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## “To Keep the Indians of the Wabache in His Majesty’s Interest”: The Indian Diplomacy of Edward Abbott, British Lieutenant Governor of Vincennes, 1776–1778

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The British employment of Indians during the Revolutionary War has consistently been called to notice and condemned by that conflict’s contemporaries and its later chroniclers. Historians of the American Revolution on the frontier have closely examined the attitudes and actions of the British officials at London, Quebec, and sundry western outposts who were responsible for initiating and directing bloody Indian raids against colonial backcountry settlements from 1777 through 1782. They have also taken pains to identify the few British officials who purportedly opposed or deprecated the crown’s use of “savage” Indians in its war effort. Among those so honored for their “humanity” is Edward Abbott, lieutenant governor of Vincennes. Abbott is repeatedly held up as an example of a compassionate and farsighted official who futilely warned his superiors that the crown’s adoption of the Indians’ barbarous methods of warfare would ultimately prove detrimental to the royal cause.

Historians, whether they pass cursorily over Abbott’s conduct or examine his administration of Vincennes in some detail, always highlight his condemnation of Britain’s wartime Indian policy. In most cases Abbott’s transactions appear briefly either as an antecedent to George Rogers Clark’s adventures in the Illinois-Wabash country or as a sidelight to the guerrilla war waged against the Ohio valley frontier by Henry Hamilton, British lieutenant gover-

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nor of Detroit. Relying upon a few British documents, Consul W. Butterfield wrote in his history of Clark's conquests (1904) that Abbott's limited presents of warlike stores helped the warriors carry on "their murderous visitations" of frontier settlements. He also stressed, however, that Abbott did not directly encourage "the savages" to make war and that he "deplored the marauds." About three decades later Abbott's reputation gained a substantial boost from three prominent western historians. That not all British officials favored ruthless Indian forays was pointed out with stated pleasure by James A. James in his biography of Clark (1928), by Louise P. Kellogg in an article on Revolutionary-era Indian diplomacy (1929) and a major study of the British regime in the Midwest (1935), and by Nelson V. Russell in an article about Hamilton's Indian policy (1930). Each of them cited Abbott as having been innocent of any "charges of inhumanity" because of his pleas to Quebec's governor, General Sir Guy Carleton, to discontinue crown sponsorship of Indian raids. In two studies of Hamilton's policy published in 1951, John D. Barnhart again called attention to Abbott's protest against the use of the Indians while relating his financial handicaps and his onetime offer to raise warriors to fight the rebels. John Bakeless, in another standard Clark biography (1957), stressed that Abbott lacked sufficient government-supplied merchandise to treaty with the tribes effectively. In two important works on the Revolutionary frontier (1965 and 1967), Jack M. Sosin once again singled out Abbott as a British official who "resisted taking the offensive in the West and insisted on limiting the use of Indians." Most recently, in a book (1976) and an article (1977) presenting overviews of the war in the west, George M. Waller reinforced the portrait of Abbott as a steadfast opponent of the use of Indians as combatants, contending, moreover, that the government sent him to Vincennes specifically "to enlist the warriors of the Wabash," a task for which "he had little stomach." In the most complete narrative of Abbott's tenure at Vincennes, Barnhart and Dorothy L. Riker explained in their history of colonial Indiana (1971) that Abbott believed he could win over the Wabash tribes and perhaps make them militarily useful to the royal cause, but that he was stymied by financial restrictions. Yet, even they closed their discussion of Abbott by accentuating his criticism of British Indian policy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Consul W. Butterfield, *History of George Rogers Clark's Conquest of the Illinois and the Wabash Towns 1778 and 1779* (Columbus, Ohio, 1904), 49-50, 106; James A. James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark* (Chicago, 1928), 53; Louise P. Kellogg, "Indian Diplomacy during the Revolution in the West" (*Illinois State Historical Society Transactions*, No. 36; Springfield, 1929), 52; *idem*, *The British Régime in Wisconsin and the Northwest* (Madison, Wisc., 1935), 130-32, 141-42; Nelson V. Russell, "The Indian Policy of Henry Hamilton: A Re-valuation," *Canadian Historical Review*, XI (March, 1930), 25, 35; John D. Barnhart, "A New Evaluation of Henry Hamilton and George Rogers Clark," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*,

Significantly, this laudatory characterization of Abbott derives from a single document, a brief letter that he sent to Carleton from Detroit on June 8, 1778, four months after he had quit Vincennes. This letter found its way into the papers of Carleton's successor as governor of Quebec Province, General Frederick Haldimand. In 1857 Haldimand's heirs donated his 232 manuscript volumes to the British Museum in London,<sup>2</sup> and during the 1880s the Public Archives of Canada had handwritten transcripts of the entire Haldimand collection made for its repository in Ottawa.<sup>3</sup> Once acquisition by the Canadian Archives brought Haldimand's papers to public notice in North America, regional historical societies soon published selected documents from the Ottawa transcripts. In this manner, Abbott's letter first appeared in 1886 in the *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society Collections*.<sup>4</sup> In 1912 James A. James included a copy taken from the British Museum original in the first volume of the George Rogers Clark papers he edited for the *Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library*.<sup>5</sup> Because of its consequent accessibility in printed form, American historians have relied on this document, one of the few of Abbott's letters to be published, as their solitary guide to the attitudes of the lieutenant governor toward the Indians and Indian warfare. Even Barnhart and Riker drew their material from only an additional eight Abbott letters

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XXXVII (March, 1951), 646; *idem*, *Henry Hamilton and George Rogers Clark in the American Revolution with the Unpublished Journal of Lieut. Gov. Henry Hamilton* (Crawfordsville, Ind., 1951), 14-15, 33; John Bakeless, *Background to Glory: The Life of George Rogers Clark* (Philadelphia, 1957), 61, 111; Jack M. Sosin, "The Use of Indians in the War of the American Revolution: A Re-Assessment of Responsibility," *Canadian Historical Review*, XLVI (June, 1965), 120-21; *idem*, *The Revolutionary Frontier, 1763-1783* (New York, 1967), 104-105; George M. Waller, *The American Revolution in the West* (Chicago, 1976), 30, 33-34; *idem*, "Target Detroit: Overview of the American Revolution West of the Appalachians," in *The French, The Indians and George Rogers Clark in the Illinois Country* (Proceedings of an Indiana American Revolution Bicentennial Symposium; Indianapolis, 1977), 50; John D. Barnhart and Dorothy L. Riker, *Indiana to 1816: The Colonial Period* (Indianapolis, 1971), 175-80, 184-90.

<sup>2</sup> Now widely available on microfilm, the manuscript Haldimand Papers are located in vols. 21,661-21,892, Additional Manuscripts (British Museum Library, London). Hereafter, the Haldimand Papers will be cited as HP/source for the particular documents cited; references to the original manuscripts will be BM Add. MSS. The letter in question is Edward Abbott to General Sir Guy Carleton, Detroit, June 8, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,782, folios (fols.) 41-42.

<sup>3</sup> The Public Archives of Canada initially classified its transcripts of the Haldimand Papers as Series B, vols. 1-232. Recently, these have been incorporated into Manuscript Group (MG) 21, B2, which also includes the Public Archives' microfilm copies of the original Haldimand Papers from the British Museum. A comprehensive calendar of the Series B transcripts (which can also serve as a guide to the microfilmed originals) can be found in Douglas Brymner, "Calendar of the Haldimand Papers," *Annual Reports of the Public Archives for 1884-1889* (Ottawa, 1885-1890).

<sup>4</sup> *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, Historical Collections* (40 vols., Lansing, Mich., 1877-1929), IX, 488-89 (cited hereafter as MPHSC).

<sup>5</sup> James A. James, ed., *George Rogers Clark Papers*, Vol. I: 1771-1781 (*Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library*, Vol. VIII; Springfield, 1912), 46-47.

transcribed from the records of the British Colonial Office. Yet numerous other documents exist that allow a closer and more accurate view of Abbott's transactions with the Indians. They reveal the exact state of British-Indian relations along the Wabash during the one and one-half years before Clark's Virginians appeared at Vincennes, and they explain precisely what triggered Abbott's oft-quoted outburst against his government's Indian policy.

Scrutiny of Abbott's Indian diplomacy will reveal that he undertook his assignment with a complete willingness to use native warriors against the rebels. Yet, once he arrived at Vincennes, he neither offered the war hatchet to his district's Indians nor engaged them to perform any other material services for the crown. This passivity arose not from scruples on his part but rather from the pronounced Anglophobia of the Wabash tribes, from the British ministry's failure to send him orders to rouse the Indians to war, and from crippling financial restrictions placed on him by Governor Carleton. His later condemnation of Indian raids came in response to an agent's report about a specific incident south of the Ohio River. To an already frustrated Abbott this occurrence revealed at last the ultimate futility of the contradictory dual manner in which he and Henry Hamilton had hoped to prosecute the Revolutionary War in the Midwest, a region with whose complexities Abbott was quite familiar.

In contrast to Hamilton, Abbott began his lieutenant governorship possessing lengthy experience with the Midwest, its Indians, and Indian warfare. When he received his appointment, he was an active-duty artilleryman who had served for more than ten years at Detroit, where he had established ties of family and friendship. Although Louise Kellogg long ago partially noted Abbott's service at Detroit, other writers have continued to repeat the misinformation that he "had no Indian or border experience."<sup>6</sup> In reality, Abbott was a career officer of the blue-coated Royal Regiment of Artillery (R.R.A.). He had entered the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich as a teenaged gentleman cadet in January, 1757, and graduated as a lieutenant-fireworker two years later. By late 1762 he was serving as a junior officer with the detachment from the 1st Battalion, R.R.A., that manned the guns at fortress Detroit. In that capacity he distinguished himself during Pontiac's siege of 1763 on several sorties in armed bateaux in company with Lieutenant Dederick Brehm (later Governor Haldimand's trusted aide-de-camp) and Lieutenant Jehu Hay (later Hamilton's Indian agent and subsequently Detroit's post-Revolution lieutenant gov-

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<sup>6</sup> Hiram W. Beckwith, ed., *Letters from Canadian Archives (Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, Vol. I; Springfield, 1903)*, 310-12; Barnhart and Riker, *Indiana to 1816*, 188 n. 19.

ernor). Remaining at Detroit after the Indians' eventual defeat, Abbott gained promotion to second lieutenant in 1764 and to first lieutenant in 1769. He also married a local *Canadien* (Franco-American) belle, Angelica Desrivières, by whom he had one son in 1771 and at least one more soon afterward. In addition to commanding the small artillery detachment, he acted for some time as Detroit's military engineer and also attended the Indian councils held by the post's successive army commandants. Like Hay, who also married and remained at Detroit, Abbott established close contacts among the settlement's British merchants and *Canadien* Indian traders and seems to have entertained thoughts about carving out a permanent life on the American frontier. In 1773, however, the 1st Battalion was relieved at Britain's scattered American cantonments by detachments from the newly formed 4th Battalion, and that July Abbott and his family sailed for England.<sup>7</sup>

After his arrival Abbott learned that Governor Carleton was in London lobbying for passage of the Quebec Act, a measure for establishing an effective civil government of the largely French-speaking population of Laurentian Canada and the *Canadien* and Native American inhabitants of the military-ruled Indian territory in the interior. Once passed, this legislation (to take effect May 1, 1775) extended the borders of Quebec Province to encompass former French-held territory south of the Great Lakes and north of the Ohio River and provided for five subordinate lieutenant governorships at the outlying settlements of Detroit, Michilimackinac, Kaskaskia, Vincennes, and Gaspé. Abbott determined to seek one of these appointments, probably the position at Detroit. He met with William Legge, Earl of Dartmouth, secretary of state for

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<sup>7</sup> This paragraph is based on scattered bits of information about Abbott's career found in: "Lieut. Jehu Hay's Diary: Under Siege in Detroit, 1763," in Howard H. Peckham, ed., *Narratives of Colonial America, 1704-1765* (Chicago, 1971), 220-21; Receipt of Theophile Lami for pay as Indian smith, Detroit, May 1, 1773 (witnessed by Lieutenant Edward Abbott), Major Henry Bassett to General Thomas Gage, Conference with the Indians who brought in the murderers of Pond, Detroit, May 9-10, 1773, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,670, fols. 40, 42; Abbott to William Legge, Earl of Dartmouth, [probably London, early 1774], in Great Britain, Historical Manuscripts Commission, *The Manuscripts of the Earl of Dartmouth* (3 vols, London, 1887-1896), II, 119 (cited hereafter as *Dartmouth Manuscripts*); Lieutenant Charles Sackville Colleton to Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Cleaveland, Detroit, October 3, 1773, June 3-4, 1774, J. Reid to Cleaveland, Woolwich, May 2, 1774, fols. 96, 114, 110-111, vol. 1537, ser. 55, War Office Papers (Public Record Office, London); cited hereafter as WO ser./vol.; Abbott to William Edgar, St. Vincenne, August 6, 1777, pp. 651-52, vol. II, A1, MG 19, William Edgar Papers (Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa); cited hereafter as Edgar Papers; Howard H. Peckham, *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising* (Princeton, N.J., 1947), 204, 232; "The King's Shipyard," *Burton Historical Collection Leaflet*, II (January, 1924), 23-25; Charles Dennissen, *Genealogy of the French Families of the Detroit River Region, 1701-1911*, edited by Harold F. Powell (2 vols., Detroit, 1976), I, 1; *List of Officers of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, as They Stood in 1763, with a Continuation to the Present Time . . .* (Deptford Bridge, [London?], 1815), 6.

American affairs, early in 1774 and furnished him with a written report concerning Detroit's government, inhabitants, and commerce. He assured the American secretary that a "proper person" could easily govern the region's numerous Indians. He became so sure of his influence with Dartmouth, who controlled the new appointments, that he neglected to pay court to Carleton, a precaution not overlooked by Captain Henry Hamilton of the 15th Regiment, who had served as the governor's major-of-brigade in Canada from 1767 to 1768. When the commissions were issued on April 7, 1775, the lieutenant governorship of Detroit went to Hamilton, and Abbott had to settle for Vincennes. This commission gave him the governance of Vincennes's civil and judicial affairs, the superintendence of its Indian trade, and an annual salary of £200.<sup>8</sup>

In anticipation of his appointment and return to Canada, Lieutenant Abbott had arranged as early as April, 1774, for his transfer to the Royal Artillery's 4th Battalion, which was still stationed in America. By the time he received his commission, however, the American Revolution had broken out, and he and his family were not able to depart Britain until late 1775. They initially landed at Boston the following January and then joined the British exodus from that besieged city to Halifax in March. Abbott had to wait there while a large British-German expeditionary force drove rebel troops from the St. Lawrence valley during May and June before he could return to Canada. The fighting's residual disruption of public affairs and transportation westward detained him throughout the summer at Montreal. There he fell in with the many soldiers and citizens who were growing ever more vocal in their criticism of Carleton's handling of Quebec's Indian affairs.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For Abbott's office seeking, see Abbott to Dartmouth, [probably London, early 1774], Abbott to Dartmouth, Montreal, September 16, 1776, in *Dartmouth Manuscripts*, II, 119, 426; Instructions to Governor Carleton, Court at St. James, January 3, 1775, in Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty, eds., *Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada* (2 vols., Ottawa, 1907), I, 419-37 (cited hereafter as DRCHC); John Pownall to Abbott, Whitehall, April 8, 1775, Kenneth G. Davies, ed., *Documents of the American Revolution, 1770-1783* (21 vols., Dublin, Ireland, 1972-1981), VII, 298, #1083; Isaac Todd to William Edgar, Montreal, June 25, 1775, Abbott to Edgar, St. Vincenne, August 6, 1777, pp. 478, 651-52, Edgar Papers; Abbott to [Dartmouth], Halifax, April 27, 1776, fol. 34, vol. 35, ser. 42, Colonial Office Papers (Public Record Office, London); cited hereafter as CO ser./vol.; Establishment of the civil officers of the Province of Quebec, June 20, 1776, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,697, fols. 141-142. For Carleton, the Quebec Act, and the lieutenant governors, see the text and the many cited references in Paul L. Stevens, "His Majesty's 'Savage' Allies: British Policy and the Northern Indians during the Revolutionary War—The Carleton Years, 1774-1778" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1984), 256-59, 362-66, 1952 n. 39, 1987-90 nn. 1-4.

<sup>9</sup> Reid to Cleaveland, Woolwich, May 2, 1774, Cleaveland to Captain Edward Williams, Boston, November 28, 1774, Cleaveland to Colonel Thomas Ord, Boston, January 25, 1776, Cleaveland to Viscount George Townshend, Boston, January 25, 1776, Abbott to Cleaveland, Green's Farm, May 16, 1776, WO 55/1537, fols. 110-111, 33, 60, 60, 142; Abbott to [Dartmouth], Halifax, April 27, 1776, CO 42/35, fol. 34; *List of Officers of the Royal Regiment of Artillery*, 6.

Cautious and enigmatic, Carleton evidently hoped to overcome the American rebels with reconciliation rather than retaliation, and he deliberately refrained from inflicting more military damage upon the Americans than he considered necessary. In particular, he abhorred the thought of sending Indians—whom he regarded as barbarous savages—against rebel settlers or even rebel soliders in arms. Consequently, he had neglected to employ his Indian allies in the manner most likely to have disrupted the rebel invasion in 1775. Likewise, in 1776 he refused to employ against the battered rebel army on Lake Champlain the thousand or so Canadian and far western warriors who assembled at Montreal during June and July. His scruples angered many of his subordinates, who could not understand his apparent leniency toward the rebels and who believed that the crown's Indian allies could have prevented the rebel invasion in 1775 and might yet complete the destruction of Congress's northern army in 1776. Abbott, who already harbored resentment against Carleton over the matter of his appointment, readily agreed with those who argued that the governor should have sent Indian raiders against the Americans. In fact, he wrote to Dartmouth in September to give his opinion that Carleton could have saved his province two prolonged campaigns if he had employed Indian parties when the rebels had first probed Canada's border in 1775. Shortly after this, Abbott at last set out for the interior and Vincennes.<sup>10</sup>

Before Abbott departed Montreal Carleton gave him written instructions to govern his behavior at Vincennes. Although these are no longer extant, Abbott later noted that they contained nothing "except the form of Office on all occasions"; that is, they outlined a lieutenant governor's responsibilities over his post's civil administration, fiscal accounts, and fur trade as contained in Carleton's own instructions from the home government. Because Carleton had not received any accurate intelligence about events in the Midwest for a year or more, he could give Abbott no specific instructions regarding military activities, defensive posture, or Indian affairs. He doubtless told Abbott in general terms to foster Indian friendship for the crown, but he emphatically—though only verbally—forbade him "to incur any Expence for the Indians of Post Vincennes." He also declined to provide any regular troops to garrison that Wabash village. In these actions the governor adhered

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<sup>10</sup> Abbott to [Dartmouth], Montreal, September 16, 1776, in *Dartmouth Manuscripts*, II, 426; Abbott to Edgar, St. Vincenne, August 6, 1777, pp. 651-52, Edgar Papers. Carleton's management of the Indians during 1775 and 1776 and the many critics thereof in Canada and England are examined in considerable detail in Stevens, "His Majesty's 'Savage' Allies," 361-406, 417-54, 494-518, 567-76, 614-52, 692-712, 788-840.

to a consistent but unexplained policy he followed from 1775 onward.<sup>11</sup>

Even though Carleton had labored to get the Illinois-Wabash country included within Quebec's expanded borders, he refused to expend the smallest resource to defend it or retain its inhabitants' allegiance after the Revolutionary War commenced. In response to the need to consolidate his forces when the rebels invaded Canada and to orders received from General Thomas Gage regarding a har-brained western scheme advocated by the royal governor of Virginia, Carleton had ordered the withdrawal of the small British garrison from Fort Gage at Kaskaskia, Illinois, in late 1775. After Captain Hugh Lord boated his seventy men to Detroit in May, 1776, no British soldiers remained anywhere in the Illinois-Wabash country. The army officer appointed as Kaskaskia's lieutenant governor never attempted to get to his post, and Carleton placed Philippe François Rastel, Sieur de Rocheblave, the local resident whom the departing Captain Lord had appointed as acting commandant, on an allowance not to exceed £200 annually. Subsequently, Carleton repeatedly attempted to eliminate all other government expenses for that region. Nevertheless, the ambitious Abbott, anxious to rule Vincennes as a personal, semiautonomous enclave, had no intention of obeying the governor's financial restrictions. He thought that his friendship with Dartmouth gave him enough influence to govern Vincennes as he, not Carleton, thought best. He seemed not to worry that Dartmouth had been replaced as American secretary in November, 1775, by Lord George Germain (formerly Sackville).<sup>12</sup>

Abbott, his wife, and his sons reached Detroit during October or November and spent the winter there amidst their relatives and friends. Abbott found that Hamilton had already been at his post for a full year. Both of these men betrayed a certain jealousy, each regarding the other as a rival for the role of dominant British authority in the Midwest and favorite with officials at Quebec and

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<sup>11</sup> Abbott to [Dartmouth], Montreal, September 16, 1776, in *Dartmouth Manuscripts*, II, 426; Todd to Edgar, Montreal, September 12, 1776, Abbott to Edgar, St. Vincennes, August 6, 1777, pp. 541-42, 651-52, Edgar Papers; Abbott to Carleton, Detroit, April 15, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 35-36; Abbott to Carleton, St. Vincennes, August 3, 1777, CO 42/38, fol. 88; Carleton to Hamilton, Quebec, May 16, 1777, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,781, fol. 5 (also MPHSC, XII, 307-308); Thomas Dunn to Major Robert Mathews, Quebec, October 10, 1783, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,859, fol. 107; Instructions to Governor Carlton, St. James, January 3, 1775, DRCHC, I, 419-37; Barnhart and Riker, *Indiana to 1816*, 178.

<sup>12</sup> Abbott to Edgar, St. Vincennes, August 6, 1777, pp. 651-52, Edgar Papers; Philippe de Rocheblave to Lord George Germain, Fort Gage, January 22, February 28, 1778 in Edward G. Mason, ed., "Rocheblave Papers" (*Chicago Historical Society Collections*, Vol. IV; Chicago, 1890), 395-97, 407-408. The relationship between Virginia's Governor Dunmore, Gage, Carleton, and the withdrawal of Captain Lord's garrison from Kaskaskia is detailed and documented in Stevens, "His Majesty's 'Savage' Allies," 459-65, 490-94, 670-76.

London. Abbott worried that Hamilton might interfere with his governing the Wabash district as he thought fit. Nevertheless, he must have spent many days talking over military and Indian affairs with Hamilton and with Jehu Hay, his old friend who was now Hamilton's Indian agent and principal adviser. They expected that only one more campaign would be required to subdue the rebels, and Hamilton believed that the tribes of the Detroit region and the Ohio country would readily join in any offensive action his superiors might authorize in 1777. Hamilton had tried to restrain the warriors from raiding during 1776 because Carleton's few letters to him had indicated a disinclination for the Indians' assistance. He knew, however, that belligerent Mingo and Shawnee tribesmen were independently resuming their conflict with Virginia frontiersmen that had begun with Lord Dunmore's War in 1774 and never really ended. In major councils at Detroit and Niagara during August to October, 1776, Hamilton and Niagara agent John Butler had succeeded in forging a loose, pro-British defensive coalition amongst the Lakes Tribes (that is, the Wyandots, Ottawas, Potawatomis, and Chippewas who resided in the vicinity of Detroit), several of the Ohio tribes, and the pro-British factions of the Six Nations of New York. To ensure cooperation among all the king's Indian friends, Hamilton wished to extend this coalition to the far western tribes dependent upon Mackinac, to the remaining Ohio tribes (particularly the pro-American Delawares), and especially to the populous and usually anti-British tribes of the Maumee and Wabash valleys. Winning the latter over to King George's allegiance and to Hamilton's coalition would become the first objective of Abbott's Indian diplomacy.<sup>13</sup>

That winter was a comparatively quiet time at Detroit, and Abbott took the opportunity to renew old friendships, particularly with men he thought might prove helpful in his new office. Among these he included several of Detroit's leading merchants, such as Jacques (*dit* Duperon) Baby, James Sterling, William Edgar, and James Cochran. He quietly promised provision contracts to Baby, a judgeship to Sterling, and profitable patronage to Edgar if he accompanied him to the Wabash. He also dispatched messages to Vincennes announcing his impending arrival and requesting a report on local conditions there. In response he was now and then visited by couriers and travelers from the Wabash, including a Piankashaw chief (evidently Le Grand Coete, or Great Queue, the tribe's principal civil chief), to whom he gave a pair of shoe buckles

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<sup>13</sup> Abbott to [Dartmouth], Montreal, September 16, 1776, in *Dartmouth Manuscripts*, II, 426; Todd & McGill to Edgar, Montreal, February 6, 1777, Abbott to Edgar, St. Vincenne, August 6, 1777, pp. 576-79, 651-52, Edgar Papers. The complete story of the intertribal coalition and other relevant matters are recounted in Stevens, "His Majesty's 'Savage' Allies," 760-81, 877-81.

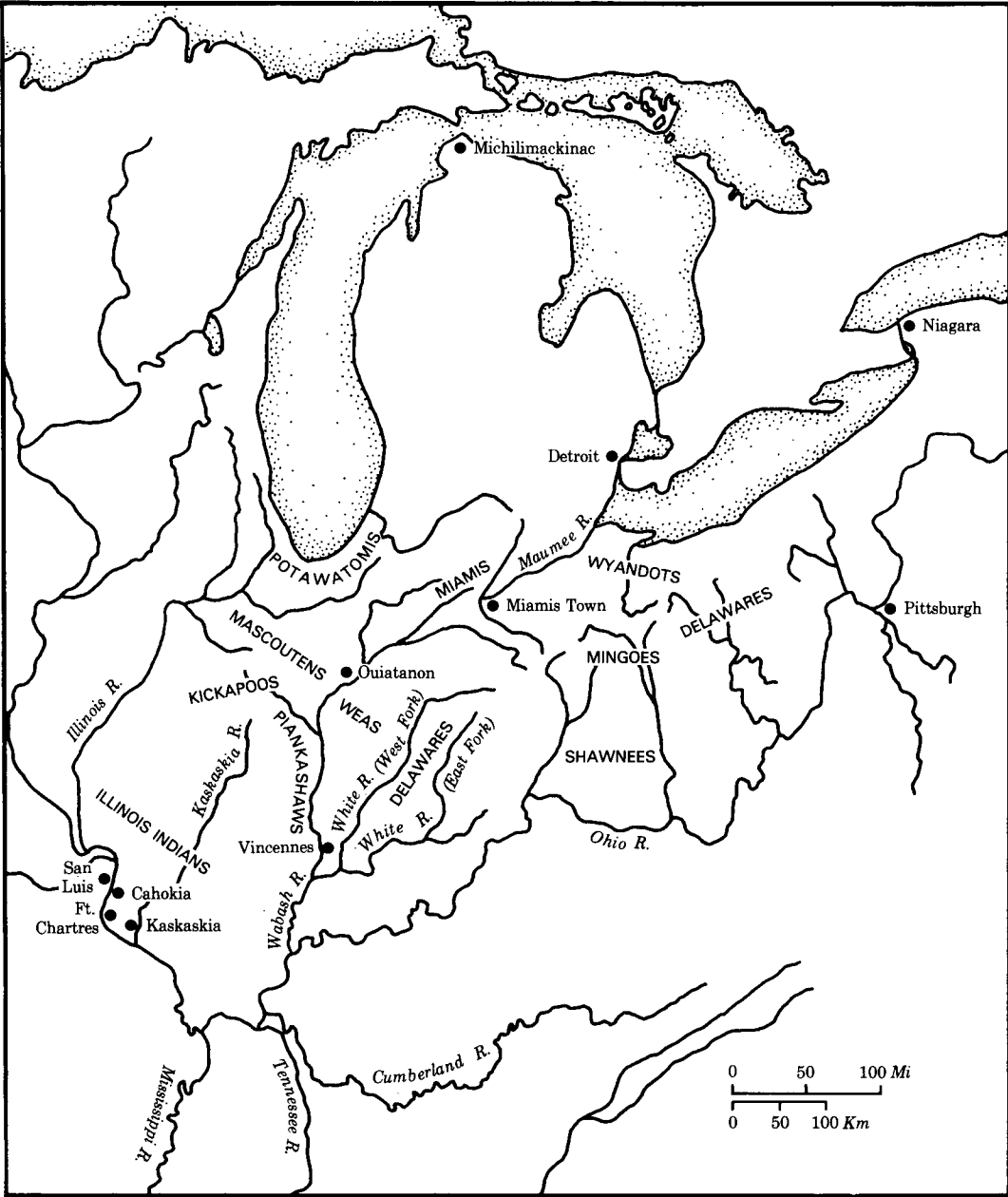
as a Christmas present. In total disregard to Carleton's prohibition, he began to purchase merchandise on government credit for distribution to his visitors. The information about the Vincennes district that he gained during his stay in Detroit, however, probably proved most helpful to him because the tribes of the Wabash valley and the Illinois country were continuing to exhibit their usual contempt for Britain's claims of sovereignty.<sup>14</sup>

Abbott's ability to govern his district effectively seemed problematical because of the long absence of British authority from the rich and populous valley of the Wabash River and the adjacent headwaters of the Maumee. The region that was about to become his responsibility contained three permanent *Canadien* settlements: Vincennes, Ouiatanon, and Miamis Town. Although Vincennes was a substantial settlement, these villages were primarily bases of operation for their resident *Canadien* traders, who followed the Indians on their periodic hunts and went from one post to the next to buy furs. These *Canadiens* were friends and relatives of six strong and refractory Indian nations—the Miami, Mascouten, Kickapoo, Wea, Piankashaw, and White River Delaware—which could probably muster some eighteen hundred to two thousand warriors. The first five of these tribes were often called the Wabash confederacy because of the interests they shared through their common occupancy of that river. The British and Indians alike regarded the Miamis, who inhabited the headwaters of the Wabash, as head of this confederacy, which in reality was only a loose alliance of tribes founded on past kinship and current propinquity. It lacked a single decision-making body and even a central council place. Neither the *Canadiens* nor the Indians of the Wabash region had ever regretted the absence of British officialdom, and they still did their utmost to discourage Britons from entering their domain.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Account of Lieutenant Governor Abbott with Andrews & Meldrum, November 25, 1776–April 26, 1777, J. M. Legras to [Abbott], Duposte Vincenne, December 15, 1776, Account of Lieutenant Governor Abbott with James Cochran, Detroit, January 7–April 15, 1777, Todd & McGill to Edgar, Montreal, February 6, 1777, Receipts of Cutun and of Claude Campau to Edgar, Detroit, April 14, 1777, Abbott to Edgar, St. Vincenne, August 6, 1777, pp. 566, 567, 569-72, 576-79, 586, 589, 651-52, Edgar Papers; Alexander Macomb to John Porteous, Detroit, November 1, 1776, p. 27, Vol. I, Box 1-Reel 1, John Porteous Papers (Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, Buffalo, New York); Account of Lieutenant Governor Abbott with James Sterling, Detroit, December 26, 1776–April 14, 1777, pp. 20-21, D1, MG 19, Fort Vincennes Papers (Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa); cited hereafter as Fort Vincennes Papers; Ensign John Caldwell to Sir James Caldwell and Lady Elizabeth Caldwell, Detroit, March 31, 1777, B3/13/111, Caldwell Family Papers, Bagshawe Muniments (The John Rylands University Library of Manchester, England); Abbott to Carleton, Detroit, April 15, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 35–36.

<sup>15</sup> For a comprehensive, fully documented account of the populations, settlements, and politics of the Wabash valley Indians c. 1776, see Stevens, "His Majesty's 'Savage' Allies," 101-105, 142-49, 1887-92 nn. 35-39, 1913-16 nn. 82-92.



THE WEST OF EDWARD ABBOTT, 1776-1778

Map prepared by Indiana University Audio-Visual Center.

In 1769 Vincennes had been a substantial community containing fifty or sixty *Canadien* families—250 people, including 50 men able to bear arms. During the following years it grew steadily until it numbered some eighty or ninety permanent families in 1776. Vincennes also attracted passing “Strollers and Vagabonds from Canada, Detroit, Illinois, and other Places,” who usually swelled its population by several hundred more. Considered “one of the most beautiful places in the world” by those who visited it, it was a thriving trade and agricultural center. About 1767 a passing British agent had tried to repair its old crumbling French fort, but no British officer had ever been sent to assume command. Local officials handled all civil and military matters as well as relations with the neighboring Indians. Jean Baptiste Racinne *dit* Ste. Marie, a Vincennes resident, was the only representative of British authority there. The British officer commanding at Fort Chartres on the Mississippi had appointed him captain in militia and “commandant” in late 1768 or early 1769. His duties included greeting and entertaining the many family groups and passing war parties from all the tribes of the Wabash, Illinois, and Ohio countries who frequented Vincennes to trade or to talk. The townspeople enjoyed good relations with them all, especially with the nearby Piankashaws and White River Delawares.<sup>16</sup>

Like their *Canadien* friends the tribes of the Wabash confederacy and the neighboring Potawatomis, who occupied the entire southern rim of Lake Michigan, had never completely acceded to British dominion. They were warlike peoples, who did not hesitate to waylay, kidnap, or kill any British traveler, trader, or soldier whom they happened upon. One royal official noted that they had “been kept almost altogether in the dark with respect to the power of the British nation.” Throughout the 1770s the Wabash tribes figure prominently in almost every rumored Indian plan to strike the British. The hostility of these tribes continually threatened to interrupt navigation on the Ohio River, and all the nations of the region were involved in a long-standing war against the southern tribes, particularly the Chickasaws and Cherokees. Every year numerous war parties of ten to thirty warriors made their way southward along the Wabash. When they reached the Ohio River, they made a practice of plundering British and Anglo-American boats and traders before proceeding against their Indian enemies.

Such depredations persisted through 1776, and British officials remained convinced that the *Canadiens* encouraged them in order to eliminate possible competitors for the Indians’ furs. To make

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<sup>16</sup> For a comprehensive, fully documented account of Vincennes and the other settlements of the Wabash and Maumee valley *Canadiens* c. 1776, see Stevens, “His Majesty’s ‘Savage’ Allies,” 142-49, 1913-16 nn. 82-92.

matters worse, every British attempt to pacify the Wabash region had had the opposite result. During 1772–1773 an order for the complete evacuation of Vincennes had provoked vociferous protests from the *Canadien* inhabitants and threats from the Indians to kill Captain Lord's messengers. The order's revocation did little to restore goodwill toward the British. In 1771 the northern Indian superintendent had appointed Alexis Loranger *dit* Maisonville, a *Canadien* trader long resident along the Wabash, to act as his agent among the Wabash confederacy. But Maisonville earned the enmity of the Miamis during a soap opera of personal squabbles and commercial rivalries at Miamis Town in 1774, and he consequently lost his influence with the tribes and hence his ability to further British interests. When Lord led Kaskaskia's garrison to Detroit in 1776, he held councils with the Indians at Vincennes, Ouiatanon, and Miamis Town to negotiate a safe passage through their lands. Although he succeeded in this, his speeches also informed the tribesmen that the last vestige of British power was leaving the Illinois-Wabash country. Thus, while Abbott paused at Detroit, news from the wintering grounds west of the Wabash and south of Lake Michigan spoke of "war on all sides," meaning hard feelings and violent clashes between Indians and white traders. In the absence of any effective authority to regulate the fur trade, unscrupulous dealings and abundant liquor led to an inordinate number of incidents involving *Canadien* as well as British and Anglo-American traders. The task of convincing the haughty warriors of the Wabash to abandon ingrained prejudices and practices and to join an intertribal coalition favoring the despised British was sorely to test Abbott's assertion that a proper person could govern the tribes easily.<sup>17</sup>

After some delay owing to poor weather, Abbott finally set out from Detroit on April 15, 1777, a week after he had greeted three *Canadiens* and two Piankashaw chiefs whom the citizens of Vincennes had sent to act as his escort. In view of the war's continuation in the east and reports from Rocheblave of rebel traffic on the Ohio River, he wrote Governor Carleton, "I thought it my duty to be at my post as soon as possible that I might prevent the machinations of His Majesty's Enemies and if possible hinder any succour they might receive by the river Mississippi." Although Abbott's promotion to captain-lieutenant of the Royal Artillery would become effective while he was en route, he recognized that without troops he would "be looked upon as a Cypher," and he therefore begged Carleton to send him a garrison as soon as possible. He

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<sup>17</sup> The preceding two paragraphs summarize information related with greater detail and extensive documentation in Stevens, "His Majesty's 'Savage' Allies," 149–51, 220–22, 674–76, 878–79, 976.

assured the governor, however, that while awaiting the troops he would “be able to persuade the Indians to keep in our interest, who are now wavering, & engage them to act offensively if your Excellency thinks proper.” Just how he expected to win them over—especially in view of Carleton’s ban on Indian-related expenses—he did not say. Still suspicious of Hamilton, Abbott had not informed him of this prohibition, even after Hamilton had warned him that along the Wabash “the Indians are rapacious and the French traders taught Captain Lord that they are not less so.” Abbott continued to believe that circumstances permitted him to ignore the governor’s verbal directive.<sup>18</sup>

William Edgar, having been promised a lucrative position as Abbott’s government contractor, had earlier advanced Abbott more than £4,500 to pay for a supply of Indian presents and sundry other expenses and now joined the small entourage that accompanied the lieutenant governor up the Maumee. The company also included Abbott’s wife and children, thirty-five *Canadien* boatmen, and three Piankashaw chiefs, including Le Grand Coete. Hamilton sent along a delegation from the Lakes Tribes to ensure Abbott’s welcome along the Wabash. Led by Egushaway, the principal war chief of the Detroit Ottawas, these delegates numbered seven Ottawas, two Chippewas, and several Potawatomis, together with the interpreters Eleopole Chesne, Isidore Chesne, and Claude Pierre Gouin.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Abbott to Carleton, Detroit, April 15, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 35–36; Todd to Edgar, Montreal, September 12, 1776, Account of Lieutenant Governor Abbott with Andrews & Meldrum, November 25, 1776–April 26, 1777, J. M. Legras to [Abbott], Duposte Vincenne, December 15, 1776, Account of Abbott with James Cochran, Detroit, January 7–April 15, 1777, Todd & McGill to Edgar, Montreal, February 6, 1777, Receipts of Cutun and of Claude Campau to Edgar, Detroit, April 14, 1777, Legras, *État Des fournitures faite par ordre de Mr. le lieutenant Governor abbotte . . .*, Vincennes, March 16, 1777, Receipt of Codere [?] to Edgar, St. Vincennes, May 27, 1777, Abbott to Edgar, St. Vincenne, August 6, 1777, pp. 541-42, 566, 567, 569-72, 576-79, 586, 589, 626, 641, 651-52, Edgar Papers; Carleton to Hamilton, Quebec, May 16, 1777, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,781, fol. 5; Hamilton to Carleton, Detroit, June 16–July 3, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 24–25, Accounts of Bills drawn . . . by Edward Abbott . . ., April 1, 1777–April 23, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,858, fol. 311, April 1, 1777–July 20, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,832, fol. 13; Dunn to Mathews, Quebec, October 10, 1783, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,859, fol. 107; *List of Officers of the Royal Regiment of Artillery*, 6; Barnhart and Riker, *Indiana to 1816*, 178.

<sup>19</sup> Abbott to Carleton, Detroit, April 15, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 35–36; Receipt of Isidore Chesne to Edgar, April 26, 1777, Receipt of Pierre Gouin to Edgar, Miamis Town, May 1, 1777, Legras, *fournitures faites aux Outaouas sauteurs et pour par ordre de Mr le Gouverneur abbotte . . .*, St. Vincenne, May 24, 1777, Receipt of Elleopole Chesne to Edgar, St. Vincenne, May 26, 1777, Abbott to Edgar, St. Vincenne, August 6, 1777, pp. 594, 599, 633, 639, 651-52, Edgar Papers; Hamilton to Carleton, Detroit, June 16–July 3, 1777, Proceedings of a Council held at Detroit, June 17–24, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 24–25, 70–77; Accounts of Bills drawn . . . by Edward Abbott . . ., April 1, 1777–April 23, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,858, fol. 311, April 1, 1777–July 20, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,832, fol. 13; Hamilton to Carleton, Detroit, April 25, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,782, fols. 35–36 (also MPHSC, IX, 433–37); Barnhart and Riker, *Indiana to 1816*, 178-80.

Upon reaching Miamis Town on April 30, Abbott's company encountered a welcoming committee comprised of Jean Marie Philippe Legras and twenty-four members of the Vincennes militia, Vincennes interpreter Jean Baptiste Vaudry, the Piankashaw chief Tobacco's Son, and thirty-six Indians representing each of the Wabash valley tribes. When the Miamis from the surrounding villages joined the Indians already assembled, Abbott found himself playing host to more than five hundred greedy tribesmen and compelled to hire an additional interpreter, Fontenoy de Quindre. Abbott soon discovered that there was "no end to the demands of the Indians." Although he tried to pass across the portage to the Wabash as quickly as possible, the necessary ceremonies and councils detained him for a week and consumed a considerable amount of his merchandise and foodstuffs. He had to turn to resident trader Charles Beaubien for an additional £490 worth of goods to satisfy the voracity of a people who knew a royal official lacking troops had to substitute bribes for bayonets. From their self-serving protestations of loyalty, however, Abbott concluded that "the greatest Unanimity seems to reign between these Nations, in regard to his Majesty's Interest."<sup>20</sup>

When Abbott's augmented party reached Ouiatanon on May 14, an even larger throng than had collected at Miamis Town greeted him. He found the Kickapoos, Mascoutens, and Weas there "so numerous and needy" that he "could not pass without great expense." He had to acquiesce in their exorbitant demands, he admitted, because he had "no troops and only a handful of French." Recognizing his weakness, these tribesmen did not accord him as cordial a welcome as those at Miamis Town. At this point, therefore, Edgar advanced Abbott additional credit to settle the bills of Godefroy & Company (who had equipped passing couriers for six months) and to purchase more provisions and presents for the In-

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<sup>20</sup> Abbott to Carleton, Miamis, May 4, 1777, CO 42/36, fols. 302-303; Hamilton to Carleton, Detroit, June 16-July 3, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 24-25; Charles Baubin [Beaubien], *Étaté generale des fourniture fait dans Le villajes Des Miamie par ordre de monsieur Le gouverneur abbot . . .*, Miamie, May 6, 1777, pp. 22-25, Fort Vincennes Papers; Account of Lieutenant Governor Abbott with Andrews & Meldrum, November 25, 1776-April 26, 1777, Receipt of Nicholas Lorrain to Edgar, Miamies, May 2, 1777, J. Porlier benae, *Étaté Des fournitures faite pour Le service Du Roy au Miami*, May 2, 1777, Receipt of Mouton & Wiggans to Edgar, Miamis, May 3, 1777, Receipts of Charles Barthlemy and of Poitiney to Edgar, Miamies, May 6, 1777, Charles Gouin, Receipt to Edgar for payment owed to Nicholas Gouin, Miamies Carrying Place, May 11, 1777, J. M. Legras, *Fournitures faites aux Volontaires et Sauvages . . .*, St. Vincennes, April 7, 1777, Legras, *Paye aux Volontaires Nommés . . .*, St. Vincenne, May 24, 1777, Receipts of Jean Baptiste Vaudry and of Fontinoy de Quindre to Edgar, St. Vincennes, May 27, 1777, pp. 566, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605-606, 631, 632, 640, 642, Edgar Papers; Normand MacLeod to Hamilton, Miamie, October 14, 1778, in Normand MacLeod, *Detroit to Fort Sackville, 1778-1779: The Journal of Normand MacLeod*, edited by William A. Evans (Detroit, 1978), 41.

dians. Yet Abbott's offerings, "though very large, were in a manner despised." The chiefs told him that "their ancient Father (the French) never spoke to them without a barn full of goods." That Abbott "left them seemingly well disposed for His Majesty's service" was therefore less the result of his own than of the Ottawas' diplomacy. Probably by reminding the Wabash headmen of their tradition of friendship and cooperation with the Ottawas, Egushaway fashioned a new alliance between his people and the Wabash tribes. The chiefs gathered at Ouiatanon presented the Ottawa delegates with wampum to take back to Detroit as a sign to the Lakes Tribes of their willingness to join the intertribal coalition initiated the preceding autumn.<sup>21</sup>

When he disembarked at Vincennes on May 19, Abbott became the first person "bearing His Majesty's commission" to take possession of that strategic hamlet. He began his administration with guarded optimism. The Wabash, he found, was "perhaps one of the finest rivers in the world," and the people of Vincennes were apparently friendly. Their respectful reception and initial compliance with his orders encouraged him. After officially relieving Ste. Marie, he had Edgar settle the former acting commandant's bill of some £428 for past Indian expenses and then purchase an additional £2,593 worth of trade goods from James Cochran to provide a supply of Indian presents. Next, Abbott organized the local militia into three companies of fifty men each and selected as their commander Hypolite Beaulon, a merchant who traded with and interpreted for both the Delawares and Weas.<sup>22</sup>

Abbott recognized the necessity for quickly establishing his authority and regularizing his administration. No sooner had he arrived than he received a note from Rocheblave confirming reports he had heard at Detroit and along the river concerning Spanish intrigues in British Illinois. He viewed his own position as partic-

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<sup>21</sup> Abbott to Carleton, St. Vincennes, May 26, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 37-38 (also Beckwith, ed., *Letters from Candian Archives*, 313-16); Fournitures faites par Godefroy & Co. . . . , Ouia, December 27, 1776-May 15, 1777, pp. 22-25, Fort Vincennes Papers; Hamilton to Carleton, Detroit, June 16-July 3, 1777, Council held at Detroit, June 17-24, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 24-25, 70-77; Accounts of Bills drawn . . . by Edward Abbott . . . , April 1, 1777-April 23, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,858, fol. 311, April 1, 1777-July 20, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,832, fol. 13.

<sup>22</sup> Abbott to Carleton, St. Vincennes, May 26, June 9, July 12, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 37-38, 45-46, 51; Account of Lieutenant Governor Abbott with James Cochran . . . , Vincennes, May 21, 1777, J. M. Legras, *Payement faite à Different Couriers pour Mr. De Rocheblave*, St. Vincennes, May 20, 1777, Receipt of Jean Baptiste Vaudry to Edgar, St. Vincennes, May 27, 1777, Abbott to Edgar, St. Vincennes, August 6, 1777, pp. 617-19, 630, 640, 651-52, Edgar Papers; Jean Baptiste Racine dit Ste. Marie, *Mémoire Des Marchandiss* . . . , Post Vincennes, September 21, 1773-January 6, 1776, closed and signed by Ste. Marie on February 18, 1777, and witnessed by Vincennes inhabitants on May 27, 1777, pp. 1-18, Fort Vincennes Papers; Hamilton's journal entry for December 28, 1778, in Barnhart, *Hamilton and Clark*, 158.

ularly vulnerable because he lacked not only troops but also a fort and cannon with which to defend his post against a possible Spanish or rebel incursion. Moreover, he quickly discovered that the Indians as well as the Spanish could intrigue against British authority.

Although the militia mounted a guard of sorts for the lieutenant governor's person, the absence of a stockaded government center subjected Abbott to the continuous "importunities" of the hundreds of tribesmen who flocked to Vincennes. Their incessant pestering caused him some apprehension. The Piankashaws of the village nearest Vincennes and the Delawares of the White River seemed friendly enough, but other tribesmen had told many of the *Canadiens* privately that the British official "should not live long." Still unwilling to accept the intrusion of British authority into their territory, the Wabash Indians, Abbott concluded, were "striving to sett [*sic*] the French [*Canadiens*] against the English government." Consequently, he sought to protect himself by building a palisade around the cabin in which his family stayed and by asking Rocheblave to send him some of the artillery standing idle at Kaskaskia's Fort Gage.<sup>23</sup>

Abbott knew, however, that until a garrison arrived he could maintain the Indians' friendship only by liberally dispensing merchandise to them. The journey from Detroit, for example, had cost more than £7,500, all charged to his post's Indian department account. Therefore, he dared to ask Carleton to appoint a permanent commissary of Indian affairs for Vincennes and to recommend Edgar for the position. Even before the lieutenant governor reached his post, however, Carleton had seen the bills he had run up at Detroit and immediately rushed off an angry letter to Hamilton informing him of the restrictions placed on Abbott's spending. He told Hamilton to warn Abbott that he would not honor any future unauthorized bills of exchange. He also advised the leading merchants at Quebec and Montreal to inform their correspondents at Detroit of this fact. Carleton already contemplated ordering the lieutenant governor back to Quebec if he continued to flout his commands.<sup>24</sup>

Rocheblave, on the other hand, desperately hoped that Abbott might leave Vincennes for Kaskaskia. Ever since Lord's departure

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<sup>23</sup> Abbott to Carleton, St. Vincennes, May 26, June 9, July 12, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 37–38, 45–46, 51; J. M. Legras, *Payement faite à Different Couriers pour Mr. De Rocheblave*, St. Vincennes, May 20, 1777, p. 630, Edgar Papers; *Mémoire d'observations . . . par Paul Des Ruisseaux*, Quebec, August 23, 1777, WO 28/10, fols. 393–394; Hamilton's journal entry for January 15, 1779, in Barnhart, *Hamilton and Clark*, 164.

<sup>24</sup> Abbott to Carleton, St. Vincennes, May 26, June 9, July 12, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 37–38, 45–46, 51; Carleton to Hamilton, Quebec, May 16, 1777, HP/BM Add. MSS, 21,781, fol. 5; Hamilton to Carleton, Detroit, June 16–July 3, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 24–25; Todd & McGill to Edgar, Montreal, May 15, 1777, pp. 613–14,

he had struggled without troops or money to gain the cooperation of the Illinois and Wabash tribesmen in the face of Indian intransigence, Spanish intrigues, and the interference of Anglo-American and *Canadien* traders. He especially feared—with good reason—Spanish tampering with the tribes on the British side of the Mississippi and Spanish assistance to rebels boating military supplies up the Mississippi and Ohio from New Orleans to Pittsburgh. His attempts to win Indian support for river patrols failed completely, including his council in late May with some White River Delawares and a number of the Kickapoos, Mascoutens, and Potawatomis who had wintered along the upper Illinois River. This meeting, which was observed by George Rogers Clark's spies, went well enough, but Rocheblave managed to persuade the Spanish-influenced Kickapoos, Mascoutens, and Potawatomis only to refrain from constantly making war "upon the subjects of Great Britain." The Delawares, conversely, appeared to him "to be attached to our interests," and their headmen promised "to prevent the passage of the colonists in case of any attempt by their party upon this territory." When the Delaware chiefs offered him their assistance, however, he sent them to discuss such matters with Abbott. On June 1 he wrote to the lieutenant governor himself and offered to step aside if he would transfer his headquarters to Fort Gage.<sup>25</sup>

Initially, Abbott viewed the situation a bit more confidently than did Rocheblave, but he soon came to realize that he shared the latter's powerlessness to promote British interests effectively. The military force at his disposal consisted only of Beaulon's militiamen, who might or might not prove willing to defend their own village, and the two 3-pounders and two swivels that Rocheblave sent to him under care of Paul Des Ruisseaux, a reliable Kaskaskian. Abbott placed the cannon in Fort Sackville, as he called the ramshackle palisade around his cabin, a structure Hamilton later described as being a "miserable picketed work" lacking "platforms for small arms" and even an inside well. During his first month in office he had the opportunity to talk with Vincennes's leading citizens and with the territory's only Catholic priest, Père Pierre Gibault of Kaskaskia, and he believed they would support his government. He mirrored Rocheblave's apprehension about the Spanish, however, and during the summer he repeatedly warned

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Edgar Papers (another copy is on p. 643); Boisson fournis par Mr. Rapicaut . . . , Vincennes, May 19-24, 1777, Abbott to Edgar, St. Vincenne, August 6, 1777, Hamilton to Edgar, [Detroit], September 5, 1777, pp. 620-21, 651-52, 653, Edgar Papers; Mémoire d'observations . . . par Paul Des Ruisseaux, Quebec, August 23, 1777, WO 28/10, fols. 393-394; Dunn to Mathews, Quebec, October 10, 1783, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,859, fol. 107; Accounts of Bills drawn . . . by Edward Abbott . . . , April 1, 1777-April 23, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,858, fol. 311, April 1, 1777-July 20, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,832, fol. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Stevens, "His Majesty's 'Savage' Allies," 670-76, 878-81, 976-83, 1326-30.

Carleton of the danger from that quarter and solicited troops to protect "this place, as a key to Canada." He also kept a wary eye turned eastward, and as one of his first acts he dispatched a few friendly Delawares "toward Fort Pitt to see what is doing there."<sup>26</sup>

Recognizing his exposed and weak military condition, Abbott now looked to the Indians to provide at most defensive assistance. In fact, with many of the Wabash tribesmen murmuring against him, the principal goal of his Indian diplomacy became the reconciliation of the Indians to the presence of a British official at Vincennes. Consequently, Abbott had to engage in negotiations with the Indians and, necessarily, to continue expending government funds on Indian gifts. From June through August he drew an additional £1,211 from several local merchants. In frequent meetings with visiting tribesmen, he informed Carleton in August, "I have done to the best of my judgement to keep the Indians of the Wabache (who are numerous) and the Delawares, in his Majesty's interest." The response of the tribes of the upper Wabash proved speciously amiable, while the nearby Piankashaws were necessarily accommodating and the White River Delawares surprisingly cooperative. The conferences with the Delaware chiefs bore the most substantial results. No doubt aided by Beaulon, Abbott confirmed their promises to Rocheblave, including their pledge to warn him "should the Rebels or the Spaniards attempt to come here." For the time being, he counted heavily on Indian support to safeguard his district.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, when Rocheblave sent Abbott an alarming—but false—rumor about impending war with Spain in mid-July, the latter engaged Des Ruisseaux not only to carry an urgent letter directly to Carleton but also to visit and treat with the Wabash tribes on his behalf. Des Ruisseaux spent several days at Ouiatanon delivering Abbott's messages and gifts and trying to persuade the headmen to acknowledge the British as their "father." He spoke first with the assembled Weas, the tribe that had treated Abbott least hospitably during his journey to Vincennes. The following day he held a sim-

<sup>26</sup> Abbott to Carleton, St. Vincennes, May 26, June 9, July 12, August 3, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 37–38, 45–46, 51, CO 42/38, fol. 88; Mémoire d'observations . . . par Paul Des Ruisseaux, Quebec, August 23, 1777, WO 28/10, fols. 393–394; Hamilton's journal entry for December 17, 1778, in Barnhart, *Hamilton and Clark*, 148–49; Joseph P. Donnelly, *Pierre Gibault, Missionary, 1737–1802* (Chicago, 1971), 167, n. 29.

<sup>27</sup> Abbott to Carleton, St. Vincennes, June 9, July 12, August 3, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 45–46, 51, CO 42/38, fol. 88; Abbott to Edgar, St. Vincennes, August 6, 1777, pp. 651–52, Edgar Papers; Mémoire d'observations . . . par Paul Des Ruisseaux, Quebec, August 23, 1777, WO 28/10, fols. 393–394; Hamilton to Carleton, Detroit, June 16–July 3, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 24–25; Accounts of Bills drawn . . . by Edward Abbott . . . , April 1, 1777–April 23, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,858, fol. 311, April 1, 1777–July 20, 1778 HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,832, fol. 13; Dunn to Mathews, Quebec, October 10, 1783, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,859, fol. 107.



PHILIPPE-FRANCOIS RASTEL,  
SIEUR DE ROCHEBLAVE

Courtesy State Historical Society  
of Wisconsin, Madison.

ilar council with the *Canadien* traders and a number of Kickapoo and Mascouten leaders. All the chiefs insisted unctuously that their tribes had always loved peace, and they asked him to assure Abbott of their fidelity. Des Ruisseaux, acting in Abbott's name, gave them a little tobacco and gunpowder and then continued on his way. He probably conducted comparable talks with the Miamis and then sent messages back to Vincennes indicating a satisfactory outcome to his conferences. By August 13 he was in Quebec delivering Abbott's and Rocheblave's dispatches into the hands of Governor Carleton.<sup>28</sup>

In the meantime, Abbott received dispatches late in July telling him that Hamilton had begun a broad scale Indian war. On June 16 Hamilton received through Carleton an order in which American Secretary Germain directed the lieutenant governor of Detroit to initiate Indian raids against the backcountry of Virginia and Pennsylvania. Germain's order explicitly authorized Hamilton to rouse the Indians to war, expressly authorized him to recruit as many whites as he thought necessary to aid them, and implicitly authorized him to spend as much money as his guerrilla campaign might require. Hamilton acted without hesitation. During the first week of July he dispatched the first of many Indian-partisan raiding parties. He also sent out a number of Indian and white couriers to carry his war message to the tribes that had not yet taken up the hatchet. He had greater plans for his frontier war, however, than merely overseeing ignoble forays against hapless settlers.<sup>29</sup>

Hamilton and Jehu Hay shared a vision about the development of the British west and of Detroit, which, they believed, promised to become a thriving metropolis if they could attract hardworking English colonists to cultivate its potential. They undoubtedly had expressed these views to Abbott, who had probably also participated in similar discussions with Hay, Dederick Brehm, and other officers during his initial decade at Detroit. Hamilton hoped that rebel tyranny would drive ambitious farmers of loyal English stock to the frontiers and that Indian depredations would

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<sup>28</sup> Parole adressé par Monsieur Paul Deruisseaux à tous les Chefs ouiattanon . . . , Ouiattanon, July 15, 1777, Réponses des Chefs ouiattanon . . . , July 15, 1777, Parole adressé par les Chefs quiquapous et mascoutins au Mr. Paul Deruisseaux . . . (et réponse), Ouiattanon, July 16, 1777, WO 28/10, fols. 385–386, 387–388, 388–390; Mémoire d'observations . . . par Paul Des Ruisseaux, Quebec, August 23, 1777, WO 28/10, fols. 393–394; Rocheblave to Abbott, Fort Gage, July 7, 1777 (carried to Carleton by Des Ruisseaux and forwarded by Carleton to Germain on August 13, 1777), CO 42/37, fol. 53; Carleton to Abbott, Quebec, September 2, 1777, Captain Edward Foy to General Allan Maclean, Quebec, September 5, 8, 1777, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,699, pp. 172–73, 176.

<sup>29</sup> Stevens, "His Majesty's 'Savage' Allies," 1029–56; *idem*, " 'Placing Proper Persons at Their Head': Henry Hamilton and the Establishment of the British Revolutionary-Era Indian Department at Detroit, 1777," *The Old Northwest*, XII (Summer, 1986).

then prompt them to seek refuge at Detroit. To this end, he not only cautioned his raiders to treat noncombatants with mercy, but he also provided their leaders with handbills (or placards) to post wherever they went. These handbills (which Abbott also seems to have issued) offered safe conduct, humane treatment, military rank and pay, and a 200-acre bounty to any frontiersman who withdrew to Detroit and served the king. Hamilton had been informed that loyalism was widespread among backcountry folk, and he truly expected such people to form the nucleus of a new British Detroit. Thus, he attempted to wage a contradictory, dual-natured campaign, using the stick of rampaging warriors and the carrot of safe, free farmland to frighten and to lure frontierspeople into joining the royal standard at Detroit and other British posts.<sup>30</sup>

The campaign remained solely Hamilton's, however. When forwarding Germain's order to Hamilton, Carleton had enclosed information copies for both Abbott and Rocheblave, but the American secretary's instructions pertained to Hamilton alone. Germain had nowhere given Abbott authority to instigate an Indian war, and Carleton, who disapproved of Germain's course, was not compelled to permit Abbott or Rocheblave the unchecked spending powers he had to grant Hamilton or to order them to involve the Wabash and Illinois tribes in the war. While Carleton was unwilling to order Abbott's involvement, Hamilton was unable to order Abbott to participate in the campaign because he had no authority over his colleague at Vincennes. Even if Abbott had been asked to engage the Indians, moreover, he learned from the same dispatches that he would never be able to furnish the enormous amounts of gifts, equipment, and munitions they would demand before condescending to help the British.

When Hamilton sent Abbott his copy of Germain's order, he also wrote to him about Carleton's objections to his spending habits and had quoted the governor's vow that in the future "none of His [Abbott's] Bills will be answered." William Edgar, Abbott's principal creditor, had transmitted the same distressing news from Detroit. Despite these warnings, however, Abbott went on spending money for several weeks. He did so, he informed Carleton, solely because of his zeal to secure the goodwill of the Wabash tribes, but in reality he defied the governor because he thought he had more influence with the Colonial Office than did Carleton. Late in August, however, he received a letter Carleton had written on May 22 that told him in no uncertain terms to discontinue all expenditures. Faced with certain financial ruin without government support for his credit, Abbott tried after that to eliminate all expenses for Indian affairs, except a salary for an interpreter. Pulling tight

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<sup>30</sup> Stevens, "His Majesty's 'Savage' Allies," 1287-94; *idem*, " 'Placing Proper Persons at Their Head.' "

the purse strings, however, effectually strangled his Indian diplomacy.<sup>31</sup>

Before the arrival of Carleton's letter, Abbott had still clung to the hope that he would be able to engage the tribes of his district in the king's service. At the time he learned of the ministry's decision to enlist the Lakes and Ohio tribes in its 1777 campaign, he had felt confident that his and Des Ruisseaux's parleys had won over the Wabash nations. When he realized that he was going to be left out of the year's military operations, in fact, he wrote to Carleton on August 3 to assert that "at this time [I] can have a thousand [warriors] at my Command to act wherever your Excellency may think proper." Yet, in presuming that the Wabash tribesmen might aid the British cause if Carleton financed their employment, Abbott—and Hamilton—badly misjudged the Indians' temper. Whatever platitudes the chiefs mouthed when British officials faced them in council, the Wabash confederacy, in whole or in part, was far from ready to join any undertaking backed by the long-despised British. This became clear when Hamilton's agents carried his war belt up the Maumee late in July.<sup>32</sup>

The Miami nation refused to commit itself to the British war. Charles Beaubien and Lieutenant Fontenoy de Quindre, newly appointed agents of Hamilton's Indian department, persuaded a few war chiefs to take out raiding parties, but even these eventually returned without having struck a blow. During the absence of these warriors, the Miamis "called the Head Men & Capts. of their Nation" together at Miamis Town to discuss the war belt. They knew that the Lakes Tribes and most of the Ohio nations had accepted it, but they also listened to a Delaware messenger announce that his tribe's pro-American Ohio chiefs "would not receive the Tomhawk." After due deliberation upon the British axe, the Delaware envoy reported, "the Twightwees [Miamis] sent it back again to the Govr. and said it would be the ruin of their Nation if they took it." The Delaware envoy also disclosed that representatives of the Weas, Kickapoos, and other Wabash tribes attended the Miamis' council and concurred in their decision. This was shown to be true during late August or early September when Hamilton's agent at Ouia-

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<sup>31</sup> Germain to Carleton, Whitehall, March 26, 1777 (No. 14), CO 42/36, fols. 69–73 (see also the copy in HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,698, fols. 3–4); Todd & McGill to Edgar, Montreal, May 15, 1777, pp. 613–14, Edgar Papers; Carleton to Hamilton, Quebec, May 16, 21, 22, 1777, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,781, fols. 5, 4, 5–6; Hamilton to Carleton, Detroit, June 16–July 3, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 24–25; Abbott to Carleton, St. Vincennes, August 3, September 26, 1777, CO 42/38, fols. 88, 99; Abbott to Edgar, St. Vincenne, August 6, 1777, Hamilton to Edgar, [Detroit], September 5, 1777, pp. 651–52, 653, Edgar Papers; Accounts of Bills drawn . . . by Edward Abbott . . ., April 1, 1777–April 23, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,858, fol. 311, April 1, 1777–July 20, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,832, fol. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Abbott to Carleton, St. Vincennes, June 9, August 3, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 45–46, CO 42/38, fol. 88.

tanon, Jean Baptiste de Céloron, received orders from Detroit “to present the hatchet to the Indians” of the Wabash. Despite Céloron’s personal influence and British-supplied presents, the Wabash confederacy would have none of it. When Céloron offered the war belt to the Weas, Kickapoos, and Mascoutens, they rudely refused it.<sup>33</sup>

By the end of the summer, therefore, British policy toward the Wabash-Illinois tribes had run afoul of both fiscal stringency and Indian intransigence. Deprived of their credit and excluded from the ministry’s general orders for the year’s operations, Abbott and Rocheblave had neither the authority nor the means to draw the neighboring Indians actively into the war, even though each would have done so had he been able. Instead, they hoped at best to maintain the tribesmen’s reluctant toleration of the British officials in their country and to secure their promises to oppose any other Euro-American intruders. Conversely, Hamilton, whose strategic vision encompassed the lands and peoples of the Wabash-Illinois region, had been given a free hand and a blank check by the ministry for raising the warriors of whichever tribes he wished. When he tried to enlist the Wabash confederacy, however, he found himself and his intertribal coalition rebuffed by proud-minded nations that had always disdained the British and still retained secure commercial connections with friendly *Canadien* and Spanish traders. During 1777, therefore, neither the powerful tribes of the Wabash nor the puny Illinois tribes participated in the destructive raids Hamilton sponsored against the frontiers.

Abbott had grown increasingly discouraged ever since reaching Vincennes, and by November he had given up all hope of coping with his district’s intrusive Spaniards, inconstant *Canadiens*, and intractable Indians. Because of Carleton’s parsimony with men and money, Abbott had come to realize that he could neither reverse nor even stem the relentless deterioration of Britain’s already feeble authority. He learned early that month, for instance, that the Spanish had sent wampum belts among the tribes of the

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<sup>33</sup> Abbott to Carleton, St. Vincennes, August 3, September 26, 1777, CO 42/38, fols. 88, 99; Hamilton to Germain, Detroit, July 27, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 55–56; Hamilton and Jehu Hay, Return of Parties of Indians sent from Detroit against the Rebels after the 2d July 1777, WO 28/10, fol. 396; Carl John Fliegel, comp., *Index to the Records of the Moravian Mission among the Indians of North America* (New Haven, Conn., 1970), 1053 (“Twichtwee”: 7-15-1777); David Zeisberger to General Edward Hand, Cuchachunk, September 23, 1777, Reuben G. Thwaites and Louise P. Kellogg, eds., *Frontier Defense on the Upper Ohio, 1777–1778* (Madison, Wisc., 1912), 101–103; Meeting between the Commissioners and Captain White Eyes & other Delawares, Pittsburgh, April 26, 1778, Vol. III, George Morgan Letterbooks (Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh); Hamilton’s journal entry for November 19, 1778, in Barnhart, *Hamilton and Clark*, 124–25; MacLeod’s journal entries for October 13, November 19–20, 1778, in MacLeod, *Detroit to Fort Sackville*, 33, 82–84; Mémoire de Service que Louis Lorimier a l’honneur de représenter . . . , Rivière aux Roches, December 28, 1782, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,831, fols. 57–60.

Wabash with the intention, he surmised, of “setting the Indians against us.” The Spaniards’ message, which claimed that the Wabash valley belonged to the Spanish crown, invited the Indians “to come & trade with them where they shall have as much Rum as they please & Merchandise at a much cheaper rate than the English or French can sell to them, who only impose on them.” Always sensible about a bargain, the Indians were carrying most of their peltry across the Mississippi to the Spanish settlements. This development naturally distressed the local merchants, men not likely to support a regime that could not protect their trade. Capturing the Indians’ trade, Abbott believed, represented the first step in a Spanish plan to take over British Illinois, by force if necessary. “The Spaniards . . . wait only the decision of our present troubles [with the colonies] to break with us,” he wrote to Captain Richard B. Lernoult (then stationed at Niagara), “when they think we shall be exhausted.”<sup>34</sup>

The lieutenant governor concluded that same November that he could not rely upon the Indians for help in combatting invaders, whatever the fair promises their chiefs had made. He had learned by then from Céloron that the Wabash confederacy had refused Hamilton’s war belt. Abbott had decided, moreover, that even the White River Delawares, the one tribe that had actually offered its military assistance, were “a set of Rascals,” for he had just heard that the Delawares “have made Peace with the Rebels.” In reality, this report probably told merely of one of the periodic resolutions of neutrality issued by the chiefs of the Ohio Delawares. Although the White River band very likely did not subscribe wholeheartedly—or perhaps at all—to the policy of the Ohio chiefs, Abbott nevertheless took the news as another substantial setback for his Indian diplomacy.<sup>35</sup>

He poured out his pessimism in letters to colleagues like Lernoult and Rocheblave. His correspondence with the latter, however, only revealed that British fortunes worsened more rapidly at Kaskaskia than at Vincennes. Rocheblave complained bitterly about blatant efforts by the Spanish to expel the British from Illinois and about the shortsightedness of Carleton’s forsaking a territory which someday “would be perhaps one of the richest colonies which his Majesty possesses.” Rocheblave’s dejection only exacerbated that of

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<sup>34</sup> Abbott to Carleton, St. Vincennes, November 16, 1777 (extract), CO 42/38, fol. 92; Abbott to Captain Richard B. Lernoult, Vincennes, November 23, 1777, quoted at length in Lieutenant Colonel Mason Bolton to Carleton, Niagara, February 4, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,756, fol. 59; Rocheblave to Germain, Fort Gage, January 22, 1778, Rocheblave to Carleton, Fort Gage, February 18, 1778, in Mason, ed., “Rocheblave Papers,” 395-97, 401-406.

<sup>35</sup> Abbott to Carleton, St. Vincennes, November 16, 1777 (extract), CO 42/38, fol. 92; Abbott to Lernoult, Vincennes, November 23, 1777, quoted at length in Bolton to Carleton, Niagara, February 4, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,756, fol. 59.

Abbott. By mid-November Abbott had had enough. He packed his trunks and prepared to abandon his government. He assembled the “principal People” of Vincennes to inform them of his intention to go to Detroit and “to settle a Police till my return.” The following day, however, these leading citizens begged him to stay, promising even to transform his rickety stockade into a proper fort at their own expense. Against his better judgment, Abbott agreed to remain through the winter. By this time, however, he knew all too well that he kept his position only at the sufferance of the white and Indian inhabitants of his district.<sup>36</sup>

During the ensuing months, furthermore, Abbott also realized that he had been abandoned by Carleton. The last word he had received from his superior was the angry financial edict that had reached him in late August. When Des Ruisseaux delivered Abbott’s and Rocheblave’s pleas for support, as well as his own lengthy report on the values of the Illinois-Wabash country, in mid-August, Carleton declined to prepare a substantive reply. Instead, he sent Des Ruisseaux back with a curt note telling Abbott he would honor a bill for the emissary’s expenses—after Abbott verified them. This perfunctory message formed his last written communication to Vincennes’s lieutenant governor. He never responded to Abbott’s inquiries about how he was to protect his government and conduct Indian affairs without troops or money.<sup>37</sup> Abbott did not even see this final note, moreover, because Des Ruisseaux was unable to reach Vincennes before winter weather blocked the rivers and trails. Ruminating on the governor’s silence, Abbott understood finally that he had fallen under Carleton’s “displeasure,” and he came to feel himself “obliged to leave the place agreeable to a former order of his not to incur any expence.” He explained later to Germain that events during the winter convinced “me to leave the place before the Indians returned from their winter Hunt, knowing they would be much exasperated by my not making large presents.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Abbott to Carleton, St. Vincennes, November 16, 1777 (extract), CO 42/38, fol. 92; Abbott to Lernoult, Vincennes, November 23, 1777, quoted at length in Bolton to Carleton, Niagara, February 4, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,756, fol. 59; Rocheblave to Germain, Fort Gage, January 22, 1778, Rocheblave to Carleton, Fort Gage, February 18, 1778, in Mason, ed., “Rocheblave Papers,” 395-97, 401-406.

<sup>37</sup> Rocheblave to Abbott, Kaskaskia, July 7, 1777, Abbott to Carleton, St. Vincennes, July 12, 1777, CO 42/37, fols. 53, 51; Mémoire d’observations . . . par Paul Des Ruisseaux, Quebec, August 3, 1777, WO 28/10, fols. 393-394; Carleton to Abbott, Quebec, September 2, 1777, Foy to Maclean, Quebec, September 5, 8, 1777, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,699, pp. 172-73, 176; Abbott to Germain, Detroit, April 3, 1778, CO 42/38, fols. 161-162.

<sup>38</sup> Abbot to Germain, Detroit, April 3, 1778, CO 42/38, fols. 161-162; Abbott to Carleton, Detroit, April 25, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,782, fols. 39-40 (also MPHSC, IX, 488; Beckwith, ed., *Letters from Canadian Archives*, 317-18); Hamilton to Carleton, Detroit, April 25, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,782, fols. 35-36; James Sterling to Germain, London, December 24, 1779, Vol. XI, George Germain Papers (William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan); cited hereafter as Germain Papers.

When Abbott informed Rocheblave of this decision, the horrified Kaskaskia commandant hurried overland to Vincennes at once, hoping to find some means of preventing Abbott's going. During a brief conference at the end of January he begged Abbott to remain at Vincennes or at least to join him at Kaskaskia, but Abbott would not change his mind. Although he had heard that come spring many loyalists from the Pittsburgh area, having "determined to take the benefit of my placart [handbill]," would seek a refuge at Vincennes "from the oppression of the Rebels," he believed that Carleton's spending proscription left him no alternative but to leave before they or the Wabash tribesmen showed up at Fort Sackville's gate. Costly experience had taught him that he dared not "meet thousands of savages, without presents of ammunition, Liquor, & Merchandise." "Notwithstanding every precaution in my power," he confessed, "I have [already] been obliged to incur a great expence to keep the Indians in the crown's interest." Since receiving Carleton's last warning about expenditures, in fact, he had doled out to the tribesmen goods costing some £3,745, a bill the governor might well refuse to pay.<sup>39</sup>

Consequently, while Rocheblave glumly embarked upon a return voyage to Kaskaskia, Abbott bade farewell to the citizens of Vincennes on February 3. Abbott thought the inhabitants were still "firm in their allegiance to defend Fort Sackville against all enemies of Great Britain," but he nevertheless recognized that they thought "themselves cast off from His Majesty's protection." His departure, coming after so short a stay and the earlier withdrawal of Lord's garrison, effectually forfeited Britain's last semblance of authority in the region, particularly with the tribes of the Wabash valley. Whatever the attendant expense, Abbott still recognized and advocated "the utility of a Person to command at St Vincenne to prevent the Savages entering into the Rebels service." By abandoning his post so precipitately, Rocheblave feared, the lieutenant governor ran "the risk of having the doors shut upon him for a long time to come by the Indians who have been tampered with by our [Spanish] neighbors." Therefore, Abbott did what little he could to provide for the management of Indian and civil affairs in his absence. Nonetheless, he left Britain's *Canadien* stewards not only

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<sup>39</sup> Rocheblave to Germain, Fort Gage, January 22, and February 28, 1778, and Rocheblave to Carleton, Fort Gage, February 18, 1778, in Mason, ed., "Rocheblave Papers," 395-97, 407-408, 401-406; Abbott to Germain, Detroit, April 3, 1778, CO 42/38, fols. 161-162; Abbott to Carleton, Detroit, April 25, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,782, fols. 39-40; Accounts of Bills drawn . . . by Edward Abbott . . . , April 1, 1777-April 23, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,858, fol. 311, April 1, 1777-July 20, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,832, fol. 13; Account of Bills drawn for His Majesty's Service by the Commanding Officers and Lieutenant Governors in the Upper Country, and paid by Thomas Dunn Esqr. by order of His Excellency General Haldimand, Quebec, May 5, 1779, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,749, fol. 71.

without the military and financial support they had lacked since 1776 but also without any shred of faith in royal government by the general public.<sup>40</sup>

Abbott entrusted crown business at Vincennes to Major Beaulon, his militia commander. He gave Beaulon brief written instructions that emphasized the importance of maintaining Fort Sackville in good repair, of preventing the inhabitants from occupying the ground cleared for the fort's outer emplacements, and of offering protection to any frontier people seeking refuge from the rebels. Regarding the Indians, he only ordered the major to "punish severely" any inhabitants who violated the provision of the provincial trade ordinance of 1777 prohibiting the sale of liquor to Indians without a proper license. Clearly, he also expected Beaulon to act as the king's spokesman to any tribesmen visiting Vincennes, much as Ste. Marie had once done. Before leaving he also sent Jacques Timothé Boucher, Sieur de Monbreun, who perhaps carried handbills Abbott had patterned on Hamilton's, down the Wabash to survey the situation along and beyond the Ohio and to sound out the reportedly double-dealing Delawares of the White River. Unable to afford another council, Abbott apparently did not meet with the neighboring Piankashaws to explain his withdrawal. When he passed by Ouiatanon, however, he could not avoid the tribesmen there, and he had to ask Céloron to distribute in his name merchandise costing £463. Thereafter, Céloron, who acted with Hamilton's financial support, became the only effective crown officer beyond the Maumee-Wabash portage.<sup>41</sup>

As news of Abbott's departure spread, tribal leaders in the Illinois-Wabash country seemed to cast about to identify and take the measure of the remaining representatives of the European powers with which they must still conduct their trade. At the same time, the perennial raiding and horse stealing done by young warriors contributed further to the region's instability. During February and March Céloron helped equip several parties of Kickapoos, Mascoutens, and Weas, totaling about fifty men, which set off "to

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<sup>40</sup> Rocheblave to Germain, Fort Gage, January 22, February 28, 1778, Rocheblave to Carleton, Fort Gage, February 18, 1778, in Mason, ed., "Rocheblave Papers," 395-97, 407-408, 401-406; Abbott to Germain, Detroit, April 3, 1778, CO 42/38, fols. 161-162; Abbott to Carleton, Detroit, April 25, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,782, fols. 39-40.

<sup>41</sup> Abbott to Hypolite Beaulon, St. Vincennes, February 3, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,782, fol. 15; Abbott to Germain, Detroit, April 3, 1778, CO 42/38, fols. 161-162; Report of Timothé de Monbrun, St. Vincenne, April 12, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,782, fols. 64-65; Abbott to Carleton, Detroit, April 25, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,782, fols. 39-40; Bill of Exchange for Monsr. Céloron drawn by Abbott, Detroit, July 20, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,858, fol. 16; Abbott to Haldimand, Fort St. John, September 22, 1783, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,859, fols. 102-103; Account of Bills drawn . . . by Edward Abbott . . ., April 1, 1777-July 20, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,832, fol. 13.

war towards the Ohio." Hamilton, presuming they heeded his war belt, forwarded arms and ammunition to Ouiatanon "to gratify those among them who behave well," but they had merely set foot on the traditional warpath leading south against the Chickasaws and anyone else they might encounter. Only the White River Delawares, far from having gone over to the rebels, shared interests with the British. In response to an invitation, a war chief led a Delaware deputation to Kaskaskia on March 17. He told Rocheblave that his people had discovered five or six hundred rebels constructing a fort on the Cumberland River not far south of the Ohio. This news moved the commandant to appeal to Hamilton for troops and supplies because "we are upon the eve of great events in this country." The Delawares also reported that they had attacked these rebels, killing four of them and losing one of their chiefs. Rather than simply keeping their pledges to Rocheblave and Abbott to repel invaders, they more likely resented seeing whites overrun their new hunting grounds as relentlessly as they had occupied Delaware lands in the east.<sup>42</sup>

In telling this tale, moreover, the war captain exaggerated. His rebel horde was no more than eight families just settled somewhere along the Cumberland. Monbreun visited them during February or March and found them amenable to Abbott's offer of asylum under British protection. They refused to emigrate to Vincennes, however, until he could guarantee them safe passage; Indians had already attacked their party while it descended the Tennessee River and killed three of their men. Monbreun learned the identity of their assailants when he met with the Delawares during his return to Vincennes. Encouraged by a wampum belt from Rocheblave, the Delawares intended to strike the settlers again, and they demanded that Monbreun accompany twenty of their warriors back to the Cumberland "to ravage all the habitations and to kill all the English [colonists] they found on that river." When he declined to join them, they voiced some bitterness about the British allowing their Indian friends to suffer an enemy invasion unaided. Monbreun promised only to forward their declaration of loyalty and their request for powder, ball, and other necessities

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<sup>42</sup> Rocheblave to Carleton, Fort Gage, February 18, 1778, Rocheblave to Hamilton, Fort Gage, March 17, 1778, in Mason, ed., "Rocheblave Papers," 401-406, 409; Report of Timothé de Monbrun, St. Vincenne, April 12, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,782, fols. 64-65; Hamilton to Carleton, Detroit, April 25, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,782, fols. 35-36; Richard McCarty to John Askin, St. Urseuls at the Illinois, June 7, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,757, fol. 7 (also MPHSC, IX, 368-69; Clarence W. Alvord, ed., *Kaskaskia Records, 1778-1790* (Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, Vol. V; Springfield, 1909), 44-45; Hamilton to Germain, Detroit, June 7, 1778, CO 42/38, fols. 163-164; Proceedings of a council with the Ouiattans, Quiquaboues, and Mascoutins, Detroit, June 29-July 3, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,782, fols. 52-54 (also MPHSC, IX, 452-58).

to the absent lieutenant governor. The report he dispatched from Vincennes on April 12 also called attention to the apparent anomaly of simultaneously encouraging loyalist migration and Indian raids and prompted a last outburst of frustration from Abbott to his superiors.<sup>43</sup>

Abbott and his family had reached Detroit on March 7 "after a painful journey of thirty three days through the woods." He immediately set about justifying his pullout to British authorities. He also tried to convince them of the importance of the Illinois-Wabash region and urged them to expend the money necessary to defend it properly. He wrote first to Germain, pointing out Carleton's ultimate responsibility for his abandoning his government, and three weeks later to Carleton, detailing the state of affairs at Vincennes. He observed returning war parties and attended some of Hamilton's Indian councils, and he also must have talked a good deal about the war and the Wabash with Hamilton, who thereafter would have to assume a greater responsibility for that district. Owing to Abbott's discouraging words, Hamilton became convinced that "it must be impossible for the Ouabash Indians to be kept in order without a vast expense in presents or the presence of some Troops." The outposts southwest of Detroit manifestly needed British officers and soldiers, he informed Carleton, because the minds of the Indians "are poisoned by the falsehoods and misrepresentations of the French [*Canadiens*]." Because Britain had failed to enforce its authority for so long, he now understood that the tribes had formed "a presumption of their own importance" which made them inveterately "arrogant and troublesome." Nonetheless, Abbott, ever since returning to the west, had hoped to win them over and employ them in King George's interest. The financial considerations of Indian management alone had compelled him to leave Vincennes once he realized that Carleton's refusal of support threatened him with bankruptcy.<sup>44</sup>

The receipt of Monbreun's report on June 7, however, brought to a head doubts about British frontier policy that had been brewing in Abbott's mind. More clearly than Hamilton ever did, Abbott had come to recognize the paradox underlying the carrot-and-stick tactics initiated by Hamilton in 1777. On the eighth he forwarded Monbreun's letter to Carleton together with an impassioned note

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<sup>43</sup> Report of Timothé de Monbrun, St. Vincenne, April 12, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,782, fols. 64-65; Rocheblave to Carleton, Fort Gage, February 18, 1778, and Rocheblave to Hamilton, Fort Gage, March 17, 1778, in Mason, ed., "Rocheblave Papers," 401-406, 409.

<sup>44</sup> Abbott to Germain, Detroit, April 3, 1778, CO 42/38, fols. 161-162; Abbott to Carleton, Detroit, April 25, June 8, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,782, fols. 39-40, 41-42; Hamilton to Carleton, Detroit, April 25, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,782, fols. 35-36; Council held at Detroit, June 14-20, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,782, fols. 46-51, 55 (also MPHSC, IX, 442-52).

stating that the governor could “plainly perceive the employing of Indians has been of great hurt to the cause.” “Many hundreds [of settlers] would have put themselves under His Majesty’s protection,” he asserted, had they not been prevented by marauding Indians. Faced with British-sponsored Indian raids, “These poor unhappy people are forced to take up arms against their Sovereign, or be pillaged & left to starve; cruel alternative.” He now thought it “shocking” that “it is not people in arms that Indians will ever daringly attack, but [only] the poor inoffensive families who fly to the deserts [backcountry] to be out of trouble [from the Revolution], and who are inhumanely butchered sparing neither women or children.” To those who “said it is necessary to employ Indians to prevent their serving our enemies,” he offered a startling—and possible practical—alternative. “I will be bold to say,” he explained, “their keeping a neutrality will be equally (if not more) serviceable to us as their going to war, for the reason I have already gave [alienating loyalists and neutrals]; & surely the presents they receive will prevent their acting against us.” He appealed to Carleton’s “known humanity” to “put a stop” to the Indians’ indiscriminate guerrilla warfare.<sup>45</sup>

Although Abbott’s change of heart eventually won him history’s laurels as a humanitarian gentleman, it did not change British Indian policy in any way. Abbott’s new analysis of the Indians’ role in Britain’s wartime strategy was probably the most perceptive—and assuredly the most novel—presented by a royal official during the Revolution, but it never found a receptive audience. Carleton, certainly in agreement with such a viewpoint, had resigned and left for England before Abbott’s letter reached Quebec, and the next governor, Haldimand, was committed to using Indian raids as part of a policy of active defense for his province. Abbott’s radical concept of Indian neutrality was shared only by Thomas Pownall, a former royal governor of Massachusetts, whose advocacy of the idea had already been ignored by the House of Commons in February, 1778, and by most Indian leaders, who strove with varying degrees of success to keep their peoples as little involved as possible in the Englishmen’s civil war. Abbott himself never returned to Vincennes or to any other position of authority involving Indian affairs.<sup>46</sup>

The turn of events in the Midwest during the ensuing summer—namely the rebels’ occupation of the Illinois-Wabash towns—caused Haldimand to recall Abbott to Montreal, where he spent the following winter and spring serving on mundane regulatory commissions

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<sup>45</sup> Abbott to Carleton, Detroit, June 8, 1778, Report of Timothé de Monbrun, St. Vincennes, April 12, 1778, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,782, fols. 41–42, 64–65.

<sup>46</sup> Stevens, “His Majesty’s ‘Savage’ Allies,” 1771–80, 1820–25, 1830–42.

that set the price of wheat and bread and granted tavern licenses. In 1779 Haldimand settled most of the bills Abbott had drawn at Vincennes and accepted his offer to return to duty with the Royal Artillery. For the remaining four years of the war Abbott commanded the gunners at Fort St. Johns on the Richelieu River near Lake Champlain. The troubles that had driven him from Vincennes did not catch up with him again until late in 1783, when he was hauled into court and briefly jailed for defaulting on the bill of exchange with which he had paid for the Indian goods furnished by Céloron at Ouiatanon in 1778. Haldimand reluctantly settled this debt in order to free him to take an artillery detachment to Dominica in the West Indies. He sailed from Quebec on October 23, 1783, but he seems to have fared no better in the Caribbean than he had on the Wabash. Probably still plagued by his penchant for ignoring or overstepping his superior's orders, Captain Edward Abbott, former lieutenant governor of Vincennes, was court martialed and cashiered from the Royal Artillery on December 20, 1787.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Quebec Gazette*, March 11, April 22, July 15, 1779, October 30, 1783; Account of Bills . . . paid by Thomas Dunn Esqr. by order of His Excellency General Haldimand, Quebec, May 5, 1779, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,749, fol. 71; Abbott to Germain, St. Johns, September 29, 1779, James Sterling to Germain, London, December 24, 1779, Vol. XI, Germain Papers; Abbott to Haldimand, Fort St. John, September 22, 1783, Dunn to Mathews, Quebec, October 10, 1783, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,859, fols. 102-103, 107; Abbott to Mathews, [Quebec], October 18, 1783, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,735, fol. 261; Mathews to Abbott, Quebec, October 18, 1783, HP/BM Add. MSS. 21,721, fol. 380; *List of Officers of the Royal Regiment of Artillery*, 6; Beckwith, ed., *Letters from Canadian Archives*, 310-12.