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A Gathering of Rivers

Lucy Eldersveld Murphy

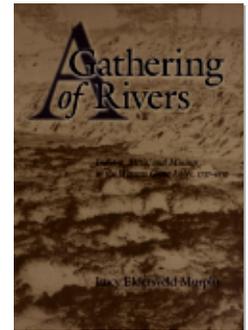
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Epilogue

Following the Black Hawk War, the Sauk and Mesquakie people were finally forced west of the Mississippi and spent a miserable thirteen years confined to Iowa. Their population declined due to malaria, smallpox, alcoholism, starvation, and violence from about six thousand in 1833 to about twenty-five hundred in 1845 when they were removed to Kansas. (Another group, the Missouri [River] Sacs, had separated in 1816.) During the 1850s a group of about one hundred Mesquakies, fed up with Kansas, returned to Iowa, bought land, and established a community at Tama, which still exists. By 1869 another two hundred Mesquakies had joined them. In that year the remaining members of the Sac and Fox Tribe (as they were officially known) were moved to Indian Territory. Only about seven hundred of them had survived the cholera, smallpox, measles, alcoholism, and poverty of their twenty-four years in Kansas.¹

Between 1827 and 1862 the Winnebago people were victims of multiple treaties, forced land cessions, and removals to a series of five reservations in Iowa, Minnesota, and North Dakota. In 1865 their present reservation in Nebraska was established, by which time their population had dwindled from about five thousand around 1830 to less than half that number. Over the years many Winnebagos resisted removal, hiding out or returning to Wisconsin, and many took homesteads during the late nineteenth century under the Indian Homestead Act of 1875. As of 1978 they owned 3,673 acres of homestead land and about 554 acres of tribal community land in Wisconsin.² Other tribes living around the western Great Lakes also experienced removal or confinement to reservations (sometimes both).

In 1972 there were 877 Winnebagos living on their Nebraska Reservation and 1,587 in Wisconsin, while 561 Mesquakies resided at Tama, Iowa, and 935 others on the Sac and Fox Reservation in Oklahoma. The Indian population of the Fox-Wisconsin and surrounding area has been slowly growing: 39,387 Indians lived in Wisconsin, 21,836 in Illinois, and 7,349 in Iowa by 1990.³ The Sauks and Mesquakies are now federally recognized as the Sac and Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa, the Sac and Fox Nation of Oklahoma, and the Sac and Fox Nation of

Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska. The Wisconsin Winnebago Tribe recently changed its name to the HoChunk (HoCąk) Nation of Wisconsin; another branch of this people is the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska.

Even after removal, Indians still came back to visit from time to time. After Henry Gratiot died, his daughter kept in touch with many Winnebagos, according to her husband. "For many years after [her] marriage . . . and up to 1860, many of the surviving members of the tribe would come almost annually to visit her at her home in Galena. . . . Bringing their blankets with them, they would sometimes remain for several days, sleeping on the floor of her parlors."⁴ In 1856 John Dixon's eleven-year-old granddaughter reported: "A few years since, a party of his Indian friends, came to visit him, they encamped opposite the house, and came every day to see him. [T]hey stayed nearly two weeks. . . . Since then an old Indian Chief (Shabbona) has twice been to see him, and stayed over night at our house."⁵ When Honinega Mack's Indian relatives visited, "she usually left the house and lived in their temporary lodges for a few days."⁶

Marguerite and Antoine LeClaire received two sections of land on the west bank of the Mississippi in the Sauk and Mesquakie treaty of 1832, and Antoine received one section on the east side from the Potawatomis in 1829; they grew wealthy with the development of the cities of Davenport, Moline, and LeClaire.⁷ Sauks and Mesquakies visited the LeClaires every year until Marguerite's death in 1876. "For years, large delegations of the tribesmen came here every fall, whole villages at a time, and camped near [the] house and enjoyed the hospitality of the family."⁸ When George Davenport was murdered by thieves in 1845, Indians from central Iowa guarded the LeClaires at their home in Davenport. The LeClaires' wealth from land grants by the Indians enabled them to provide generously for their guests, who "were always made welcome, entertained as long as they wished to remain, and when leaving, always carried away as a free gift what necessities they required — corn, flour, etc."⁹ These visits were the vestiges of the accommodation that had existed in the Fox-Wisconsin region before the Black Hawk War.