

The Early Osage—"The Ishmaelites of the Savages"

by James R. Christianson

THE LOCATION OF THE ANCESTRAL HOME of the Osage tribe is not known with certainty. Tribal tradition says it was somewhere along the Ohio River. Linguistically the Osage are classified as the Dhegiha speakers of the Siouan language family, as are the Omaha, Ponca, Kansa, and Quapaw. The Osage are described as being the most formidable among these southern Siouan tribes which wandered together in some prehistoric period as far as the lower course of the Ohio River. Some linguistic maps identify the original home of the Osage and other members of the same family as being in the vicinity of present-day Virginia and North Carolina, and westward to the eastern boundary of Tennessee. From here they are thought to have been driven by the Iroquois and other tribes to the general area of the lower Ohio River. Other students of Osage antiquity have determined, on the basis of ethnographical and archeological evidences, that the culture characteristically Osage was unique to the area of its late prehistoric and early historic habitation sites centered on the Osage River and extending into southeastern Oklahoma, northeastern Arkansas, and southwestern Missouri.¹ The Indians themselves offer little help in resolving the question of their origin. Several Osage tribal myths relate to Osage origins but examination proves them all historically unreliable.

One myth has it that the first Osage man came down from the sun at about the same time that the first Osage woman came from the moon. These two became the parents of three boys and three girls. The

two younger children—a boy and a girl—successfully communicated with the Great Spirit and were in turn given knowledge of the bow and arrow, of fire, and of the lever. They shared this information with their brothers and sisters. Eventually the six paired off and became progenitors of a powerful nation. Desiring to expand and explore, this people penetrated the wilderness in every direction ruthlessly defeating and subduing in the process all its inhabitants. They became known as Wha-sha-she or the daring men, and were so called for many hundreds of years, until the eighteenth century when they encountered white men and were subsequently renamed Ochage or Osage.²

Throughout their recorded history, the prowess and fierceness of Osage warriors made them an object of fear to their enemies, who were many, and a prize to their allies, who were few. Of the Osage it was said that they were "noble and generous with their friends but terrible with their enemies." In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Osage, whose influence extended over most of what is presently Missouri and Arkansas north of the Arkansas River, the southern half of Kansas, and the northern half of Oklahoma, warred against tribes as far south as Texas. The losses suffered by some of their victims were so great that, as in the case of the Tonkawa, Tawakoni and Kichai, weaker tribes were forced to move beyond the reach of Osage attacks.³ Their aggressive ways won for them the title of "the Ishmaelites of the savages," for it was said "their hand was against everyone and most of the other tribes were hostile to them."⁴ From time to time, the offended nations would band together to fight the Osage. Such was the case in 1750 when the Wichita

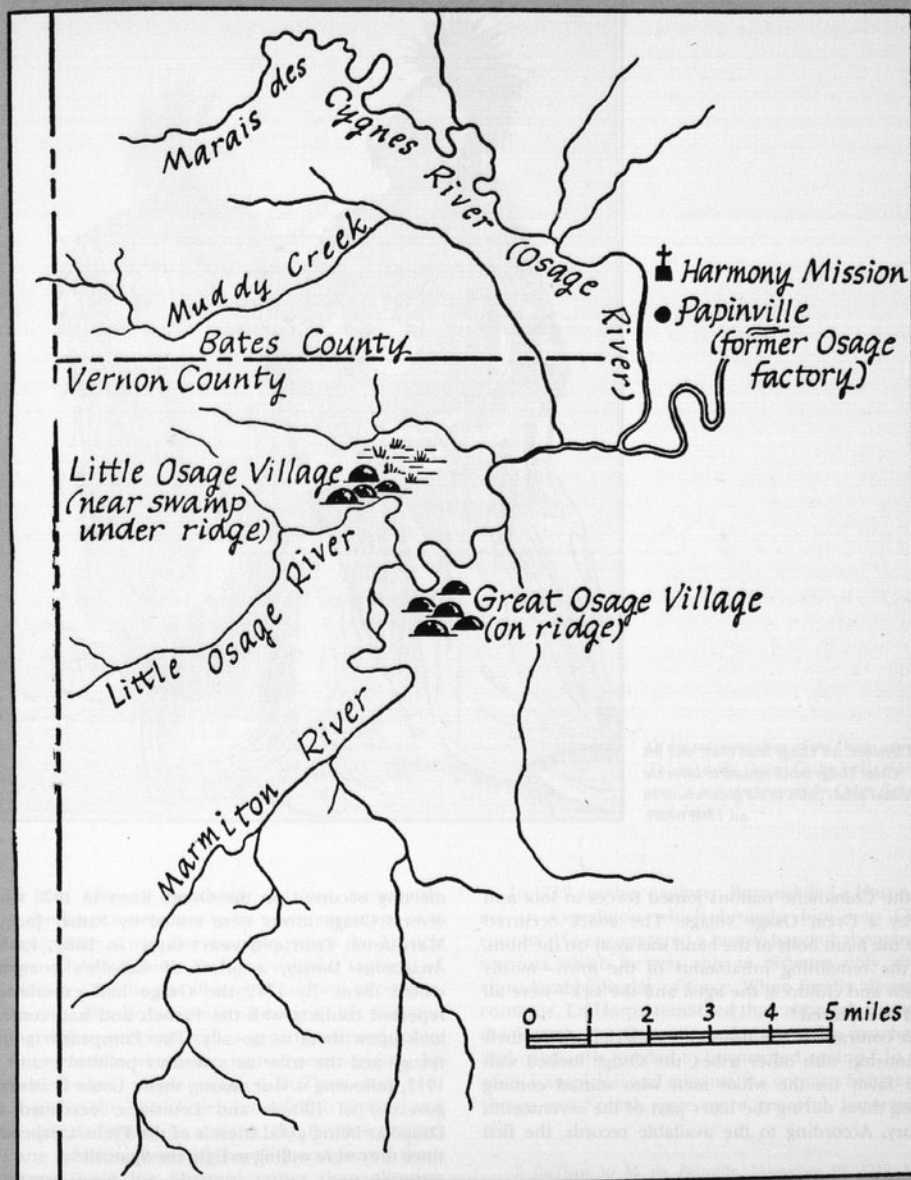
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1. Frederick Webb Hodge, ed., *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin no. 30, pt. 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910), 156; Joab Spencer, "Missouri's Aboriginal Inhabitants," *Missouri Historical Review* 3 (July 1909): 278; Brewton Berry, Carl Chapman, John Mack, "Archeological Remains of the Osage," *American Antiquity* 10 (1944).

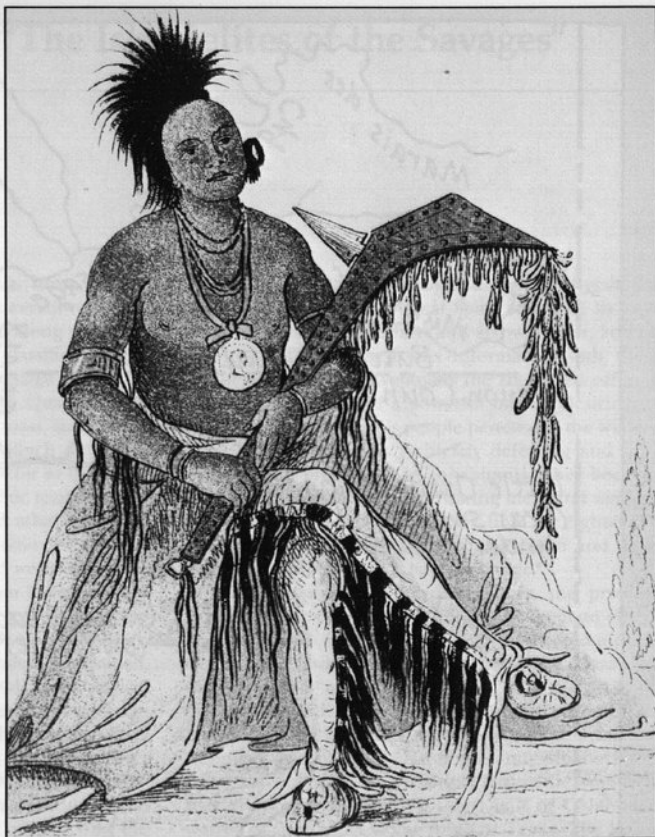
2. Mary Paul Ponziglione, "The Osages and Father John Schoenmakers," *Osage Papers*, St. Louis University, St. Louis.

3. Mary Paul Ponziglione, "The History of the Osage Indians," *Osage Papers*; Grant Foreman, *Indians and Pioneers: The Story of the American Southwest Before 1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 14-17.

4. Abraham P. Nasatir, "Ducharme's Invasion of Missouri, an Incident in the Anglo-Spanish Rivalry for the Indian Trade of Upper Louisiana," *Missouri Historical Review* 24 (April 1930): 435.



In 1673, Pere Marquette noted Osage village sites that were located in present-day Missouri. (From John Joseph Mathews, *The Osages: Children of the Middle Waters*. Copyright, 1961, University of Oklahoma Press.)



Clermont, an Osage head chief, and his Great Osage band refused to leave the Arkansas lands ceded to the government in an 1808 treaty.

and the Comanche nations joined forces to loot and destroy a Great Osage village. The attack occurred while the main body of the band was away on the hunt, and the remaining inhabitants of the town—mostly women and children, the aged and the sick—were all killed or captured.⁵

In contrast to the hostilities experienced in their relationship with other tribes, the Osage looked with some favor on the white men who started coming among them during the latter part of the seventeenth century. According to the available records, the first

meeting occurred on the Osage River in 1673 when several Osage towns were visited by Father Jacques Marquette. Fourteen years later, in 1687, Father Anastasius Douay, a priest of LaSalle's company, visited them. By 1712 the Osage had experienced repeated contacts with the French and had come to look upon them as an ally. The Europeans in turn recognized the tribe as a distinct political entity. In 1717, following a visit among them, Louis Boisbriant, governor of Illinois and Louisiana, described the Osage as being good friends of the French, especially since they were willing to fight the Spanish.⁶

5. Carl Chapman, "The Origin of the Osages," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1959), 81.

6. Ibid., 75; Ponziglione, "History of the Osage Indians," 30.



Of his representation of the Osage warrior, Tal-lee, artist George Catlin wrote that it was "a fair specimen of the Osage figure and dress."

To the Osage, friendship did not necessarily mean the French were not to be taken advantage of if an opportunity arose. For example, when the French explorer Charles Claude DuTisne visited a segment of the tribe in 1719, he was ill-treated and was allowed to depart only after he surrendered many of his weapons and agreed to proceed with a greatly reduced force. To make matters worse, the natives sent word to the Pawnee, toward whose villages DuTisne was proceeding, that the Frenchmen intended to capture and make slaves of them. As a result, the Pawnee greeted DuTisne and his party with hostility and forced them to retreat down the Missouri rather than allowing them to continue, as they wished, to the land of the Padoucas.⁷

In 1719 another explorer, Bernard de La Harpe, was on an expedition which brought him into Osage country. He encountered a hostile band of about twenty warriors which he was able to disperse only after a considerable display of force. When finally allowed to continue, La Harpe remarked that, although friends of the French, the Osage were known to be treacherous and constantly needed to be guarded against.⁸ In spite of such suspicion and mistrust, the contacts between the Osage and French were more peaceful, harmonious,

7. DuTisne to M. de Beinvillle, November 22, 1719, Indian Papers, 1600-1799, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

8. Anna Lewis, "La Harpe's First Expedition in Oklahoma, 1718-1719," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 2 (December 1924): 321-39.

and lasting than the associations of the Osage with any other people. This was no doubt partly because of intermarriage and some acceptance of Catholicism.

The change in civil administration from French to Spanish occurred in 1763, and in time resulted in a radical modification of the relationship between the Osage and the European power claiming jurisdiction over them. The new governors of the area were at first disposed to follow a conciliatory policy toward the Osage. For this reason, in 1769, they were included on the list of nations receiving presents from the Crown. They were still on the list in 1777. A note attached to the report of that year's gifts described the Osage as excellent hunters, their furs being the main source of supply for the Spanish post in St. Louis. The note characterized the Osage further as very hostile toward other tribes, much given to horse stealing, and always ready to break the peace. Finally, it specified the location of the tribe's two bands: the Little Osage, numbering some four hundred warriors, lived about eighty-five leagues from St. Louis near the banks of the Missouri; and the Great Osage, said to number eight hundred fighting men, located one hundred eighty leagues up the Missouri from St. Louis.⁹

In 1779 Spanish officials reported that although every reasonable effort had been made to befriend the Osage, it was to no avail. In view of this, the Spanish government decided in 1780 to invoke a prohibition on all trade with the Osage nation. Finding the established avenues of commerce closed to them, the Indians initiated trade with Americans living east of the Mississippi River and developed this new relationship to the extent that they were little affected by the Spanish prohibition. They also continued to commit serious depredations against other Indian tribes. The Spanish retaliated in 1793 by declaring war against them and by encouraging all surrounding tribes to unite in an effort to destroy their common enemy. The general good demanded that the Osage be absolutely destroyed and their land secured.¹⁰

During the ensuing months, the Spanish attempted to marshal the forces of tribes hostile to the Osage, some from as far distant as northern Mexico. Before the Spanish and their allies were ready to launch an assault, the Osage scattered over the Plains on their accustomed summer hunt, thereby eliminating all possibility of success. In the meantime, defection of

the Loup and Chavuesnon tribes and a total absence of response from white settlers made victory over the Osage doubtful and introduced the possibility of an embarrassing defeat. Finally, in the spring of 1794, a large party of Osage laid siege to a village, killing one white man and so frightening the settlers that they raised an immediate cry for peace. By that time, the government was also anxious for a settlement and negotiated a peace pact.¹¹

Under the terms of the treaty, the Spanish obtained permission to establish a fort near the Great Osage villages. They did this hoping that the continuous presence of soldiers and traders would influence the natives to remain peaceful. On May 18, 1794, Spanish governmental officials selected Auguste Chouteau to build the fort, at the same time granting him an exclusive trading privilege that was to last six years. The establishment, named Fort Carondelet after the Spanish governor of New Orleans, was completed in 1795. Pierre L. Chouteau, the Spanish-appointed commander of the post, cooperated with Auguste in establishing a close relationship with the Osage.¹²

In spite of the treaty, the Osage were slow to change their violent ways. So great was the desire of the Spanish to placate them, however, that considerable allowance was made for their abrasive behavior. Such favoritism proved extremely irritating to other tribes which continued to harbor a deep hatred for the Osage. Their feelings were expressed by a Miami chief who complained that if the people of his or any other nation were to steal horses, become intoxicated or commit other extravagant acts, their European governors would promptly label them dogs deserving death. The Osage, however, could pillage, steal, and kill and receive only caresses and presents. The Spaniards' favoritism rankled several tribes—among them the Miami, Comanche, and Chickasaw. Taking license from the earlier declaration of open season on the Osage, these tribes began sending out war parties that took many scalps. Under the leadership of Clermont, one of the principal chiefs, some of the Osage chose to ignore the pleas of the Chouteaus and retaliated. Following a successful mission, Clermont returned to find that Big Track, one of the lesser chiefs and a favorite of the Chouteaus, had replaced

11. Houck, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 2:55-57; Chapman, "Origin of Osages," 88-89.

12. Houck, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 2:82, 100-6; Baron de Carondelet to Pierre Chouteau, May 21, 1794, P. Chouteau Papers, 1794-1795, Missouri Historical Society. Don Renate Auguste Chouteau was a rich Creole living in St. Louis. He was friendly toward Spain and highly regarded by the Osage as he and his brother Pierre had once lived among them.

9. Louis Houck, ed., *The Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 2 vols. (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley and Sons Co., 1909), 1:44-48, 141-44.

10. Ibid., 1:163-64, and 2:49-52. Earlier efforts to enforce conformity had led to a devastating attack in 1775 by the Sac and Fox on the Little Osage. See Chapman, "Origin of Osages," 84.

him as the leader of several Great Osage towns. In response to this action precipitated by the Chouteaus, the old chief assembled his followers and removed to the lower Verdigris River near its junction with the Arkansas, thereby establishing the Arkansas band of the Osage nation.¹³

By 1798 the Spanish authorities were of the opinion that, except for the Arkansas band, the presence of the fort and the influence of the Chouteaus had successfully tempered the Osage taste for trouble-making. One observer expressed the expectation that

in a few years the Osage would be as much a source of help and friendship to neighboring tribes as they had been a source of injury and fear in the past. Clermont's people, on the other hand, had become notorious for their atrocities. Since the victims were mostly hunters and wanderers along the Arkansas River, a class described as the "scum of the posts," the Spanish decided to do nothing rather than have the band retaliate and disturb the Illinois settlements which had been increasing rapidly under the more peaceful conditions.¹⁴

13. Houck, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 2:95-96, 196. See also Chapman, "Origin of Osages," 89-90.

14. Houck, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 2:102, 250-51; Auguste Chouteau to Manuel Gayoso de Lemus, June 24, 1797, P. Chouteau Papers, 1796-1797, Missouri Historical Society.



Indicative of other tribes' hostility toward the Osage was the name of this Pawnee sub-chief—He Who Kills Osages.

Although the government had granted Auguste Chouteau a trade monopoly with the tribes, other traders and merchants were anxious to secure a portion for themselves. Their zeal for profit was not dampened by the fact that the Osage would often refuse to pay for goods or would force an unequal exchange, mistreating the traders should they resist. This avarice motivated them to try to undermine the Chouteau monopoly. Meanwhile, government officials close to the scene expressed the opinion that it was no longer necessary to continue the agreement with Chouteau. Auguste himself was hesitant about his ability to continue since, under the existing agreement, the Spanish government did not subsidize the cost of maintaining the fort and of pacifying the Osage. In 1802 the question came to a head when a new governor, Juan Manuel de Salcedo, ordered that an exclusive right to trade with the Osage be granted Manuel Lisa and his partners. Thus excluded, Auguste succeeded in retaining the right to trade along the Arkansas River and persuaded many of the Great Osage to accompany him to a post he had previously established above the junction of the Verdigris and Arkansas rivers. Big Track became chief of the new settlement. At this point, the Osage nation was divided into three separate units. In addition to the group that followed Chouteau, there were the Little Osage and some Great Osage under Chief White Hair, located along the Missouri and the Osage rivers, and Clermont's band of Great Osage, living on the Arkansas River.¹⁵

Between 1800 and 1803 the several Osage bands were again guilty of serious depredations. Following the purchase of Louisiana in 1803 and a subsequent "Treaty of Friendship and Allegiance" with the United States in 1804, the unrest continued.¹⁶ The tribe's reputation became such that hunters and trappers from the states were "affraid [*sic*] of those savages who are at war with the world and destroy all strangers they can meet with." Further, frontiersmen who knew them concurred that this tribe, above all others, was

"extremely faithless, particularly those on the arcansa [Arkansas], the others...are but very little more to be depended upon; they pretend to make peace & enter into terms of amity, but on the first favorable occasion, they rob, plunder and even kill without hesitation." According to the same report, neighboring tribes also viewed with "great abhorrence" this "barbarous, uncivilized race," and had been "concerting plans" for destruction of the Osage.¹⁷

By 1808 acts of violence charged to the Osage had increased to such a degree that Meriwether Lewis, the new governor of the Louisiana Territory, declared them beyond the protection of the United States and recalled traders from among them. Tribes hostile to the Osage were told that they were free to treat them as their common enemy and were encouraged to attack in such numbers as to either destroy or drive them out of the country. President Thomas Jefferson suggested that the friendly nations not only be encouraged to war against the Osage but that they also be armed by the federal government as a means of assuring victory.¹⁸

The disciplinary measures proposed by the President and the governor did not, however, have a chance to materialize. Faced with possible destruction, several Osage factions sent a peace delegation to St. Louis in the fall of 1808 and, as part of a treaty agreement with the U.S. government, offered to meet in April 1809 with the spokesmen of the various injured nations.¹⁹ This show of good faith resulted in a stay of execution, whereupon the Osage failed to appear at the intended council. For this reason, when they arrived at Fort Osage in August of 1809 to trade for winter supplies, George Sibley, the factor, turned them away. He ordered them to return to their homes and gave them until snowfall to settle their differences with the other tribes. If by that time they had not demonstrated to him and to their agent, Pierre Chouteau, that they could conduct themselves properly, their enemies would be permitted to attack them from every direction. "If," General Clark wrote to Sibley, "this plan is strictly adhered to these bandits might be

15. Houck, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 2:102, 151; Walter B. Douglas, "Manuel Lisa," *Missouri Historical Collection* 3 (1911):241-42; Foreman, *Indians and Pioneers*, 21; Pierre Chouteau to Thomas Jefferson, January 31, 1805, and March 1805, Pierre Chouteau Letterbooks, Missouri Historical Society; Auguste Chouteau to El Baron de Carondelet, April 18, 1797, P. Chouteau Papers, 1796-1797; Auguste Chouteau to Manuel Gayoso de Lemus, April 14, 1799, P. Chouteau Papers, 1797-1799.

16. El Marques de Casa Calvo to Carlo de Lasso, June 9, 1800, and Manuel de Salcedo to Carlo de Lasso, August 27, 1802, P. Chouteau Papers, 1800-1803, Missouri Historical Society; Pierre Chouteau to Thomas Jefferson, October 12, 1804, Pierre Chouteau Letterbooks.

17. Thomas Jefferson and William Dunbar, *Documents Relating to the Purchase and Exploration of Louisiana* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1904), 73-74, 166-67.

18. Lewis to Sec. of War Henry Dearborn, July 1, 1808, and Jefferson to Lewis, August 21, 1808, *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, comp. and ed. Clarence Edwin Carter (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), 14:196-97, 219-20. Some of the Little Osage and White Hair's band of Great Osage were not under the ban.

19. James McFarlane, Osage agent, to William Clark, February 20, 1809, *Territorial Papers of United States*, 14:269.

brought to a true sense of their situation and a great portion of them may become good Indians."²⁰

After Governor Lewis was killed in the autumn of 1809, officials lifted the ban, and the Osage were once again offered protection and allowed to visit Fort Osage. Under the terms of the treaty with the United States in 1808, the parties stipulated that the tribe surrender all but the extreme western edge of its lands in Missouri and Arkansas, about fifty million acres, in exchange for \$1,200 cash, up to \$5,000 in payments for damage claims against them, and \$1,500 as an annual annuity.²¹ In addition, the treaty required that the Osage trade at the fort and that all bands, including Clermont's in Arkansas Territory, remove to the vicinity of the fort. This they did in large numbers even though the treaty was not ratified until 1810. By the spring of 1809, however, dissatisfactions arose and the natives began filtering back to their old village sites.

The death of Lewis and the subsequent change in policy encouraged them to trade at the government post, but those who had left refused to resettle in the area. The latter group attached itself to Auguste Chouteau, viewing him as their white "father." The tribesmen who remained near the fort did so primarily because of their attachment to Gen. William Clark. The divisions within the tribe were discovered by their enemies, who then proceeded to intercept trading parties journeying to and from the post.²² These attacks increased until the several bands were forced to ask the federal government for an escort. When no escort materialized and raiders killed a large number of tribesmen on a trading expedition in the spring of 1812, the Osage decided to no longer go to the government trading post. Thereafter, they dealt with traders who came to them.

At this time, George Sibley reported the location of the Osage bands as follows: the Great Osage, numbering about four hundred families, were in part on the Osage River some eighty miles south of Fort Osage; the remainder on the Neosho River 120 miles to the southwest of the fort. Contrary to the terms of the 1808 treaty, Clermont's Arkansas band, numbering

six hundred families, refused to leave ceded lands in Arkansas and persisted on the Verdigris River about two hundred miles southwest of the post. The Little Osage, with 250 families, were also on the Neosho, about ten miles southwest of the fort.²³

During the next several years, Sibley became increasingly sympathetic toward the tribe, feeling that their conduct on the whole had become such as to deserve the government's favor. The expressed allegiance of the Osage during the early years of the War of 1812 entitled them, he felt, "to every accom[m]odation of the obligations which the treaty lays towards them." Gen. William Clark, southern superintendent for Indian Affairs, did not take quite the same view. Learning that Sibley was going to live for some months among the Great Osage on the Osage River, he reminded him in a letter of the many whites killed by these and the Arkansas band during the previous year and of their untold depredations resulting in large property losses. In the face of this, he insisted that an example be made of some of their members, and the sooner the better.²⁴

When the War of 1812 ended, the Osage had vacated much of the land they had surrendered in the Treaty of 1808. In 1815 the many white settlers already on the ceded land were joined by most of the Miami tribe, who settled near the Missouri River at a former Little Osage village site in present Saline County, Missouri.²⁵ The following year, a few Cherokee arrived, and by the close of 1818 over three thousand Cherokee were living in the lower Arkansas River area. In subsequent years, the United States relocated other tribes—the Delaware in 1820, the Kickapoo in 1823, and the Creek in 1825—within the former Osage homeland. The presence of these and other Indians

23. Ibid. See also Sibley to Clark, July 9, 1813, Sibley Papers.

24. Sibley to Clark, July 9, 1813, and Clark to Sibley, March 18, 1814, Sibley Papers. An example of the Osage offenses here referred to is shown in Auguste Chouteau and Sylvestre Labbadie's complaint that \$735 in goods had been lost to the Osage in the following manner. Joseph Suisse, an employee, had been trading with the Indians when a group of Osage came into the post, complained of the high prices, and demanded that the trader "stand aside or he would have cause to repent." They then broke open bales of blankets and distributed them all around. The same was done for clothing and other items. When the trader and a companion attempted to stop the proceedings, they were violently thrown aside and the latter's Indian wife threatened with death for attempting to conceal some blankets. See Claim of A. P. Chouteau and Sylvestre Labbadie, June 3, 1814, Indian Papers, 1800-1815, Missouri Historical Society. Chouteau also complained that the Osage were notorious beggars and their demands for free coffee, tea, alcohol, and other sundries were not easily refused, reducing their agents to a condition of financial ruin.

25. Chapman, "Origin of Osages," 96. See also Spencer, "Missouri's Aboriginal Inhabitants," 276.

20. Clark to Sibley, August 19, 1809, Sibley Papers, Missouri Historical Society.

21. William Clark to Sec. of War Henry Dearborn, September 23, 1808, *Territorial Papers of United States*, 14:224-26. See also Pierre Chouteau, Jr., to Sec. of War William Eustis, September 2, 1809, Pierre Chouteau Letterbooks, 136. A drawing of the approximate area given up in the 1808 treaty can be found in George Vance Labadie and Russell G. Fister, *The Golden Book of the Osages* (no imprint).

22. Officers at Fort Osage to Sec. of War Eustis, July 16, 1812, *Territorial Papers of United States*, 14:587-88.



This Osage delegation was photographed on a visit to Lawrence in 1874. Nopawalla, chief of the Little Osage, is seated third from left, second row.

and the reluctance of the Osage to discontinue their annual hunting expeditions to these lands became a source of serious conflict. The emigrant Cherokees' displeasure with the location of their new home intensified the conflict. Cut off from access to the west, the Cherokee coveted Osage lands just north of the Arkansas River in what is presently Oklahoma and western Arkansas.²⁶ This region was a prize because of its natural abundance and its service as a much needed outlet to the western buffalo graze.

By the summer of 1815, the government, recognizing escalating unrest, intervened by establishing an Indian commission and sending its members to

meet with a deputation of headmen from the agitated tribes. The commissioners and tribal leaders arranged a council, but when the appointed date in October arrived and the Osage delegation did not appear, the situation continued unresolved. Before the government could take further preventive action, General Clark reported that the emigrant tribes had declared war. During the summer of 1817, an allied force of nearly six hundred Indians from the Miami, Delaware, and Cherokee and Creek tribes moved against several Osage towns, but with little success. Clark feared, however, that should the war continue, the Osage would soon be wiped out. The fact that the Osage were guilty of numerous serious offenses against American frontiersmen, who as a result were also on the verge of attacking them, heightened the threat of extinction. Charges against the tribe were so numerous that the government withheld total annuity payment for 1817

26. Charles C. Royce, "The Cherokee Nation of Indians," *Fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, 1883-84* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887), 217-18; Foreman, *Indians and Pioneers*, 79-81.

to pay off the claims of aggrieved settlers. Without the annuity supplies, the Osage were unable to trade for the guns and ammunition they needed to successfully defend themselves.²⁷

In May 1818, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun informed Gov. William Clark that the President had ordered an immediate end to the conflict. Since the Osage were bested in their several encounters with the allied bands, he directed that they grant to the Cherokee the desired strip of land, thereby allowing them access to the distant buffalo herds. The President, Calhoun wrote, was anxious to placate the eastern Cherokee and hoped by this to effect their removal to the west.²⁸

Clark responded by arranging for a peace council to be held in St. Louis and by writing to the Osage as follows:

To the Osage Nation—Chiefs, Braves and considerate men. Open your ears and listen to a few words I send to you.

Children and Friends:

You know that I am acquainted with your situation, that I know your difficulties with other tribes and red-skins and that I have felt for your distresses.

Children—You know that I have turned three Indian armies from the direction of your towns and prevented other parties from sucking the blood of your people.

Children—The country you claim is extensive and other tribes have for many years passed [*sic*] proved to you by their conduct that they wished to possess your lands.

Osages—If you have confidence in me attend to what I say—Your Great Father, the President of the United States is willing to purchase your lands and apportionate [*sic*] a part to such tribes as he may think proper, who will live in friendship with you and will strengthen your arm.

Children—I am informed that wild animals are becoming scarce every year in your country and that you are in want of many things to support your women and children—You[r] annuities are too small to be of much service to you. I wish to make that annuity larger and I also wish to render you a service in producing a continuation of peace and quietude between the Osages and the different tribes of red-skins, as well as white people.

27. R. Wash, chairman of the Indian Commission, to George Sibley, June 30, 1816, and Clark to Sibley, April 4, 1817, and November 11, 1817, Sibley Papers.

28. Calhoun to Clark, May 8, 1818, *Territorial Papers of United States* (1951), 15:390-91.

Clark concluded by authorizing tribal chiefs to send a deputation to St. Louis in the fall of the year if they were willing to treat in the manner he proposed.²⁹

The Osage responded affirmatively to the governor's inquiry, and their representatives subsequently concluded a treaty on September 25, 1818. Under its terms, the tribe relinquished all claims to more than 1.8 million acres of land. In return, the federal government assumed all responsibility for the claims of citizens who could prove to the satisfaction of the commissioner of Indian affairs or his representatives that their property had been stolen or destroyed by the Osage. The total amount allowed for this purpose was not to exceed \$4,000.³⁰ A few days later, on October 6, 1818, the segment of the Cherokee tribe living on the Arkansas River and their Shawnee and Delaware allies entered into a treaty of perpetual peace with the Great and Little Osage. Each side agreed to return all its prisoners the following spring, and the Osage were to allow the other tribes undisturbed passage to all hunting grounds south of the Arkansas River. Finally, no private revenge was to be sought by any of the parties to the treaty; instead, all intertribal grievances were to be submitted to the respective agents.³¹

On this pleasant note the treaty sessions ended, and the participants returned home from St. Louis. The X's on the peace pact of October 6 were hardly dry, however, when a band of Cherokee attacked the homeward-bound party of Osage, stealing some forty horses. In recompense, the Osage demanded the immediate liberation of all tribe members held prisoner by the Cherokee. When these were not immediately released, they raided a Cherokee cache and confiscated many hides and furs. This act was followed by an attack on a Cherokee hunting party which resulted in the deaths of three Cherokee hunters and the loss of their furs.³² Hostilities continued on a similar scale until 1821, when a force of some

29. Clark to Osage Nation, June 1818, St. Louis Superintendency Papers, 2: 87, Kansas State Historical Society.

30. *American State Papers. Documents, Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States [Indian Affairs]*, 2 vols. (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1834), 2:167-68.

31. Osage Treaty of 1818, St. Louis Superintendency Papers, 2: 93. The 1.8 million acres obtained by the Osage became known as Lovely's Purchase. Lovely, the Cherokee agent at the time, actively encouraged the purchase. Because of his role in the original negotiations, his name was associated with the purchase although it did not appear in the treaty. See Gov. George Izard to Sec. of War, January 28, 1826, *Territorial Papers of United States* (1954), 20:191.

32. Foreman, *Indians and Pioneers*, 85-86. See also B. O'Fallon to George Sibley, August 25, 1819, Sibley Papers.

four hundred Osage took the field in what was to be an all-out effort to subdue the emigrant tribes. Headed by a lesser chief, Mad Buffalo, the Osage, in need of guns and ammunition, threatened to capture Fort Smith on the Arkansas River. They failed to do so, and the better equipped allied tribes subsequently defeated them. The allies followed up their victory by attacking an Osage village. The raid netted seventy to one hundred horses, plus forty Osage dead and thirty captured. The governor of the Arkansas Territory, James Miller, encouraged the allied offensive. Unable to secure the peace and believing the Osage to be the aggressors, Miller gave the tribes clearance to wage war against the Osage saying he was setting them "at liberty to let loose the Dogs of War."³³ The governor's decision resulted not only from continuous intertribal unrest but also from the alleged plundering and killing of white frontiersmen by the Osage.³⁴

Hostile acts by the tribe were so numerous by spring 1821 that territorial officials petitioned the federal government to issue weapons and ammunition sufficient to arm two hundred minutemen authorized to repel the outrages of the Osage.³⁵ Still other voices demanded not merely the repulsion, but the destruction of the tribe. The extinction of the Osage was seen as the only real solution since the injuries they inflicted were almost equalled by those of enemy war parties which, in going against the Osage, passed through scattered white settlements and committed depredations as they went.³⁶ Authorities in Washington rejected this extreme solution, continuing their

efforts to arrange a binding peace treaty among the warring tribes.

The Cherokee and their allies signed a peace treaty with the Osage in 1822, but this pact, like its 1818 predecessor, was of short duration because of a schism among the Osage over the question of peace. Most of them, the Little and Arkansas bands especially, either did not trust the government and the Cherokee or they strongly favored continued conflict. Another peace proposal called for the removal of both Indians and whites from the area between the Osage Line and the Missouri border and the establishment of a no man's land. Some government officials believed that if all unnecessary contact were thus eliminated, peace would come to the frontier.³⁷

About this time, 1821, missionaries, led by the Rev. Nathaniel B. Dodge, from the United Foreign Missionary Society of New York moved onto Osage lands and established Harmony Mission on the banks of the Marais des Cygnes, about fifteen miles from a large village of Great Osage and approximately the same distance from a main segment of the Little Osage. A year earlier the Union Mission had been founded near the Neosho River.³⁸

Because of adverse and unaccustomed environmental conditions, the missions' early years were extremely trying. Additional discouragement stemmed from the Indians' near universal indifference to the message of Christianity. Year after year passed with little obvious adaptation or application by the Osage of the message of salvation which the clerics offered. Missionaries blamed their lack of success on various causes, but generally agreed that the redmen's concept of right and wrong was too simple and uninhibited to enable them to comprehend the complex Christian philosophy. Whereas the latter stressed an appreciation of such abstract terms as atonement, grace, redemption, original sin and salvation, the Osage philosophy was typified by adherence to a simplistic form of justice which is illustrated in the story of a warrior who, having recently killed a man, exclaimed to one of the ministers, "I am innocent of this murder. It was done by mistake." In another instance, a young

33. "An Account of the Osage-Cherokee War," from the Journal of Matthew Lyon, April 8, 1821; William Bradford to Sec. of War, November 20, 1821; Matthew Lyon to Sec. of War, March 22, 1821, and April 7, 1821; Gov. James Miller to the Cherokee Indians, March 20, 1821, *Territorial Papers of United States* (1953), 19:333, 335, 336-37, 343-45, 356. Fort Smith, named after Gen. Thomas A. Smith, was established on the Arkansas River at the mouth of Poteau River. Its erection, called for in 1818, was partly a result of the need to establish more control over the Osage. See Katie L. Gregg, "The History of Fort Osage," *Missouri Historical Review* 34 (1939-1940): 467-69.

34. One of the offended settlers complained to the Secretary of War: "you can have but little idea how the people is imposed on by this trib of indians they have got on a extensive frontier the people is weak heir in number not abel to protect them Selvs from them they now it and it maks them Sausy & mischievous they are going to & fro through our Settlements killing up our stock destroying our crops & Stealing all our best horses—it is impossibel for the inhabitants heir to stand it if their is no means taken to stop it. therefor pleas to inter feare in that case for us & get them confined to ther one bounds & not Suffer them to pas through our settlement." See Reuben Easton to Sec. of War, March 1819, *Territorial Papers of United States* 19:60-61.

35. Robert Crittenden, Acting Governor of Arkansas Territory, to Sec. of War, May 17, 1821, *Territorial Papers of United States*, 19:289.

36. Gov. James Miller to President of the United States, December 10, 1822, Indian Papers, 1816-1824, Missouri Historical Society.

37. Richard Graham to Sec. of War, June 1, 1821, September 20, 1821, November 12, 1821, Richard Graham Papers, 1821-1823 [hereafter cited as Graham Papers], Missouri Historical Society. Graham's jurisdiction was extended to cover the Osage in 1821.

38. Doris Denton, "Harmony Mission, 1821-1837," (master's thesis, University of Kansas, 1929), 18; Berry, Chapman, Mack, "Archaeological Remains," 40; John C. Calhoun to William Clark and all Osage Agents, March 15, 1832, *Territorial Papers of United States*, 15:710.

woman became extremely vile and immoral and refused to be counseled concerning her conduct. In time, an old man, a relative, resolved the situation by plunging a knife into her chest. The tribe admired rather than punished the old man. In a similar case, a young brave asked a sister who was disobedient and refused to listen to their parents if she intended to continue such conduct. When she answered yes, he shot and killed her.³⁹

In substance, the Osage did not involve a supreme being in their moral conduct and would not be persuaded to do so. Their God was a god of nature and was viewed as being "hateful and bad," rather than "amiable and good." Benton Pixley at Harmony Mission described the Osage attitude thus: "They hate him: he is of a bad temper; they would shoot him, if they could see him."⁴⁰ One old Indian said that as a young man his great desire had been to kill his white and red enemies and that he saw no wrong in fulfilling this objective. Deity was concerned only when he failed to kill—then God hated him for this failure.⁴¹

In view of the Indians' traditional philosophy, the missionaries found that the basic guilt, fear, and repentance precepts of Christianity did not take root among the Osage. The doctrine of man's immortality and his responsibility to prepare for eternity attracted little attention. Many of them, who believed in a hereafter, saw no connection between happiness there and moral conduct here. The majority scoffed at this belief and held it up to ridicule. On this point, one missionary wrote that he had just finished describing to a group the separate and eternal nature of the soul when he saw one of his listeners "strangely intent upon catching a fly." Having at length succeeded, he crushed the insect with his fingers. Then laying it on the floor and rubbing it about until not a vestige of it remained, he triumphantly exclaimed, "What remains to exist? Where is the soul?" drawing his conclusions that men died and returned to nothing in the same way.⁴²

In time, the once high hopes of the ministers and their families gave way to despair and frustration. Typical of the discouragement which they felt was that expressed by the Reverend Dodge, who wondered

what possible hope could be held out for such a "hard, wild, warlike people...." "God," he wrote, "is able, indeed, to convert the Osages in a day," but he and his fellows could only suffer it out and place their trust in the promises of God. In spite of this assurance, he confessed that he often looked upon the Osage and asked "Can these dry bones live?"⁴³

In their numerous reports to parent denominations, the missionaries gave vivid descriptions of the Osage nature. One such report told of how on the one hand, the tribesmen were friendly and hospitable, willingly sharing the last of their food with a stranger, while on the other, at times when food was in short supply, it was their custom to leave an aged parent to perish on the plains without food or drink. The report further noted that the Osage were always at war, but were not a warlike people. They delighted in combat and were most cruel, though not prone to torture or mistreat prisoners. They often would adopt a captive child in place of one of their own who had died.⁴⁴ Another missionary thought it a miracle that the tribe had not been destroyed, since they were "in continual motion; their hand is against every man, and every man's hand against them."⁴⁵

Outrages attributed to the Osage continued throughout the 1820s, but at a slackened pace. An attack that resulted in the killing of several white hunters on November 17, 1823, produced a general call for a severe chastening of the tribe. Threatened with action from U.S. forces stationed at Fort Gibson, the Osage surrendered five braves said to be responsible for the killings. When, some months later, they were tried and found guilty but nonetheless pardoned because of the unpunished killing of several Osage by whites in 1820, settlers along the frontier were enraged by what they saw as a total miscarriage of justice.⁴⁶

By 1825 the Osage were ready to go to the conference table to bargain—not so much for peace as for relief from their pressing economic problems. Continuous Osage depredations against both whites and Indians and subsequent claims against them had either greatly reduced or completely eliminated their annuity. This situation, plus numerous losses suffered at the hands of the Cherokee and their allies, had

39. William F. Vaill, "Osage Indians," *Missionary Herald* 22 (September 1826): 268-69.

40. Benton Pixley, "Osages: Their Character, Manners, and Condition," *Missionary Herald* 24 (March 1828): 80.

41. Nathaniel B. Dodge, "Religious Notions and Traditions," *Missionary Herald* 25 (April 1829): 123.

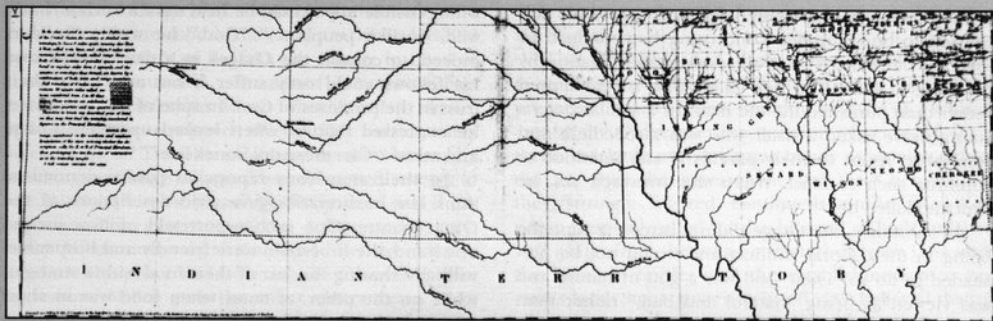
42. Pixley, "Osages: Their Character, Manners and Condition," 80.

43. Nathaniel B. Dodge, [Report on Harmony Mission], *Missionary Herald* 23 (May 1827): 150.

44. Vaill, "Osage Indians," 268.

45. Dodge, [Report on Harmony Mission], 149.

46. *St. Louis Enquirer*, January 13, 1824; *Intelligencer*, St. Louis, January 15, March 13, November 27, 1824; *Arkansas Gazette*, Little Rock, October 26, 1824, May 3, May 24, June 7, 1825; *Louisville Public Advertiser*, June 4, 1825.



brought the Osage to the point of recognizing that they were land-poor and, as in 1818, the only solution to their extreme poverty was to negotiate with the federal government.⁴⁷

William Clark, who had been appointed superintendent of the St. Louis Superintendency, of which the Osage agency became a part in 1824, was aware of the natives' plight and exploited it to the fullest in the spring of 1825 in a treaty which he outlined and proposed to Secretary of War James Barbour. Clark recommended that the government ask for the surrender of all Osage claims to land within and west of the state of Missouri and Arkansas Territory, except for a strip extending from the state line west an indefinite distance and so located as to include the Osage towns situated on the Neosho River. The Osage, he informed Barbour, could be made to agree in exchange for some \$6,000 in gifts, a fifteen- or twenty-year annuity amounting to \$6,000 or \$7,000 a year, plus hogs, cattle, poultry, and articles of agriculture valued at approximately \$12,000.⁴⁸

When the treaty negotiations were concluded, the Osage had ceded to the United States all the land

Clark had sought, a total of over forty-five thousand-square miles. As payment, in addition to the money, livestock, and agricultural items recommended by Clark, the government was to pay all just claims against the tribe up to \$25,000.

With the conclusion of the Treaty of 1825, the official seat of the Osage nation shifted from its historic location within the drainage area of the Missouri River to lands drained by the Arkansas River. The new reservation began twenty-five miles west of the Missouri line, was fifty miles wide, and extended as far west as the Mexican line.⁴⁹

Within a year after the treaty was signed, most of the northern Osage were settled within the boundaries of their new reserve along the Neosho and the Verdigris rivers. The Arkansas band, however, continued to resist all efforts of removal. The agent for the Arkansas Osage, Alexander McNair, pressured them with presents, threats and bribes, but succeeded in obtaining nothing more than promises that were never kept.⁵⁰

The benefits which the Osage enjoyed as a result of the Treaty of 1825 did not improve their relationship with the eastern tribes, especially the Delaware

47. Gov. James Miller to Sec. of War, March 1, 1822, *Territorial Papers of United States*, 19:408-9. The government, in an effort to force the Arkansas band to rejoin the northern segment of the nation, required them to go to Fort Osage for the annuity. After 1816, when forty warriors were lost in an attack by enemy tribes on the journey, the headmen refused; for this reason, and later claims against the band, they received only a fraction of their share or none at all.

48. Clark to James Barbour, Sec. of War, April 19, 1825, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1880, U.S. Office of Indian Affairs, St. Louis Superintendency [hereafter cited as St. Louis Superintendency], National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (microfilm, Brigham Young University).

49. *U.S. Laws, 1821-1827* (Washington City: Williams A. Davis, 1827), 7:728-31; Charles C. Royce, "Indian Land Cessions in the United States," *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1899), 708.

50. McNair to William Clark, March 14, 1825, March 20, 1825, St. Louis Superintendency. In spite of the cession and subsequent removal, the tribe remained under St. Louis Superintendency jurisdiction. Maj. Richard Graham continued as Osage agent, and McNair, appointed subagent to the Arkansas band in May 1824, continued in that position. See McNair to John C. Calhoun, Sec. of War, May 29, 1824, Osage Agency, 1824-1841, National Archives, pp. 17-19 (microfilm, BYU).



Above: This map from 1870 indicates the "Osage Ceded Lands" (vertical lines) in Kansas; the "Osage Reservation" across the state's southern boundary; and the "Proposed Osage Reserves" in Indian Territory (horizontal lines) per an 1868 treaty.

Left: An 1866 map of southeastern Kansas shows the survey boundaries of Seward, Wilson, Neosho counties on the "Osage Indian Lands."

and the Cherokee. As a result, a declaration of peace, which the Delaware and the Osage agreed to in June 1825, was short-lived. The first article of the pact declared that there should be perpetual peace and friendship and all problems between the two tribes would be forgotten and forgiven. Experience, however, had taught the Delaware that their treaty partner could not be trusted. Anderson, the Delaware chief, had discovered this fact after a treaty agreement in 1822. Having decided to put their declaration of friendship to the test, he went by invitation into Osage country to trap and hunt during the winter of 1823-1824. While camping along the Arkansas River, a number of Osage hunters approached him and his party, recognizing them as friends and asking for gunpowder. The Delaware obliged and even held their peace when the visitors showed themselves pilferers before going on their way. Some weeks later a second group of Osage approached Anderson's camp. After asking for and receiving a quantity of powder, they attempted to stampede and take horses and would have succeeded had Anderson and his men not prevented them. The next morning, in the chief's absence, the Osage shot one of the young Delaware warriors and took all his possessions. Shortly thereafter, Osage attacked the main Delaware camp and robbed it of many robes and furs.⁵¹

Convinced of the treacherous nature of the Osage, the old chief did not hesitate to blame that tribe

when, several months after the Treaty of 1825, his son was killed by Indian attackers. The boy was part of a hunting party which went out in the fall of the year "about roasting ear time." While searching for stray horses, the young brave became separated from the main band and was found dead the following day. The only evidence pointing to the Osage was a rumor that the dead warrior's horse had been seen in their possession. This, however, was proof enough for Anderson and his people, and when five members of the imputedly guilty tribe visited a Delaware village shortly thereafter, they were murdered. The Osage retaliated in December 1825 by killing a Delaware youth and stealing twenty-six horses. They, in turn, lost four braves in January, but gained revenge a few weeks later by killing four Delaware: two men, a woman, and a child. They also stole eight horses and destroyed six hundred hides. On March 19 a large party of Osage attacked a Delaware hunting camp, killing five—including two young girls and a baby. In April a Delaware war party seriously injured a number of Osage, killing one.⁵²

Beginning with the report of the murder of Anderson's son, Agent Graham made repeated efforts to convince the Delaware chief that the Osage were not guilty and that further bloodshed could be avoided if the two bands would meet and discuss the matter.⁵³ Utterly disheartened at his lack of success, Graham wrote to his superiors that he saw no purpose expend-

51. "Delaware Talk," June 5, 1825, St. Louis Superintendency Papers, 2: 141, 147. See also Richard Graham to Gen. William Clark, May 29, 1826, Letters Received, 1825-1828, St. Louis Superintendency, National Archives (microfilm, BYU).

52. Richard Graham to Chief Anderson, March 18, 1826; John Campbell, Delaware agent, to Richard Graham, March 6, 1826; Chief Anderson's Statement of the Murders Committed Between the Delaware and the Osage, May 1826, Graham Papers.

53. Graham to Chief Anderson, March 18, 1826, Graham Papers.

ing further time and effort in what he termed an impossible situation. Warfare such as the Delaware and Osage were waging, he advised, was natural to the Indians and could not be prevented. If they were allowed to settle their own differences, the weaker nation would soon give in and, with both having had an opportunity to express their hatred and test their strength, they could reach a more lasting peace. Graham concluded his report by stating that the Osage were sure to lose since they were objects of bitter hatred because of their countless depredations, constant harassment, and plundering of the Santa Fe caravans. In view of this, Graham saw no reason to come to their rescue.⁵⁴

Superintendent Clark did not agree with his agent and directed him to go immediately to the village of Chief Anderson and inform him that the Great White Father would be greatly displeased if the conflict did not cease. Graham proceeded as ordered, declaring that he viewed the trip as wasted effort.⁵⁵ After delivering his message, Graham found the Delaware were not fearful of incurring the displeasure of the Great Father, nor were they moved by threats of soldiers being sent into the area if they did not cease hostilities. After prolonged debate, the old chief informed the agent that he was sorry the government did not approve, but rather than forgive the Osage he wished to be given the powder and guns with which to hunt them down. His ears, he said, were closed to further talk. The war chief, Killbuck, brought the parley to a close, Graham reported, by declaring with anger that:

...if the Great Father had not interfered the thing with the Osage would have been finished...now it was to[o] late, their tomahawks were sharp and could not be turned back. Their hearts were not bad, it was only that the Osage were evil. They wished nothing from the Osage but war.⁵⁶

By this time, the Osage were as anxious for peace as their enemies were for battle. In hopes that Graham would succeed, the various Osage bands agreed to desist from further hostilities. When word came that the Delaware were determined to destroy them with the aid of the Cherokee and other tribes, the Osage turned to the government and sought protection. At this point Clark ordered the leading chiefs of all

tribes involved to come together; in the presence of troops, a peace treaty was to be drawn up and signed by all the chiefs present. To smooth over the objections which were certain to arise, the government guaranteed the payment of all claims pending against the Osage.⁵⁷ Thus, with a threat and a promise, Clark intended to establish peace among the tribes along most of the Missouri-Arkansas frontier.

Since a successful council took some time to plan and convene, hostilities continued and were a source of much unrest. In October 1826 a war party from Clermont's band raided a Kickapoo village, killing nine and capturing three of its inhabitants. At about the same time, members of White Hair's village took some twenty Pawnee scalps and numerous horses. In November the Kickapoo and Delaware living on the Red River joined forces and destroyed an Osage camp, killing one brave and seriously wounding several more, besides capturing their ponies. The brave who took the scalp of the dead Indian carried it to a Cherokee village where considerable excitement and a small celebration ensued.⁵⁸

War fears and threats continued into the summer months of 1827. In August, Col. Matthew Arbuckle, commander at Fort Gibson, attempted to inspire negotiations for peace. After several frustrating and fruitless weeks, Arbuckle declared he was giving up all efforts to end the warfare. His decision was hastened by the fact that while holding a peace council with a number of Kickapoo, Delaware and Osage leaders, members of Clermont's band ruthlessly assaulted a Delaware town. Peace under these circumstances, Arbuckle declared, was impossible.⁵⁹

Others working to settle the Indian dispute were Superintendent William Clark, Pierre L. Chouteau, subagent to the Osage, and John F. Hamtramck, the newly appointed Osage agent, all of whose persistence and influence resulted in a peace council that convened in late 1827. By the end of December, the leaders of the several tribes represented had drawn up and accepted a peace agreement. Among the nations promising to live peaceably with each other

57. William Arbuckle to John Campbell, Delaware agent, May 14, 1826, and Clark to James Barbour, Sec. of War, June 11, 1826, St. Louis Superintendency.

58. John Jolly, Cherokee chief, to Edward W. Duvall, Cherokee agent, December 4, 1826, and John F. Hamtramck, Osage subagent, to William Clark, February 8, 1827, *Territorial Papers of United States*, 20:318-19, 411.

59. Arbuckle to the Adjutant General of the Western Department, August 27, 1827, *Territorial Papers of United States*, 20:527, 7n.

54. Graham to William Clark, April 29, 1826, St. Louis Superintendency.

55. Graham to George Graham, May 10, 1826, Graham Papers.

56. Graham to William Clark, May 29, 1826, St. Louis Superintendency. See also William Arbuckle to William Clark, May 29, 1826, Graham Papers.

were the Osage, Choctaw, Delaware, Kickapoo, and Shawnee.⁶⁰

The Cherokee were conspicuously absent from the council, having refused at the last moment to meet and make peace with the Osage. The feud between the two tribes went back some ten years to the time when the first handful of Cherokee emigrants from Tennessee had settled in the lower Arkansas River area. As Cherokee numbers increased, so did the agitation with the Osage. In the years that followed, there was much suffering on both sides. Of the many violent acts that occurred, however, the murder of the son of a Cherokee chief named Graves by two Osage warriors overshadowed all the rest and was largely responsible for keeping the two nations at war for most of the decade of the twenties.

In spite of their increased dislike for the Cherokee and irrespective of serious outrages which that tribe committed against them during the last months of 1827, the Osage were not drawn into a war. On the contrary, they proceeded to make peace treaties with neighboring Indian nations until they were virtually surrounded by friendly tribes. By March 1828 there had been no Cherokee raids in two months, and reports were that they were prepared to abide by the Treaty of 1827.⁶¹ This information proved correct. Except for isolated conflicts and an occasional threat of all-out violence, the Cherokee found it to their advantage in the years that followed to work through government channels in obtaining redress for the continued misdeeds of the other tribe. The Osage, meanwhile, made an honest attempt to abide by the various peace agreements. They succeeded at this for almost two years before their depredations increased to the point that they were once again viewed as the most troublesome natives on the frontier.⁶²

The resumption of hostilities was characterized more by petty thefts and mischievousness than by outright acts of violence. Neighboring tribes and white settlers accused them of such things as stealing horses, hogs, and furs; living on and refusing to leave the lands of the Creek and Cherokee; and sacking

Harmony Mission. Unlike their misdeeds of earlier years, however, these were not deeds of the nation in general but were the crimes of renegade tribesmen, strongly opposed by the several chieftains. For this reason, the Osage chiefs and their agent made an effort to reclaim, whenever possible, whatever was stolen and either return it or consent to a reduction of the annuity equal to the amount of an unreturned claim.⁶³

As hoped, this arrangement helped to keep offended nations placated, but it also led to the general impoverishment of the tribe as a whole and consequently to an escalation of Osage hostility. Impoverishment plus a hard winter and the ravages of smallpox made 1831 a year of desperation for the Osage and resulted in a greater number of offenses against their neighbors than had occurred for many years. The serious unrest which resulted had the effect of causing the tribe to lose favor even with its agents. Pierre L. Chouteau, normally their closest ally and reappointed Osage agent as of June 1830, declared the time had come for the Osage to realize "their getting out of line would not be further endured without serious punishment" and all stolen livestock must be either returned or paid for immediately. He informed the guilty that since he controlled the annuity payment he would withhold everything due them until completely satisfied of their repentance.⁶⁴ The crux of the problem, he wrote, lay in the continued residence since the Treaty of 1825 of members of Clermont's band on Cherokee and Creek lands. Their forced removal to the reservation proper, he insisted, was absolutely necessary if the Osage were ever to live peaceably with their neighbors.⁶⁵ In an effort to achieve this, Chouteau sent messages to John Eaton, the secretary of war; to William Clark, the superintendent of Indian affairs at St. Louis; and to Col. Matthew Arbuckle, commander at Fort Gibson, urging that a council be held at the fort for the purpose of settling the differences among the Cherokee, Creek and Osage, and of arranging for the removal of Clermont's band to the

60. Hamtramck to William Clark, January 10, 1828, St. Louis Superintendency.

61. Hamtramck to William Clark, January 13, 1828, St. Louis Superintendency; Clark to Thomas L. McKenney, February 24, 1828, *Territorial Papers of United States*, 20:606-7. They had made peace with the Choctaw, Delaware, Kickapoo, Shawnee, Peoria, and Seneca tribes and were in the process of treating with the Pawnee, Oto, Iowa, Kansas, and Sac.

62. Col. Matthew Arbuckle to Maj. Gen. Alex Macomb, May 31, 1830, Osage Agency, 1824-1841, pp. 204-5.

63. Pierre L. Chouteau, Osage agent, to Col. Matthew Arbuckle, March 1, 1831, and Capt. Nathaniel Pryor, Osage subagent, to Pierre L. Chouteau, February 6, 1831, Osage Agency, 1824-1841, pp. 273-76, 285-86.

64. Chouteau to Nathaniel Pryor, March 1, and March 13, 1831, Osage Agency, 1824-1841, pp. 280-81, 292-93. See also William Clark to Thomas L. McKenney, June 9, 1830, St. Louis Superintendency.

65. Chouteau to Gen. William Clark, April 5, 1831, Osage Agency, 1824-1841, pp. 325-26.

reservation.⁶⁶ His correspondents offered willing support and, as a result, the council convened in May 1831.

Chouteau and his fellow agents were pleasantly surprised at the response of the Osage to the demands made at the Fort Gibson meeting. They expressed a willingness to move and openly confessed their wrongdoing by surrendering their annuity "to pay for the wrongs they had committed against their neighbors." Because the guilty bands, especially Clermont's, were so cheerful and apologetic for their offenses and because their families were going to suffer from the loss of the annuity payment, Chouteau and the other government representatives in attendance gave them food and other staples to the amount of \$1,731.51.⁶⁷

Following the May 1831 council, the Arkansas Osage experienced a change of heart, causing their agent to labor intensely but vainly in an effort to have them removed to tribal lands. The errant Osage numbered more than one-third of the nation and had refrained from agreeing with the Treaty of 1825. These facts made their agent's tasks in effecting their relocation perplexingly difficult. Inasmuch as the 1825 treaty had cost them their homeland, the Arkansas Osage preferred to ignore its removal clause and remain where they were. Chouteau persisted in his efforts, not only because he desired peace, but also because he felt that the Creek and Cherokee ruthlessly took an unfair advantage of the Arkansas band. The two tribes were guilty, he declared, of taking every opportunity to make claims against the Osage for depredations, no matter who had committed them. "If a Creek Indian or negro kills a hog or steals corn," the agent declared, "the crime is charged to the Osage and as the Creek are devoid of all principle of honor they do not hesitate to claim compensation from the Osage although they know they are innocent." Chouteau felt that such was the case at the May 1831 meeting, at which time he wrote that the claims brought against the Osage by the Creek and Cherokee were both unjust and villainous and that the claimants did not "scruple to swear to the greatest of falsehoods and if able will do so again." The loss of every stray

animal from the Creek nation was charged to the Osage in spite of the fact that the Cherokee, Delaware, Shawnee, and other tribes continually passed through the Creek area.⁶⁸

At this point in their history, the circumscribed nature of Osage lawlessness, plus the fact that the Cherokee and Creek were able to take advantage of them almost with impunity, was an indication of both their impoverished condition and their greatly reduced status among the frontier tribes. Although they put together a brief offensive in 1833 resulting in some three hundred warriors overrunning a Pawnee village and successfully taking four hundred horses and the scalps of many men, women and children, this was an isolated incident and proved to be nothing more than the last-gasp sword rattling of a waning power.⁶⁹ The outrage was resolved the following year when Chief Walking River of the Little Osage and Chiefs White Hair and War Eagle, of the Great Osage, met with government agents and with representatives of the Pawnee and several other tribes to sue for peace. As satisfaction for their losses, the Pawnee were presented with a large part of the Osage annuity for 1834, and the council ended peacefully with the attending tribes agreeing to a solemn pact of friendship and nonaggression.⁷⁰

With this peace agreement, intertribal wars involving the major segments of the Osage nation ended. This condition evolved because of a general dissipation of the tribe's economic and military strength and as a result of the reservation bands' increased isolation. Attention now turned toward economic survival, which meant that the Osage had to live in peace with the other tribes or suffer the loss of their much needed annuities, as well as the good graces of the federal government. A further significant factor in the new peace on the frontier was the steady influx, through 1838, of the Cherokee, primarily from the state of Georgia. This, plus the more rapid adjustment of the eastern tribes to the ways of civilization, placed the Osage both numerically and economically at a disadvantage.

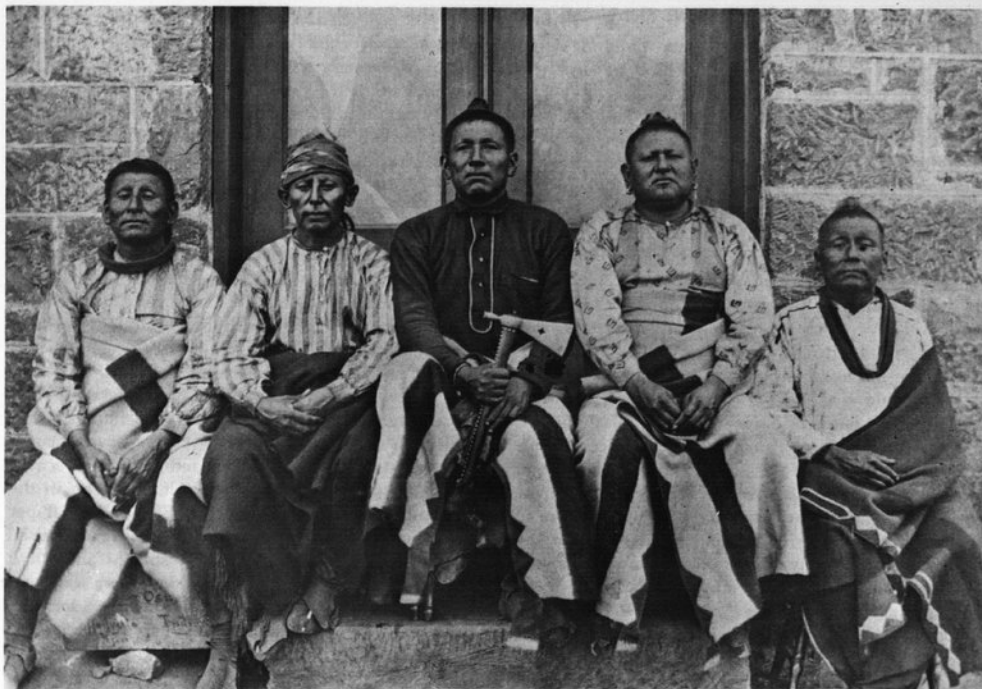
66. Chouteau to Col. Matthew Arbuckle, March 25, 1832, Osage Agency, 1824-1841, pp. 403-4.

69. William F. Vaill, "Journal of Mr. Vaill, During a Preaching Tour," *Missionary Herald* 29 (October 1833): 369.

70. Henry Ellsworth, Federal Peace Commissioner, to Herbert E. Herring, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, December 3, 1833, U.S. Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881, Western Superintendency, 1832-1836, National Archives (microfilm, BYU); Pierre L. Chouteau to Gen. William Clark, August 6, 1834, Osage Agency, 1824-1841, pp. 539-40.

66. Chouteau to Eaton, April 30, 1831, Osage Agency, 1824-1841, p. 348. See also Clark to Eaton, April 22, 1831, Letters Received, St. Louis Superintendency, pp. 267-69, National Archives (microfilm, BYU).

67. Chouteau to William Clark, June 30, 1831, Osage Agency, 1824-1841, p. 350. The whole outlay was sustained by Chouteau. He made immediate application for reimbursement but was denied satisfaction for a number of years.



Chief counselors of the Osage in 1877 were Strike Axe, Chetopa, Big Hill Joe, Big Chief, and Hard Robe.

By the 1830s, the Osage were in the process of surrendering their militant independence and becoming wards of the federal government. With this transition, there was also a change in the Osage image, as perceived by various contemporaries. Col. William Arbuckle noted that in the past the federal government had always found the Osage hard to deal with and that they were considered the worst disturbers of the peace among all the Indian tribes, but he now felt that they were increasingly easy to handle and to his knowledge were without serious offense during the two previous years. They were, he claimed, determined to maintain the peace, knowing that the hand of every Indian nation was against them and that their well-being required cultivating the good offices of the U.S. government.⁷¹

Like Arbuckle, George Catlin noted, as a result of a visit in 1832 to all of the principal bands, that the Osage were a changed people. Although once powerful and able to cope with any foe, in recent years they had been reduced to skeletons of their former selves. Continuous wars, the devastation wrought by smallpox in 1830 and 1831, and the loss of their vast realm to the advances of civilization had placed them on the defensive and made them a dependent nation.⁷² Isaac McCoy, writing in 1838, concurred, stating that the once powerful Osage had previously invited combat and were more than a match for other tribes living east or west of the Mississippi, but in more recent times they were a feeble and dependent people against whom "war would be an unmanly act." They stole and depredated, he wrote, in order to prevent

71. Chouteau to Clark, August 6, 1834, Osage Agency, 1824-1841, pp. 539-40.

72. George Catlin, *Illustrations of the Manners, Customs, & Condition of the North American Indians. With Letters and Notes*, 2 vols. (London: Chatto & Windus, Piccadilly, 1876), 2:43-44.

starvation which resulted from the depletion of their domain and the exploitation of its wildlife. "Could one," he asked, "kill a company of hungry boys who steal from you?" Much of the Osage problem, McCoy suggested, was a result of the ineptness and indifference of absentee agents whose character was generally so deficient as to have a degrading influence on the Indians on those rare occasions when they did visit.⁷³

On January 8, 1837, Capt. James Cooke, following an extensive visit to numerous scattered Osage camps, reported that the nation was divided into three main villages. Two were on the reservation proper, some 150 miles from Fort Gibson, and the third, Clermont's, was on the Verdigris River some forty-five miles from the fort. All the groups visited were found to be destitute, living mostly on acorns, corn, and half-wild hogs. The hogs, along with the corn, were stolen from white settlers. This latter fact was the cause of numerous and, as Cooke found, usually exaggerated complaints from neighboring settlers and Indians. The chief claimants were the Cherokee who were said to invite the Osage to hunt on their lands for the purpose of selling them whiskey. After the purchase, when the Osage became unruly, the Cherokee would complain and ask that the troops remove them. Under these conditions, with the Osage restricted to their own lands by the military and faced with continuous pressure by the arrival of increasing numbers of eastern Cherokee, Cooke suggested that the government must meet their needs in a more satisfactory fashion. Otherwise, their only alternative to starvation was to join the wild tribes in the west or to lay waste the Missouri frontier. Thus, he concluded:

...if the government does not properly interpose, the Osage will have disappeared from the face of the earth: or, losing name, language, and character, will sink to the last gradation between them and utter barbarism, and become the nomad outcasts of the desert. This, if permitted must be pronounced when the whole case is considered, the strongest proof offered in a century, of the impulations [*sic*] on the American people, of apprehension, and ill faith to the Indian, and an eternal reproach upon the nation.⁷⁴

Authorities in Washington finally agreed that a council with the Osage should be held. Pursuant to this decision, they appointed Matthew Arbuckle commissioner with instructions to negotiate a treaty

favorable to the tribe. Accordingly, Arbuckle met with some forty-five chiefs and warriors early in January 1839. By January 11 they reached agreement and signed a treaty the following day. The new pact completely favored the Osage. They were not required to surrender any of their reservation but were allowed additional compensation for lands ceded to the United States in the treaties of 1808, 1818, and 1825. Among the more liberal concessions made by the government were a \$20,000 annuity for twenty years; hogs, cattle, and farming equipment, including wagons and carts, valued at \$15,000; the building of grist and sawmills and houses for the chiefs; and the assumption of all tribal debts, including claims against the individual bands.⁷⁵

The Osage headmen were pleased with the treaty and pressed for ratification without delay. It was increasingly obvious to most tribal leaders that if they wished to survive they had little choice in the matter. They must either become civilized or suffer because the annuity, although twice what it had been in the past, amounted to no more than \$2.50 per year per individual. If the government paid the promised amount in goods, its rewards were small; if in cash, it meant at best only temporary freedom from want and a chance to reestablish credit with a local trader. The same view was generally held by numerous concerned individuals who pointed out that the only recourse for the Osage, if the decade of suffering and neglect which they had just experienced was not to be repeated, was for them to change to an agricultural society and to accept the ways of the white man.

During the next thirty years, the Osage, except for a brief moment of glory during the Civil War, were a virtual nonentity in terms of power, influence, or respect among either the white or the Indian populations. During this period, their land drew the attention of white settlers and speculators, who indiscriminately settled upon and took possession of it. Ensuing pressure to surrender the land, plus the loss of their annuity payment in 1859 and their inability to secure a livelihood either from the hunt or from the soil, caused the Osage leaders to enter into negotiations for the sale of their land in 1865, 1868, and 1870.

75. Matthew Arbuckle to C. A. Harris, September 29, 1838, Osage Chiefs and Warriors to J. R. Poinsett, January 12, 1839, Osage Agency, 1824-1841, pp. 740, 909. The treaty outline received by Arbuckle called for the removal, at government expense, of the Arkansas Osage and an annuity allowance to the tribe of \$15,000 a year for twenty years. See also Charles J. Kappler, *Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties*, 2 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904), 2:525-27.

73. "Journal of Isaac McCoy, 1828-1838," 516, Isaac McCoy Collection, Kansas State Historical Society.

74. Capt. James Cooke to William Arbuckle, January 8, 1837, Osage Agency, 1824-1841, p. 328.

The long-awaited legislation authorizing the purchase of the remaining Osage lands and the removal of the tribe to the Indian Territory was passed by Congress as sections twelve and thirteen of the Indian Appropriations Bill of 1870. This act and the treaty of acceptance that followed signified for the Osage the release of the last of their original domain and their removal from Kansas, but not the end of their struggle for the right to coexist with their white and Indian neighbors. White settlers preceded them onto their new homeland and defied all measures to clear them off.

By the year 1876, the Osage nation had been reduced from one of the most significant tribes in the area of the Mississippi River drainage to a band of only three thousand full and mixed bloods on a reservation purchased from their traditional enemy,

the Cherokee. By this date their laws, schools, religion, and money were all regulated by representatives of the federal government while the Indians themselves, although economically better off than at any time in their history, were confined to their reservation, turning their backs on the Osage past and submitting to the white man's way of life. The Osage were, as was written of the American Indian some years earlier, "ruined by a competition which they had not the means of sustaining. They were isolated in their own country, and their race only constituted a little colony of troublesome strangers in the midst of a numerous and dominant people."⁷⁶ [KH]

76. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve, 2 vols. (New York: Colonial Press, 1900), 1:448.