

# FOR THEIR HOMELANDS

In the early 1830s, troubles stemming from the Black Hawk War were appearing near Kirksville. As a result two stockades were built: Fort Matson, which was built on the land across from the present-day Madison Church and Cemetery, and Fort Clark, which stood on Camp Collett east of Novinger. A force of around 500 Indians from Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, and northern Missouri began to threaten new settlements in this area. Sauk chief, Black Hawk, led the unsuccessful battles, which became the last Indian war in this part of the country.

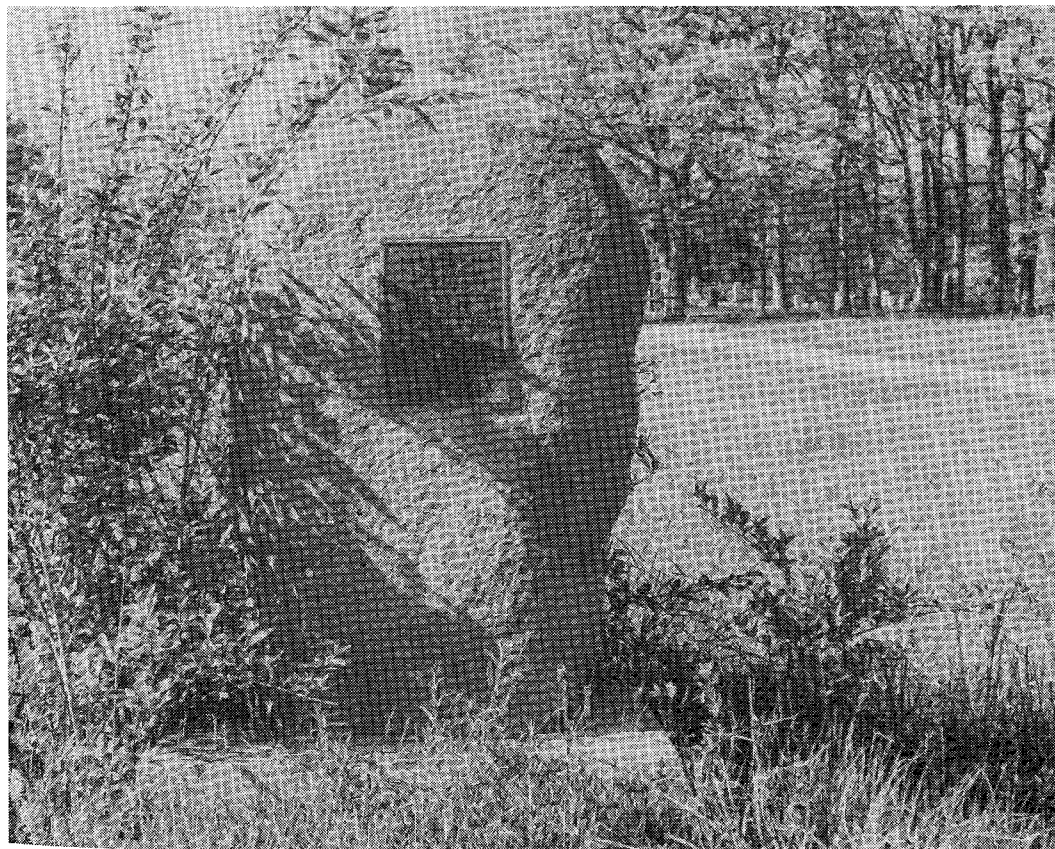
Chief Black Hawk was born in 1767. Known in his native tongue as Ma-ka-tai-me-she-kia-kiak, he became a minor chief of his tribe in 1788 at the age of 21. From this time forward, he struggled with the westward movement of the white man. A few days after the last battle of the war, Black Hawk was captured and taken as a hostage to Washington, D.C., to meet President Andrew Jackson. Black Hawk died on October 31, 1838, on the Sauk Reservation near Des Moines, Iowa.

The dispute named for the Sauk chief was over land located near Rock Island, Illinois, on which the Sauk and Fox Indians had lived for years. In 1804, a contract was signed by Keokuk, self-

designated chief of the tribe, in which the Indians sold their homelands for \$500 a year for 10 years. In return the Indians could live on the now government land until it was sold to white settlers moving into the area.

Although given monetary compensation, many of the tribal members did not accept this agreement. Black Hawk was one of them. He declared that the chiefs who signed the document were intoxicated and the liquor was provided by the whites involved in the deal. According to **Westward Expansion**, a textbook by Ray Billington, Black Hawk's "hatred of Americans transcended his good judgment" when he and his followers continued to live on the land.

**Westward Expansion** continues to state that authorities in Illinois decided that the "peaceful natives endangered the frontier." Governor Reynolds of Illinois sent the state militia to drive the Indians off the land and out of the state. Seeing the danger for his tribe, Black Hawk called a truce. A new treaty was created, stating that the Indians would cross the Mississippi River from Rock Island. They also promised to never re-cross back into Illinois.



*This bronze plaque, donated by the Daughters of the American Revolution, is mounted on the boulder designating the approximate area where Fort Matson was located. In the background is Fort Madison Cemetery. (Photo courtesy of Dr. David D. March)*

After spending a horrible winter in Iowa in which they had little food or shelter, Black Hawk made a decision to return to the land he had surrendered. Breaking the treaty, he led approximately 1,000 tribesmen, including many women and children, across the Mississippi near the mouth of the Rock River in 1832. He planned on peacefully returning to his former lands and planting crops with his people. As Black Hawk crossed near a fort on the Rock River, his group was shot at by soldiers who saw this as an aggressive movement. Black Hawk and his people continued to move in hopes of returning to their homelands; however, it was no longer by peaceful means.

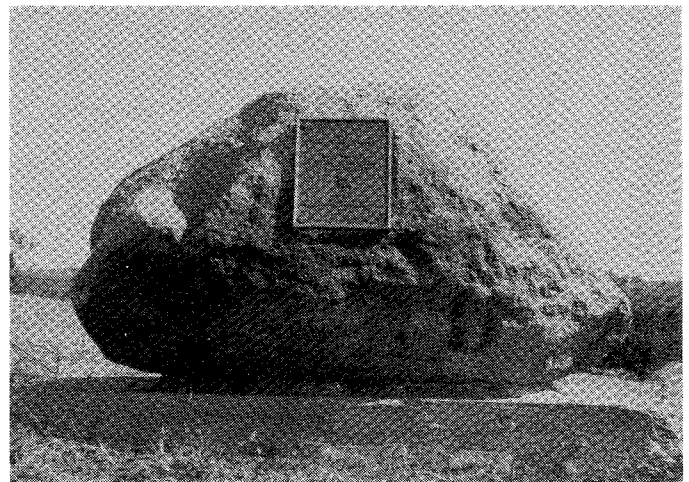
The last confrontation of the war was at the Bad Axe River in Wisconsin. Black Hawk's band of Fox and Sauk Indians were trying to cross the river. A group of around 1,300 vengeful Americans trapped them against the steamship *Warrior*. **Westward Expansion** reported only 150 men, women, and children that started the trip to the Rock River Valley three months before were alive after the Bad Axe Massacre: "It was one of the bloodiest tragedies in the sad history of American-Indian relations."

The Black Hawk War was short-lived, lasting throughout the summer of 1832. Before the conflict ended, two frontier forts were established in Adair County in preparation for the impending Indian uprising.

One of the forts, Fort Clark, was located at what has been called Camp Collett, the Gordon Collett farm south of Highway 6 and east of Novinger. It stood on high ground overlooking the Chariton River from the east. Inside the fort, there were three blockhouses that served as quarters for the military detachment that patrolled the area and for worried settlers that lived nearby. The fort stood idle for many years but later, the Collett family used the remaining structure as a stable for their horses. A bronze plaque donated by the Daughters of the American Revolution can now be seen in the area where the fort stood. It is mounted on a huge boulder furnished by Ira Collett in 1925.

The other fort built in this time period for the purpose of local protection was Fort Matson. Named after its commanding officer, it is found two miles east of an unmarked gravel road off U.S. 63, one mile north of Sublette. Currently, the Madison Church and Cemetery is across the road from where the fort stood. Captain Richard Matson came to Adair County in 1832 from Ralls County. The fort consisted of a stockade, a brush shed for horses and a separate log building used for general storage as well as for storing the company's magazine gun. A palisade, a high fence of stakes used for defense, surrounded a blockhouse. The company stayed the winter before returning to their homes or other military duties. According to Marlow Ediger, who owns the 45 acres on which the fort was built, "It seems to me like maybe the fort could have been there where that hill is located," the hill across from the church. Like Fort Clark, the land is marked with a bronze plaque on a large boulder donated by the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Although the Indians were not successful in their campaign, the Black Hawk War was the last Indian uprising in this area.



*This large boulder, located near Novinger on the Gordon Collett farm, marks the approximate site of Fort Clark. The plaque was donated in 1925 and Ira Collett had it mounted on the large boulder shown. (Photo courtesy of Dr. David D. March)*

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**By Kimberly Baker**

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