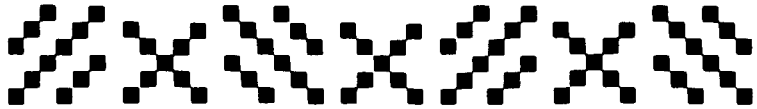


“Nothing Has Been Effected”: The Vincennes Treaty of 1792

*R. David Edmunds**



January, 1792, was not a good month for Secretary of War Henry Knox. At his desk in the War Department in Philadelphia, the former Revolutionary War hero pondered a multitude of problems besetting the new American republic. At sea, American commerce was victimized by the Barbary pirates, while closer to home, the British still occupied posts on the western frontier. Moreover, the Indian tribes in the Old Northwest remained hostile and refused to relinquish their claims to lands north of the Ohio. Although American officials had attempted to purchase the lands from small delegations of tribesmen, other Indians denounced the transactions and channeled their opposition into raids against American commerce on the Ohio. Knox had authorized American military forces to retaliate, but in October, 1790, the tribesmen had defeated an expedition commanded by General Josiah Harmar, and one year later, during November, 1791, they had gained an overwhelming victory over a larger expedition led by Arthur St. Clair, governor of the Northwest Territory. St. Clair's defeat had been especially humiliating, for in the rout of his troops the Indians had killed over six hundred Americans, including many members of the regular army. During December, 1791, Knox had defended his efforts in a communique to President George Washington, and one month later he had issued another statement vindicating the government's actions. For all practical purposes, however, by January, 1792, American Indian policy was in shambles.¹

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¹ "Statement relative to the Frontiers Northwest of the Ohio," December 26, 1791, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* (2 vols., Washington, 1832-1834), I, 197-99; "State of Causes of the Indian War," January 26, 1792, in Clarence E. Carter, comp. and ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States*:

Knox was faced with the dilemma of choosing between launching another campaign with the remnants of the western army or attempting to negotiate a peaceful settlement with the recently victorious tribesmen. Neither alternative offered much hope of success. After St. Clair's loss to the tribesmen, the American troops in Ohio were demoralized. To send such soldiers on another expedition against the Indians was to invite one more defeat for the United States. But negotiations also seemed fraught with disaster. Since the Indians had beaten two American armies soundly, there appeared to be little chance that they would soften their opposition to white occupation of lands in Ohio.

Knox eventually decided that negotiation was the lesser of two evils. In the past the Indians had refused to accept American claims to lands in eastern Ohio, but the secretary of war considered the tribesmen to be unpredictable and hoped that they might change their minds. He believed that the Indians had been "misled" about American land claims. If they could be brought into extensive negotiations with American commissioners, Knox hoped that they could be bribed or persuaded to accept the American position. Such negotiations would be relatively inexpensive, and even if the talks did not succeed, at least the hostile Indians' attention temporarily would be turned away from attacking the frontier.²

During the spring of 1792 Knox took measures to implement his decision. He instructed American military commanders in the West to send speeches to the Indians urging them to make peace with the government. The secretary of war also dispatched a series of messengers to the tribes in the hope that such personal envoys might persuade the hostile tribesmen to at least meet with government officials. In January, William Steedman and Peter Pond were ordered to travel to Detroit to convince the western tribesmen of the government's good intentions. In March, Knox met with visiting Iroquois leaders who also agreed to visit the hostile Indians, and one month later Captain Alexander Trueman was instructed to journey to the Indian villages along the Maumee to persuade the Miamis

Territory Northwest of the River Ohio, 1787-1803 (2 vols., Washington, 1934), I, 359-66. For a general discussion of events prior to 1792, see Reginald Horsman, *Expansion and American Indian Policy, 1783-1812* (East Lansing, 1967); and Randolph C. Downes, *Council Fires on the Upper Ohio: A Narrative of Indian Affairs in the Upper Ohio Valley Until 1795* (Pittsburgh, 1940).

² "Instructions to Brigadier General Rufus Putnam," May 22, 1792, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I, 234-36.

and Shawnees to come to Philadelphia for treaty negotiations.³ In May the government sent both Colonel John Hardin and the friendly Stockbridge chief, Captain Hendrick Aupaumut, on similar missions, and in June the Mohawk chief Joseph Brant also agreed to present the American argument to the hostile tribesmen.⁴

In addition to his efforts at negotiation, Knox also made plans to rebuild American military forces. On April 12, 1792, he appointed Anthony Wayne as "Major General and of course commanding Officer of the troops in the service of the United States," and during the next two months he expended considerable effort in providing Wayne with adequate men and supplies for the nucleus of a new western army. If the proposed negotiations failed, at least the United States would have the military power needed to defend its claims to land north of the Ohio.⁵

Knox's decision to strengthen American military power was a wise choice, for his efforts at negotiation proved fruitless. Steedman and Pond, the first American emissaries, were intercepted by the British at Lake Erie and prevented from going to Detroit. The Iroquois leaders, whom Knox had entertained so lavishly in Philadelphia, made no attempt to contact the hostile tribesmen until the following fall when the western Indians informed them that they now demanded that the United States give up all claims to lands in eastern Ohio. Both Aupaumut and Brant received similar replies, but the other American messengers, Trueman and Hardin, suffered a worse fate. Both were captured by the Wyandots, who ignored their peaceful mission, tomahawked the prisoners, and threw their bodies into the Maumee River.⁶

³ James Wilkinson to the Miami, Shawnees, Delawares, Tawa, Wyandot, Pottawatomie, Huron, and the Chipeway, April 3, 1792, Edward E. Ayer Manuscripts (The Newberry Library, Chicago); "Instructions to Captain Peter Pond and William Steedman," January 9, 1792, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I, 227; George Washington to the Five Nations, March 23, 1792, *ibid.*, 229; "Instructions to Captain Alexander Trueman," April 3, 1792, *ibid.*, 229-30.

⁴ "Instructions to Captain Hendrick Aupaumut," May 8, 1792, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I, 233; Secretary of War Henry Knox to Joseph Brant, June 27, 1792, *ibid.*, 236-37; James Wilkinson to John Hardin, May 20, 1792, *Collections of the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society* (40 vols., Lansing, 1874-1929), XXIV, 414-16.

⁵ Knox to Anthony Wayne, April 12, June 15, 29, 1792, in Richard C. Knopf, ed., *Anthony Wayne, A Name in Arms: The Wayne-Knox-Pickering-McHenry Correspondence* (Pittsburgh, 1960), 15-16, 17-20, 24-26.

⁶ "Instructions to Brigadier General Rufus Putnam," May 22, 1792, in Rowena Buell, ed., *The Memoirs of Rufus Putnam* (Boston, 1903), 262; Rufus Putnam to Wayne, July 10, 1792, Miami File (Great Lakes-Ohio Valley Indian Archives, Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology, Indiana University, Bloomington); Wilkinson to H. Innes, July 20, 1792, Northwest Territory Papers (Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis). Also see Horsman, *Expansion and American Indian Policy*, 91-92.

Unaware that his emissaries had failed, Knox continued his efforts at negotiation during early 1792. The secretary of war knew that the hostiles planned to hold a great council on the Maumee River during September, and he was anxious that American representatives be in attendance. Accordingly, in May, 1792, he instructed Brigadier General Rufus Putnam to meet with the Indians again to present the American position to the tribesmen. Putnam was ordered to assure the Indians that the United States claimed no lands other than those already ceded by the tribes. He was also ordered to assert that the government was still negotiating only because the United States desired peace, not because the tribesmen had defeated Harmar and St. Clair. To aid Putnam in the proceedings Knox appointed John Heckewelder, a Moravian missionary, as his assistant.⁷

During the early summer Putnam and Heckewelder journeyed down the Ohio toward Fort Washington at the mouth of the Miami River. En route, Putnam sent a message to the Indians along the Maumee, informing them that he would travel to Fort Jefferson, near modern Greenville, Ohio, to discuss preliminary arrangements for the negotiations. But as Putnam and Heckewelder proceeded west, their ardor to meet with the hostiles diminished. On July 2, when the two officials arrived in Cincinnati, General James Wilkinson informed them that a large war party had recently attacked Fort Jefferson, inflicting sixteen casualties upon the garrison. On the following day they learned of the death of Trueman and Hardin. The frightened Putnam immediately concluded that the attack upon Fort Jefferson had been aimed at him, and he cancelled all efforts to meet with the warriors of northern Ohio.⁸

Despite their decision to avoid confrontation with the hostile tribes, both Putnam and Heckewelder were unwilling to admit that their mission was a failure. Anxious to salvage some sort of negotiations from their trip to Ohio, the commissioners surveyed other tribes, hoping to find Indians more amenable to American diplomacy. Finally, their attention fixed upon the Indians of the lower Wabash Valley. During March,

⁷ "Instructions to Putnam," May 22, 1792, in Buell, *Putnam Memoirs*, 257-67; Knox to John Heckewelder, May 18, 1792, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I, 233-34.

⁸ "Brother John Heckewelder's Travel Diary from Bethlehem to Post Vincennes on the Wabash River, and Return, 1792," in Paul A. W. Wallace, ed., *Thirty Thousand Miles with John Heckewelder* (Pittsburgh, 1958), 265-68; speech by Putnam to the Indians, June 5, 1792, in Buell, *Putnam Memoirs*, 269-71; Putnam to Knox, July 5, 1792, *ibid.*, 273-78; Putnam to Wayne, July 10, 1792, Miami File (Great Lakes Indian Archives).

1792, the Wea and Eel River bands of the Miami Confederacy had made a preliminary peace with government officials, and Major John Hamtramck, the American commander at Vincennes, had spent the next two months attempting to extend the agreement to the Piankashaws, Illinois Confederacy, and part of the Potawatomis. These western tribesmen were isolated from the hostiles and already were pro-American. Moreover, many of the Potawatomis and Indians in the Illinois Confederacy were under the influence of French Creoles from Illinois who consistently opposed the efforts of the pro-British Indians along the Maumee. Although these tribesmen were already friendly to the United States, they offered the only opportunity for negotiation, and Putnam rationalized that if a formal peace treaty could be signed with the Wabash tribes, some of the more hostile Indians might follow their example. He also believed that after the treaty had been concluded, the Wabash and Illinois chiefs could be lured to Philadelphia where their lands could be purchased from them.⁹

Other western officials, including Wilkinson and Secretary of the Northwest Territory Winthrop Sargent, were also eager for any kind of negotiation, and they supported Putnam's proposals to meet with the Wabash tribes. By mid-August when Putnam received Knox's approval, preparations for the treaty were well under way.¹⁰ At Vincennes, Hamtramck sent messages to the western Indians, promising them gifts and requesting that they assemble at his post in mid-September. Meanwhile, Putnam purchased large quantities of food and trade goods and secured a military escort to assist in transporting the merchandise from Cincinnati to Vincennes. Putnam also obtained the release of several Wea and Piankashaw prisoners who had been confined at Fort Washington. He wished to return them to their relatives at Vincennes in the hope that such a gesture of good will would establish a favorable atmosphere for the conference.¹¹

⁹ Putnam to Knox, July 5, 1792, in Buell, *Putnam Memoirs*, 278-79; "Articles of Agreement with the Wabash Indians," March 14, 1792, in Carter, *Territorial Papers*, II, 374-75; John Hamtramck to Knox, March 31, 1792, *ibid.*, 380-83; speech by La Gesse, June 17, 1792, Donald J. Berthrong Collection (Bizzell Memorial Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman).

¹⁰ Wilkinson to Putnam, July 5, 1792, in Buell, *Putnam Memoirs*, 278-79; Winthrop Sargent to Knox, July 12, 1792, in Carter, *Territorial Papers*, II, 406-407; Knox to Putnam, August 7, 1792, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I, 237-38.

¹¹ Putnam to Hamtramck, July 24, 1792, in Buell, *Putnam Memoirs*, 305-308; Putnam to Wilkinson, July 20, 1792, *ibid.*, 299-300; Putnam to Knox, July 22, 1792, *ibid.*, 302-303.

On August 18 Putnam and Heckewelder left Cincinnati for the Wabash. The journey down the Ohio River was uneventful until the party reached the falls near Louisville. While passing through the rapids, one of the boats carrying the Indian prisoners capsized, forcing the Indians to take refuge on the Kentucky shore. The bedraggled tribesmen soon attracted a mob of Kentuckians who threatened the Indians' lives. Heckewelder interceded, protected the tribesmen, and transported them across the river to Fort Steuben on the north bank of the Ohio about three quarters of a mile above the rapids. The party then proceeded downstream to the mouth of the Wabash where they boarded pirogues for the voyage to Vincennes. They reached their destination on September 12, 1792.¹²

When Putnam and Heckewelder arrived at the village on the Wabash, they encountered a growing assemblage of Indians. In addition to the Weas, Piankashaws, and other Wabash Indians, important delegations of tribesmen from the Illinois country were also present. Jean Baptiste Ducoigne, the leading chief of the Illinois Confederacy, led a mixed party of Kaskaskias and Peorias. Kickapoos and Mascoutens from the Vermillion River were in attendance, as were several Potawatomis from the Lake Peoria region. The Potawatomis were led by La Gesse (the Quail), a chief long known for his anti-British sentiments. During the American Revolution La Gesse had guided a Spanish expedition against a British post on the St. Joseph River, and in the period after the war he had consistently opposed the attempts of British traders to extend their efforts down the Illinois River Valley. Accompanying La Gesse was Jean Maillet, a Creole trader from Peoria who exercised considerable influence over the Potawatomis and Kickapoos.¹³

On September 13 Putnam released the Wea and Piankashaw prisoners to their families, and the resulting jubilation gave a holiday atmosphere to the frontier village. Meanwhile, preparations for the treaty continued, and on September 19 drovers from Kentucky arrived with a herd of cattle to be used as food during the proceedings. In the next few days additional

¹² Putnam to Knox, August 16, 21, 1792, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I, 240, 240-41; "Heckewelder's Diary," in Wallace, *Thirty Thousand Miles*, 274-80.

¹³ Henry Vandenburg to Sargent, September 22, 1792, Winthrop Sargent Papers, roll 3, pp. 545-46 (Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston); "List of Signers of the 1792 Treaty," Potawatomi File (Great Lakes Indian Archives); Sargent to Knox, October 29, 1792, in Carter, *Territorial Papers*, II, 412-13.

tribesmen and their families arrived, swelling the assemblage to over 680.¹⁴

The treaty negotiations started on September 24. After distributing tobacco to the Indians, Putnam addressed the tribesmen, telling them that he represented the "great Chief General Washington" whose "Council-Fire was burning bright . . . for the benefit of all Nations." Recently, however, he stated, a cloud had passed between the council fire and the western tribes, causing a darkness in which the Americans and Indians "could not distinguish one another, but stumbled against each other, and struck the Tomahock in each others heads." Putnam then assured his audience that he had been sent to remove the cloud and to rekindle the fires of friendship between the United States and her red brothers.¹⁵

On the following day the Indians gave their formal reply. After presenting Putnam with a pipe and several strings of white wampum, Ducoigne spoke for the assembled tribesmen. He assured the Americans that although the Indians wanted peace, they were concerned over the loss of their lands. He pointed out that "in the days of the French . . . all the Country was clear and open," but the land recently had been "stained with blood." Ducoigne blamed the British, charging that both British and Spanish agents "by giving us goods endeavour to keep us strangers to you." He also accused the British of starting the warfare. "It was the English," he claimed, "that gave us the tomhock to strike you."¹⁶

Although Putnam and Heckewelder had anticipated Ducoigne's charges against the British, they were surprised at his comments concerning land claims. As the Kaskaskia chief continued his speech, he startled the commissioners by stating: "It is best that the white People live in their own Country and we in ours. Formerly our lands were extensive. Now they are small. Therefore we wish to keep what we have. We desire of you to remain on the other side of the river Ohio. These are the sentiments of all the Chiefs and Warriors."¹⁷ Following Ducoigne's oration other chiefs also spoke and echoed his opinions. To the bewildered commissioners it seemed as if the

¹⁴ Putnam to the Indians, September 13, 1792, in Buell, *Putnam Memoirs*, 333-34; Putnam to the People of Vincennes, September 16, 1792, *ibid.*, 334-35; "Heckewelder's Diary," in Wallace, *Thirty Thousand Miles*, 280; "Rations delivered to the Indians at the Treaty of Vincennes," September, 1792, Miami File (Great Lakes Indian Archives).

¹⁵ "A Journal of the Proceedings at a Council Held with the Indians of the Wabash and Illinois at Post Vincennes, by Brigadier General Putnam," in Buell, *Putnam Memoirs*, 335-37.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 340-43.

¹⁷ Speech by Jean Baptiste Ducoigne, September 25, 1792, *ibid.*, 340-50.

Wabash and Illinois Indians had adopted the hard line of the Maumee Confederacy and were demanding that all American settlement be withdrawn from Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio.¹⁸

On September 26, when the proceedings reconvened, La Gesse of the Potawatomis came to the Americans' rescue. He chided the other tribesmen for complaining that their lands were shrinking. "If your land was dear to you," he asked, "why did you give it away?" He then scolded the Weas and Piankashaws for not showing more respect to the United States, stating that if Putnam journeyed to his village, the commissioner would be treated with the proper honor and ceremony. Taking his cue from La Gesse's speech, Putnam asked the tribes if they really wanted the United States to withdraw to Kentucky and to cut off all trade with the Indians. He then assured the tribesmen that the Americans did not want their hunting grounds and offered to show them on a map just how small were the lands that the United States claimed.¹⁹

After examining the maps the tribesmen again met with the treaty commissioners and capitulated to the American point of view. Ducoigne informed the officials that he did not mean that the Americans "settled on this side of the Ohio should move away. Our request is that no other settlement be made." He further assured Putnam that the tribesmen wanted American trade goods, stating "We do not wish you to be strangers to us. We wish to be your good Neighbors and you to send Traders among us, to furnish us for our wants as the French, English and Spaniards have done." Putnam was pleased with Ducoigne's speech and concluded the session by replying that he had no doubt that the Great Spirit had interceded to bring "harmony and contentment to all parties."²⁰

On September 27, 1792, a "Treaty of peace and friendship" was signed by Putnam and thirty-one representatives of the Wabash and Illinois tribes. The agreement pledged perpetual peace and friendship between the Indians and the United States, forgave all past grievances, and placed the Indians under the protection of the American government. Perhaps the most controversial item in the treaty and the one that would generate the most trouble was article four, which guaranteed to the tribesmen "all the lands to which they have a just claim; and no part shall ever be taken from them, but by fair purchase, and to their satisfaction." It also provided that the In-

¹⁸ "Heckewelder's Diary," in Wallace, *Thirty Thousand Miles*, 283.

¹⁹ "A Journal of the Proceedings," in Buell, *Putnam Memoirs*, 351-55.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 355-58.

dians had the right to sell their lands but that they could also refuse such transactions.²¹

Following the completion of the negotiations, Putnam provided the Indians with four oxen and large quantities of bread and brandy. Although Putnam and Heckewelder both suffered from "bilous fever," the tribesmen were anxious to celebrate, and the festivities lasted for several days. Finally, after the food and brandy were gone and the presents had been distributed, most of the Indians began to leave for their villages.²²

Meanwhile, Putnam made plans to maximize the impact of the treaty upon all the western tribes. He sent a messenger to the hostile warriors along the Maumee, informing them that their brothers had made peace with the United States and inviting them to join in the agreement. He also made preparations to send several of the Wabash and Illinois chiefs to Philadelphia. Putnam believed that these Indians would be awed by their contact with eastern civilization and that they then could be coerced into assisting the United States in negotiating with the hostiles.²³

When news of the treaty reached Philadelphia, Knox was elated. Convinced that the United States had achieved a diplomatic coup on the Wabash, Knox wrote to Wayne, predicting that Putnam's efforts would successfully detach eight hundred warriors from the hostile confederacy. The secretary of war also instructed Wayne to arrange for the safe passage of the Wabash chiefs to the capital, ordering the general to insure that the Indians' journey would progress "under circumstances of convenience and perfect security against all insults and danger."²⁴

On October 5 sixteen Indians who had signed the treaty set out for Philadelphia. Accompanying the warriors were Heckewelder, two Indian women, several interpreters, including Maillet, and a small squad of soldiers commanded by Captain Abner Prior. The party journeyed east across Indiana to Fort Steuben

²¹ "A Treaty of peace and friendship . . .," September 27, 1792, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I, 338.

²² "Rations delivered to Indians at the Treaty of Vincennes," September, 1792, Miami File (Great Lakes Indian Archives); "Schedule of Goods Delivered at the Indian Treaty," September, 1792, *ibid.*; "Heckewelder's Diary," in Wallace, *Thirty Thousand Miles*, 283-84.

²³ Putnam to the Delawares, Shawnees, Miamis, Wyandots, and others, October 6, 1792, in Buell, *Putnam Memoirs*, 368-69; Putnam to William Wells, October 7, 1792, *ibid.*, 370; Putnam to the Indians, September 29, 1792, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I, 320.

²⁴ Knox to the Senate, November 8, 1792, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I, 319; Knox to Wayne, November 9, 1792, in Knopf, *Anthony Wayne*, 131-33; circular by Anthony Wayne, December 5, 1792, Potawatomi File (Great Lakes Indian Archives).

where, on October 17, they boarded canoes and ascended the Ohio. On their way up the river the Indians stopped at Fort Washington where Sargent and Wilkinson gave a dinner in their honor. They arrived at Pittsburgh on December 7.²⁵

After resting for four days at Master's Tavern, the Indians and their escort were provided with horses, and on December 11 they left Pittsburgh for Philadelphia. En route to the capital, however, the party met with disaster. As the Indians passed across southern Pennsylvania, smallpox broke out among their ranks, and by December 26, when they reached their destination, two of the chiefs had already succumbed to the malady. Government officials in Philadelphia immediately inoculated the remaining Indians, but the smallpox continued to spread. During January, 1793, seven more warriors, including La Gesse, also fell victim to the disease.²⁶

On February 1 the surviving Indians met with Washington, and Ducoigne spoke for the tribesmen, pledging their friendship to the United States but asking the government to safeguard their lands from the frontiersmen. Three days later the Indians again visited with the president, delivered similar pleas, and sought assistance for the relatives of the recent smallpox victims. Washington's reply remains unknown, but the tribesmen evidently were satisfied, for following the conference they dined with the president and several Cabinet members.²⁷

Although Knox was encouraged by the growing ties between the Wabash tribes and the government, he was less optimistic about the progress of the treaty in the Senate. On February 13, 1793, the agreement was presented to the Senate for ratification. It immediately encountered opposition. Many senators believed that the fourth article of the document was too broad and that Putnam and Knox had been far too generous in guaranteeing Indian title to lands along the Wabash. Other senators wanted the treaty amended so that only the govern-

²⁵ "Heckewelder's Diary," in Wallace, *Thirty Thousand Miles*, 284-91; Wayne to Knox, December 6, 1792, in Knopf, *Anthony Wayne*, 147; Wayne to James O'Hara, December 7, 1792, Miami File (Great Lakes Indian Archives).

²⁶ O'Hara to Wayne, December 8, 1792, Potawatomi File (Great Lakes Indian Archives); O'Hara to Mr. Salander, December 10, 1792, *ibid.*; Knox to Wayne, December 26, 1792, January 12, May 8, 1793, in Knopf, *Anthony Wayne*, 154-57, 169-70, 233.

²⁷ St. Clair to George Washington, February 2, 1793, in Carter, *Territorial Papers*, II, 430; Indian speeches, February 1-4, 1793, in Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Bergh, eds., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (20 vols.; Washington, 1904-1905), XVI, 377-89; John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington* (37 vols., Washington, 1931-1940), XXXIII, 327n.

ment would have an option to buy Indian lands in the Wabash Valley. The proposals were discussed for three days; the Senate then referred the treaty to a committee led by Aaron Burr, which studied the document for ten days and reported back to the full Senate on February 26. The treaty was debated for two more days, but the Senate still could come to no decision. On February 28, 1793, the senators resolved to postpone further discussion of the measure until the next session of Congress. Meanwhile, Washington and Knox were instructed to renegotiate the treaty, guaranteeing the United States preemptive rights to Indian lands in the Wabash Valley.²⁸

Knox, however, was busy with other affairs. During February he learned that the warriors along the Maumee planned to meet in council on the Sandusky River in June. Knox knew that these Indians remained hostile, and he was not optimistic about negotiating with them. Nevertheless, since the Wabash and Illinois tribes had signed the treaty at Vincennes, the secretary of war thought that the Maumee tribesmen might, perhaps, follow their example and that a diplomatic victory could be achieved. Moreover, the surviving Wabash and Illinois chiefs were still in Philadelphia, and he hoped that they could be persuaded to travel to Ohio and to use their influence in the government's behalf. Knox therefore spent March and April of 1793 attempting to persuade the remaining Wabash and Illinois warriors to journey to the Sandusky.²⁹

He met with only limited success. Ducoigne and the Wabash chiefs feared that their lives would be threatened by the hostile Indians and refused to take part in the venture. Only two Potawatomis, Gomo from the Illinois River and Waweachsetoh from the Tippecanoe, agreed to Knox's proposal. During May, 1793, all of the Indians left Philadelphia and proceeded to Pittsburgh where Gomo and Waweachsetoh, accompanied by the interpreter Maillet, separated from the party and continued on by horseback toward the Sandusky. The remaining tribesmen, still escorted by Prior, boarded canoes and descended the Ohio to their homes in the West.³⁰

Maillet and the two Potawatomis reached the Sandusky River in early July, but their mission ended in failure. Learn-

²⁸ *Journal of the Executive Proceedings of the Senate of the United States of America* (Washington, 1829), I, 128, 134-35.

²⁹ Knox to Wayne, March 5, 1793, in Knopf, *Anthony Wayne*, 198-200; Knox to Benjamin Lincoln, Beverly Randolph, and Thomas Pickering, April 26, 1793, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I, 340-42.

³⁰ Knox to Wayne, June 21, 1793, in Knopf, *Anthony Wayne*, 233; Thomas Pasteur to Wayne, October 29, 1793, Potawatomi File (Great Lakes Indian Archives).

ing of their intentions, British Indian Agent Alexander McKee denounced the Potawatomis as American spies and used all of his influence to keep them from meeting with the other tribesmen. On McKee's orders the Shawnees seized both the Potawatomis and their interpreter, holding them captive until September when some Chippewas interceded in their behalf. Although they finally were released, Maillet and the two Indians did not arrive back in Vincennes until October 21, 1793.³¹

While Gomo and Waweachsetoh were held captive by the Shawnees, the United States again attempted to negotiate with the hostile tribes. During July and August American officials met with delegates from the Indians along the Maumee, but the negotiations proved fruitless. The tribesmen demanded that the Ohio River serve as the boundary between Indian and American lands, and the United States continued to assert its claims to areas north of the river. Finally, in mid-August, the talks ended, and the Americans returned to the East. Both sides realized that all hope for a peaceful settlement was over, and during the following winter Wayne made preparations for his fateful march to Fallen Timbers.³²

Ironically, while Wayne planned his expedition to the Maumee, the Senate continued to debate the treaty signed at Vincennes. On January 9, 1794, the Senate refused to ratify the document because the agreement did not specify that the United States had preemptive rights to Indian lands in the Wabash Valley. The senators preferred to wait, hoping that Wayne and a rebuilt army could impose a military solution to the conflicting land claims in the Old Northwest.³³

The Vincennes treaty of 1792 reflects the bankruptcy of American Indian policy in the period following St. Clair's defeat. Anxious for any sort of success, government officials willingly turned to the Wabash Indians after the more hostile Maumee tribes had spurned all offers of American negotiations. The Vincennes treaty, however, was hardly the diplomatic coup envisioned by Secretary of War Knox. Neither the Wabash tribes nor the Indians from Illinois were part of the hostile

³¹ Pasteur to Wayne, October 29, 1793, Potawatomi File (Great Lakes Indian Archives); Abner Prior to Wayne, December 20, 1793, *ibid.*; Pasteur to Wayne, January 14, 1794, Berthrong Collection.

³² The best discussion of the 1793 treaty negotiations can be found in Reginald Horsman, "The British Indian Department and the Abortive Treaty of Lower Sandusky, 1793," *Ohio Historical Quarterly*, LXX (July, 1961), 189-213.

³³ *Executive Journal of the Senate*, I, 145-46.

confederacy still facing the United States. Indeed, such western chiefs as Ducoigne and La Gesse had always opposed the confederacy, and although both resented whites settling on their lands, they had remained constant friends of the Americans. Knox's boast that the treaty would detach eight hundred warriors from the ranks of the hostiles was optimism carried to the extreme. Undoubtedly the chiefs who signed the treaty had more than eight hundred warriors in their villages, but most of these tribesmen were already friendly to the United States.

The pilgrimage of the chiefs to Philadelphia only added to the fiasco. Even if they had escaped the smallpox, the treaty signatories would have been useless as emissaries to the hostile tribes. The Indian leaders along the Maumee despised Ducoigne and La Gesse, and Ducoigne was well aware of their hatred when he refused Knox's request that he go to Sandusky. Only such young and inexperienced chiefs as Gomo and Waweachsetoh were foolish enough to accept Knox's offer, and they barely escaped with their lives.

As the Senate's actions indicated, even the terms of the treaty were unrealistic. Anxious to clear Indian title from the lands north of the Ohio, the senators refused to ratify any "Treaty of peace and friendship" that did not facilitate the transfer of such lands to the United States. Putnam's promises that the Indians had "a right to sell, and a right to refuse to sell" may have won him the friendship of the tribesmen along the Wabash, but such altruism only assured the defeat of the treaty in Philadelphia.³⁴

The Vincennes treaty negotiations have been defended as part of Knox's delaying tactics, designed to give Wayne time to rebuild the western army.³⁵ But such a position gives too much credit to American diplomacy. Unquestionably, Knox wanted to keep warriors away from the frontier, but the Indians who attended the treaty negotiations were already friendly to the government. The hostile tribesmen, those warriors along the Maumee, refused to take part in the proceedings and repudiated the treaty signatories. Indeed, while the treaty negotiations were in progress, the hostiles continued to raid American shipping on the Ohio. Perhaps a more accurate assessment of the treaty and its aftermath can be found in a letter from Knox to the president. On January 2, 1794, the secretary of war wrote to Washington, admitting that "the expectation of the treaty having been frustrated, nothing has been effected."³⁶

³⁴ "A Treaty of peace and friendship," September 27, 1792, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I, 145-46.

³⁵ See, for example, Horsman, *Expansion and American Indian Policy*, 90.

³⁶ Knox to Washington, January 4, 1794, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I, 470.