

The Northwest Indians and the British Preceding the War of 1812.¹

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Public officials of the Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois territories, private individuals, and the press, believed in the decade before 1812 that the British in Canada were encouraging the Indians of the Northwest to resist land sales to the United States government. They thought, too, that the Indian depredations and warlike activities prior to the War were supported and fomented by the British Indian department, or by other British agents from Malden, Upper Canada. A comparison of the accusations that were made against the British with the official British Indian policy as it affected the Indians in the territories of the United States in the decade prior to the War of 1812 will afford a test of the validity of the accusations.

When Westerners arraigned the British as the instigators of their frontier difficulties with the Indians, using precedent as their guide, they were not altogether on unhistorical ground. During the period when England still retained the Western posts, English officers gave material assistance and direct encouragement to the Indians in their wars against the United States.²

Shortly after the Indiana Territory was created reports were sent out that the British were tampering with the Indians. Reports of such nature continued to emanate not only from Indiana but from Michigan and Illinois territories as late as the close of the War of 1812. They varied only in their intensity and directness. As early as July, 1801, William Henry Harrison, governor of Indiana Territory, wrote Henry Dearborn, Secretary of War, that "the British have been unremitting in their exertions to preserve their influence over the Indians resident within our territory. . . ." He feared conversations by the British among the Indians would weaken the little influence he had over them, and stated that his informants reported that the British were especially as-

¹ This is a revised form of a paper written for a seminar in American history directed by Dr. R. C. Buley at Indiana University.

² Andrew C. McLaughlin, "The Western Posts and the British Debts," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, 1894 (Washington, 1895), 444.

siduous in "their efforts to keep the Indians in their interest, as a means of assisting them in any designs they may form against Louisiana. . . ."³

When the Indians complained to Harrison early in 1802 about the treatment they were receiving from the Americans, saying that the Americans used them for their own selfish aggrandizement, Harrison could explain the complaints in no other manner than that such ideas had been suggested to the Indians by Britishers. He believed the Indian jeremiads to be above the capacity of the Indians, and said "they must have been put into his mouth [the Indian's] by the said M'Kee,⁴ or by some of the British merchants." The Indians lamented that the United States was seeking to destroy them and to take possession of their land. Harrison stated that the British had been the instigators of this report, and that they had "even attempted to make the Indians believe that the United States intended to destroy them by means of the small-pox" transmitted by goods received from government agents.⁵

William Hull, governor of the Michigan Territory, reported to Dearborn in October, 1805, that there was considerable activity among the Indians; that the Western Indians on the Mississippi had been sending messengers to the Chippeways, Ottawas, Potawatomes, and Shawnee telling them that the people of the United States meant to exterminate them. The Western Indians advocated a common war. Hull could not place blame for the stir among the Indians on the British government or on any of the officers high in command, but he did believe "there are many individuals, who have great influence with the Indians, [who] would give encouragement to it."⁶ Probably the "many individuals" to whom Hull referred were the numerous British traders who,

³ Moses Dawson, *A Historical Narrative of the Civil and Military Services of Major-General William H. Harrison* . . . (Cincinnati, 1824), 9.

⁴ Alexander McKee was born in Pennsylvania, but he joined the British during the Revolution. As a reward for his services he was made an interpreter of the Indian department in Upper Canada. Shortly before the War of 1812 he was made British superintendent for Indian affairs for Upper Canada.

⁵ Dawson, *Harrison*, 14.

⁶ *Documents Relating to Detroit and Vicinity, 1805-1813*, in *Michigan Historical Collections* (Lansing, 1874-), XL (1929), 77-78. The earlier volumes were entitled *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*.

by Article III of Jay's Treaty, were given free ingress into the territories of the United States. The influence of these traders over the savages was most potent, and the ability of British traders to spur them to action cannot be underestimated.⁷

By the summer of 1807 there was an acute state of nervousity among the settlers and public men of the Indiana and Michigan territories, due to the activities of Tecumseh and the Prophet. In 1806 these two Indians had gathered the remnants of the Shawnee tribe about them at Greenville, Ohio, where the religious fanaticism and eloquence of the Prophet, combined with the practicability and statesmanship of Tecumseh, caused Indians from many tribes to flock around them.⁸ Their influence was felt not only in the immediate neighborhood of Greenville, but especially in the region of the Great Lakes. "All the Ottawas from L'arbe au Croche adhere strickly [*sic*] to the Shawney Prophets advice. . . ."⁹ Dawson states that the Indians "were assembling in council day and night, and belts of wampum, and pipes, were sent in all directions. . . . An extensive cor-

⁷ On the subject of the fur traders, see Wayne E. Stevens, "The Northwest Fur Trade, 1763-1800," in *University of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences* (Urbana, 1912-), XIV (1926), 407-610. Secretary of State, James Madison, in writing in 1806, to James Monroe and William Pinkney, then ministers to Great Britain, spoke of the evils perpetuated under Article III of the Jay Treaty by British traders: "1st It gives to the British Traders dealing with the Indians on our side of the Boundary, opportunities of gaining an influence which it cannot be doubted that they have frequently employed in stirring up the Indians against the United States."

2dly The mixture of British traders with the American traders, produces collisions and heart burnings; with mutual efforts to make the Indians their partizans and sometimes their avengers against the property and persons of their rivals.

3dly The animosity of the British traders in such cases against their rivals is easily extended against the United States, and the Indian partizans still more readily pass from a vindictive spirit against the American traders to a hostile one against the nation to which they belong."

He asked Monroe and Pinkney to make, if possible, some amendment to that article. William R. Manning (ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Canadian Relations, 1784-1860* (4 vols. Washington, 1940-), I, 174-75.

⁸ Elmore Barce, "Tecumseh's Confederacy," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XII, 168. James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, 1892-93* (Washington, 1896), Part 2, p. 670, *et passim*. Benjamin Drake, *The Life of Tecumseh and his Brother the Prophet* (Cincinnati, 1841), *passim*.

⁹ *The John Askin Papers, 1796-1820*, *Burton Historical Records* (Detroit, 1928-), II (1931), 568-69.

respondence . . . was held with the British agent, M'Kee¹⁰ The ebullition and movements of the Indians were thought to be caused by their attempt to form a union or confederacy among themselves. Such a union, it was feared, would be hostile to the United States because it was believed that the British were the real promoters of the movement. At this time the Shawnee tribe and part of the Potawatomes, Chippeways, and Ottawas were friendly to the British.¹¹

Captain I. Dunham, Commander at Michilimackinac, was convinced that the intentions of the Prophet and Tecumseh were hostile to the United States and that they were meditating "to Strike somewhere, a desperate and decisive blow."¹² Governor Hull did not know by whose influence they were moved, possibly by their own.¹³ But he did report increased activity of the British Indian agents at St. Josephs, where "all the Northern Indians are to be collected. . . ."¹⁴ He likewise noted that "Large bodies of Indians from the westward and southward continue to visit the British post at Amherstburgh, and are supplied with provisions, arms, ammunition. . . ." and that "Much more attention is paid to them than usual."¹⁵ In October he reported that there were about two thousand Indians at Amherstburg, nine-tenths of whom resided in the United States. "The British," he stated, "seem to be making every preparation for War, and It is the general opinion, with them, that it will take place."¹⁶ Indian chiefs on their way home from Malden were examined by Hull. From them he was informed that the British talked of a near war with the United States and told the Indians they "must take up the hatchet in their favor."¹⁷

Hull sent speeches to the Indians of the Territory and environs in an effort to counteract the British influence. His efforts, however, were of little effect, for he reported that the Indians about Michilimackinac, on Lake Superior, Lake

¹⁰ Dawson, *Harrison*, 92-93.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

¹² *Documents Relating to Detroit and Vicinity, Michigan Historical Collections*, XL, 124.

¹³ *Ibid.*, XL, 160.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, XL, 155.

¹⁵ *American State Papers, Indian Affairs* (Washington, 1832), I, 799.

¹⁶ *Documents Relating to Detroit and Vicinity, Michigan Historical Collections*, XL, 207.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, XL, 253.

Michigan, Green Bay, and the Chippeways at Saguina were unfriendly. "The situation of the Frontier," he reported, "is such that I have thought it my duty to fortify this Town in the strongest manner possible agst Indians."¹⁸

To the citizens of the Territory of Michigan the journeys of the Indians to Amherstburg, the passing of the war-pipe and the execution of war dances was proof enough of an offensive alliance between the Indians and the British. By public resolution they unanimously resolved "That any attack from the Indians upon our settlements, shall be considered as actuated by the British Government and that We shall act accordingly."¹⁹

The gathering of Indians at Greenville aroused great apprehension among the settlers of the Indiana Territory. William Wells, Indian agent, informed Harrison that the Prophet kept a communication with the British at Malden. Moreover, he was telling the Indians that the Great Spirit was going to destroy every white man in America, and as a result the Indians were preparing for war. "It is my opinion," he stated, "that the British are at the bottom of all this Business and depend on it that if we have war with them that many of the Indian tribes will take an active part against us. . . ." ²⁰

Harrison believed the cause of the "stir and commotion" was the attempt of the Indians to "cement a more perfect union and friendship amongst themselves. . . ." but he felt the real spirit behind the movement was British influence. The confederacy was part of a general coalition against the United States.²¹ In a pungent letter to the secretary of war he gave vent to his spleen:

The British could not have adopted a better plan to effect their purpose of alienating from our government the affections of the Indians than employing this vile Instrument (the Prophet). It manifests at once their inveterate rancour against us and their perfect acquaintance with the Indian character.²²

According to his information the Chippeways, Ottawas and

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, XL, 179-80.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, XL, 164.

²⁰ Logan Esarey (ed.), *Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison*, 2 vols. (*Indiana Historical Collections*, VII and IX, Indianapolis, 1922), I, 239-42.

²¹ *Ibid.*, I, 243-44.

²² *Ibid.*, I, 247-48.

part of the Potawatomies only waited for a sign from the British agents to commence an attack on the settlements.²³ The plan of confederation had not yet been communicated to the Miamis, Weas, Delawares, and the Kickapoos.²⁴ Word was sent by the governor to the Shawnee to scatter the warriors gathered around the Prophet, but the governor's command went unheeded.

The Vincennes *Western Sun*, with "Truth its Guide—Liberty its Object," was loud in its denunciation of British intrigue in 1807. An article signed "Veritas" answering an earlier one by "An Elector," accused the latter of being pro-British in sympathy and went on to denounce England "which even now has her agents stirring up the numerous tribes of Indians to make war."²⁵ "Shandy," one of Editor Stout's many anonymous correspondents, "From information recently received," could state, "there is every reason to believe that the Indians in the neighborhood of Canada, entertain the most hostile designs against us." British agents, he continued, especially McKee and Elliott,²⁶ were working among the Indians within the borders of the Indiana Territory. Further, the Prophet was called a tool of the British and, it was asserted, British agents "are sulking amongst us."²⁷ As was the editorial custom in those days, Editor Stout worked as vigorously with the scissors as with the pencil. From the *National Intelligencer* came a clipping that informed the readers of the *Western Sun* why the Indians considered the Americans as objects of hatred:

It is impossible to view such extravagance as flowing from the unprejudiced mind of the savage. It can only be ascribed to the interested views of a foreign trading company, or to the instructions or countenance of the government from which that company emanates.²⁸

The last issue for 1807 closed with no doubt in the mind of the correspondent "that the hostile disposition of these In-

²³ *Ibid.*, I, 247-48.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 243-44.

²⁵ Vincennes, Indiana, *Western Sun*, September 5, 1807.

²⁶ Matthew Elliott was born in Ireland. When the Revolution broke out he was an Indian trader working out of Pittsburgh. He joined the British, and after the war served in the Indian department of Upper Canada.

²⁷ Vincennes, Indiana, *Western Sun*, September 12, 1807.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, September 19, 1807.

dians may fairly be imputed to the machinations and influence of British agents and traders."²⁹

Because the possibility of war with England seemed less likely in 1808 than in 1807, there was comparative quiet on the frontiers during the later year. Harrison did make a significant observation in his report to the secretary of war in April, 1808, when he stated that one constant source of friction between the Indians and the settlers was the presence among the former of British traders and agents. These men constantly counteracted the influence of the Americans among the Indians and would do so until a law prohibiting their residence among Indians was passed.³⁰ From Detroit in July of that year J. R. Williams, a Detroit trader, wrote a letter that was so typical of the belief held by Westerners that it will bear quoting. In part, went the epistle:

The old or long reiterated Sound of War Still dins in our ears-- Governor Gore of upper Canada has lately Visited Amherstburgh & Sandwich he came through by Land from York by the way of the river Thames accompanied by a considerable retinue principally of Indians, it is really astonishing to Witness the great influence which he as british Governor has on the Indians, he has scarcely arrived that at least 1000 Indians Comprising a great many Chiefs had assembled at Amherstburgh to Salute him report says that it is not denied by the British themselves that he has invited them to war against the U States, stating to them that now was the proper time to reclaim their lands making the Ohio the boundary that the U.S. were constantly infringing on their possessions & driving them still further back into the Woods . . . their [British] Strength remained yet unimpaired & their Arm so well strung that they could spare their Children Some Sinews (meaning men) to assist them in the recovery of their Lands & Territory.³¹

In 1809 the initial success enjoyed by the Prophet seemed to be on the wane. Wells apprised Harrison that the Indians were leaving him, especially the Chippeways, Ottawas, and the Potawatomes. The loss of prestige was in part caused by the Prophet's strong advocacy of the extermination of the whites of the Indiana Territory.³²

Harrison, in spite of the enthusiastic report from Wells,

²⁹ *Ibid.*, December 23, 1807.

³⁰ Esarey, *Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison*, I, 289.

³¹ "War of 1812—Williams Papers," in *Michigan Historical Collections*, XXXII (1903), 516.

³² Esarey, *Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison*, I, 337.

was none too credulous about the Prophet's loss of influence. Nor did he give credence to the reports that the Chippeways and Ottawas were so at odds with the Prophet that they were going to wage war against his followers. Such reports he thought to be strategies suggested by the British. The Chippeways and Ottawas were on their way to join the Prophet on the Wabash; together they would then fall upon the settlements.³³

Could Harrison have read a report sent in that same year by William Clark, governor of the Louisiana Territory, he would have been even more pessimistic. Clark wrote from St. Louis that he was convinced that the British were interfering with the Indians of the Northwest. He had evidence to prove that four British subjects had wintered at Rivière à la Roche [Rock River] in disguise. While there they had tried to get the Indian nations together and send them against the American frontiers.³⁴

For the years 1808, 1809, and 1810, there were in the *Western Sun* numerous articles and letters stigmatizing the Prophet as a British pawn, and branding the British with reproach for their intrepidity in encouraging the Indians to resist land sales.³⁵ The confederacy that had been under way among the Indians gave the editor considerable worry because it "was the effect of British intrigue—and we have never doubted that the secret agents of that power, which are known to exist in every part of America but particularly in the Indian country, gave it all the countenance in their power."³⁶

In April, 1810, Harrison wrote to the secretary of war in a great state of agitation. He had "lately received information from sources which leave no room to doubt its correctness, that the Shawnee Prophet is again exciting the Indians to Hostilities against the United States." The Prophet had an estimated one thousand Indians under his command, of which 350 or 400 were warriors. They consisted of Kickapoos, Winnebagos, Potawatomies, Shawnee, Chippeways, and Ottawas. Again Harrison was certain "that the

³³ *Ibid.*, I, 340.

³⁴ *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, I, 765.

³⁵ Vincennes, Indiana, *Western Sun*, April 6, 1808, October 21, 1809, June 23, and July 21, 1810.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, August 25, 1810.

present hostile disposition of the Prophet and his Votaries has been produced by British interference." The Indians had received a large supply of ammunition from Malden, refusing to buy any from the American traders because "they could get more without paying for it. . . ." Though the British were behind the activities of the Prophet, Harrison did not entirely despair of peace. He thought

it probable that the British agents in Canada have anticipated the orders of their government in their endeavors to set the Indians upon us, and that the first account of a favorable change of disposition towards America in that Government will induce them to countermand the orders, which have been given to their Indian allies.³⁷

In spite of the many reports brought in by scouts and friendly Indians of the Prophet's intentions of going to war, Harrison in May could still report that there would be no Indian war unless England and the United States went to war. He was, however, concerned about the possibility of the Indian disaffection extending to the tribes of the Illinois River. That would double the number of the Prophet's warriors and enable them to do great damage to frontier settlements.³⁸

One month later the dispatches of the governor took on a new note. He believed that the British might urge the Indians to hostilities even though they had no intention of going to war themselves. That "corrupt Government" might do it just "for the purpose of increasing our difficulties and embarrassments. . . ." ³⁹ The Indians were ripe for war, many were only restrained by fear. Proper and timely urging would send them down on the settlements. Harrison did not want to create undue alarm, but he considered events of such a threatening nature that defensive measures should be taken. Accordingly, after consulting the public officers and some important merchants of Vincennes, he called two companies of the militia into actual service and established alarm posts.⁴⁰

Shortly after the defensive measures had been taken one of Harrison's informants reported that the Prophet's

³⁷ Esarey, *Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison*, I, 417-18.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 420-21.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 425.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 428.

plan of confederation included all the tribes on the Mississippi and also the Southern tribes, especially the Creeks (the Prophet's mother supposedly was a Creek), and the Choctaws. The Prophet was urging confederation by telling the Indians that unless they unified and made a stand against the whites they would lose their land. Detroit, Chicago, Fort Wayne, Vincennes, and St. Louis were to be destroyed. Again Harrison accused the British of being the authors of the plan. Having given the impulse to the movement, the British now "found it difficult to regulate the after movements of their tawny allies."⁴¹

Governor Clark, in July, complained that the Sacs and the Kickapoos were visiting both Malden and St. Joseph and that a great number of them were then visiting the Prophet.⁴² Harrison in the same month reported that Matthew Elliott was scattering presents with a lavish hand among the Indians.⁴³ He estimated the value of the presents to exceed the value of all the peltries taken from the country inhabited by the tribes. The presents were not given for commercial reasons, "But from a desire to retain in their influence the most warlike of the Tribes, as a kind of barrier to Canada."⁴⁴ John Johnston, United States Factor at Fort Wayne, reported that the Sauks had just returned from a visit to the British. The party had received "forty-seven rifles and a number of fusils, with plenty of powder and lead."⁴⁵

The inhabitants both of the Indiana and Illinois territories were greatly disturbed over the activities of the Indians in 1810. The people between the Big and Little Wabash rivers, inhabiting the prairies, were "very much fluctuated [*sic*] of late concerning a talk of an Indian War" Out of forty-two families in that region only fifteen were determined to stay and those that stayed had erected a fort for protection.⁴⁶ The citizens of Indiana Territory sent the following petition to Madison:

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, I, 433-35.

⁴² *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, I, 799.

⁴³ Presents were given to the Miamis, Delawares, Shawnee, Potawatomes, Kickapoos, Chippewas, Ottawas, and Wyandots.

⁴⁴ Esarey, *Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison*, I, 450-51.

⁴⁵ *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, I, 799.

⁴⁶ Esarey, *Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison*, I, 455.

It is a matter of regret that even we so far in the interior cannot be shielded from the effects of the more than savage policy of Britain—in constantly keeping commissaries for the corruption of our aboriginal neighbours—and it is still more lamentable that strong grounds of presumption exist that there are those resident amongst us engaged in the nefarious design.⁴⁷

In December Harrison reported that the chiefs in a council at Brownstown had entered into a resolution to make no more land sales. The "British Agent [Matthew] Elliott strongly recommended this measure to them, and informed them that the English and French had made peace and would soon unite their arms to dispossess the Americans of the lands they had taken from the Indians."⁴⁸

The year 1811 brought with it more reports of "hostile Indians urged on by the British" and the long-expected Indian war culminated in the Battle of Tippecanoe. But before that battle many were the denunciations of British perfidy. Harrison told the secretary of war that if the intentions of the British were "pacifick the Indian department of Upper Canada have not been made acquainted with them"⁴⁹ Johnston derived the same information he had "been in possession of for several years, to wit: the intrigues of the British agents . . . in creating an influence hostile to our people. . . ." and urged the establishment of a fort near the Prophet's town on the Wabash.⁵⁰ Matthew Irwin, United States Factor at Chicago, wrote that Indians were assembling on a branch of the Illinois under the influence of the Prophet.⁵¹ This "banditti," wrote Harrison, "is now about to be let loose upon us, and . . . nothing but vigorous measures will prevent it."⁵² The Indians were destroying the property of people who lived on the frontiers and insulting the families left unprotected. A Potawatomie War Chief told Harrison that a British agent had delivered a message to the Prophet telling him the time had come to take up arms.⁵³ Benjamin Parke, Captain of the Light Dragoons, asked to make a report by Harrison, confirmed rumors that the

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 485-86.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 497.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 504-05.

⁵⁰ *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, I, 800.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, I, 800.

⁵² Dawson, *Harrison*, 189.

⁵³ Esarey, *Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison*, I, 549.

Prophet's party was greatly increasing. More alarming, he found the disaffection to extend to all of the tribes between the Wabash, Mississippi, and Great Lakes. The "language and measures of the Indians indicate nothing but War. . . ." To dissolve the confederacy and "silence the turbulent and unprincipled," a force of several thousand men ought to be marched into the country.⁵⁴

Another of Harrison's informants, Touissant Dubois, Indian trader, reported that all of the Indians of the Wabash had been or were on a visit to Malden. The British were distributing goods with abandon. Dubois examined the goods of an Indian (not a chief) and "found that he had received an elegant rifle, 25 pounds of powder 50 of lead 3 blankets 3 strouds of cloth, ten shirts and several other articles."⁵⁵ The amount of goods sent over for that year exceeded by twenty thousand pounds sterling the goods for ordinary years.⁵⁶

The *Western Sun* informed its readers that so great was the fear of the Indians in the Illinois Territory that citizens there were moving into forts, and Editor Stout feared that "there is little room to hope that a rupture with the Indians can be avoided."⁵⁷ In August, 1811, a gathering of citizens of Knox County, Indiana Territory, "Resolved that we are fully convinced that the formation of the combination headed by the Shawanoe Prophet, is a British scheme, and that agents of that power are constantly exciting the Indians to hostility against the United States."⁵⁸ The resolution with a letter was directed to the President asking that vigorous measures be taken. When Tecumseh made a visit to Vincennes late in July, 1811, and in the course of his speech to Harrison denied affiliation with the British, Editor Stout paraphrased his remarks to read, "In obedience to the orders of my masters (the British), I have now succeeded in uniting the northern tribes of Indians in a confederacy for the purpose of attacking the United States."⁵⁹

We have seen, then, that Westerners were open in denouncing the British of Canada as the fount of their Indian

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 565-66.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 571-75.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 571-75.

⁵⁷ June 15, and July 6, 1811.

⁵⁸ Vincennes, Indiana, *Western Sun*, August 3, 1811.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, August 3, 1811.

troubles. Attacks such as those above described did not cease with the Battle of Tippecanoe, but grew in violence and frequency and continued down to the declaration of war in June, 1812. In fact, these reports as they emanated from Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois territories were taken up by the presses of Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee and were of primary importance in shaping Western opinion and building up a war psychosis.⁶⁰ These reports were reiterated in the halls of Congress by the "War Hawks" or the "Liberty Boys" from the frontier regions and they gave as one of the reasons for desiring a declaration of war the fact that the British were urging the Indians to hostilities against the American frontiers.⁶¹

When Westerners accused the English of plotting with the Indians and urging them to war against the Americans and to resist further land sales, they thought they had a genuine grievance. By studying the correspondence and papers of British officials we can gain some insight into the nature of the official British Indian policy. It is well to remember, however, that official British Indian policy is one thing, whereas unofficial Indian policy might bear no relation to it. The home government might pursue one policy while the many British traders who circulated among the tribes, and who wielded no mean influence over them, might, to protect their economic interests, be conducting programs antipodal with those of the British government. The official policy shall be described here; the Indian relations of British traders will be dealt with in the future.

That the British cultivated the friendship of the Indians in the Northwest from the close of the American Revolution to the cession of the Western posts, and that they encouraged the Indians to make war against the moving line of American settlers has been shown by Andrew C. McLaughlin.⁶² We are here concerned with the British attitude toward the Indians in United States territory after 1796. What was

⁶⁰ Julius W. Pratt, *Expansionists of 1812* (New York, 1925), 17-59, *passim*.

⁶¹ See the speeches of Felix Grundy, Richard M. Johnson, Henry Clay, and others in *Annals of Congress*, 12 Cong., 1 Sess., I, *passim*.

⁶² McLaughlin, "The Western Posts and the British Debts," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, 1894, pp. 413-44, *passim*.

the policy of the Canadian Indian department toward Indians resident in United States territories?

For some twelve years following the cession of the Western posts by England the Indian department of Upper Canada pursued an extremely passive policy toward the Indians of the Northwest. They, of course, continued the practice of giving them a few annual presents, for to do otherwise would have meant the loss or curtailment of their trade among the various tribes. But the expenditures of the department had been cut, for, "Retaining their attachment to the King's Interests has not of late years been thought an object worthy of consideration. . . ." ⁶³ If the British were actively urging the Indians to war on the Americans, such persuasions must have been indeed secretive, for the Canadian archives contain no evidence of such incriminating character. ⁶⁴ In fact, on several occasions when Indians poured out their grievances against the Americans to the British Indian agents and talked of going to war, the agents recommended peace. ⁶⁵

Beginning in 1807, when war between the United States and England seemed likely, the English again started taking an active interest in the Indians. The purpose of this renewed interest in them is revealed in a letter written by Sir James H. Craig, the governor-general of Canada, to Francis Gore, lieutenant-governor. Craig was concerned about the position of the Indians in event of an Anglo-American war, for he knew "If a war takes place, they will not be idle. If we do not employ them, there cannot exist a moment's doubt that they will be employed against us. . . ." He feared that unless the Indians were brought over to the British side, the chain of friendship would be broken and "All our valuable commerce now carried on in the Indian country would be lost and it would be years before our traders could venture to the parts necessary to resume it." He urged that much caution be used in conversations with the Indians and even suggested that negotiations should wait until war be-

⁶³ *Michigan Historical Collections*, XXV (1896), 240.

⁶⁴ See the annual *Report on Canadian Archives* prepared by the Archivist.

⁶⁵ At an Indian council held at Amherstburg in June, 1805, the Indians pledged to take up the hatchet any time for the British, but McKee strongly urged that peace be maintained between Indians and the people of the United States. *Michigan Historical Collections*, XXIII (1895), 41, 42.

came more likely. If, however, the Americans made direct proposals to the Indians, the British Indian agents were to lose no time in sending messages to the different Indian nations and putting the question of aid to them point-blank. But if the Indians were to be used, "They should never be suffered to act alone if it can be avoided, but always with some of our people. . . ." Craig had heard something of the Prophet and suggested to Gore that the British purchase his aid in case of war.⁶⁶

The same sentiment Craig expressed to Castlereagh. He explained that the Indians were valueless as friends, but dangerous as enemies. He, therefore, thought it politic to attempt to secure them to the interests of Great Britain. For some time the Indian department had been under the jurisdiction of the civil authorities. Craig suggested that better results could be obtained if it could be again placed under military command.⁶⁷

Castlereagh was quick to agree with Craig upon his proposed Indian policy: "Under an undefined relation with the United States of America, I entirely concur in your Position, that attention must be kept up to conciliate the Indian Tribes upon the following Principle; that if in a contest they are not employed to act with us, they will be engaged to act against us. . . ." Furthermore, he let it be known that if the United States and England ironed out their difficulties he would be willing to enter into some joint system for the treatment of the Indians as the basis of a permanent arrangement.⁶⁸

As a guarantee that the Indians would ally with them in case of a future war, the British took steps to cement the alliance. Members of the Indian department felt that the task of winning over the Indians after such a long period of neglect was a difficult one. Steps were taken for the conduction of a pressure campaign on the Indians. Everything that would aid in such a campaign was used by the department, even to bringing a surgeon to Amherstburg to minister to the ailing Indians as they came in.⁶⁹ Craig ordered Gore

⁶⁶ "Anticipation of the War of 1812," *Report on Canadian Archives*, 1896, (Ottawa, 1897), 31, 32.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1893 (Ottawa, 1894), 13.

⁶⁸ *Michigan Historical Collections*, XXIII, 69.

⁶⁹ *Report on Canadian Archives*, 1893, p. 17.

to emphasize the long "subsisting Ties that have existed between us" and to supply the Indians with arms to protect themselves against the advance of the land-hungry Americans. He stated that the officers "of the Indian Department must be diligent and active, the communication must be constant" The idea that the English were the only source of protection for them "must be held up to them not merely in Great Councils and public Assemblies, they should be privately urged to some of their leading men, with whom endeavors should be used to lead them to a confidence in us. . . ." ⁷⁰

Gore realized the great effort that would have to be put forth by the Indian department completely to win back the Indians. As a step in his plan of conciliation he made Amherstburg the residence of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, because that was the principal gathering place of the Western Indians,⁷¹ and readmitted into the Indian department Matthew Elliott who had much influence over the savages. From Amherstburg messages were sent to the Indians in all parts of the Northwest inviting them to come there for councils.⁷² While assembled they were given presents of many kinds including guns, gunpowder and lead. Elliott reported to William Claus, deputy superintendent of Indian affairs for Upper Canada, that by November, 1810, he had already given 6,000 Indians their annual presents and had issued 70,770 rations.⁷³ In councils the British spoke to the Indians of the differences that existed between the two governments and told the Indians that they could regain the country taken from them by the Americans.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ *Michigan Historical Collections*, XXV, 233.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, XXV, 240.

⁷² *Ibid.*, XV (1909), 44, 45.

⁷³ *Report on Canadian Archives*, 1893, p. 45.

⁷⁴ At a conference in Amherstburg in 1808, Claus using James Girty as his interpreter told Captain Johnny, Blackwood, and Buffaloe, three principal Shawnee chiefs that "You must be sensible & must see and feel the conduct of the Americans towards you when compared with that of your Great Father the King, whose affection for his Indian Children is as warm as it ever was & you cannot think otherwise, for altho' far removed from you, yet he every year thinks of their necessities & sends to this country for their use cloathing, and a great variety of other necessary articles, besides arms & ammunition for the young men—All that you have ever received from the American Government has been as a payment for Land wrested from you by unfair means." *Michigan Historical Collections*, XXV, 243.

The members of the Indian department were skeptical about the success of their campaign to win the Indians. Gore especially was pessimistic. In a letter to Craig he attempted to correct the optimism of Elliott, by stating that the only way the co-operation of the Indians could be relied upon was by sending a great regular force to Upper Canada. When the Indians were reassured by the presence of such a force, they might co-operate.⁷⁵ Major General Isaac Brock thought the British would first have to capture Detroit and Michilimackinac before the Indians would join forces with them.⁷⁶

When Westerners in the press and by dispatch accused the Prophet and Tecumseh of holding constant intercourse with the British at Amherstburg they were not far from correct. Shortly after the Prophet moved to the Wabash in 1808, he sent a message to Claus assuring him of his friendship.⁷⁷ In June of that year Tecumseh was at Amherstburg and Claus reported that he held a three-hour conversation with him,⁷⁸ but the purport of the conversation was not given. Two years later Tecumseh again visited Amherstburg and assured the British of his friendship, and told them he was going to war against the Americans:

Your Fathers have nourished us and raised us up from Childhood, we are now men, and think ourselves capable of defending our Country, in which cause you have given us active assistance and always advice. We are now determined to defend it ourselves, and after raising you on your feet leave you behind but expecting you will push forward towards us what may be necessary to supply our wants.⁷⁹

While attempting to assure themselves of the aid of the Indians, the British keenly realized that their Indian activities would arouse criticism in the United States. Craig wrote to Gore in 1808 advising him to conduct Indian affairs with extreme circumspection. Though he wanted to preserve the attachment of the Indians he did not want to do anything that would irritate the public mind in the United States.⁸⁰ In talks with the Indians there was, if possible,

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, XV, 53.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, XV, 57.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, XV, 49.

⁷⁸ "Diary of Col. Wm. Claus," *ibid.*, XXIII, 53.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, XXV, 276.

⁸⁰ *Report on Canadian Archives, 1893*, p. 5.

to be no mention made of possible hostilities. This procedure was to be adopted to prevent the Indians from reporting that the British were trying to force them into a war with the United States.⁸¹ "I beg leave to assure you," went the reply to one of Craig's letters, "that I have been particularly careful in guarding the officers of the Indian department from taking any measures at present, that might tend to initiate [*sic*] the government of the United States."⁸²

When Tecumseh told the British that he was going to war they tried to stop him. Craig advised the members of the Indian department to "use all their influence to dissuade the Indians from their projected plan of hostility, giving them clearly to understand, that they must not expect any assistance from us."⁸³ Brock did all he could to hold the hand of the Indians from war:

My first care upon my arrival in this Province [York, Upper Canada] was to direct the officers of the Indian Department to exert their whole influence with the Indians to prevent the attack which I understood a few Tribes meditated agst the American frontier. But their efforts proved fruitless, such was their infatuation the Indians refused to listen to advice and they are now so deeply engaged that I despair of being able to withdraw them from the contest in time to avert their destruction, a high degree of fanaticism which has been for years working in their minds has led to the present state of things.⁸⁴

Gore advised Claus to withhold the supply of arms and ammunition from those tribes that insisted upon going to war, but prudently to compensate the Indians with non-military supplies. He wanted the Indian department so conducted "that His Majesty's Government as far as may be, should preserve its faith with the United States of America, and its relations with the Indian Nations unimpaired, by the most liberal construction of neutrality towards the former, and benevolence to the latter."⁸⁵ In urging the Indians to peace, "The officers however should be extremely cautious in pointing out to them, that it is for their own good only, that this advice is given to them, and not from any dirilection [*sic*] of that regard, with which we always view their interests."⁸⁶

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 1893, p. 10.

⁸² *Michigan Historical Collections*, XXIII, 47.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, XXV, 281.

⁸⁴ *Report on Canadian Archives*, 1896, p. 65.

⁸⁵ *Michigan Historical Collections*, XXV, 282.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, XXV, 281.

After Tippecanoe, the British government working through Augustus J. Foster, British minister, at Washington, did all it could to repel the attacks made by the American press and Congress on England as the instigator of the warfare.⁸⁷ Sir George Prevost, governor-general, had published in many United States newspapers, especially the Federalist press, an article signed "Philaethes" which attempted to refute accusations made against the British. The following which was written to the editor of the Quebec *Mercury* gives us some idea of Philaethes:

I have been led to these remarks, Sir, by observing that the opprobrious system of national slander, this new species of warfare, against which neither virtue, nor valour can always furnish an adequate defence [*sic*] has been transplanted with other noxious productions from the polluted soil of France to the political Hotbeds of the United States, where they have for some time been shooting and spreading with a sort of forced and unnatural exuberance.

That the British Government in North America has instigated the Indians to make war upon the United States and has actually furnished arms for that purpose has not only been frequently advanced in the public prints, but has been more than insinuated in official papers and roundly asserted in the speeches of their legislators.

If I had access to these vehement Declaimers, I would beg leave to say to them, Where, gentlemen, are we to look for the source of this unmeasured enmity to England? Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts? If you really wish to go to war with us is it manly previously to vent your hostility in endeavoring to traduce our character? Do you not see that the unmerited reproach, that you would cast upon us, will recoil, with double force, upon yourselves? Is it politic, if you are bent upon fighting us to irritate a future enemy by unworthy artifices and fabricated charges, which must put his feelings to the rack? To labour to provoke a great and powerful people to forego their natural moderation and to rise into more than ordinary resentment by injurious and insulting invective? By accusation heaped upon accusation without consistency, without probability, without even the shadow of proof?⁸⁸

The English, then, sought to ally the Indians with them in event an Anglo-American war took place. To gain or regain their friendship after a long period of indifference

⁸⁷ Augustus Foster, British Minister to the United States, to James Monroe, Secretary of State of the United States, December 28 1811, Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Canadian Relations, 1784-1860*, I, 608-09.

⁸⁸ *Report on Canadian Archives, 1896*, p. 66.

they furnished the Indians with weapons of war,⁸⁹ and promised that they could regain land given up to Americans by joining with them in war. When they found that the Indians were going to make war they attempted to dissuade them. Such attempts must have been paradoxical to the savage mind. For on the one hand they were given armaments to wage war, and on other occasions they were told not to commence hostilities. Americans, therefore, were accurate when they reported that the Indians were receiving arms from the British, and that the British were encouraging the Indians to resist land sales. But when they reported that the British were urging the Indians to hostilities they were incorrect.

⁸⁹ The Indian department of Upper Canada sent in two requisitions for annual Indian presents. One was for peace time, the other was to be used in case of war. The war requisition for 1809 contained orders for 1700 firearms, 18,000 pounds of powder, 300 pistols, 20,000 pounds of tobacco, and myriad other items. *Michigan Historical Collections*, XXIII, 70-72.