Wisconsin Death March: Explaining the Extremes in Old Northwest Indian Removal

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Throughout the fall of 1850, four officials of Zachary Taylor’s administration conspired to lure the Lake Superior Chippewa Indians away from their lands in Northern Wisconsin and Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. Two of these officials, Secretary of the Interior Thomas Ewing and Commissioner of Indian Affairs Orlando Brown, provided the initial approval for the plan, but they did not remain in office long enough to witness its disastrous results. The others, Minnesota Territory’s governor, Alexander Ramsey, and Sub-Agent John Watrous, were directly involved as prime movers from start to end. By moving the place for the annual annuity payments to a new temporary sub-agency at Sandy Lake on the east bank of the upper Mississippi and by stalling the delivery of annuity goods and money, they planned to trap the Chippewa by winter weather, thus forcing them to remain at this remote, isolated location.

This scheme, kept secret from both local Americans and the Chippewa, was designed to break the tenacious resistance of these Indians, who had rebuffed earlier efforts to persuade them to resettle in northwestern Minnesota. The stratagem failed. It succeeded only in reinforcing the opposition of the Chippewa to relocation even though it had killed large numbers of them: of the some three thousand (mostly adult males) who gathered at Sandy Lake in early October, some four hundred died before the survivors could make their way back to their homes by the following January.

This incident was demonstrably atypical of the experiences of the two dozen other Indian populations in the Old Northwest who were subject to the Indian Removal policy between 1825 and the early 1850s. On the contrary, judged by the degree of physiological stress and the casualty rate suffered during the relocation process, the Lake Superior Chippewa case represents an extreme. As such, it deserves special attention, since it and others like it generated much contemporaneous commentary while exposing the interests, aims, and intrigues of the diverse denominational, political, economic, and ethnic interests directly involved. Moreover, because it represents one extreme, to be fully understood, this Chippewa case must be compared with other cases of Old Northwest Indians subject to dislocation and resettlement. By examining the Lake Superior Chippewa case both intensively and comparatively, we can better appreciate how Old Northwest Indian communities reacted resourcefully and variously to American policy initiatives. In the Chippewa case the Indians drew effectively on a variety of relationships with and the support of Wisconsin citizens to oppose the interlocking national, regional, and local patronage system which, rather than “settlement pressure,” had fueled the drive for their relocation.

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Although these Chippewa were certainly victimized by a few American officials and punished by events under no individual’s control, ultimately they emerged from this confrontation as victors. During the three years following the abortive effort to dislodge them, they effectively maneuvered, procrastinated, and negotiated to a standoff those functionaries still bent on their dislocation, and in the end achieved their major goal of remaining on reservations within their preferred habitats in Wisconsin and Michigan by explicit treaty-specified right. Moreover, the Chippewa were not alone among the Indians of the Old Northwest in successfully thwarting American efforts to implement the removal policy. Systematic study of the diverse responses of the two dozen groups of Indians in the region subject to the various tactics of Americans to move them west makes this eminently clear and contributes further insights into the distinctive features of the Chippewa case.

Of the more than forty efforts between 1825 and 1855 to bring about the westward resettlement of Old Northwest Indians, there were just four where outright force, or—as in the Chippewa example—furtive deception and trickery, were employed to produce the results desired by federal administrators. In these few cases, the coercive tactics used contributed to extraordinary hardship and fatalities, consequences that can be, in some part, plausibly attributed to the actions of American authorities. The other three involved Black Hawk’s band of recalcitrant Sauk, Fox, and Kickapoo in 1831–1832, certain villages of the Indiana Potawatomi in 1838, and the Winnebago intermittently over the course of a decade and more after 1838.  

Although each of these four cases had its own distinguishing features, they shared a series of specific common antecedents, one or more of which were lacking in all other attempts to dislodge and to relocate groups of Old Northwest Indians. These features in combination conditioned the resort by Americans to coercion or deception. In sequence, the first of these was a serious, prolonged, public dispute over the legitimacy of a treaty obligation, with the Indians vehemently denying the right of Americans to demand the surrender of particular tracts and their resettlement and with their adversaries hewing to the right to evict. Next, such a dispute had to be moved to a crisis point, with the Indians adamantly rejecting further American efforts at verbal persuasion and the various incentives proffered. Finally, there had to be present politically influential local Americans with strong vested interests in securing the dislocation, transportation, and resettlement in particular places of the Indians involved. These interests were varied and intertwined. They included some combination of local political prestige, career enhancement, visionary dreams of ecclesiastical colonies, control of patronage resources, profound power needs, ideological convictions, the need for immediate income, the aim of thwarting rivals, the lure of capital accumulation, and others more or less distinguishable in the historical record.  

Lacking one or more of these three conditions, American authorities did not use force to drive Indians west in a manner that fits the “Trail of Tears” stereotype. Ordinarily, officials relied on personal influence, on oral argument (enumerating what they defined as the positive inducements for moving and the disincentives for remaining), and on the dispositions of the Indians to cooperate in what must be defined as encouraged, but not forced, migrations. Similarly, numerous groups of Old Northwest Indians, sometimes differing with Americans on the stipulations in treaty engagements, sometimes not, did not press the issue, but in-
stead escaped or evaded the removal policy entirely. By avoiding direct confrontation, such dissidents avoided a situation in which Americans were moved to use the exorbitantly expensive, often ineffective, and morally demeaning option of armed escort and manifest compulsion.

Three different cases together represent the antithesis of the Lake Superior Chippewas' extraordinary experience. In September, 1837, the Mdewakanton Dakota (Sioux), for example, sold their remaining claim to lands in western Wisconsin in what has been called a "removal" treaty. However, their relocation was to them a profitable non-event. As their capable agent, Lawrence Taliaferro, remarked in 1836, they were only maintaining the semblance of a presence in their former territory east of the Mississippi "so as to get a good price for it in case of a desire on the part of the U States to purchase."

They had earlier abandoned these lands, owing to pressures from intrusive Chippewa and other ecological and social imperatives (well described by Gary C. Anderson). With the help of Agent Taliaferro, who blew fluff into the ears of Washington officials about the desirability of "removing" these Indians to the west, the Dakota leaders then negotiated a treaty that provided them nearly a million dollars for lands they could neither safely occupy nor productively use. As of the fall of 1837, there were no Dakota east of the Mississippi to be "removed." Prompted and advised by Taliaferro, they had seen in the removal policy an opportunity for large profits at no cost to themselves. The Dakota were not alone among Indians of the region who recognized positive incentives in American initiatives that others, such as the Chippewa bands nearby, defined as menacing rather than beneficial.

Among those Indians who found opportunities in the removal policy were two groups that could not be touched by American authority, for they were British subjects residing in Canada. These voluntary participants came from among the Hurons of Anderdon Township and the Christian Indians (i.e., Moravian Delaware) of New Fairfield, Canada West. Both represented schismatic divisions of fully Christianized, literate, self-governing, predominantly English-speaking communities organized as townships in the Province of Canada. In both these cases, the decision to emigrate came after a long irresolvable factional dispute involving efforts of the Crown to purchase large portions of their reserved estates. Those who elected to emigrate were groups who favored both the sale and emigration to the West, moves long blocked by their rivals.

In neither instance was there a hint of American influence during the preliminaries. Instead, responding to solicitationstions from related peoples with similar concerns in the United States, both the Moravians and the Huron factions approached American authorities for permission to participate in the removal program. For the Moravians, the invitation had come from the "Missouri Party" of the Stockbridge-Munsee in eastern Wisconsin, a faction which also favored resettlement. Theirs was a considerable feat of arms, certainly demonstrating great enthusiasm for the journey. For in 1837 some 202 Moravians departed the Thames River valley in open Mackinaw boats, rowing their way across the western Great Lakes, via the Green Bay-Fox-Wisconsin River waterway to the Mississippi, and then traveling by steamer to St. Louis and eastern Kansas. In 1843, fewer Anderdon Hurons traveled west—making an easier trip of it by canal boat and river steamer—with their relatives and Methodist conferees among the Ohio Wyandots. In neither instance did all from these Canadian emigrant parties long remain in the Indian Territory. Many soon leased
or sold their "head rights" to the land they had acquired and promptly returned to Canada.

In contrast were the responses of several major groups of Indians that evaded or avoided the plans of Americans by one device or another. Numerous Potawatomi, Ohio Ottawa, and smaller numbers from other tribes slipped across the international border, using Canada as a temporary or permanent refuge, while others moved into northeastern Michigan or northern Wisconsin. Then there were more who—like those master escape artists, the Winnebago—simply refused to stay put after being repeatedly transported west of the Mississippi.12

Moving Indians into western lands selected by Americans for their supposedly exclusive and permanent occupation was one matter; keeping them there was an entirely different and often far more difficult one. As the exasperated Governor Alexander Ramsey complained from Minnesota Territory in the fall of 1851, "No argus-eyed vigilance on the part of officers of the Indian department can erect a Chinese wall between this tribe [the equestrian Winnebago] and the inhabitants of Wisconsin."13 His annoyance stemmed not only from the reluctance of dislocated Indians to stay where they were replanted, but also from the willingness of many Americans near their former homes to tolerate or even ease their return. Obviously, the removal policy at this date was out of tune with the disposition of peregrinating Indians and with the sentiments of numerous citizens of Wisconsin and Michigan as well.

Although his grievance was expressed a year after the scheme for displacing the Lake Superior Chippewa was conceived and set in motion, Ramsey had been one of the four actors most responsible for the design and through 1851 had actively promoted efforts to carry it out. If other Indians like the Winnebago could not—short of building and manning a "Chinese wall"—be separated from their old homes, then what sense was there in Ramsey's conniving to transport west yet another large population of manifestly unwilling, notably ambulatory Indians?

That the Chippewa were to be settled within the governor's jurisdiction, however temporarily, is but part of a necessarily complex answer to this query. There were, to be sure, considerable political and economic rewards to be gained simply from the business of transporting Indians westward, as Ramsey knew, even should they immediately counter-march. Yet this fragment of an explanation still leaves a larger puzzle. How, in 1850, did a Secretary of the Interior, a Commissioner of Indians Affairs, a Territorial Governor, and a lowly Indian Sub-Agent come to concoct a scheme that, in the end, caused the loss of many Chippewa lives and yet left the Chippewa in Wisconsin?

The scheme was designed a dozen years after Andrew Jackson and other leading advocates of removal had declared implementation of the policy a success, "as having been practically settled."14 The United States of 1850 was no longer the geographically compact republic anticipated in 1803 when Jefferson first conceived of defusing federal-state tensions by displacing unwanted Indians into a vast, newly acquired western territory. Nor was it the developing nation of 1825, when a "permissive" policy of community-by-community resettlement was issued by Executive Proclamation, or that of 1830, when the formal, comprehensive, nationwide provisions of the Indian Removal Act obtained congressional sanction.15 By 1850, the ideology of Manifest Destiny had been announced and affirmed, the Mexican war won, Continentalism achieved. No national leader could any longer confidently believe that conflicts involving culturally alien, not read-
Alexander Ramsey. Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Minnesota Territory, Alexander Ramsey was a prime mover in the effort to dislodge the Wisconsin Chippewa bands and to move them and their treaty granted resources into his jurisdiction. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.
ily assimilable Indians might be avoided by relocating them “permanently” in a huge western Indian Territory on lands that would be forever theirs. By 1850, this was no more a realistic plan than was the abortive parallel policy of reducing sectional tensions over slavery by repatriating Afro-Americans to Liberia.¹⁶

The political pressure for Indian Removal was effectively removed by events of the latter 1840s, which saw the emergence of a geographically larger, socially more complex United States. The new continental nation was far more diverse ethnically than it had been when the removal and repatriation schemes were conceived. Nevertheless, through the 1830s and 1840s the promise of permanency of tenure on tribal lands in an exclusively Indian Territory legislated in the 1830 Removal Act (essentially a segregated native homeland or apartheid policy) was confirmed in every proper removal treaty. No such stipulation was included in those negotiated with the Lake Superior Chippewa in 1837 and 1842 for the cession of their lands east of the Mississippi. The 1850 effort to dislodge them from Wisconsin and to resettle them near Sandy Lake—east of the Mississippi—involved a temporary location only, because of their specific history of dealings with the United States.

Occupying the farthest northwestern reaches of the Old Northwest, the Lake Superior Chippewa were the last Indians of that Territory to have their independence erased by formal treaty agreement with the United States. Although placed under nominal American sovereignty in the 1783 Treaty of Paris and again in the Treaty of Greenville in 1795, this was a status unknown to these Indians—who remained in a position of unqualified political autonomy. The degree of their continuing independence was marked by two developments. Unlike other foraging bands near them, they had sat out the War of 1812, declining British invitations to join in active military operations. Thus, not considered enemies by American authorities, they did not participate in any of the several subsequent peace treaties pressed on neighboring Indians—including related Chippewa bands—when hostilities ended. These postwar compacts restored the status quo ante bellum and required a fresh acknowledgement of American authority in the region, which the Lake Superior Chippewa had yet to deliver. Moreover, throughout the removal era, the Lake Superior Chippewa continued a century-old pattern of warfare against their Dakota neighbors, as good a measure as any of their autarchy and a major concern of Americans attempting to impose peace on this frontier.

Such concerns were expressed between 1825 and 1827, when three treaties were required at last to bring all these small, scattered Chippewa bands under some measure of American authority.¹⁷ These agreements established the bounds and bounds of Lake Superior Chippewa lands, declared a “peace” between the Chippewa and their Indian neighbors, defined a new subordinate political status for them, and included provisions for modest educational services and the payment of a minor annual annuity. So far as American authorities were concerned, these Chippewa thereby became dependent client societies.

Yet for a decade these agreements had little consequence for the daily lives of these Indians. No lands were ceded, while the small annuity fund and scanty Indian Office services provided were delivered mainly to those Chippewa living near Sault Ste Marie. For another full decade, contacts between the Lake Superior Chippewa and Americans, other than traders and a few ineffective missionaries, remained occasional and minor. However, these three treaties expressed the legal foundation for the Chippewa’s political
and economic future. The “tribal” boundary agreements, for example, were intended to ease, and were later used for, land sale negotiations, whereas at Fond du Lac (Duluth) in 1826, American negotiators had obtained a vaguely defined privilege from the Chippewa: “to search for, and carry away, any metals or minerals from any part of their country.”

Sixteen years later, when at La Pointe the Chippewa were pressed hard to cede their last remaining lands east of the Mississippi River, this seemingly minor stipulation about exploration for mineral samples was used as a weapon to defeat their resistance.

For nearly a decade following acknowledgement of their dependent status, few new settlers or entrepreneurs appeared among them, especially in the interior away from the watercourses. Then, in 1836, a variety of developments prompted both Chippewa leaders and American authorities to arrange the first of a series of land cession treaties. Among the Chippewa, the initiative came, significantly, from those along the upper Mississippi River, who with other bands were increasingly disturbed by declining income from the fur trade and were jealous of neighboring native peoples receiving annuities from the United States when they had none. Taking advantage of Joseph N. Nicollet’s exploration of the Mississippi’s headwaters, these Chippewa sent a delegation with this French astronomer-mathematician on his return to Fort Snelling. There Flat Mouth of the Pillager band near Leech Lake, the most prominent leader among the Mississippi bands, declaimed a list of their miseries and wants. Other tribes, including the Chippewa of Michigan, he complained to Agent Lawrence Taliaferro, “are doing better than us. They have treaties we hear, and they have goods and money. . . . We hear of treaties every day with our Nation on the lakes and yet not a plug of tobacco reaches us on the Mississippi . . . we wish to know when we might have our expectations realized.”

Unknown to the Chippewa, American authorities were already moving to arrange a cession of portions of their lands. That February the Senate had directed the Executive Branch to arrange a purchase of tracts north of the Wisconsin River. Seen from Washington, the aim was to obtain control of the shores of Lake Michigan and the Upper Mississippi, both to make the whole course of that stream the “barrier” between Indians and the organized states and territories and to gain legitimate access to the vast pine forests of the region. The latter represented a legislative response to the growing demand for pine lumber to build the proliferating new towns of the Mississippi Valley, a demand that had far outdistanced the supply of reasonably priced lumber shipped from western New York and Pennsylvania. Moreover, on the edges of the Chippewa’s pine forests proper, a coterie of long-resident entrepreneurs, recognizing a profitable new market when they heard of it, were already maneuvering to obtain private control of these valuable Chippewa resources. These were the old-line principals in the fur trade, the heirs and assigns of the dismantled American Fur Company, as well as smaller independent traders, led by such notables as Hercules L. Dousman, Samuel C. Stambaugh, H. H. Sibley, William Aitken, and Alexis Bailey.

For a number of years, these experienced local residents had been exploiting their personal ties among the Chippewa and other tribes, obtaining from them leases for sawmill sites and timber cutting rights in “Indian country.” Operating in the gray areas of Federal Indian law, their activities were scarcely slowed by an imperative directive from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs prohibiting such
private contracts. In early 1837, the Commissioner dispatched a trusted investigator, Major Ethan Allen Hitchcock, to evaluate the situation. He reported that water-power sites and locations for dams and impoundments along the streams in the piney region, vital for timbering, were few in number. Hence, unregulated, the American Fur Company’s successors could quickly obtain exclusive control of timber resources, which would block broader development of the region. From Fort Snelling, Agent Taliaferro reinforced Hitchcock’s reports, emphasizing—so he claimed—the opposition of these entrepreneurs to government interests and the growing antagonism of the Chippewa to them. Later, Wisconsin’s territorial governor, Henry Dodge, expressed additional reasons for defining a serious threat in the efforts of this cabal: they were, he charged, loyal to British interests. Thus, in addition to the concern with maintaining the government’s ascendency in managing Indians and the need to promote extraction of pine timber vital for regional development, two Jacksonian specters hovered over the preliminaries to the Chippewa’s first land cession: the threats of private monopoly and of increased British incursions into the economy of the Northwest frontier. Underneath, however, the real threat was one of old-resident, locally influential individuals to the established Democratic patronage system, interests that threatened the flow of political benefits to the faithful.

In May, 1837, Governor Dodge received instructions for this first Lake Superior Chippewa land sale. Therein the Commissioner of Indian Affairs narrowly emphasized to him the importance of acquiring the pine lands but forbade recognition of any existing private leases for lumbering, which in the end only provoked a land-rush for key sites even before the treaty was ratified (Fig. 1). Although a comprehensive national removal policy was then being implemented, no hint of such a provision was contained in these instructions or expressed during actual negotiations. On the contrary, Governor Dodge was directed to press for use of the proceeds for long-term local Chippewa social and economic development on their remaining lands in Wisconsin and Minnesota and to determine whether the western Chippewa bands would allow the United States to resettle the Ottawa and Chippewa of Michigan among them. From the perspective of Washington and the officials of Wisconsin Territory, there was yet no need to bring about the dislocation and westward “removal” of these Chippewa bands. Instead, they were expected eventually to resettle voluntarily among their kin to the north and west.

Practical arrangements for this parley created immediate and long-range problems. Since the Lake Superior Chippewa had been in an administrative never-never land (their villages were located between and remote from the Indian agencies at Sault Ste Marie and Fort Snelling), they had never been effectively served by any Indian agent. The latter place was convenient to Governor Dodge’s offices in Mineral Point, close to the Mississippi River traffic-way in extreme southwestern Wisconsin. But his selection of Fort Snelling as the treaty grounds placed arrangements for the meeting in the energetic hands of Agent Taliaferro. Taliaferro was rarely slack in promoting the interests of Indians within his jurisdiction—in this instance the Chippewa bands of the Upper Mississippi—nor reluctant to thwart the influence of his rival at the Mackinac Island-Sault Ste Marie Agency, Henry R. Schoolcraft. Thus from the start, the Mississippi bands, only a small fraction of whose lands were involved in this negotiation, were administratively much favored.

The second cluster of Chippewa in-
Henry Dodge. When governor of Wisconsin Territory in 1837, Henry Dodge negotiated the Treaty of 1837, and later defended the Chippewas' rights under the 1842 treaty to occupy and to exploit their ceded lands for "many years." Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

involved were from bands on the Lake Superior shoreline, and none of their lands were ceded that year. Lastly came the interior Wisconsin Chippewa of the Mississippi River's eastern watershed, whose lands were on the block that summer. These interior bands did not receive an official announcement of the treaty, and few of their leaders arrived at Fort Snelling in time to participate in or benefit immediately from the arrangements. This happened because neither of the two newly appointed sub-agents dispatched to carry word of the meetings—Miles M.
Vineyard from Crow Wing above Fort Snelling and Daniel P. Bushnell from La Pointe—visited the interior Wisconsin bands. Indeed, a year later Bushnell still hardly knew the locations of the bands he served or the boundaries of his sub-agency.

Although in earlier treaties the Chippewa had been identified as a “tribe,” the treaty sought at the confluence of the Mississippi and St. Peter’s rivers in July 1837, was negotiated with a new, American-conceived political-administrative fiction, the “Chippewa Nation.” The use of “nation” did not denote any sense of political sovereignty. Instead it was used as a means of dealing with the several Chippewa bands collectively. This novel appellation allowed American authorities to negotiate with some of their delegates as if they represented all and to treat the whole of the lands they occupied as a “national” estate, a concept alien to traditional Chippewa thinking. But while the leaders from the bands on the Lake Superior shore demurred, on the principle that the tract being ceded were not theirs to sell, the powerful chiefs from the Mississippi bands made no attempt to disabuse American negotiators of this
Chief Buffalo (Psheke). Old Psheke of La Pointe, the senior leader and speaker of the Lake Superior shore line Chippewa bands, led the opposition to resettlement in the west and the drive for reservations in Wisconsin. The marble original of this portrait bust was carved from life by Francis Vincenti in Washington, 1855. Chief Buffalo was then about ninety-six years old, and he died later the same year. Courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol, Washington, D.C.

misconception. Indeed, since they had little to lose and much to gain, they dominated the proceedings, intimidating their kin from east of the Mississippi. The few leaders from interior Wisconsin, whose lands were being disposed of, arrived late and scarcely raised their voices. 27

On the American side of the conference table, although instructed to obtain an outright sale of the whole region, Governor Dodge repeatedly said he wanted only control of the pine forests. Recognizing an opening when they saw it, the Chippewa instructed their official speakers,
Magegabow (The Trap) and the elder Bugonageshig (the elder Hole in the Day) in their reply. On July 27, Magegabow, in flowery words embellished by symbolic gestures, tried to communicate the Mississippi bands' chiefs' interim negotiating position. The Chippewa, he proclaimed, would sell the particular lands wanted by Americans, but they wished "to hold on to a tree where we get our living, & to reserve the streams where we go to drink the water that gives us life." The Secretary recording these debates, Verplanck Van Antwerp, was nonplussed, noting in the margin of the minutes, "This of course is nonsense ... I presume it to mean that the Indians wish to reserve the privilege of hunting, fishing, etc. on the lands." Clearly, this was not the American intention. Just as clearly, the Chippewa leaders understood their adversaries' aims of acquiring clear ownership of the whole tract.

Meanwhile, Magegabow continued, laying an oak bough on the table before Governor Dodge and saying, this is "the tree we wish to reserve. . . . It is a different kind of tree from the one you wish to get from us." Although these Mississippi bands' spokesmen had no direct interest in the lands being sold, they were declaring their willingness to sell pinelands (useless to them) and their desire to reserve from the sale the deciduous forests and the waterways, which were of particular value to the interior Chippewa as the game-poor coniferous forests were not. Certainly the Mississippi bands' leaders understood the American aim to purchase the use and occupancy rights to the whole region outright, for the governor had repeatedly explained this both before and after Magegabow's speech. What they were doing was hedging, inserting a qualification into the official record, one they could later use to dodge undesirable ramifications of the agreement or to reopen negotiations.

The participating Chippewa finally approved an outright sale of the whole tract. Notably, no mention of removal from the lands was inserted into the agreement; neither had there been any discussion of this matter. Instead, the treaty awarded the Chippewa the temporary privilege of residing on and taking their subsistence from the habitat ceded, "during the pleasure of the President." With these words the Senate delegated to the executive branch the necessary authority to determine when, in the future, Chippewa rights to occupy and to exploit the pine lands should end. Certainly, the Chippewa, at the time, construed these expressions to mean a very long time. Since they could see few Americans in their lands and since it was to be years before their basic adaptations were much disturbed by aliens there, they had no reason to think otherwise. Indeed, American officials at the time expressed no definite ideas about when this privilege would be withdrawn.

However, an eyewitness to the negotiations recorded a foreboding judgement about the "pleasure of the President" phrasing, not about the timing, but about the way this privilege would ultimately be withdrawn. Writing to his superior in Boston, missionary W. T. Boutwell predicted "trouble with the Chipys. before five years should they attempt to remove them . . . the Inds. have no idea of leaving their country while they live—they know nothing of the duration of a man's pleasure." An experienced observer of Chippewa ways, Boutwell was commenting on several social facts. The scattered, politically decentralized Chippewa, especially those in Wisconsin, would not feel themselves bound to contracts made by distant chiefs not their own, and they would likely resist a later order to abandon the ceded lands issued by any remote authority figure such as the President.

But so far as American authorities were concerned, a firm agreement had been
reached: the lands wanted had been acquired by outright purchase, while continued Chippewa use of the area was impermanent. So, too, were realized certain of the “expectations” expressed by Flat Mouth the previous year. Those Chippewa at the treaty grounds received a modest amount of goods, and the bands later got the benefits of a substantial twenty-year term annuity. For a time the annual payments—whether goods or money—were shared among some of the constituent bands of the fictive “Chippewa nation,” especially those from the Upper Mississippi and from interior Wisconsin. Although few of the latter had participated in the negotiations, after protesting the next year, they finally accepted the treaty’s terms when assured they would share in these annual payments.\textsuperscript{32}

The Lake Superior shoreline bands, however, by their own choice were excluded from the annual compensation. Nonetheless, a few of the latter were soon issuing complaints like those of Flat Mouth in 1836, expressing envy of those bands who were receiving payments from the United States and indicating a disposition to sell additional lands in exchange for annuities. Some American authorities, too, were concerned with this disparity, particularly because the lakeshore Chippewa still regularly visited British posts to receive “presents,” stipends supposedly “5 times” greater than the annual per capita payments from the 1837 treaty.\textsuperscript{33} Meanwhile, in the interior, the lumber rush was on. Hardly had the treaty been signed when the old resident entrepreneurs, whose maneuvers had helped precipitate the cession in the first place, flooded into the pine lands, there preempting prime mill sites and timber tracts well before the treaty’s ratification, land surveys, or public sales.

The resentments of Lake Superior-shore Chippewa were exacerbated by a decision reached by American authorities. Although the large, long established traders lobbied for Fort Snelling or—ominously—Sandy Lake, as the point of distribution for annuity goods, and while the Chippewa recipients themselves preferred several locations convenient to their villages, the Office of Indian Affairs fixed on La Pointe as the one place where the Chippewa had to gather yearly to take delivery of their treaty dividends. Therefore, for several years the lakeshore bands had to stand by and watch as those from the west and south assembled amidst them to receive payments. Certainly, significant parts of the goods and money delivered initially to the visiting Chippewa delegations quickly flowed, through long-established kin ties and reciprocal exchange networks, into the hands of the Lake Superior hosts. But this could not have satisfied the chiefs of the lakeshore villages, who witnessed their counterparts, especially the notably imperious and ostentatious leaders of the Mississippi bands, receive recognition and rewards denied to them. Thus more fuel was added to a growing discord, which soon pitted all Wisconsin Chippewa against those from the Upper Mississippi.\textsuperscript{34}

However, at the time, no one recognized the truly hazardous economic transformation then emerging. For many decades, these Chippewa, as specialized winter trappers, had been involved in flexible, personalized, predictable exchange relationships with individual traders. Now they were collectively dependent on a complex, ill-organized, impersonal federal appropriation-purchase-transportation-accounting-delivery system, a cumbersome arrangement that rarely brought payments due to a place on a date compatible with their own seasonal subsistence work. Over the next decade the Chippewa learned that this system seldom worked satisfactorily: long delays and interference in late fall wild-rice gathering and winter hunting, not to mention the
costs of long distance travel to the payment grounds, were the rule. On the other hand, there were unanticipated benefits from the treaty. As the clear-cutting of pine forests progressed, the size of the ecotone—the pine forest-prairie "edge" where white-tailed deer flourished—was vastly increased. Since deer were the most desirable and the prime source of food for the interior Chippewa, as the size of the herds increased the subsistence value to them of the lands they had ceded was also enhanced. This ramification was precisely contrary to standing American preconceptions: that the advance of "civilization" would cause a decline of available game and the voluntary migration of the "primitive Indian hunter."  

Nonetheless, although the issue had not been raised during the 1837 negotiations or by the Senate in ratifying this accord, Indian removal was in the air, for the resettlement of Indians from other parts of the Old Northwest was then being pressed vigorously. In response to rumors of such dislocations and reactions from the Chippewa, local Indian agents regularly advised their supervisors that the Lake Superior Chippewa would resist this threat with all means available to them. There was, simultaneously, little or no indication from neighboring citizens that moving the Chippewa was a desirable tactic.  

But these Chippewa had to cope with the real danger of treaty stipulated resettlement in the west during September, 1842. That month the same three clusters of bands that had negotiated the 1837 agreement gathered at La Pointe to debate a second cession, this one involving all remaining Chippewa territory in Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Again the Americans sought, not agricultural lands, but control of a valuable natural resource, the copper-ore rich tracts along the Lake Superior shoreline. The treaty dealings at La Pointe were in striking contrast to the 1837 council. At the earlier sessions, negotiations were, by the standards of the day, conducted in an open and aboveboard fashion, despite some manifest miscommunication and confusion. In 1842, the meetings provoked angry discord between opposed parties and a lasting controversy.

Before the final 1842 treaty document was signed, the chief American negotiator, Robert Stuart, had to engage in a variety of tricky tactical moves and coercive threats to force through an agreement. Moreover, to secure the consent of the parties most imperiled—Wisconsin's interior and the Wisconsin-Michigan Lake Superior shoreline bands—he had to issue firm verbal commitments, explicit stipulations not written into the formal agreement. Stuart (long a senior agent of the American Fur Company, recently appointed to succeed Henry R. Schoolcraft as head of the Mackinac Superintendency) faced an unusually complex and contentious situation. In addition to his duty to the United States, he had firmly in mind the fiscal needs of his former employer, John Jacob Astor. Moreover, he confronted an unruly assembly of diverse and generally opposed interests: old trading firms and newly established ones, several denominations of missionaries, mining entrepreneurs, the culturally marginal "half-breed" community, commercial fishermen, and—by no means the least divided or quarrelsome—the Chippewa themselves.  

The latter were now separating decisively into two divisions, those from the Upper Mississippi, and those who occupied the lands ceded in 1837 and the tracts to be sold at this meeting. Moreover, because control of the last of the Chippewa's Wisconsin lands was at issue, all involved were possessed of more than the usual windfall mania, which often stimulated dramatic confrontations at Indian treaty proceedings during this era.
Thus in October the parties gathered in a variously expectant, threatened, or angry mood. Most of them, "who otherwise before-time was but poor and needy, by these windfalls and unexpected cheats" eagerly anticipated obtaining some benefit, security if not wealth. They milled about for days and nights eager to shake free of the great treaty tree—each in his own direction—some of its perennial fruits.

The instructions Stuart received from Commissioner Thomas H. Crawford were of a sort to vex or inflame most of these interest groups. He could allow no payment of traders’ claims on the treaty grounds, a provision subsequently softened. Neither personal reservations for half-breeds or "friends" of the Indians, nor band reservations for the Lake Superior Chippewa were allowed. Most important for the future of these Indians was the unyielding two-stage requirement for their dislocation and resettlement. Those Chippewa immediately affected offered no opposition to the first of these, the plan for their immediate abandonment of those particular tracts containing copper ore. Neither did they oppose the cession of nearly all their remaining lands. They demanded, however, several small band or community reservations, both within the area ceded in 1837 and the lakeshore region now on the table for disposition.

Stuart’s instructions about the removal provision, however, were firm. The Chippewa would have to agree one day to abandon the land sold and to resettle in the remaining "national" lands west of Lake Superior, that is, in the territory of the rivals, the Mississippi bands. But the Commissioner of Indian Affairs had stressed, and Stuart in council repeatedly emphasized, that this second step migration would not be required for a "considerable time," not until "policy" required the President to call for their relocation.

On that issue—the timing of their resettlement—the fate of the negotiations hung. While Stuart readily disposed of the traders’ demands and those of the half-breeds, the removal issue so threatened the Wisconsin bands that they resisted obstinately. It was then that Stuart resorted to a heavy-handed deception, claiming that the Chippewa had already ceded the mineral tracts in 1826, an allegation that the Chippewa delegates (and their American allies) denied. Ultimately, to obtain substantial support for the treaty from those nominally in control of the lands, he introduced a decision-making novelty—majority rule. The lakeshore and interior bands, relying on the traditional requirement of a consensus, were thereby outmaneuvered. Unaffected by the cession or the removal provisions, and in line to reap yet more benefits at no cost to themselves, the eager chiefs of the Mississippi bands quickly gave Stuart their "votes." They had no more intention of welcoming the Wisconsin Chippewa into their lands than the latter had of moving there. For entirely different reasons, so, too, did the small Catholic and Methodist mission communities on the Keweenaw Peninsula cast their "votes" for Stuart’s proposals. This minority of christianized Chippewa believed that they could avoid removal by becoming landowning, tax-paying, farming citizens of the State of Michigan.

Even so the Wisconsin bands balked and protested. Stuart then inserted into the oral record a critical clarification and stipulation. Yes, he and the Chippewa soon agreed, they would immediately have to give up occupancy and use of the copper ore tracts proper. Additionally, some day in the future the President would likely require the Chippewa to abandon all the lands being ceded and to settle elsewhere. The question pressed by the Chippewa chiefs was—when? In the distant future, replied Stuart. Be more
specific, demanded the suspicious chiefs. Not during your lifetimes, nor those of your children, not for fifty to one hundred years, were Stuart's phrasings as recorded by different observers. Indeed, Stuart himself later repeatedly defended the rights of these Chippewa under such mutual understandings when others violated the explicit assurances this tough-minded Scot had publicly given.\(^43\)
Nonetheless, although most of the Wisconsin chiefs then capitulated, several remained unbelievers and refused to place their marks on the treaty document. In this manner was created the basis for a later, prolonged, unresolved dispute over the meaning of the 1842 agreement, a controversy over the issue of timing of Chippewa removal, the first necessary ingredient for the trouble that erupted eight years later. This controversy raged over what the Chippewa and their supporters (including Stuart) saw as premature demands for these Indians to move. No further condition, such as the Chippewa’s “continued good behavior,” had been discussed during the debates over terms, nor was any such condition mentioned in the years immediately following.\(^4\)

However, for more than a year before the 1842 treaty, a few key actors in Wisconsin Territory had regularly misinformed authorities in Washington to the effect that the Chippewa were eager both to cede their lands and to resettle west of Lake Superior. Together with his allies, Governor James D. Doty—who had strong personal and political interests in developing the new Northern Indian Territory in Minnesota and the Dakotas—was first among these promoters.\(^5\) Superintendent Stuart, following his first visits to his new charges, particularly after his exertions in extracting a land cession agreement from them, knew better. When the few advocating Chippewa removal continued their efforts, Stuart stood in opposition, arguing he had personally and officially promised them no removal for many years. Of greater practical importance, he pointed out, there were no obvious incentives for the Chippewa to make this move, for they had ample supplies of fish, game, and wild rice in their present locations and were experiencing few problems with the influx of Americans in the region.\(^6\) In addition, the Wisconsin bands were by no means eager to settle among those on the Mississippi, who twice had been deployed against them to their disadvantage, especially because they knew that the remaining part of the “national” estate was an impoverished area.

Chippewa resistance to removal was reinforced because, as they understood the 1842 treaty, they could not be obligated to give up use and occupancy of the ceded lands for many years, and this construction was championed by numerous Americans directly familiar with its negotiation. Similarly, the tactics used against them in the 1837 and 1842 negotiations had led to increased solidarity between Wisconsin’s interior and lakeshore bands. Facing a common threat in their politically altered environment, they began responding with better coordinated opposition. Prompt organization of their dissent was imperative, for within a year following the treaty, new pressures developed for their immediate dislocation. Despite the early opposition of Superintendent Stuart, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Crawford, Governor Dodge, and others, who variously argued that immediate removal was against the spirit of the treaty expressed in explicit verbal stipulations or that it would not benefit the Chippewa, this pestering continued and increased in strength. Wisconsin Chippewa opposition came into clear and successful focus in 1847, when the United States made an abortive effort to secure the cession of the mineral-rich north shore of Lake Superior.\(^7\) Knowing how much Americans valued control of that region, the Wisconsin Chippewa used as a bargaining token their rights to this—for their economic purposes—barren landscape. Without a treaty-guaranteed right to remain in Wisconsin, the Chippewa would have nothing to do with negotiations for the cession of the north shore, which they managed to block until 1854, when their demands for reservations were finally met.\(^8\)

When efforts to talk the Chippewa into
migration continued following the unsuccessful 1847 treaty councils, these communities stepped up their political opposition. Meanwhile, they proceeded along self-defined paths toward economic improvement in place, irrespective of what views American authorities held for their future. Then, in early August, 1847, Commissioner Medill signaled the preliminary design for their removal. The La Pointe sub-agency was to be closed, its functions shifted west of the Mississippi to Crow Wing even if efforts to secure the north shore of Lake Superior were unsuccessful. In the latter instance, relocation of the La Pointe sub-agency and its services, so believed the Commissioner, would have the effect of luring some Wisconsin Chippewa west, easing the way for the removal of the remainder. Later Medill explained the government’s plans for resettling all Wisconsin Chippewa that coming spring to R. Jones, Adjutant General of the Army. The Chippewa were not alone in Medills design: the Menomini, Stockbridge, and those Winnebago still in Wisconsin (then near statehood) were also targeted, together with the Winnebago in the old “Neutral Ground” in the northeastern part of the new state of Iowa. Together, these several relocations were designed to clear Wisconsin, Iowa, and southern Minnesota of their remaining Indians, leaving a broad corridor open for American movement westward, between the existing Indian Territory southwest of the Missouri River and a viable new Northern Indian Territory in northcentral Minnesota.

While these distant plans were being laid, the Lake Superior Chippewa followed their own variegated agenda of economic adaptation. The 1842 treaty had added a second valuable term annuity to their annual income. Over the course of twenty-five years, they would share with the Mississippi bands yearly an additional $12,500 in coin, an equal amount in hard goods, rations, and consumables, and over $6,000 for the services of blacksmiths, farmers, teachers, and other artisans. But this was only a small fraction of their annual needs, so these Indians proceeded to make up the balance by their own enterprise. Fur-trapping continued to be of small importance, while on the lakeshore, Chippewa men were increasingly engaged in commercial fishing, either with their own equipment or as seasonal labor for Americans. As mining developed, numerous Chippewa men transported supplies, acted as guides, cut and supplied mine timber, or delivered venison and fish. Intensive gathering went on, and gardening increased, particularly of root crops; this was largely the work of women, who traded surplus vegetable foods and otherwise served the mining crews. In the interior, where the timber industry was expanding along the lower river valleys, similar changes in economic behavior occurred, attuned to the labor and material requirements of that extractive industry.

Some few Chippewa, particularly those on the Keweenaw Peninsula, as well as at the Reverend L. H. Wheeler’s experimental station at Bad River, even approximated the old expectation of ill-informed American philanthropists by engaging in sometimes productive, male-managed, animal-powered small farming, although most others strongly resisted this novelty, risky at best in these latitudes. The substantial development, notably, lay in individual wage work and small-scale commercial enterprise, primarily in extractive industries, not in agriculture. But of greater long-range importance was the growing recognition among the local American population—most of whom were entrepreneurs, managers, or laborers, nearly all male, not under-capitalized small farmers with families seeking cheap land—that the Chippewa were delivering services and goods important to their
enterprises. The Chippewa were creating tight social and economic bonds with potential allies in their immediate neighborhood. 39

Thus, by early 1848 one necessary antecedent of a high stress, forced relocation was firmly in place: there was a prolonged, irresolvable dispute between Chippewa leaders and American national authorities over the right of the latter to demand and enforce abandonment of the ceded lands. Since Wisconsin's statehood was imminent and its laws would soon be extended over the area inhabited by the Chippewa, Commissioner Medill made a firm decision: they would have to leave. When rumors of government planning for this step reached the Chippewa they responded with a variety of political counter-moves. Some started asserting their "right" to reservations, claiming these had been promised during the 1842 negotiations. 41 But planning for relocation went on, with the 1849 establishment of Fort Gaines (in 1850, renamed Fort Ripley) on the upper Mississippi, and the reshuffling of agents and agencies aimed at concentrating the Chippewa on their remaining "national" lands in northern Minnesota. Chippewa opposition hardened as well, expressed in systematic lobbying in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Washington for the right to remain on small reserved parcels within the bounds of their old estate. A few on the Upper Peninsula, aided by their missionaries, started preempting and purchasing public lands, thereby acquiring the status of taxpaying citizens under state law. 42 Meanwhile, others sent delegations to plead their case in Washington. 43

The Chippewa delegations to the nation's capital did not find an attentive reception, for throughout 1849 and 1850 Congress and President Taylor were preoccupied with larger issues such as incorporating the far West into the American state and the associated crisis regarding the extension of slavery in new territories. Nevertheless, despite the unconcern with the desires of several thousand Indians in an already established Free State, various political-administrative developments combined to create a national and a local context for what Methodist Missionary John H. Pitezel, an eyewitness on the Lake Superior scene, subsequently called a "chain of distressing evils." 44

President Taylor's patronage sweep through the positions controlled by his office created the official team directly responsible for the Chippewa's winter disaster. Since the Indian Office had been transferred to the new Department of the Interior, relations with these Indians were brought under the supervision of a Taylor loyalist, Thomas Ewing of Ohio, a man more concerned with problems of the distant West than with those in northern Wisconsin. Secretary Ewing, however, strongly favoring the trading firms, kept a firm grip on the details of managing the Indian business, causing the new Commissioner, the Kentucky Whig Orlando Brown, much frustration. The third member of the administrative chain responsible for arranging the attempt to move the Chippewa out of Wisconsin was the Pennsylvania Whig, Alexander Ramsey, who in March, 1849, was appointed Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the newly formed Minnesota Territory. This trio had little experience in the management of relations with Indians, but the team was not yet complete. It was awaiting its fourth, junior but key, member, Sub-Agent John S. Watrous. 45

Until this time, the relocation of the Lake Superior Chippewa had been little more than an administrative intention; no specific mechanism for accomplishing this aim had been created. Neither had there been an immediate impetus for translating thoughts into deeds. Excepting the Lake Superior shoreline and the river valleys
traversing the pine lands, most of the ceded Chippewa lands were entirely unpopulated by Americans. The fact that the Americans residing nearby were almost entirely male likely reduced rather than increased local support for removal. However, there was simply too little “settlement” anywhere to create local “pressure” for removal. In addition, although they adamantly held to their right to remain in Wisconsin, the Chippewa had not forced the dispute to a confrontation point. Instead, still holding title to the north shore mineral lands, they remained pacific and reasonable, employing lobbying and bargaining tactics, seeking approval for reservations within their old estate.

The thrust, but not an explicit mechanism of Chippewa removal, derived from the appointment of Governor Ramsey, who was the titular head of the Whig party in Minnesota Territory as well as Governor. Being one of the few Whigs in a frontier Democratic stronghold and expected to deliver economic favors to party loyalists, his position in this new Territory was particularly difficult. Thus, concerned with patronage and with establishing a firm presence in his new office, when counseled by a powerful Minnesota trader, H. H. Sibley, Ramsey could see that the Wisconsin Chippewa presented an opportunity. Obtaining their removal meant also transferring their large annual annuities and the numerous salaried jobs associated with their management into his superintendency. As well as moving an important patronage resource out of a Democratic state into his hands, the resettlement would also have meant a policy coup, a major step toward rejuvenating the floundering plans for a Northern Indian Territory.

The April 22, 1850, appointment of John S. Watrous as the new Chippewa sub-agent added a critical figure, a man with at least some experience in the region and among these Indians, and one with a profound vested interest in seeing them dislodged. Originally from Ashtabula, Ohio, Watrous had arrived at La Pointe in 1847 hoping to make his fortune in the Indian trade, in which he was unsuccessful. Something of a political chameleon, in early April he left his desk in the Wisconsin State Assembly—where he had briefly served a Democrat constituency in the northwestern part of the state—to travel east in search of greater opportunity, likely drawn there by news of the Presidential order revoking the Chippewa’s 1837 and 1842 treaty privileges. In Washington he presented himself to influential friends of his family as a staunch Ohio Whig and as a man experienced in dealing with the Chippewa.

Watrous was a man with plans—for himself and for dispossession these Indians. He was soon dispatched to his new post carrying Commissioner Brown’s official, public orders to bring about the immediate movement of the sub-agency into Minnesota Territory, as well as a covert scheme for dislodging the reluctant, wary Chippewa. Thus was combined an ongoing dispute over a treaty and several influential local actors—men with vested interests in securing a removal. A potential disaster lay waiting only the major confrontation that the Chippewa had been avoiding. Guided and supported by his superiors in the administrative hierarchy, particularly by Governor Ramsey, Watrous soon manufactured this confrontation.

The public version of these plans specified a summer, 1850, timing for the relocation. However, aside from closing down the sub-agency’s operations in Wisconsin and Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, Watrous did little to bring about the move that early. Indeed, there is no suggestion anyone believed the Chippewa would cooperate had such an attempt been made. Aside from Ewing, Brown,
Ramsey, and Watrous, few if any others knew of the covert, contingency design, timed for a tricky, hazardous, early winter dislocation. In any respect, news of the President’s executive order withdrawing the privilege of occupying the ceded lands spread rapidly, and the reaction was equally swift. While the Chippewa and their American allies began mobilizing for political resistance, there was also much demoralization. Of those who had been farming, many would not plant crops that spring; many more spent long periods in councils debating how to avoid resettlement. The time and energy spent in political agitation and the wasted economic inactivity resulted in decreased food production that summer and fall. The Chippewa became even more dependent on government rations, which contributed to the winter debacle.

Protestant and Catholic missionaries associated with the Indians were divided in their reactions. Being largely dependent on federal funds for their operations, they had to tread lightly; the position most commonly expressed was one of ambivalent neutrality, and none rose to a heroic defense of the Chippewa. On the one hand, they deferred to presidential authority; on the other, they had to consider what they saw as their responsibilities to the Chippewa, which were, mainly, to see to the future of themselves and their schools and missions among the Indians. Most commonly, while not actively supporting or opposing relocation, they would not counsel the Indians to move or stay. In the end, only a few became active advocates of resettlement. The Reverend Sherman Hall at La Pointe was one. Soon after taking office, Watrous acquired Hall’s loyalty with the promise of an important job at the proposed new Indian boarding school in Minnesota.

However hesitantly, soon some missionaries quietly began aiding the Chippewa in framing their petitions and helping to mobilize help from other Americans in the region. One active and effective supporter was Cyrus Mendenhall, a mining entrepreneur associated with the Methodist Episcopal Mission Society, who on an inspection trip along the Lake Superior shore in June, 1850, circulated a memorial among Americans calling for the recall of the removal order. Most merchants, mine foremen, lumbermen, and other influential citizens between Sault Ste Marie and La Pointe responded to Mendenhall’s appeal, which was subsequently delivered to Congress and officials in Washington. Mendenhall kept up the pressure and was soon joined by the Reverend S. B. Treat (Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions). Their lobbying effort grew in force and did not end until after removal order was withdrawn two years later.

Indeed, from the start there was no evidence of local public support for the Chippewa’s removal. Regional newspapers, echoing and reinforcing the sentiments of their readers, regularly criticized the President’s order and both the motives for and the tactics employed in efforts to implement it. Sault Ste Marie’s Lake Superior News and Mining Journal was consistently strident in its support of the Chippewa, and its editorials and news clips were picked up and reprinted throughout the Great Lakes area. The Chippewa even made the news in Boston, when one of their delegations passed through on its way to Washington. The fact that the whole region occupied by the Chippewa was strongly Democratic did not aid the Taylor administration in its efforts to dispossess them.

Meanwhile, Sub-Agent Watrous worked at implementing the public version of his orders. He first conducted an inspection tour of Sandy Lake (Fig. 2), the new site where the Chippewa annuities were to be
distributed. There he began arranging his own future as well, at that profitable intersection between private enterprise and public business. He established a mutually promising relationship with the agents of Chouteau and Company, the St. Louis firm that dominated trade in that area, and with potential contractors, suppliers, and transportation firms in St. Paul. By the end of July, 1850, he enjoyed a freedom of action greater than most Indian agents, for three key figures at the top of the Whig political hierarchy and national administration were gone, with the death of President Taylor and the resignations of Secretary Ewing and Commissioner Brown. Meanwhile, Congress was violently debating the Great Compromise, not mundane domestic matters such as the Indian Appropriation Bill. Thus an unanticipated ingredient was added to Watrous’s covert plan—whatever he did or abstained from doing, the vital Chippewa annuity money would certainly be dangerously late in arriving. At the same time, the Chippewa were celebrating what seemed to them a success. Watrous had led them to believe that they had only to come to Sandy Lake—285 to 485 difficult canoe and portage miles to the west—to receive their annuities. Some Chippewa determined to do this, while all understood that they could for many years remain in Wisconsin even if it meant giving up the treaty specified annuities and local services of blacksmiths and farmers.
These Indians and local citizens had no inkling that, earlier in the year, Commissioner Brown had sent Governor Ramsey a different set of orders and a plan, which Watrous, if not himself its principal architect, was certainly aware of before he left Washington in late April. This plan was never made public, allowing Ramsey and Watrous later to deny that a removal had ever been intended during the winter of 1850-1851. The scheme was straightforward. Annuity goods and money were to be paid only to those Chippewa who traveled to Sandy Lake accompanied by their families. These payments were not to be made in late summer or fall, because then the Chippewa would simply return to "their old haunts." Instead, the payments were to be made only after winter had set in, preventing travel by canoe. Someone, most likely Watrous, had advised the Commissioner of the Chippewa’s great aversion to overland winter travel. Lured by their annuities, they were to be trapped near Sandy Lake by winter’s freeze.65

In early October, the Lake Superior Chippewa were informed that both their cash and goods annuities would be waiting for them at Sandy Lake on the 25th of that month, a date already dangerously late in the season, which guaranteed at minimum further disruption of their own seasonal subsistence work. Watrous had by then obtained the goods specified in the 1837 and 1842 treaties and had them, together with a grossly inadequate supply of rations, delivered to Sandy Lake at extraordinarily high prices. Since the new sub-agency’s farms were not yet in operation, there were no public food supplies stored at that remote location. Thus, once the Chippewa received their money annuities, they were heavily dependent for basics on purchases from the local traders, since the marshy Sandy Lake region, as well as the route going and coming, were notoriously deficient in game. This deficiency was exacerbated when the upper Mississippi flooded that season, inundating the crude structures where the supplies of both the government and the private traders were stored, spoiling the inadequate amounts of flour and salt pork available, and destroying the local wild rice crop. To compound these sources of nutritional stress, the Lake Superior shoreline Chippewa had a poor fishing season earlier that year and had already experienced grave food shortages.66

Constructed in this manner by several key actors with personal and political goals overriding any concern they may have had for their charges, with an assist from uncontrollable natural and institutional events, a tragedy lay in waiting for those Chippewa electing to hazard the long trip to Sandy Lake. Not all the Lake Superior Chippewa accepted the high risks they could see in this dangerous edge-of-winter journey. The bands at L’Anse, Ontonagon, Pelican Lake, and La Vieux Desert refused entirely. Those from the headwaters of the Wisconsin River sent but two men, and the villages on the Chippewa River drainage somewhat more. More came from the La Pointe area villages, but in all these instances the Chippewa took precautions. Ignoring orders to bring their families, they dispatched mainly adult males. Apparently, only from those villages closest to Sandy Lake, on Lake Superior’s northern shore and on the upper Mississippi, did some family groups make the journey. Moreover, intending to pack the annuity goods for their communities home by canoe and on their backs, these delegations traveled light, without the rolls of birchbark and woven mats needed to sheath temporary wigwams, many even without their firearms. These decisions further contributed to the physiological stress they experienced over the next three winter months.67

Those Chippewa bands who sent dele-
gations to collect their annuities coordinated their travel plans. Coming by different routes, they assembled at Fond du Lac before pressing up the difficult portages along the St. Louis River, and then via the Savanna portage to the marsh and bogs surrounding Sandy Lake. Exactly how many made the trip is uncertain. It was likely fewer than 3,000, the figure Watrous later used in boasting of how many he had "removed" that winter. Earlier, he claimed 4,000 had assembled by November 10, but this number included some 1,500 from the Mississippi and Pillager bands, present to collect their annuities, not to be resettled. Watrous never provided his superiors with careful counts or lists of those who arrived, for once confronted with the disaster his actions had caused and the great hostility of the assembled Chippewa, he distributed the remaining putrefying rations and the other goods from the flooded warehouses to those present, disregarding his orders to deliver only to family groups.68

Those Lake Superior Chippewa hazarding this journey began arriving at Sandy Lake in mid-October. They discovered Watrous gone and no one present authorized to parcel out the goods waiting for them; he was on his way to St. Louis supposedly to collect the more valuable annuity money. Soon the suffering began—from illness, hunger, and exposure. The sojourners lacked shelter, and most of the scanty supply of spoiled government rations were quickly consumed, leading to an epidemic of dysentery so incapacitating and deadly that American witnesses were certain it was cholera. This was soon accompanied by an epidemic of measles, which further contributed to high rates of illness and fatalities. The Chippewa were concentrated in an unsanitary, waterlogged area, with few natural food supplies available. While they lacked shelter and medical services, were unable to collect their goods, waited day-to-day for the arrival of Watrous to bring their critically needed money payments and to open the warehouses, the Chippewa’s health and energy were increasingly sapped by hunger, infectious diseases, and the winter now on them. If some of these components had been absent, they might have scattered, reducing the rate of reinfection. As it was, American witnesses reported that on many days there were eight or nine deaths, so many that the few who were well could not inter the corpses properly.69

Watrous saw only the last days of this calamity, for he was absent from his post until November 24, a month later than the promised payment date that had lured the Chippewa west. After sending messages for the Chippewa to assemble, on October 6 he left for St. Louis and arrived there on the 21st, four days before the scheduled payment, then at least two weeks hard travel to the north. In St. Louis he soon learned that no funds had arrived and none were expected that year, information he could easily have anticipated while yet in St. Paul, for the national political crisis had so stalled Congress that for months little attention was given ordinary domestic matters. The Appropriation Bill providing funds for the Chippewa’s annuities did not pass until November 12, much too late in the year for the required physical delivery of the specie to such a remote location. Watrous on October 26 finally took passage on a steamer for his return trip, but the vessel was delayed, and he did not arrive at St. Paul until November 13. There he tarried two more days, attending to his own business, mainly pleading to obtain an upgrading of his Sub-Agency and a promotion for himself. He did not leave St. Paul until the 15th, and then the onset of winter forced him to abandon his canoe and travel on foot overland, an ill augury for the sick, starving Chippewa at Sandy Lake, who had been waiting six weeks for their goods and money.70
The major unanticipated institutional ingredient adding to the scale of the disaster organized by Brown, Ramsey, and Watrous was the failure of Congress to appropriate funds for the Indian Department in a timely fashion. Without hard cash to purchase necessaries for the winter, the Chippewa—who in addition to the epidemic illness, great loss of life, and their general debilitation had lost an entire season’s subsistence production—were in even more desperate condition.

However, on arriving at Sandy Lake on the 24th and seeing the consequences of his scheme, Watrous set to work cutting his administrative losses. The idea of trying to keep these sick, starving Chippewa near the Mississippi was swiftly dropped. He then did what little he could to relieve their “pinching wants.” After much wrangling over who would be responsible for the unauthorized expenditure, he persuaded the traders to deliver a small quantity of ammunition at a highly inflated cost to the Chippewa for subsistence hunting on their way home. Similarly, he drew up arrangements for the traders to deliver to the Chippewa from their stores $8,368.40 in provisions, an advance against their yet unpaid cash annuity, at what he claimed were “the most reasonable terms possible.” The terms were in fact extraordinary, three to six times those of prices at St. Paul and other nearby depots. By Governor Ramsey’s own estimates, this amount was barely three days supply of food, entirely insufficient for the Chippewa’s arduous return trip.

Finally, on December 3, with winter fully on them, when their scanty rations and goods were at last in their hands, the encampments broke up. The Chippewa left immediately, abandoning two hundred sick and a few well adults to care for them. By then more than a foot of snow lay on the ground and the streams were frozen over, preventing the use of canoes, which the Wisconsin Chippewa jettisoned along the St. Louis River or scrapped to be used as fuel for the frigid nights. Then they set off on foot along the frozen trails eastward, heavily laden with the goods for their families. By the Chippewa’s own reckoning, many more died on the trails home than had died at Sandy Lake. 72

The total mortality for this whole sorry episode cannot be determined exactly. Watrous, himself, although sometimes claiming reports of epidemics and starvation were exaggerated, admitted that more than 150 had died at Sandy Lake proper, including twenty of those left in his charge after the Chippewa departed. About two hundred was the estimate of several missionaries present part of the time at the new Sub-Agency during these events, while William W. Warren, a month after the goods distribution, reported that nearly two hundred died at Sandy Lake alone. But the best enumerations were likely those of the Chippewa leaders themselves, for they were totaling up their own deceased kin. Two separate reports from them, one from the elder Psheke [Buffalo] and his fellow leaders at La Pointe in November, 1851, and a second from the interior Wisconsin leaders a year later, agreed that 170 died during the time spent waiting at Sandy Lake, with another 230 dying on the return trip. Most of these were adults, mainly able-bodied men, an especially hard blow to these small populations. Thus, of the population at risk, something less than three thousand, the Ewing-Brown-Ramsey-Watrous plan to lure the Lake Superior Chippewa west and trap them there successfully removed some twelve per cent, by killing them. The human loss was one thing: in addition the Chippewa also lost much capital equipment (their canoes), much critical subsistence work and other productive economic activity, and they went further into debt, when they were forced to encumber unpaid and future annuity funds for survival rations. 73
After returning to their homes, the Chippewa were even more determined to avoid removal. Neither would they at any time of the year so much as visit Sandy Lake, which they now defined as a "graveyard." Once information of the winter’s carnage became public, Watrous came under sharp, continuing attack from the Chippewa and their now numerous supporters. Missionary groups, regional newspapers, and local citizens led the opposition, and the legislatures of Wisconsin and Minnesota aided, while the Chippewa themselves began organizing a series of memorials and delegations to Governor Ramsey and to Washington. Within six months the new Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Luke Lea, and the Secretary of the Interior responded to this lobbying effort, seemingly in favor of the Chippewa.

On August 25, 1851, the Secretary issued instructions apparently rescinding the 1850 removal order. Transmitted to Watrous by telegraph, this information became immediate public knowledge, spread by the *Lake Superior News* in an account highly favorable to the Chippewa. A few weeks later, leaders from the La Pointe and other bands traveled to Sault Ste Marie for a grand "Indian Jubilee" celebrating their victory. The rejoicing was premature. Although the removal order itself was publicly withdrawn, actual efforts to accomplish this goal were not ended; for the requirement that annuities be paid only to Chippewa in the west remained in force, and Agent Watrous continued determined efforts to dislodge them on an even larger scale than earlier.

Backed by Governor Ramsey, Watrous had begun active, large-scale removal operations early in the year, and these continued through 1851 and 1852 irrespective of publicized instructions from Washington. Recognizing that the Chippewa would have nothing to do with Sandy Lake, Watrous selected Crow Wing and Fond du Lac as destinations more likely acceptable to them. He marshalled his forces, employed more personnel, placed influential marginals such as William W. Warren and missionaries such as W. L. Boutwell on his payroll, stockpiled resources, let contracts, issued assembly orders, called for troops to aid his work (which were refused), and scurried around the region working to lure the Chippewa out of their ceded territory, all the while affecting to keep his plans secret from the Chippewa and their American allies.

The one major incentive Watrous had was the annuity fund, now doubled because of the accumulation of 1850 and 1851 installments. To increase the pressure he refused payment in Wisconsin to any subdivision of the Chippewa: Pagan, Christian, Successful Farmer, New Land Owner, Half-Breed, Lake Shore Fisherman, Interior Hunter, whatever. And in autumn, 1851, he made plain that he still favored the same deception plan and tactics that had proved so disastrous a year earlier. "It is my intention," he reported to Ramsey on September 22, "to delay (unless otherwise instructed) making the moneyed payment of the present year to the Chippewas of Lake Superior until after navigation ceases, which is done to throw every obstacle in the way of their returning to their old homes." The governor did not otherwise instruct.

However, in spite of all the preparations and expenditures, most Chippewa would have nothing to do with these plans. Many traveled to Fond du Lac or Crow Wing that fall; after obtaining their annuities, few tarried to experience a repeat of the previous year’s debacle. Nonetheless, the newly promoted Agent Watrous proclaimed near total success, reporting that only seven hundred Chippewa remained in the east subject to later removal. His reports were seconded by
Governor Ramsey, who also professed victory in his Annual Report. Both were dissembling, as local citizens, employees of the removal effort, missionaries, the newspapers, and the Indians themselves well knew. The Wisconsin and Upper Peninsula Chippewa remained within their old band territories, irrespective of the change in their status caused by Wisconsin’s statehood and the cession of their lands.76

These attempts to dislodge the Lake Superior Chippewa continued through 1852, but with diminishing effect. As the protests of the Chippewa and their allies grew in volume, and evidence of costly failures mounted, a final delegation to Washington at last produced success. Following a meeting of old Psheke from La Pointe with the President in late June, 1852, when another petition from the citizens of the Lake Superior shore was presented, Millard Fillmore finally cancelled the removal authorization entirely. Of even greater value to the Chippewa, the President now approved the payment of back, current, and future annuities at La Pointe. The Chippewa victory was complete two years later. Then, after a Democratic President had taken power in Washington, a new Commissioner of Indian Affairs, George W. Manypenny, dismantled the old Indian removal policy and installed a new program emphasizing concentration on reservations and economic development in place. On September 30, 1854, the Lake Superior Chippewa signed their last treaty with the United States, one severing relationships with the Mississippi bands, and guaranteeing them the right to reside on and take their subsistence from reservations within the environments they had long inhabited.77

Forty years ago, in the first attempt to find order in the implementation of the removal policy among the Indians of the Old Northwest, Grant Foreman concluded that their resettlement was, “haphazard, not coordinated, and wholly un-systematized,” and further asserted that the whole period for these peoples was characterized by no pattern.78 But if we plot the different responses of all Old Northwest Indian societies to the removal policy against the basic forms of their adaptations to broad biotic zones, their different types of social organization, and the paths and various goals of American intrusions into their lands, a clear matrix emerges. This underlying pattern yields a near mutually exclusive distribution of those Indian communities that did resettle in the western Indian Territory against those that did not. By placing their activities into a broader social context, this pattern also helps to make understandable the Chippewa’s resistance to relocation.

The Chippewa of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula and Wisconsin were by no means alone in their successful resistance to this American inspired and commanded resettlement program. Despite repeated efforts running over many years, the federal authorities entirely failed in efforts to dislodge any of the native societies in the Great Lakes region similar to these Chippewa in basic social organization, technology, subsistence economy, environmental adaptation, and culture.

Those Old Northwest Indians whose assessments of the removal policy were most strongly negative were foraging peoples, dependent on hunting, fishing, and gathering for their subsistence, while they exchanged for manufactured goods and money the same products needed for their own sustenance. They inhabited biotic zones characterized by numerous streams, marshes, and lakes, with long, harsh winters and extensive deciduous and coniferous forests. They were also skilled builders and users of framed-up bark canoes, their main means of transportation. And their direct contacts and
experience with the western prairie lands were few or none.79

Thus, the Lake Superior Chippewa’s success in thwarting implementation of the removal policy was true also of extensive populations of other Chippewa communities, and the Menomini, Ottawa, and those Potawatomi villages on the Lake Michigan shore above present Milwaukee. Organized as small, autonomous bands, these native peoples had maintained their political, social, cultural, and religious integrity to a degree well beyond those of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Moreover, throughout the era these Old Northwest Indians were not surrounded by Americans, agriculturalists or otherwise. Hence they and Americans were not immediately in open competition for the resources of the same environments. These foraging bands, confidently following their own cultural and adaptational trajectories, recognized no advantage in westward migration away from habitats familiar to them. Instead, they defined this possibility as greatly damaging to their welfare. Indeed, several thousand Indians from these communities, when faced with the prospect of closer dealings with Americans and their authorities, did voluntarily abandon their lands in the United States. But these slipped across the international border into Canada and resettled in locations similar in climate, flora, and fauna to those they had abandoned.90

To the south an entirely different pattern of Indian responses to the removal policy emerged. In striking contrast to the reactions of the foraging bands in the northern reaches of the Old Northwest, when the era closed all the Indians there—with some few exceptions—had been dislocated and resettled in the west. These were multi-community tribal societies such as the Shawnee, Delaware, Wyandot, Kickapoo, and Sauk. They occupied habitats characterized by relatively long growing seasons, prairie and parklands, fertile bottom lands, and hardwood forests. They lived in large, semi-permanent villages, and their traditional economies had been based on a mix of intensive horticulture and large-game hunting.81

Moreover, well before the removal era began in 1825 they had been forced to adapt to a new environmental reality: large numbers of American farmers, merchants, entrepreneurs, and developers were a significant and threatening part of their milieu. Occupying the ground directly in the path of the post-Revolutionary frontier, for decades their relations with these newcomers had been marked by intense, open rivalries, for they were involved in sometimes violent competition for the same environmental resources. Thus they had long been involved in land cessions. Some, like the Mdewakanton in 1837, had more or less eagerly exchanged less critical portions of their estates for goods, immediate cash payments, and annuities. Others had been driven to such sales by intense pressures from appointed negotiators and other interested parties. Understandably, the effects of the removal policy fell on them earlier and heavier than on the northern foragers like the Chippewa. Indeed, the first treaties with any Indians—either of the Old Northwest or the Southeast—to be impelled by and obtained under the specific terms of the 1830 Removal Act were negotiated with several such communities in Ohio.82

These farming, large-game hunting tribal societies of the Old Northwest’s prairie lands were also distinct from the foraging bands to the north in another salient characteristic. While the foragers remained committed to bark canoe transport, those to the south had long since abandoned such frail vessels in favor of horses. Indeed, twenty years before Thomas Jefferson conceived of using the newly acquired Louisiana Territory as a suitably distant homeland for Indians,
numerous Shawnee, and Delaware, followed by lesser numbers of Kickapoo, Illini, and Potawatomi, had used their new means of travel voluntarily to abandon their land in the Old Northwest and resettle in Missouri and Arkansas, with some going as far west as Texas. Since horses facilitated East-West movement of people and goods across the valleys of the great midcontinent river systems, even those who stayed in the remains of their old tribal estates were enabled to add seasonal horse-nomadism for purposes of hunting, trade, diplomacy, and war to their technological inventory. Oriented to large game hunting from the start, when they faced increased competition with Americans near their lands, they used horses to bring the resources of the western environments within their reach.

Hence, by 1825 not only were many from these prairie tribes familiar with the western environments, but several related pioneer Indian communities were already well established there. Indeed, through the 1830s, emissaries from such western trail breakers often visited their kin in Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana, soliciting new recruits and allies. The Lake Superior Chippewa, and other bark canoe-using foragers of the north, had no such experiences, technological capacity, relationships, or inclinations.

There were some few exceptions to this general dislocation and westward resettlement of the prairie tribes. These included some hundreds of Indiana Miami and fewer Michigan Potawatomi who were allowed, by negotiated treaty right, to remain on small parcels in their old environments. Then there were the many who escaped the full consequences of American policy by resettling in British territory. These included numerous horse-nomadic Potawatomi, Ohio Ottawa, and others who settled on the Ontario Peninsula. Making appropriate ecological choices, these voluntary emigrants selected locations south of the Canadian Shield region, in habitats and a climate like those familiar to them. These immigrants studiously avoided British efforts to concentrate on the—to them—barren landscape of Manitoulin Island, further demonstrating the significance of both environmental adaptations and the capacity of Old Northwest Indians to bend the policies of powerful states to their own wants and ends.

More recently than Foreman, Prucha, stressing the extensive prior moves of the Old Northwest's native peoples, concluded that "the emigration of these tribes in the Jacksonian era was part of their migration history." Such an interpretation places the most charitable interpretation conceivable on this American policy, but it does not distinguish one type of migration from another; neither does it look far beneath the surface appearances of events. Such an interpretation is rather like concluding that the experience of Japanese-Americans between 1942 and 1946 may be adequately explained as part of their prior migration history as well.

In a larger historical perspective, none of the Great Lakes-Ohio Valley Indian societies had ever experienced a program quite like the American removal policy as arranged and conducted in the years after 1825. Some, such as the Ontario Iroquoian and Michigan's Algonquian horticultural tribes, during the second half of the seventeenth century had been refugees, fleeing the ravages of war, pestilence, and starvation. Many had sometimes responded to the incentives offered by French or British traders and officials in selecting sites for new settlements. For more, including the Chippewa, their earlier migrations were in response to internal stresses such as population increase, intra-community conflict, resource depletion, or a particularly successful adaptation to new technologies and economic opportunities. Such relocations were
generally voluntary, even if encouraged by inducements from European colonial officials, not forced. None of the Indian communities in this region had, until the mid-1820s, collided with a rapidly expanding nation-state bent on fueling its own internal development by the wholesale expropriation of resources and disposition and dislocation of native inhabitants. The fact that in some instances the goals of particular Old Northwest Indian communities converged with the policies of the United States does not distract from this conclusion. It demonstrates merely that these Indians were adaptable enough to hunt out new opportunities in an unmapped thicket of adversity.

"Settlement pressure" is the most popular, widespread and persistent explanation of the timing or the sequence of efforts at implementing the removal policy.88 However, as a single-factor explanation this will do neither for the examples of the Chippewa and neighboring foraging bands nor for Old Northwest Indians generally. For at the moment the four American officials conceived their plan to deceive and dislodge the Lake Superior Chippewa, there were few or no Americans "pressing" on their lands. Nor were there many for decades thereafter. Indeed, as witnessed, these Indians found many staunch supporters among the small populations of neighboring citizens. Similarly, had the density of neighboring American population been the major cause of removals, then the perennially reluctant Wyandot of northwest Ohio would have been forcibly transported west at least a decade before their 1843 capitulation and resettlement. "Settlement pressure," perhaps phrased better as significant competition between Americans and Indians for the latter's environmental resources, helps explain how and when Indians were pressured to cede

land. By itself it does not explain the drive to move them to distant locations.

Recognizing this distinction—between the acquisition of Indian land and their planned resettlement in distant places—also requires distinguishing the manifest from the less well-recognized functions of the removal policy after 1825. Doing so helps us better understand not only this extraordinary Chippewa case, but efforts to implement this policy among other Old Northwest Indians generally. For decades before 1825, the overt business of acquiring Indian rights to occupy and use the resources of land had been commonly accomplished without necessarily demanding or forcing resettlement in remote locations, certainly not so to an area officially demarked as an exclusive "Indian Territory." Frequently, this was achieved by acquisition of most or nearly all of an Indian society's land, leaving them to concentrate on the remaining parcels of their old estates. Indeed, this was the explicit intention spelled out in the Chippewa's 1837 treaty, not the requirement that they resettle in the west. Moreover, when this planned resettlement policy was finally succeeded by its replacement (the reservation policy), substantial populations of near or entirely landless Indians remained in Michigan and Wisconsin, with smaller groups in Ohio and Indiana, as well as throughout the eastern United States. This did not cause an appreciable slowing of the populating or economic development of these regions. Before and after the years when a comprehensive, nationwide removal policy was in effect, indeed, even between 1825 and the early 1850s, Americans pressing on Indian environments acquired titles to and control of most Indian land without demanding resettlement in a designated all-Indian Territory.

The Chippewa's experiences between 1842 and 1852 forces our attention to a
different issue, the understory of the drive to relocate Indians in the west, and to additional conclusions. Whatever the much idealized rationalizations of the Jefferson, Monroe, Adams, and Jackson administrations about the goals of Indian removal, well before 1842—and especially so before the disastrous winter of 1850–1851—the transportation and resettlement of eastern Indians under the ideological guise of benevolent public policy had acquired an institutional life of its own. In the business of collecting, uprooting, transporting, and subsisting Indians, numerous public officials and private citizens discovered incentives and rewards. Removing Indians was often made to serve neither the declared wants, the assessed needs or the passions of neighboring citizens, nor the long range values of a nation. It served, rather, the imperatives of the American state and specifically the narrow political-economic patronage concerns of whatever administration was in power.

In the instance of the abortive effort to dislodge and to resettle the Lake Superior Chippewa, we witness a national patronage system gone awry. Secretary of the Interior Ewing, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Brown, Territorial Governor Ramsey, and the unusually eager and ambitious Sub-Agent Watrous, each from his own distinctive concerns, each with his own network of patrons and henchmen to serve or to satisfy, were directly responsible for arranging this affair. Each bent a near obsolete public policy to his personal career interests and political obligations. Certainly, the consequences of their decisions were exacerbated by legislative chance and environmental accident. Nonetheless the Chippewa’s death march was directly caused, to borrow James MacGregor Burns’ illuminating phrase, by the self-interested operations of several of those “little circles of influence” that have plagued American life for two centuries. Sub-Agent Watrous did not have to cause the actual permanent relocation of the Chippewa to achieve his personal or his political goals; he had only to seem to do so. Being able to claim a large increase in the Indians under his jurisdiction, he was successful in obtaining an upgrading of the status of his post to a full agency, a promotion to agent, the doubling of his salary, and whatever gratuities grateful St. Paul contractors and Sandy Lake traders may have delivered into his hands.

But what did these Chippewa accomplish for themselves by effectively blocking the efforts of American officials to treat them as an exploitable natural resource? The late Homer G. Barnett has noted that “Dispossession of land and its equivalent, migration, requires adaptation if a group is to survive.” The Lake Superior Chippewa, by the terms of the treaties of 1837 and 1842, experienced the loss of ownership of the habitats they had conquered a century earlier, although they skillfully avoided total eviction from these lands. Nonetheless, although they escaped forced emigration, they, too, had to adapt, for their social and physical environments did not remain constant. For decades they were able to apply old knowledge and skills to obtain the essentials for their lives, ranging over familiar terrain, still little settled by Americans, exploiting known sources of food and raw material, while also adjusting themselves to the changing circumstances brought by booming timber and mining industries, and by their status as dependent wards of the federal government.

It was twenty years before all the reservations granted in the 1854 treaty were selected and surveyed, at which moment American settlements had advanced to the point where the federal government at last required the Wisconsin Chippewa to settle
on and to extract their subsistence from within these confined spaces. It was in the mid-1870s that the first clear evidence of cultural disintegration appeared in the form of a revitalization movement, the Dream Dance, a missionary-spread new religion, which sought through collective application of supernatural power to defeat American economic and political ascendancy. A full century later, the legal heirs and political successors to the old Chippewa bands turned to the federal courts for a different type of aid, seeking to recover rights allegedly granted to their ancestors by treaty. Employing quite different premises and tactics than in earlier years, the modern Chippewa have met with somewhat greater success. By the later 1980s, they were truly experiencing intensive “settlement pressure,” that is, competition for scarce natural resources with their neighbors. The consequences of this latest engagement between Chippewa, American neighbor, and the federal patronage system will be a task for some future scholar to describe, assess, and explain.  

Endnotes

1 This essay reports some findings of the Old Northwest Indian Removal Project, which was supported by a research grant from the National Endowment of the Humanities. The author is indebted to numerous readers of earlier drafts for their aid and useful suggestions, especially Victor Barnouw, Tom Biolsi, John Clark, Faye Clifton, Conrad Heidenreich, Michael Green, Jeanne Kay, Robert Kvasnicka, James McClurken, Joseph Manzo, Bruce Trigger and Richard White; and also Paul Haas, John D. Haeger, and Paul Prucha. In the interests of saving space, citations for this essay have been much abbreviated. A full bibliography is contained in the author's *The Voight Decision and Wisconsin Chippewa Treaty Rights: A Critical Bibliography* (Institute for the Development of Indian Law, forthcoming); and in the archives of the Old Northwest Indian Removal Project.


3 The incident is mentioned in a few older state and regional histories such as J. N. Davidson’s, *In Unnamed Wisconsin* (Milwaukee 1895), 168; and is briefly discussed in V. Barnouw’s *Acculturation and Personality Among the Wisconsin Chippewa* (American Anthropological Association Memoir No. 72, 1950), 37, 59. Such descriptions are based on other secondary and scanty primary sources, principally the Rev. J. H. Pitzel’s eyewitness account in *Lights and Shades of Missionary Life* (Cincinnati, 1860), 298. E. J. Danziger, in his *The Chippewas of Lake Superior* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 88, and his “They Would Not Be Moved: The Chippewa Treaty of 1854,” *Minnesota History*, 43 (1973), 178, touches the episode in passing.

William C. Haygood’s editorial comments, accompanying publication of excerpts from Benjamin J. Armstrong’s reminiscences in his old age, attempted a sketchy assessment of the incident, but these remarks are not well informed. See, “Reminiscences of Life Among the Chippewa,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 4 Parts, 55: 175–96, 287–309; & 56: 37–58, 140–61. In the extensive interviewing preceding his *Wisconsin Chippewa Myths and Tales and Their Relation to Chippewa Life* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), Barnouw found no oral traditions concerning the events (Barnouw to Clifton, Personal Communication, 1985). Nor are there any such folk memories recorded in the major 20th-Century collections of Chippewa oral traditions, such as the Charles Brown Papers, Col. HB, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, or the U. S. Works Progress Administration’s Chippewa Historical Project Records, Microfilm 532, State Historical Society of Wisconsin. The last recorded Chippewa mention of this episode dates to 1864, when the Lake Superior chiefs assembled to record their memories of treaty dealings with the United States. See, G. P. Warren, “Statement of Treaties between the Chippewa Indians and the United States, from 1825–1864, from the Chippewa Standpoint,” File 1864, Guide 714 (State Historical Society of Wisconsin).

4 The cases include, in Wisconsin—
nebago, Menomini, Potawatomi communities north of Milwaukee, Chippewa of Lake Superior, Mdewakanton Dakota, and the Emigrant New York Indians (Oneida, Stockbridge-Munsee, and the Brotherton); in Ohio—five groups; in Indiana—two groups; in Illinois—three groups; in Michigan—six groups; and from Ontario—two small groups, the Moravian Delaware and Anderdon Hurons.


of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives and Records Service [RG73].


15 Prucha's *The Great Father*, 241–42, provides a useful recent overview of selected features of Old Northwest Removal. The author views the whole process through the eyes of American elites and authorities in Washington, often reflecting but not penetrating their idealized aims and ideological pronouncements, while displaying little understanding of the native peoples and their responses to the policy.

16 W. Miles, "'Enamoured with Colonization': Isaac McCoy's Plan of Indian Reform," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 38 (1972), 268–268, has done so.


19 Flat Mouth’s speech, in, Taliaferro to Governor Henry Dodge, September 29, 1836. *NAM M234*, Roll 757. He was referring to the 1836 treaty with the Ottawa and Chippewa of Michigan. For accounts of Lake Superior Chippewa impoverishment in this period, see, G. Franchere to W. Brewster, 14 March 1835, Records of the American Fur Company, Steere Collection, Baylis Public Library, Sault Ste Marie, Michigan, Box 1, Folder 3; Bisheke [Chief Buffalo] to H. R. Schoolcraft, September 8, 1835, *NAM M1*, Roll 72; and, E. A. Brush to Lewis Cass, *NAM M234*, Roll 664.

20 Secretary of War Lewis Cass to President Van Buren, March 7, 1836, *NAM M21*, Roll 18.

21 The correspondence, reports, petitions, and memorials concerning their efforts are extensive. For samples, see, S. C. Stambaugh to H. R. Schoolcraft, June 8, 1836, *NAM M1*, Roll 72; COIA C. A. Harris to Governor Dodge, October 15, 1836, *NAM M21*, Roll 20; and, Bailey to COIA E. Herring, June 18, 1836, *NAM M234*, Roll 422.

22 COIA Harris to A. Bailey, July 15, 1836, *NAM M21*, Roll 19; Hitchcock to Harris, March 30, 1837, *NAM M234*, Roll 751; Taliaferro to Dodge, 30 January, 24 July, and August 2, 1837, *NAM M234*, Roll 758; and, Dodge to Harris, August 15, 1837, *NAM M234*, Roll 758. Major Hitchcock, a regular Army officer, was disbursing agent at the St. Louis Indian Superintendency. The antagonism of some Chippewa to certain traders was real. In December, 1836 a party of Chippewa murdered William Aitken, Jr., the son of a prominent trader by an Indian woman, one of the rare acts of violence by these Chippewa against Americans.

23 Identified as Roys Area 242, Fig. 1.


25 The first sub-agent at La Pointe, Daniel P. Bushnell, was appointed by Governor Dodge in November, 1836, but was not confirmed until the following April. Edward E. Hill, *The Office of Indian Affairs, 1824–1880: Historical Sketches* (New York, 1974), 88.

26 Edward D. Neill, "Occurences in and


28 Both came from villages outside the area being ceded. Magegabow was a war chief from Leech Lake, Bugonageshig an extraordinarily ambitious upstart village leader from Gull Lake. See, James G. E. Smith, Leadership Among the Southwestern Ojibwa, Publications in Ethnology No. 7, National Museum of Man (Ottawa, 1973).

29 See Dodge's marginal notes on p. 21 of the treaty journal to this effect.

30 This they subsequently did. See, Warren, "Statement of Treaties"; and, Obishkazawge's Speech, September 12, 1869, NAM M234, Roll 394.

31 Boutwell to Rev. David Green, August 17, 1837, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Papers (Minnesota Historical Society—Transcripts of Originals in Houghton Library, Harvard University) [ABCFFMPMNHS], Box 2.

32 Rev. Frederick Ayer to President Martin Van Buren, September 30, 1837; Gov. Dodge to COIA, February 17, 1838, NAM M234, Roll 387.

33 J. Schoolcraft to H. R. Schoolcraft, November 21 and December 1, 1837, NAM M1, Roll 45.

34 B. F. Baker to COIA, January 9, 1838, NAM M234, Roll 758; Dodge to COIA, July 6, 1838, in, C. F. Carter and J. P. Bloom, eds., Territorial Papers of the United States (Washington, D.C., 1934–1969) [TPUS], Vol. 17, 1029–31; and, COIA to Dodge, July 26, 1838, NAM M21, Roll 24; A. Brunson to R. Stuart, July 20, 1843, NAM M1, Roll 55.


36 D. P. Bushnell to Dodge, February 12, 1839, TPUS 27:1196; and, H. Dodge to Secretary of War, April 25, 1841, NAM M234, Roll 759.

37 Treaty with the Chippewa, October 4, 1842, 7 U.S. Statutes 591; Kappler, Indian Treaties, 542–45. The lands involved are identified as Royce Area 261, Fig. 1.


39 Kappler, Indian Treaties, 542–45. Official Documentation for this treaty is scanty, since Stuart kept no journal and delivered no written report on his deliberations. However, the Rev. L. H. Wheeler independently prepared a journal, including a particularly full eye-witness description of events, which he sent to his superior, David Greene, May 3, 1843, ABCFFMP-MNHS, Box 3. Moreover, because of the controversy aroused, there is an unusual amount of supplementary reporting on these negotiations, for example in Warren, "Statement of Treaties," and from other Chippewa and American participants, such as A. Brunson to J. D. Doty, January 6, 1843, NAM M1, Roll 54.


41 COIA Crawford to Stuart, August 1, 1842, NAM M1, Roll 53.

42 A. Brunson, A Western Pioneer (Cincinnati, 1872), Vol. 2, 165–69; Stuart to COIA, October 24 and November 19, 1842, NAM M1, Roll 39; ARCOIA 1842, 401–402; A. Brunson to Gov. J. D. Doty, January 8, 1843 (encl., letter from Chief Buffalo to L. Warren, October 29, 1842 & speech of White Crow, December 18, 1842), NAM M234, Roll 388; and the Rev. Wheeler's account of the negotiations, cited above.

to Rev. Greene, December 8, 1842; Chief Martin to Rev. A. Brunson, encl. in Brunson to COIA, to Gov. Doty, and to Secy. War Spencer, January 8, 1843, NAM M234, Roll 388; Warren, "Statement of Treaties" (section on 1842 treaty).

44 In the memoir dictated in his old age, B. G. Armstrong claimed Stuart had promised that the Chippewa could remain on their lands so long as they remained peaceful. There is no independent suggestion of the truth of this assertion—that continued occupancy and use rights were contingent on good behavior as there is little support for other such claims in Armstrong's reminiscences. Americans in the era would have classified any such misbehavior as "deprivations," individual acts, which under the Trade and Intercourse Act of 1834 and Chippewa treaties required the punishment of the individuals concerned, not the tribe collectively. Armstrong, a self-proclaimed "friend of the Chippewa," was actually an inconsequential figure on this frontier, who in his later years much inflates his role as mover and shaker among the Chippewa and in the corridors of power. He is barely mentioned in contemporary public and private sources, where some of his depictions are contradicted and others unsupported by various eyewitness participants. The original is, Early Life Among the Indians (Ashland, Wisconsin, 1892); edited excerpts republished as Armstrong, Reminiscences.

45 Kappler, Indian Treaties, 542–45; Brunson to Doty, July 19, 1842, NAM M234, Roll 388; Stuart to D. Greene, December 8, 1842, ABCFMP-MNHS, Box. 3. For background on mining developments in the area, see R. J. Hybels, "The Lake Superior Copper Fever," Michigan History, 23 (1950), 97–119 & 309–26.

46 Doty to Secretary of War, November 17, 1841; H. L. Dousman and H. H. Sibley to Secretary of War, February 18, 1841; and L. Warren to Doty, October 2, 1841; in NAM M234, Roll 388.

47 Identified as Royce Area 332, Fig. 1.

48 Doty to COIA, April 5, 1843, NAM M234, Roll 517; and, Stuart to COIA, June 2, 1843, NAM M1, Roll 39.

49 Doty to COIA, April 5, 1843, NAM M234 Roll 427. COIA to Stuart, 13 May, 1843, NAM M1 Roll 54. Stuart to COIA, 2 June, 1843 & 29 March, 1844, NAM M1 Roll 39. COIA W. Medill to I. A. Verplanck & Charles Mix, June 4, 1847, NAM M21 Roll 39. COIA to Gov. Dodge, August 2 and 16, 1847, NAM M21 Roll 40. C. Borup to W. A. Richmond, August 31, 1847, NAM M1 Roll 61. COIA to G. Copway, December 14, 1847, NAM M21 Roll 40; and, ARCOJA 1847, 8–9.

50 COIA Medill to Dodge, October 31, 1846; and to Henry M. Rice, October 31, 1846, NAM M21 Roll 38. Medill to Dodge, August 2, 1847; and to Brig. Gen. R. Jones, December 6, 1847, NAM M21 Roll 40.

51 There is no hint of such a commitment in the records of this treaty negotiation or in the Chippewa complaints about these immediately thereafter. The 1848 assertion was probably an example of Chippewa negotiating style, although they certainly wanted reservations.


53 Medill to R. McClelland, March 3, 1848, NAM M21 Roll 40; G. Johnston to H. R. Schoolcraft, June 28 & August 18, 1848, NAM M234 Roll 771; Medill to J. E. Fletcher, c/o T. Harvey, August 17, 1848, NAM M21 Roll 41; Petition of Lake Superior Chippewa Head Chiefs, February 5, 1849, House Misc. Doc. 36, 30–2 [CS 544]; Delegation of Chippewa Head Chiefs to President, February 5, 1849, NAM M234 Roll 390; Medill to Livermore, August 22, 1848 & February 12, 1849, NAM M21 Roll 41. S. Hall to A. Hall, March 28, 1849, Northwest Mission Papers (NWMP-UMD) Box 1, Folder 1, University of Minnesota—Duluth; Pitezel Journal, July 9, 1849, J. H. Pitezel Papers [JPP-CHL], Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University. "Chippewas of L'ance," Lake Superior News & Mining Journal [LSN&MJ], June 12, 1850.

54 "Removal of the Payments to Sandy Lake," Journal V, 1851, JPP-CHL.


56 Relocating the Chippewa would have meant the loss of the only females then available to loggers and miners. Indeed, the infrequent conflicts that erupted between Americans and Chippewa were occasioned by the former trying to gain sexual access to Chippewa women. See, R. N. Current, The

57 H. M. White, Guide to the Microfilm Edition of the Alexander Ramsey Papers and Records (Minnesota Historical Society), 16-18; and, Current, History of Wisconsin, Vol. 2, 197-205. The Lake Superior Chippewa’s annual monetary value that year consisted of $22,000, and $44,200 in goods and services, plus the salaries of employees of the Indian Department. All cash payable in specie—gold and silver. This was a considerable resource for a struggling, cash-poor new Territory. See “Omnibus Appropriation Bill,” House Miscellaneous Document 57, November 12, 1850, 31-1, Vol. 2, p. 61 [CS 582].


59 Brown to Watrous, April 22, 1850, NAM M21 Roll 43; “John S. Watrous File,” in, Minnesota Territory, Appointments Division, Secretary’s Files, National Archives Record Group 48, Interior Department Appointment Papers [RG48].


61 S. B. Treat to COIA Lea, May 12, 1852, ABCFMP-MNHS, Box 6.

62 J. N. Davidson, “Missions on Chequamegon Bay,” Collections of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, Vol. 12, 434-52; Milwaukee Weekly Wisconsin, June 5, 1850; J. P. Durban to Secretary of the Interior, October 3, 1850, NAM M234, Roll 767; D. King, et al., to D. Atkins, July 15, 1850, NAM M234, Roll 771; S. Hall to Treat, 28 March 1850, ABCFMP-MNHS, Box 5; Hall to Ramsey, 28 March 1850, NAM M234, Roll 168; H. Hall to L. D. Mudgett, March 13, 1850, NWMP-UMD, Box 1; Hall to Treat, October 7, 1852 and May 17, 1853, ABCFMP-MNHS, Box 6.


65 Brown to Ramsey, March 26, 1850; Watrous was handed his commission in Washington a month later—Brown to Watrous, April 22; NAM M21, Roll 43; “Indians to be Removed,” June 1, and “From the Lake Superior Journal,” June 27, 1850, Detroit Free Press.


70 Watrous to Ramsey, November 13 & 14;
Washington and Minnesota defended him until mid-1852, when he fell under a graver suspicion, of infidelity in political character. It was first claimed, then confirmed, that Watrous had been masquerading under false party colors. As a Minnesota competitor put it on February 28, 1853, he came “on to the Mississippi a rampant Whig. He now pretends to be a strong Democrat.” It was an appropriate time for Watrous to adopt this fresh party hue, for Franklin Pierce was to be inaugurated three days later. While this switch did not save him his position as Indian Agent under the new Democratic administration, it did ease the way for his later success in Minnesota. He settled in the Fond du Lac area where he became the Register of the U.S. Land Office, and, after Minnesota’s statehood, the first—Democratic—Speaker of the Minnesota Assembly. As he had anticipated in 1850, a tour as Indian Agent was a profitable thing for a young man on this frontier, both financially and as a means of career advancement. See, E. Whittles to President Fillmore, April 17, 1852, NAM M234 Roll 149; and November 16, 1852, Roll 767. J. R. Carey, “History of Duluth, and of St. Louis County to the Year 1870,” Minnesota Historical Collections Vol. 9, 250. S. B. Olmstead to S. B. Lowry, February 28, 1853, in, “John Watrousc File,” RG 48.

79 Watrous to Lea, June 7, 1852, NAM M234, Roll 149; Citizens of Lake Superior Petition to President Fillmore, June 4, 1852, NAM M234, Roll 149; Chief Buffalo to Ramsey, July 23, 1852, NAM M234, Roll 428; B. Armstrong, Early Life Among the Indians, 26, 30–31, 101. There is no separate confirmation of Armstrong’s claims to personal credit for this success. “Treaty with the Chippewa, 1854,” Kappeler, Indian Treaties, 648–52.


80 Charles Callender calls this the secondary or lesser configuration of Old Northwest Indian patterns in his, “Great Lakes-Riverine Sociopolitical Organization,” in Trigger, Handbook...Northeast, 610.


82 Callender refers to this as the dominant configuration in the Old Northwest, “Great Lakes-Riverine,” 610.

83 See, Treaties with the Seneca, Shawnee,


17 E. Whittsley to President Fillmore, April 17, 1852, *NAM M234* Roll 149; and November 16, 1852, Roll 767. Carey, “History of Duluth,” 250.


19 *Qualitative Science* (New York, 1983), 203–204.
