Indian Removal and the Transformation of Northern Indiana

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In 1907, Hoosier cartoonist John T. McCutcheon created his famous “Injun Summer” fable for the Chicago Tribune. The Tribune continued to reprint the popular piece every fall until 1992, when the paper withdrew it because of readers’ growing discomfort with its portrayal of Native Americans. The two-panel cartoon, with accompanying text, depicts an old man and a little boy sitting in front of a cornfield, filled with harvested shocks, as darkness falls. The old man spins a yarn in which the field turns into a dancing ground for the “sperrits” of long-departed Indians. According to the old man, the Indians “all went away and died, so they ain’t no more left.”

The Indians had not died out and not all of them went away. They were, however, largely absent from the land, with those who remained marginalized and apparently out of sight to McCutcheon. The cartoonist had grown up in Tippecanoe County, Indiana, in the 1870s, only a generation or two removed from their presence. Indeed,

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he remembered “corn and Indian traditions” as dominant themes of his boyhood.²

The white settlement of the American heartland could not have taken place without the dispossession of the Indians—the subtext of McCutcheon’s cartoon. Removal of the native peoples from the lands between the Appalachians and the Mississippi was a major preoccupation of the U.S. government in the early nineteenth century. Yet this process, and the social and ecological transformation of which it was a part, is often glossed over in popular histories of Indiana.³

This article looks at the process of dispossession and removal in northern Indiana, focusing on the three million acres ceded by the Potawatomi in 1832. The cession began a transformation of the area from communally held tribal land to private property through the mechanism of federal land policy. The success of the process required close connections between the U.S. representatives who negotiated land cessions and distributed annuity payments, the traders upon whom Indians depended for the manufactured goods that had become necessities, and the speculators who bought up cheap land. The areas wrested from the Indians, including McCutcheon’s rural Indiana, were integrated into white America. In 1855, all federal land offices in Indiana—including that at Winamac in Pulaski County from the 1832 cession—were consolidated into one in Indianapolis. The transformation of Indian country into American heartland that had begun with the land cessions of two decades earlier was now largely complete.⁴

Although the drive for the appropriation of Indian land in the Old Northwest began in the colonial period, it accelerated with the end of the American Revolution and the birth of the United States.


²The process is well represented by the Bailly Homestead Site in the Dunes National Lakeshore, Porter County, Indiana. The interpretive signs at the site are classic examples of the denial of racial and cultural mixing in nineteenth-century Indiana. One sign portrays Marie Bailly and her children as a stereotypical white pioneer family greeting Indians clad mostly in deerskins. Marie was the Ottawa wife of a French trader and, according to Susan Sleeper-Smith, spoke poor French, if any, and no English; her Indian neighbors and relatives had been involved for generations in the fur trade, in which cloth was a key commodity. In reality, it may have been hard to distinguish Baillys from Potawatomis by sight. Susan Sleeper-Smith, Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes (Amherst, Mass., 2001), 156-57.

³E. Wade Hone, Land and Property Research in the United States (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1997), 334, 342.
Tribal lands in the early Indiana Territory.

Indiana Geological Report, 1882. Courtesy of Herman B Wells Library, Indiana University
From the early 1800s to the 1830s, tribal lands disappeared with each cession to the U.S. government.

Indiana Geological Report, 1882. Courtesy of Herman B Wells Library, Indiana University
While settlers and speculators desired this land, the new federal government looked to it as a source of revenue. A Native confederacy fought tenaciously in defense of the land, inflicting a humiliating defeat on Arthur St. Clair's army on the western edge of the Ohio Territory in 1791. The first military buildup in U.S. history, Anthony Wayne's 1794 victory at Fallen Timbers, and waning British support for their native allies led to the signing of the Treaty of Greenville in 1795. Twelve Indian tribes, including the Potawatomi and Miami, ceded the majority of the present state of Ohio and a slice of southeast Indiana. The treaty created the original nucleus of the public domain in the Old Northwest. The federal government obtained additional cessions in the first decade of the nineteenth century as the administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison committed to obtaining more land for settlement. Indiana Territorial Governor William Henry Harrison oversaw most of these cessions. His transactions, intended to extend the Greenville boundary, culminated in the 1809 Treaty of Fort Wayne, which added 2.8 million acres in south-central Indiana to the public domain. This cession sparked Native opposition and helped fuel the resistance movement of the Shawnee Prophet and Tecumseh, who received considerable support from tribes in northern Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin.5

With the acquisition of Indian land came the question of what to do with the Indians. Jefferson emphasized the goal of "civilizing" the Indians—turning them into Christian farmers who would use animal power and male, not female, labor in the fields. This transformation, he hoped, would free up "excess" land for white settlement. The Louisiana Purchase opened the further possibility of moving Indians west of the Mississippi onto the excess lands of other Native peoples like the Osage.6

The War of 1812 proved a decisive setback for the Native Americans throughout the Old Northwest. In northern Indiana, most Potawatomi supported Tecumseh's movement and the British; Harrison characterized them as "our most cruel and inveterate enemies." Miami

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6Wallace, Jefferson and the Indians, 222-25, 254-60; Horsman, Expansion and American Indian Policy, 104-114.
leaders had opposed the Shawnee brothers and tried to stay neutral, although some young warriors joined in the Kickapoo-led attack on Fort Harrison at Terre Haute. The Miami nevertheless found their villages burned by the Americans, forcing them to defend themselves on the Mississinewa River in December 1812. Historian Stewart Rafert sees these attacks as originating both from the American desire for Miami land in central Indiana, and from Miami resistance to further cessions after 1809. After Tecumseh’s death in 1813, his movement fell apart, and any real possibility of British support for Indian resistance ended shortly after the war. The outcome of the war for Indians in the Midwest was, in the words of historian Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, “loss of land, status, wealth, and power.” Armed resistance was no longer an effective strategy for native peoples fighting their dispossession. As the government completed its survey of the 1809 cession, and Indiana achieved statehood in 1816, pressure intensified on midwestern tribes to give up their land.7

As early as the Treaty of Greenville, Native people had begun to receive annuities in cash and goods from the federal government, which rose as they sold more land. These payments became increasingly vital to the Native economy, providing needed income for exchange with white traders. Treaties often included provisions designed to further the civilizing mission; more commonly, a significant portion of money paid for land was earmarked to reimburse traders’ claims for debts for goods bought on credit. The fur trade persisted, although under stress from decreasing animal populations. European demand for raccoon skins increased in the 1830s, and areas like the Kankakee marsh continued to supply furs. Indian traders, however, found a steadier source of income in treaty money and schemed to get their hands on it. With their considerable influence among Indians, they played an important role in negotiations.8

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Land cessions resumed after the war. In 1818, the Miami surrendered most of their land south of the Wabash in the New Purchase. The Delaware, who had settled in east-central Indiana after 1795, agreed to move west, and most did so in the early 1820s. The Kickapoo, in western Indiana and Illinois, also agreed to leave, giving up Illinois land claims that overlapped those of the Potawatomi. In northern Indiana, the Potawatomi began to sell land. In 1818, with the Miami, they sold a tract north of the Wabash and west of the Tippecanoe. Three years later, in a treaty signed at the site of present-day Chicago, the tribe sold much of their land in southern Michigan, also surrendering a strip of northern Indiana south of the state line and east of the St. Joseph River.9

As the result of military defeat and land cessions, the federal government took charge of millions of acres in the public domain. The 1796 Land Act established the office of Surveyor-General and provided for the sale of land at public auction for a minimum price of $2 an acre. Originally, the smallest tract available for purchase was one section (640 acres), which meant that small farmers would need the huge sum of $1,280 for purchase. An 1800 act allowed the sale of half-sections and set up credit terms for payment. It also set up the first land offices in Ohio. The first office in Indiana opened at Vincennes four years later. By 1812, eighteen land offices distributed former Native holdings, and Congress had created the General Land Office (GLO) within the Treasury Department headed by the Commissioner of Public Lands.10

After the War of 1812, the government surveyed and sold large tracts of land, but the panic and depression of 1819 (fueled in part by land speculation) left the GLO with a great deal of paper money of little value, as well as with huge defaults on amounts owed on credit. The 1820 Land Act, created in response to the crisis, eliminated credit but reduced the minimum land price to $1.25 an acre. Additionally, the minimum purchase was reduced first to eighty acres and later to forty. Land

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became more accessible during the great flood of sales in the 1830s, as Indian removal reached its climax. Indian policy and land policy worked together. They were major aspects of the federal government presence on the frontier and important sources of federal patronage. When John Tipton took over as Indian agent at Fort Wayne in 1823, the old fort buildings housed both his offices and the land office.\footnote{Rohrbough, \textit{The Land Office Business}, 89-179; Gates, \textit{History of Public Land Law Development}, 140-43; Nellie Armstrong Robertson and Dorothy Riker, eds., \textit{The John Tipton Papers}, Vol. 1, 1809-1827 (3 vols., Indianapolis, 1942), 11.}

By 1826, the tribes remaining in Indiana, mostly Potawatomi and Miami, faced an assault on their remaining lands. They were not nomadic hunters, as those who sought to justify their dispossession often portrayed them. Indians grew corn and other crops, and their summer economy in permanent villages centered on this cultivation; by the early 1800s, they had also acquired horses and other livestock. Indian women were the cultivators—using only hand tools, which limited productivity—but removal advocates such as Lewis Cass ignored the female economic role. At the same time, the economies of Native peoples were increasingly oriented to trade with whites and to the world economy. Trade brought to them firearms and ammunition, metal utensils, and cloth, along with less utilitarian items like tea, jewelry, and alcohol (which had a notoriously debilitating effect on Indian society). Native traders were tied to the world market, as eastern firms like the American Fur Company and Suydam & Sage sold furs to a London broker who marketed them in Europe.\footnote{Clifton, \textit{The Prairie People}, 243-44; Edmunds, \textit{The Potawatomis}, 15-23, 226-28; Clayton, “The Growth and Economic Significance of the American Fur Trade,” 68; Robert A. Trennert, Jr., \textit{Indian Traders on the Middle Border: The House of Ewing, 1827-54} (Lincoln, Nebr., 1981), 62.}

By 1826, the Miami found themselves more directly beleaguered by settlement than the Potawatomi. They had sold most of their territory in 1818, but much of their remaining land and many of their villages were located along the Wabash, in the path of the projected Wabash and Erie Canal. At the same time, they had a smart, acculturated leader in Jean-Baptiste Richardville. Son of a Frenchman and a Miami woman who were both involved in the fur trade, Richardville was in his sixties at this time. He had been a young village leader during the Northwest Confederacy; the American attacks in the War of 1812 had forced him over to the British side. Richardville came to the fore as the central
leader of the Miami in the postwar period, as diplomacy and creative accommodation became the chief means of defending land and autonomy. While Richardville grew wealthy from trade and the material favors granted him in treaties, he managed to delay removal for the majority of Miami and to avoid it altogether for some.\(^13\)

Native societies did not perceive land in the same manner as the developing American capitalist society that was pushing them aside. In traditional Native society, land was not something that could be bought or sold; however, decades of Euro-American influence challenged and modified those views. During the period of armed resistance to U.S. expansion, the Northwest Confederacy had promoted a view of land as intertribal property belonging to all Indians. Mohawk leader Joseph Brant had been a proponent of this view, and Tecumseh revived the concept in his efforts to unite against white expansion. From 1795 to the 1830s, tribes ceded their lands even as individuals and small family groups—often of mixed ancestry—received a few sections of land. Still, Indian societies did not fully incorporate the concept of land as individual property, as a commodity and a source of profit.\(^14\)

After over a century of trade and interaction with whites, Native society in the Midwest had culturally adapted to a degree and had experienced some prosperity from the continuing fur trade as well as from annuity payments for land. Despite this trend, inequality continued to grow, as illustrated by artist George Winter’s sketch of a family of “Mendicant Indians” with a bow and arrows but without horses or guns, at a time when Richardville was allegedly becoming one of the richest men in Indiana.\(^15\)

Historians have pointed out similarities between the everyday lives of white and Indian people on the frontier in this period. Whites, how-

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ever, were citizens of a state based on capitalism and private property. In contrast, the government's assertion of sovereignty, backed up by military victory, subjected the Native population to federal government supervision. White settlers may have relied heavily on subsistence production, barter, or what historian Susan E. Gray calls “neighborly exchanges,” but they participated in a society and institutions that had an aggressive, capitalist view of land.

The 1826 Treaty of the Mississinewa made serious inroads on Indian land north of the Wabash. Government commissioners included John Tipton, a prominent figure in white-Indian relations in Indiana. A hero of the Battle of Tippecanoe, Tipton spent the next years filling a variety of state political offices and helped to negotiate the Indiana-Illinois border in 1821. In 1823, he became Indian agent at Fort Wayne; in 1824, he became the county agent in charge of land sales. In 1828, he was instrumental in moving the agency to what soon became the town of Logansport, arguing that the new location was more central to Indian settlements. Interestingly, he also held considerable real estate holdings in the nascent town, among them the first flour mill. Tipton held the post of Indian agent until he was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1831. As a senator, he served on the Committee on Indian Affairs and continued to take an interest in removal policy and in the organization of Indian Territory west of the Mississippi. He maintained an abiding interest in Indian lands and their private acquisition, often by himself or his associates. His varied correspondents included Baptist missionary Isaac McCoy, an advocate of the civilizing mission and removal; trader Allen Hamilton, an Indian agent and Fort Wayne banker; and prominent Indianapolis lawyer and banker Calvin Fletcher.

The Treaty of the Mississinewa was a disappointment to those hoping to push the Potawatomi and Miami out of northern Indiana. Lewis Cass, governor and Indian superintendent of Michigan Territory and a key figure in regional Indian policy, was one of the treaty commissioners along with Tipton and Indiana governor James Ray. The commissioners’ purpose, as expressed by Governor Ray, was to “endeavour to extinguish their [the Indians’] title to all the Lands claimed by them within the

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State.” At the treaty signing, Cass lectured the Indians on the hopelessness of their position and the need for them to move west of the Mississippi. The governor singled out McCoy, also present at the signing, as the Indians’ friend who would help them relocate. Cass emphasized the decline of game in the region and the effects of alcohol on Native economy. He told them, “[Y]ou have a large tract of land here, which is of no service to you—You do not cultivate it, and there is but little game on it….Your father owns a large country west of the Mississippi—He is anxious that his red children should remove there.”

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18Ibid., 13-16, 536-37, 598-606; Edmunds, The Potawatomis, 228-29; Ralpert, The Miami Indians of Indiana, 91-95; Clifton, The Prairie People, 226-27; Anson, The Miami Indians, 191-93; James Ray to Lewis Cass, June 12, 1826, frame 111, roll 18, M1, Michigan Superintendency of Indian Affairs, Letters Sent and Received by the Superintendent, Record Group 75, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives Great Lakes Region.

George Winter, Council of Keewaunay, 1836. For each treaty signing, a council was convened to discuss terms. Courtesy of Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology, Indiana University.
Cass initially received a negative response. Aubenaubee, a leader at the 1812 siege of Fort Wayne, acted as the primary speaker for the Potawatomi. In response to Cass, he denied any desire on his people’s part to sell any of their lands. Le Gros of the Miami expanded on Aubenaubee’s rejection:

It is yourselves destroying us, for you make the spirituous liquor. You speak to us with deceitful lips, and not from your hearts… You say the game is going away, and we must follow it; who drove it away… you have drove it away… You point to a country for us in the west, where there is game—We own there is game there, but the Great Spirit has made and put men there, who have a right to that game, and it is not ours.

Cass and Governor Ray responded with threats and sarcasm, arguing that the government could simply have taken Indian land after the war. Cass credited Indian prosperity entirely to annuities being received for earlier cessions.\(^9\)

Proponents of removal were motivated by the drive for internal improvements. Men like Tipton and Ray were aware that improved transportation was necessary to facilitate settlement and promote economic development, and the treaty with the Potawatomi directly furthered those goals. As a direct result of the signing, Congress gave the state of Indiana “a right of way of one hundred feet and one section of land for each mile of a road from some point on the Ohio River via Indianapolis to Lake Michigan.” The treaty freed up northern acreage for the Michigan Road; removing Native peoples from the region also fit into plans for a proposed canal that would link the Wabash River to the Erie Canal, just opened in 1825.\(^20\)

The treaties accomplished much of what the federal and state governments wanted in their drive to realize these and other public improvements. The Miami ceded their land north of the Wabash, except for a number of reservations. One relatively large one—thirty-six square

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\(^9\)Robertson and Riker, eds., *The John Tipton Papers*, Vol. 1, 576-92. Metea, noted for resistance to land sales at earlier treaties, had also been a leader of the attempt to take Fort Wayne fourteen years earlier. At the 1826 treaty’s conclusion, he pushed for a permanent annuity of $100 for each Potawatomi, which Cass dismissed.

miles—was located significantly north of the Wabash. Entrusted to the chief Papakeechee, or Flatbelly, this reservation, in 1834, helped define the boundaries of Potawatomi cessions in 1828 and 1832. These reservations reduced the amount of land ceded, and continued a Miami presence in the area, but they also chopped up tribal land into discontinuous pieces. Despite their earlier protests, the Potawatomi had already agreed to the cession of the strip north of the Wabash, in which they could also claim an interest. They also ceded the route of the projected Michigan Road along with a strip south of the Michigan line extending west to the south end of Lake Michigan. To Cass and his associates, the cession of the Michigan Road route had the added advantage of geographically dividing the Potawatomi. The northern strip also gave the state of Indiana sites for two potential commercial and banking centers, South Bend and Michigan City. Both towns benefitted by their close proximity to water: South Bend developed water-powered industry along the St. Joseph River, while Michigan City became a shipping port on the lake.\textsuperscript{21} This cession encompassed the first sections of northwest Indiana to become part of the public domain, including much of modern-day La Porte County, part of northern Porter County, and, in northeast Lake County, a portion of the Miller section of Gary still marked by Indian Boundary Road.\textsuperscript{22}

In their evaluation of the 1826 treaty, Cass and his fellow commissioners stated that removal could be accomplished, but would have to wait until “[t]ime, the destruction of game, and the approximation of our settlements” forced the Indians to capitulate. They also believed that the isolation of small groups on reservations would help their cause. Two years later, Cass and Pierre Menard persuaded the Potawatomi to sell land in southwest Michigan, the tribal center for over a century, as well as a larger section of northeastern Indiana, including the Elkhart River valley, that linked the South Bend-Michigan City strip with the settlements around Fort Wayne.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{21}Access to the lake for Indiana was an explicit goal for Tipton: “The tract upon Lake Michigan is essential to the interests of Indiana; for, without it, her citizens can have no access to that important outlet.” Robertson and Riker, eds., \textit{The John Tipton Papers}, Vol. 1, 603.

\textsuperscript{22}Kappler, \textit{Indian Treaties}, 273-81, 294-97; Rafert, \textit{The Miami Indians of Indiana}, 85, 91-95; Anson, \textit{The Miami Indians}, 192; Edmunds, \textit{The Potawatomis}, 228-29; Carmony, \textit{Indiana, 1816-1850}, 185, 264, 521; Powell A. Moore, \textit{The Calumet Region: Indiana’s Last Frontier} (Indianapolis, 1959), 53n33, 76. The Miami retained a large reservation south of the Wabash until 1840.

Although the earlier James Monroe and John Quincy Adams administrations had promoted Indian removal, it became a national priority with the presidency of Andrew Jackson. In December 1829, Jackson urged Congress to pass a general policy of removal. He claimed removal was in the Indians’ own best interests and presented it as an aid to the process of “civilization.” Theoretically, emigration to the West was to be voluntary. The following month, Cass—who shortly thereafter supervised Indian policy nationally as Jackson’s secretary of war—published Considerations on the Present State of the Indians, and Their Removal to the West of the Mississippi. In justifying removal, Cass presented Indians as steadily degenerating, incapable of reform in their current locations, and without rights to sovereignty. Cass functioned as the federal government’s ideological point man; McCoy was another key proponent of removal, promoting the concept of the civilizing mission. Closely associated with Tipton and Indiana interests, McCoy and other missionaries saw removal as a necessary step in saving Indians from alcohol and demoralization—a theme that Cass had already raised in the 1826 negotiations.24

The Indian Removal Act enacted in 1830 put into law the practices that had begun with previous treaties. The act is widely remembered for its implementation in the South, including the forced removals of the Creek and Cherokee and the long, bloody war fought by the Seminole. Removal north of the Ohio River figures much less prominently in textbooks and in the public consciousness. At the beginning of 1830, much of Indiana north of the Wabash was still in the hands of the Potawatomi or Miami. In a message to the legislature, Governor Ray called for removal of Indians from the state, “[b]ut in love and without force”; the legislature responded by calling for the extinction of Indian property ownership in the state.25

In the same year, the Black Hawk War to the west provided an urgency—and a convenient, additional rationale—for government removal of all Native Americans, Potawatomi in particular, from north-

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ern Indiana. Members of the Sauk and Fox tribes re-entered ceded lands in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. For a few months, they held off troops with the aid of a few Potawatomi, Winnebago, and Kickapoo. The resulting conflict was the final gasp of armed resistance by a small minority of the region’s natives, but it frightened whites throughout the Midwest.26

Although the Black Hawk uprising had not reached into Indiana and few Potawatomi had joined in the war, some warriors from the tribe had destroyed a settlement on Indian Creek northwest of Ottawa, Illinois. From the Indian viewpoint, these were defensive wars against Anglo-American designs on the land, but two generations of backcountry whites had also lost farms and family members to the same skirmishes and wars. Genuine fear among settlers conveniently meshed with government policy to push toward hastening removal.27

When the Winnebago agreed to give up land in southern Wisconsin in September 1832, it was clear that the Potawatomi were next. In October, less than three months after Black Hawk’s people were defeated at Bad Axe on the Mississippi, the United States and the Potawatomi signed three treaties on the Tippecanoe River. Cass, now secretary of war, again wanted to “extinguish entirely, so far as it can be effected, the native title to all Indian lands in the State of Indiana.” At Camp Tippecanoe, the Potawatomi surrendered their remaining lands in the state, except for the federally designated reservations, as well as land in eastern Illinois southeast of the previously ceded corridor between Chicago and the upper Illinois River. The following year, a treaty at Chicago ceded remaining Potawatomi lands in both Illinois and Wisconsin. This treaty included a new component—a pledge to emigrate to a specified western reservation in the northwest corner of


Missouri, which was later shifted northward into Iowa. In these two treaties, the Potawatomi yielded the last major pieces of land that had at the beginning of the nineteenth century encompassed a large area around the south end of Lake Michigan in Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin.

U.S. commissioners, headed by former Indiana governor Jonathan Jennings, signed the three 1832 treaties with different groups of Potawatomi. On October 20, the government acquired the eastern Illinois land; on the 26th, the northern Indiana land west of the Michigan Road; and on the following day, the smaller tract of Indiana land east of the Michigan Road, mostly in modern Marshall, Fulton, and Kosciusko Counties. Total compensation included $247,000 in goods (delivered and priced by traders); payment of $111,879 in debts owed to traders; and annuities of $35,000 for twenty years plus $15,000 for twelve years. Including miscellaneous items, the total compensation came to about $1.3 million for over four million acres, or thirty cents per acre.

The eastern part of the cession, on either side of the Michigan Road, was lake and moraine country, much of it drained by the Tippecanoe River, a tributary of the Wabash. This section was partly wooded, partly prairie and oak barrens. The western part of the cession area in Indiana, mostly in the Kankakee watershed, included the Grand Kankakee Marsh. This large area of wetlands was important to the Potawatomi and to the fur trade as hunting and trapping grounds. However, for white settlers, the marsh was of little immediate use and was an obstacle to travel. The area to the south (modern Jasper, Newton, and Benton Counties) was mostly prairie and oak savanna, much of it poorly drained and difficult to plow. It was an extension of the prairies between the Illinois and Wabash Rivers, and included much of the Illinois portion of the cession. North of the Kankakee were thousands of

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White, The Middle Ground, 441, 515; Horsman, Expansion and American Indian Policy, 252-53; Gray, “Limits and Possibilities.”

acres of dry prairie good for farming, as well as a large amount of little-valued swamp and dune land, especially around the Calumet Rivers in northern Lake County.\footnote{Tanner, Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History, 14-15; E. Chamberlain, Indiana Gazetteer or Topographical Dictionary of the State of Indiana (1850; Knightstown, Ind., 1977), 163, 233-34, 279-80, 283-86, 362-63, 367-68, 421-22, 433-34.}

The 1832 Potawatomi treaties established many reservations of two types—some created specifically around villages, usually at least two sections or square miles in size, and some drawn much larger. These reservations were the basis of the next round of treaties in northern Indiana, and they created a significant obstacle to removal. One reservation of thirty-six sections was given to Cass’s adversary, Aubenaubee; another reservation of twenty-two sections was given to Menominee and three other chiefs on the Yellow River. Other reserved lands were individual “floating” reserves, usually a section or less, which the recipients—often influential chiefs and mixed-race traders and their families—could locate anywhere within the ceded territory. Historians sometimes characterize these land grants as bribes or as a way for speculators to bypass the normal policy of sale at public auction. Most of the grants required the permission of the president for sale or assignment; however, permission was often achieved with the intervention of a sympathetic Indian agent. A small minority of grants were issued in a form of freehold ownership known as fee simple, eliminating the need for presidential permission.\footnote{Kappler, Indian Treaties, 368; Robertson and Riker, eds., The John Tipton Papers, Vol. 1, 15, 17-28, 43-44, 47-48.}

There is little doubt that these small reserve lands helped Native people seeking to avoid removal. Many such grants went to Richardville and other Miami leaders. Richardville received forty-four quarter sections in treaties from 1818 to 1840; another Miami leader, Francis Godfroy, received seventeen sections. The government also made some cash payments in lieu of land grants in later Miami treaties, as it had in the 1833 Potawatomi treaty. Many of Richardville’s holdings were issued in fee simple (as in 1818) or converted to fee-simple tenure in the 1834 treaty. Although he sold some of this land to Tipton and others, Richardville was able to delay Miami removal until after his death in 1841, and obtained exemptions from emigration for many Miami,
including his own extended family. Some grants, including Godfroy’s land near the mouth of the Mississinewa and those of other families upstream, provided a refuge for those Miami who were able to avoid removal in the 1840s. 33

These treaties also involved the well-established feature of payments made out of the annuities to traders, to meet claims of outstanding Indian debts. At the 1836 Potawatomi annuity payment, agent Abel Pepper allowed traders George Ewing and Cyrus Taber to draw up a list of debts to be paid. This list substantially benefited Ewing and Taber, and a rival group of traders protested, forcing a new committee to

reassess the list. Traders did business with the Indians on credit, which meant the annuity money was essential to keeping their businesses solvent. The fact that traders often greatly inflated debts and prices had an even greater impact on the real value to the Indians of the portion of annuity payments made in goods at treaties. It is not surprising that the traders’ payment period was marked by excessive drunkenness and spending.34

Traders were not always consistent in their position on Indian removal, based upon changing perceptions of their self-interests. William Ewing wrote to Tipton in 1830 discouraging removal of “the blood thirsty and degenerateing Miamies,” thinking it better to “suffer them to occupy back and unimportant situations for a while, as their increased annuity will be of material benefit in the first settling of our country and there is yet room for all.” Eight years later, Ewing’s brother and partner, George, participated in the forced removal of Potawatomi from the Yellow River area to Kansas (although he seems to have been more focused on obtaining musicians to accompany the volunteer military detachment). The Ewings later supported Miami removal after obtaining an interest in the removal contract in 1846. The brothers’ firm adapted to removal by following the Indians west, establishing operations in Kansas and Iowa in the 1840s and early 1850s. According to historian Paul Wallace Gates, the Ewing family was second only to the Chouteaus of St. Louis in claims against Indian annuities during the removal period, receiving $4,716 from the October 26, 1832 treaty and $5,000 from the 1833 treaty. The Indian trade depended on suppliers in the East; the Ewings and other traders in the area, including Tipton’s associates Allen Hamilton and Jordan Vigus, maintained an account with the New York firm of Suydam and Jackson, later Suydam & Sage.35

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34 Edmunds, _The Potawatomis_, 239-60; Trennert, _Indian Traders on the Middle Border_, 54-55; Rafert, _The Miami Indians of Indiana_, 83; Anson, _The Miami Indians_, 182. The influence of traders on policy and their monetary interest in treaties is discussed in Phyllis Gernhardt, “Justice and Public Policy: Indian Trade, Treaties, and Removal from Northern Indiana, 1826-1846” in _Boundaries Between Us: Natives and Newcomers along the Frontiers of the Old Northwest Territory, 1730-1850_, ed., Daniel A. Barr (Kent, Ohio, 2006), 178-95.

35 Trennert, _Indian Traders on the Middle Border_, 19, 62-63, 89-118, 119-20, 130; Robertson and Riker, comps. and eds., _The John Tipton Papers_, Vol. 3, 183-84, 201-202, 216-17, 323-24, 488-90, 677-78, 681; Gates, _History of Public Land Law Development_. The American Fur Company (AFC), dominant in Chicago and in the Great Lakes region, was not as powerful in Indiana. AFC representatives received at least $20,000 from the 1833 Chicago treaty but nothing in the 1832 treaties, although occasional AFC employee Gurdon Hubbard obtained $6,673. Kappler,
Indian agent William Marshall began to gain title to the northern Indiana band reservations with four treaties in December 1834, although only the last of these pledged removal within a three-year period. Marshall’s successor, Abel Pepper, continued this process with ten treaties between April 1836 and early 1837. The treaties followed a set form and pledged removal west within two years. In later treaties, the government paid $1.25 an acre, the minimum price it would realize from public land sales. Although many village leaders agreed to these terms, some did not and objected to others selling their lands.

Some Potawatomi groups sought the support of the Catholic Church in resisting removal. The church had been a presence in the region for 150 years, with deep roots in French communities associated with the fur trade, and had influence among many mixed-race tribal members (including Richardville). Interest in Catholicism had grown among Potawatomi in southwest Michigan in the 1820s, particularly within the group led by Chief Leopold Pokagon.

Menominee, a chief and spiritual leader who shared the large reservation on the Yellow River, also developed close ties with the church. Although he never agreed to give up his people’s land, the signatures of three other chiefs sharing his reservation appeared on an August 5, 1836 treaty. In a letter to Tipton, forwarded to the commissioner of Indian Affairs, Menominee and seventeen others, including the ostensible signers of the treaty, repudiated the sale:

[W]e Chiefs and familys heads of Said Reservation Do by this protest and object against any such thing like a Treaty or Sale of our land as having no part in it or give any authorization to it…we have never Consented to any Sale of our Reserves or give any authorization to it or have had any part in Said Treaty.

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The government forcefully resolved the problem with Menominee’s people. At Pepper’s request, Gov. David Wallace authorized Tipton to raise 100 volunteers from the area. On August 29, 1838, troops surrounded and arrested Menominee and other leaders who had gathered for a council. Six days later, the remaining 850 Potawatomi were rounded up and forced to walk west. Two months later, about 750 arrived in Kansas. Although some had slipped away to return to Indiana, at least 42 had died of typhoid and other causes along the road, giving this removal its contemporary name of the Trail of Death.37

37Edmunds, The Potawatomis, 266-68; Clifton, The Prairie People, 298-99; Trennert, Indian Traders on the Middle Border, 66-67; Robertson and Riker, comps. and eds., The John Tipton Papers, Vol. 3, 659-769. Some descendants of the Potawatomi who were removed remain in Kansas today, while others moved to Oklahoma after the Civil War.
Another forced removal took place in 1840 in southern Michigan, where some Potawatomi were still living on the Nottawasippi reservation, despite the fact that they had agreed to surrender the land in the 1833 treaty. In 1850, a final removal included a few Potawatomi from Indiana. Most Potawatomi from Indiana, Michigan, and east central Illinois who had been forcefully removed in 1838 and 1840, had been relocated along the Marais des Cygnes River in eastern Kansas. The Potawatomi from northern Illinois and Wisconsin settled in southwest Iowa around modern Council Bluffs. When Iowa became a state in 1846, federal authorities summoned both groups to a treaty council and induced them to move to another reservation in the Kansas River valley.38

Not all of the Potawatomi removed west of the Mississippi. Anthropologist James Clifton estimates that as many as 2,500 moved to British Canada, appealing to the ties established through decades of alliance with the British in earlier conflicts with the United States. Although most of this group were from Wisconsin and Illinois, a small faction led by Okamanse emigrated from Indiana. Other Potawatomi, mainly from Illinois and southern Wisconsin, moved to northern Wisconsin and the upper peninsula of Michigan. The Pokagon band, as Catholics with fee-simple titles to less desirable land, remained in Michigan just north of the state line. They escaped removal for two reasons: their leader had used proceeds from the sale of individual grants to purchase other, less valuable property from the Kalamazoo land office; and according to an amendment to the 1833 treaty, their status as Catholics exempted them from removal (although they were supposed to collect their annuities in northern Michigan). Another southern Michigan group, some left over and some returned from the 1840 removal, stayed at the sufferance of the state government. Mixed-race individuals of Potawatomi ancestry, such as the Bailly family of Porter County, also remained in the area.39

Although part of the Miami tribe left the upper Wabash valley in 1846, spurred on by the dispatch of federal troops, several leading families remained, including that of Richardville. Many Miami from the Mississinewa valley also stayed—their descendants constitute the modern Miami Indians of Indiana. With the exception of the land on which these groups lived, Northern Indiana was devoid of tribal land. The process of privatization via government land sales had come close to achieving the final goal of Tipton and his committee.40

After Indian removal, the next step in the transformation of land ownership was the distribution, or sale, of the land to white owners. Federal land office business burgeoned in the 1830s as millions of acres became available through Indian cessions. According to historian Malcolm Rohrbough, sales peaked nationally between the fall of 1833 and the spring of 1837, a period when land revenues exceeded the total value of sales to date. The government sold over twenty million acres in 1836, over three million acres in Indiana alone. By 1837, sixty-two land offices were operating. These sales led to a frenzy of speculation until the financial panic of 1837 and the ensuing depression. Although the sale of land slowed considerably during the financial crisis, it did not stop completely.41

In 1834, the government surveyed the northern Indiana lands surrendered by the Potawatomi two years earlier, setting the stage for the public sale of lands and future settlement, although not necessarily in that order, as squatters rushed in. Almost all the 1832 cession area fell under the purview of the district land office at La Porte. Six years after its inception, the office moved south to Winamac, in the cession’s heart.42

The arrival of white settlers before the lands went on public sale raised the issue of preemption. Squatters pressed for a right of preemptive purchase over the pieces of land on which they had settled and made improvements. The rush of settlement in the 1830s, coupled with

the effects of the 1837 panic and depression, brought preemption to the fore as a national political issue. The 1838 Preemption Act allowed such claims for up to 160 acres by heads of families and single men 21 years of age and older. This right was later extended to widows. The act spurred more settlers to rush to Indian land about to enter the public domain. Tipton described the problem to the Senate in 1838: “[T]he people of four entire counties in Indiana—Porter, Lake, Newton and Pulaski, with a portion of Miami and others—are settlers on public lands.” Squatters had an interest in asserting preemptive rights to their lands whether legally protected or not, making many preemption claims in northern Indiana, particularly in areas like Lake County that were offered for sale a year later.

Solon Robinson, Lake County’s most celebrated early settler, was one of those who squatted and subsequently filed a preemption claim (on November 17, 1838, for 160 acres). Robinson, a native of Connecticut, had arrived in southeast Indiana in the late 1820s and tried his hand at several trades including town promotion, innkeeping, and auctioneering. In late 1834, he moved to the newly ceded northwest corner of the state, settling on an “Indian cornfield” in the center of what would become the seat of Lake County—Crown Point, Indiana. Robinson ran a store and later served as justice of the peace, county clerk, and postmaster and wrote extensively for national agricultural publications. He left the area in the early 1850s to become agricultural editor of the New York Tribune.

The Lake County Squatter’s Union began at Robinson’s home on July 4, 1836, with 476 settlers signing the founding document. Similar claims associations started up within the same period in the Midwest—Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Iowa—as well as in the South. Settlers who poured onto the millions of acres of recently vacated Indian land were anxious about the chances of federal preemption legislation and desirous of protecting their land claims and improvements. The Lake County group was notable because of its size; it became something

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of a model for other groups, and Robinson soon became known as “King of the Squatters.”

The group elected Robinson as register of the Squatter’s Union, a job title taken from the federal land offices. He was charged with registering claims of up to 160 acres made on the lands upon which improvements had been made. Poorly timbered claims were allowed to add forty acres of additional timber; however, single claims were limited to 80 acres of heavy timber—reflecting the importance of timber and the geographic conditions of the 1832 cessions, much of which was prairie and oak savanna.

Union members were prepared to intervene en masse at land auctions to ensure that their members would retain their claims. By the time Lake County lands came up for sale in March 1839, the 1838 Preemption Act was in force; nonetheless, the squatters came to the auction armed and got their land.

Confrontations between settlers and Potawatomi on ostensibly ceded reserve lands occurred in the area of the Tippecanoe and Yellow Rivers, and were part of the justification for the forced removal of 1838. To the northwest, where much of the land was swamp more useful for hunting than farming, relations with the Natives were more placid. The Potawatomi were the “best customers” of Robinson’s store, paying promptly in raccoon, muskrat and mink skins, and cranberries. Robinson reported that three Indian men had taken 1,300 raccoon skins in one season, earning $1,625. The Potawatomi continued to trap in the Calumet and Kankakee marshlands. Settlers reported hundreds of Potawatomi in winter hunting camps in the Kankakee Marsh and near Cedar Lake in Lake County during the late 1830s. Some French traders with Indian wives and mixed-race children also remained in the area. Furs persisted as a source of income for decades after the Natives’ departure, until the swamps were drained for industry or agriculture. As late as the 1850s, South Bend-based trader Lathrop Taylor continued to buy large numbers of pelts.

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Ball, Lake County, Indiana, 64-65.

Mutually beneficial economic exchanges between white settlers and lingering Indians were common. Susan E. Gray tells a story of the complex interactions between settlers and the Potawatomi and Ottawa in southern Michigan in the same period. The contacts continued in areas where Indian communities persisted, but as part of a transition between two regimes on the land.\(^50\)

The La Porte-Winamac office registered a profusion of claims for the floating reserves within the 1832 cession area. Many of these were located in Fulton, Marshall, and Kosciusko Counties, in the eastern part of the cession set aside for Potawatomi bands; others were in Lake, Porter, and La Porte Counties, in the northwest part of the cession. In Lake County, the floating reserves were concentrated in the county’s northeast corner. In 1835, whites purchased at least a section and a half from Indians on Deep River, a tributary of the Little Calumet, creating the settlement of Liverpool. Strikingly, not one of the dozens of Indian grantees had chosen a tract in the prairies south of the Kankakee and west of the Tippecanoe, perhaps because this land was less suitable to summer villages and cultivation or perhaps because it was harder to sell.\(^51\)

Many Indian reserves, of course, ended up in the hands of speculators. Some of Robinson’s neighbors, with his support, defended their claims from a speculator who had purchased an alleged Indian “float.” Robinson supported tax exemptions for similar lands, including a reserve he had purchased on behalf of George Ewing in northeast Lake County. According to his 1850 deposition about that transaction, the squatter king had acted as an agent for the Indian trader/speculator since 1843.\(^52\)

\(^{50}\)Gray, “Limits and Possibilities.”


\(^{52}\)Kellar, Solon Robinson, Vol. 1, 12-15, 80-84; Vol. 2, 446-48. Robinson said that the Indian involved was a man he knew well by the name of Shobonier. The man was entitled to two sections “at his village” in the Illinois lands surrendered on October 20, 1832. However, records from the La Porte-Winamac land office compiled by the Indiana State Archives show that an Indian named Mis-sink-qu-quah took up a claim for that section as one of six granted under the October 27 treaty. Kappler, Indian Treaties, 353, 374.
By the 1840s, northern Indiana’s land was thoroughly shaped by private property ownership and animal-powered agriculture. The next stage in the area’s transformation from Indian land into American heartland included political organization, the growth of market-oriented agriculture and industry, and the development of transportation and infrastructure necessary for this growth.

Most of the area’s formal county boundaries originated in acts passed by the state legislature between 1830 and 1840. The exceptions are Starke County, then mostly in the Kankakee Marsh, which was organized in 1844; and Newton County, along the Illinois state line south of Lake County, which was separated from Jasper County in 1859. Private taxable land (improved land over five years past initial federal sale) included over 76 percent of the area of Kosciusko, 64 percent of Marshall, and 71 percent of La Porte Counties in 1850, but only 19 percent in Lake and 16 percent in Pulaski. The majority of land in Jasper, Newton, Starke, and White Counties remained in federal hands.53

The state’s most developed areas lay in the eastern part of the 1832 cessions, around the Michigan Road, in land with more timber. Further west, swamps and wet prairies inhibited settlement, best exemplified by the swamps in the Kankakee Marsh and at the base of Lake Michigan which held back development in Lake County. Settlers perceived the poorly drained prairies of Newton, Jasper, and Benton Counties as less desirable. Those lands sold late and most ended up in the hands of speculators. Henry Ellsworth, the patent commissioner under Jackson who later settled in Lafayette, bought up vast tracts in this area. When he died in 1858, he owned over 100,000 acres, including nearly one-third of Benton County. Large cattle ranches were common in the area for a time, as they were in central Illinois; much land remained in the hands of large proprietors and occupied by tenants. This area is still one of the most sparsely populated sections of the state.54

The federal land business changed after the mid-1840s. With settlers occupying most of the desirable land, sales and revenues dropped. After the Mexican War, much of the land business involved military warrants issued to veterans and sold to speculators; Ellsworth acquired much of his land in this manner. With the Swampland Act of 1850, Congress allocated a great deal of the least desirable land to the states. Indiana received 1,266,706 acres, of which 111,400 were in Lake County (over one-third of the county) and 55,305 in Porter County. However, much of this land ended up in the hands of large investors like George W. Clark, a Chicago civil engineer, who bought over 19,000 acres, mostly in northern Lake County, from the state of Indiana. Steel mills and refineries would appear on this land early in the next century.55

Nationally, by the 1850s, the newer areas, which had begun to be absorbed and settled in the 1830s, were enjoying agricultural growth. Indiana was second to Illinois in wheat production by 1860 (with Wisconsin third), had the largest swine population of any state (with Illinois second), and was fourth in corn production. Of northern Indiana counties including territory ceded in 1832, La Porte and Kosciusko were the most agriculturally advanced by 1860; La Porte had actually led Indiana counties in wheat production in 1850. Although counties like Lake, Starke, and Newton were less developed, their agricultural production grew substantially through the 1850s, and the area as a whole produced over four million bushels of corn and one million bushels of wheat in 1860. Manufacturing, too, contributed to local prosperity. La Porte County led the area in the value of its manufactures in 1860; St. Joseph County seems to have been the flour-milling center. Shortly thereafter, South Bend and Mishawaka began to use the power of the St. Joseph River to manufacture plows and wagons to meet the demand for agricultural implements to cultivate prairie lands.56

55James W. Oberly, Sixty Million Acres: American Veterans and the Public Lands Before the Civil War (Kent, Ohio, 1990); Gates, Landlords and Tenants on the Prairie Frontier, 120; Barce, Annals of Benton County, 62; Gates, History of Public Land Law Development, 180-81; Moore, The Calumet Region, 93-98.

56Agriculture in the United States in 1860; compiled from the original returns of the eighth census, under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, by Joseph C. G. Kennedy, superintendent of the census (1864; New York, 1990), xxix-xxx, xlvii, cxxiv, 39, 43, 45; Manufactures in the United States in 1860; compiled from the original returns of the eighth census under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior (1865; New York, 1990), 127, 134-35; U.S., Seventh Census, 1850, 227, 233, 791-92; Robert M. Taylor, Jr., et al., Indiana: A New Historical Guide (Indianapolis, 1989), 523-24.
Transportation and internal improvements had long been key interests of many who desired to promote such economic development. The success of the Erie Canal in bringing commodities and settlers from eastern markets through the Great Lakes engendered great interest in canal building in the newly acquired lands of the Midwest. As mentioned earlier, men like Tipton and Ray were strong believers in the “American commercial agricultural system” that, as historian Ginette Aley has written, included such improvements as the projected Wabash and Erie Canal, as well as the Michigan Road, both of which factored prominently in the 1826 negotiations and in later negotiations with the Miami. Despite the Indiana legislature’s ambitious 1836 Internal Improvements Act, the Panic of 1837 froze transportation development into the early 1840s. Many projected improvements never came to fruition, although the canal was open to Lafayette by 1843, and reached the Ohio at Evansville ten years later.57

Railroad construction was also part of the 1836 plan, and while, according to historian Donald F. Carmony, a “paper network” of railroads was set in place before the 1837 panic, the economic crisis delayed actual construction in Indiana, as it did throughout the Midwest. Railroad development recovered slowly in the 1840s. Indeed, horses, rather than locomotives, actually pulled some trains in the down period. Robinson, who rode on one of these in Kentucky, stated that “with very few exceptions, good common roads are more advantage to the farming community than rail-roads.” The 1840s brought an enthusiasm for plank roads as a substitute for the stalled railroads. Propertied men such as Ellsworth saw them as even more important than railroads for enhancing the value of their land.58


Yet it was the railroads, not canals or plank roads, that would ultimately revolutionize the transportation of agricultural produce to market and of city goods to the rural consumer. The railroads shrank effective distances between places as they began to cross the Midwest. The Michigan Central and Michigan Southern, built in 1851-52, followed the base of Lake Michigan into Chicago via Lake County. The intersection of the lake and the railroads provided the foundation for Chicago’s development and for the subsequent emergence of one of the world’s great industrial areas in Indiana’s northern Lake County—much of the latter on what had been Potawatomi land. The railroad that became known as the Monon line extended north to Michigan City by 1854, despite the stagnation of projected harbor improvements after the financial crisis. The Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Fort Wayne crossed the heart of the 1832 cession area by 1858, and another railroad reached Robinson’s Crown Point in 1865.59

The closing of the Winamac land office in 1855 and the consolidation of land sales in Indiana indicated the end of a transition period. Geography still held back development in much of the western part of the cession area, but even in these areas white landowners could claim private property, usable for exchange or rent income within organized counties and towns. Upwards of 40,000 whites had replaced around 2,500 Potawatomi.60 Northern Indiana was now part of an American countryside, one largely absent of Indians. The transformation of northern Indiana had occurred within less than three decades. Federal bureaucracy played a decisive role through Indian policy and land policy. Speculators, investors, and entrepreneurs also influenced the construction of a white Midwest.

Could there have been a different outcome for the Native population in light of the fact that the western part of the cession remained less developed? Could the government have settled the Potawatomi on reservations on the less desirable land of Newton and Jasper Counties? Anyone who had argued against removal would have encountered political and ideological opposition, fueled by recent memories of armed


conflicts in which the Potawatomi had played a prominent role. Even those who saw themselves as friends of the Indian, including Isaac McCoy, were part of a new society based on private property and the pursuit of monetary gain. After the best lands for agriculture and town development had been snatched up, less desirable acreage was still an object of speculation and a source of profit. Indian removals in northern Indiana took place within the context of a speculative boom in midwestern frontier land; men such as John Tipton, Allen Hamilton, George Ewing, and Henry Ellsworth—backed by the money and military power of the federal government—led what was, perhaps, an irresistible push to make Native peoples disappear from the tribal lands.61

In 1907, John T. McCutcheon could look back with nostalgia on the “Indian traditions” of his boyhood home in Indiana, but his fable perpetuated the myth of a picturesque, vanished Indian who had had little, if any, relationship to contemporary society. McCutcheon’s Indians bore only the slightest resemblance to real people like Richardville, Menominee, Le Gros, Okamanse, and the Potawatomi and Miami men and women who followed them. In reality, the Indians did not vanish—they were pushed aside. They were deliberately removed from the scene, or marginalized into its corners, to make way for a new society. McCutcheon, his Indiana cornfields, and the booming Chicago in which he worked were products of this new order in the Midwest. Its origin lay in the dispossession of the Natives from their lands. Far from being a picturesque sidebar to the area’s history, this removal constitutes a vitally important part of its story.