brother “A Treaty was to be made with the Winnebagoes on the 10th at which the army was to be present.” In the midst of a cholera outbreak, however, the council seemed uncertain. If the outbreak subsided and the Indian delegations showed up, Gallagher wrote, “and the treaty is made at that time, we shall return home this fall.” Soldiers and militiamen alike were being retained by federal and local governments for the purposes of treaty-making and keeping the peace. The Ho-Chunks were among many tribal nations the U.S. intended to draw into council, with the Black Hawk War as their leverage. See Joseph S. Gallagher to Benjamin B. Gallagher, 31 August 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1085-86.

to answer to, however, and they wanted a treaty. Reynolds pushed for the council to go on, even if Scott had to move it to a remote, godforsaken place. Reynolds suggested Koshkonong.¹⁹ Two days before the Ho-Chunk delegations arrived at Rock Island, however, Scott declared the epidemic over and Fort Armstrong a safe gathering place.²⁰ This would prove a fatal call for a renowned Ho-Chunk chief named Lame Caramani, and nearly fatal for John Kinzie.

Cholera was nearly gone from Rock Island, but other disappointing news arrived with the Ho-Chunk delegations. The commissioners had anticipated that the Portage Ho-Chunks would provide additional evidence against the Rock River band and White Crow in particular. The Portage agent, John Kinzie, had implied as much in his recent correspondence with the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, George Porter: “It seems that they have deceived [General Atkinson] and Genl. Dodge in several instances.”²¹ Scott was incredulous to learn otherwise in the days before the council: “Mr. Kinzie informs me that they will accuse by name, many individuals of the Rock river Winnebagoes, as having taken an active part against us in the late War—but not the principal chief the White Crow, or The Blind, who, I learn, from another source, is the uncle of Mr. Kinzie’s interpreter.”²² It mattered little to General Scott that Whirling Thunder and Little Priest were head chiefs of the Rock River band and White Crow their orator; White Crow had become the face of dishonesty in the eyes of Americans. In contrast, American officers and officials held Whirling Thunder in high regard. Captain Gideon Low told General Scott that Whirling Thunder was “one of the best chiefs among the nation & commands more respect than anyone among them.”²³ Focused on White Crow, Scott grew

¹⁹ John Reynolds to Winfield Scott, 6 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1113.

²⁰ Winfield Scott to John Reynolds, 7 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1117.

²¹ John Kinzie to George Porter, 10 August 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 974.

²² Winfield Scott to Lewis Cass, 9 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1125.

²³ Gideon Low to Winfield Scott, 3 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1100.

immediately suspicious of his nephew, Pierre Paquette. In a pre-council report to Lewis Cass, Scott complained about the unexpected setback: “This will be strictly looked to, for Neapope, and other prisoners, examined here, directly and positively implicated that chief.”²⁴ Whether Scott followed through on his investigation is unclear, but the doubts he raised in September 1832 would resurface for decades to come, as veterans and historians debated Paquette’s trustworthiness.

As much as the Ho-Chunks controlled the events of the spring and summer, the Americans, as victors at Bad Axe, controlled the September council. The treaty commissioners, Winfield Scott and John Reynolds, did not allow the Rock River Ho-Chunks to speak on the first day of the council and for much of the second. The first two councils between the Rock River Indians and the commissioners involved Scott communicating “a Talk and interrogatories” relating to the conduct of the Rock River band in the recent conflict. White Crow responded directly to the allegations against his people. If the Americans wanted the truth about Ho-Chunk actions and movements during the conflict, he argued, they need not look beyond the requests the army and militia made upon them. “We were sent for to act as guides,” White Crow explained, “we went when called for, and can now come forward with clean hands.”²⁵ The orator called on Henry Dodge and Henry Gratiot to corroborate his claims. But, according to the treaty journal, neither came forth.

White Crow dismissed Scott’s further inquiries and accusations in equal measure. When asked why he had not brought with him to Fort Armstrong any of the accused Ho-Chunks, White Crow advised the Americans to send better interpreters. He had not understood “half of the talk, as the interpreter explained it.” In any case, the men wanted by the Americans had gone among

²⁴ Winfield Scott to Lewis Cass, 9 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1125.

²⁵ Council with the Rock River Winnebago, 11 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1133.

the Potawatomi, out of White Crow's reach.²⁶ The Americans pressed White Crow to send someone after them, warning that the alternative would be an American force entering his country and chasing them down. White Crow advised them not to waste their time. The Americans had learned little from their summer campaign spent chasing down fugitive Indians in the Rock River country. Americans could not move through Ho-Chunk country without guides, as White Crow reminded the general in response to Scott's inquiry about the whereabouts of the orator and his warriors during the conflict. Implicit in Scott's question was his suspicion—and that of the troops—that the Ho-Chunks undermined American efforts to locate the Sauk band. He attempted to defend his people's actions according to American expectations of Native allegiance. White Crow told the commissioners that he and his warriors had been too busy helping the Americans find their way through his country to hunt the Sauk.²⁷

The first day at the conference with Winfield Scott and John Reynolds had not gone well for the Rock River Ho-Chunk. By now, it was clear to the Ho-Chunks that the U.S. was building its case to justify a forced land cession. White Crow chose a humbler approach for the next morning's conference. Speaking for the Rock River chiefs and people, White Crow expressed shame for the violence that some of their young men had perpetrated. The Winnebago Prophet, White Crow asserted, had misled the young men. "Those who have taken up the hatchet did it contrary to my advice and in spite of my authority," White Crow stated.²⁸ The effort that White Crow, Whirling Thunder, Little Priest, and others put into keeping the peace in April and May was threatened by Indian violence against whites. This is the same message White Crow delivered to Black Hawk, as evidenced in Black Hawk's autobiography. Neapope's claim that

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 1134.

²⁸ Second Council with the Rock River Winnebago, 12 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1136.

White Crow urged his warriors to attack Fort Koshkonong stands in stark contrast to the words and work of the Ho-Chunks the previous spring and summer. The Rock River Ho-Chunks had nothing to gain and everything to lose if the crisis turned violent. The treaty council at Rock Island proved these fears true.

The commissioners all but silenced the story White Crow wished to tell. Nevertheless, the orator persisted. It was the Americans—Gratiot, Dodge, Atkinson—who had called on White Crow for help. If White Crow had shut his ears to Gratiot's and Dodge's pleas for help in June, the Americans, he argued, "would never have seen anything more of those young [Hall sisters]." He implored the Americans, "I did as the general [Dodge] told me, I helped him in guiding his army, but now I suffer."²⁹ "If I had been a bad Indian, as it is said I have been. Would I have rescued the girls from the Sacs?"³⁰ White Crow was trying to minimize Neapope's voice.

Responding to Neapope's accusations, White Crow attempted to turn the tables, vilifying the Sauk band to the commissioners. As far as his encounters with the enemy band during the conflict, White Crow justified each of these as missions for the Americans. For example, White Crow told the story of his initial visits with the Sauk band south of the Prophet's village in April. White Crow operated as a mediator, an emissary for peace, and an interpreter. White Crow had carried a message from Henry Atkinson to Black Hawk—that the general wanted the Sauk war leader and his band to return west of the Mississippi. White Crow and the Rock River chiefs also tried to convince the Ho-Chunks living in White Cloud's village to relocate to upper Rock River lands. White Crow had wanted peace. The orator recounted how he had saved Henry

²⁹ Council with the Rock River Winnebago, 11 September 1832, *BHW*, vol. 2, bk. 2, 1136.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Gratiot from the Sauk warriors who took him hostage and wanted to kill him. White Crow talked about how he carried an American flag when his chiefs met with the Sauk band's chiefs. The Sauk warriors had trampled it, but White Crow raised it again.³¹ In earlier versions of this story, told by both Henry Gratiot and White Crow, the flag was white and signaled the peaceful mission of the Rock River Ho-Chunk envoys. However, facing down accusations that he and his people had betrayed the Americans, White Crow spoke of an American flag, which more vividly symbolized his allegiance to the U.S. Making the flag American also suggested that, in April, the orator and his chiefs had understood the futility of Indian resistance to Americans, though the Sauk band did not. The Sauk band, of course, had returned only to plant corn. That reality mattered little to the Americans, and White Crow no doubt used that fact to his advantage. That the Sauk band warriors trampled on an American flag in White Crow's revisionist tale made them anti-American and warlike, unlike the Rock River Ho-Chunks in the story. White Crow's story, in addition, highlighted the poor treatment his people received from the Sauk band.

In highlighting his obedience to Americans throughout the conflict, White Crow also cast responsibility for their situation on Henry Gratiot, and, to an extent, on Henry Dodge: "We had an agent in our country (Mr. Gratiot) and we could see him each day, as well as the War chief (Gnl Dodge)."³² White Crow implied that if his people had been doing something wrong, then their agent and the general should have corrected them. Gratiot had departed Rock Island before this second conference and White Crow took advantage of the optics of an absent agent. Furthermore, White Crow said, he had been "told by our Great Father, The President of the United States to follow Mr. Gratiot's advice." White Crow said he did just that. "Ever since I have been called an orator, I have done what the whites have told me; and why should I not

³¹ Ibid., 1133.

³² Second Council with the Rock River Winnebago, 12 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1135.

continue to do so hereafter?”³³ Given the opportunity to speak at last in the council, he hoped to minimize the impact of the treaty on the Rock River Ho-Chunks.

White Crow narrated a brief history of his good relations with the Americans. He admitted his initial desire to fight the Americans “when General Dodge first marched out into our country.” White Crow was undoubtedly recalling the 1820s lead rush during which settlers illegally invaded and mined Ho-Chunk lands as well as the small-scale Ho-Chunk response known as the Winnebago War of 1827. White Crow had listened to the Great Father, however, and ultimately chose peace and friendship with the Americans. As for the latest conflict, White Crow reminded the commissioners of his continued friendship: “I did as the General told me, I helped him, in guiding his army, but now I suffer.”³⁴ Using reason and calculated argument, without giving anything away to the Americans, White Crow hoped for the best possible outcome from the awful situation in which he and his people found themselves in September.

Regardless of the narrative White Crow put forth, American officials preferred to emphasize the narrative of Ho-Chunk duplicity in their assistance of Black Hawk and his people. This became the prime and nearly singular justification for the Rock Island Treaty council and Ho-Chunk removal from the Rock River country in 1833. While a few individual Ho-Chunks had taken part in the murders of Durley and St. Vrain’s party in May, 1832, ultimately eight Ho-Chunk men were identified during the Rock Island council as co-conspirators with the Sauk and Fox. The sins of the few were held against many Ho-Chunks. To drive the point home to the Ho-Chunks, the treaty stipulated the surrender of all eight before the Ho-Chunk would receive any annuity payment.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

For Americans, the 1832 crisis could have been a story of Ho-Chunk courage, or alternately, of their suffering. Rather, the Black Hawk War would become the backdrop for U.S. officials to justify Indian removal for the sake of white settlement. The conflict happily provided advocates of Indian removal an opportunity to divest Ho-Chunks of their lands, and soon thereafter, the Pottawatomi of theirs.³⁵ At the onset of the Black Hawk War, Illinois Governor John Reynolds set his sights on the removal of the Ho-Chunks and the Pottawatomi. The Ho-Chunk nation ceded its Illinois lands in 1829, though over seven hundred Ho-Chunk Indians still occupied villages in the state, and the Potawatomi still owned lands in northern Illinois. After a large contingent of the Sauk people resisted an attempt to remove them west of the Mississippi in the spring of 1831, Reynolds warned President Andrew Jackson that if the federal government did not succeed in removing all the region's Indians—Sauk, Ho-Chunk, and Potawatomi—the people of Illinois would address matters with Indians in their own way, “adopting some very harsh measures.”³⁶ The summer's events and the current council would provide just that opportunity.

At the 1832 council, General Winfield Scott presented the U.S. government's offer to purchase Ho-Chunk lands south and east of the Wisconsin River as an amicable agreement, but the Ho-Chunk had no position of strength from which to negotiate. Scott couched his offer to purchase and exchange Ho-Chunk lands along the Rock River for a new home in the west in the rhetoric of removal recently popularized by Andrew Jackson and other high-level politicians.

³⁵Illinois Governor John Reynolds pushed hard for Indian removal from lands within his state. Ho-Chunk removal, Reynolds wrote Secretary of War Lewis Cass, “is very interesting to the people of this State” and added that he would “do all in my power to effect so desirable an object.” Quoted in Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 215. In a letter to Cass written during the conflict, Illinois citizens called on the government to make good use of the war buying out Indian lands and removing the Ho-Chunk and Potawatomi to the Arkansas River: “There is no time so suitable to remove those Indians as when you are secretary of war, and General Jackson President.” Quoted in Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 214.

³⁶ John Reynolds to Andrew Jackson, 15 August 1831, *BHW* vol.2, bk. 1, 140.

Proponents of Indian removal argued that the policy was well-intentioned in that it protected American Indians from the harmful behaviors of white squatters on the frontier. Those who had moral questions about forced removal of Indian peoples took comfort in the belief that relocating Native communities west of the Mississippi was the only way to prevent American Indians from extinction.³⁷ If left side by side, they assumed, neighboring white and Indian populations would resort to violence against each other. The recent conflict, Scott claimed, had demonstrated this: “It is owing to this proximity that, during the past summer, difficulties and discord have arisen.”³⁸ Though the Ho-Chunks and the U.S. had signed a land cession treaty not three years earlier, that established new boundaries separating Indians and whites, “The time has already come,” Scott said, “when a portion of the Winnebagoes...should remove a little further.” In exchange for Ho-Chunk lands east and south of the Wisconsin River, the U.S. federal government would move Ho-Chunks to “a wide country, fit for cultivation,” providing annuities and assistance relocating. The U.S. wanted to offer the Ho-Chunk “just compensation for every acre,” with one exception. Because White Cloud and his villagers had “raised the hatchet,” Scott explained, “we claim and demand, as forfeited to the United States, their just proportion.”³⁹ In

³⁷ Andrew Jackson Message to Congress "On Indian Removal," 6 December 1830, Records of the United States Senate, 1789-1990, Record Group 46, Records of the United States Senate, 1789-1990, National Archives; The New York Board of Emigration, “Preservation and Improvement of the Aborigines of America, in Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Documents of United States Indian Policy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 22-23. For a recent scholarly examination of rhetoric around removal policy, see Jason Edward Black, *American Indians and the Rhetoric of Removal and Allotment* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015). See also John Bowes, *Land Too Good for Indians: Northern Indian Removal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016). A classic work is Ronald N. Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (1975; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

³⁸ Council with the Winnebago from the Fort Winnebago, Rock River, and Prairie du Chien Agencies, 12 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1136. While the Ho-Chunk were told that they had to emigrate to save themselves from white settlement and violence, the administration was working to relocate Native peoples from New York to former Ho-Chunk and Menominee lands. See Satz, *American Indian Policy*, 114.

³⁹ Council with the Winnebago from the Fort Winnebago, Rock River, and Prairie du Chien Agencies, September 12, 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1137.

singling out White Cloud, the Winnebago Prophet, Scott's approach and the treaty itself took shape, at least in part, around White Crow's narrative. White Crow's method had some small effect on the council.

For white Americans, news from the Rock River country in the late summer and fall of 1832 was all good. The Black Hawk War was over. In October, it was reported that the cholera epidemic had "entirely disappeared at Rock Island and the vicinity." And commissioners Winfield Scott and John Reynolds had "concluded a Treaty with the Winnebagoes...by which the removal of the tribe west of the Mississippi was secured, and a valuable tract of country...was obtained." The newspaper continued: "The Winnebagoes further agree not to reside, plant, fish or hunt upon the ceded territory after the first of June next, the time designated in the Treaty for their removal."⁴⁰ Because of the recent conflict, the Rock River country was already a familiar place. Only now, instead of conflict, white Americans could begin imaging the country as a removal landscape, a region emptied of its Indian inhabitants and opened for settlers.

The 1832 Treaty of Rock Island told a powerful place-story. It was, as Patrick Jung notes, "the most significant consequence of the Black Hawk War."⁴¹ Record of the exchange at the treaty council that September chronicled two peoples speaking past each other. Americans saw a land that would soon become a settler's territory, and Ho-Chunks spoke of a homeland and a future in which they might live side by side with the Americans. Commissioners Scott and Reynolds would have none of that future, especially as it related to the Rock River people. These Ho-Chunks would soon become transients in their own lands. They would now be the squatters hoping to be passed by as Americans moved into the area. The treaty overwrote

⁴⁰ *Republican Compiler* (Gettysburg), October 18, 1832.

⁴¹ Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 185.

indigenous and cosmological intricacies of belonging. The calculus of these negotiations led to a much simpler mathematical calculation. The Rock Island treaty ceded nearly three million acres of arable prairie lands—Ho-Chunk homelands—to the United States. The Ho-Chunk side of the ledger created at Rock Island was far less appealing.⁴²

In exchange for their lands south of the Wisconsin River, the Ho-Chunk received land west of the Mississippi, an annuity of \$10,000 for twenty-seven years, and funds for education, agricultural training, and supplies. Ho-Chunks knew how to farm, even if by different methods. Lame Caramani, a village chief, thought his warriors “would look very strange behind a plough.” What was stranger still was that the treaty, and the powerful narrative driving removal, sought to make farmers out of farmers.⁴³ The annuity payments were partly tied to education, to Indians adopting plow-agriculture and other Euro-American farming techniques. Removal rhetoric ignored the history of agriculture—and innovative agricultural methods—among Native communities east of the Mississippi. Scholars of U.S. Indian policy have come to agree that federal disregard Native American agriculture was based largely on Euro-American notions of gender. Men ought to farm land and conduct economic affairs, not women.⁴⁴ When women farmed, the activity faded from view.

⁴² Scholars tend to view this treaty as fair and justified, though costly for Native peoples. In his assessment of the land cession and removal treaties between the U.S. and the Ho-Chunk, Sauk and Fox, and Potawatomi nations after the conflict ended, Patrick Jung argues the U.S. forced the region’s Indians to “pay a steep price in land for the belligerent actions by minorities of their tribes.” See Jung, *Black Hawk War*, 185. John Hall writes, “Good or not, the Americans’ offer was better than the Ho Chunks had reason to expect.” Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 213.

⁴³ As historians have observed, the disruptions of removal reduced Native communities’ agricultural output. See Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, *Great Lakes Creoles: A French-Indian Community on the Northern Borderlands, Prairie du Chien, 1750-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 222.

⁴⁴ See Anthony F. C. Wallace, *The Long, Bitter Trail: Andrew Jackson and the Indians* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 48. For a thorough examination of federal Indian policy in the early republic and its intended and unintended consequences on gender relations in Native society, see Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998). On Native women and gender relations in Wisconsin and Illinois, including Ho-Chunk women, see Murphy, *A Gathering of Rivers*.

Portions of the Ho-Chunk annuity payments were tied to education in American agricultural methods, and Winfield Scott had talked of lands adapted to Indian farming in the council. Scott's underlying narrative seized upon the war as the central justification for taking lands and keeping the peace in the region. His promise of agricultural lands must have seemed hollow to the Ho-Chunks, even more so since their efforts over the previous months had been all about protecting their corn and their capacity to cultivate it where they lived. Americans' ethnocentrism, especially among those who supported Indian removal, led them to ignore Native successes in their own agricultural practices. They did so, as Ronald Satz argues, "to exaggerate the hunting aspects of Indian society."⁴⁵ Americans attempting to dislodge Ho-Chunks from their land ignored Ho-Chunk attempts to protect their corn—in speech and action.

Despite the conciliatory tone and feigned concern for avoiding further confrontations between Ho-Chunks and white settlers, the Rock Island treaty was a removal treaty. If removal policy aimed at limiting violence, the necessary compromises as well as the weight of loss fell exclusively on Indian people. As removal policy was envisioned, white settlers were rarely inconvenienced beyond having to wait for the land to be cleared of Indians. Removal policy replaced civilization policy, or, more to the point, civilization efforts would begin only once the Indians moved to their new lands. The Rock Island treaty of 1832 was intended to structure white settlement of Ho-Chunk lands and provided mechanisms for Ho-Chunk removal.

Article 11 of the treaty reinforced Ho-Chunk exclusion from their Rock River homelands: "In order to prevent misapprehensions that might disturb peace and friendship between the parties to this treaty, it is expressly understood that no band or party of Winnebagoes shall reside, plant, fish, or hunt after the first day of June next, on any portion of the country herein ceded to

⁴⁵ Satz, *American Indian Policy*, 253.

the United States.”⁴⁶ There were to be no misapprehensions. The Ho-Chunk were to leave. There was to be no planting and certainly no harvesting in the coming year. Ho-Chunk agricultural activities were to be displaced with them. The 1832 treaty promised a reservation west of the Mississippi in Iowa, but since the Ho-Chunk nation retained a sizable chunk of Wisconsin land north of the Wisconsin River, adjacent to ceded lands in the Rock River and Four Lakes region, the vast majority of Ho-Chunk villages planned to remain east of the Mississippi. The reserved lands in northeastern Iowa, known as the “neutral ground,” served as a buffer between two ancestral enemies: the Dakota to the north and the Sauk and Fox to the south. Though the Ho-Chunks were free to choose where to make their new homes, the sandy soil in lands north of the Wisconsin River, while rich in timber, could not produce the crops they had grown in the Rock River country. Neither choice offered Ho-Chunks what they had in the 1832 ceded lands. Their remaining Wisconsin lands could not provide subsistence for the entire Ho-Chunk nation, a reality known to the treaty commissioners and their superiors. White officials took for granted that lands west of the Mississippi would be more desirable for Ho-Chunks, who would voluntarily abandon all eastern lands in time.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Treaty with the Winnebago, 1832, in Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2 (Treaties) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904), 346. Similar to the 1829 treaty, in which the Ho-Chunks ceded their lead region lands, the 1832 treaty left some ambiguity on the matter of removal. The 1829 treaty, which Jason Tetzloff describes as a “semi-official removal treaty,” contained no clause allowing for continued Ho-Chunk presence in ceded lands. Ho-Chunks were subsequently pushed out by increased white settlement and alienation of resources. The 1832 treaty stipulated Ho-Chunk removal from ceded lands, but not necessarily west of the Mississippi, which was a core component of Indian removal policy. The Indian Removal Act stipulated that Indian lands east of the Mississippi would be exchanged for lands west of it. While the Ho-Chunk nation received a western reservation as part of the 1832 treaty agreement, they also retained homelands east of the Mississippi, between that river and the Wisconsin River. The displaced Ho-Chunk people could choose where to relocate their villages. See Jason Michael Tetzloff, “The Diminishing Winnebago Estate in Wisconsin: From White Contact to Removal” (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, 1991), 65-76.

⁴⁷ Tetzloff, “Diminishing Winnebago Estate,” 77-89.

Wherever the Ho-Chunks relocated, they no longer belonged in the Rock River country. From the perspective of white officials and settlers, extinguishing the Ho-Chunk people's legal rights to land and resources, prohibiting their subsistence in this place, was the same as extinguishing Ho-Chunk belonging. Article 11 also made clear that the tranquility of the region and the progress of its settlers hinged upon the permanent removal of the Ho-Chunks. The federal government wasted no time initiating the Rock Island treaty council, where they would present the Ho-Chunk nation with evidence of their "treachery" during the war and force them to cede their Rock River lands. U.S. agents also argued that the 1832 treaty was necessary for the protection of the Ho-Chunk—given recent events, and the outrage among white settlers toward the Ho-Chunk, the nation could not be protected from harm should it remain in the Rock River country. Commissioner Scott responded to Ho-Chunks' protest of these provisions, arguing that the Americans and the Ho-Chunks were "too close" and that "quarrels and wars were sure to follow" if the Ho-Chunks did not relocate.⁴⁸

Agent Joseph Street tried to protect the Ho-Chunks of his agency from those further east, arguing that the Ho-Chunks near Prairie du Chien were a "separate & distinct portion of the Winnebago Nation," and that the communities on either side of the Wisconsin River had been "living very much as Indians of separate tribes" for some time.⁴⁹ The Prairie Ho-Chunks, as Street called those belonging to his agency, had no desire to relocate to the other side of the Wisconsin: "I think they would feel that they were intruding upon lands they ought not settle on."⁵⁰ The logical course, Street advised Scott, was to buy out the Rock River Ho-Chunk lands

⁴⁸ Council with the Winnebago from the Fort Winnebago, Rock River, and Prairie du Chien Agencies, 12 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1130-1156; Mark Diedrich, ed., *Winnebago Oratory: Great Moments in the Recorded Speech of the Hochungra, 1742-1887* (Rochester, Minnesota: Coyote Books, 1991), 45.

⁴⁹ Joseph Street to Winfield Scott, 9 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1127-1128.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, bk. 2, 1127.

and relocate the rebellious band to Iowa, “for the good of the frontier and country” and the “permanent peace and safety of Whites in Illinois and Michigan.”⁵¹ Street’s message also implied that Scott should not encourage the Rock River Ho-Chunks to relocate to lands north and west of the Wisconsin, lands claimed by the Prairie Ho-Chunks.

If the Prairie Ho-Chunks were to be held harmless in the 1832 treaty, the Rock River land cession and their removal had been Scott’s orders since June, when he was preparing to head west to take command of General Atkinson’s forces and bring the conflict to a satisfactory end. Secretary of War Lewis Cass and President Jackson deemed Henry Atkinson ineffective, though Scott sympathized with Atkinson over the nature of the conflict and the terrain that bogged down troops, horses, and wagons. How Scott would transform the strategy into a winning one remained a mystery during the 1832 cholera epidemic proximate to the treaty council. Scott never relieved Atkinson of his command. Scott’s other orders, handed down by Cass with the “approbation of president,” were to effect Indian removal from the region. The rumors and reports of Ho-Chunk misconduct during the 1832 conflict angered Scott and prompted an investigation. The now-steady stream of surviving Sauk band members to U.S. camps and forts allowed Scott to interrogate them, as any information they might provide regarding Ho-Chunk crimes would serve as leverage against the Rock River band.

Though Scott angled for removal, he was neither ignorant of nor unmoved by Indian suffering. He routinely ordered his officers to provide hungry Native peoples with provisions, and made sure that survivors of the Sauk band were liberated from barracks so they could return to Keokuk’s Iowa reservation.⁵² Scott sought justice for murdered and maimed Americans, but he did not suffer incompetence or lies from his men or from civil agents who caused Native

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, bk. 2, 1128.

⁵² Scott to Zachary Taylor, 5 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1111.

peoples harm, actions that risked further Indian and white violence in the region. While interrogating Sauk prisoners in mid-August, he learned that an Indian agent in Missouri had seized friendly Sauk and Fox Indians without cause. Superintendent of Indian Affairs William Clark had already rebuked the agent and ordered the Indians' release, but Scott still seethed. He recounted this event in a letter to Lewis Cass, noting, "It is by such stupid and unwarrantable acts that Indian Wars are got up on our frontiers."⁵³ Cass's reply reached Scott two weeks later, in which he challenged the general's critique of the agent and his assessment of Indian wars, in particular the most recent one: "The warfare was so utterly unprovoked on the part of the Indians, and has been prosecuted by them in such a reckless spirit of cruelty," that the United States was well within its rights to pacify the Indians by whatever means necessary to attain permanent peace on the frontier.⁵⁴ Cass made clear that Scott was free to determine the best methods of attaining a Ho-Chunk land cession, but not to waver from his original orders.⁵⁵

Those orders could be traced, at least in part, to voices from earlier in the summer. As early as July 1832, Illinois citizens called on the government to make good use of the war by buying out all Indian lands and removing the Ho-Chunks and Potawatomi to the Arkansas River: "There is no time so suitable to remove those Indians as when you are secretary of war, and General Jackson President."⁵⁶ Indeed, the ascendance of key pro-removal politicians had aligned with crisis and policy to bring about Indian removal in the Old Northwest. The positions of superintendent and Indian agent, like Secretary of War and Commissioner of Indian Affairs,

⁵³ Andrew S. Hughes was the Indian agent involved in the incident Scott mentioned. Scott to Cass, 16 August 1832, *BHW*, vol. 2, bk. 2, 1013n3.

⁵⁴ Lewis Cass to Winfield Scott, 4 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1104.

⁵⁵ Cass to Scott, 4 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1104-05; Joseph Street to Winfield Scott, 9 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1127-28.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 214, from, Citizens of Illinois to Lewis Cass, 10 July 1832, National Archives, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-81: Chicago Agency, 1824-1847, Microcopy No. 234 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1959), Roll 132, F248-249.

were patronage appointments. With pro-removal politicians in high positions—including the presidency—the character of Indian policy could look quite different from one administration to the next. As Ronald Satz argues, “The result was that the officials’ obligations to the Indians became subjugated to political considerations.”⁵⁷

Lewis Cass agreed entirely that Indians were indeed to be sacrificed in the interest of territorial expansion and white settlement. And by the 1820s, Cass was seen as an expert on Indian affairs. Later in the decade, he weighed in on the battle between Georgia and the Cherokee Nation. In Georgia, the struggle was for more than land, but for sovereignty in Indian Country. Cass viewed land as a commodity and considered its exploitation as divinely sanctioned. If left in the hands of Native peoples, land was “doomed to perpetual unproductiveness.” Additionally, Cass promoted Indian removal because it would, in his opinion, prevent the trouble that always occurred when whites and Indians lived in proximity to one another. Removal offered Native peoples a place, a home “where they and their descendants can be secure in the enjoyment of every privilege which they may be capable of estimating and enjoying.” As scholars of Indian removal have long observed, removal advocates identified the presence of whites as detrimental to Indian livelihood. However, never did Cass or his like-minded contemporaries suggest limiting white settlement. Rather, the problem was focused on the Indian experience. As in most pro-removal narratives, the Ho-Chunk were victims of a seemingly unstoppable, unnamed demolishing force that decreased game and drove them from their lands. When combined with the perception of Indian indolence and their stubborn refusal

⁵⁷ Satz, *American Indian Policy*, 185.

to farm more and hunt less, Cass argued that the potential of white settlers was reason enough to demand Indian removal.⁵⁸

Though Cass's publications speak generally to the policy of forced Indian removal and, in particular, to that of the Cherokee, he had had plenty to say about the Ho-Chunk nation during his tenure as Michigan's territorial governor from 1813 to 1831.⁵⁹ The 1832 crisis presented Cass with an opportunity to realize his vision. In June 1832, Cass instructed General Winfield Scott on matters beyond the immediate conflict with hostile Indians: "It is very desirable that the whole country between Lake Michigan & the Mississippi, & south of the Ouisconsin, should be freed from the Indians; & with this view, you will endeavor to prevail upon the friendly or neutral Chiefs of those tribes...to cede their claims, & to remove west of the Mississippi."⁶⁰ The crisis brewing in Illinois and Wisconsin had already become, in Cass's mind, a cause for Indian removal. Long before the 1832 war, Cass believed Ho-Chunk removal west of the Mississippi was a forgone conclusion.

In his final report to Lewis Cass immediately following the Rock Island council, General Scott seemed both pleased with and surprised by the process and its outcome: "The whole arrangement was, in truth, under the circumstances, very much in the hands of the commissioners." He added that if he and Governor Reynolds had "agreed to just & equitable provisions in favour of the Winnebagos, it was because conscience required that they should be treated with justice and liberality."⁶¹ The fate of the Rock River Ho-Chunks and their homeland was in their hands. No doubt some of the commissioners' leverage rested on Sauk band

⁵⁸ Lewis Cass, "Removal of the Indians," *North American Review*, January 1830.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Lewis Cass to Winfield Scott, 15 June 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 1, 140. John Hall points out that Cass never identified which Native groups were friendly or neutral, indicating his desire for all Indians to be removed. Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 214-15.

⁶¹ Winfield Scott and John Reynolds to Lewis Cass, 22 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1187.

testimonies they collected, but other factors undermined the capacity of Ho-Chunks to resist or even limit the demands made by the U.S. officials at the treaty council.

Amidst the myriad political forces stacked against them, the Ho-Chunk were physically suffering by September 1832. Evidence that Ho-Chunk delegations arrived at Rock Island in September semi-starved appears in the correspondence among agents, officers, and officials. Captain Gideon Low was instructed by either Henry Gratiot or John Kinzie to send food with Whirling Thunder, White Crow, and Little Priest for their journey to Rock Island in September and, Low reported, “It will be also necessary for me to supply their families with a small quantity during their absence.”⁶² Ho-Chunk hunger began several months earlier, however. Army and militia scouts stumbled upon starving Ho-Chunks in the Koshkonong swamps in mid-June. Around this time, Kinzie began feeding Ho-Chunks at the Portage. In mid-July, General Atkinson sent for provisions from Fort Winnebago to feed the massive military force at Koshkonong. Having nothing left for the Ho-Chunk, Kinzie requested two to three thousand bushels of corn from his superior, George Porter. The circumstances of the war, Kinzie explained, had left “a very large proportion of the Winnebagos in a state of semi-starvation.”⁶³ The condition of the Ho-Chunk worsened in the weeks before the council. They were nearly starving, and the future held no real promise of bettering conditions. Nothing seemed in their favor when they arrived at Rock Island.

⁶² Gideon Low to Winfield Scott, 3 September 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1101.

⁶³ John H. Kinzie to George B. Porter, 12 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 774-775.

Starving Time

At the Portage in late September, Juliette Kinzie awaited the arrival of her husband, John, from the Rock Island council. News of the treaty and the cholera outbreak there reached her first. Though terrified for her husband, Kinzie also felt sadness for the Ho-Chunks after learning that “the Indians had consented to the sale of their beautiful domain.” Kinzie considered herself to be among the Ho-Chunks’ most passionate advocates. At the same time, she believed that Indian removal was a benevolent policy. Removal seemed the only option for the Ho-Chunks. The Ho-Chunks showed some signs of the ill effects brought by white settlement and unscrupulous traders, yet they remained more isolated and self-sufficient than their Algonquian-speaking neighbors. Nonetheless, Kinzie did not put much faith in the Ho-Chunks: “If they persist in retaining [their lands], and become surrounded and hemmed in by the white settlers, their situation is more deplorable than if they surrendered their homes altogether.”⁶⁴ Over the past two years, Kinzie had grown to admire the beauty of the Ho-Chunks’ homeland as well as their fondness for it. By the end of her second summer at the agency, she could not imagine a different solution to the Ho-Chunk problem: “there is no alternative in such cases,” she concluded. When writing her memoir years later, Kinzie reiterated her belief that the Rock River Ho-Chunks, who understood their circumstances, “gave up their lands at the proposal of Government” and made the “best bargain” they could for lands in the west.⁶⁵ Like virtually all memories of her time at the Fort Winnebago agency house, her recollection of the treaty of 1832 bore Kinzie’s wide-eyed and well-meaning, though ill-informed, optimism.

⁶⁴ Kinzie, *Wau-bun*, 351.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 453.

Unlike most Americans at the time, who were all too willing to blame the myriad problems facing Indians on Indians, Juliette and John Kinzie understood that the condition of the Ho-Chunks was a direct result of the war. Juliette Kinzie explained:

Many causes conspired to make an early [annuity] payment desirable. In the first place, the Winnebagoes, having been driven from their homes by their anxiety to avoid all appearance of fraternizing with the Sauks, had made this year no gardens nor corn-fields. They had, therefore, no provisions on hand, either from present use or for their winter's consumption, except their scanty supplies of wild rice. While this was disappearing during their protracted detention at the Portage, they were running the risk of leaving themselves quite unprovided with food, in case of a bad hunting-season during the winter and spring.⁶⁶

Having spent the planting and cultivating moons in service to both the Americans and their Sauk kin, by the first frosts of the fall, the Ho-Chunks were starving. Kinzie could see it. Anyone who saw them could see it. They needed help and hoped to collect on the annuities and supplies promised by the recent treaty.

Starving and in great need, the greater part of the Ho-Chunk nation convened at Fort Winnebago, "in obedience to a notice sent by Governor Porter." George Porter had announced an annuity payment at Fort Winnebago, and the Rock River Ho-Chunks would use this opportunity, and audience, to surrender the accused Ho-Chunk men among them. The Ho-Chunks hoped to collect more than cash for the pledged annuity payment, however. They, along with their agents, anticipated corn rations. They needed food. The two to three thousand bushels of corn requested by John Kinzie, with instructions to be "delivered here or near this place, in October or sooner," had not yet arrived.⁶⁷ When the conflict ended in August, John Kinzie side-stepped proper procedures to attain much-needed corn for the Ho-Chunks. He commissioned the

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 357.

⁶⁷ John Kinzie to George Porter, 12 July 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 775-775.

sutler at Fort Howard to procure a couple boatloads of corn expressly for the Indians, but was told “there was no corn to be obtained from Michigan.”⁶⁸ It is unclear why Governor Porter preferred to come to Fort Winnebago and administer treaty annuities himself. In any case, he was late. As Juliette Kinzie recalled, “The time appointed had now arrived, and with it the main body of the Winnebagos.”⁶⁹

At least 3,000 Ho-Chunks, those belonging to the Rock River and Portage agencies, convened in the vicinity of Fort Winnebago in late September 1832. In accordance with Article 9 of the treaty, and also as a show of good faith, Rock River Ho-Chunk leaders intended to surrender the men accused of killing or injuring Americans during the recent conflict. The surrender took place amid a grand ceremony orchestrated entirely by the Rock River Ho-Chunk, for an audience comprised of troops and officers garrisoned at Fort Winnebago, John and Juliette Kinzie, and Henry Dodge. Looking out over the Portage road on the morning of the surrender, the awaiting audience could see “a moving concourse of people, in which brilliant color, glittering arms, and, as they approached still near, certain white object of unusual appearance could be distinguished.”⁷⁰ As the parade got closer and the drum beat louder, the Portage audience saw that the Rock River Ho-Chunk headmen were “in their most brilliant array” and the prisoners “all habited in white cotton, in token of their innocence.” But for the government’s coercion and threat to punish their families by not paying them annuities, the Ho-Chunk

⁶⁸ Kinzie, *Wau-bun*, 358. The Fort Howard sutler was Benjamin Kercheval. Kercheval told John Kinzie that the only available corn was in Ohio. Even if a purchase was approved and the corn delivered to Green Bay, the Fox River would be partially frozen and too treacherous to navigate until its spring thaw.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 349-50.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 352. White Crow presided over the surrender, giving a speech that emphasized the importance of the ceremony, but also that the accused were innocent and would soon be freed. White Crow, a master craftsman of stories, ceremony, and performance, had no doubt planned the well-attended ceremonial surrender for an absent and tardy Governor George Porter.

prisoners could have easily remained free as long as they wished.⁷¹ Rather unceremoniously, the Ho-Chunk prisoners were led away to the Fort Winnebago jail. The Ho-Chunks had planned to depart for their winter hunting grounds following the surrender ceremony, but they chose to wait for their annuities.

Ho-Chunks accepted the terms of the 1832 treaty under great duress. Juliette Kinzie witnessed and recorded the melancholy mood among the Ho-Chunk as they waited for Governor Porter's arrival. Among the signatories loudest in their condemnation of the treaty was Wild-Cat, who Kinzie called "the Falstaff of Garlic Island."⁷² Kinzie met Wild Cat in 1831, shortly after her arrival at the Portage. She described him as "a fat, jolly, good-natured fellow, by no means the formidable animal his name would imply." She had seen his Garlic Island village from Lake Winnebago on her way from Green Bay to the Portage. "It was little wonder that he should shed bitter tears, as he did," she remembered, "over the loss of his beautiful home on the blue waters of Winnebago Lake." Because of its prominent position on Garlic Island, Wild Cat's village was well known to white travelers. It was here that Judge James Doty stopped to purchase much-needed vegetables from the island villagers on his way to Prairie du Chien in 1823. Sarah Collins Doty, among other travelers before and since, was struck by the "fine permanent lodges and fine cornfields" that housed and fed over a thousand inhabitants. In 1832, the permanent lodges remained, but their fields were empty.⁷³

⁷¹ Juliette Kinzie points out that it "was a work of some little time on the part of the nation to persuade these suspected individuals to place themselves in the hands of the whites....The trial of Red Bird, and his languishing death in prison, were still fresh in their memories." Kinzie also intimates that these men only gave themselves up because they believed themselves innocent and hoped the American officials would, too. Kinzie, *Wau-bun*, 352.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 352.

⁷³ Publius V. Lawson, "Summary of the Archeology of Winnebago County, Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Archeologist* 2, no. 1 (October 1902): 40-85, 60.

Wild Cat faced misadventure on his way to Rock Island in early September. Someone dropped two kegs of whiskey in his canoe on the Fox River with such force that the boat needed repair. John Kinzie believed that Wild-Cat was enticed into a “desperate frolic,” probably by traders. Reflecting on the treaty, a weeping Wild Cat claimed that “If he had not been accidentally stopped on his way to the treaty and detained until it was too late, he would never, never have permitted the bargain.”⁷⁴ The 1832 treaty was no bargain, however. Unethical white men and their whiskey worked to silence Ho-Chunk voices at Rock Island. When Juliette Kinzie recollected the response a delayed Wild Cat received from his fellow Ho-Chunks, the story had a different tone: “The shouts of laughter which greeted this explanation were so contagious that poor Wild-Cat himself was compelled to join in it, and treat his misfortune as a joke.”⁷⁵ The loss of the Ho-Chunks’ homeland, and their impending hunger crisis, was no laughing matter, however. When weeks passed by without sign of Porter, John Kinzie advised the Indians to go to their hunting grounds. He would send for them when the governor and the supplies arrived.

George Porter’s arrival in early November was not the celebratory one Ho-Chunks and the Kinzies had envisioned. Nearly two months late, Porter’s boat arrived at Fort Winnebago with none of the corn or other requested provisions. The governor had silver for the annuity payment and traders arrived at the fort to sell supplies, but brought nothing to eat. Little Elk told Porter what he already knew: “All our corn has been destroyed during the past summer; our only hope for the present is the chase.” Game was scarce, village leader Little Elk explained, and “the time has now past for laying up our winter’s supply of provisions.”⁷⁶ In their weakened state, waiting near the fort for the arrival of provisions seemed the better option. Now the Ho-Chunk

⁷⁴ Kinzie, *Wau-bun*, 353.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 363.

⁷⁶ Memorandum of a talk held with Winnebagoes, at Fort Winnebago, 8 November 1832, in *Correspondence on the Subject of the Emigration of Indians* (Washington: Duff Green, 1835), 88-95.

leader did not think they would make it if they began their migration to winter hunting grounds so late. Had General Scott not provided for them in September, giving the Ho-Chunks a portion of their rations stipulated in the treaty for removal supplies, Little Elk believed his people would already have starved.

Little Elk exercised far more self-control in his reproach of Governor Porter than White Crow, but the Portage band orator shared White Crow's disgust for the annuity payment arrangement. Little Elk complained that the 500 Ho-Chunks of the Prairie du Chien agency received as much in goods and payment as the 3,800 of the Rock River and Portage bands. The orator complained of the previous debts claimed by local traders—"They come to our father here [Kinzie] with long papers, to take all our money. When we had no money, they never troubled us with their ugly papers."⁷⁷ The traders, he complained, took all the silver, leaving nothing for the Ho-Chunks: "We have but little, and that little they want, and to starve us."⁷⁸ Porter and Kinzie spent the day after Porter's arrival inside the agency house going over accounts, no doubt determining what amount of Ho-Chunk silver was owed the various local traders.⁷⁹ Little Elk asked for both the governor's and the Great Father's pity for "his red children." Little Elk also made a singular, clear request: "We want corn."⁸⁰ Little Elk was no doubt addressing matters of money and debt, but in contrasting currency and corn, the orator reminded the governor that hungry Ho-Chunks could not eat silver. They needed corn.

George Porter had missed the elegant and moving September surrender ceremony, which was no doubt choreographed by White Crow and other leaders. Ever since, the Rock River orator's anger had grown with his hunger. White Crow did not suppress his disgust. Ho-Chunk

⁷⁷ Ibid., 89.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 89.

⁷⁹ George Porter, Journal, November 5, 1832, *Emigration of Indians*, 52.

⁸⁰ Memorandum of a talk held with Winnebagoes, 8 November 1832, *Emigration of Indians*, 89.

people were in a “very bad situation” from the conflict, made worse by Porter’s neglect. “We have waited here long,” White Crow admonished the governor. The Ho-Chunks’ sufferings resulted from the alienation of their resource and land. For this, White Crow blamed the Americans.⁸¹

The Ho-Chunks had little choice at Rock Island. Had they refused to relinquish their lands, the commissioners could very well have taken it without the promise of annuities and corn. Coercion and pressure was very much part of the treaty-making process. In 1828, White Crow and his fellow Ho-Chunks were detained in Washington by U.S. officials until they agreed to sell their lands in the lead region. The leaders put their trust in the president’s promises: “he told us we would be a great deal better off than ever we were before,” White Crow recalled how he and hundreds of Ho-Chunks bore evidence of betrayal, claiming that “ever since, we have been worse off.”⁸² Americans promoted the same falsehoods that September as they had in 1828, assuring the Rock River Ho-Chunks that they would be better off once there was distance between them and the whites. White Crow knew the Americans to be liars. General Atkinson and other “White chiefs” had promised White Crow in June 1832 that if his people left their village, “as soon as the fuss would be over, we should be recompensed for our losses for corn.”⁸³ When the Americans called the Ho-Chunk liars, White Crow reminded them: “but I find that some of you whites are as good at it as many of our young men.”⁸⁴ Procuring food was crucial. “I am looking for something to eat hereafter from our great father, the President,” White Crow

⁸¹ Ibid., 90.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 89.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 90

said, warning Porter that, “if we should not get something, we shall certainly lose half of our nation.”⁸⁵ Faced with a starving death, they had no choice but to make their marks on the treaty.

At the 1832 treaty council, White Crow had tempered his anger in hopes of preventing land loss. Now, with the Rock River country sold and forced relocation looming for nearly 4,000 Ho-Chunk, White Crow spoke his mind. The Ho-Chunks had suffered personal affronts from whites. Upon returning home after the conflict, White Crow and his fellow villagers found not only their corn gone and fields destroyed, but the graves of their people disturbed: “They took all our corn, and many articles, as they passed our villages, and have even taken up the dead that were buried, and took off the blankets, &c., in which they were wrapped.” The troops’ “conduct in this particular,” White Crow said, “has hurt the feelings of many of our young men.”⁸⁶ The Rock River Ho-Chunks looked into the coming winter hungry, humiliated, and defeated.

At Rock Island, General Winfield Scott had talked at length about justice for the Americans killed or harmed by Ho-Chunks. Previously restrained in his speech, White Crow spoke here pointedly of the injustices suffered by the Ho-Chunks at the hands of Americans. The accused Ho-Chunks had now spent several weeks in what Juliette Kinzie referred to as the “dungeon.” The men, one of whom was a teenager, were “badly off for clothing,” and, White Crow warned, “they are freezing to death.” White Crow pleaded for Porter to treat the accused better, to deliver justice: “They are only *suspected*; and until they are found guilty, they should not be treated as if they wished their death.”⁸⁷ In the end, White Crow made a sole request: “If our great father, the President, intends to do anything for us, in the way of corn,” it should be

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid. Emphasis in original. The italicized word “suspected” probably indicated White Crow’s vocal inflection.

sent to Gratiot's Grove: "We would wish our father (Mr. Gratiot) to have it, so that we can get it when we call for it."⁸⁸ They trusted Gratiot. And trust that fall was almost as scarce as corn.

Earlier issues White Crow had with Gratiot were now forgotten. Though White Crow had maligned Gratiot at the treaty council for his bad advice, the orator now credited him with keeping the Ho-Chunk alive. White Crow reflected on Gratiot's long history in the region: "He has done too much for us, before he was appointed agent, for me to forget him. Things of that kind are not easily forgotten," the orator stated. Of this, George Porter was made aware. By the end of his speech, White Crow had detailed a history of American presidents plotting to take Ho-Chunk lands, military officers and federal officials renegeing on promises, and white troops digging up Indian corn and Indian dead, assaulting Ho-Chunk sacred and ancestral roots in their homelands. Both Little Elk and White Crow stood by their agents, John Kinzie and Henry Gratiot, respectively, while admonishing their superiors. In 1816, when the "long knives" reoccupied forts in the region after the War of 1812, Ho-Chunk leaders explained to U.S. officials and officers that they would judge the Americans intentions toward the Ho-Chunk by their actions. Those who treated the Ho-Chunk with respect, and kindness, would be counted as friends. Those who authored Ho-Chunk misery would not. The history of Ho-Chunk and American relations had, it seemed to White Crow, displayed the greed and deceit of the United States. The 1832 treaty was a clear example of such relations.

The weather worsened each day following George Porter's arrival by horse on the November 4. By the morning of November 6, the day the boat arrived with the annuity payment, several inches of snow covered the ground. Payment was delayed for another two days. The severity of the weather, Porter's secretary Joshua Boyer wrote in the governor's journal,

⁸⁸ Ibid.

“prevented many of the Indians, who were bad off for clothing, from leaving their wigwams.”⁸⁹ Many young men among the Ho-Chunk also skipped the scheduled payment, seizing upon the “advantages which the snow furnished for hunting.”⁹⁰ When the Ho-Chunk and Porter met in council, the sky had cleared, and the temperature dropped to twenty-four degrees.⁹¹ Starvation rations were difficult enough in good weather. With winter closing in, the annuity payment was welcome, but the Ho-Chunks needed food.

Governor Porter’s response to Little Elk and White Crow matched the day’s chill. Prior to visiting Fort Winnebago, Porter held councils with various Native communities in the east, most recently at Green Bay. “All of these, on each council day,” Porter said, “the sky was clear, the sun bright, and the weather fine.” Drawing a stark contrast to weather conditions at the Portage, the governor asked, “Why is it that the Great Spirit is not equally propitious here?” Now his turn to speak, Porter berated the Ho-Chunks. “You know the cause,” he told them. The Ho-Chunks had not surrendered all the accused men “concerned in the murder of our white men.” The 1832 treaty named eight Ho-Chunks and the accused murderers sitting in the Fort Winnebago prison numbered seven. Porter was willing to starve the Ho-Chunks into this final submission, if not to death.

Porter also alluded to the Ho-Chunks’ less clearly defined wrongdoings in the conflict. They had guided, fed, and sheltered the Sauk band while steering American troops in the opposite direction. “Last summer, if you recollect, as now, you wished to persuade us that you were our friends and could show a ‘clean hand,’ innocent of any participation with, or

⁸⁹ George Porter, November 6, 1832, *Emigration of Indians*, 53.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁹¹ Ellen Whitney dates the council in which Little Elk, White Crow, and George Porter spoke as November 8, 1832, but Porter’s journal records it as November 7, 1832.

knowledge of, the intentions of the Sacs.”⁹² If the Ho-Chunks had told the truth, “the Great Spirit would not have got angry with you, and placed you in your present troubles.”⁹³ In Porter’s narrative of events, much like Scott’s at Rock Island, there was no room for Ho-Chunk agency, only treachery. The treaty commissioners had failed in their attempt to extract testimony from the Prairie du Chien or Portage Ho-Chunks implicating White Crow and the Rock River Ho-Chunks in a broader scheme of thwarting U.S. war efforts. Still, Porter pointed to that alleged treachery, rather than American misdeeds, to explain the distressed circumstances of the Ho-Chunk: “Your women and children would not, as they now are, have been suffering for want of something to eat. All this will be a good lesson to you, and teach you hereafter always to tell the truth.”⁹⁴ Porter’s Great Spirit, who condemned Ho-Chunk people for their actions in the recent conflict, was not Mą’ųna, or Earthmaker. Earthmaker and Grandmother Earth loved their children, the People of the Big Voice. Their sacred gifts of homeland and corn had been at the core of Ho-Chunk peacekeeping tactics and deceptions throughout the spring and summer of 1832. Porter appropriated Ho-Chunk cosmology but failed to imagine a Ho-Chunk logic that encouraged and justified their actions in the conflict.

In many documented instances, Porter seemed to be an advocate for Native peoples, but when it came to their economic well-being during treaty-making and annuity payments, Porter looked out for his friends, and his friend were not Indians. John Kinzie and his Detroit- and Chicago-based family were among Porter’s closest friends and the Portage Indian agent enriched these relations. After Porter awarded Kinzie and Benjamin Kercheval exclusive roles as merchants at treaty proceedings in 1833, for instance, traders sued him for allowing these men a

⁹² Memorandum of a talk held with Winnebagoes, 8 November 1832, *Emigration of Indians*, 94.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

monopoly.⁹⁵ Despite numerous Indian complaints about unscrupulous traders, such as those voiced in November 1832 by Little Elk, Porter routinely sided with traders who claimed debts owed them by various bands and tribes at every annuity payment. Kinzie, it appears, benefited from Porter's discretion on these matters as well. In 1833, after examining merchant claims against the Potawatomi, Indians who were entitled to cash grants in lieu of reservations according to their treaty, Porter awarded over one hundred thousand dollars to the Kinzie family and to the family of Thomas Forsyth, Kinzie's uncle and former Indian agent to the Sauk and Fox.⁹⁶ Facing down more than allegations regarding corrupt traders, Porter accepted none of the guilt placed upon him by the Ho-Chunks for their troubles and made no apologies, even for his tardiness. All of the suffering endured by the Ho-Chunks at present had been their doing, Porter believed. It was the Great Spirit's desire to punish his Ho-Chunk children. The Ho-Chunks received their annuity payments, but nothing was given to the families of Ho-Chunk Indians who "had behaved improperly" during the recent conflict, per orders from the War Department. To add injury to insult, neither Porter nor Boyer mentioned Little Elk's and White Crow's pleas for corn in the governor's journal for the War Department.⁹⁷ When Porter left the Portage a few days later, he loaded his pack-horses with so much government corn from the Fort Winnebago stores that they became fatigued, forcing the governor to purchase another horse from an Indian

⁹⁵ R. David Edmunds, *The Potawatomis: Keepers of the Fire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 249.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ This stands in contrast to detailed journal entries. For instance, after visiting Thomas Owen's Chicago agency, Boyer detailed the dire situation among the Potawatomi, expressed by Indian leaders and Owen. The entry from November 17 explained why the Indians had no corn crop and implored the War Department to consider Owen's request for provisions: "Their people must die with hunger, if some assistance was not granted." Porter, Journal, 17 November 1832, *Emigration of Indians*, 53.

trader around eighty miles south of the Portage.⁹⁸ This was the new order that would be visited on the Ho-Chunks following the 1832 treaty.

The scene that unfolded at the Portage in October and November offered early indications that the Ho-Chunks might resist their removal. It also made plain that the Ho-Chunk were not pleased with the recent treaty, as General Scott and Governor Reynolds suggested in their report to Secretary of War Lewis Cass. While at Fort Winnebago for Porter's visit and annuity payment, Henry Gratiot became convinced that the Ho-Chunks would resist their removal. Having no opportunity to convey this information to Porter before the governor departed Fort Winnebago, Gratiot sent him a letter immediately afterward. "I am fearful that the Winnebagoes will not willingly leave Rock River, & anticipate that force will be required to drive them from the country."⁹⁹ One message Gratiot heard came from Turtle Creek bear clan chief, Manapega, or Old Soldier:

Before we remove, we will carry wampum to the neighboring Indians; then we will move, but will return again. The Great Spirit is mad with the whites and when they gather again to come against us, he will send a sickness among them that will destroy them and we will remain on Rock River in peace.¹⁰⁰

Contrary to Porter's claims, Old Soldier believed the Great Spirit would lend assistance to the Ho-Chunks, helping them remain in their homelands while destroying the Americans. The sickness referred to by Old Soldier was undoubtedly cholera. The disease had sidelined General Scott's force in July, killing hundreds and terrorizing the region's white settlements. Cholera had

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Henry Gratiot to George B. Porter, 21 November 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1215. See also John Dixon's report from December 6, 1832 *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1229; Henry Atkinson to Alexander Macomb, December 20, 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1234.

¹⁰⁰ Diedrich, *Winnebago Oratory*, 45; Henry Gratiot, Journal, 19 September 1832, OIA, LR, Prairie du Chien Agency, roll 696; Nancy Lurie, "The Winnebago," in *Northeast*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger, vol. 15, *Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 698-99.

also taken a popular Ho-Chunk chief, Lame Caramani, days after he signed the September treaty.¹⁰¹ Old Soldier's words may have given Porter a chill, for the governor had fallen ill shortly after departing the Portage for Chicago. His illness, described as a "severe cold in his neck," was first recorded in his diary on November 16 and much delayed his work and travel. As of November 28, Porter was "very unwell" and attempting his return to Detroit.¹⁰²

Henry Gratiot worried less about retribution from Ho-Chunk spirit beings than about Old Soldier's fierce expression of belonging. So, too, did Henry Dodge. In a letter to General Atkinson, Dodge wrote, "Mr Gratiot states that the Winnebagoes say the Great Spirit sent the cholera among the whites to punish them for the injustices they have done the Indians."¹⁰³ Furthermore, "The Winnebagoes appear much opposed to the treaty made at rock Island," and "the Winnebagos of Rock river say they had nothing to say in the sale of their Country that the War chief General Scott, made them sit down when they wanted to *talk*."¹⁰⁴ In response to the Ho-Chunks' threat of spiritual warfare and displeasure over the treaty, Dodge advocated the removal of the Rock River and Portage Indians west of the Mississippi and prohibiting their

¹⁰¹ Lame Caramani was also known as Chiioonaazhinga, or He Who Stands in the House.

¹⁰² George Porter survived his unidentified illness in 1832 but succumbed to cholera in July 1834 when the next outbreak hit Detroit.

¹⁰³ Whether this was Dodge's interpretation of Old Soldier's message, or if Gratiot offered Dodge a more detailed version than he did Porter, it is worth mentioning that a great portion of the army never engaged in the chase for the Sauk band and his followers because so many soldiers were sickened with cholera. For more information on cholera's impact on the 1832 conflict, see *BHW 1831-1832*, vol. 2, bk. 3. For the correspondence in which Dodge expresses concern for removal in the spring, see Henry Dodge to Henry Atkinson, December 10, 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1231-1232. Atkinson had also received correspondence from John Dixon, who countered Gratiot's concerns over whether Ho-Chunk would remove peaceably. Dixon claimed that the Ho-Chunk had been changed by the recent conflict and feared the whites. Atkinson, in a letter to his superior Alexander Macomb, dismissed Gratiot's concerns and favored Dixon's opinions because of Dixon's "intimate acquaintance with the Winnebagoes." See Henry Atkinson to Alexander Macomb, 20 December 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1234.

¹⁰⁴ The inconsistency in Dodge's spelling is in the original source. Dodge to Atkinson, 18 December 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1231-1232.

resettlement above the Wisconsin. Otherwise, the entire Ho-Chunk nation would be collected in one place and no doubt cause trouble for whites in the lead region.¹⁰⁵

Contributing to growing anxiety among the region's military and political officials was the escape of the Ho-Chunk prisoners from the Fort Winnebago jail in December.¹⁰⁶ Juliette Kinzie mused that while the "prisoners had never read the memoirs of Baron Trenck...they had watched the proceedings of the badgers," making their escape after six weeks of digging through a tunnel that stretched from the jail floor to beyond the walls of the fort.¹⁰⁷ Dodge informed Atkinson that the frontier settlers, who already lived in fear of Indian reprisal, were impatient for a mounted force to "give confidence to the settlers and oblige the Winnebago's to leave the Rock river country should they be disposed not to go peaceably." No doubt needing Atkinson's approval, Dodge expressed his desire that his mounted rangers would "be in motion as early as horses can live on the grass."¹⁰⁸ Whereas Dodge's future prospects improved with the threat of Indian unrest as there would be more work for him and his militia. General Atkinson, alternately, approached the matter from a different position. Further unrest would be interpreted as Atkinson's failure to solve the issue finally.

John Dixon from Galena offered Atkinson yet another perspective on the future of the Ho-Chunks. Dixon believed that the Ho-Chunk posed no threat and did not entertain any idea of an uprising. He claimed, "to a certainty . . . there is no other calculations amongst [the Ho-Chunk]." The tables had turned. The Ho-Chunks, Dixon informed Atkinson, now feared the

¹⁰⁵ Dodge to Atkinson, 18 December 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1231-1232. Dodge's explicit concern here is Ho-Chunk proximity to white miners. Dodge claimed concern that the Ho-Chunk "will be placed in a situation to communicate directly with the Chippewas and Sioux," increasing potential for intertribal violence, or potentially, a pan-Indian alliance against white settlers.

¹⁰⁶ Henry Dodge to Henry Atkinson, 10 December 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1231-32.

¹⁰⁷ Kinzie, *Wau-bun*, 361.

¹⁰⁸ Dodge to Atkinson, 18 December 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1232.

whites.¹⁰⁹ Atkinson gave no orders to mobilize. While Indian agents and military officers deliberated over potential Ho-Chunk resistance, Ho-Chunks themselves prepared for a starving time. Dodge and others prepared for a forced removal. The Americans looked forward to a land vacant of Indians. The Ho-Chunks saw only hunger in the absence of corn. Their lands, it seemed, were slipping away.

Corn has a rich presence in Ho-Chunk lore because it meant their survival or death. Unlike wild rice, maize required human planting and cultivation. Kernels from each year's crop had to be saved as seed for the following year. The Ho-Chunks understood that eating these seed kernels, even to gratify a deep hunger, ensured future starvation. Corn seed had to survive through the Winter Moon, the period following harvest, until the next planting season, or the Corn Moon. If the kernels survived a starving time, so too would the Ho-Chunks. The stories the Ho-Chunks told one another in the winter months took the form of cautionary tales and allegories about the consequences of violating this practice. Seed corn was often represented by a nit, or young louse, in these tales. This may seem counterintuitive, but in Ho-Chunk lore, such pests signaled times of plenty. In the early twentieth-century, Ho-Chunk informant Oliver LaMère explained to anthropologist Paul Radin, "When lice are about, the people are never in want of food, they say, for lice dread hunger among humans above all else, and always make sure people are well fed. When people are in hunger, [people] have nothing to do, and spend all their time hunting down their lice."¹¹⁰ The Lice Spirit brought fecundity, protecting lice as well as seed corn. During a starving time, kernels risked consumption by their human hosts. The

¹⁰⁹ See Henry Atkinson to Alexander Macomb, 20 December 1832, *BHW* vol.2, bk. 2, 1234; John Dixon to Henry Atkinson, Dixon's Ferry December 6, 1832, *BHW*, vol. 2, bk. 2, 1229.

¹¹⁰ Richard L. Dieterle, "The Man's Head," *The Encyclopedia of Hočąk (Winnebago) Mythology*, 2005, <http://www.hotcakencyclopedia.com/ho.LittleHumanHead.html> (accessed March 15, 2013). Another title for this story is, "Little Human Head." The American Philosophical Society holds the "Paul Radin Papers, 1912-1959.

potential for failed crops and hunts was always there, and the Ho-Chunk sought to guard against prolonged famine through storytelling. In 1832, however, famine loomed and the weather all but ensured more trouble. Following a poor harvest, the only hope lay in successful hunts. But lack of snow that season made locating deer difficult. The extraordinary circumstances of the summer may have also made the hunt harder. Unprecedented human movements through the region as well as the absence of crops in fields, which attracted animals, may have driven out large game. The crisis of 1832 left no part of Ho-Chunk seasonal rounds intact.

The three agents fumbled over what to do or how to help the Indians in the absence of emergency provisions. The concern of Joseph Street at Prairie du Chien echoed the cautionary tales among the Ho-Chunk. In December 1832, Street informed his superior, William Clark, about the immediate food shortage among the Prairie du Chien Ho-Chunk and what that might mean for the next year's planting: "Their crops have been destroyed, and they have no seed." The Ho-Chunks of his agency needed government-supplied corn to eat, but Street urged that a "large part of their rations ought to be corn for planting, otherwise they will raise nothing any where another year." Street had a small amount of corn stored at his agency, though he preferred not to distribute this to the Ho-Chunks: "I shall endeavour to keep some part of what I have for seed for the Mississippi Indians, if I can keep them from eating it up this Winter. They are suffering & must have some to eat."¹¹¹ Though unaware, Joseph Street had inserted himself into familiar Ho-Chunk stories, helping to protect the seed corn through the Winter Moon.

Further isolated from settlements and dependable delivery of supplies, John and Juliette Kinzie were about to become eyewitnesses to a deadly winter and spring for the Ho-Chunk. John Kinzie's appointment to the Portage agency, as well as Henry Gratiot's to Rock River,

¹¹¹ Joseph Street to William Clark, 5 December 1832, *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 1227-1228.

came after the violence of 1827 between Ho-Chunk Indians and whites in the lead region. Federal and regional officials felt that more oversight in Ho-Chunk country was needed. In 1832, Kinzie, the Portage sub-agent was twenty-nine years old. Kinzie spoke the language of the Ho-Chunk fluently, having studied it since he was fifteen and a clerk for the American Fur Company. Kinzie's connections with the region's Native peoples began with his father, who had established a Chicago-based trading post in 1804. Kinzie's comfort among the region's Indian peoples made him uniquely qualified as an Indian agent, particularly among the Ho-Chunk, who seemed quite fond of him. The Indians of both the Rock River and Portage agencies called John Kinzie Shaw-nee-aw-kee, or The Silver Man.¹¹² A great deal of John Kinzie's wealth was derived from trade with Indians, some of it unethical, yet Kinzie's desire to prevent white settlement in the Old Northwest in order to preserve it as an Indian hunting ground constituted rare white advocacy for Native lifeways east of the Mississippi. His wife Juliette Kinzie proved an extraordinary addition to the agency house when she joined her new husband there in the fall of 1830.

While John Kinzie negotiated his position as the Great Father's civilian liaison to the Ho-Chunks, Juliette Magill Kinzie observed the "fascinating spectacle of wilderness life" at Fort Winnebago from fall 1830 to summer 1833. Having grown up in Connecticut reading about noble Indians, Juliette Kinzie looked forward to her life at Fort Winnebago, especially her plans to document the lives of the Ho-Chunk. To maintain her roots as a "true daughter of New

¹¹² The Kinzie's provide much information about the Ho-Chunks and processes during the starving time. John Kinzie distributed annuity payments to the Ho-Chunk Indians assigned to his agency at Fort Winnebago and to those assigned to Henry Gratiot's Rock River agency. Juliette Kinzie listed the principal villages in her memoir: "The principal villages of this division of the tribe were at Lake Winnebago, Green and Fox Lakes, the Barribault (Baraboo), Mud Lake, the Four Lakes, Kosh-ko-nong, and Turtle Creek." She added, "Messengers were dispatched, at or before the arrival of the annuity-money, to all the different villages, to notify the heads of families or lodges to assemble at 'the Portage.'" See Juliette Kinzie, *Wau-bun*, 80.

England,” Juliette Kinzie brought her “knitting-work and embroidery” as well as her piano.¹¹³ At times consumed by the task of domesticating her new space, from “little knick-knacks arranged on the mantel-piece” to the “white curtains hung at the windows, and the chairs and dining table each in its proper place in relation to the piano,” Juliette Kinzie nonetheless spent a great deal of time with Ho-Chunk Indians.¹¹⁴

Juliette Kinzie, like her husband John, referred to the Ho-Chunk as her “children” and often entertained them as guests in her agency home. As Juliette Kinzie learned, Ho-Chunk people tended to treat closed doors as suggestions only, entering often without knocking. Tensions arose occasionally in the agency house when either Juliette Kinzie or her Ho-Chunk guests unknowingly deviated from one another’s customary rules of courtesy and respect. For example, a Ho-Chunk named Washington Woman, whose trip to Washington D.C. in 1828 earned her this moniker, once borrowed a favorite conch of Juliette’s without permission so her villagers could listen to the ocean sounds inside.¹¹⁵ Ho-Chunk women would bring gifts of food and mats to Juliette Kinzie, throwing them at her feet, and on more than one occasion, Kinzie “failed to appear pleased, to raise the articles from the floor and lay them carefully aside,” at which the Ho-Chunk women expressed their shame and said, “Our mother hates our gifts.”¹¹⁶ Kinzie did not understand the importance of gift-giving in the Ho-Chunk community.

The Ho-Chunks, as well as the Menominee and Potawatomie of the region, reciprocated Juliette Kinzie’s sincerity and welcomed her to their lands as well as into their homes. Native

¹¹³ Ibid., 37-38.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 79.

¹¹⁵ Washington Woman was a daughter of White Crow, known also as Indian Princess. She married Yellow Thunder shortly after the 1828 trip to Washington D.C. She lived in her husband’s village on the Fox River in present-day Winnebago County. During her travels in the east, Washington Woman demonstrated great ease. Her name reflects her worldliness following the trip. See A. B. Stout and H. L. Skavlem, “The Archaeology of the Lake Koshkonong Region,” *Wisconsin Archeologist* 7, no. 2 (March 1908): 86-87.

¹¹⁶ Kinzie, *Wau-bun*, 277

men and women proved vital to Juliette Kinzie's travel and comfort and even intervened to feed and shelter her when she was lost. Many Ho-Chunks, in turn, believed that the Kinzies had saved their lives, for example, by administering vaccines during smallpox outbreaks.¹¹⁷ There was a shared affection between the Kinzies and the Ho-Chunk people of the Portage and the Rock River bands, but the role of Indian agents in the age of removal meant that affection was only part of the relationship. Also, Indian agents and their families were well-provided for when their Indian children were not. Gradations of privilege and suffering become more evident in the day-to-day details of their interactions, particularly during the starving time of 1833.

Living among the Ho-Chunk people meant living amidst their misery. Juliette Kinzie bore witness to the ravages of hunger and bitter cold upon her Ho-Chunk children and she eventually wrote about it in her memoir.¹¹⁸ Juliette Kinzie suffered the starving Ho-Chunks, but never hunger itself. Still, her observations and her words are invaluable given the virtual absence of other accounts of Ho-Chunk pain, death, and survival during the starving time. Her words, however inadequate, shatter a silence that would otherwise allow us to forget this awful—and preventable—period of Ho-Chunk agony and sorrow.

The Kinzies dreaded the arrival of spring. “What we had long anticipated of the suffering of the Indians began to manifest itself as the spring drew on,” Kinzie remembered, “Its extent

¹¹⁷ Peter Shrake, *The Silver Man: The Life and Times of Indian Agent John Kinzie* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2016).

¹¹⁸ Kinzie, *Wau-bun*, 373-380. Scholars working in the fields of American Indian and western history have increasingly focused on the trauma and violence of history, including the physical pain of colonialism. Here, Kinzie's narrative is most important. For example, see Karl Jacoby, *Shadows at Dawn: An Apache Massacre and the Violence of History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), and Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (New Haven: Harvard University Press, 2006). These scholars draw, in part, from Elaine Scarry, who examines the limits of human language to articulate or express the human body in pain. See Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

was first brought to our knowledge by those who came in little parties begging for food.”¹¹⁹ After the annuity payment and George Porter’s visit in November, John Kinzie sent the Ho-Chunk away from the Portage to their winter hunting grounds. The Ho-Chunks were loath to go, but the agent convinced them that hunting would help them survive. The winter hunt went poorly. The lack of snowfall prevented even the best and most healthy Ho-Chunk hunters from tracking the deer they desperately needed. Ho-Chunks instead ate what the deer would have eaten—bark and acorns.¹²⁰

Hungry, exhausted, and cold, the Ho-Chunk people began returning to the Portage as early as February.¹²¹ Portage residents and visitors as well as the Ho-Chunks who made it to the agency house informed the Kinzies about the horrors: “We heard of their dying by companies from mere inanition, and lying stretched in the road to the Portage, whither they were striving to drag their exhausted frames.”¹²² Such descriptions never made it into eastern newspapers, where an American public still celebrated the removal treaties that followed the Black Hawk War. In public narratives rationalizing Indian removal, real human misery was absent. Americans who tolerated forced Indian relocations, either as punishment for Indian violence against whites or as policy that might “save” the Indian race, never imagined a wilderness road transformed into a graveyard. This was, tragically, what the road to the Kinzie home had become. For this “daughter of New England,” a believer in the Noble Savage, the scenes and stories surrounding her home collapsed the comfort of distance that the vast majority of American citizens enjoyed from the horrors of dispossession.

¹¹⁹ Kinzie, *Wau-bun*, 384.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 374.

¹²¹ Sometime in February 1833, George Porter wrote to Elbert Herring about the Ho-Chunks’ situation. This letter is missing from the record, but see Herring’s response to Porter, 2 March 1833, *Emigration of Indians*, 94.

¹²² Kinzie, *Wau-bun*, 385.

Juliette Kinzie believed that she and her husband had exhausted their capacity to help the Ho-Chunks. After every meal, Juliette Kinzie set aside “every remaining particle of food” from their plates “to be given to some of the wretched applicants by whom we were constantly thronged.” John Kinzie purchased a barrel of bad flour from Fort Winnebago and made bread, or something close to it, to give to beggars.¹²³ If recalling her regular meals during the Ho-Chunks’ starving time gave Juliette Kinzie pause while writing her memoir, the inequality did not deter her altruistic self-reflection.

Faces that Juliette Kinzie struggled to recognize appeared in the agency windows. When Old Grayheaded Decorah’s daughter Elizabeth appeared in the window, she was recognizable only by her missing nose. She had suffered this mutilation by her former Fox husband when she refused to live among his people. Elizabeth had visited the Kinzies every two or three weeks since their arrival, walking ten miles from her Baraboo River village to watch “with great interest our employments—our sewing, our weeding and cultivating the garden, or our reading.”¹²⁴ Now, Juliette Kinzie was struck by Elizabeth’s transformation, “How wan she looked!” Elizabeth responded to Kinzie’s customary Ho-Chunk greeting with “a sigh that was almost a sob.” Old Gray’s daughter “did not beg, but her countenance spoke volumes,” and Juliette Kinzie gave her the plate of food from which she had been eating. Instead of devouring its contents, Elizabeth took it from the house, undoubtedly to share it with other Ho-Chunks nearby.¹²⁵ *Wau-Bun*, Juliette Kinzie’s memoir abounds with examples of Ho-Chunk generosity, yet Elizabeth’s selflessness in this moment made a lasting impression on the agent’s wife. The

¹²³ Ibid, 373.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 270. Elizabeth was the woman’s baptismal name.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 385-386.

spring of 1833 it seems, brought Juliette Kinzie's first exposure to the physical agonies of the starving time.

Kinzie's earlier recollections of healthy and happy Ho-Chunks inhabiting a landscape of abundance also fill the pages of *Wau-Bun*. On her journey to the Portage in September of 1830, she first encountered Ho-Chunk Indians as they gathered cranberries: "We were hemmed in by a little fleet of canoes which surrounded us, the women chattering, laughing, and eagerly putting forward their little wooden bowls of fresh cranberries as an offering of welcome to me."¹²⁶ The Ho-Chunk were always generous to the Kinzies. But the Ho-Chunk women who had brought venison, ducks, pigeons, whortleberries, wild plums, and berries of all kinds over the years now visited the agency house seeking food from the Kinzies. John and Juliette emptied their pantry until "the time at length arrived when we had nothing to give." The Kinzies, like all the white and *Métis* families living near the Portage, "were now obliged, of necessity, to refuse further assistance."¹²⁷

The Ho-Chunks did not disperse, however, and more came every day from the winter hunting grounds. At the center of Ho-Chunk woe stood the agency house:

We were soon obliged to keep both doors and windows fast, to shut out the sight of misery we could not relieve. If a door were opened for the admission of a member of the family, some wretched mother would rush in, grasp the hand of my infant, and, placing that of her famishing child within it, tell us, pleadingly, that he was imploring 'his little brother' for food. The stoutest man could not have beheld with dry eyes the heart-rending spectacle which often presented itself. It was in vain that we screened the lower portion of our windows with curtains. They would climb up on the outside, and tier upon tier of gaunt, wretched faces would peer in above, to watch us, and see if indeed we were as ill provided as we represented ourselves.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Ibid., 59-60.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 373.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 386.

In her imagination, Kinzie felt she shared the Ho-Chunks' misery. The Ho-Chunks knew better. What the Portage and Rock River Ho-Chunk people thought of the Kinzie's disengagement with them is unknowable. The darkened windows and locked door undoubtedly signaled to the Indians that change was afoot. Moreover, compassionate Indian agents and their wives, in the end, lacked the power and influence necessary to preserve Native life and livelihoods. Through Juliette Kinzie's compassion we are able to glimpse the starving time's real victims, but her ability and her willingness to remove herself from Ho-Chunk suffering reminds us that she did not share in it. Juliette Kinzie's privilege prevented her from imagining herself and the Ho-Chunks as "us." Rather, the Ho-Chunks remained, always, "them" in her memoir. Never did Kinzie speak of "our suffering." She always called the Ho-Chunk "them."¹²⁹

Juliette Kinzie seems to have overlooked other causes of the starving time. In her memoir, which she dedicated to Lewis Cass, "the tried friend of the pioneer and the red man," Juliette Kinzie recalled thinking of only one thing during this time: "Oh! The boats—the boats with the corn! Why did they not come?"¹³⁰ Had she known that their longtime friend Lewis Cass had ignored pleas made to him by Indians and their agents, including John Kinzie's most desperate appeal for "emergency rations" in August of 1832, Juliette Kinzie may have reserved warm words for Cass. Cass and George Porter, who are warmly recalled in Kinzie's memoir, had contributed to the unprecedented human misery visited upon the Rock River Indians, and to the misery she met at the door and windows of her agency home. The Ho-Chunks' pain is discernable through Juliette Kinzie's anguish.

¹²⁹ Dening, "Empowering Imaginations," 422. See also, Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xvi.

¹³⁰ Rorty, *Contingency*, 375.

Not until February of 1833 did George Porter write to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Elbert Herring regarding the dire and deadly conditions among the Ho-Chunks. “Your representation of their present destitute condition has been promptly acted on by the department,” Herring told Porter. The U.S. treasurer would pay 500 dollars to Porter’s office, “to be applied, if you shall think it advisable, for the investment of corn, where it can be procured most advantageously, and transported most readily, and at the smallest expense, to be distributed among [the Ho-Chunk].” If the “obvious danger of distress, in respect of deficient means of subsistence” emerged again, Herring implored Porter to let his department know without delay, so “that timely measures may be taken to mitigate the evil.”¹³¹ With that, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs made funds available for the corn White Crow had first requested nine months earlier. Everything, it seemed, happened on the government’s schedule, not according to the needs of the Ho-Chunks.

The boats of corn arrived in the spring, when the thawing ice on the river allowed. Juliette Kinzie recalled the announcement of their arrival as “a thrilling and most joyful sound.” The day remained vivid in her memory. Hundreds of emaciated Ho-Chunks gathered along the bank. She watched them as they watched the boats navigate the winding course of the river. She remembered how the Ho-Chunks stood there, hatchets in hand, and their children nearby holding empty kettles and pans. There would be no accounting for incoming and outgoing rations this time. Without delay, the Indians with hatchets broke open corn barrel after corn barrel. The children filled their kettles and pans, “and hastened to the fires that were blazing around to parch and cook that which they had seized.” And they ate.¹³²

¹³¹ Elbert Herring to George Porter, 2 March 1833, *Emigration of Indians*, 605.

¹³² Kinzie, *Wau-bun*, 376.

Among those gathered at the bank was Wild Cat, the village chief of Garlic Island. Kinzie once described Wild Cat as “jolly” and “fat,” but by the spring of 1833, he was hardly so. Kinzie wrote, “As the first boat touched the land, we, who were gazing on the scene with anxiety and impatience only equaled that of the sufferers, could scarcely refrain from laughing, to see old Wild-Cat, who had somewhat fallen off in his huge amount of flesh, seized ‘the Washington Woman’ in his arms and hug and dance with her in the ecstasy of his delight.”¹³³ These were the survivors of the starving time. Ho-Chunk people whom Juliette Kinzie considered friends, even family, had experienced incomprehensible distress—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. For Kinzie, watching an emaciated Wild Cat dancing by the river bank undoubtedly provided a gentler memory of this time.

Juliette Kinzie viewed the arrival of corn as a turning point for the Ho-Chunks. Their suffering was over, she thought, and once “refreshed and invigorated” from their feasts, “our poor children departed once more to their villages, to make ready their crops for the ensuing season.”¹³⁴ Whether John Kinzie shared his wife’s fanciful thinking, that the Ho-Chunk of the Portage and Rock River agencies would use their fields one more season, is unclear. The 1832 treaty marked June 1, 1833, as the deadline for Ho-Chunk removal, the traditional beginning of the Cultivating Moon for the Ho-Chunk people.

The boiled corn was a welcome feast for the Ho-Chunks, though it offered them only momentary relief. Forced removal, not hunger, now represented the depth of their misery. The treaty pledged rations to feed Ho-Chunks during their transition to new homes, as the timing of removal would interrupt their customary work clearing and preparing fields, building up corn

¹³³ Ibid., 376.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 387.

hills, and finally planting their seed corn and other crops. Ho-Chunks undoubtedly had discussed their pending removal in the previous months, strategizing to ensure that the following winter and spring would not be a starving time. Though some leaders contemplated remaining in their villages and planting their existing fields, others sought permission from their agents to relocate much earlier in the spring so they could prepare new fields for their crop. Undoubtedly, all agreed that corn should not come from boats or the federal government. Rather, in the Winter Moon, they believed it should come from caches beneath their homes, and during the Corn Moon, the crop should grow out of their corn hills, as worldly reminders of Grandmother Earth's sacred gift.

In March and April, federal and regional officials, including Indian agents, governors, and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, debated the merits and legality of forcing the Ho-Chunks west of the Mississippi. The 1832 treaty stipulated that the Ho-Chunk must leave the ceded territory by June 1, but that they could go either north of the Wisconsin or west of the Mississippi. By early April, Elbert Herring had been persuaded that “all, or nearly all” the provisions and supplies promised to the Ho-Chunk should be made at Prairie du Chien, as the “object of the treaty is to accommodate the migration Indians.”¹³⁵ He added, “If any considerable quantity is delivered at Fort Winnebago the Indian will remain about there, and our object may be frustrated.” Herring's concerns echoed those of Joseph Street and others. American officials hoped that Ho-Chunk hunger and dependence on the U.S. for food would guarantee their removal from the Rock River country. But their scheme produced only difficulties. Rather than expediting their relocation, hunger intensified Ho-Chunks' desire to remain.

¹³⁵ Elbert Herring to William Clark, 2 April 1833, *Emigration of Indians*, 644.

However fanciful Juliette Kinzie's visions seemed of Ho-Chunks planting corn in their ancestral fields and corn hills, that is precisely what many of them did. As federal officials discussed using provisions to inconvenience the Ho-Chunks, the Indians took actions to provide for themselves. Earlier than usual that spring, Ho-Chunks planted their corn. The Ho-Chunks knew that if their crops survived the April frosts, they would not be ready for harvest before the June 1 deadline for removal. The Ho-Chunks facing removal counted on compassion from their Great Father, and asked to remain one more Corn Moon.¹³⁶

John Kinzie and Henry Gratiot—who observed the starving time with dreadful closeness—supported Ho-Chunk requests to stay and plant their fields one more season. They wielded little influence over local and federal officials who opposed delaying Ho-Chunk removal. However, their pleas on behalf of the Ho-Chunks found sympathy with an unlikely ally: territorial Superintendent of Indian Affairs and Governor George Porter. Porter endorsed Gratiot and Kinzie's request for the Ho-Chunks to remain another season and cultivate their crops, forwarding the appeal to the Indian Office and Elbert Herring, Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Porter's friendship with John Kinzie may have obliged him to assist the agent in ameliorating Ho-Chunk suffering, and the governor's conscience may have compelled him to help the Indians rather than chastise them, as he had done before the starving time. But he wielded no influence in Washington. Elbert Herring's response was swift and defeating. The Ho-Chunks must remove before the June 1, 1833, deadline. Moreover, Herring made clear that Porter and his sub-agents needed to realign their sympathies with the United States, not the Indians.¹³⁷ The tranquility and prosperity of the region and its white settlers depended upon it.

¹³⁶ Memorandum of a Talk at Four Lakes, April 29, 1833, with the Winnebago nation of Indians, of Rock River," *Emigration of Indians*, 203-205.

¹³⁷ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 225-230.

Elevated to national renown by his actions in the recent war and by his appointment by the president to command a new federal dragoon unit, Henry Dodge also weighed in on the matter of Ho-Chunk removal. But his sentiments echoed those of Lewis Cass, John Reynolds, Elbert Herring, and Andrew Jackson: “I consider it important to the future growth of this country that the Winnebagoes should be forced to leave the country they have ceded to the U.S.”¹³⁸ Local citizens and settlers needed assurance that the Indians were preparing to leave ceded lands, prompting the War Department and Henry Dodge to gather the Portage and Rock River Ho-Chunk Indians for a council in late April at Four Lakes (Madison).

The most prominent village leaders among the Rock River Ho-Chunks came: White Crow, Little Priest, Little Black, Spotted Arm, White Breast, and Whirling Thunder, all of whom had spoken out against white encroachment on their lands since at least the 1820s. Whirling Thunder spoke more than usual on this occasion.¹³⁹ Apart from his hereditary role as a chief, Whirling Thunder was respected in and outside the Ho-Chunk community for his oratory skills as well as his shrewdness and wisdom in councils. Speaking for all Rock River Ho-Chunks at Four Lakes, Whirling Thunder attempted to convey the experience of his people during the starving time to Henry Dodge, a man determined to see them removed. “Our women have broken their hoes in digging roots to live upon,” he said, “We resemble children begging of their father for something to eat.”¹⁴⁰ Referring to them as his fathers, Whirling Thunder called upon Henry Dodge, Henry Gratiot, and John Kinzie to allow the Ho-Chunks to stay for one more

¹³⁸ Henry Dodge to Alexander Macomb, 13 April 1833, in *The Iowa Historical Record*, vol. 4-6 (Iowa City: State Historical Society, 1888-1890), 454.

¹³⁹ By April of 1833, Whirling Thunder may have assumed the role as the principal chief of the Rock River band, due to Man-eater’s declining health. Indeed, Man-eater, who lived on the northeast shore of Koshkonong, had not been present at any councils or talks over the previous year.

¹⁴⁰ Memorandum of a Talk at Four Lakes, April 29, 1833, with the Winnebago nation of Indians, of Rock River,” *Emigration of Indians*, 203-205, quote on 203.

planting season: “We are very anxious to remain on our lands for this season, that we may be able to raise corn wherewith to keep us from starving the ensuing winter.”¹⁴¹ Whirling Thunder explained, “We are not like you whites. We never provide for a rainy day.” Whirling Thunder was speaking about a subsistence lifestyle, one where a combination of crop failure and bad hunts always proved deadly. But his metaphor hardly captured the strange and terrifying position the Ho-Chunk found themselves in. In the previous months, the U.S. government had demonstrated its inability, even unwillingness, to provide for the Ho-Chunks. Forcing the Ho-Chunks to remove in the spring of 1833, to abandon their fields and corn hills as well as their fishing and gathering places, all but ensured another starving time.

Along with twelve other Rock River Ho-Chunk Indians, Whirling Thunder had signed the 1832 treaty. He understood its terms specifying the removal deadline. In his opinion, though, the government had not met its treaty promises: “A great deal of provisions has been promised to us.” Whirling Thunder told Dodge that those promises were broken.¹⁴² Then the chief recalled General Winfield Scott’s words at Rock Island in September, when he claimed that the U.S. did not want Ho-Chunk lands for white settlement, but rather to create separation between Indians and whites. If this were true, Whirling Thunder reasoned, then their ceded lands would not be occupied or planted by whites so soon.

Dodge went through the motions of a council, allowing all those present to speak their minds, but he had arrived at Four Lakes with closed ears. Impassioned speeches from emaciated Ho-Chunk leaders and orators had no impact. “The stipulations in the [1832] treaty will be complied with,” Dodge informed the Indians and their agents, “the provisions, as promised, will

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 203.

¹⁴² Ibid.

be given.”¹⁴³ Dodge rejected outright Ho-Chunk requests to remain in ceded lands. But when he failed to grasp the significance of corn to the comfort and security of the Rock River Indians, Whirling Thunder made it clearer: “The sooner the corn can be delivered to us here the better to enable our removal.”¹⁴⁴ If Dodge and the Great Father would not honor Ho-Chunk requests to raise corn in their ceded homelands, Whirling Thunder hoped they would hear the logic in linking sufficient corn supplies with his people’s willing relocation.

White Crow delivered the same message, with his usual pointed logic. The orator warned that if he removed without corn, he did not know how many of his people would follow.¹⁴⁵ Removal was not a simple matter of Ho-Chunks abiding by treaty or law; the Ho-Chunks required security and subsistence. White Crow pondered aloud whether his people would be so feeble, or so indisposed to removing, if provisions of corn promised by the federal government had arrived on time and in sufficient quantities. “If we were well supplied with provisions, we would not think it hard to remove from our country,” he explained, “but we know we will suffer.”¹⁴⁶ Beyond White Crow’s measured jab at government inaction and indifference to his people’s ongoing suffering, the orator reiterated a physiological and spiritual logic among the Ho-Chunk: corn would be an essential component for their successful reestablishment elsewhere.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 205.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Dodge was likely not authorized to renegotiate any aspect of the Rock Island treaty, even if he had wished to do so. Whether or not the Ho-Chunks gathered at Four Lakes in April of 1833 understood the limits of Dodge’s power, or that of their agents, they pressed him on the terms of the treaty. For thorough discussion of the 1832 Rock Island treaty between the U.S. and the Ho-Chunk, see Tetzloff, “The Diminishing Winnebago Estate in Wisconsin,” 65-76.

¹⁴⁶ Memorandum of a Talk at Four Lakes, April 29, 1833, with the Winnebago nation of Indians, of Rock River,” *Emigration of Indians*, 203. White Crow tried to get Dodge to understand the security that corn offered his people. To appease White Crow’s anger and distress over finding his village’s crop destroyed the previous year, federal officials pledged to recompense White Crow for his losses. “I am looking for something to eat hereafter from our Great Father...if we should not get something, we shall certainly loose half our nation....” Memo of a Talk held with the Winnebagos, Nov. 8, 1832, OIA, LR, Prairie du Chien Agency, roll 696.

Home was where they cultivated their corn and their sacred belonging, as Earthmaker and Grandmother intended.

Whether the Ho-Chunks knew that Henry Dodge lacked authority to alter the terms of the treaty, White Crow and Whirling Thunder pressed for other concessions, all related to subsistence. They sought permission to hunt in Rock River lands after their removal. “The young men can get along well in the new country,” White Crow explained, “but the old men, like myself, cannot. We wish to hunt small game.”¹⁴⁷ Each of their requests—to plant corn, to hunt, to gather in ceded lands—had been expressly prohibited in the treaty. Dodge reminded them of this. His purpose at Four Lakes was to ensure Ho-Chunk removal. He pledged wagons, oxen, and canoes, and two companies of soldiers to assist in their relocation.¹⁴⁸ Such were the constraints of federal policy focused on displacing people, not placing them. If the federal government forced the Rock River Ho-Chunk to remove, sending soldiers but no corn, White Crow warned that his people would be compelled to return.

In a letter to Lewis Cass following the Four Lakes council, Dodge complained, “The Winnebagoes are the most difficult Indians to understand I have ever been acquainted with.” More than one capable interpreter was present at Four Lakes, including Pierre Paquette and John Kinzie, so the nature of Dodge’s perplexity is unclear. In any case, Dodge doubled down on his efforts to bring about Ho-Chunk removal without delay, telling Cass that the Ho-Chunks did not want to leave the ceded lands and that “nothing but a strong mounted force would drive them off.”¹⁴⁹ Dodge was, indeed, responding to Ho-Chunk yearnings to stay home.

¹⁴⁷ Memorandum of a Talk at Four Lakes, April 29, 1833, with the Winnebago nation of Indians, of Rock River,” *Emigration of Indians*, 205.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Minutes of a Talk at Four Lakes, April 29, 1833...enclosure in Henry Dodge to Lewis Cass, 3 May 1833, OIA, LR, Winnebago Agency, roll 931; See also, Diedrich, *Winnebago Oratory*, 48.

In the spring of 1833, the region's white residents grew were eager for the Ho-Chunk people to leave. As Indians resumed their traditional spring subsistence activities—returning from hunts, fishing, and preparing and planting their fields—whites grew alarmed. Some of this concern stemmed from rumors about how much ammunition the Ho-Chunks had purchased immediately after the November 1832 annuity payment at Fort Winnebago. The Ho-Chunks purchased more than usual, hoping to survive the winter almost exclusively on animal flesh. Rumor of a seasonal medicine feast at Turtle Village (Beloit) prompted the editor of the *Galenian* to report that 4,000 warriors were gathered there, compelling John Kinzie and Henry Gratiot to quell baseless white fears.¹⁵⁰ The idea of a Ho-Chunk plot against Americans could not be more absurd since, Kinzie explained, the Ho-Chunks at that time were starved and incapable of waging war. Still, spring feasts among the Ho-Chunks and Potawatomi portended the Native planting season. This undoubtedly enraged local whites, and in response many invented claims of Indian property and crop theft. Whites understood that for Ho-Chunks, planting corn was a sign of belonging and permanence.¹⁵¹

Real or not, the threat of an Indian uprising unsettled white people and that was enough to uproot destitute Native communities from their homelands. As Dodge put it in April 1833, “Such is the dislike of the people of their frontier generally of these two [Ho-Chunk and Potawatomi] nations . . . that war must be the inevitable result unless they are all removed.”¹⁵² Dodge even tried to convert local anti-Indian sentiment into a volunteer removal force, calling on

¹⁵⁰ Rumors and letters referenced Potawatomi Indians as well. See Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 206-236. See pp. 219-220 for Medicine Feast rumors.

¹⁵¹ Though some desperate Potawatomi and Ho-Chunk Indians undoubtedly took food from whites, rumors of Indian depredations and thefts were exaggerated and used by politicians and newspapers to underpin the call for their removal. See Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 225-26.

¹⁵² Quoted in Louis Pelzer, *Henry Dodge* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1911), 73-74, 74n134

“the people of the mining country, to form themselves into mounted Companies,” in case the Ho-Chunk resisted removal¹⁵³ Dodge considered fighting Indians and removing them to be settlers’ duty.

Henry Dodge had emerged as a hero from the Black Hawk War and, by the summer of 1833, he would expand his reputation by removing the Ho-Chunk. In March 1833, Dodge’s militia force of Mounted Rangers began its transition into a regular unit in the U.S. Army. Many Ho-Chunks believed the dragoons would exterminate them. To beef up Dodge’s standing on the frontier, Congress turned his provisional “Battalion of Mounted Rangers,” made famous in soldier and newspaper accounts of the Black Hawk War, the First Regiment of U.S. Dragoons in the army. Now that the U.S. was in the business of removing Indians, it needed a permanent force dedicated to Indian removal. Dodge’s mounted men stood out because of their “celerity of movement”—and Congress could think of no other unit “for the more perfect defense of the frontier.”¹⁵⁴ The dragoons, or rangers, as they were sometimes called, would become the primary removal force. Pro-Jackson newspapers praised the new recruits for their virility and masculinity, even as critics of forced removal charged that any man who did such work lacked morality. A writer for the *Buffalo Journal*, for example, reported on the dragoons who were “destined for the Indian service,” calling these men “the finest looking raw recruits we ever saw.”¹⁵⁵ Indian removal provided young men an unequalled opportunity to show off their “thaws and sinews,” and their selection for this elite unit became a source of pride for their hometowns. The *Buffalo Journal* reported that Captain E. V. Sumner had selected the New York members

¹⁵³ Louis Pelzer, *Henry Dodge*, 73-74.

¹⁵⁴ Quoted in Pelzer, *Henry Dodge*, 80n140. For description of dragoons as a force of frontier miners, see Hall, *Uncommon Defense* 223, 332n72. Primary and secondary sources referring to Dodge’s mounted troops use the term Mounted Rangers as well as Dragoons. See also *Nile’s Weekly Register* 45, August 24, 1833, 422.

¹⁵⁵ *Nile’s Weekly Register* 45, August 24, 1833, 422.

himself, choosing those of high educational achievement who stood on average 5'8" all from the northern and western counties of the state.¹⁵⁶

The removal force and especially Henry Dodge's military promotion unsettled the Ho-Chunk. John Hall writes of this new unit:

Although the appointment of regular army officers such as Stephen Watts Kearny, Jefferson Davis, and Philip St. George Cooke to subordinate posts infused the unit with some of the discipline and regimentation of the U.S. Army, the First Dragoons retained the character of the earlier Mounted Rangers, which is to say that it was a unit manned by frontier miners who wished to expel Indians from the region.¹⁵⁷

The Ho-Chunk held a similar view of Dodge and his Dragoons. John Kinzie reported that the Ho-Chunk of his and the Rock River agency believed Dodge and his regiment had "been organized purposely for their extermination."¹⁵⁸

Dodge's men began their work of removal by constructing camps—one on the northwestern shore of Fourth Lake, near present-day Madison, and another on the Wisconsin River—and readying wagons, oxen, and boats to round up and move Ho-Chunk families out of ceded Rock River country. Other mounted troops circulated expresses to ensure a timely rendezvous of Indian agents, Ho-Chunks, and soldiers to initiate removal. Its completion would be marked by the last Ho-Chunk crossing north of the Wisconsin River. By the end of May, the camps were completed, the Fourth Lake camp near a favored Ho-Chunk spring. The soldiers

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 223.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., also 332n.72; Kinzie to Herring, 22 March 1833, Transcripts from Indian Office Files, Box 65. The army and the militia served distinct roles when it came to frontier relations between Native Americans and white settlers. Hall describes the Old Northwest during the early decades of the nineteenth century as a place ruled in part by quasi-martial law. The army was present in frontier regions to "subordinate the unruly frontiersmen to federal regulation," while the militia was only formed in response to Indian-white unrest. The militia and the army often clashed over their views on law and order and Indian rights. The elevation of Henry Dodge and some of his volunteers to a unit in the U.S. military came with these inherent tensions. See Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 222-25.

called it Camp Bellefontaine, and they called their Wisconsin River station Camp Knox. The Ho-Chunks exhibited no further signs of resistance, so Dodge instructed his men to employ a “mild but firm attitude towards the removing Indians” while ranging up and down the streams to ensure that every Ho-Chunk crossed the Wisconsin River.¹⁵⁹

Meanwhile, many Rock River Ho-Chunks had chosen Sauk Prairie on the Wisconsin River as the site to remake their villages. Here, they explained, “there was formerly an Indian field” as well as a village. Lake Winnebago and Fox River Ho-Chunk planned to relocate elsewhere in the Baraboo River Valley just east of the Wisconsin River.¹⁶⁰ In May, the Ho-Chunk began gathering at Four Lakes, as instructed, though impatient, hungry, and wanting supplies and escorts across the Wisconsin River. If they were going to feed themselves during the next Winter Moon, they needed to abide by the beckoning Corn Moon. The Ho-Chunk needed to prepare fields, which meant clearing rocks and trees, raising beds, and building up corn hills. The Cultivating Moon would not wait.¹⁶¹

It was immediately apparent to the Ho-Chunk gathered at Four Lakes how ill-prepared the federal government and its removal force was for their relocation, and no plans were in place for reestablishment in their new home. The U.S. government had not delivered the promised and much-needed corn rations to the Ho-Chunks at Four Lakes. Per Elbert Herring’s orders, the rations had been sent to Prairie du Chien. Anticipating a food shortage, Gratiot ordered three wagons of corn from Galena and planned to distribute it to departing Ho-Chunks at Four Lakes.

¹⁵⁹ See Kellogg, *The Removal of the Winnebago*, 23-29.

¹⁶⁰ Louise Phelps Kellogg, “The Removal of the Winnebago,” *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters* 21 (1924): 26-27.

¹⁶¹ It is not clear whether the Ho-Chunk had preserved seed corn, considering many villages had already planted in ceded lands. Henry Gratiot to Elbert Herring, 12 June 1833, *Emigration of Indians*, 429-430.

At great personal cost, Gratiot's actions produced enough corn to ease Ho-Chunk anxiety and convince them to remove.¹⁶²

In the months since the Rock Island treaty council, Gratiot worked hard to reduce Ho-Chunk fears about removal. He met with the Ho-Chunk often and advised them on how to live in their new lands and where to hunt. He told them to "cross the Mississippi where game is abundant" for their hunts, "and by going fifty or sixty miles back from the river, [you] will find buffalo and elk and on the water courses beaver."¹⁶³ All this was an attempt to lure the Ho-Chunks west.

Despite their hurry to re-plant their corn seeds on the other side of the Wisconsin River, the Ho-Chunk did not leave Four Lakes without ritual. On the eve of their removal, Gratiot observed a ceremony involving fire. Many fires had been burning, but all were extinguished, and then a single Ho-Chunk kindled a new flame. Historian Louise Kellogg referred to this as a removal ceremony, though Gratiot thought he had witnessed a Medicine Dance, a ceremony that, traditionally, contained many complex rituals and lasted several days. If in fact Gratiot observed a portion of the Medicine Dance, which was never intended for an outsider's eyes, he probably saw the fire ritual.¹⁶⁴ Of course, the Ho-Chunk did not have a ceremony for forced removal, but aspects of Ho-Chunk ceremonies that symbolized the cycle of life and death, beginnings and endings, of one generation passing on knowledge of a good and long life to the next, such as the fire ritual in the Medicine Dance, likely comforted those preparing to leave their ancestral

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 429.

¹⁶⁴ Kellogg, "The Removal of the Winnebago," 27. The Medicine Dance is complex, containing numerous rituals. While Gratiot may have identified it correctly, the meaning of its practice is difficult for outsiders to ascertain. One objective of the ceremony is to pass knowledge from one generation to the next. Another meaning of the ceremony, according to Paul Radin, is the symbolism of life and death, a cycle of something ending and something else beginning. Fire and tobacco were central components of the Medicine Dance. See Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 319-321.

lands.¹⁶⁵ Recognition of the cyclical nature of being abounds in Ho-Chunk rituals and habits. Accordingly, Gratiot's interpretation of the newly kindled fire, the meaning he believed Ho-Chunks derived from it, was probably close to the truth: the Ho-Chunk "hoped [the fire] would burn clear and make them happy."¹⁶⁶

Fire had deep meaning for Ho-Chunks.¹⁶⁷ They regarded it as a spirit being, and every Ho-Chunk dwelling provided space for fire, which explains their name for it: "He Who Stands in the Middle of the Lodge." But fire's intimate and consistent presence in the daily life of Ho-Chunks was reflected in another name they used for it, "Our Grandfather."¹⁶⁸ Ho-Chunks often invoked the symbolism of the fire to represent their individual homes and collective villages. So, when Whirling Thunder explained to the treaty commissioners at Rock Island in 1832, "It is the wish of all my brothers, chiefs, and braves to remove their fires across the Wisconsin," his words indicated that the Rock River Ho-Chunks were willing to move their homes. To "remove their fires" was to leave a place and to build up a fire meant to affirm belonging in a place. Whirling Thunder also meant that the Ho-Chunks would move their "Grandfather." Perhaps what Gratiot observed at Four Lakes was a ceremony during which the Rock River Ho-Chunks rekindled a single fire to carry with them to their new home in different lands as way of ensuring that their

¹⁶⁵ Each of the rituals performed within the Medicine Dance possessed their own meanings while reinforcing the larger significance and purpose of the Medicine Dance. See Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 302-330, and 318 for the fire ritual specifically.

¹⁶⁶ Kellogg, "The Removal of the Winnebago," 27; Henry Gratiot to Elbert Herring, 12 June 1833, *Emigration of Indians*, 429-430; Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 302-330, esp. 318-321.

¹⁶⁷ I use the past tense here for the sake of consistency, but I do not mean to suggest that Ho-Chunk peoples today do not hold this belief.

¹⁶⁸ Paul Radin explains: "As a spirit [fire] possesses many gifts that are of use to human beings in their sojourn on earth, and in order to obtain them, mortals must make offerings of tobacco to him. He may also appear to them during their fastings and bless them with a number of powers. In addition to his other power, it is believed that he is the messenger of Earthmaker and the other spirits and that he transmits both the messages, as well as the offerings that mortals make to them, by means of the smoke that rises upward." See Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 118, 164, 411n 37.

“Grandfather” would follow them on their journey. Ho-Chunks relied on the same traditions that rooted them in their ancestral homelands to make sense of their alienation from these lands.

Juliette Kinzie recalled a bittersweet goodbye. The Portage Agency was coming to an end, and the Kinzies prepared to leave the Great Carrying Place and their shared home with the Ho-Chunks in the summer of 1833. Juliette Kinzie and her husband John had great affection for their “Winnebago children,” and this affection was reciprocated by the Ho-Chunk. When Ho-Chunks living near the Portage learned of their departure they “came flocking in, to inquire into the truth of the tidings they had heard, and to petition earnestly that we would continue to live and die among them.”¹⁶⁹ Old Decorah’s daughter, Elizabeth, crippled from rheumatism, made her usual ten-mile walk from her father’s Baraboo River village. When Juliette Kinzie confirmed that she would be leaving the agency, Elizabeth “sat for hours in the same spot, wiping away the tears that would find their way down her cheeks.”¹⁷⁰ Elizabeth was inconsolable: “No! never, never, never shall I find such friends again.... You will go away, and I shall be left here all alone.”¹⁷¹ Juliette Kinzie recalled, too, that “the fat, jolly Wild-Cat” also came and “gave way to the most audible lamentations.” On the morning of their departure, he insisted on holding the Kinzie’s baby boy, whom he called “my little brother.” He sat the baby on his “fat, dirty knee,” and lamented, “you will never come back to see your poor brother again!” After that, he “wept like an infant.” Then, the Kinzies departed *Wau-bun*, their agency home of nearly three years, with “sad hearts.”¹⁷² Juliette Kinzie travelled to Detroit and her husband to Chicago to ready their new home. As they left, a large group of Ho-Chunks accompanied John Kinzie across the Portage, and from her boat, Juliette Kinzie could “see them winding along the road, and hear

¹⁶⁹ Kinzie, *Wau-bun*, 378.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 379.

their loud lamentations at a parting which they foresaw would be forever.”¹⁷³ The Kinzies were leaving because most of their Ho-Chunks had left too. A month had passed since their June 1 removal deadline, and a land with no Indians needed no Indian agents.

The Kinzies understood their departure to be intimately linked to Ho-Chunk removal, and perhaps the Ho-Chunks knew the same. But certainly, the Ho-Chunks who had befriended the Indian agent and his wife were saddened by their departure because the Kinzies had come to symbolize an anchor in that place amidst so much change. The tears shed by Elizabeth and Wild Cat were for lost friends, but also for what had already been lost. To both Portage and Rock River Ho-Chunk Indians, the uninhabited agency house portended unwelcome change.

Seeding in Ceded Lands

The geography the Ho-Chunks were to leave would remain agricultural land, but different farmers would occupy and till the soil. This was the plan and process of removal. The reality, it would soon become apparent, was something different. Newspapers featured stories about the recruitment and movement of dragoons to the southeast and west for Indian removal and frontier patrols, but not everyone was convinced that Henry Dodge and his men would succeed in the removal of the Ho-Chunks. Charles Hammond, a lawyer, former state lawmaker, and fierce critic of Andrew Jackson, used his role as editor of the *Cincinnati Gazette* to condemn Indian removal for moral reasons. In 1833, he publicly scoffed at the idea of complete removal of Indians from their homelands.¹⁷⁴ In August, an anonymous writer addressed Hammond and

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Charles Hammond, *Cincinnati Gazette*, December 1829. See also, A. J. Langguth, *Driven West: Andrew Jackson and the Trail of Tears to the Civil War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 141. Hammond was among Henry Clay’s close circle of friends with the power of the pen and public influence. As editor of the *Cincinnati Gazette*, Clay requested Hammond’s assistance in the 1820s and 1830s to bolster his own presidential

his Ohio readers, claiming that the “Rock-river country” was a settler-ready landscape, cleared of its Indian occupants. “Mr. Hammond: It may be interesting to many of your readers to learn that the objects of the expedition to the north west this summer, under col. Dodge of the U. States’ dragoons, have been promptly and completely gained.” Not only had Dodge and his men recovered the eight Ho-Chunk prisoners accused of murder, who had escaped the previous summer from Fort Winnebago, the men accomplished the “removal of the entire nation of Winnebago Indians across the Ouisconsin river from the lands ceded to the United States by the treaty last summer at Rock island.”¹⁷⁵

The writer did not leave it to the imagination of Ohio readers to discern the meaning of Ho-Chunk removal, or of Indian removal more broadly. Ho-Chunk removal paved the way for the next phase of white settlement. The anonymous writer took up the work of enticing settlers to the Rock River country:

The removal of this nation has opened new fields for the enterprise of emigrants. Hitherto settlers have been deterred from locating in this country, and the bold few who did erect their cabins here, were in continual danger of attack from the Indians; the case is now changed; emigrants may as safely settle on the Rock River, the Ouisconsin, the Four Lakes...as upon any other lands in the west.¹⁷⁶

Booster literature like this visualized and editorialized on the potential development of a place. It encouraged settlement and investment, especially by extolling a territory’s agricultural productivity. Boosters often talked of lands as a wilderness on the threshold of becoming civilized, an ordered landscape of farms and towns and cities. But the “new fields for the

aspirations and to undermine Jackson’s bids for the White House. Hammond became notorious for his editorials questioning the legitimacy of Jackson’s marriage to Rachel Donelson Robards, for calling Jackson’s mother a “common prostitute,” and suggesting Jackson was the son of a “mulatto man.” See Robert Vincent Remini, *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 325-326.

¹⁷⁵*The Sandusky Clarion* (Ohio), August 21, 1833 (reprinted from *The Cincinnati Gazette*). This same story also appears in the *Niles Weekly Register*, August 31, 1833.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

enterprise of emigrants” had little to do with the agricultural fields left behind by the Ho-Chunks. Ceded lands had been transformed into a removal landscape marked by Fort Winnebago and defended by Dodge’s dragoons. The booster concluded: “I am confident it only remains for our citizens to know the new country and occupy it.” Such a narrative about Ho-Chunk removal speaks broadly to the meaning most Americans attached to Indian removal, and in particular, the policy’s outcome—western lands open for settlement and opportunity. The writer had served up the Old Northwest’s first removal narrative, turning Henry Dodge into its hero while also boosting settler interest in the region. The place-story justifying white belonging in the Rock River country that found traction during the Black Hawk War, that continued to evolve at Rock Island in September, that manifested itself in the treaty between the Ho-Chunks and the U.S. federal government, had finally reached its culmination—the removal of the Ho-Chunk from the Rock River country.

After August 1833, only one small detachment of dragoons remained in Wisconsin, instructed by Dodge to “range between Dodgeville and the Four Lakes and to observe the movements of the Winnebagoes” as they waited for their annuity payment.¹⁷⁷ The annuity promised in the 1832 treaty would be paid in September at the Portage agency house, and Dodge was concerned that the Ho-Chunks would remain in ceded lands. An early historical account of why the last soldiers left Four Lakes when they did explained: “the troops had effectually cleared the region of Winnebago stragglers.”¹⁷⁸ This would suggest that the soldier’s work involved more than observing.¹⁷⁹ For two months, the soldiers ranged up and down the Wisconsin River spying on Rock River Ho-Chunks, ostensibly preventing their returns to ceded lands. Dodge did

¹⁷⁷ *The Sandusky Clarion* (Ohio), August 21, 1833 (reprinted from *The Cincinnati Gazette*).

¹⁷⁸ Kellogg, “Removal of the Winnebago,” 23.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

not want the September annuity payment to be an excuse for the Ho-Chunks to remain in the ceded territory.

Rather than recognizing the events following the 1832 treaty for what they were—evidence that Indian removal was a process not a single event—the boosters promised the permanence of removal based on the remaining force as well as the soldiers at Fort Winnebago, who would “afford a permanent defence [sic] for the frontier settler.” In other words, Dodge had induced the Indians to remove, and the continued presence of his men would ensure that they stay gone. The editor who believed that whites need only move to the Rock River country overstated the power of settler land-lust; it also remained for the Ho-Chunks to leave. That, from the Indians’ perspective, was not so certain.

The Rock River Ho-Chunks had watched their watchers. After observing the troops dismantling their camp and departing the area, White Crow and an unknown number of Ho-Chunks returned to ceded lands to harvest wild rice. The *Galenian* reported the unsettling news:

Capt. Low, of the U.S. Army, who passed through this place last week, informed us, that the Winnebago Indians, of Rock river, who were removed by Col. Dodge north of the Wisconsin, or a great part of them, have returned to their old camping ground, near the Four Lakes, and are engaged in gathering rice and hunting as formerly. They say there is no game north of the Wisconsin, and they cannot live there. They talk of planting corn next season on Rock river.¹⁸⁰

The vast majority of Ho-Chunk Indians had no corn, as those living north and west of the Wisconsin River could not produce enough to feed the entire Ho-Chunk nation. The soil there was sandy. The winter was pressing in. The bobolink’s distinct song grew stronger in September, signaling the harvest-time for wild rice. The Ho-Chunks remained into September,

¹⁸⁰ *Galenian*, September 27, 1833. Excerpts of *Galenian* article were published in *Niles Weekly Register*, see “Miscellaneous” *Niles Weekly Register*, November 2, 1833, 149. A complete reproduction appears in *American Railroad Journal, and Advocate of Internal Improvements*, 685.

and they probably continued to harvest wild rice in October, long after the rice-eating birds were gone and the marshes silent.¹⁸¹ The Ho-Chunk, it appeared were not going anywhere.

The Ho-Chunks had countless stories about the Four Lakes and their belonging there dating back to deep time, yet news of their presence in that place startled Americans. In the previous weeks, newspapers around the nation reported, often triumphantly, on the efficient and complete removal of the Ho-Chunks by Henry Dodge and his men. White Crow's return challenged American notions of removal's permanence. Now, the region's settlers and officials faced the reality of removal's impermanence.

The editor of the *Galenian* responded to the short-lived removal of the Ho-Chunk with concern. The Ho-Chunk had always harvested wild rice around Four Lakes, but it was never their primary staple. In October of 1833, it was survival food. Undoubtedly the grain provided some relief from their hunger, but the Ho-Chunk people had suffered a great deal after the loss of their corn crop. They had resisted removal prior to their corn moons, and finding limited success in planting their seeds in new lands, they were faced with a decision.¹⁸² If the digging and tasseling moons of June and August had any meaning at all, the Ho-Chunks would have to remain in ceded lands, which they intended to do. To starving Ho-Chunks, returning was the only choice. Their centers had shifted north and west, but in a removal landscape created in part by their returns and hunger, Ho-Chunk subsistence migrations continued.

The *Galenian's* editor, Phileo, was a veteran of the Black Hawk War and served in Dodge's volunteer mounted battalion. He was among hundreds of militiamen led astray for

¹⁸¹ It is unclear why the soldiers left Four Lakes in October of 1833. Kellogg writes, "The dragoons' camp on Fourth Lake was kept up until October, when the troops effectually cleared the region of Winnebago stragglers." Kellogg, "Removal of the Winnebago," 28. John Hall writes that the "Ho-Chunks breathed easier when Dodge's troopers rode off to their winter quarters in Arkansas in October 1833, thereby eliminating the supposedly imminent clash of arms between Indians and federal troops." Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 223.

¹⁸² Norton William Jipson, *Story of the Winnebagos* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1923), 413-414.

several weeks in Koshkonong country by the Rock River Ho-Chunks, a demeaning experience that likely fueled his killing and scalping of invalid Indians left behind by the Sauk band. In his absence, the *Galenian* reported on its editor's bloody adventures, gleefully calling Phileo "the scalping editor."¹⁸³ Ahead of the treaty council in September 1832, Phileo used his editorializing power to advocate removal of the entire Ho-Chunk nation west of the Mississippi. So when he learned of returning Ho-Chunks at Four Lakes, Phileo viewed them no differently than he had Black Hawk and his followers: they were enemies and invaders of the United States:

If some efficient, decisive and energetic measures are not speedily adopted, and enforced, we have every reason to anticipate a renewal of the scenes which were acted under the guidance of Black Hawk for the last two or three summers, which kept the country in a continual state of suspense and alarm, and retarded the settlement and improvement of the whole north western frontier. Have not the Winnebagoes as many inducements to disturb the peace of our citizens as had the Sacs and Foxes?¹⁸⁴

Like the anonymous Rock River booster, Phileo argued that Indian removal was essential to the peace and prosperity of the region. By exaggerating the threat posed by the return of Ho-Chunks—among them the despised White Crow—Phileo hoped to spur action against them. Even as enemies and invaders, the Ho-Chunk probably did not present the formidable threat that Phileo claimed. It is doubtful that the *Galenian* editor truly believed his own dire warnings of imminent frontier warfare. Phileo believed the Ho-Chunks intended to stay, and his immediate response was to argue that they should be forced out.¹⁸⁵

The soldiers garrisoned at Fort Winnebago, Phileo thought, "would be amply adequate ... to keep those Indians off the ceded land." His chagrin is detectable in his explanation of why the

¹⁸³ Quoted in Hall, *Uncommon Defense*, 177; Wakefield, *Wakefield's History of the Black Hawk War*, 109-110; *BHW* vol. 2, bk. 2, 844n3.

¹⁸⁴ *Galenian*, September 27, 1833.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

troops were doing nothing: “We are informed that they have no instruction to that effect;—that matter being confided, exclusively to Col. Dodge, and the dragoon corps under his command.” Phileo’s audience was national in scope—he mocked the “mistaken, misguided and misplaced philanthropy of the great cities of the east,” whose residents he believed, lived such a distance from Indians that they remained ignorant of the frontier. At the same time, his words seem directed at the federal government, or even Dodge himself, urging action against the Rock River Ho-Chunks at Four Lakes. He opined, “We have reason to suppose, that so soon as these facts are made known, a speedy remedy will be applied.”¹⁸⁶ Dodge was the man for the job, thought Phileo.

Discussing Ho-Chunk belonging post-1832 treaty, post-1833 removal was, at its core, acknowledgement of it. The *Galenian* writer carefully circumvented this potential explanation for why the Rock River Ho-Chunks turned up at Four Lakes in October of 1833. He conveyed what he learned from Captain Low, garrisoned at Fort Winnebago—the Ho-Chunks returned because there was nothing to eat on the other side of the Wisconsin River. They returned because they were hungry. “There are other causes,” Phileo warned, “which may produce the same effect, and determine those Indians to remain where they are, until forced away, and kept away at the point of the bayonet.” Among the other causes for Ho-Chunk returns were “traders and others among them who are interested in their stay, and who advise them to that course.” The writer did not refute Ho-Chunk claims about hunger, but in linking Indian returns to white economic incentive, the notion of Ho-Chunk sense of place, of perceiving the Rock River lands

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

as home, receded, as did any consideration that the inhumane policy and implementation of removal might generate its own undoing.¹⁸⁷

Ho-Chunk returns unsettled Phileo and the stakes were clear in his mind. Unless the government or local militia responded with force, the Ho-Chunk at Four Lakes, harvesting wild rice, would bring a “renewal of the scenes” of the Black Hawk War, destabilizing the region and erasing any settler gains. The Ho-Chunks, by his own admission, presented no real military threat to the United States. To pretend that Ho-Chunk leaders used hunger as a cover while they planned for war seemed too far-fetched for even this *Galenian* writer. His claim that Ho-Chunks entered ceded lands “to disturb the peace of our citizens” obscured the actions and words of the Ho-Chunk for whom return was a matter of survival. A more substantive consideration of Phileo’s poignant response to Ho-Chunk returns reveals why the Rock River country, the removal landscape, became an unsettling image for white settlers.¹⁸⁸

By returning, Rock River Ho-Chunks dismissed and violated the 1832 treaty. The Indians ignored its binding qualities, its payments, its boundaries, and in particular, its power to exclude. By returning, the Indians undid the work of removal. Ho-Chunks subsistence activities in ceded lands compromised the premise of the federal Indian policy aimed at replacing Indians with white settlers. Returned Ho-Chunks rejected the permanence of Indian removal and treated ceded lands as familiar homelands. For the *Galenian*, then, the presence of Ho-Chunks threatened the progress of settlement in the region. The safety of white settlers, he feared, was once again at stake. Returning Indians disrupted white settler placemaking, even if settler fears far exceeded the designs of hungry Indians.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

Though Phileo believed permanent removal of the Ho-Chunk was possible, his call for rapid and effective response by the military recognized that Indian removal was not an event, but a process requiring constant work. If the writer perceived Ho-Chunk returns as evidence that Indian removal—a policy still in its infancy—had problems, even more confounding for him was that the federal troops garrisoned at Fort Winnebago had no orders to take up the work of removing Ho-Chunks who had returned illegally to ceded lands. If the job of Ho-Chunk removal belonged to Henry Dodge and his dragoons, then they needed to be a permanent presence in the region. Phileo squarely placed the responsibility of Indian removal on the government and its unfinished work.¹⁸⁹

For settlers, the treaty language of removal—backed by dragoons—was a powerful place-story. In clear terms, it structured who belonged in the ceded lands and when. After June 1 1833, Ho-Chunks did not belong, and the processes were in motion of opening lands to white settlers to make their homes. These processes, however, depended on the permanence of the structures of white settlement— and white settlement rested on the permanence of the removal promises of the 1832 treaty.

Treaties represented the legitimacy of laws and institutions on which settlers—and settler colonialism—depended. White settlement was intimately linked with Indian removal. Perhaps unsurprisingly, news about the 1832 treaty and Ho-Chunk removal reveals a shared understanding among Anglo-Americans regarding the role of federal Indian policy and treaties to enable white settlement. A more telling insight into the meaning white Americans placed on Indian policy and Indian treaties can be found in Phileo's response to confirmed rumors that removed Ho-Chunks had returned to ceded lands. The fact that white settlers made themselves

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

the center of the crisis over Ho-Chunk returns demonstrates the tensions of a removal landscape. Phileo's rhetoric also highlights the inhumane and intentional steps taken in the implementation of removal policy that, in large part, created this removal landscape.

The Ho-Chunk were corn people. That he returned Ho-Chunks to harvesting wild rice matters because it represented a poignant response to a perceived as a sense of place and belonging among fugitive Ho-Chunks. His words were an attempt to remove them from their place as corn planters. When the Ho-Chunk desired to seed in ceded land it was a declaration of belonging and remaining. Such activity further presented an unsettling and intolerable prospect to the settler for whom Phileo wrote. It was not only that Ho-Chunks had returned, it was that they intended to stay.

We are left to imagine, then, whether returned Ho-Chunks understood the implications of their returns for non-Indians attempting to make homes on their former homelands. Upon being discovered, did the Ho-Chunk show the whites their seed corn in an effort to explain why they were back and that they intended to stay? However such encounters unfolded, returned Ho-Chunks carrying seeds to ceded lands was an expression of belonging. The Ho-Chunks must have understood this. The white settlers and soldiers typically confounded by Siouan languages certainly understood it. Actions in this case spoke louder than words.

Removed Ho-Chunks returned to Four Lakes for food, reasserting bonds of subsistence that had defined their lives in that place. While whites ignored Ho-Chunk cosmological claims to ancestral lands, they could not ignore Ho-Chunk roots and habits of subsistence. Though they had resisted removal prior to their Corn Moon, Henry Dodge held them to their June 1833 deadline. Rock River Ho-Chunks tried and failed to cultivate their corn in the lands of their

northern kin.¹⁹⁰ So they returned. The significance of the Ho-Chunk intent to plant corn the next season was not lost on Phileo. To “talk of planting corn” was to talk of remaining and belonging. Ho-Chunk returns combined with their pledge to seed ceded lands unsettled the lead region settler.

Chasing Down Whirling Thunder

The return of White Crow and his large village to Four Lakes in September 1833 was not the only disruption to American hopes of Indian removal in the wake of the crisis of 1832. There was a core tension in this removal landscape between white settlers who wanted to replace Ho-Chunks as the indigenous inhabitants of Wisconsin lands and Ho-Chunk Indians who desired to remain. White settlers expected Indian removal to be a single event, to remain permanent. The result was, as Deborah Bird Rose puts it, Indigenous “people got in the way just by staying at home.”¹⁹¹ Beyond the obvious failures of removal policy that returned Indians embodied, the presence of Rock River Ho-Chunks signaled the survival and persistence of their attachments to and sense of belonging in this place. One reason for this was the impossibility of any policy to recreate a people’s homeland. The origins and meaning of the Rock River country as a removal landscape come into relief through the experiences and movements of Whirling Thunder and as many as two hundred of his villagers in the spring and summer of 1833. Wherever other Ho-Chunks emerged in ceded lands, and therefore in the colonial record, fills in part of the story that illuminates the tensions and dynamics at play in the Rock River country in the 1830s. This is such a story. It begins in the spring of 1833 when Whirling Thunder decided to stay home.

¹⁹⁰ Jipson, *Story of the Winnebagos*, 413-414.

¹⁹¹ Deborah Bird Rose, *Hidden Histories: Black Stories from Victoria River Downs, Humbert River, and Wave Hill Stations* (Sydney: Macarthur Press, 1991), 46

A great majority of Rock River Ho-Chunks arrived at Four Lakes in mid-May of 1833, as U.S. forces planned. But some village leaders, and their villagers, were notably absent. Neither Whirling Thunder nor Spotted Arm nor their villagers showed up at Four Lakes for relocation across the Wisconsin River. Meanwhile, Man-Eater and some villagers reported to Fort Winnebago, defying instructions to rendezvous at Four Lakes.¹⁹² Word had gone out in late April, via agents, traders, and hired runners (all relying on interpreters) for all to rendezvous at Four Lakes by May 15. Not all complied. *The Military and Naval Magazine* reported on Dodge's "march towards the rapids on Rock River...for the purpose of dislodging Man-eater's band of Winnebagoes." The report continued, "It appears that this chief, after all that had been done and said on the subject, is still lurking about the rapids with his band amidst the thick forests and swamps of that country."¹⁹³

Man-Eater, Whirling Thunder, and Spotted Arm's actions were not the only snags Dodge encountered in his efforts to enact treaty stipulations. Weighing on Dodge's mind (and reputation) was the escape the previous December of the eight Ho-Chunks accused of crimes against white settlers and soldiers during the Black Hawk War, including charges of murder. The army and Indian agents had not yet recaptured them nor had the Rock River Ho-Chunks surrendered them. Dodge responded to these complications—the missing chiefs and the escaped prisoners—with a stern warning for Ho-Chunk Indians at Fort Winnebago two weeks after the removal deadline had passed.¹⁹⁴ John Kinzie had not yet departed, and he, along with Pierre Paquette, assisted Dodge in delivering his threats to the Ho-Chunks gathered at the fort. Dodge

¹⁹²Henry Gratiot (Gratiot's Grove) to Elbert Herring, 12 June 1833, in *Emigration of Indians*, 429.

¹⁹³"Indian News," *The Military and Naval Magazine of the United States*, vol. 1 (March-August 1833): 382.

¹⁹⁴Because of where many Rock River Ho-Chunks had chosen to relocate their villages, many were less than fifteen miles from the Portage.

demanded the Ho-Chunk prisoners and warned that “refusal on the part of the Indians to remove from the Ceded Lands would oblige me to march with the Mounted Rangers to drive them across the Wisconsin River.” Dodge would not hesitate to call on the government and the army, and Ho-Chunk “chiefs would be in Danger of being taken and held as Hostages untill (sic) the murderers were delivered up, to be dealt with according to the Laws of the Country.”¹⁹⁵ Dodge also mustered his best metaphoric threat: “Should you fail to deliver these murderers your road will be filled with thorns and the sun will be covered with a Dark Cloud, which will rest over your Nation until (sic) the Blood of the Innocent is Avenged.” As an early biographer of Dodge tells it:

These admonitions bore fruit and the eight murderers were delivered to Sub-Agent Kinzie and lodged in the guard-house at Fort Winnebago. This was followed by the exodus of the Winnebagoes from the Rock River country across the Wisconsin River to the north. Lieutenant Joshua W. Pry with fifty men had assisted at the removal of Whirling Thunder and his braves who could now again hunt and fish without molestation from jealous settlers and the watchful companies under Major Dodge.¹⁹⁶

By this biographer’s account, armed with a powerful speech and small company of men, Dodge made quick work of Ho-Chunk removal and American justice. But that is far from the true story. The biographer’s version of events—much like newspaper accounts of Ho-Chunk removal in 1833—glossed over the messiness and unpredictable nature of removal work in a removal landscape.¹⁹⁷ Swallowed up by triumphant removal narratives were scattered tales about Ho-Chunk agency, how Ho-Chunk actions and decisions shaped events and even undermined efforts of Dodge and the federal government to complete removal and punish alleged criminals.

¹⁹⁵ Pelzer, *Henry Dodge*, 77.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 80-85.

The eight accused Ho-Chunk men did not just reappear at the fort. Their second surrender was secured by Whirling Thunder, though the escaped prisoners certainly had a say. The fugitive chief showed up at Fort Winnebago on his own terms and by his own will, probably while Lieutenant Fry and his men were scattered about looking for him. It was late June, three weeks past the removal deadline. Whirling Thunder had heard Henry Dodge was at Fort Winnebago and wanted to meet with him. In Dodge's biography, Whirling Thunder appears once in the context of Ho-Chunk removal, and only under escort of Dodge's mounted rangers. The biographer's praise for Dodge's surveillance and agility were undeserved. While most if not all remaining Ho-Chunks in ceded lands migrated across the Wisconsin shortly after this time, they did so begrudgingly, following a long speech given at the fort by Whirling Thunder.¹⁹⁸

Amidst all of this in the spring of 1833, Whirling Thunder decided to stay home.¹⁹⁹ Whirling Thunder's absence at Four Lakes was no mistake and represented no misunderstanding. The chief had resisted removal—as well as land cession treaties—too often for Dodge to interpret his actions as anything but intentional. Immediately upon learning that Whirling Thunder and two hundred of his villagers remained in ceded lands, Dodge travelled to Four Lakes to complete Ho-Chunk removal by any means, or so he made clear to John Kinzie, Pierre Paquette, and many Ho-Chunks at Fort Winnebago in mid-June. In the face of Ho-Chunk defiance, and the still-at-large prisoners, Dodge held up the 1832 treaty as the rule of law and justice in the region, warning that he and his soldiers would implement that law. He then

¹⁹⁸ “Whirling Thunder Speech,” *Niles Weekly Register*, August 31, 1833. The newspaperman writes, “the speech of Whirling Thunder, I have selected from the speeches of several chiefs spoke on this occasion.”

¹⁹⁹ Scholars have highlighted how incompatible ideas about land use put Native and colonial societies in conflict. See William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983). As Deborah Bird Rose puts it, Indigenous “[p]eople got in the way just by staying at home.” Rose, *Hidden Histories*, 46. Settler place-stories that emerged from the lands ceded in 1832 and 1837 took shape around Ho-Chunk presence.

ordered Lieutenant Fry and fifty men to track down, capture, and forcibly remove Whirling Thunder.²⁰⁰

Whirling Thunder as well as other Rock River Ho-Chunks made choices based on what mattered to them, and in the 1830s, more often than not, treaties and policy mattered less than survival. Survival for the Rock River Ho-Chunks required a homeland that offered them stability, safety, and sustenance. Whirling Thunder's actions and words consistently bring into relief what his people counted as a "home" and what rooted them in place—neither treaties nor removal proved more powerful than the Ho-Chunks' desire for and reliance on subsistence agriculture, and in particular, the ability to cultivate corn. He remained one of the most prominent and vocal critics of the Americans in the period after the Rock Island Treaty. At the same time, he remained an elusive catch for Dodge and his company.

Whirling Thunder's movements in June 1833 are unclear in the records, perhaps because the chief proved as skillful in evading the dragoons as the Ho-Chunks had been to the army and militia the previous summer. That said, Whirling Thunder seized upon many opportunities documented by Anglo-American officials to speak his mind on matters of Ho-Chunk survival, belonging, and preservation of their homelands. On June 23, for example, three weeks after the removal deadline, Whirling Thunder appeared at Fort Winnebago to meet with Henry Dodge and speak his mind. "We heard that you were coming, and we hastened to be off," the chief said to

²⁰⁰ Pelzer, *Henry Dodge*, 77. Whirling Thunder's movements over the next several weeks are not clear in the records, but it seems that the chief was among the first to resist removal and also to return to ceded lands after being removed. One report has Whirling Thunder remaining in ceded lands past the removal date, and a company of soldiers tracking him and escorting him across the Wisconsin River. Another tells of Whirling Thunder returning to ceded lands *after* his removal, and that three traders encouraged his return. Kellogg suggests that Whirling Thunder and his band returned to ceded lands after they removed, encouraged by local traders. Kellogg, "Removal of the Winnebago," 28-29. Lieutenant T. B. Wheelock, either of the mounted rangers or dragoons, tracked the traders (John Dougherty, Oliver Armel, and Stephen Mack) to Sugar River, arrested them, and confined them at the Fourth Lake camp while Lieutenant Joshua W. Fry and fifty men went after Whirling Thunder.

Dodge. Whirling Thunder would not recognize a connection between his remaining and Dodge's presence at the fort.²⁰¹ Whirling Thunder had brought most of his village, announcing, "we are all here but two families."²⁰² More than that, he had also arranged the return or re-surrender of the accused Ho-Chunk Indians. Perhaps this was a show of good will, for Whirling Thunder was acting in defiance of the removal order. In front of what must have been a sizable audience of soldiers, traders, Ho-Chunk agents, interpreter Paquette, and at least one newspaper man, Whirling Thunder reminded those present of his reputation as an orator. His message for Dodge was simple if not short—he and his people would leave their Rock River home and join their Wisconsin River kin. Rock River Indians would make a new home across the Wisconsin. But before doing this, Whirling Thunder needed to explain why so many Ho-Chunks yet remained in ceded lands. He once again sought acknowledgement from Dodge about where Ho-Chunks still called home.

Though undoubtedly trying Dodge's patience, the orator and respected leader of the Rock River Ho-Chunks refused to be rushed. He spoke for his Lake Koshkonong villagers, but also for the "red men of the Fox River [who] have no speakers." Because of the recent conflict and its fallout, as well as the ambiguous involvement of so many Ho-Chunks, relations between many Ho-Chunks and the Sauk and Fox had soured. Whirling Thunder spoke of the "bad birds" on the other side of the Mississippi "flying from the Sacs...I have heard them." Fear of western lands—and of retribution by the Sauk and Fox—made the so-called neutral ground an unsafe and unsuitable home for Ho-Chunks.²⁰³

²⁰¹ *Niles Weekly Register*, 31 August 1833, 10.

²⁰² "Whirling Thunder Speech," *Niles Weekly Register*, August 31, 1833. The Rock River chief seems to have heard of Dodge's visiting the fort, probably understood that his people were being tracked, and decided to meet with the commander.

²⁰³ "Whirling Thunder Speech," *Niles Weekly Register*, August 31, 1833.

Dodge and Whirling Thunder had known one another for years, but this did not stop the chief from sharing his people's origin stories from deep time—a feature of Ho-Chunk oratory that had been diminished in recent councils or subordinated to more immediate needs. “It is remembered when we were first a nation, our nation arose on Lake Michigan: since then we have been scattered,” Whirling Thunder explained.²⁰⁴ This was the abridged version of the Ho-Chunks' origin story in which Earthmaker—maker of all things and the first humans—had placed his Ho-Chunk children at Red Banks, near Green Bay. The longer story related how the Ho-Chunks grew into many clans and, soon, many nations of Indian peoples who migrated west.²⁰⁵ When the chief spoke of his people being scattered, he spoke of this deep past but also of recent history. In the eighteenth century, Ho-Chunks expanded their territory, building villages along the Fox, Rock, and Wisconsin rivers and their tributaries to maintain their isolation from European newcomers, but also to remain powerful actors in the fur trade. They had also chosen village sites suitable for their agriculture. One result of this geographical dispersion was political dispersion, and eventually, the distinction between the Wisconsin River and Rock River bands of Ho-Chunks. Whirling Thunder had seen much change in his lifetime, and he understood the world surrounding and enveloping the Ho-Chunk had transformed, but the Ho-Chunks had changed with it and would continue to adapt. “We were divided into two nations, (the Rock River and the Ouisconsin tribes),” he explained, “but now we are all together, we are one nation.” Unlike Old Grayheaded Decorah, whose village still remained further west on the Baraboo River, Whirling Thunder envisioned a future for his Rock River people where they had once lived, despite the loss of their lands.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 10.

²⁰⁵ Each of the twelve Ho-Chunk clans have their own origin story, though the Thunder Clan origin story, told by Whirling Thunder, is the most prominent among the Ho-Chunk people. For Ho-Chunk clan origin stories, see Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, 159-203.

At one point, Paquette interpreted Whirling Thunder's words as, "We are not like the white men/ they have money—we are poor; what the white man wants, he buys—we must beg." Such were the wages of the Rock Island treaty. Taken literally, Whirling Thunder's words ring true. The Ho-Chunk people lacked "money" (aside from money paid to certain Ho-Chunks because of treaties) and they had certainly had begged a lot in the months since their corn was destroyed. But perhaps what Paquette interpreted as a simple contrast between white and Indian ways failed to convey a deeper division that Whirling Thunder was driving at—that Ho-Chunk people still lived in a watchful world that required their constant caution. The differences between subsistence-based peoples and wealth-acquiring peoples went far beyond matters of money. Removal undermined the spiritual and subsistence relationship that bound his Ho-Chunk people and their Rock River landscape, but if their relocation across the Wisconsin River might create a permanent boundary—a "fence between us ... forever"—his people would try to renew these roots of belonging in new lands. Like their hand-built corn hills, Ho-Chunks could not subsist if crowded too closely together. Whirling Thunder echoed Old Gray's words to Pliney Warriner when he again expressed his people's wish to remain Ho-Chunk: "we wish to be our own masters; we wish to live in our own way; we wish to live like red men; we wish no white men to control us....I hope the fence between us will continue forever."²⁰⁶ The chief did not share the despair Old Gray expressed a few years before, but Whirling Thunder desperately needed Dodge, as well as the Great Father, to understand the essence of Ho-Chunk people as corn farmers, something U.S. officials still failed to understand.

Perhaps the short-lived fugitive life drove Whirling Thunder and his villagers to Fort Winnebago in June 1833, or maybe the chief feared Dodge would follow through on his threats

²⁰⁶ "Whirling Thunder Speech," *Niles Weekly Register*, August 31, 1833.

to remove them forcefully with mounted rangers and federal reinforcements. The Ho-Chunks would have struggled to find food and sanctuary from the ranging dragoons. If Whirling Thunder planted corn in the fields around his village after deciding to remain in his homeland, he must have realized he would not be able to cultivate it. Planting and cultivating corn required anchored and secure people, not fugitives. Narratives extolling the virtues of removal had recast agricultural Indian peoples like the Ho-Chunks as nomads, but in reality, for Whirling Thunder and his villagers, it was the removal policy and the mounted rangers enforcing it that prohibited them from farming. Subsistence, and his people's hunger, was very much on Whirling Thunder's mind when he appeared at Fort Winnebago in late June. "You promised that the road should always be open to us," Whirling Thunder reminded Dodge, likely speaking of the Fox-Wisconsin waterway and the Portage, the Great Carrying Place between. "We have a river and two lakes that we wish to get rice from," he explained, hinting at the depths of his people's hunger.²⁰⁷ The bobolink's song would not be heard for two months, but without corn in the ground, the Rock River Ho-Chunks would be in desperate need of their supplementary foods and would have to harvest them from traditional gathering places, a contingency Ho-Chunk leaders requested at Four Lakes in April 1833.

Now, a food that the Ho-Chunks harvested as an adjunct to their mainstay of corn would be crucial to get them through the Winter Moon.²⁰⁸ Not only did Rock River Ho-Chunks lack knowledge of wild rice beds in northern lands, they risked resource competition with Wisconsin River and other relocated Rock River bands. Ho-Chunks of the Rock River country had ceded

²⁰⁷ *Niles Weekly Register*, August 31, 1833, 11. In 1818, Edward Tanner observed great numbers of Winnebago and Menomonee gathering wild rice at Rush Lake (in present-day Winnebago County), and so Whirling Thunder might have been referring to this lake. Green Lake and Puckaway Lake also seem likely. Many white settlers in the nineteenth century noted Ho-Chunk use of Lake Wingra for gathering several types of food long after white settlement. See Publius V. Lawson, "The Winnebago Tribe," 123.

²⁰⁸ Lurie and Jung, *Nicolet Corrigenda*, 68.

their homelands, but they had not given up their knowledge of how to survive in it. At the Four Lakes meeting in April, Dodge denied requests by White Crow and Whirling Thunder to subsist in ceded lands, which was prohibited by the treaty of 1832. The treaty promised food rations and federal and territorial officials had since assured Rock River Ho-Chunks of corn for planting and consuming, but the Ho-Chunk were familiar with government's capacity for failure when it came to providing provisions. Before their own starving time, they had witnessed food shortages among the Sauk and Fox in 1831 and 1832. Whirling Thunder preferred to bet the lives of his people on nature's wild offerings. A benevolent Great Father and a humane policy more focused on placing Indian peoples in potential new homelands would have assuaged such fears by first preventing another starving time.

Whirling Thunder hoped his most recent actions would clear the skies with the Americans. Her reassured them, "I have taken my foot from off your land; I will not put it down there again."²⁰⁹ He added "I hope that the cloud which hangs so heavily over us, will be blown away, and never be seen again."²¹⁰ This cloud had long darkened Ho-Chunk lands and lives, so noted by orators and leaders over the last several years who spoke of their fear and anxiety about the Americans. Under this cloud, Ho-Chunk people suffered starvation, disease, resource alienation, and ultimately, the loss of their ancestral homelands. But even in their ceded lands, the removal landscape, the cloud remained. Hunger and destitution continued to plague them, driving them to make a go of it in the north. Dodge took Whirling Thunder at his word and allowed the chief and his people to depart the fort without punishment. Whether Dodge affirmed Whirling Thunder's request to harvest wild rice would have come down to a hard line of treaty—

²⁰⁹ "Whirling Thunder Speech," *Niles Weekly Register*, August 31, 1833, 10-11.

²¹⁰ Pelzer, *Henry Dodge*, 77. Pelzer wrote that after being removed, Whirling Thunder "could now hunt and fish without molestation from jealous settlers and the watchful companies under Major Dodge." In other words, Indians who remained in ceded lands would never achieve peace of mind or sense of home.

if the lakes existed in ceded lands, Dodge would not have allowed Ho-Chunks to remain and harvest upon them.

Whirling Thunder and his villagers did not stay long in their northern lands. One month later, in July, they turned up at Joseph Street's agency at Prairie du Chien. The chief told the Indian agent there:

General Dodge has hunted us from lake to lake like deer. We could not hide from him. We wanted to remain where we were. We have looked at the country on the Wisconsin. It is poor and there is not much meat and no furskins, and there are too many Indians there already. We can't live there. General Dodge would not let us remain on Rock river, and we got hungry, some of us said "let us go and see this father at Prairie du Chien." And now we are glad we have done so—our hearts are happy.²¹¹

Whirling Thunder's words say much about the challenges his people faced. Desperate Ho-Chunks tried and failed to subsist in northern lands and were compelled to leave. Former homelands provided them no refuge, however. In this early removal landscape, the Rock River Ho-Chunk became a displaced people. They found that returning to former villages did not mean resuming regular subsistence patterns, since they constantly moved to evade dragoons. Returned Ho-Chunks, therefore, remained unsettled in their former homelands. As long as mounted soldiers tracked fugitive Ho-Chunks, the Indians—"hunted like deer"—would roam the land instead of cultivating it. Subsistence activities defined Ho-Chunk relationship to and survival in their homeland. It was hunger and a desire for a home that drove Whirling Thunder to the agency house at Prairie du Chien.

²¹¹ Joseph Street to Elbert Herring, 18 July 1833, OIA, LR, Winnebago Agency, roll 947; Diedrich, *Winnebago Oratory*, 49. It is unclear (and unlikely) that Dodge was part of the group tracking Whirling Thunder, but it is striking that he embodied the entire removal force from the perspective of the Ho-Chunk.

The chief's message also raises questions about his movements and whereabouts between June 1 and July 18, 1833, other than his documented presence at Fort Winnebago in June. Had Whirling Thunder returned to ceded lands after telling Dodge he would not? A scholar writing in the early twentieth century claims that Whirling Thunder and his band had removed but then returned to ceded lands, encouraged by local traders to do so. This version does not give the dates of Whirling Thunder's removal and returns, though the same lieutenant and fifty mounted rangers appear in this story, tracking down the chief.²¹² The difficulties in documenting Whirling Thunder's location is an unsurprising, if disappointing, reality of this removal landscape. What we can learn from his visit to Joseph Street's agency at Prairie du Chien in mid-July is that the chief and his people felt they had no home and were desperate to find one. Whirling Thunder traveled to the agency to make Street an offer—in exchange for food and other supplies, his people would explore the Turkey River reservation in Iowa: “we wish you to give us some more provisions to eat while we are looking at the country for fear we may starve before we see any game. We will go in the morning.”²¹³ No doubt gleeful over the chief's offer, Street, who firmly believed Ho-Chunks should be removed west of the Mississippi, graciously accepted his terms and forgave him any trouble he had caused Dodge and the soldiers over the previous weeks. If Whirling Thunder had trespassed in his former homelands again, he either did so secretly or Street elected to make no further mention of it.²¹⁴

²¹² Kellogg suggests that Whirling Thunder and band returned to ceded lands after they removed. Kellogg does not say whether, in this version, the soldiers were successful. Kellogg, “Removal of the Winnebago,” 28-29.

²¹³ United States, Indian Removal Records, Senate Document #512, 23 Cong., 1 Sess. vol. 4, part 9 of 15, ed. Larry S. Watson (Yuma, AZ: Histree, 1987), 43.

²¹⁴ Kellogg, “Removal of the Winnebago,” 25.

Conclusion

In his report to Lewis Cass in July of 1833, Street bragged of the deal he had made with Whirling Thunder, the now-infamously obstinate chief of the Rock River Ho-Chunks. “Could I get to see and converse with the Rock river Indians, I have no doubt I can get nearly half of them over by next spring. I have as yet been successful in every attempt.”²¹⁵ Street’s version of events denies choices Whirling Thunder made about the fate of his people. Eager to bolster the importance of his agency and his work, Street took most of the credit, but neither he nor the 1832 treaty itself, which extinguished Ho-Chunk rights to be in ceded lands, proved as effective as the soldiers work of removal. Dodge’s mounted rangers hunted and rounded up Indians. This work prevented fugitive Ho-Chunks from resuming patterns of subsistence and undermined their ability to survive in ceded lands. Such disruptions continued those visited upon the Ho-Chunk during the Black Hawk War. Whirling Thunder’s account of the journey that brought him to Street’s door testified to the power of disrupted subsistence, to the uprooting indigenous peoples from ancestral homelands. Only when former homelands provided them little refuge, however, did Whirling Thunder and his villagers take their chances west of the Mississippi.

The Ho-Chunks took those chances, as they always did, on their own terms. The evasion they demonstrated in the spring and summer of 1832, they continued through the summer of 1833, well past the time frame set out in the government’s treaty. Yes, they made their marks on the treaty at Rock Island. They had no choice but to die of starvation or be murdered as the Sauks were at Bad Axe. By September they made the best bargain they could at gunpoint. They were promised annuities, corn, western lands, at least a little time—not quite a year. In that year they made preparations both to stay if they could, and to go if they had to. These were the terms

²¹⁵ Joseph Street to Elbert Herring, 18 July 1833, in *Correspondence on the Subject of the Emigration of Indians*, vol. 4 (Washington: Printed by Duff Green, 1835), 478.

they made with themselves. Simply leaving in haste as the Americans wanted meant certain death in lands that would not grow their food. The Ho-Chunks would have none of that. Instead, they planned a future much as they had upon the earliest approaches of the Americans decades earlier. They designed a response just as they did when squatters and would-be settlers flooded their lands in the 1820s. They did not enter the parley tent at Rock Island blindly. Rather, they used their lengthy experience with the Americans in hopes of arranging the best possible outcome given the grim circumstances under which they were called to make that treaty, or rather to have that treaty made upon them. Now, with the physical force of removal all around them, they again planned to minimize the damage while maximizing the chances of survival in lands where, according to the Americans, they no longer belonged.

Conclusion

Coming and Going in a Removal Landscape

In the 1830s, white Americans talked a lot about vanishing Indians. In white imagination, Indians disappeared due to warfare, disease, intermarriage with non-Native people, but also as a result of forced removals. From positions of presumed innocence, sympathetic white Americans lamented the loss of Native American societies while blaming other whites who settled Indian lands, diminished their resources, and corrupted their cultures with alcohol.¹ By the mid-1830s, Ho-Chunks faced the all of these challenges that accompanied, actually defined, American settler colonialism. White officials and inhabitants living in ancestral Ho-Chunk lands frequently observed and documented their damaging impacts on the Ho-Chunk. In doing so, they mistakenly believed this was who the Ho-Chunks had become. All the while, however, white Americans underestimated the capacity and desire of the Ho-Chunks to adapt and persist as the original inhabitants of the land.

According to numerous officials stationed at Fort Crawford and Fort Winnebago, alcohol had undermined Ho-Chunk leadership. In July 1833, Colonel Enos Cutler at Fort Winnebago reported that the persistent traders who plied Indians with whiskey had all but destroyed the Ho-Chunk, writing that the “finest among them had become the worst.”² Joseph Street made a similar dire claim four years earlier, when he reported that the Ho-Chunk chiefs had become “so

¹ Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo called this “imperialist nostalgia.” See Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia,” *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 107-122. For a recent examination of how white New England communities wrote about Native Americans who survived conquest colonialism, see Jean M. O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Amy E. Den Ouden, *Beyond Conquest: Native Peoples and the Struggle for History in New England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

² Colonel Enos to Acting Asst. Adj. General of New York, 8 July 1833, in Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, R.G. 75, N.A., quoted in Alice E. Smith, *The History of Wisconsin*, vol. 1, *From Exploration to Statehood* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1985), 144.

besotted that their own Nation look on them with contempt.”³ According to Juliette Kinzie, white society was to blame for corrupting the Ho-Chunks: “That [Ho-Chunk] practice evinces more and more a departure from [sacred laws and virtues], under the debasing influences of a proximity to the whites, is a melancholy truth, which no one will admit with so much sorrow as those who lived among them, and esteemed them, before this signal change had taken place.”⁴ The Ho-Chunks themselves had not disappeared, but according to white observers, their cultural virtues had. Ho-Chunks’ strength and survivance had become invisible to whites even while the Ho-Chunks had not.

Life in Wisconsin had become exceedingly difficult for the Ho-Chunk. They had always been an independent people. Heeding the lesson of the seventeenth-century violence that almost destroyed them, Ho-Chunks had since deployed less violent, more measured methods to preserve their separation and independence. Autonomy, corn, and peacekeeping were their instruments of survival. Having resisted entangling themselves with the French, later with the British, and ultimately with the Americans as long as they could, Ho-Chunks also accommodated and incorporated outsiders when necessary. The Ho-Chunks attempted to shape these interactions by whatever means they could. Now, as a direct result of their efforts in recent years, they exerted little if any control over outsiders. They continued to cling to their ancestral lands as fugitives in the eyes of the federal government and their neighbors.

From the Indian agent at Prairie du Chien, to the commanding officer at Fort Winnebago and the Portage Indian Agent’s wife, white Americans lamented the loss of noble Ho-Chunk leaders and religion and culture, condemned the responsible parties, but accepted none of blame. Instead of seeing their roles as agents of American empire and facilitators of settler colonialism,

³ Joseph Street to William Clark, 9 August 1831, quoted in. Smith, *The History of Wisconsin*, vol. 1: 144.

⁴ Kinzie, *Wau-Bun*, 282-283.

Juliette Kinzie, Joseph Street, and others condemned intangible policies, rogue traders, and far-away policy makers. By 1833, the situation was indeed grim for the Rock River Ho-Chunks, but that situation did not define who they were. The Rock Island treaty left them refugees in their own lands. The influx of land-hungry whites bought the ills of that society. The ceded lands were no longer regulated by the Trade and Intercourse Acts, and with the Portage agency closed, more distant agents could do nothing but document the increasing abuses of Ho-Chunks clinging to their ancestral lands.

An Indian Agent from Detroit, however saw evidence of resistance and survival when he visited the Ho-Chunks north of Four Lakes in 1835. Edmund Brush traveled there on orders from Lewis Cass to investigate the reason for Ho-Chunk presence in lands the tribe had ceded nearly three years earlier. Brush observed Ho-Chunk families farming along the Baraboo River and saw Ho-Chunk men, as he put it, “beginning to submit to bodily labour” in the fields.⁵ Native people conforming to Euro-American gender divisions of labor was good news, but for the fact that the lands of the Baraboo River Valley belonged to the United States. Expecting to find Ho-Chunks actively resisting the Secretary of War’s insistence that they leave, Brush, like generations of outsiders before him, misjudged Indian attachment to their ancestral homelands. Many of the Ho-Chunks were simply not going anywhere, regardless of any treaty ratified by Congress and archived in the superintendent’s office or in Washington. And if they were physically forced to remove, returns to their homelands were inevitable. The Ho-Chunks focused on survival, and meeting those needs necessitated defiance.

Historians have not adequately explained how central Ho-Chunk resistance was to the Black Hawk War story. Many who have tried have done so with Euro-centric views, especially

⁵ Brush to Cass, 14 December 1835, quoted in Smith, *History of Wisconsin*, 144.

in their consideration of returned Ho-Chunks. Returned Ho-Chunks broke promises, ignored articles of the treaty, occupied ceded lands illegally, and in doing so, inconvenienced white settlers. Historian Alice Smith writes that “The Winnebago clung to their old haunts, raiding settlers’ homes and stealing stock.”⁶ This description bears similarity—too much similarity—to how white settlers in the region viewed the Ho-Chunks in the 1830s. In the years immediately following the Indian Removal Act, the rhetoric of a benevolent removal policy gained traction and was deployed in Ho-Chunk country, in no small part, as a punitive response to the events of the summer of 1832. The legislation of removal and the treaties—instruments of that policy—had been crafted and enforced by the Americans. White Americans needed no other rationale to support their means or the desired ends of attaining Indian lands. That Ho-Chunk removal was of great benefit to white settlers was left largely out of the discussion in the 1832 treaty council. No one saw this more clearly than the Ho-Chunks.

Whirling Thunder had tried to reestablish his Turtle Creek (Beloit) and Koshkonong villagers near the Portage after the 1833 removal, but overcrowding hindered hunting and cultivation.⁷ Whirling Thunder requested a tour of the Iowa reservation, though Joseph Street claimed authority for sending him and his Rock River Ho-Chunks west. The agent’s confidence was shaken the following February when Whirling Thunder and around 200 Ho-Chunks returned to Wisconsin. Street thought the Ho-Chunks were gone, while Whirling Thunder knew the people were only exploring; they were not making a commitment to move. Whirling Thunder’s return to Wisconsin was neither secret nor stealthy. He all but signed a guest book at the Sugar River agency house of Henry Gratiot. Whirling Thunder delivered a clear message to Secretary

⁶ Smith, *From Exploration to Statehood*, 146.

⁷ Diedrich, *Winnebago Oratory*, 51.

of War Lewis Cass so Cass would understand why he and his people refused their reservation in the western neutral ground:

We are tired of having no home—we are scattered all over the country like wild beasts, and wish to unite in the spring and build a village and plant corn. Father Cass—I call on you particularly because you know us: you have traversed our country and know our habits and our needs....you must certainly be kept in ignorance relation to our situation. You have sent among us some great chiefs to buy our lands. In order to get them, they promised a great deal, but we see nothing....Father, we were urged to sell at the treaty of Rock Island, the remaining of our lands on Rock River. ...We have been trying to hunt for a happy place, and we find there is none for us. We are therefore determined to make our village on the Wisconsin, where our whole band will settle.⁸

The conditions the Rock River Ho-Chunk suffered—hunger east of the Mississippi and violence west of it—were the product of decisions the Secretary of War and other officials had made. The unsettled condition Whirling Thunder described was the consequence of policies aimed at displacing Indians peoples, not placing them in suitable homelands. Whirling Thunder's actions and words were a clear indication of the place the Rock River Ho-Chunk people would call home. The chief had been displaced repeatedly since the 1829 treaty, which forced him from Turtle Village to the southeast shore of Lake Koshkonong. Dodge's mounted soldiers forced Whirling Thunder and his people to abandon this village soon after the 1833 removal deadline. Since abandoning his Lake Koshkonong village, he and his people had, for the first time, become a placeless and homeless people, with no spot suitable to cultivate corn. The soil and climate of their new western home was poor, and warring tribes in that region further diminished the chances of survival there. Whirling Thunder reasserted a subsistence-based belonging: where the Ho-Chunks planted their corn was home. Should Cass come looking for

⁸ Whirling Thunder, Speech, February 1832, in Mark Diedrich, ed., *Winnebago Oratory: Great Moments in the Recorded Speech of the HoChungra, 1742-1887* (Rochester, Minnesota: Coyote Books, 1991), 51.

him, Whirling Thunder was leading his people back to the Great Carrying Place and perhaps even further east to the Rock River country.

In October 1835, Cass's emissary Brush arrived in the Rock River country to meet with Ho-Chunk leaders "in order to explain and remove certain difficulties which had occurred in [the government's] intercourse with the Indians of that region."⁹ Over two years had passed since the removal deadline for the Rock River Indians, yet most still occupied their ceded homelands. The Senate Committee on Indian Affairs wanted to know why. After Brush's visits with the Ho-Chunk, Cass and the War Department compiled and submitted a report to the Senate. In many ways, that report, submitted in March of 1836, documented the emergence of the removal landscape in the Rock River country and its evolution over the previous three years. The report's intended purpose, however, was not to critique removal as a policy, but rather to identify obstacles that had prevented the successful completion of Ho-Chunk removal and to offer solutions.

New contours and dynamics of this removal landscape emerged in the years after 1833, and both Indigenous and white sources describe them. Whirling Thunder provides the most consistent window into the lives of Ho-Chunk refugees in their own homeland amid ongoing U.S. forced removals. Correspondence among Lewis Cass, Henry Gratiot, and others offer the perspective of white officials. What is revealed in these exchanges is that while some white settlements had faltered, other changes in the region, such as continued disease outbreaks among the Ho-Chunks, ongoing resource alienation, and perpetual hunger due to the increasing white settler presence, effectively eroded the Ho-Chunks' ability to remain in their ceded

⁹ United States, "Report from the Secretary of War Showing the Conditions of the Winnebago Indians Occupying the Country Ceded to the United States Between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi, Sept. 9, 1835," U.S. Congress, *Senate Document 215*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, Serial 281, 2.

homelands. The 1834 smallpox and cholera epidemics were especially destructive to the Ho-Chunk.

Agents reported that entire communities were gutted by disease. The Ho-Chunks, who had stubbornly resisted conversion by Christian missionaries, witnessed the utter failure of their own spiritual framework. Ho-Chunk healers employed traditional remedies and rituals, but the Ho-Chunks died so quickly and in such large numbers that the living fled their villages, often leaving the dead unburied.¹⁰ Moses Paquette, Ho-Chunk *Métis* son of Pierre Paquette, remembered “very well the appearance of the small-pox scourge among the Winnebagos in 1834,” a sickness he believed the Ho-Chunks had never seen before. “The medicine men soon abandoned their futile attempts to stay the ravages of the pest, and the survivors simply fled before it like a herd of stricken deer.”¹¹ Reports claimed that disease killed between one-fourth and one-half of the total Ho-Chunk population. At least 1,500 people lay dead.¹² Ho-Chunk returns continued to create unsettled conditions among white settlers in the region, as well as officials and lawmakers, but over time, Ho-Chunks grew weary from their own unsettled condition.¹³

Even amidst the calamity and destruction visiting their communities, Ho-Chunks resisted leaving. By the time Brush arrived in the region late in 1835, around 2,500 removed Ho-Chunks,

¹⁰ Robert Bieder, *Native American Communities in Wisconsin, 1600-1960: A Study of Tradition and Change* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 148; P. V. Lawson, “The Winnebago Tribe,” in *The Wisconsin Archeologist* vol. 6, no.3 (July 1907), p. 112; *History of Winnebago County* (Chicago: Warren, 335); Reuben Gold Thwaites, “The Wisconsin Winnebagos: An Interview with Moses Paquette,” *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, vol. 7 (Madison: Democrat Printing Company, State Printers, 1892), 401-02; George Boyd to John Mason, 15-30 April 1834, George Boyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

¹¹ Moses Paquette, “The Wisconsin Winnebagos,” in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, vol. 7, 401.

¹² The number of Ho-Chunk deaths from small pox and cholera in 1834 is uncertain. In 1830, James McCall, a federal official who worked with the Ho-Chunk as a treaty commissioner, reported 4,000 Ho-Chunk. Between 1830 and 1833, John Kinzie’s Portage agency records claimed to pay annuities every September or October to between four and five thousand Indians. At the 1834 annuity payment in the fall, only 3,000 Ho-Chunk gathered. This would suggest that between 1,000 and 2,000 died.

¹³ See John Hall, *Uncommon Defense: Indian Allies in the Black Hawk War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 259, for information about the smallpox epidemic that hit Ho-Chunk villages in 1834.

virtually all of those who were still alive, had returned to the Rock River region. Nearly 200 inhabited Four Lakes, where Brush met with Little Priest and White Breast, two principal chiefs of the Rock River band and signers of the 1832 treaty.¹⁴ Brush reported that as many as 1,200 had reestablished villages on the “Kuskanong, Catfish, and Sugar creeks as well as the Lekatolakee and Rock river.” Still more had pushed further south into Illinois, “below Dixon’s ferry.”¹⁵ By the spring of 1834, Little Priest, White Crow, and Whirling Thunder had established a village of around of 500 just north of the Portage, and they were actively cultivating new fields. Brush’s report is unclear in its complaint regarding this particular village, but it appears that White Crow, Little Priest, and Whirling Thunder may have selected a village site in unceded territory—lands still in aboriginal title, but not Ho-Chunk lands. Cass had to explain to Congress why the Ho-Chunks were not settled on approved lands north of the Wisconsin and west of the Mississippi and why so many continued to inhabit ceded lands. Brush drew on Cass’s directions when he went to Wisconsin.

Brush carried with him a simple but firm message to the Rock River Ho-Chunks. The Secretary of War and the president wanted them to understand “the impossibility of suffering them to occupy the ceded country.” They had to leave and soon. Moreover, “the measures to which the Government would resort, if milder means failed to compel a compliance with the terms of the treaty,” would bring more violence to the region.¹⁶ Brush arranged a council at the home of a local trader at Four Lakes. He planned to meet with the principal chiefs of the Rock River bands—Little Priest, White Breast, and Whirling Thunder. There he found Little Priest

¹⁴ White Breast signed the 1832 treaty under the name Stone Man

¹⁵ E. A. Brush to Lewis Cass, 14 December 1835, in *Public Documents Printed by the Order of the Senate of the United States*, vol. 3 (Washington: Printed by Gales & Seaton, 1836), 6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

and White Breast, but the other “influential chief for whom I had sent, could not be found,” Brush explained. He was speaking of Whirling Thunder.¹⁷

Brush was taken aback by what happened at this meeting. The Ho-Chunks “were rejoiced to see a messenger from their great father, since it proved he had not forgotten them,” Brush explained in his report to Cass that they “now needed [the great father’s] advice and assistance.”¹⁸ Either Little Priest or White Breast explained, through an interpreter, their dire situation: “The bands below [the Wisconsin River] did not know where to put their heads, and the words of their father had come in the right time to tell them what to do.”¹⁹ What Brush expected to find out on his journey to the Rock River country is unknown, but he seems not to have anticipated desperate, anxious, and yet gracious Ho-Chunks. The Ho-Chunks reiterated the same message Whirling Thunder articulated upon his return over a year earlier—Rock River Ho-Chunks remained without suitable homelands; they had no place to put their heads or plant their corn.

Brush, a federal official and an outsider to Wisconsin, glimpsed the removal landscape experienced by the Rock River bands. But the perspective he offered was that of Ho-Chunk refugees, whose everyday lives seemed to him appalling: “They describe their situation to be most deplorable: dispersed over the country, they are driven by the whites from place to place, and some of their young men have been recently whipped.”²⁰ Though sparse, settlers already played a role in preventing returned Ho-Chunks from resettling in ceded lands. The “whites had sent the Indians away from their settlements on Rock river, and all were preparing to come

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 6-7.

²⁰ Ibid., 7.

away.”²¹ Whereas Ho-Chunk removal was deemed necessary in 1832 and 1833 because of the inevitable violence or threat they posed white settlers, by the end of 1835, Ho-Chunk removal was demanded by settlers tired of their “trespass.” Settlers did not want to see the human cost of the lands where they now furrowed their fields and built their homesteads. While Brush’s report is telling, neither he nor the white settlers viewed the Ho-Chunk presence or their acts of theft as consequences of an inhumane removal policy. “The settlers have not forgotten the occurrences of 1832,” Brush explained, “and now that the Indians have lost the power to be formidable, they are regarded as wandering vagrants, whose irregularities and encroachments are to be corrected and restrained by the law of the club and lash.”²² Brush represented the mindset of white settler well. They privileged the memory of the Black Hawk War as a truth that justified all they gained. How the Ho-Chunks remembered the war or the failed promises of corn rations from the 1832 treaty mattered little to the settlers.

In the end, Brush delivered Cass’s harsh ultimatum, but he met no resistance and found no misunderstandings among the Ho-Chunks regarding the treaty. “All the chiefs acknowledge the treaty,” Brush reported, “they had made it and sold the land.” Brush also conveyed their regret to the president and to Cass “for having remained so long in the country.”²³ The only problem Brush distilled from his council with the Indians was their homelessness. Rather than challenging the treaty or resisting removal, Rock River Ho-Chunks requested government assistance in relocating to a new home. The leaders echoed Whirling Thunder’s words for Cass in 1834: “You have sent among us some great chiefs to buy our lands. In order to get them, they

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 8.

²³ Ibid., 7.

promised a great deal, but we see nothing.”²⁴ When Cass did not respond to Whirling Thunder’s 1834 letter, the chief sent another in September 1835, repeating his concerns and asking permission to travel to Washington D.C. to meet with the Secretary of War and President Jackson. Failing to convey his people’s hurt and discomfort using pen and paper, the chief wanted to explain the challenges facing the Ho-Chunks in person, through oratory.²⁵ Like white newcomers who relied on the federal government to structure their settlement of Indian lands, the Ho-Chunk chiefs expected the U.S. government to fulfill its promises and provide the Ho-Chunks with a home. Or, as the interpreter put it, they wanted the government to “relieve them from the evils of their unsettled condition.”²⁶ Slowly, Americans in the region began to recognize the magnitude of Ho-Chunks’ resistance to removal.

In the reports submitted by Sub-Agent Henry Gratiot on the failure of Ho-Chunk removal we find the most honest and gritty depictions of Ho-Chunk removals and returns. As some Ho-Chunks evaded removal forces in the summer of 1833, John Kinzie and his family departed the Portage agency house for their new life in Chicago. Henry Gratiot, however, remained in his agency home at Gratiot’s Grove on the Sugar River. He continued as Indian agent, living still near the Rock River Ho-Chunk. His good relationship with them over the years positioned him as a unique observer of their “unsettled condition.” Gratiot had personally escorted Rock River Ho-Chunks north of the Wisconsin River in May of 1833. He had purchased them corn out of his own purse when the promised rations failed to arrive at Four Lakes. “They remained [north of the Wisconsin River] only a few months,” Gratiot explained, “when they returned to the Rock

²⁴ “Whirling Thunder,” in Diedrich, ed., *Winnebago Oratory*, 51. White Crow made a similar statement in 1833. See Memorandum of a Talk held at Four Lakes, April 29, 1833, with the Winnebago nation of Indians, of Rock River, *Correspondence on the Subject of the Emigration of Indians*, vol. 4 (Washington: Duff Green, 1835), 203-204.

²⁵ Diedrich, *Winnebago Oratory*, 51.

²⁶ *Ibid.*; Henry Gratiot sent Whirling Thunder’s message to the Secretary of War, see Henry Gratiot to Lewis Cass, 2 February 1834, OIA, LR, Winnebago Agency, roll 931.

river, being compelled to leave the [north] country...because they could not subsist themselves.”²⁷ Gratiot made clear as well that the Ho-Chunk understood the terms of the treaty and, “being anxious to abide by the treaty they had made, and avoid a collision with the whites,” the Rock River Indians re-crossed the Wisconsin, “to make another attempt, and promptly obeyed the [treaty] requirements of the United States.”²⁸ Ho-Chunks returned because they were starving, not because they misunderstood the treaty. They had no choice. They wanted no fight.

Gratiot had urged the Ho-Chunk to “stay north of the Wisconsin” but, by his own admission, the flaws of removal policy undermined its objectives. “It was of no avail; such was the scarcity of game north of the Wisconsin, that they suffered for food, and seeing that famine stared them in the face, they resolved to return, being more willing to meet death at the hands of the whites than to die of starvation,” wrote Gratiot. The facts Gratiot conveyed revealed inherent flaws in the policy of removal—without supplying promised provisions to starving people, keeping displaced Ho-Chunks in place was an impossible task. Of course, more than hunger explained why removed Ho-Chunks returned to ceded lands—to their home. Likewise, much more than poor planning and execution explains the removal policy’s failure.

Gratiot occupied a unique position in the midst of this removal landscape. He served the federal government and the designs of its Indian policy, but he counted the Ho-Chunks as friends, not objects on which to impose such an inhumane and poorly planned policy. Because of his familiarity with Rock River Ho-Chunk lifeways—their spiritual and physical reliance on

²⁷ “Report from the Secretary of War Showing the Conditions of the Winnebago Indians, 3. In the fall of 1835, the Ho-Chunks told Brush the same thing: “They could not subsist on the other side of the Wisconsin and were afraid to cross the Mississippi.” Brush to Cass, 14 December 1835, 7-8.

²⁸ Henry Gratiot to Lewis Cass, 25 February 1836, in “Report from the Secretary of War Showing the Conditions of the Winnebago Indians, 4.

the Rock River soils for corn—Gratiot recognized their plight. Yet, despite their yearning to remain in ceded lands, he also knew its “impossibility.” And so, it fell to Gratiot to negotiate this space between being and not being in the region. Only then could he begin to make sense of Ho-Chunk returns.

Gratiot understood the importance of discerning the differences between Ho-Chunk bands living between the Mississippi and the Wisconsin rivers and those living further east in the Rock River region when it came to matters of subsistence and inter-tribal relations. For example, the western Wisconsin Ho-Chunks considered Henry Gratiot a friend. Gratiot entertained many Ho-Chunk visitors in his home in the months and years after the planned June 1833 removal. Ho-Chunks held informal gatherings as well as councils among Rock River leaders, but their arrival at Gratiot’s home near Prairie du Chien was intended to demonstrate that they were an unsettled people. They had been displaced—physically, legally, psychologically—and they expressed “a willingness, indeed an anxious desire, to leave the ceded country, if they could find another where they could support themselves.”²⁹ But there was no place that could be so simply exchanged for their Rock River lands. The Indians knew it. Most Americans could not be convinced to care.

By early 1836, the impossibility of the Ho-Chunks remaining was quite clear. “The country in which the Rock-river Winnebagoes now reside, is fast filling up with white inhabitants,” Gratiot explained in his report to Cass. He continued, “the Indians are falling a prey to the vices incident to association with the frontier settlers of our country. Their situation is in the highest degree deplorable.” Gratiot did not fault the Ho-Chunks, but rather the “cupidity of the whites” for selling the Ho-Chunks whiskey “in order to make good bargains out of them,

²⁹ Henry Gratiot to Lewis Cass, 25 February 1836, in “Report from the Secretary of War Showing the Conditions of the Winnebago Indians,” 4.

until they are stripped of everything.”³⁰ Gratiot’s letter shows his own anguish at witnessing the Ho-Chunks’ hard times, a scene that other federal officials largely ignored. Requests made by Rock River Ho-Chunks to travel to Washington in hopes of gaining an audience there were denied. Acknowledging that Rock River Ho-Chunks were refused permission to travel to Washington, “to represent their miserable situation to the Government,” Gratiot explained, “I have undertaken to act for them, at the urgent request of their tribe, and in accordance with my own feelings of compassion and sense of justice.” Gratiot spoke for Ho-Chunk people who had not yet been silenced by the government or by death. He described their suffering in the fullest capacity language could allow:

...the men who were once proud warriors, and supported themselves and their families by hunting, are now despoiled of their guns and their blankets, and, what is worse, of their character, and are reduced to absolute beggary. I have this day heard, from unquestionable authority, that several of this tribe were found dead within the last month, and their appearance too plainly indicated that hunger, united with inclement weather, was the cause of their death.³¹

Gratiot’s description of the demise of Ho-Chunk people, both in character and in health, was likely received as an endorsement of their removal. The debilitating impact of white settlers on native peoples was a common story used to justify removal. Supporters and critics of federal policy knew this. Indeed, Gratiot included in his report a final plea: “To save this unfortunate band from utter destruction by the most loathsome diseases, it is absolutely necessary that they should be removed from their present location.”³² But Gratiot did not describe Ho-Chunk suffering in this way simply to build support for his plan to complete Ho-Chunk removal. He sought to protect the Ho-Chunks from any more misery.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

Their desolation, Gratiot understood, stemmed from poor decisions made by his superiors in their implementation of removal policy in the Rock River country. For example, Elbert Herring's decision to deny the Rock River Ho-Chunks the annuity payments and provisions promised in the 1832 Rock Island treaty for the previous two years left Gratiot baffled:

The annuity provided for by the third article of the treaty of the 15th September, 1832, has for the last two years been withheld from the Rock-river band, which consists of about 2,500 souls, and has been paid to the band of Winnebagoes north of the Wisconsin, who are natives of that country, and are much less numerous than the former band, and who, though they participated in making the treaty, ceded no lands, so that the Rock-river band literally have no means of support but the precarious and scanty resource of fishing.³³

The federal government punished the Rock River Ho-Chunks for returning to ceded lands and hunting, fishing, and cultivating there in violation of Article 11. From Gratiot's perspective, both parties had failed to abide by the treaty of 1832. While Ho-Chunk returns were "unavoidably a fruitful source of annoyance to the whites," the failings of the federal government had caused the Ho-Chunks a great deal more suffering.

Gratiot also seemed to take issue with the treaty, in particular, the selection of the "neutral ground" as the site of the Ho-Chunks' western reservation:

[T]hey are extremely anxious to go west of the Mississippi, but before they can do so, the tribes above and below the "Neutral Ground" must be propitiated, and to reconcile them, some presents will be required, the expense of which, together with the cost of a journey to their country for the purposes of talking with them, will probably be about \$4,000, which sum I have included in my estimate of the expense of removing the Rock-river Winnebagoes.³⁴

Witnessing the federal government's failings, Gratiot imparted his knowledge of the lifeways among Ho-Chunks indigenous to the land below and above the Wisconsin River. Gratiot knew the Rock River country well and described it as "a vast territory, and not inferior, in richness of

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 3-4.

soil, to the most fertile portion of the fertile West.”³⁵ The lower Wisconsin River lands were quite different, and so, too, were the ways in which Ho-Chunk people survived there: “That portion of the Winnebagoes who now live north of the Wisconsin, are able to support themselves there, because they are natives of that country, and have been accustomed to its soil and climate, and to the requisite modes of procuring subsistence, from their infancy, and of consequence have their fields enclosed, and all necessary arrangements made to raise their corn, beans, &c.”³⁶ At the core of Ho-Chunk suffering and their returns to ceded lands, and at the center of the federal government’s failure, was lack of food. The U.S. government, so focused on displacing Indian peoples to make way for white settlement, overlooked or ignored the relationship to land that all humans share: procuring nutrients from the soil, subsisting in a familiar place, possessing an indigenous knowledge of how and what to eat.

In the end, Gratiot’s “own compassion and sense of justice” did not compel him to articulate Ho-Chunk yearning to remain in their homelands, but rather to design their removal in a manner that would be quick, less painful, and centered on placing them in a new homeland where neither suffering nor survival would compel them to leave. Gratiot used words like “feasible” and “convenient” and “propriety” to sum up how Ho-Chunk removal ought to take place on the ground.³⁷ Women and children would make the overland journey in wagons to the Wisconsin River, and from there, they would travel by keel-boat. The 1832 treaty had stipulated funds for a school at Prairie du Chien, a school to which no Ho-Chunk had yet sent a child. The Ho-Chunks wanted these funds to be redirected “to preparing the soil of the new country to which the Indians desire to remove, for the reception of seeds.” Gratiot backed this logical

³⁵ Ibid., 3.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. 5.

redistribution of monies—food before books—and suggested that an “agriculturalist...be sent to the country...as soon as possible ...in order that the ground may be seasonably prepared for cultivation.”³⁸ Gratiot made other sensible suggestions, but in the end, he believed the success of Ho-Chunk removal rested on whether Ho-Chunks could subsist there and be safe. Success required that Ho-Chunk be able to make a new home out of an unfamiliar place.

Gratiot made another case for Ho-Chunk removal, one that had nothing to do with treaty stipulations or federal goals, but rather, touched on perhaps the most unsettling aspect of Ho-Chunk returns for local white settlers:

Another reason why the Winnebagoes should be removed from the Rock-river country will readily present itself to your mind. Reduced as they are from their once proud station of independent warriors, to abject poverty, and seeing death in its most horrid shape rapidly approaching them, it is much to be feared that they will take up the hatchet and lay down their lives on the soil they inherited from their fathers, if measures are not taken to remove them from their present position to a country where they can make a living by hunting. Indeed, this result is almost inevitable. These Indians are spread over a large tract of country, and are unavoidably a fruitful source of annoyance to the whites, and very slight causes would arouse the slumbering passions, only to be quieted by the utter extermination of the tribe.³⁹

By 1835, Gratiot’s investigations and recommendations regarding Ho-Chunk removal were at last heard by others. Lewis Cass finally acknowledged: “The tract granted to the Winnebagoes for their residence, by the treaty of 1832...is not so extensive or desirable as that which was ceded by the Winnebagoes.” Cass added, “independently of this circumstance...the Winnebagoes were probably under some apprehensions, if they placed themselves so near the Sacs and Foxes, without some previous arrangement, that hostilities with them might ensue.” Cass glossed the relationship among the Sauk, Fox, Ho-Chunk, and Americans in the Black Hawk War and put it in simple but ambiguous terms: “Recent events upon that frontier

³⁸ Ibid., 4-5.

³⁹ Ibid., 4.

had created unpleasant feelings among some of these tribes.”⁴⁰ The Rock River Ho-Chunk had been drawn into a violent conflict they did everything to avoid. They were forced to sign a treaty they did not want. Now they were suffering in a land that once provided them every comfort.

Cass knew that only a small number of Ho-Chunks had chosen to relocate west of the Mississippi, and that most remained east of that river and relocated instead “north of Ouisconsin, to their old possessions, which they have never ceded to the United States. Subsequently they have gradually returned.”⁴¹ Cass placed this geographical convenience at the fore of his explanation for Ho-Chunk returns and in doing so, presented one easy solution to completing and ensuring the permanence of Ho-Chunk removal west of the Mississippi: the government should buy out all remaining Ho-Chunk lands east of that great river boundary. If Ho-Chunks owned land adjacent to ceded lands, their presence in ceded territory would likely continue.

Ho-Chunks’ insistence on remaining east of the Mississippi seemed to catch federal officials off guard. Cass, like Commissioner Herring, intended Rock River Ho-Chunks to remove to their western reserve, per Article 2 in the 1832 treaty. Although they had been given the option of relocating to remaining lands in Wisconsin, Cass knew this territory could not support the entire nation. He wrote, “I have always understood that their country north of the Ouisconsin, is a sterile Barren region, almost destitute of game, and very unfavorable to any of the products raised by the Indians.” He found Rock River Ho-Chunks irrational in their decision to relocate to northern lands: “I do not believe that the whole body of the Winnebagoes can subsist comfortably upon it, at any rate, with their habits of indolence and improvidence.”⁴² It

⁴⁰ “Report from the Secretary of War Showing the Conditions of the Winnebago Indians,” 2.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

was not simply the lack of flora and fauna north of the Wisconsin River; Cass also alleged Ho-Chunk laziness and carelessness as essential elements of their distress.

Depicting the Ho-Chunks as indolent and improvident helped Cass on two fronts. First, such a claim created distance between federal officials and responsibility for Ho-Chunk suffering, deaths, and even returns. Second, if the Ho-Chunk had made a poor decision when they removed to lands north of the Wisconsin River, then the federal government must not fail to remove them west of the Mississippi in its next attempt. Because Ho-Chunk “indolence and improvidence” prevented them from making a living on what Cass himself described as “sterile, barren” lands, it was assumed that more industrious and frugal white settlers might thrive in these same lands. The Ho-Chunks were also frugal and industrious, though they used the lands differently. They could not so easily or simply take up new lands and within the span of a season expect to have the same relationship they had to the Rock River country. In reality, Cass had underestimated Ho-Chunk anxiety over their neutral ground reservation in 1832 and 1833 as well as the Ho-Chunks’ desire to remain close to their Rock River homes and traditional subsistence base. What had become clear in the years since is how decisions made by the commissioner and Cass undermined the Ho-Chunks’ ability to survive in either their western or northern lands.

Cass also addressed the small window of time the 1832 treaty left for Ho-Chunk removal. “Measures were taken, soon after the ratification of the treaty with the Winnebagoes, for their removal from the ceded lands,” he explained, continuing, “That step was deemed essential to the tranquility of that part of the country which had been recently disturbed by war and representations were received at the Department, urging the subject upon the immediate attention of the Government.”⁴³ Whether the Senate questioned Cass’s timeline or overall planning of Ho-

⁴³ Ibid.

Chunks removal is unclear, but Cass defended his decision to make quick work of it. The federal government's timeline for Ho-Chunk removal was driven by the desires of local white settlers and politicians and not the well-being of Ho-Chunks. Cass made no attempt to obscure this fact in his removal narrative. The policy of Indian removal ultimately served settler interests.

Cass remained committed to a single ending that alone would signal success—the completion of Ho-Chunk removal. Removal had been successful once, he pointed out: “After some delay, nearly all of them quitted the ceded country.”⁴⁴ He was referring to Henry Dodge's removal efforts in the summer of 1833. Cass was confident that a successful Ho-Chunk removal could be achieved again, by whatever method the government chose: “The tribe has yielded valuable and extensive possessions to the United States. They are now dispersed, poor, and miserable. We might, no doubt, expel them by force; though, as a mere matter of pecuniary calculation, that measure would be an inexpedient one. But it involves much higher considerations.”⁴⁵ Because of their condition, brought about by loss of land and resources, Cass dangled the idea of forced removal, but quickly retracted it in favor of a less costly plan. In any case, the Ho-Chunk had become an eyesore for local settlers: “It is very desirable, therefore, that they should be speedily removed to the country west of the Mississippi.”⁴⁶ As the Ho-Chunks returned, American patience with them had run out. If the Ho-Chunks would not willingly leave and stay gone, most Americans believed forced removal was the only remaining solution.

In his 1833 editorial on the return of White Crow to Four Lakes, Phileo called for a “speedy remedy” to the problem, which was forced removal at the point of a bayonet. Removal policy served the interest of white settlers who wanted Indian land, and so its emphasis on

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

displacing Indians rather than placing them in suitable homelands continued. Two years would go by before this truth would emerge, when, in 1835, the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs formally requested a report from the Secretary of War Lewis Cass about the failure of Ho-Chunk removal in the region. White settlers found the subject of continued Indian belonging an uncomfortable one. The Ho-Chunks, so long as they remained, were a constant reminder of the moral and practical failing of federal Indian policy. Cass was not eager to explain those failings to the Senate.

Any discussion of Ho-Chunks in the ceded territory after 1833 was, at its core, acknowledgement of Ho-Chunk belonging. For a hundred years, the Ho-Chunk made decisions to keep themselves at arm's length from the French, the British, and the Americans. At every turn, they acted to protect their lands and their corn, and by extension their lives. By the 1830s, the pressure newcomers imposed became too great to control from a distance, so they took further action to minimize the adverse impact of the militia and the U.S. Army in their lands as they worked desperately and with every negotiating and navigating tool available to maintain peace in their lands. When maintenance of that fragile peace failed, they again found themselves in a difficult position, from which they worked to minimize the disaster forced upon them by the Rock Island treaty. Facing the reality of removal, they again took action to resist forced emigration to the West. When they returned in 1833 and over and over again thereafter, they did so on their own terms, as quietly as possible, to a homeland that was no longer theirs, but from which they would continue to wring an existence. While many, too many, died in the removal landscape that was once their home, those who returned would continue to make that land home for another hundred years.

* * *

A casual review of any map of Wisconsin in the twenty-first century will show large, contiguous reservations for many of the Ojibwa bands residing in Wisconsin. The Menominees also retain a portion of their original homeland as a large reservation near the bottom of Lake Michigan's Green Bay. Nearby, Oneidas, emigrants from New York in the years after the American Revolution, have a large reservation. By contrast, Potawatomis have a much smaller land base in the state today. The Dakota, who once occupied a large portion of western Wisconsin, are also now largely absent and have no land base east of the Mississippi. A closer look will reveal a scattering of small land parcels (often no more than a quarter section) held in trust, protected for the Ho-Chunks now by the same government that once tried, unsuccessfully, to remove them. This is the modern estate of Wisconsin's Ho-Chunks. It is noteworthy that a lot of that land is within the territory they lost as the punitive price of peacekeeping more than 150 years ago.

When the Ho-Chunks invited their Sauk and Fox kin to join them along the Rock River to plant corn and live as they could, the Ho-Chunks were acting as humanitarians. The Ho-Chunks were increasingly concerned with white encroachment in their lands, but they also had great compassion for the Sauk band and wished for them a better existence. The Ho-Chunks sought no quarrel with the Americans. They could not have imagined in early 1832 that the peaceful invitation extended to the Sauks would result in the events that followed. The Ho-Chunks soon found themselves at the center of the conflict Americans manufactured against the Sauk band. With no easy choices that spring, they chose to take control of the situation, to take control of the Sauk band in their protection, and to take control as best they could of the army and the militia in

the hopes of preserving peace and protecting their land and corn. They navigated the role of peacekeepers with great caution and almost as much success that summer. Though they tried early on to act as brokers of peace, when it became clear the Americans would have no such dialogue, they worked quietly between and among the Americans and the Sauk band to secure peace over their lands. In that role, they became covert emissaries of peace. Their method of making the human shadows American soldiers and militiamen could sense but rarely touch was largely invisible to Americans who wanted nothing of peace. That role has likewise been largely invisible to historians who have not seen the subtext of Ho-Chunk actions in the spring and summer of 1832.

In the Rock Island treaty council that September, the Ho-Chunks could not reveal their peace process as defense of their actions because the Americans had no mind for rationalizing mercy or justice. Americans wanted Ho-Chunk land. Any evidence of Ho-Chunk peacekeeping would be twisted against them as accusations of malicious duplicity. Ho-Chunks had few choices at the 1832 council and none of them could lead to happy outcomes. They had lost much of their corn in the summer of 1832, and that fall they would lose the land from which it grew. For many, the following years would be spent resisting removal as paupers in their once-rich and fruitful land. Others left for Iowa and Nebraska as they were directed. Those who remained lived as squatters, as silently and as quietly and as invisibly as possible in the hope of staying close to the bones of their ancestors and to the spirits that gave their world life. White Crow is buried in Wisconsin.

Ho-Chunk experiences in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century were similar to those of other Native groups in the region. Europeans brought deadly diseases to Indian Country, which greatly diminished the Ho-Chunk population and compromised their political

and military power and control over territory. Inter-marriage with the Fox and other Algonquian people as well as trade with the French brought a temporary measure of stability to the Ho-Chunks, and their sense of community strengthened as they struggled to control encounters and relations with outsiders. When the Ho-Chunk incorporated outsiders such as the Sauk and Fox or the French and the British into their lives, they did so in measured and self-interested ways. The Ho-Chunks drew boundaries around their distinct peoplehood and eschewed allies and kin when these relationships undermined their autonomy. This was their “middle ground” in place and time. The arrival of the Americans following their victory in the War of 1812 changed much of this dynamic. Change, though assured, was not immediate. Americans were different neighbors, invaders really, and the Ho-Chunks understood this from their earliest encounters.

In a short period of time, just over two decades after the 1814 Treaty of Ghent concluded the war, Americans had replaced the Rock River Ho-Chunks as owners and dominant population of the Rock River Country. Famine and malnutrition resulted from failed crops and the loss of their most arable land. Deadly epidemics of small pox, cholera, and other diseases increased among Ho-Chunks while their unfamiliarity with foreign lands on which they might hunt, gather, and farm persisted. The population and condition of the Ho-Chunks declined in the 1830s. When Americans arrived in numbers, the change they brought surpassed the fears of Rice-Eater and The Smoker after the War of 1812. Americans ploughed, drained, and cleared the land such that it was almost unrecognizable to the Ho-Chunks.

Ho-Chunks understood early on in their relationship with the Americans that violent resistance was not the path to happiness and stability. They tried to regulate and shape American behavior from time to time, as individuals or in small groups. Ho-Chunks exacted their own system of justice and retribution in the form of tolls, policing, and intimidation along the Fox-

Wisconsin waterway and the lead region. Small displays of sovereignty did little more than annoy white settlers and soldiers and ultimately, Ho-Chunk efforts failed to abate Americans' arrogance as well as their appetite for Indian property. Murdering white settlers and soldiers caused only serious repercussions for Indians. The Great Father did not see such actions as Ho-Chunk justice, but rather as an affront to American justice and a cause for disciplinary diplomacy or outright war. When Ho-Chunks sought American assistance and understanding in the wake of Red Bird's violent retaliations in 1827, when they called on the Great Father "to reach out his long arm and draw [white squatters] back," the president instead swept the Ho-Chunks from their own lower Rock River lands.⁴⁷ After the 1829 treaty, the Ho-Chunks exercised greater restraint, smashing white settlers' cooking kits rather than their heads. The Ho-Chunks half-heartedly hoped that the invented boundaries Americans drew to distinguish tribal lands from white-owned lands would create and preserve peace in the region.

By September 1832, it was clear their hopes had been misplaced. Federal policy, combined with frontier Indian-hating, made the Ho-Chunks and their Native neighbors primary targets for expulsion from their own lands. Diplomacy and dialogue had often benefitted the Ho-Chunks, but by 1832 negotiations mattered little to an American government intent on evicting Indian from their lands. Americans did not conquer or exterminate the Ho-Chunks. Rather, whites seized opportunities to take lands when the Ho-Chunks were most vulnerable. Americans worked at every opportunity to create those vulnerabilities.

In the same year that Pliney Warriner encountered Old Greyheaded Decorah near the Portage, Americans elected Andrew Jackson President of the United States. While Decorah talked of planting corn, Jackson asserted that Native peoples lacked the intelligence and will to

⁴⁷ Diedrich, *Winnebago Oratory*, 23. Four Legs spoke to Lewis Cass and Thomas L. McKenney on August 11, 1827, in a council at Butte des Morts along the Fox River.

practice proper and productive agriculture. Even in the absence of coherent evidence, white narratives and assertions justified Native American removal. For Jackson, Indian racial and cultural inferiority justified their expulsion from lands desired by white settlers as well as Indian exclusion from U.S. citizenship. Local whites adapted these national removal narratives to local circumstances. The Ho-Chunks, a formidable and defiant population in the 1820s, had become a demoralized and fragile people by the mid-1830s. In both contexts, whites believed that Ho-Chunk removal solved their Indian problem. Jackson and others ignored the core message of Old Greyheaded Decorah's story in 1828. If left alone, the Ho-Chunks could take care of themselves. But they could not be left alone, because, from the American perspective, the Ho-Chunk were in the way.

Within five years of the Rock Island treaty, white residents and officials of the Wisconsin Territory thought that the remaining Ho-Chunk community was in their way. The federal government concurred. Through dishonest means, federal officials maneuvered a Ho-Chunk delegation that went to Washington specifically to secure their remaining Wisconsin lands into signing the 1837 land cession and removal treaty instead. Ho-Chunk leaders tried to guard against this outcome by excluding Bear Clan members from the delegation. Bear Clan people, such as White Crow, had clear authority to speak about land matters. Federal officials did not bring the Ho-Chunk delegation to Washington to talk about land, however. Federal officials intended to force a land cession treaty and refused the delegation passage home until they conceded. Winter was no time to be away from their families, and the Ho-Chunk delegation worried about those they left behind and whether the deadly diseases from previous winters might return. Ultimately they signed the treaty. The signers had no authority to cede land and quietly hoped their marks on paper would do no harm. Federal officials talked of Indian

removal, but the Ho-Chunk delegation believed the federal government's word that they would have eight years to prepare for relocation. The Ho-Chunks would work during this time to revise or even negate the treaty, which they viewed as fraudulent. The official treaty presented by the government stipulated not eight years, but a mere eight months, before a forced removal would be executed.⁴⁸

In 1836, Andrew Jackson had appointed Henry Dodge the first governor of the Wisconsin Territory. It was a political achievement built on his manufactured military fame and frontier reputation. The Wisconsin Territorial Seal from 1836 likely presents Dodge's vision for the region. It shows an Indian, perhaps a Ho-Chunk, walking westward toward the Mississippi. Furrowed fields and Anglo-American structures transform the landscape. The story of that seal narrated an Anglo-American place-story about white belonging and Indian alienation. Much like Dodge's heroic efforts during the 1832 crisis, the seal's narrative was fiction. Ho-Chunk history and belonging in Wisconsin did not end with the 1836 territorial establishment, the 1837 treaty, or the 1848 transition to statehood, which came about when a sufficient number of settlers had arrived.

Contrary to Ho-Chunks' hopes and desires, which they had articulated consistently since Americans arrived at Green Bay in 1816, the 1837 treaty extinguished Indian title to all remaining Ho-Chunk lands east of the Mississippi River. Even more cruel, the treaty stipulated Ho-Chunk removal to a reservation in the trans-Mississippi West and prohibited Ho-Chunk from any form of subsistence in the ceded country. Former British Navy Captain and writer Frederic Marryat was present for the treaty signing, and the forced ceremony reminded him of Jacob tricking Esau to give up his leadership of Israel for a single meal in a moment of need. But

⁴⁸ Steven D. Hoelscher, *Picturing Indians: Photographic Encounters and Tourist Fantasies in H.H. Bennett's Wisconsin Dells* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 57.

Marryat knew better.⁴⁹ The U.S. government took what it wanted to achieve the ends it desired. The treaty and promised annuity were a pittance and added an illusion of fairness to the deal. But the Ho-Chunks were not fooled by the worthless bargain.

The Ho-Chunk people struggled against alienation from their homeland and resources for the next half century. Thousands were forcibly removed, first to territories in Iowa and Minnesota. Federal troops carried out forced removals through the 1840s and 1850s. In the early 1840s, heeding calls for better reservation lands for farming, the federal government relocated the Ho-Chunks to northern Minnesota. Though trying to make a living on the land, Ho-Chunk leaders complained of the soils, the short growing season, and of their precarious placement between two tribes that hated one another: the Ojibwa and the Dakota.⁵⁰ Next, the Ho-Chunks succeeded in getting a new reservation in south-central Minnesota, near Blue Earth. Though small, the Blue Earth reservation proved fertile ground for these displaced corn farmers. Whatever modicum of comfort the Ho-Chunks secured in Minnesota was short-lived, however. They were sent further west still—to the Dakota Territory—after starving Dakota people rose up in Minnesota and killed over 500 whites in the late fall of 1862, in an event that came to be called the Dakota War or the Dakota Uprising. Innocent of any involvement, 2,000 Ho-Chunks paid for spilled American blood when they were forcibly removed by federal troops to Crow Creek in the Dakota Territory during the winter of 1863. Rancid food and harsh weather killed nearly 550 Ho-Chunks along the way.⁵¹ In the months following that removal, some tried to remain at Crow Creek and others returned to Wisconsin. Within a year of their removal, more

⁴⁹ Hoelscher, *Picturing Indians*, 56; Frederic Marryat, “An English Officer’s Description of Wisconsin in 1837,” *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, vol.14, 138-39.

⁵⁰ Patty Loew, *Indian Nations of Wisconsin: Histories of Endurance and Renewal* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2001), 46-47.

⁵¹ Lurie, “Winnebago,” 700; Hoelscher, *Picturing Indians*, 58.

than 1,000 Ho-Chunks paddled the Missouri River south to Nebraska and sought refuge among their kin, the Omaha. When they refused to return to Crow Creek, the federal government yielded to Ho-Chunk leaders and purchased for them a portion of the Omaha reservation. Since 1865, the “treaty-abiding faction” of Ho-Chunks have made their home in Nebraska as the Winnebago Nation.

Ho-Chunk removals from Wisconsin continued in the 1860s and 1870s. The 1862 violence in Minnesota and the Modoc War in 1872-73 in California stoked white fears of local Indian uprisings, which in turn led to new calls for Indian removal. Cheered on by the vast majority of white citizens in Wisconsin, federal troops made several more attempts to round up and remove remaining Ho-Chunks. Even so, the work begun by Henry Dodge and his dragoons in the spring of 1833 remained unfinished after the federal government’s final attempt in 1874.⁵² Troops marched at least 860 Ho-Chunks to Nebraska that year, but in 1875 only 204 of these Ho-Chunk emigrants remained in the West. The rest returned to Wisconsin by their own effort and at their own expense. While some Ho-Chunks seeking a stable home suitable to their subsistence needs created the Nebraska community, the vast majority of Ho-Chunks refused to stay removed, returning to Wisconsin by foot, horse, and canoe from ever more distant reservations. Some Ho-Chunks evaded removal forces altogether and never left Wisconsin.

Wisconsin was never a removed landscape, one cleared of its Indian inhabitants. Between 1833 and 1874, whites documented presence of Ho-Chunk people, labeling them renegades, rebels, illegals, vagrants, drunks, muskrat Indians, fugitives, and stragglers.⁵³ In 1887, Henry Rice, a former Minnesota senator, said that “Wisconsin was always the region [the Ho-Chunk] desired and it is doubtful if the generation of that day would have ever been content

⁵² Hoelscher, *Picturing Indians*, 58.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 57-61.

elsewhere.”⁵⁴ Ho-Chunks eked out a living by however they could. They were day laborers; they crafted goods for the Indian trade; they farmed unsold lands; they passed as non-Indians in order to survive.

Yellow Thunder, for example, a peace chief who had experienced removal to Iowa at least once, remained a Wisconsin resident by becoming an individual landowner. He chose to stay, and to hide in plain sight.⁵⁵ He persuaded a white trader to go with him to the land office in Mineral Point in 1849, where he entered forty acres near Wisconsin Dells. Yellow Thunder’s purchase transformed him into a legal resident of Wisconsin. For other Ho-Chunk Indians hiding in plain view, the chief’s homestead became a cultural and spiritual enclave. Steven Hoelscher describes the homestead as “a haven for the refugees avoiding white pressure and a site of medicine dances and other ceremonies that helped maintain traditional culture.”⁵⁶ He explains, “Eventually, [Yellow Thunder’s] act of survivance became a model for others to emulate, as more than 600 hundred Ho-Chunk families took advantage of federal legislation in 1881 permitting them to purchase forty-acre tracts.”⁵⁷ These small parcels proved to be powerful places of belonging for the Ho-Chunks.

Policies of removal and assimilation transformed Ho-Chunk lives over the course of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, they persisted, both as a tribal community and a people rooted in their sacred and ancestral homelands. In 1881, the same year Helen Hunt Jackson condemned

⁵⁴ Ibid., 58; Paquette, “Wisconsin Winnebagos,” 407.

⁵⁵ Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 116. Sleeper-Smith views “hiding in plain view” as one of the most effective ways in which western Great Lakes Native peoples resisted removal. Potawatomis and Miamis masked their identity by presenting the “whitest” version of themselves when their appearance was necessary, by sending individuals who most resembled and successfully mimicked white culture and society in their clothing, mannerisms, and physical appearance.

⁵⁶ Hoelscher, *Picturing Indians*, 61.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

federal Indian policies for dismantling the social and economic worlds of Native peoples, the federal government and the state of Wisconsin offered the Ho-Chunk forty-acre homesteads.⁵⁸ The land Ho-Chunks purchased was scattered throughout central Wisconsin and almost always the poorest acreage. Whites had long since purchased the best lands. Nonetheless, the lands purchased remained tax free and inalienable for twenty-five years. Although dispersed over a ten-county area and ill-suited for communal life, Ho-Chunk homesteads offered a long-awaited refuge from the threat of removal. The homesteads also ensured that Ho-Chunk would have a place in modern Wisconsin's society and political economy.

When they no longer had to hide, Ho-Chunks remained in plain sight by making a living as seasonal workers as well as performers for tourists. In the late nineteenth century, they began capitalizing on white nostalgia for allegedly vanishing Indian peoples, posing for postcard portraits by photographer H. H. Bennett in the unique landscape of the Wisconsin Dells or in Bennett's studio. Americans, once insistent on their removal, were by 1900 fascinated by a romantic vision of the past the Indians now represented. The Ho-Chunks were more than willing to fuel that romanticism in their own interest. This was one of many ways that the renegade faction of Wisconsin Ho-Chunks survived, endured, and joined the modern economy. Their efforts, however wrought by colonialism, helped Ho-Chunks' economic and cultural survival. Money earned in their more recent tribal endeavors, chiefly gaming, is funneled to the same causes, and especially into buying land along the Wisconsin River.

The federal government did not seek to recognize the Ho-Chunk living in Wisconsin as a sovereign Indian tribe until the 1930s when the Indian Reorganization Act—the Indian New

⁵⁸ Helen Hunt Jackson, "The Winnebagoes," in *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government's Dealing with Some of the Indian Tribes* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1881; Norman University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 218-56.

Deal—opened the door to reaffirm their tribal sovereignty. But the Wisconsin Ho-Chunk rejected the opportunity because they were suspicious of the need for federal approval of their tribal government. Still, the Ho-Chunk received some benefits in the form of federal housing on government-owned lands. Neither these lands, nor those owned by individual Ho-Chunks, were considered trust lands or reservations, however. With scattered settlements on individually owned plots and on federal lands, the Ho-Chunks who engaged in seasonal work might appear similar to their ancestors from the 1830s who complained of their unsettled condition. Robert Bieder writes, “they moved like shadows across the land,” and “survived by picking other peoples’ crops.”⁵⁹ However, migrating for work and returning to homesteads and federal lands offered the Ho-Chunk a degree of security they had not enjoyed for much of the nineteenth century. Moreover, their reservation-less existence protected them somewhat from unscrupulous business interests. Bieder explains, “Possessing no timber or land resources, the [Ho-Chunk] were not targets for exploitation from lumber companies and realtors and so could work out their own strategy for survival, free from outside pressures and internal economic interests.”⁶⁰ Reservations increasingly defined tribal identity for the Menominee, Ojibwa, and other Native communities, diminishing, to a degree, the importance of ceremonies as an expression of belonging. Among the Ho-Chunks, by contrast, ceremonies remained integral to community identity, creating a sense of belonging even in the absence of a defined reservation.⁶¹

Meanwhile, starting in 1949, the Ho-Chunks pursued compensation for lands lost in the nineteenth century through the Indians Claims Commission. The committee formed by the Ho-Chunks proved to be the prototype for a future Ho-Chunk tribal government. Ho-Chunk tribal

⁵⁹ Bieder, *Native American Communities in Wisconsin*, 205.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁶¹ Lurie, *Wisconsin Indians*, 41; Lurie, “Trends of Change,” 40-41, 61-62; Lurie, “Cultural Change among the Wisconsin Winnebago,” *Wisconsin Archaeologist* 25, no. 4 (1944): 124-25.

members voted to adopt a tribal constitution in 1963, and in this they were distinct from their Winnebago kin in Nebraska. This prompted the federal government to recognize the Wisconsin Ho-Chunks as a sovereign tribal nation under the Indian Reorganization Act. Recognition flowed from an act of bureaucratic kindness by the Kennedy administration in the months before the president's assassination. Tribal recognition required lands held in trust, and the administration counted 40 acres of federal land in the swamps of central Wisconsin to serve as such—as their reservation.

The Ho-Chunks had survived a half-century of removals, and in some cases, they had prospered in their enclaves. Now they seized an opportunity offered by state and federal governments that had tried multiple times to expel them. The scattered homesteads may not have provided a contiguous land base, but they provided a home. Hoelscher explains, “That they have survived, and progressed, in a state that treated them first as illegal fugitives and then as second-class citizens without the physical security of a reservation environment is a testament to Ho-Chunk survivance in the face of severe hardship and systematic oppression.”⁶² The preceding chapters provide a glimpse of that history.

Heeding Sonya Atalay's caution to avoid minimizing the violence of colonialism or celebrating Native agency and presence, this history has emphasized “stories of struggle, particularly those that create a context for understanding and appreciating the creative methods of resistance and survival in the face of such unimaginable turmoil.”⁶³ In 2010, over 6,500 people constituted the Ho-Chunk tribal nation of Wisconsin. After losing well over 8 million acres in the nineteenth century, individual Ho-Chunks and their sovereign government have

⁶² Hoelscher, *Picturing Indians*, 55.

⁶³ Sonya Atalay, “No Sense of Struggle: Creating a Context of Survivance at the NMAI,” *American Indian Quarterly* 30, no. 3/4 (Summer and Fall 2006): 609.

bought back over 8,000 acres of land. The Ho-Chunk nation owns over 5,000 acres in fee simple and has placed over 3,500 acres more into federal trust. In Wisconsin, Ho-Chunks live across fourteen counties, and more still in Illinois.⁶⁴

In 2012, Jon Greendeer, President of the Ho-Chunk nation, delivered the State of the Tribes address in the Wisconsin State Capitol. Like his ancestors, Greendeer prepared his audience of Wisconsin lawmakers and other dignitaries for a long and “carefully crafted” message. Selected to speak for all eleven federally recognized tribal communities of Wisconsin, Greendeer explained that his words had to be inclusive, had to “carry the substance of our issues” from Wisconsin’s Indian Country. He spoke of Indian people’s mental and physical health struggles as well as their successes in realms of economy and education. Wisconsin Indians are not needy people, Greendeer stated: “the people I speak of are strong and they are resourceful.” Similar to The Smoker’s message in 1816, Greendeer praised Indigenous cultures and survivance. He called for cross-cultural respect, for well-intentioned government-to-government dialogue, and he reminded his audience of his people’s duty to care for their Grandmother, the Earth. In 2012, legal and political battles waged over mining access and development in northern Wisconsin, massive economic projects to which all Wisconsin tribal communities united in opposition. Indians are caretakers of the land, Greendeer stated, “and sometimes soldiers for it as well.” He continued: “As Indian people, we have suffered greatly. We have suffered greatly from the atrocities of our past and we are still living with a dark history of our removal. Removal came at the expense of our families’ lives. This will not be forgotten. And you can hear it in our voices. If you’ve ever wondered, just for a moment, why it is that it

⁶⁴ Wisconsin State Tribal Relations Initiative, Ho-Chunk Nation Tribal Statistics, July, 13, 2017 (accessed December 21, 2017) <http://witribes.wi.gov/docview.asp?docid=5638&locid=57>; *Tribes of Wisconsin* (Madison: Department of Administration, Division of Intergovernmental Relations, 2017), 7, (accessed November 29, 2017) ftp://doafpt1380.wi.gov/Doadocs/2017_Tribes_of_WI_v_11-2017.pdf.

sounds different when Indian people speak, let me tell you this, it is because they are carrying the voices of those who are no longer here and those who have yet to be born into this next generation. They are who you hear in our voices.”⁶⁵

Only in the twentieth century would Ho-Chunks legitimize their indisputable home in Wisconsin. They waited over a hundred years for their homes in Wisconsin to become truly permanent. Ho-Chunks have acquired thousands of acres of trust or reservation land near Black River Falls, Wittenberg, Wisconsin Rapids, Tomah, and Wisconsin Dells. Though small and scattered, these lands are the direct result of the last two hundred years of effort and action to remain among or proximate to the marshes, lakes, and rivers of Wisconsin. Ho-Chunk success cannot be counted by a quantity of acres, but rather by a continued existence near and among the fields and corn hills they planted for as long their own history remembers. Through their struggle, starvation, loss, sorrow, and death, they are here today. Perhaps now their humanitarian actions and intentions reaching back more than a century are visible. The Waterspirits must be pleased.

⁶⁵ Jon Greendeer, “State of the Tribes Address,” (speech, Madison, Wisconsin, March 13, 2012).

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