

Iowa, Sac, and Fox Presbyterian Mission

Iowa and Sac & Fox Mission



In 1836 Superintendent of Indian Affairs William Clark (of Lewis and Clark fame) negotiated a treaty at Fort Leavenworth with the Iowas and Missouri Sacs and Foxes. The agreement stipulated that both tribes would give up all claim to lands lying between the state of Missouri and the Missouri River for \$7,500. In addition to the monetary consideration, the government was to "build five comfortable houses for each tribe, break up 200 acres of land, fence 200 acres of land, furnish a farmer, blacksmith, teacher, interpreter, provide agricultural implements, furnish livestock" and a host of other small items.

By the fall of 1837 Iowas and Sacs and Foxes had removed to their respective reservations west of the Missouri River. Before the removal was complete Andrew S. Hughes convinced missionaries to include both tribes in their efforts. Hughes contended that "the Sac and Fox exist in a declining fashion, and without the intervention of some supporting body, their desperate situation seems certain to worsen." The missionaries, eager to reach more people, gladly accepted the new challenge.

A Presbyterian Mission set up on southern edge of the Iowa reservation in present-day Doniphan County, Kansas. In November 1837 Samuel M. Irvin and his wife, Eliza, (pictured at left) established a mission two miles west of the mouth of Wolf River. They were joined in December by Reverend and Mrs. William Hamilton. Hamilton left in 1853 when he was sent to work among the Otoes in Nebraska.

The first mission building was a one-story log structure covered with clapboards. It was a little distance from the Indian settlement and separated from it by a stream. In 1844 the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions authorized construction of a permanent building which was completed in 1846. It was three stories high with a belfry that made the total height 52 feet, and it was 107 feet long by 37 feet wide. The first story was walled with native limestone and the upper two with brick manufactured on the grounds. Shingles, doors, windows, and finished lumber were sent from



Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, while other building materials were obtained in the local area. The cost of the building, \$8,000, was met by a \$6,000 appropriation from the tribal annuities and \$2,000 from the mission board. This new structure was erected on the north side of Mission Creek, apart from the old mission complex by about two hundred yards.

Lessons were taught in English and the Iowa language. This was made possible by the arrival in 1843 of a printing press on which Hamilton and Irvin published a hymnal and several grammar books in the Iowa language. Studies included spelling, arithmetic, and geography, but emphasis was placed on the industrial and domestic arts and farming.

With the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, a new treaty was negotiated causing a reduction of Indian lands. The treaty took effect that same year, and white settlement began then in earnest. As a result of the loss of land, the mission became too far removed from the two reservations to make attendance at the school convenient for Indian children. Consequently, the mission closed in 1863. From 1863 to 1866 the mission functioned as the Indian Orphanage Institute, but this new role was limited by a proliferation of similar institutions in the Midwest.

After the institute closed in 1866, the mission sat empty until 1868 when the west portion of the building was razed, leaving about 40 percent of the original structure. In 1937 the Northeast Kansas Historical Society organized to preserve the remaining portion of the mission building, which had been used as a residence until about 1905. It became the property of the state in 1941. Since 1963 the Kansas Historical Society has administered this property as a state historic site. In 1996 the mission was rehabilitated as a museum to showcase the arts and history of the emigrant tribes of American Indians in northeast Kansas. The building itself has since been closed to the public, however, **Iowa and Sac & Fox Mission Site** is now a drive-through site with interpretative signage.

Photo Gallery: Iowa, Sac, and Fox Presbyterian Mission

