

## William Wells and the Indian Council of 1793

*Edited by Dwight L. Smith\**  
*Contributed by Mrs. Frank Roberts\*\**

With the catastrophic defeat of Arthur St. Clair in early November, 1791, the American effort to establish peace with the Indians of the Old Northwest through the use of force virtually collapsed. Although the new United States had gained the area on paper, along with its independence from Great Britain, at the end of the American Revolution in 1783, the facts seemed to indicate otherwise. The Indians posed a real threat to the very survival of the small settlements which hugged the north bank of the Ohio and even to those south of the river in Kentucky. Moreover, the British had not even bothered to evacuate several posts on the American side of the Canadian border,<sup>1</sup> evidence which the Indians certainly respected more than the treaty surrender of these posts. Seemingly determined to hold actual control, the British gave the Indians moral and material aid. They increased the garrison strength of the posts which they held and even built (later, in 1794) another one, Fort Miamis along the Maumee River, at a strategic spot in the midst of the Indian country.<sup>2</sup>

Prophets of doom predicted dire consequences. Rufus Putnam accurately asserted that the Indians "began to believe them Selves invinsible,"<sup>3</sup> while John Cleves Symmes feared that Congress would abandon the frontier because of the costliness of an adequate military force and that the Ohio country settlements would soon fall to the Indians.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The posts stretched from Dutchman's Point on Lake Champlain on the east to Fort Michilimackinac on the west. In addition to the latter, Fort Erie and Detroit were of immediate concern to the western country.

<sup>2</sup> The fort was built at the site of a previous fortification within the present town of Maumee, Ohio. It was constructed as an outpost to protect Detroit. Samuel F. Bemis, *Jay's Treaty: A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy* (New York, 1923), 169, 175.

<sup>3</sup> Rowena Buell (ed. & comp.), *The Memoirs of Rufus Putnam and Certain Official Papers and Correspondence* (Boston and New York, 1903), 116.

<sup>4</sup> Symmes to Elias Boudinot, January 12 and 15, 1792, in *Quarterly Publication of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio*, V (July-September, 1910), 93-101.

With more insight than most American policy makers possessed, a British Indian agent, Colonel Alexander McKee, asserted that the Indians "will not quietly give up by negotiation what they have been contending for with their lives since the commencement of these troubles."<sup>5</sup> The official instructions of two American peace emissaries illustrate the considerable divergence of American policy from McKee's point of view. These instructions asserted: "We cannot ask the Indians to make peace with us, considering them as the aggressors: but they must ask a peace of us."<sup>6</sup> The Americans were determined to cling to the north bank of the Ohio and, furthermore, to push settlement up the rich valleys of the Muskingum, Scioto, Little Miami, Great Miami, and Wabash.

Repeatedly during the years from 1792 to 1794 the American olive branch was extended to the Indians. At the same time, however, a determined major military effort was abuilding under Anthony Wayne. If the former failed, the sword would be unsheathed.

Confident of their success, if it came to a military showdown, the Indians were nevertheless willing to make peace if the Americans met their demands. One of the Indian efforts to this end was a general council held in the summer of 1793 on the lower Maumee River. William Wells attended this council.

Wells had been taken captive as a boy of twelve by the Miami Indians and was adopted by their chief, Little Turtle. He married a daughter of the chief and lived as an Indian for a number of years. He participated with the Indians in action against Josiah Harmar in 1790 and Arthur St. Clair in 1791. After a visit with his family, he decided to leave the Indians and join the American army. Wells became a scout for Wayne, rendered valuable service in the campaign, and was rather severely wounded in a minor skirmish a few days before the Battle of Fallen Timbers. He also figured in subsequent peace negotiations. Wells later became an Indian agent. He

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<sup>5</sup> McKee to Joseph Brant, August, 1792, in William L. Stone, *Life of Joseph Brant (Thayendanega)* (2 vols., Cooperstown, N.Y., 1865), II, 333.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Knox to Peter Pond and William Steedman, January 9, 1792, U.S., Congress, *American State Papers, Indian Affairs* (2 vols., Washington, D.C., 1832-1834), I, 227.

was one of the victims of the Fort Dearborn massacre in the War of 1812.<sup>7</sup>

The following document is a deposition which Wells made to Wayne and concerns the Indian council along the Maumee.<sup>8</sup> The intelligence it contains was important in helping to determine the decisive American move against the Indians. The failure of the American commissioners at the council signaled the march of Wayne from Hobson's Choice, near Fort Washington (Cincinnati), northward into Indian country, a move which ended in Indian defeat at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in the summer of 1794 and the Treaty of Greene Ville in the following summer.

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N. Western Territory ss<sup>1</sup>

Personally appeared before me a Certain Wm. Wells, aged twenty four years born in the State of Pennsylvania, on the Monongahela & employed as one of my Emissaries at the private council of the Hostile Indians lately held at the Rapids of the Miami of the Lake.

Who deposeth & saith, that he arrived at the rapids on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of July last when he sat in Council with the

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<sup>7</sup> William Wells awaits a biographer. General information on his career is found in Bert J. Griswold, *The Pictorial History of Fort Wayne, Indiana* (Chicago, 1917), 127, 136, *et passim*.

<sup>8</sup> The details of the council are found in the papers of some of the observers, commissioners, and participants. The official records of Benjamin Lincoln, Beverly Randolph, and Timothy Pickering, the American commissioners, are found in *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, I, 340-361. See also Benjamin Lincoln, "Journal of a Treaty Held in 1793, with the Indian Tribes North-West of the Ohio, by Commissioners of the United States," *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections* (Boston), 3d series, V (1836), 109-176. Unofficial observers were sent by the Quakers. See Jacob Lindley, Joseph Moore, and Oliver Paxson, "Expedition to Detroit, 1793," *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections* (Lansing), XVII (2d ed., 1910), 565-671. The journal of Joseph Brant, one of the principal Indians at the council is in Ernest A. Cruikshank (ed.), *The Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe, with Allied Documents Relating to His Administration of the Government of Upper Canada* (5 vols., Toronto, 1923-1931), II, 5-17. For other related documents, see *ibid.*, I and II, *passim*.

<sup>1</sup> In the transcription of this document, the editor has been as literal as possible. The vagaries of the scribe as to capitalization, spelling, punctuation, and paragraphing have been retained. In instances of doubt, as for example in cases where a mark can be interpreted as either a comma or a period, editorial prerogative has been exercised by choice of the proper one demanded by the occasion. The use of "sic" and other editorial devices is held to a minimum. If words are repeated from the end of one line or page to the beginning of the next, they are not repeated in the transcription.

In the document occasional words or passages are lined out. They were probably left out of the copies of this original deposition that were

Hostile Indians—being adopted and consider'd as one of them,

that he was Captured by the [*Weeaws?*]<sup>2</sup> at 14 years of age & has resided with them, for Nine years & has frequently been passing from Post Vincennes into the Indian Country, that he went with a message from Genl Putnam last fall as far as the rapids to invite the hostile indians to a treaty:<sup>3</sup>

“At his arrival on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July last at the rapids of the Miami there were about 1400 Indians assembled & Continued to arrive daily until about the 20<sup>th</sup> when they amounted to twenty four hundred; *Eighteen hundred* of whom were *warriors*.

That they continued to Council daily until they sent their *order* to the Commissars [Commissioners] to go home that they wou'd not treat with them,<sup>4</sup> this was about the latter end of July. that they continued to meet in Council daily for ten days after they had sent that message to the Commissionsers, [consulting upon the mode & operation of war &c.]<sup>5</sup>

That they demanded the Ohio as the boundary & in their private conversation—they also said they ought to be paid for all the Lands in the State of Kentucky—

That Simon Girty sat constantly with them as one of the Council—That Governor Simcoe's Aid De Camp & a Lieut

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made to be sent by Wayne to his superiors. These words are omitted in this transcription unless they are necessary to the sense of the manuscript or unless they reveal additional information which the scribe as an afterthought decided to omit. In such cases they are included with the lined out words indicated in brackets and labeled by footnotes.

Since many of the place names and names of persons herein mentioned are generally familiar in the literature of the period, extensive editorial identification is not made. Their specific application to this particular situation is demonstrated in the other documentary accounts. See note 8 in the introduction to this document.

The abbreviation “ss” appearing in the first line of this document stands for “scilicet,” which means “namely” or “to wit.”

The original manuscript from which this transcription is derived is in the Anthony Wayne Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and is published here by permission of the society. A photocopy was graciously supplied the editor by Mrs. Frank Roberts, Fort Wayne, Indiana, who is conducting research in the same general area in preparation of a study for publication.

<sup>2</sup> The Wea were a subtribe of the Miami.

<sup>3</sup> The Rufus Putnam peace mission of 1792 is detailed in his correspondence and memoirs. See Rowena Buell (ed. & comp.), *The Memoirs of Rufus Putnam and Certain Official Papers and Correspondence* (Boston and New York, 1903), *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> The impasse was reached because the council demanded the Ohio River boundary as its *sine qua non*, a concession the American commissioners were not authorized to make.

<sup>5</sup> The bracketed passage was lined out in the manuscript.



WILLIAM WELLS

Silvy of the 5<sup>th</sup> British Regiment & one other British Officer with, Colo McKee,<sup>6</sup> remained in Colo McKees house at about 50 or 60 yards distance,

That every night several of the principle head Chiefs—particular the Shanowas & Delawares used to meet in private Council at McKees—with the aforesaid Aid De Camp, & British Officers—

That Colo McKee always promised, that the King their father would protect them & offerd them every thing they wanted in case they went to war such as arms ammunition & provision, at that place, but that they must come there for the provision that he cou'd not carry it any further; That they ought not to make peace upon any other terms, than to make the Ohio the boundary Line, but to defend their Lands at all events, & that the King their father would not suffer them to be imposed upon”

That a Majority of the Council had at three diff[er]ent times determined for peace & to send for the Commission[er]s—but Colo McKee always made them rescind next day—by his promisses over night—& that nothing prevented a peace taking place but the advice & influence of the British—that all the Western Indians were in favor of peace except the Shawanees Delawars—& Wayondotts

That the southern Indians i e the Creeks & Cherokees were determined for war, & wou'd Never hear of peace,

That it was ul[t]imately determined—that they wou'd all unite in making a General War & distroy the whole of the frontier inhabitants that the Southern & Western armies of Indians shou'd form a junction at the falls of the Ohio & penetrate the Country—that they wou'd never be at a loss for Provision, that the Kentuckians & *Long Knife* had plenty of cattle & corn & that they cou'd supply themselves—

That the western Indians were to fall upon & Destroy the army in the 1st Instance—& the Southern Indians to fall upon the frontier [of Georgia]<sup>7</sup> this fall & winter;

That Colo McKee furnished the whole of the Indians with arms ammunition scalping knives & tomhawks as soon as the treaty was over, & promised them Clothing when they wanted

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<sup>6</sup> Simon Girty and Alexander McKee were renegade American frontiersmen who defected to the British during the American Revolution and who figured importantly in relations between the Indians and the English.

<sup>7</sup> The bracketed words were lined out in the manuscript.

it—that the supply of Ammunition was very abundant even more than they cou'd use this winter that the arms furnished were partly rifles & partly Fusces [fusils]—the Rifles carry an ounce ball & have three sights behind two to lift up—in proportion to the distance at which they fire, that the Chiefs were furnished with Horsman swords & pistols

That the number of warriors who wou'd immediately operate against the Legion<sup>8</sup> wou'd be about *sixteen Hundred* composed of the following Nations, viz

Fighting men			
Shawanoes	300	Chepawas	150
Delawares	350	part of the Six Nations	35
Miamies	100	Cherokees & other Indi-	
Wayondotts	200	ans living on the Miami	65
Tawas [Ottawa]	150	There are six or seven	
Munsays <sup>9</sup>	30	other nations living on	
Pottawatimes	100	Lake Michigan who will	
	—	be with them say	40
	1230		—
			290
		total	1520

total Fifteen Hundred & twenty provided the army moves with rapidity—but if they advanced as slow as the[y] did in the Campaign of 1791—they [*sic*] Indians will most certainly Collect to at least *two thousand warriors*, they appear to be confident of success:—after delivering the terms &c they had a General war dance, that the British officers joined in it—particularly Gov Simcoes A D C [aide-de-camp] painted as an Ind[ia]n.

That the distance from the Miami towns is about 35 to Au Glaise, & from Au Glaise to Colo McKee's is about 24 miles—the place from which the Hostile Indians always received their supplies—that Mr Elliot<sup>10</sup>—partner of McKee's had set off for detroit for a large supply of Indian stores.

<sup>8</sup> After the defeat of St. Clair the army was reorganized. Its new designation was "Legion of the United States."

<sup>9</sup> The Munsee comprised one of the three principal divisions of the Delaware.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Elliott had defected to the British along with Girty and McKee.

that by this time, he must have returned with them; That there are small Indian Villages all the way from Au Glaise on both sides of the river down to Colo McKees. & from McKees to the Lake which is sixteen miles. & along the Lake all the way to Detroit—That there are always a number of Indians with and about Colo McKee's

That the distance from Fort Jefferson to the Miami Villages is about Seventy miles & from Au Glaise to Fort Jefferson is nearly about the same distance, the Indians however say it is nearer from Au Glaise to Fort Jefferson, than from, the Miami Villages to that Fort:—that the Miami Indians went directly from the field of battle to Au Glaise. That the route which Genl St Clair was on led to the right of the Miami Villages, & wou'd have crossed Genl Harmars trace before he reach'd that town, that the battle was fought on the main branch of the Wabash—& that had he taken a direct course from Fort Jefferson he shou'd not have crossed that river but once the course he was on wou'd have crossed it three times, that he believes the Indian path which Genl St Clair followed is on the best ground & wou'd have led him to the Miami Villages by turning considerably to the left after leaving the field of Battle, but the path is now grown up & full of bushes:—that he is of Opinion the nearest & best route from Fort Jefferson to Glaise wou'd be by the field of Battle & then to incline a little more to the right—was to fall in with the Glaise river some distance from its junction with the miami & keep down it which wou'd be sure guide to the Indian towns, that the distance from the field of Battle to Au Glaise is not more than forty Miles;

That the I[n]dian spies or runners frequently come in from the vicinity or within view of Fort Jefferson to Au Glaise in one day—that is between daylight & dark—that one of those runners wou'd go from Fort Washington to Fort Jefferson in one day—that he believes it to be farther From Fort Washington to Jefferson—than from Jefferson to Au Glaise

That their plan of operation will be in the first instance to attack the convoys—to kill the pack horses—to harress the army by firing frequently upon them in the night—four or six hundred at a time, until they fatigue them out—provided they think the army too numerous—but shou'd they think



themselves in force sufficient—they will immediately attack the army after passing the Battle Ground<sup>11</sup> perhaps before.

That the Indians seperated on the 28<sup>th</sup> ultimo & were to assemble again at Au Glaise in twenty five days from that time, in order to Operate, as circumstances may [illegible]— i e to watch the motions of the Army—& wait a favorable moment to strike

That two men belonging to Cap Priors Company deserted from Fort Jefferson one of them arrived at the rapids on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July—& gave the Indians as full intelligence as he was capable of—that two soldiers were captured near fort Jefferson, they were brought to Au Glaise, one of them was Killed immediat[e]ly & his body thrown into the river, the other was sent to a Shawane's town lower down

That were the Legion to penetrate as far as the rapids—he is decidedly of Opinion, that not only the Militia about detroit but also the British troops wou'd advance to Oppose us: that the Militia French & English are about fifteen Hundred Commanded by Colo. McKee

That the Creeks & Chickasaws were on the point of going to war with each other—but the Creeks say they were de-suaded from it by their Fathers the Spaniards—who told them if they wished to go to war—there were people who wanted to take their Lands from them—to unite & go to war against them—i e against the US—

That the Creeks were accompanied by a British officer from their Nation to the rapids of the Miami who they Called their Father—he lives in the Creek's Nation—immediately upon his arrival Colo McKee furnished him with a sailboat to go down lake Erie to Governor Simcoe's that he returned from thence to the rapids at the time that the Commissioners sent by two runners that they were going home

That this officer told the Indians he had accomplished the business upon which [he] went that arms & ammuniton &c were already sent to the Creek Nations by water—that the American Army wou'd be divided that part must go to the southward—that he had seen a paper mentioning that since they left home—the Creeks & Cherokees had destroyed several Villages & all the frontier inhabitants next those Nations—he told the western indians—that they wou'd have but a

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<sup>11</sup> "Battle Ground" and "field of battle" used previously refer to the site of St. Clair's defeat, where Fort Recovery, Ohio, now stands.

small army to oppose, that the Kentuckians wou'd find business enough at home—that they & the people of Cumberland wou'd be attacked by the Choctaws & Cherokees—that this is corroborated by the Cherokees themselves:

That all the southern Indians say they were advised & encouraged by the Spaniards to go to war against the Americans with a promise of a full supply of every thing they—wanted

That upon the whole he is fully of Opinion that a very General Confed[e]racy is formed and forming among the Indian nations against America except the Wabash & Illinois & Kickpoos [& the Six Nations]<sup>12</sup> Tribes of Indians who are determined for peace nor did they or any of the Chickasaw or Choctaws attend the Council—that there were letters from the two last named nations by which it wou'd appear that those Nations were much divided in their sentiments for war or peace—& that part of the *Chickasaws*—threatened to fall upon *Piomingo*<sup>13</sup> & his towns—because he refused to go to war against America.

That the Six Nations, were Generally inclined for peace, from the first to the last, except a few of their young warriors, & one Chief of considerable note who had but one eye

Wm Wells

Sworn before me at Hobsons Choice  
this 16<sup>th</sup> day of Sepr 1793

Anty Wayne

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<sup>12</sup> The bracketed passage was inserted in the manuscript and then lined out.

<sup>13</sup> Piomingo was the leader of a pro-American Chickasaw contingent that joined the St. Clair expedition in 1791. See "William Colbert," Frederick W. Hodge (ed.), *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico* (2 vols., Washington, D.C., 1907-1910), I, 322. Hodge's *Handbook* is *Bulletin 30* of the Bureau of American Ethnology.