

REMEMBRANCE OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN THIS PLACE PRESBYTERY OF EAST IOWA (2021)

As we come together as the Presbytery of East Iowa in this place, we honor the guidance provided by the 223rd General Assembly by recognizing that we were not the first inhabitants of this place, and we honor the indigenous peoples upon whose land we live today, even as we confess the ways in which our predecessors transgressed the basic humanity of these peoples through duplicitous treaties, forced re-settlement, and privation.

We remember:

The Meskwaki, the People of the Red Earth, a part of the Algonquian peoples of the Eastern Woodland Culture, who suffered damaging wars with French and English peoples engaged in exploration and settlement on this land in the early 18th century, with one skirmish in 1730 decimating the tribe. As Euro-American colonization and settlement proceeded in the United States during the 19th century, the Meskwaki were compelled to migrate south and west into the Iowa tall grass prairies.

We remember also:

The Sauk people of the Eastern Woodlands culture group in the Ojibwe tribe. Closely allied with the Meskwaki people, the Sauk people resisted French encroachment into their settlements in the Quad Cities area. After a devastating battle of 9 September 1830, across the river in Illinois, in which hundreds of warriors were killed and many women and children taken captive by French allies, Meskwaki refugees took shelter with the Sauk, led by Chiefs Keokuk and Black Hawk. At first Keokuk accepted the loss of land as inevitable in the face of the vast numbers of white soldiers and settlers coming west. He tried to negotiate with agents of the federal government to preserve tribal land and his people, and to keep the peace.

Having failed to receive promised supplies from the Americans on credit, Black Hawk wanted to fight, saying his people were "forced into war by being deceived." Led by Black Hawk in 1832, the mainly Sac band resisted the continued loss of lands (in western Illinois, and Eastern Iowa.) Their warfare with United States forces resulted in defeat at the hands of Generals Winfield Scott and Edmund P. Gaines in the Black Hawk War.

In 1841 and 1842, federal agents compelled the native American leaders to sign treaties untranslated from the English legal style in which they were written, These treaties did not promise co-habitation of the lands as orally stated by these agents, but rather stated in the Preface that "the citizens of the Territory have a right to expect that its growth will not long be retarded by the occupancy of so large and valuable tract of land within its limits by a people not amenable to their our laws, whose wild and savage character render them dangerous neighbors."

In 1842-43, the two tribes were bureaucratically merged and renamed, becoming the Sac and Fox Nation in U.S. government documents. And this large group were compelled to re-settle in Kansas and Nebraska, where smallpox outbreaks further decimated their population. The peoples were ultimately settled in Indian Territory, now the state of Oklahoma.

Only a small remnant of the Meskawki people was permitted to buy land offered by Philip, David, and Isaac Butler near Tama, Iowa. In 1851 the Iowa state legislature passed an unusual act to allow the Meskawki to buy land and stay in Iowa with the restriction that they stay on this reserved settlement..

May we remember by this example, that we should strive to live in peace with one another, recognizing the full humanity of the Other and the indwelling face of God in each person.