The year 1988 marked a milestone in Arsenal Island history, for in that year, the Rock Island Arsenal (RIA) celebrated designation of the arsenal's old stone buildings as National Historic Landmarks by United States Secretary of the Interior. To commemorate such an occasion, the Rock Island Arsenal Commander, Colonel David T. Morgan, Jr., has requested that this illustrated historic series be completed.

An Illustrated History Of The Rock Island Arsenal And Arsenal Island Part One (Revised Edition) covers nearly two hundred years of island history prior to the establishment of the Rock Island Arsenal. This historical overview explains, through the use of photographs and words, the rich historic past of Arsenal Island.

The United States Government's presence on Rock Island makes it the oldest institution in the Quad-Cities area. The government's historic ties with Arsenal Island date back to the signing of the Treaty of 1804 and the establishment of Fort Armstrong on the island in 1816. The United States flag flew above Rock Island long before any of the communities of the surrounding area were founded. Even before Illinois and Iowa had achieved statehood, the U.S. Army had established a significant military presence on Rock Island with the building of Fort Armstrong. The fort served as a sanctuary to early pioneers who sought refuge behind its walls during the threatening days of Indian uprisings. Part One also examines the historic ties and conflicts between the government and local interests concerning the economic development of Rock Island. This illustrated history is intended for the enjoyment and education of its readers.

The author would like to thank Colonel David T. Morgan, Jr., for requesting such a project; Dr. Herbert P. LePore, Chief of the AMCCOM Historical Office, to whom I owe a special thanks for guiding my work through this revised edition, and taking time from his busy schedule to personally edit the text of this work. Also, I would like to express my appreciation of the support of people and organizations both within and outside of government service. Key individuals within the Rock Island Arsenal community, such as Mr. Ronald E. Sikorski, Mr. Patrick J. Broderick, and past RIA Commander, Colonel John S. Cowings, sustained my efforts during the completion of the first edition. Likewise, the Rock Island Arsenal Historical Society supported the publication of the first edition. I would like to acknowledge the encouragement I received from my colleagues, Dr. Robert H. Bouilly and Mr. Ralph C. Krippner. Thanks is also due Mrs. Allie Callear for assisting in developing the format and putting the narrative of the first edition into the computer and to Mrs. Carol Secoy and Ms. Nancy Newton, AMCCOM Historical Office, for respectively providing the necessary editorial support and administrative support for the revised edition. In addition, thanks are extended to the Field Printing Plant for their professional assistance.

THOMAS J. SLATTERY
October 1988
The history presently being preserved at the Rock Island Arsenal encompasses more than the history of the arsenal itself. It also includes the frontier history of Fort Armstrong, the regional history of Colonel Davenport, the regional history of Black Hawk, the history of the first bridge to span the Mississippi River, and the Civil War history of the Rock Island Prison Barracks. The entire island is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and is known as Arsenal Island. In June 1988, the Secretary of the Interior designated the old stone buildings, which formed the 19th Century Rock Island Arsenal, National Historic Landmarks.

The history of Rock Island is divided into three successive eras: the regional history and two periods of "permanent" U.S. Government occupancy on the island. The regional history includes those events prior to 1816 which led to the government establishing a military post on the island. The military post and the depot era of Fort Armstrong constituted the first "permanent" presence of the U.S. Government on Rock Island; The establishment of Rock Island Arsenal was the second government presence. Rock Island has made an indelible contribution to local and national history.
CHAPTER TWO
ISLAND HISTORY PRIOR TO 1816

In the days of the Old Northwest, where the Mississippi River formed the western boundary of the United States, Rock Island was in the “backwaters” of American history. Throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries, history seldom had an impact on Rock Island.

On the occasions when it did, it was in support of historical developments which were taking place up river at such places as Prairie du Chien, Dubuque, and Galena. The prospect of acquiring wealth initially attracted Europeans and white Americans to the fur trading area of Prairie du Chien and the lead region of Dubuque. French traders seeking to expand their Indian trade discovered that the most convenient route, from the Great Lakes to the Mississippi River, was by the Fox River-Wisconsin waterway. At each end of the route important French fur trading communities developed. Prairie du Chien, at the mouth of the Wisconsin River on the Mississippi, and Green Bay on Lake Michigan anchored both ends of the Fox River-Wisconsin River portage route.

Prairie du Chien, not Rock Island, was originally the leading fur trading post on the upper Mississippi River. However, it was not long before French-Canadian voyageurs and coureur de bois from Prairie du Chien, began extending trading operations down river. These French-Canadians established trade with various Indian tribes along the Mississippi River and its main tributaries.

Voyageurs were French-Canadians employed by fur traders to transport “made goods” and canoes from the remote regions of the Old Northwest. A coureur de bois differed from a voyageur in that he operated without a French fur license, and he often illegally traded with the British. Often the coureur de bois was a French-Indian woodsman.

Early fur traders in the Rock Island area paddled a canoe called the Canot du Nord or North Canoe. The North Canoes were 20 feet in length and could carry as much as a ton of cargo besides its crew of eight voyageurs. The cargo primarily consisted of trade goods which were packed into 90 pound bundles for easier handling. The bundles contained the material originally needed for bartering such as cloth, kettles, traps,
The Fox River - Wisconsin River Portage Route was a convenient fur trading route that linked the Great Lakes with the Mississippi River. (Jo Davies County Historical Society, Galena, Illinois)

Right: The Fox River - Wisconsin River Portage Route was a convenient fur trading route that linked the Great Lakes with the Mississippi River. (Jo Davies County Historical Society, Galena, Illinois)

blankets, guns, ammunition, and whiskey.

Several French traders, and later British agents, referred briefly in their journals to the "big island" (Rock Island) at the bend of the Mississippi River near the "upper rapids". These early journals mentioned in greater detail the Sauk camp near the mouth of the Rock River and also Credit Island, an island which was situated a mile or so downstream from Rock Island.

French-Canadian traders seemed to prefer Credit Island to Rock Island as the site of their trading and established a small trading post on Credit Island. These traders extended credit to Indians in exchange for their promise of pelts. The island, so associated with this practice, became known as Credit Island. Later, British traders often set up their trading camp on Rock Island instead of Credit Island when trading in the vicinity.

Occasionally, after trading, a French-Canadian coureur de bois, or a woodsman known as a hivergant, would spend the winter at the Sauk village on the Rock River. By living among the Indians, the trader not only established good relations with the Sauk, but he also protected his investment by serving as a reminder to the tribe of their debt. In 1763, France lost its colonial possessions in North America to Great Britain as a result of the French and Indian War. However, many of the French-Canadian traders and voyageurs continued to work in the fur trade, first for the British and then later for the Americans.

After the French and Indian War, the British Government in Canada continued the French practice of providing gifts to Indians. The tribes made pilgrimages each spring to the Canadian communities of Montreal and later Malden to council with their “great father” where they would also receive presents. British medals and flags were presented to Indians who agreed to trade with British agents. Malden is situated near Windsor, Canada.

Foreign intrigues planned by British agents successfully brought most of the Indian nations of the Old Northwest, including those of the upper Mississippi River Valley under the influence of the British. During the American Revolutionary War, almost every tribe of the Old Northwest fought as auxiliaries for the British.

In 1778, Sauk and Fox warriors were among the Indians who gathered at Montreal to receive British presents and medals.1 Later in 1780, Sauk and Fox braves participated in an unsuccessful attack on the town of Pencour, which eventually became St Louis, Missouri. These Indians had joined a British force of soldiers, traders, and other Indians from Prairie du Chien in attacking Pencour. Lieutenant Colonel John Montgomery, under orders from Colonel George Rogers Clark, led a combined force of American Rangers, as well as French, Spanish, and American settlers from St. Louis in a retaliatory strike against the Sauk village located at the mouth of the Rock River. Colonel Montgomery and his 300 men supposedly burned the Sauk village, making this action the westernmost conflict of the American Revolution.2

Later, under the provisions of the 1783 Treaty of Paris which ended the American Revolutionary War, the British ceded to the United States a huge western tract of land
known as the Northwest Territory. The territory included the present states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota.

Britain, unwilling to give up its valuable trade with Indians of the territory, continued to operate its trading companies on North American soil, from Canada. Long after the treaty was signed, British agents continued to trade along the upper Mississippi River Valley, including the Rock Island vicinity. British traders used their influence among the Indians to discredit their competitors, the American traders. The British government in Canada, acting in its own interest, agreed to supply arms and ammunition to Indian leaders such as Tecumseh, who formed an Indian confederacy to counter the encroachments of American traders and settlers into the Northwest. The noted Sauk warrior, Black Hawk, was among the braves that joined the confederacy. As American settlers advanced through the frontier of the Northwest, they defeated the confederacy at Fallen Timbers, Ohio, in 1794 and at Tippecanoe Creek in 1811.

In dealing with the Indians of the Northwest Territory, the United States Government established the precedence of negotiating formal treaties with the Indians to gain possession of land they occupied. These treaties defined and redefined boundary lines between advancing white settlements and retreating Indian Tribes. In many of the treaties, provisions were added to establish forts at strategic locations within the newly drawn boundaries of the Indian territory. This chain of events formed a scenario which was repeated as the American frontier advanced through the Northwest territory.

Lead Mining and Other Trade with the Indians

In the 18th and early 19th Centuries, European trade with the Sauk and Fox Indians involved more than fur pelts. Although pelts were profitable, Europeans also traded for lead, corn, beeswax, feathers, and tallow. Lead was of particular importance to European and American traders. In fact, Sauk and Fox women were taught by Frenchmen to mine for lead and to operate crude furnaces near the Fox villages, which were close to the present city of Dubuque, Iowa. The Sauk of the Rock River region and
the Fox Indians of both the Rock Island and Dubuque vicinities developed a brisk trade in lead with Europeans.

The French initially attempted to develop the lead region of Northeast Iowa, Northern Illinois, and Southern Wisconsin. However, a series of Indian wars with the Fox Indian tribe severely hindered French mining efforts. Fox warriors periodically raided the fur and mining expeditions that traveled the portage route between Prairie du Chien and Green Bay. When not actually raiding the expeditions, they extracted a tribute from those that traveled the route. The Fox tribe, in order to survive a war of annihilation waged on them by the French, allied themselves with the Sauk Tribe from the Saginaw Bay area of Michigan. Eventually, the two tribes migrated to the mouth of the Rock River near Rock Island.4

In 1788, the Fox Indians granted lead diggings near the present city of Dubuque to Julien Dubuque, a French trader. Miners such as Dubuque shipped lead down river to St. Louis instead of by portage to the Great Lakes.5

By purchasing the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803, the United States doubled its size, and opened the mouth of the Mississippi River to American commerce. The Mississippi River no longer formed the western boundary of the U.S., and by the early 1820s, speculators began leasing land in the lead region of the upper Mississippi Valley from the United States Government. Out of the mining area along the Fever River in Illinois grew the mining community of Galena. Numbering less than 50 persons in 1822, Galena's population rose to over 10,000 people a decade later. The sudden influx of miners resulted in clashes between the mining communities and Indians of the area. This led to the “Winnebago War” of 1827. The short-lived uprising led by Red Bird, a Winnebago chief, was easily put down by a show of U.S. Army Regulars.

Federal Government Acquires Rock Island

In 1804, Rock Island came under Federal control. President Thomas Jefferson instructed the
Governor of the Indiana Territory, William Henry Harrison, to acquire Indian lands which adjoined the Mississippi River and its tributaries. Harrison, later the ninth President of the United States, made an effort to obtain Indian land cessions. Through bribery, liquor, and threats, he seized every opportunity to “negotiate” land away. Through negotiations Harrison succeeded.

In November 1804, four Sauk and two Fox chiefs arrived in St. Louis to meet with Harrison regarding the release of a Sauk brave being held for killing a white man. Harrison, during negotiations for the release of this brave, persuaded the chiefs to sign a treaty which ceded to the U.S. a vast tract of land controlled by the respective tribes. The ceded land included territory on both sides of the Mississippi River, roughly between the Wisconsin River to the north and the Missouri River to the south; and extending east to the middle of the present Illinois River and west as far as the watershed region between Des Moines and the Missouri River. Both the Sauk villages on the Rock River and in Rock Island were included in the land purchase.

In return, the Indians were to receive the official protection and friendship of the United States, and were to be paid $2,234.50 in goods, plus an additional guaranteed annuity of $1,000 in goods to be received annually thereafter.

A story regarding the unethical practices used by William Henry Harrison during negotiations with the Sauk and Fox chiefs has been included in several historical works of the Rock Island area. The minor chiefs supposedly told members of their tribes that they were inebriated during the majority of their stay in St. Louis. The chiefs explained that the $2,234.50 of trade goods they were to receive from the Federal Government was instead given to Pierre Chouteau, a wealthy French fur trader, for payment of the chiefs’ expenses. Chouteau witnessed the signing of the treaty and also served as host for William Henry Harrison during his visit to St. Louis. As for the brave being held by army authorities, he allegedly was shot while running from his guards.

Later, a dispute over the meaning of Article Seven of the 1804 Treaty was of great concern to the Sauk and Fox Indians in Illinois. Article Seven stated:
Below: An 1829 map of the U.S. lead mines in the upper Mississippi River region. At that time, the mines were worked by private individuals who paid the U.S. Government a tenth of all the lead manufactured for the privilege. Much of the lead was shipped down the Mississippi River through the Upper Rapids at Rock Island, on its way to St. Louis, Fort Armstrong, Rock Island, and the Upper Rapids appear at the lower left corner of the map. (Wisconsin State Historical Society)
As long as the lands which are now ceded to the United States remain their property, the Indians belonging to said tribes (Sauk and Fox) shall enjoy the privilege of living and hunting upon them.10

The six chiefs who agreed to the 1804 Treaty were supplied with liquor, but not unknowingly. Liquor was certainly nothing new to the chiefs for Sauk and Fox Indians had been trading with French and British agents for over a century and a half. Many traders included liquor as part of the trade goods offered to the Indians of the upper Mississippi River Valley.

The chiefs probably believed they were receiving free liquor in exchange for granting Americans the use of hunting grounds they already shared with other tribes. Furthermore, the White Americans concept of land as property was foreign to Indians. Adding to their confusion were the differences they encountered negotiating with American agents rather than Europeans. Europeans gave “presents” to the Indians after counseling them. They also readily extended them credit for pelts yet to be trapped. The British especially ingratiated themselves with the Sauk Indians through the use of these tactics. The gifts and credit placed them in good favor with the Sauk, while at the same time indebting the Indians to the British for some future request or deed.

In contrast, the U.S. Government would not allow its agents to extend credit to Indians. United States agents were instructed to receive pelts, land, or something tangible in exchange for their trade goods. For several years after the treaty, many Sauk believed that the $1,000 annuities they received from U.S. agents were “presents” rather than payments for their land.11 As experienced as the Sauk and Fox were in dealing with Europeans, they nevertheless struck a “bad bargain” with William Henry Harrison.

**Rock Island Comes to the Attention of the U.S. Army**

Lieutenant Zebulon Pike first brought Rock Island to the attention of the U.S. Army. In 1805,
William Henry Harrison, the first Governor of the Indiana Territory which included Illinois, was appointed special commissioner to negotiate boundary treaties with various Indian tribes. Later, William Henry Harrison became the ninth President of the United States (AMSAS-HI).

Excerpt from beginning paragraph of the 1804 Treaty with Sauk and Fox Indians cited below. Note that the purpose of the article was to bring the two tribes under U.S. influence by restricting the tribes’ dealings with foreign powers. (AMSAS-HI)

A Treaty Between the United States of America and The United States of Sac and Fox Indians

Articles of a Treaty made at St. Louis in the District of Louisiana Between William Henry Harrison, Government of the Indiana Territory and District and Commissioner Plenepotentary of the United States for concluding any treaty or treaties which may be found necessary with any of the Northwestern Tribes of Indians of the one part, and the chiefs and headmen of the United Sac and Fox Tribes of the other part.

Article 1. The United States receive the United Sac and Fox Tribes into their friendship and protection, and the said tribes agree to consider themselves under the protection of the United States, and of no other power whatsoever.

Early U.S. Army posts near St. Louis, MO, such as Fort Bellefontaine, Camp Adams, Cantonment Miller, and Jefferson Barracks, served as the starting points for numerous military expeditions and exploratory ventures into the Upper Mississippi River Valley. Jefferson Barracks is depicted in early sketch to the right. (Augustana College Library Special Collections)

Based on Pike’s report, Congress passed legislation in June 1809 to reserve Rock Island, or “big island” as it was referred to in Pike’s journal, as a federal military reservation.

Pike recorded several chance meetings with individuals and groups on his journey up the Mississippi River from St. Louis. His instructions were to gather information regarding the river and to note potential sites for the construction of forts which were to be strategically located in the new territory. In addition, Pike was to record British activity among the Indians of the upper Mississippi River Valley.
In the vicinity of Rock Island, he met with James Aird, a fur trader from Prairie du Chien who operated a trading camp on Credit Island. Mr. Aird informed Pike that in 1781 or 1782 the Sauk village on the Rock River was burned down by about 300 Americans. This account corroborated the story regarding Colonel Montgomery’s raid on the Sauk village during the American Revolution. According to his journal, Pike met with four canoes of Sauk warriors near Rock Island.

We met four canoes of the Sacs, with wicker baskets filled with young pigeons. They made motions to exchange them for liquor to which I merely turned the back of my hand.12

Another encounter with Sauk warriors was also included in the Pike journal. Pike mentioned in his journal a meeting he had with a Captain Many, who was traveling the river in search of Osage Indian prisoners among the Sauk and Fox Indians of the region. Captain Many told Pike that the Sauk expressed hostility towards Americans during his visit to their village near Rock Island. Pike also wrote that a White American, working as a government representative, was living among the Sauk and Fox Indians of the Rock Island vicinity. The American was hired to teach the Indians methods of farming; but, according to Pike, was fired the following year for neglecting his job. The teacher’s position was a provision of the 1804 Treaty with the Indians.

**Sauk and Fox Indians**

Lieutenant Pike’s journal supported the claim that Sauk and Fox warriors had a reputation for being hostile. When Fox and Sauk warriors controlled the Fox River- Wisconsin River portage, they were notorious for demanding tribute from those who traveled the route. They were also fond of “taking” pelts from neighboring tribes. French traders at Green Bay, tired of the hostile ways of the two tribes, formed an alliance with the Menominee, the Ottawas, and the Chippewas and forced the Sauk and Fox from the area.
While migrating to the Rock River in present day Illinois, the Sauk and Fox warriors drove the Illini Indians from the Rock Island and Rock River regions out.

In addition to defeating the Illini and nearly annihilating the entire Mascoutin tribe, the Sauk and Fox Indians also sent war parties out against the Menominees, the Sioux, the Pawnee, and the Osage, among others. Today, writers and local museum curators tend to emphasize the Sauk’s planting, mining, and hunting skills rather than their fighting ability. However, the Sauk and Fox were proud of their reputation as fierce warriors.

American artist George Catlin referred to a Sauk village on the north banks of the Rock River as “Saug-e-nug” in his 1837 writings. This may explain the popular use of the term “Saukenuk” for the name of the village since the Sauk and Fox had no written language and traders simply wrote down what they heard. Although neither tribe located its village on Rock Island, they frequently visited the island to gather berries, nuts, fish, and hunt game.

**Black Hawk’s British Band and the War of 1812**

Sauk and Fox chiefs attempted to honor the 1804 agreement with the U.S. Government.
However, when war broke out between the United States and Britain in 1812, a large band of Indians led by the Sauk warrior Black Hawk chose to fight as auxiliaries for the British. Black Hawk, also called Ma-Ka-Tai-Me-She-Kia-Kiak or “Black Sparrow Hawk” allegedly offered his services to American soldiers at Fort Madison; but the soldiers declined the offer. It was known that Black Hawk was displeased with the Americans at Fort Madison for refusing to extend him credit for winter supply goods. Therefore, when the British traders arrived at Rock island, he readily welcomed them. These traders had a variety of gifts for the Indians and a confidential message for Black Hawk. The message, from a British colonel, urged Black Hawk to raise a war party and join the British force at Green Bay.

The British Colonel was Robert Dickson, a trader active in recruiting Indians to aid the British in the War of 1812. He had long been a trader at Prairie du Chien.

Black Hawk raised the war party, traveled to Green Bay, and for a time fought as an ally of the British during the War of 1812. Despite his desire to wage war down the Mississippi Valley, the British instructed Black Hawk to fight with their troops near Detroit. Black Hawk and his Sauk warriors were present during the Fort Dearborn Massacre of 15 August 1812. However, after initial success, the fighting did not go well for the British, and Black Hawk returned to his village on the Rock River.

Though he returned to the village, Black Hawk remained hostile towards the United States. On three occasions during the War of 1812, Black Hawk led Sauk warriors against U.S. military forces attempting to journey up river from St. Louis.

Governor William Clark of the Missouri Territory, and famous partner of the explorer Meriwether Lewis, organized the first expedition from St. Louis in 1814. Clark intended to build a fort near Prairie du Chien to protect American fur traders in the upper Mississippi River Valley, and to create a buffer protecting St. Louis from British and Indian attack via the Mississippi River.
With the exception of a skirmish with Sauk Indians near Rock Island, Clark’s expedition uneventfully made its way up river to Prairie du Chien. At Prairie du Chien, Clark’s men erected a stockade and named it Fort Shelby. The detachment of American troops left behind at Fort Shelby was attacked by the British, forcing them to abandon Fort Shelby and return to St. Louis. As they returned to St. Louis, the troops were again fired on by Sauk warriors as they passed Rock Island.

An earlier attempt by American soldiers to strengthen the garrison at Fort Shelby also failed. Lieutenant John Campbell, with three keelboats loaded with 133 regular army and volunteer soldiers, embarked from St. Louis in early July 1814 for Prairie du Chien. On 19 July, Campbell’s expedition departed Rock Island and immediately encountered bad weather. Forced ashore on an island six miles upstream from Rock Island, Campbell’s vessel came under attack by Indians. Black Hawk and other Sauk warriors had been trailing the three boats and ambushed the stranded craft. Lieutenant Campbell and several members of his crew escaped to another vessel. The National Intelligencer of August 1814 stated the number of killed and wounded in this engagement to have been thirty-six. Lieutenant Campbell and surgeon’s mate Dr. Abraham Stewart were among the wounded. Black Hawk pillaged the abandoned keelboat, while Sauk braves scalped the mortally wounded and the dead left behind. Later, according to Black Hawk’s own account of this incident, the Sauk warriors “put on the clothes of the dead soldiers and danced over their scalps”. Black Hawk’s account of this incident is recorded by Antoine LeClaire, a government interpreter and prominent businessman of the Rock Island area. According to LeClaire, Black Hawk stated that he gave the books and papers found on Campbell’s boat to British Soldiers.

Lieutenant Campbell’s boat, partially destroyed by fire, remained at the battle site and
Right: Colonel Zachary Taylor who in the War of 1812 unsuccessfully led U.S. forces against Sauk and Fox Indians at the Battle of Credit Island. Nearly twenty years later, Colonel Taylor would lead U.S. Infantry Regulars to victory over Sauk and Fox Indians in the Black Hawk War of 1832. Eventually, Zachary Taylor would become the twelfth President of the United States. (AMSAS-HI Archives)

for years was a landmark for river boats. Since this historic battle, the island has been referred to as Campbell’s Island. The Illinois state legislature, around 1904, appropriated $5,000 for a monument to be placed on Campbell’s Island in commemoration of those who fought and died in battle.

Zachary Taylor and the Battle of Credit Island

During the War of 1812, Zachary Taylor, later the twelfth President of the United States, led a reprisal attack against the Sauk of the Rock River region. In September 1814, as a Brevet Major, Taylor left St. Louis with 334 men, primarily militia and ranger, but also including a few regular army soldiers. His mission was to undertake a retaliatory strike against the Sauk to punish them for their attacks on the earlier American expeditions of Governor Clark and Lieutenant Campbell. However, before he could attack, his vessels were discovered. British artillery placed on Credit Island and Sauk musket fire riddled Major Taylor’s vessels, forcing them to retreat back to St. Louis. Lieutenant Duncan Graham was the officer-in-charge of the British troops who aided the Indians.

Sergeant John Keating of the Royal Artillery Regiment earned a commission as a lieutenant for his efforts in the Battles of Credit Island and Fort McKay. Besides providing artillery, the British had gathered a large war party with Indians from other pro-British tribes to aid the Sauk and Fox in their fight against the Americans. Greatly outnumbered, there was little more Zachary Taylor could do but retreat.14

British Control of the Upper Mississippi River Valley

The rivalry between Great Britain and the United States for dominance over the Indians of the Northwest was a contributing factor to the War of 1812. The British in Canada, acting in their own self-interest without regard to the safety of Americans, began supplying arms and ammunition to Indians known to be hostile toward Americans. Congress considered British support of the Indians as one of the reasons for declaring war against Great Britain.

During the War of 1812, Great Britain temporarily gained control of the upper
Right: Sauk warrior Black Hawk was the leader of the last hostile Indian uprising in the State of Illinois, known as the Black Hawk War of 1832. Black Hawk stated that Rock Island supplied his tribe with fruits, nuts, and plenty of fish from the rapids. He said he spent happy times on the island and that a good spirit lived in a cave in the rocky bluffs beneath the fort. “But the noise of the fort has since driven him away and no doubt a bad spirit has taken his place.”

Black Hawk’s Autobiography
(AMSAS-HI Archives)

Mississippi River Valley and the Great Lakes region of the Illinois Territory, American authority in the territory north of Fort Edwards collapsed. (The location of Fort Edwards is cited on the map on page 18). The war ended with the British in control of all the U.S. forts and the U.S. Government trading factories in the Illinois Territory above a line that stretched from Fort Edwards to Peoria.

Pro-British sentiment remained strong among some of the Indians of the Northwest after the war. Indians such as the Sauk and Fox continued to trade with the British after the War of 1812 and, as late as 1820, Sauk warriors such as Black Hawk continued to make their annual pilgrimage to Fort Malden, Canada, to receive presents during their visit with their “British Father.” Five years after the end of the War of 1812, some Indians, such as the Sauk of Rock River, continued to display the British flag and British medals in their village. The British in Canada had cast a special silver medal to honor Black Hawk for efforts during the war.15

Major Morrell Marston, while commanding officer of Fort Armstrong, wrote to Jedediah Morse in November 1820 that he considered it important that, as soon as possible, the government should exchange all British flags and medals the Indians had in their possession for American ones. He also wrote that the flags given to them ought to be made of silk which would make them as durable and portable as the British flags. According to Major Marston, these American flags should be large to match the size of the British flags.16

Treaty of Portages des Sioux

Though Black Hawk’s warriors had been successful in thwarting American expeditions up river from St. Louis, the war was not totally successful for the British. On 24 December 1814, the War of 1812 concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent. Though peace with the British was achieved, such was not the case with their Indian mercenaries or allies.

However, in 1815, President James Madison appointed Missouri Territorial Governor William Clark, Illinois Territorial Governor Ninian Edwards, and Auguste Chouteau, a St. Louis fur trader, as commissioners to negotiate treaties
with the principal tribes who aided the British during the War of 1812. Nine months later, in September 1815, the U.S. signed a separate peace treaty at Portages des Sioux with all but a few of the Indians who had fought for the British. Instead of attending the peace conference, the Sauk of the Rock River sent messengers to Canada to meet with the British. However, the messengers returned without a promise of aid from the British. Receiving no support and fearing an attack by American troops, the Sauk of the Rock River agreed to peace terms in St. Louis on 13 May 1816. The treaty, approved by Sauk leaders, including Black Hawk, reaffirmed the United States Government’s claim to Sauk and Fox Indian lands according to the terms set down in the Treaty of 1804.

**Government Trading Factories**

As early as 1795, 17 years before the War of 1812, the U.S. Government devised a plan to reduce the presence of private traders upon the Indians of the Mississippi River Valley. The Federal Government established a system of government trading factories and trading posts in the Northwest. These government owned and operated trading houses made the Indians more economically dependent upon the United States, and by doing so, diminished the influence of foreign traders upon them. The government intended the trading factories to also provide the Indians with a more equitable deal than they had been receiving from private traders, especially the unscrupulous ones.

Unfortunately, the government trading factories were ineffective and too costly to maintain. They had higher overhead prices than the private traders, which may account for the fact that the government prices were usually higher than those of the private trader. The Indians continued, however, to trade with foreign agents and private American traders, though ostensibly under government control.17

A note written by Major Morrell Marston, of the Commanding Office at Fort Armstrong on Rock Island from August 1819 – June 1821, best expressed the Indian attitude toward attempts by the U.S. Government to compete with private
Private traders regularly traveled to the Indian villages with their trade goods, contrary to the practice of government traders, who operated trading posts known as factories. According to Major Marston, a typical reply by Indians in his vicinity, when informed that the President of the United States supplied the trade goods at the government trading houses, was:

You are pasi-i-to (a fool), our Great Father is certainly no trader; he has sent those goods to be given to use, as presents, but his agents are endeavoring to cheat us, by selling them for our peltries.\(^\text{18}\)

After the War of 1812, the U.S. Government re-established trading factories at Prairie du Chien, Chicago, and Green Bay. In 1818, for example, the government added a trading house at Fort Edwards and, in 1819, it was operating independently. The high traffic of liquor traded to Sauk and Fox Indians between the region of Fort Edwards and Rock Island led to the establishment of the federal trading factory at Fort Edwards. The trading of liquor to Indians, though illegal, was commonly practiced by French, Spanish, English, and American Traders. As an aside, Indians of the upper Mississippi Valley purportedly traded anything they possessed for whiskey. Those Indians supposedly bartered away an entire season’s worth of pelts, clothing off their backs, their weapons used for hunting, and their women, to trade for liquor.\(^\text{19}\)

At the factories or trading posts, furs were sorted as to grade and quality, and treated and pressed into bales in preparation for shipment. Trading houses, such as the Fort Edwards factory, shipped pelts and skins of deer, bear, beaver, otter, raccoon, and muskrat down river to St. Louis. During the winter season of 1819, the Sauk and Fox Indians supplied five traders 980 packs of peltries. The estimated value of the furs was cited at $58,000 dollars.\(^\text{20}\) A manager supervised each factory and, at times had a staff that included clerks, laborers and interpreters.

Government trading factories were too few and scattered to have had any effective impact on the fur trading business of the Northwest. The government estimated that during their peak years the factories only handled ten percent of the fur business. Indians saw little advantage in
Fort Armstrong, Fort Edwards, Fort Crawford, and Fort Snelling formed a chain of military posts, built along the upper Mississippi River, in 1816-1819. The U.S. Army constructed them to control the Indians and their trade, and to keep the river open to commerce. (AMSAS-HI)

trading at the factories. It was more convenient for them to deal with private traders who traveled to their villages than to transport their pelts on a long journey to one of the scattered government trading houses. In addition, the government trading factories did not extend credit or offer liquor. Government trading factories eventually lost out to the powerful American Fur Company of John Jacob Astor and were abolished in 1822.

**Act of 1816 and the American Fur Company**

Congress passed the Act of 1816 that prohibited foreigners from engaging in trade with the Indians on American soil. John Jacob Astor, the leading American fur trading entrepreneur, lobbied for the passage of the bill. After securing the legislation, Astor immediately expanded the American Fur Company and set into motion his place to control the entire fur trading business within the United States. He purchased the remaining third of the Southwest Company which he had earlier formed with Montreal merchants, thus making him the sole owner. Astor then acquired a number of trading posts of the British Northwest Company, which were on American soil in the Great Lakes region of the United States, and secured the services of the best traders in the upper Mississippi River Valley and Great Lakes region in his effort to corner the fur trade. The beginning of the American Fur Company's operation in the Northwest in 1817 coincided with the army's establishment of a series of military posts through the region. Two agents of the American Fur Company in the Rock Island vicinity were Colonel George Davenport and Russell Farnham, both of whom played significant roles in Rock Island's history.

**Army Establishes U.S. Authority in Valley**

The War Department, acting in support of the Fur Trading Act of 1816, began that same year to reassert its authority over the Northwest. The U.S. Army planned to construct a chain of military posts through the upper Mississippi River Valley and the Great Lakes region. The purpose of constructing these posts was twofold: the forts provided safety for American fur traders and prevented British and French-Canadian traders from opening in the area.
Fort Snelling built in 1819, was originally named Fort Saint Anthony Falls. In 1824, it was renamed for its first commander Josiah Snelling. The Fort was situated on a high bluff at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers. The construction of Fort Snelling completed a series of U.S. forts built to re-establish United States control of the upper Mississippi River Valley. Today, it is a historical site of the Minnesota State Historical Society. Fort Armstrong, at Rock Island, was another of these posts built after the War of 1812. (AMSAS-HI)

During the period from 1816 to 1819, the United States Army reconstructed Fort Dearborn near Chicago, built Fort Howard at Green Bay, and constructed Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien. These forts effectively prevented foreign traders from using the Fox River-Wisconsin Waterway portage to enter the Mississippi River Valley. In addition to Fort Crawford, two smaller posts were constructed in 1816-1817. They were Fort Armstrong at Rock Island and Fort Edwards at the mouth of the Des Moines River. In 1819, Fort Snelling, constructed at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, completed the series of forts along the upper Mississippi River Valley. The army strategically placed the forts where it did to impress the Indians and monitor their trade. Government Indian agencies were also frequently established at or near these military posts.

Indian Agents

Indian Agents and their subordinates were the official civilian representatives of the U.S. Government at many of the forts of the upper Mississippi River Valley. Agents, such as Thomas Forsyth at Fort Armstrong, provided a communication link between the Sauk and Fox Indians and the Federal Government. The duties of Forsyth and his subagents included administration of the Government’s treaty obligations such as the payment of annuities to the Sauk and Fox tribes. Forsyth’s other duties included granting licenses for trade with the Indians; enforcing regulations pertaining to the fur trade; distributing presents to principal chiefs; and receiving visiting Indians. Indian agents also performed the difficult task of explaining new government regulations and correcting Indian misconceptions of past treaties.

An example of an Indian agent performing such duties occurred in 1818, when agent Thomas Forsyth informed the Sauk and Fox tribes that the annuities they had been receiving were not presents but actually part of the purchase price for their lands. Although many Indians continued to accept the annuities, some did not. Black Hawk among others, refused to receive any annuities after hearing Forsyth.
CHAPTER THREE

FORT ARMSTRONG: THE FIRST PRESENCE OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ON ROCK ISLAND

In the spring of 1816, Brevet Brigadier General Thomas A. Smith was dispatched from St. Louis to Rock Island. As earlier mentioned the War Department instructed the army to build a number of military posts on the upper Mississippi River to deter British and other foreign trading outfits from operating in the river valley. General Smith, remembering the defeats inflicted upon U.S. expeditions by Sauk and Fox Indians, selected Rock Island as a site for one of the forts.23

Brigadier General Smith arrived at Rock Island in early May 1816 and chose the western tip of the lower end of the island as the construction site for the fort. From this site U.S. troops could observe the troublesome Sauk and Fox Indians; protect American fur traders; and keep open a line of communication and commerce to Prairie du Chien and other posts further up river.

On 10 May 1816, a detachment of troops from the U.S. 8th Infantry landed on the island and immediately began building a fort. Shortly thereafter, General Smith and a detachment of troops proceeded up river to construct Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien. In General Smith’s absence, Colonel William Lawrence assumed command of the construction site at Rock Island and, upon completion, the fort at Rock Island was named Fort Armstrong in honor of John Armstrong. John Armstrong had been an army officer in the American Revolutionary War and later served as Secretary of War under President James Madison. His role in the U.S. invasion of Canada during the War of 1812, coupled with the British retaliatory capture of Washington and the burning of the capital, led ironically to Armstrong’s resignation as Secretary of War in 1814.
Description of Fort Armstrong

In many respects Fort Armstrong represented the army’s stock plan for building military posts on the Western Frontier. It had squared hewn timbers with dovetailed corners; and its blockhouses had an overhang and a monitored roof which provided a lookout station. Usually, building such as the barracks, which were made from hewn timber, formed the exterior walls of the fort. The most noticeable feature of the barracks were their inward-sloping shed-type roofs.

At many of the frontier military posts pickets were stationed to guard against surprise attacks. In 1817, the army assigned Major Stephen H. Long, a topographical engineer, the task of charting the Mississippi River as far north as Prairie du Chien. On 2 August 1817, Major Long wrote in his journal probably the best description of Fort Armstrong. He wrote:

The Fort (Armstrong) is situated immediately upon the lower extremity of Rock Island, at which place the shores are perpendicular cliffs of limestone 30 feet high. In some instances the cliffs project over their base and even some parts of the Fort overhang the water.

Major Long elaborated with the following detailed description of Fort Armstrong:

The Fort (Armstrong) has two entire faces only, the other two sides being sufficiently fortified against an assault by the cliffs before mentioned. The east face
Below: Fort Armstrong, about 1845, probably during its last days as an army depot. Note that the fort had three blockhouses with the one towards the interior being the largest. (AMSAS-HI Archives)

commences immediately upon the top of the cliff, where here is a Block (No.1) 2 stories high and 21 feet square. The front upon this side is 277 feet including a Block House (No.2) at the NE corner of the Fort 26 feet square. The North face forms a tight angle with the east and extends from Block House No. 2 to the North Channel of the River, where it is terminated by Block House No. 3 of the same dimensions as No. 1, presenting a front of this side of 288 feet. Both faces are flanked by Block House No. 2, the other Block Houses being placed in such a manner as to form a part of the Front of the two faces. The Block Houses are all two stories high, their second stories being placed diagonally upon the first. No. 2 has also a basement story which is used as a store house. The faces are made up principally by the rear walls of the Barracks and store houses. They are about 20 feet high and furnished with two rows of loop holes for muskets. The spaces between the buildings are fortified by walls of stone about 8 feet high supporting a breast work of timer 5 feet high.

The buildings ranged along the Faces contain 7 rooms 20 feet square upon each side; 8 of which are occupied as soldiers’ quarters, 3 as hospitals, 2 as store houses, and 1 as Guard House. On the south and west sides detached from other parts of the works are situated 2 buildings (one word illegible) 64 feet long & 16 wide, containing four rooms each, designed for officers’ quarters. In the SW corner is a 2-story building with low wings designed as quarters for the Commanding Officer and Offices for the use of the Garrison. The body of the building is furnished with Piazzas on both sides, and the whole combines a degree of taste and elegance worthy of imitation at all other military posts in this part of the country.

The works are constructed principally of square timber, the lower part of the block houses including embrasures (an opening for a gun in the war or parapet) is of stone. The Magazine also is of stone, 7 by 10 feet in the clear, its walls 4 feet in thickness. Besides these, there are a few other buildings outside the Garrison, viz. a smith shop, sutler’s and contractor’s stores, a stable, etc. 24

Fort Armstrong’s strategic position on the western tip of Rock Island’s lower end provided the fort with command of both channels of the Mississippi River. Troops constructed fortifications only on the two sides of the post facing inland. Steep bluffs eliminated the need for two fort walls and one blockhouse. The three blockhouses of the fort anchored the walls which faced the interior of the island, and three companies of infantry were quartered in the barracks. Additional buildings housed the fort’s surgeon, interpreter,
Indian agent, blacksmith, servants, officer, and commander.

The Garrison at Fort Armstrong

Nearly 1,000 men comprised General Smith’s expedition, which constructed military posts near the mouths of three major tributaries to the Mississippi River. The expeditions were composed of 800 regular army soldiers and 150 laborers, which actually comprised at that time approximately 1/10 of the nation’s standing army.

During construction, Fort Armstrong had a garrison of 600 soldiers; but, shortly thereafter that numbers were reduced to less than 200 troopers. Frequently, between 1824 and 1836, the garrison at Fort Armstrong fell below 100 soldiers.

Fort Crawford, located near the mouth of the Wisconsin River, had a garrison strength of approximately double the size of Fort Armstrong. Fort Edwards, the first of the three posts to be constructed, was situated near the mouth of the Des Moines River at the site of present day Warsaw, Illinois, and generally had a smaller garrison than Fort Armstrong. It’s garrison strength consistently numbered below 100 men. In 1824, the U.S. Army closed Fort Edwards. However, Fort Armstrong continued as an active military post until 1836 and an army garrison remained at Fort Crawford until 1856.

The initial site selection of Fort Crawford, near Prairie du Chien, was poor. Spring floods forced the selection of a new site further back from the Mississippi. Fort Crawford was abandoned briefly in 1826, but re-established a short time later with the construction of a new stone fort.
The small army posts situated in the West, along the upper Mississippi River, were isolated from civilization especially during the winter months when the river froze over. Periodic stops by supply boats or mail couriers who arrived by river or by overland routes broke the isolation with news from the East. Each post, however, was also visited by an inspector general who attempted annually to conduct an inspection tour of all posts on the western frontier. His visits brought military discipline to the posts and raised the spirit de corps of troops whose spirit and training had eroded due to isolation and the lack of soldierly instruction.

From 1826 to 1845, Colonel George Croghan, a hero of the War of 1812, served as the inspector general of these outposts. Colonel Croghan annually toured the Western Frontier, inspecting posts and preparing first hand comments of activities at the forts for inclusion in his official reports to Washington.

His inspection report of Fort Armstrong in August 1826 praised the post for the excellent deportment displayed by its soldiers. Colonel Croghan attributed the lack of discipline to the lack of whiskey available at Fort Armstrong during Major J.H. Vose’s command. Major Vose enforced general orders which restricted each soldier’s purchase of liquor to one gill (1/4 of a pint or four ounces). The four ounce daily ration from the post sutler was poured out at the mess hall door. Soldiers who received permission to purchase whiskey received a half-a-gill ration (two ounces) just before breakfast, and the remaining two ounces at dinner. Although general orders from the Adjutant General’s Office restricted, then banned, the daily ration of alcohol at military posts, replacing it with coffee, the soldiers at Fort Armstrong and other installations managed to purchase a steady supply of liquor from other sources.26

The life of a soldier at Fort Armstrong tended to be routine, especially during the winter months when the Mississippi River froze over and the river closed to navigation.

The soldiers, in addition to their military tasks of performing guard duty, drilling, and keeping the peace, served as carpenters,
teamsters, gardeners, orderlies, blacksmiths, and livestock handlers. At times, a portion of the troops stationed at Fort Armstrong would be detached to either Fort Crawford or Fort Edwards. Soldiers also were frequently dispatched to the lead mining region near Galena and Dubuque. Officers stationed at Fort Armstrong, or at one of the other frontier posts in the Mississippi Valley, often went on furlough to escape the drudgery of frontier duty. Soldiers on furlough for more than a year without leave, however, were reported as deserting the army. Desertion and drunkenness among the troops were two of the more serious problems that the Commanding Officer of Fort Armstrong had to contend with on the frontier. Other problems included enforcement of regulations that prohibited foreign traders and the sale of alcohol to Indians. Periodically, soldiers who strayed from the garrison were killed and scalped by Indians. One such soldier, John Haines, left Fort Armstrong alone to hunt on 27 September 1820. His body was discovered a week later, shot, scalped, and mutilated with multiple stab and club wounds. The army responded to such acts of violence by demanding that the responsible tribe, in this case the Winnebagoes at Prophet's Town, turn over to them the guilty party. To ensure such actions were taken, the army held five Winnebago chiefs as hostages until the murderers were delivered to them.

Colonel George Davenport and Antoine LeClaire

Two future entrepreneurs, George Davenport and Antoine LeClaire, became historically significant individuals. Davenport was employed as the post sutler at Rock Island and
Antoine LeClaire was hired as the interpreter for the Fort Armstrong commander and the Indian agent. Both of these men became prominent business leaders of the communities they later founded on each side of the Mississippi River opposite Rock Island.

In 1816, the army did not have a commissary department that provided personal items to soldiers. Instead, a private contractor was commissioned by the government to provide the items. George Davenport, as the agent for the private contractor, sold supplies to the soldiers stationed at Fort Armstrong. He had been a seaman, an army recruiting sergeant, and a post sutler. However, Davenport did not become wealthy until he started trading with the Indians. In 1818, he quit his post sutler position and devoted his time entirely to his Indian trade business. Davenport became a full-time trader the same year Illinois became the twenty-first state to be admitted to the union. In addition to his store on Rock Island, Davenport established several other trading posts in the area.

In 1822, George Davenport expanded his trading operations with various tribes of the Upper Mississippi River Valley. He established a trading post on the Fever River near Galena, Illinois. Colonel Davenport also set up trading houses at Flint Hills (Burlington, Iowa), at the mouth of the Iowa River; and on the Wapsipinicon (Wapsi) and Maquoketa Rivers in Iowa territory. He also included in his operations three trading posts along the Rock River in Illinois.

At Rock Island, George Davenport’s double log cabin initially served as a combination trading post and quarters. Indians and early settlers frequently visited Davenport’s cabin to receive provisions on credit. He provided them with “grub stakes” (credit) until they were ready to market their peltries or crops.

Considered by many to be the first white civilian to live on Rock Island, George Davenport was born in England and came to the United States as a young man. He used his English background to gain the confidence and trade of the Sauk, Fox, and Winnebago tribes. Wabokieshiek, also known as the Prophet, was leader of the Winnebagos camped on the Rock River at Prophet’s Town.
These Indians considered George Davenport, as an Englishman, a friend.

Davenport’s wealth increased after he formed a partnership with Russell Farnham in 1824. In 1826, the two traders sold their trading business to Astor’s American Fur Company and became agents for that trading company. Also in 1826, Davenport and Farnham built a combination inn, tavern, and stagecoach station, known as the John Barrel House, on the Mississippi shore in the city of Rock Island. The station was part of a stage route to Galena from Southern Illinois. The village of Farnhamsburg, one of two villages that formed the city of Rock Island, developed around that inn. The John Barrel House became the seat of justice for Rock Island County and was the site of the county’s first election.

George Davenport capitalized on the increasing traffic between Southern Illinois and Galena. A man of many talents, he piloted The Virginian; the first steamboat to dock at Rock Island through the “Upper Rapids” or Rock Island Rapids of the Mississippi River. The steamboat serviced in the lead mining region of Dubuque and Galena. Soon Mississippi steamboats were frequently navigating the “Upper Rapids” carrying workers and supplies to this mining region. Lead diggings near Dubuque and Galena, approximately 100 miles upstream from Rock Island, increased the local economy. Traders, such as Davenport, had for several years acquired lead, as well as pelts by barter with the Sauk and Fox Indians. John Shaw, another trader who operated a trading boat between St. Louis and Prairie du Chien, also traded with the Indians for lead. By 1823, thousands of pounds of lead were being shipped downstream from the mines around Galena and Dubuque.

It was not long before settlers, speculators, and men looking for work made their way to these mines north of Rock Island. Not all of the traffic traveled by boat; many walked the trails across the Rock River Valley and along the Mississippi River to Galena. By 1823, a few of these travelers from Southern Illinois settled as squatters on Sauk lands along the Rock River Valley. Since the land had not yet been surveyed or opened for public sale, these settlers were encroaching upon the Indians camped near the mouth of the Rock River.

Antoine LeClaire, post interpreter, was of French and Pottawatomi Indian background, and
acquired vast tracts of land from the Sauk and Fox. He served as interpreter at treaty councils between the Sauk and Fox nation and the U.S. Government which took place in 1829, 1831, 1832, 1836, 1837, and 1842. Through the Treaty of 29 July 1829, Antoine LeClaire and wife Frances received two sections of land totaling 1,280 acres from the Sauk and Fox Indians. The LeClaire Reserve, another tract of land, was acquired by LeClaire after serving as interpreter during the 1832 Black Hawk Treaty. Davenport purchased this land from LeClaire, and at the head of the “Upper Rapids” or Rock Island Rapids laid out the town of LeClaire naming it in his honor. According to George W. Wickstrom’s work The Town Crier:

Colonel George Davenport and two other men who had an eye for a little quiet speculation in corner lots plotted a city in 1832 or 1833 where downtown Rock Island now stands. They laid out whole clocks for court, jail, churches, and a college, and they named the streets for the mighty men, white and red, who then lived in these parts.  

In 1836, LeClaire and Davenport, along with a few other land speculators, founded the city of Davenport on the west bank of the Mississippi River opposite Rock Island. Colonel Davenport purchased an interest in the town site of Port Byron, Illinois, and later, in 1841, he laid out an addition to the city of Moline. Rock Island became the “cradle” of the Quad Cities. Much of the organizing and mapping out of these communities occurred at meetings held at the Davenport House located on Rock Island.

Impact of Intertribal Feuds Upon Rock Island Region

Intertribal squabbles and sporadic fighting took place among various tribes of the Mississippi River Valley which frightened and disturbed settlers near Fort Armstrong. Settlers were shocked by the ruthlessness of Indian intertribal warfare. Under the Indian code of conduct, no one of the enemy tribe was spared. Indian agents and commanders at Fort Armstrong and other military posts along the Mississippi River intervened constantly in intertribal feuds to prevent disputes from erupting into full scale frontier wars.
In 1825, the U.S. Government attempted to arrange peace between warring Sioux and the Sauk and Fox tribes. According to Indian tradition, relatives of a murdered victim could demand payment in blood or “gifts” from the attackers to “cover” the loss of their dead relative. Government agents tried to develop a plan which eliminated the need for such avenging attacks. The government attempted to provide a peaceable solution to the problem. It agreed to cover the dead on both sides of the Indian conflict. Government officials considered such a procedure to be less expensive than mobilizing the army.

The plan, however, proved ineffective. Territorial encroachments by hunting parties continued to occur and many of the hunting parties returned to their villages with the scalps of their enemies.

Settlers feared an attack on the Sauk and Fox villages near Dubuque and Rock Island by the Sioux, Menominee, and Winnebago forces. However sixteen chiefs and one woman from the Fox village across from Rock Island were attacked by a war party of Sioux, Winnebago, and Menominee warriors while en route to the parley. The attackers spared one of the Fox chiefs so he could return to his village and tell the tale of the attacks. Again, as in other attacks, the massacre of the Fox leaders was in retaliation to earlier hostile acts performed by the Sauk and Fox against the Sioux. 

The Sauk and Fox tribes prepared for war by mobilizing a force of approximately 1,000 braves. However, the Fox tribe camped near Dubuque, fearing an attack from the Sioux and their allies, evacuated their village and fled downstream to Sauk and Fox villages near Rock Island. As soon as the Fox village was abandoned, squatters from Galena took possession of the Indian diggings, however, federal troops drove off these intruders.

Government agents negotiated a treaty in July 1830 with the feuding Indians that supposedly
Right: Next to Keokuk, Chief Wapello was probably the most influential leader among the Sauk and Fox Indians. (Hauberg Museum, Black Hawk State Park)

“covered” (provided payment for) the losses on all sides involved in the intertribal fighting. An interesting side note to the treaty was that the American Fur Company obtained a provision to the treaty whereby Sauk and Fox Indians were obligated to pay the debts they owed to Company agents, George Davenport and Russell Farnham, from the future sale of tribal lands to the United States.29

Unfortunately, the intertribal warfare was not resolved by the Treaty of 1830. Many Fox Indians felt the gifts they have received to cover the loss of their dead chiefs had not been sufficient; besides, the desire for revenge was too great among many of the Fox braves. In August 1831, a combined Sauk and Fox war party massacred twenty-five Menominee camped at Prairie du Chien in retaliation for the previous slaughter of Fox leaders. When United States agents realized that their plan to prevent any future revenge raids by covering the deal on all sides would not prevent another series of retaliatory attacks, they called for military intervention. However, winter prevented any immediate action by the United States Army. The following spring, General Henry Atkinson, representing the United States Government, held a council at Rock Island in which he threatened to use military force, if necessary, to apprehend the braves involved in the attack on the Menominees. Keokuk and Wapello, two chiefs who were consistently friendly to the United States Government, agreed to the demand. The chiefs, however, were not able to deliver more than three participants to the massacre. The other involved in the slaughter at Prairie du Chien had joined Black Hawk’s hostile band camped on the Rock River. The government did not press the issue any further, fearing that a show of military force might drive more braves into the camp of the hostiles. Many Sauk and Fox Indians were bitter against the Americans because their Fox leaders were killed while trying to comply with a request by the United States Government.

Encroachment by Squatters

Civilization steadily encroached on the Indians in Illinois. Though Illinois achieved statehood in 1818, much of the northern portion of the state had yet to be settled. By 1827, the lead mining community of Galena had become the county seat for the newly organized Jo Davies County, as a result of an increase in population. In that same year, a road linking Southern Illinois with Galena was being surveyed and staked out. In the midst of this progress, the Commanding Officer at Fort Armstrong had to dispatch arms and ammunition to Galena to defend the settlement against an uprising of hostile Winnebagos. A show of military force by army regulars quickly put down the uprising. Illinois Governor Ninian Edwards, in response to the outbreak of Indian hostilities, petitioned the War Department to remove all hostile tribes, including the Winnebagos and the Sauk and
Fox from Illinois. The War Department, in turn, pressured Tom Forsyth, the Indian agent at Fort Armstrong, to convince the Sauk and Fox tribes that they should leave Illinois and relocate on the west bank of the Mississippi River. In the fall of 1828, Keokuk, spokesman for the friendly faction of the two tribes, persuaded many of the Indians to join him at a new camp situated on the Iowa River in what is now the state of Iowa. However, a smaller more militant faction led by Black Hawk remained at the Sauk village located on the banks of the Rock River. Eventually dissident Indians from the Fox and the Kickapoo tribes joined Black Hawk’s band. Counting women and children, the hostile band numbered approximately 1,500 Indians. Keokuk’s peaceful group included a majority of the Sauk and Fox braves and their chiefs, and the camp numbered approximately 3,500 Indians.

Black Hawk’s band continued to live in Illinois and practiced their Indian traditions. After the crops had been harvested in the fall, the braves left their village on the Rock River to participate in their annual winter hunt. In the fall of 1828, and again in 1829, news spread throughout the state that Black Hawk’s British band had left Illinois for good. A rumor also spread that the supposedly abandoned Sauk land would be offered for public sale by the Government Land Office. Soon squatters began to occupy some of the lodges and portions of the land near the Rock River village; but each spring, to their surprise, Black Hawk’s band returned to the village. Black Hawk was astonished by the increasing number of settlers residing in the Rock Island vicinity. Disputes arose between the settlers and Indians over possession of lodges, cornfields, and land. The Indians resented their lodges being occupied or destroyed by squatters; their cornfields being fenced in and taken possession of by these settlers; and their burial grounds being destroyed by the squatter plows. A clash between the Indians and settlers was inevitable as both sides continuously harassed one another. The Indian agent at Fort Armstrong received a steady stream of complaints from settlers and braves. Squatters were especially adept at writing petitions and letters of grievances. Governor Reynolds, upon receiving these written pleas for the removal of Black Hawk’s British band from Illinois, wrote the War Department for assistance. He also called for a volunteer army of Illinois citizens to, if necessary, remove Indians by force.

Article seven of the 1804 Treaty stated the Sauk and Fox Indians could remain at their Indian settlements for as long as the Federal Government possessed the land. Instead of dispatching troops to force an eviction, which would have violated the spirit of the 1804 Treaty, the Federal Government
Below: Keokuk, rival of Black Hawk, was appointed Chief of Sauk Indians by Illinois Governor J. Reynolds and General W. Scott at the close of the Black Hawk War. (AMSAS-HI Archives)
began to open portions of the Sauk land for public sale. In October 1829, the U.S. Government Land Office put the old Sauk village up for sale. Colonel George Davenport and his partner, Russel Farnham, purchased eighty percent of this land. Black Hawk, believing he had the support of other tribes and the support of the British in Canada, threatened the settlers and demanded they leave.

The settlers were convinced the Sauk had formed an alliance with the Fox, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, and Winnebago tribes. Fearing an attack, the settlers fled to Fort Armstrong and Davenport's trading post on Rock Island.

Colonel Davenport erected a stockade around his cabin and outbuildings and placed an old swivel gun at the entrance. Only a garrison of eighty U.S. Regulars, under the command of Captain John Bliss, stood between the settlers and what they believed to be several thousand hostile Indians.

Governor Reynolds, fearing a possible massacre, requested additional federal troops to protect the settlers. In response, General Gaines, at Jefferson Barracks near St. Louis, dispatched a large military force to Rock Island.

As a show of force until reinforcements arrived, Captain Bliss had his soldiers begin target practice. He also ordered the firing of morning and evening (cannons) guns for the first time.

General Gaines and six companies from the 6th U.S. Infantry arrived at Rock Island by steamboat in early June 1831. In addition, Colonel Zachary Taylor brought four additional companies down from Fort Crawford. In an attempt to peaceably settle the dispute, General Gains held a council with Sauk and Fox leaders. Keokuk, Wapello, and other chiefs arrived peacefully at the council; however, Black Hawk did not. He appeared with his warriors in war paint; carrying arms; and singing war chants.31

General Gaines explained the government’s position regarding the land the Sauk and Fox had ceded to the United States. He stated that by the provisions of the 1804 treaty, the Indians must relocate because the government had opened the ceded land for public sale. Keokuk and the
other chiefs encouraged Black Hawk and his band to cross the Mississippi River and join them at their camp. However, Black Hawk refused to leave.

On 19 June 1831, Governor Reynolds arrived with his volunteer army and joined General Gaines near the mouth of the Rock River. The combined forces closed in on the Sauk village. U.S. Regulars, along with a company of local volunteers known as the Rock River Rangers, marched from Fort Armstrong across the site of the present day city of Rock Island to the Sauk village on the Rock River. The Rock River Rangers were comprised of 58 men and older boys from the Rock River Region.

The steamboat Enterprise carried a company of soldiers and a cannon up the Rock River to the Indian camp. However, when the troops arrived at the village, they found it deserted. Black Hawk, fearing that the rowdy, undisciplined Rangers could not be controlled by their officer, had fled with his band across the Mississippi River the previous night. The Rangers, who were spoiling for a fight, took out their frustrations by destroying the abandoned Sauk village.

General Gaines sent an ultimatum to Black Hawk stating that if he did not return to the council he would send his army across the Mississippi River after him. On 30 June 1831, Black Hawk met with Governor Reynolds and General Gaines at Rock Island. At this conference, 27 chiefs and warriors, including Black Hawk, signed a treaty that included three major agreements: to honor the provisions of the 1804 Treaty; to move to Keokuk’s camp on the Iowa; and not to return across the Mississippi River without the permission of the U.S. Government. In addition, the Sauk and Fox tribes were to break off all communication with the British. In return the U.S. Government agreed to provide food and replace the loss of the cornfields that Black Hawk’s party abandoned on the Rock River in Illinois.

Within a year Black Hawk had broken his promise. On 8 April 1832, Black Hawk and his party re-crossed the Mississippi River. They entered the state of Illinois at Yellow Banks near the present community of Oquawka. According to several accounts, Black Hawk and his British band crossed the Mississippi signing and banging their drums in
what seemed a very threatening manner. Settlers in the Rock Island vicinity, upon hearing the ruckus, fled to Fort Armstrong for protection. To the settlers on the Illinois frontier, it appeared that Black Hawk’s band was a war party invading the state to attack their settlements. The settlers and government officials responded to this threat by arming themselves, organizing a state army of mounted volunteers, and calling for assistance from federal troops.

Although the sight of approximately 1,500 Indians noisily crossing the river startled the settlers, the band was not a typical war party. Women and children customarily did not travel with war parties. Black Hawk’s band that crossed the river, however, consisted of nearly 500 warriors and approximately 1,000 women and children.

Black Hawk claimed his party had accepted an invitation from the “Prophet” to live and to plant corn at Prophet’s Town, located up the Rock River nearly forty miles from Rock Island. However, Black Hawk did possess some vague plan to persuade Keokuk and his followers to join his conspiracy; but they refused. Two members of the dissident band provided Black Hawk with faulty advice. The Prophet related to Black Hawk his visions of neighboring tribes joining him in driving off the settlers. Neapope, one of the few Sauk chiefs to have joined the dissident band, falsely informed Black Hawk that he had received a pledge of arms and ammunition from the British during a visit to Canada in 1831. Based on this information, Black Hawk began his journey to retake his former village. Not grasping the severity of the situation, he ignored messages from Fort Armstrong and from the peaceful Sauk and Fox camps advising him to return to the west banks of the Mississippi River. Illinois Governor John Reynolds labeled the Indian crossing an invasion and called for the immediate formation of an army of state volunteers to drive them back across the river.

Governor Reynolds defended his organization of a volunteer army by saying, “If I did not act, and the inhabitants were murdered after (I
was) informed of their situation, I would be condemned.32 It was also clear that Governor Reynolds equated victory over the Indians with political victory. In a letter to General Atkinson he wrote: “Nothing will save me but a decisive stroke on the Indians.”33 The Governor circulated petitions asking for aid throughout the counties, and he made speeches urging people to volunteer to defend the frontier. After receiving General Gaines’ written report of his earlier meeting with Black Hawk at Rock Island, Governor Reynolds wrote to Gaines that:

I was very much rejoiced on receiving (your) letter, as it puts my whole proceedings on a legal and constitutional footing, the responsibility of the war was removed from me.34

While Black Hawk’s band was proceeding up the Rock River toward the Winnebago camp at Prophet’s Town, federal troops were on their way to Rock Island. General Atkinson left Jefferson Barracks near St. Louis with the 6th Infantry Regiment on 10 April 1832. Governor Reynolds had assembled 2,000 volunteers at Beardstown, Illinois. Near Yellow Banks, the volunteers, under the command of General Samuel Whiteside, were to be joined by General Atkinson’s Regiment.

Fort Armstrong became the headquarters for military operations during what would be known as the Black Hawk War. A company of Illinois volunteers were stationed at Fort Armstrong as reinforcements from April to June 1832. The company pulled garrison duty and was composed of men from Rock Island and nearby counties. George Davenport supposedly volunteered for duty during the Indian trouble and received the commission of quartermaster at Fort Armstrong with the rank of Colonel.

In the 15 weeks of the Black Hawk War, a majority of the fighting actually took place in Northern Illinois and Southern Wisconsin, even though the spark that ignited the conflict happened in the vicinity of Rock Island. After Black Hawk had inflicted a humiliating defeat on a detachment of 275 mounted volunteers commanded by Major Isaiah Stillman at Sycamore Creek near Dixon Ferry, it was no longer possible to settle the dispute peaceably.

Major Stillman’s Rangers, anxious to fight Indians, had volunteered to serve as a scouting party for the U.S. Regulars. Stillman’s troops...
ignoring an opportunity to parley with Black Hawk, fired on Indian messengers carrying a flag of truce. The Rangers pursued the few Indians that escaped to Sycamore Creek, where Black Hawk surprisingly attacked the Rangers. Stillman's mounted Rangers panicked and retreated. Only 11 volunteers actually were killed in the skirmish, but their bodies were horribly destroyed. The Indians had scalped them and mutilated them. The route of these undisciplined volunteers became known in the Rock Island vicinity as the Battle of Stillman's Run. War could no longer be avoided, and state-wide panic occurred as newspapers in the state carried vivid accounts of the butchery. The politicians, regular soldiers, and volunteer Rangers became more determined to defeat Black Hawk.  

Black Hawk's band fled north, searching for a place to re-cross the Mississippi River. During these weeks of flight, isolated attacks occurred by small bands of warriors. The raiding Indians would sneak up on a lone cabin, then murder, scalp, and steal provisions of the inhabitants. The roving parties included Winnebago, Potawatomi, and Kickapoo braves in addition to Sauk and Fox warriors. On 27 May 1832, a raiding party attacked three families that had gathered at a cabin along Indian Creek, just six miles north of Ottawa, near the Illinois River. The Indians massacred 15 men, women, and children at the cabin, but spared two 17 and 15 year old sisters. The sisters were taken captive and later ransomed for horses at Blue Mound, Wisconsin.  

Besides attacking lone cabins, the small bands of marauding warriors also ambushed travelers. Another example of the random nature and savageness of the attacks by these small, roving war parties occurred on 23 May 1832. Felix St. Vrain, an Indian agent at Fort Armstrong who had replaced Thomas Forsyth, was killed while delivering dispatches from Fort Armstrong to Galena. Agent St. Vrain and his three companions were killed and scalped. Reportedly, St. Vrain's body was dismembered and his heart cut out and eaten by his killers.
Below: Lieutenant Robert E. Lee. In 1837, he surveyed the upper rapids of the Mississippi River at Rock Island. (Davenport Public Library)

Right: The upper rapids at Rock Island forced steamboat crews to unload their cargo and transport it overland past the rapids in order to lighten the vessel for its trip through the rapids. Rock Island was a break-of-bulk point. (AMSAS-HI Archives)

Many of the settlers serving as Rangers on the Illinois frontier were just as savage. Several of these citizen volunteers took Indian scalps as trophies during the campaign. The federal troops were issued specific orders not to scalp or mutilate any Indians in the course of the conflict. The Black Hawk War was the last gasp in defense of preserving the Indians’ way of life in Illinois.

During the Indian conflict, progress continued to be made in opening the state’s northern frontier region. In 1829 Lieutenant Napoleon Buford, while on topographical duty, began to draw up surveys of the rapids of the upper Mississippi River, including those at Rock Island. Also in 1829, President Andrew Jackson appointed a commission to approach the Fox Indians regarding the transfer of mineral rights to the Federal Government. On 9 February 1831, the Illinois state legislature passed an act to establish Rock Island County, which included the area of the former Sauk village. Section One of the act established the boundaries. Section Two stated that 350 inhabitants were needed for a general election to be held for the election of three commissioners, a sheriff, and a coroner. Due to the Indian unrest in the Rock Island area, the county elections were not held in 1833.

Battle of Bad Axe and the Capture of Black Hawk

Black Hawk and his followers continued north along the Mississippi River searching for a place to cross. On 2 August 1832, General Atkinson, with about 500 Regulars and some volunteers, caught up with Black Hawk’s band in Southern Wisconsin at the confluence of the Bad Axe River and the Mississippi. At the Battle of Bad Axe the Indians were decisively defeated by federal forces with the aid of the steamboat Warrior and its six-pound gun. Driven into the river by their pursuers, the Indian warriors, their elders, women, and children were shot down or drowned as they tried to escape. Many of those that reached the west banks of the Mississippi were slain by a band of Sioux recruited by the U.S. Army. Black Hawk, however, escaped with a small band that included the Prophet. Two weeks later, they were captured by Winnebago Indians who also had been recruited by the United States Army. The army recruited Sioux, Winnebago, and Menominee
Below: The Battle of Bad Axe depicted below resulted in a crushing defeat and slaughter of Black Hawk’s band of hostile Indians. (AMSAS-HI Archives)

warriors to aid in the capture of Black Hawk.

Lieutenant Robert Anderson, later of Fort Sumter fame, was one of the army officers aboard the Warrior. In addition to Lieutenant Anderson, an impressive number of participants in the Black Hawk War later became famous as politicians and as soldiers. Included among the roll call of Black Hawk War veterans were United States Presidents, Abraham Lincoln and Zachary Taylor; Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Army General Winfield Scott; and Secretary of War and later President of the Confederate States of America, Jefferson Davis. Several other participants later rose to the military rank of General. Among this group were two Confederate Generals, Albert Sidney Johnson and Joseph E. Johnson. A half dozen other veterans of the Black Hawk War were later elected Governor of Illinois and another veteran of the Indian conflict later became Governor of Wisconsin.39

The Black Hawk War became a secondary issue during the 1832 presidential campaign of Andrew Jackson. Governor John Reynolds’ volunteer army of Illinois settlers, with politicians as officers, had been unable to apprehend Black Hawk’s hostile band of Indians. When the governor requested additional federal troops to subdue Black Hawk, President Jackson ordered General Winfield Scott to assume command of an army of 1,000 Regulars, which was to be dispatched from the east to Fort Armstrong.

General Scott’s expedition was ill fated from the beginning. While en route to Chicago, aboard four steamboats, his troops were stricken with an outbreak of Asian cholera. When General Scott’s forces finally reached Fort Armstrong they had
been decimated by the disease. Only 220 U.S. Regulars completed the march from Chicago to Rock Island. Scott's army arrived too late to take the field against Black Hawk. A few weeks earlier, Black Hawk's dissident band had been virtually obliterated at the Battle of Bad Axe in Southern Wisconsin. All that was left for General Scott and his troops to do was to assist Governor Reynolds in drafting the peace treaty and to guard the few prisoners that survived the battle.

However, within a week of General Scott's arrival at Fort Armstrong, cholera once again surfaced among the soldiers in epidemic proportions. General Scott's had distinguished himself in an exemplary manner in his efforts to save the lives to his soldiers. General Scott, in disregard to his personal safety, dispensed medicine and cared for the sick. His strict orders to enforce discipline provided the critical leadership needed during such a crisis. Army physicians knew little as to the cause of the disease, except for their observation of the stricken. The disease seemed to attack men that were under the influence of alcohol and those weakened by the lack of proper eating habits of living in crowded, unsanitary quarters. General Scott issued the following order to the U.S.

Regulars and volunteer Rangers stationed at the fort on 28 August 1832:

It is believed that all these men were of intemperate habits. The Ranger who is dead, it is known, generated this disease within himself by a fit of intoxication... Sobriety, cleanliness of person, cleanliness of camp and quarters, together with care in the preparation of the men's messes are the great preventatives... The Commanding General... therefore peremptorily commands that every soldier or Ranger who shall be found drunk or sensibly intoxicated, after the publication of this order, be compelled, as soon as his strength will permit, to dig a grave at a suitable burying place, large enough for his own reception, as such grave cannot fail soon to be wanted for the drunken man, himself, or some drunken companion. This order is given as well to serve for the
Below: Black Hawk in captivity. (Hauberg Museum, Black Hawk State Park)
punishment of drunkenness as to spare good and temperate men the labor or digging graves for their worthless companions.\textsuperscript{40}

The order also served as a means of controlling fearful soldiers who might turn to drink in despair. After prohibiting intoxication, improving sanitary conditions, and quarantining nearly 1,500 federal soldiers and state volunteers in small groups about the banks and hills along the Mississippi River and the Rock River, the army was successful in bringing about an end to the cholera epidemic.

The Winnebago Indians had been under suspicion of having possibly assisted Black Hawk’s band during the war, but they demonstrated their loyalty to the United States government by detaining Black Hawk and his followers. The reward of money and horses made the task more palatable. On 17 August 1832, the Winnebagos turned Black Hawk over to authorities at Prairie du Chien. Colonel Zachary Taylor, the Commanding Officer at Fort Crawford, appointed Lieutenant Jefferson Davis to take Black Hawk by steamboat to Jefferson Barracks near St. Louis.

**The Black Hawk Purchase (Treaty of 1832)**

The United States Government held a three day peace conference from 19-21 September 1832 with the Sauk and Fox tribes. General Winfield Scott and Illinois Governor John Reynolds conducted the sessions and drafted the final treaty. The opening session was held in a tent on the west banks of the Mississippi, rather than at Fort Armstrong, since some soldiers were yet afflicted with cholera. The Sauk and Fox tribes ceded to the U.S. approximately 6 million acres of land bordering the west banks of the Mississippi River, primarily in Eastern Iowa. The ceded land included the Fox Indians’ lead diggings near Dubuque. The Indians received $660,000 in exchange for the land, and the money was divided in $20,000 annuities, to be paid over a thirty-year period by the U.S. Government. The first two years’ annuities, totaling $40,000 were awarded to Colonel Davenport to settle a credit debt the Sauk and Fox tribes owed him.\textsuperscript{41}

The Indians agreed to vacate the ceded area by 1 June 1833. However, a 400 square mile tract of land on the Iowa River known as the Keokuk Reserve, remained in possession of the Indians. Other provisions of the treaty included the appointment of Keokuk as Chief of the Sauk tribe; the awarding of two sections of land to the U.S. interpreter, Antoine LeClaire, and the supplying of food to Sauk and Fox women and children whose men were killed in the war. In addition, General Scott and Governor Reynolds agreed to honor
Below: Black Hawk Purchase Treaty depicting Antoine LeClaire, Governor John Reynolds, and General Winfield Scott at the table. Original mural on display at the Davenport Bank Building, Davenport, Iowa. (Quad Cities Times Photo Collection)
request by Keokuk for forty kegs of tobacco and forty kegs of salt.

Keokuk (He Who Has Been Everywhere), Wapello (He Who Is Painted White), and Poweshick (The Roused Bear) were among the Indian leaders listed as agreeing to the provisions of the treaty. Wapello and Poweshick were the two leading Fox Indian chiefs at the peace council. This treaty, later known as the Black Hawk Purchase of 1832, officially ended the Black Hawk War. Within a couple of years, all the other Indian tribes in Illinois were also relocated to areas west of the Mississippi River by the United States Government.

Since the threat of Indian hostilities no longer existed, the War Department removed the garrison at Fort Armstrong. Although the army abandoned the fort in 1836, the government retained Rock Island as a government reservation. In 1840, the U.S. Army made some repairs at Fort Armstrong and established an ordnance depot at the old post. Captain William Shoemaker commanded the depot until 1845, when its stores were transferred to St. Louis in support of American efforts during the Mexican War. Fort Armstrong again became vacant, a decaying reminder of Rock Island’s vanishing frontier. In 1856, the last of several fires destroyed the abandoned old post.

The Rock Island area had settled quickly once the Indians were removed from the vicinity. Colonel Davenport played a prominent role in its development and became one of the first three commissioners of Rock Island County. With help from others, Davenport laid out the county seat, which was to be named “Davenport”. However, in a letter published in the Galena Advertiser, Colonel Davenport ridiculed a state legislator for his participation in the Battle of Stillman’s Run. The legislator, in retaliation, blocked the naming of the county seat in honor of Davenport. In 1835, the name Stephenson was substituted for Davenport, and Illinois State Legislature approved the charter. In the meantime, Colonel Davenport, Antoine LeClaire, and others organized and plotted another community on the west bank of the Mississippi River opposite Stephenson. In 1836, the community on the Iowa banks became Davenport.
Below: Official letter announcing the newly elected Commissioners of Rock Island County, for the first county election held in 1833. (AMSAS-HI Archives)

Special Term of the County

Be it remembered that in pursuance of an act of the people of the State of Illinois entitled an act establishing the bounds of county commissioners, and also an act passed at the last session of the General Assembly, entitled an act to establish a permanent court of justice for Rock Island county, it appearing from the election held on the first Monday in the month of July 1833, for Rock Island county, that George DePauw, John M. Spence, and George M. Harlan were duly elected as commissioners for the county of Rock Island, and upon their taking the oaths prescribed by law as commissioners for the county of Rock, the legal notice being given that a special term would be held on the eighth day of July 1833 for Rock Island county, whereupon the said George DePauw, John M. Spence, and George M. Harlan took their seats; and the said Commissioners, upon a special term was held for the commissioners for Rock Island county on the 8th day of July in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty-three.

Present
George DePauw
John M. Spence
George M. Harlan
The village of Stephenson became Rock Island in 1841.42 The planning of these two communities, plus the organizing of the LeClaire and Port Byron villages, occurred at meetings by Colonel Davenport at his island estate. In addition to land speculation, the building of railroads, bridges, river commerce, and business development in the Rock Island area were also topics discussed at these meetings. The Davenport House became the gathering point for the early “shakers and movers” of the Rock Island area.

**The Colonel Davenport House**

In 1833, a year after the Black Hawk Purchase, Colonel Davenport built the most elegant family home for that time in the Rock Island vicinity. The Davenport family included his wife, Margaret; stepdaughter, Susan Lewis; and sons, George L’Oste and Bailey, the latter born to his stepdaughter, and purportedly fathered by Colonel Davenport.

Federal authorities in 1833 rewarded Colonel Davenport for his services to the government by allowing him to build his family residence on the northwest shore of Rock Island. In 1844, Congress passed a special act confirming Colonel Davenport’s title to the property.43 Colonel Davenport’s home was not the typical pioneer cabin. Clapboard lumber, ordered from the East, covered the two-story log-frame house. The clapboard siding gave Colonel Davenport’s frontier home the exterior appearance of a fine eastern residence. Other features of the house included a portico or porch roof, supported by columns; double hung wood sashes; a gable roof with sawed shingles; and two massive brick chimneys.

**The Murder of Colonel Davenport**

On 4 July 1845, robbers murdered Colonel Davenport at his island estate. Rumors of $20,000 in gold, supposedly hidden on the Davenport property, attracted the robbers to the island. Colonel Davenport’s wife and two sons had
gone to an Independence Day celebration in the city of Rock Island. Finding the Colonel alone, the four bandits shot, stabbed and tortured him. However, they departed the island with only a few hundred dollars they had found in the house. Colonel Davenport died from the wounds inflicted upon him by the robbers. A few months later, on 29 October 1845, John Long, Aaron Long, and Granville Young were hanged in the town of Rock Island for the murder of Colonel Davenport. The three outlaws were members of the notorious “Banditti of the Prairie” gang. A crowd of nearly 5,000, which was then approximately three times the population of Rock Island, witnessed the public hangings. The crowd watched and cheered as the Rock Island County Sheriff paraded the three bandits through the streets of Rock Island to the gallows. Then the band played, the people prayed, and the three were hanged. Unfortunately, for Aaron Long, his rope broke. The sheriff supposedly supplied him with a stiff drink, then hanged him a second time.

As for Aaron’s brother, John Long, his body was supposedly shipped to a physician in a barrel of rum. The physician displayed Long’s skeleton in his office. Years later, the doctor’s widow returned the skeleton to Rock Island. For years, the bones of the murderer of Colonel Davenport were displayed at the Rock Island County House, and later at Black Hawk State Park Museum. After several more years in storage, John Long’s skeleton was finally buried in the old pioneer’s cemetery at Black Hawk State Park on 14 September 1978.
Repair of the Colonel Davenport Ruins

In preparation for establishing an arsenal on Rock Island, the Federal Government regained sole possession of the island. A federal commission purchased the more legitimate property claims held by private citizens such as the Colonel Davenport family. The government used the house as an office, and later as a storehouse. Gradually, the Colonel Davenport home deteriorated and fell into disrepair. By the turn of the century, the building was in a state of ruin. In 1906, the Association of Rock Island County sponsored the repair of the dilapidated structure. Public interest in the Davenport House during the 1950s and early 1960s again saved the building from disrepair. On this occasion, the Scott County Home Builders Association collaborated with the Quad Cities Association of Home Builders to repair the structure. Whereas the main portion of the Davenport House has been renovated, the attached wings to the house were removed in 1906 and have not yet been restored. Currently, the Colonel Davenport Historical Foundation maintains the house as a historic site open to visitors.
After the soldiers left Fort Armstrong in 1836, and again when the army depot closed in 1845, the Federal Government placed civilian agents or custodians in charge of Rock Island. Joseph Street, an Indian agent from Prairie du Chien, was the first of these civilian agents. In 1836, the government transferred him to Rock Island. From 1836-1838 “General” Street served as Indian agent and custodian of Rock Island. In 1838, William Davenport succeeded Joseph Street as the Indian agent to the Sauk and Fox residing in Eastern Iowa. Captain W.R. Shoemaker, the Army Depot Commander, assumed command of the island and the depot from 1840-1845. After the depot closed, a series of four civilian agents were placed in charge of Rock Island. The four agents and the period that they served as custodians of Rock Island were: Thomas L. Drumm, 1845-1853; Sergeant Cummings, 1853-1854; Mr. J.B. Danforth, Jr., (founder of the Rock Island Argus) 1854-1857; and H.Y. Slaymaker, 1857-1863. Though these agents were placed in charge of Rock Island they did not usually reside on the island. The Civilian development of Rock Island occurred during the time when there was no military presence nor civilian agents residing on the island. During this period, numerous interested civilians attempted, with some success, to settle on portions of the island. These squatters considered Rock Island to be part of the public domain, especially after the military had departed the island.

The War Department was somewhat reluctant to release the island property for public sale. The army wanted to keep Rock Island in reserve and as early as 1825, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun had informed the Commissioner of the General Land Office that Rock Island was necessary for military purposes. Secretary of War Calhoun directed that Rock Island be reserved from public sale. Ten years later, in 1835, Congress ordered a survey to select potential construction sites for a new armory in the West. In the next two decades, several reports drafted by army officers favorably suggested Rock Island as a potential site
Soon after returning, about the 16th of October 1840, from Cincinnati, I proceeded up the river to Rock Island, agreeably to your orders of the 17th September, and having surveyed the grounds and buildings (old buildings of Fort Armstrong) of the island, have the honor to report that the whole island, containing about 850 acres, belongs to the United States, having been specially reserved from sale for public purposes.45

Captain Bell concluded his report with a strong statement of Rock Island’s value.

I thought it advisable to communicate these facts that the Government may be fully aware of the value of this island and it’s vicinity as the greater and most practicable and desirable water power in the valley of the Mississippi.46

In September 1841, Congress passed an act empowering a commission or board, appointed by the Secretary of War, to conduct a thorough examination of the western regions “for the purpose of selecting a suitable site on the western waters for the establishment of a national armory.” The Secretary of War selected Brigadier General W.K. Armistead, Surgeon General Thomas Lawson, and Lieutenant Colonel S.H. Long as the commissioners for the survey.

The board’s final report to Congress covered 400 pages and included a section on Rock Island. The three officers stressed in their report the ample supply of resources that they “discovered” on Rock Island and in the nearby vicinity. The officers specifically cited the abundance of limestone and the variety of timber on the island as more than sufficient for building purposes. The commissioners also emphasized the potentially great source of water power available at Rock Island. Surgeon General Thomas Lawson endorsed the Rock Island site as a healthy location.
Below: In 1846, David B. Sears built a second dam that connected Rock Island with Benham’s Island. He also constructed the mill shown below in Benham’s Island. (Moline Public Library)

He stated in the study that his endorsement was based on health reports of troops stationed at various military posts. He compared those reports with the shorter sick lists from Fort Armstrong for the same twenty year period. The board also listed Rock Island’s convenient location, its rich soil, and its nearness to coal, lead, and other mineral deposits.

The board visited Rock Island in 1842, shortly after David B. Sears had erected a mill-dam across the south channel of the Mississippi River. The dam connected Rock Island with the Illinois mainland; and the officers reported the dam had attracted another saw mill to the island. In 1846, David B. Sears built a second dam. This dam linked the main island, Rock Island, with Benham’s Island, an island in the main channel. The flat surface of the two dams provided a convenient wagon route from the Illinois mainland to Rock Island.

By the next decade, civilian development on the island had increased. The dams and the water power attracted additional mills, plants, and squatters to Rock Island. These interested civilians, along with speculators, manufacturers, railroads, and waterpower companies, attempted to acquire titles to lands on the island. Eastern speculators who had investments in western land development, railroads, and waterpower companies also attempted to acquire the island. The local citizenry was divided between those natural resources and those that supported the establishment of an arsenal on Rock Island.

Many citizens of the Rock Island vicinity recognized the positive economic impact an arsenal would have on the development of the area. A committee, comprised of Rock Island County citizens, John Buford, Joseph Knox, Joseph B. Wells, John Morse, and George Mixter, drafted an appeal to President John Tyler in the early 1840s to select Rock Island as the site for the new arsenal. The committee reminded the President that the selection of Rock Island would eliminate the need to purchase a site. Another argument presented by the committee included the ease by which arms could be supplied to the West from Rock Island via the Mississippi River and its tributaries. In addition, the appeal cited the rich mineral regions near Rock Island and the vast water power available at Rock Island.47
Jefferson Davis, Secretary of War, 1853-1857, used the authority of his office first as Senator then as War Secretary to block the sale of Rock Island. (AMSAS-HI Archives)

Dred Scott, slave and household servant of Dr. John Emerson, accompanied the doctor, an army surgeon, to Rock Island in 1833. Years later, Dred Scott became involved in a legal battle for his freedom which reached the U.S. Supreme Court. In its famous “Dred Scott Decision” of 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court declared that Scott and other Negro slaves were not citizens of the U.S., and therefore, not entitled to sue in court for their freedom. (AMSAS-HI Archives)

Several prominent politicians in Washington, D.C., also supported the view that Rock Island should be kept in reserve and not offered for public sale. The staunchest of these supporters was Jefferson Davis. First as a Senator in 1850, and four years later, as the Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis used the authority of his office to block the sale of Rock Island. In an 1854 response to a congressional request for his views regarding the sale of the island, War Secretary Davis outlined his department’s plan for Rock Island.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter... asking the views of this Department as to the expediency of selling the military reservation at Fort Armstrong, on Rock Island, Illinois, as contemplated by Senate bill No. 195. The water power available at that place, and the communication by water and railroads projected or in course of construction, concur with other circumstance in rendering Rock Island one of the most advantageous sites in the whole western country for an armory or an arsenal of construction for the manufacture of wagons, clothing, or other military supplies... Any act that may pass to authorize the sale of (the island) should, I think, leave to the (War) Department full power to retain whatever of the reservation may be found useful and proper for the contemplated works, for which it is hoped that congress will at some future day make the necessary appropriation.48

Ironically, less than a decade later, Jefferson Davis had become President of the Confederate States of America; Congress had appropriated funds for the establishment of an arsenal at Rock Island; and the Union Quartermaster Corps had constructed on Rock Island a prison barracks for the detention of captured confederate soldiers during the Civil War.

Despite Jefferson Davis’ success in preventing the sale of Rock Island, private encroachment continued. By 1854, private citizens,
in disregard to government objections, erected a variety of buildings on Rock Island. These citizens did not fit the stereo-typed “dirt poor” pioneer squatter found in contemporary literature and films. Instead, many of the “squatters” on Rock Island were successful businessmen. They operated on the island several saw mills, a sash and blind factory, a chair factory, a wooden tub and pail plant, two shingle shops, two warehouses, a number of stables, and several lumberyards. A few railroad shanties, a dozen or so homes, and other lesser buildings were also on Rock Island. Several of these island businessmen became prominent citizens of the local area. They included David B. Sears, Spencer H. White, and John W. Spencer, owners of a brush dam built in 1841 across Sylvan Slough which connected Rock Island to the Illinois mainland. The three dam owners laid out a town on the Illinois mainland opposite the upper end of Rock Island. Initially, they named the town site Rock Island Mills. However, there were already numerous communities, a river, and an island with similar Rock Island names. Therefore, David B. Sears and the others joined with Huntington Wells, Charles Atkinson, and Joel Wells in plotting out a larger town in 1843, naming it Moline.

**David B. Sears, DeWitt Dimock, and John Gould – Early Entrepreneurs**

In 1855, David Sears purchased title to Benham’s Island, situated near the upper or eastern portion of the larger island of Rock Island. Earlier, in 1846, he had built a stone wall dam which connected Benham’s Island with Rock Island. The dam furnished water power to Sear’s Flour Mill on Benham’s Island and to several businesses on the main island. In addition to the mill, a house with barn, outbuildings, three warehouses, and a steamboat landing were built by David Sears on Benham’s Island. A road built between the two dams formed part of a wagon route that stretched from Moline, across the dam at Benham’s Island, to the steamboat landing. From this steamboat landing, wagons were ferried across the Mississippi River to the Iowa shore.

*Below: David B. Sears’ 1850s Mississippi Mills on Rock Island, along the northeast opposite Benham’s Island. (cartouche from 1857 map of Moline) (Rock Island County Historical Society)*
The Sears’ mill and dams built at Rock Island attracted other businesses to Rock Island. The waterpower available at Rock Island brought commerce to the island. In 1847, Sears persuaded John Deere and his partners, Robert N. Tate and John Gould, to resettle in Moline along the shore of the Sylvan Slough. He did this by offering Deere and Associates rent free waterpower for a period of time, and also promising he would build them a frame factory if they would relocate their grand plow shop from Grand Detour, Illinois to Moline.

David B. Sears and other citizens who held property on Rock island without legal authority maintained extended correspondence with legislators in Washington D.C., in an effort to obtain titles to the properties. Only the persistence of Colonel George Davenport and David B. Sears paid off. They were the only ones to receive legal title to property on Rock Island. As with the case of Colonel Davenport, David Sears received title to the 35.45 acres of land on Rock Island opposite Benham’s Island through a special act of Congress. Influential politicians had aided both Sears and Colonel Davenport. In 1855, David B. Sears succeeded through the special act of Congress to purchase 35.45 acres of island property for $1.25 an acre; the same price per acre that Colonel Davenport paid for his 158 acres in 1844.

Mr. Sears, an enterprising man, laid out a portion of his island property in lots. He planned to develop it as a subdivision to the city of Moline. Although David Sears sold a few lots to his Rock Island Village, the village never developed, and Mr. Sears sold the property back to the Federal Government for $145,175. The price reflected improvements he had made on his property.
Dimock, Gould, and Company

Shortly after John Deere and Robert N. Tate moved their plow shop from Grand Detour to Moline, the two partners invited John Gould, an accountant from Grand Detour, to buy into their plow business. In November 1851, Mr. Gould sold his interest in the company to John Deere for $2,600. John Gould then formed a partnership with his brother-in-law, DeWitt Dimock. In 1852, they opened a woodenware business on Rock Island named Dimock, Gould, and Company. The two partners selected the island as a site for their business in order to take advantage of the waterpower and to be closer to the lumberyards on the island. DeWitt Dimock had earlier, in 1846, established a bedstead factory on Rock Island; but, in 1852, he sold his factory and joined John Gould in forming their wooden tub and pail factory on the island. Their printed business cards read: “Dimock and Gould manufacturers of wooden tubs, pails, bedsteads, and all kinds of (wooden) turned stuff.”

Dimock, Gould and Company’s woodenware factory was the first of its kind of the local area. Prior to 1852, woodenware was shipped into the area from the east at great expense. DeWitt Dimock employed the latest technology in his plant. He instituted the assembly line system, and mass production methods, and relied heavily upon machinery to do practically everything but fasten rivets and paint the products. However, in 1856, a fire destroyed the factory; but, by the following year, Dimock and Gould had built another on the island. After the old brush dam road was washed out due to a flood, Dimock, Gould, and Company replaced the road with a wooden bridge that spanned the slough from Moline to the island. Later, the Federal Government replaced the bridge with a stronger one, constructed in 1873. During the Civil War, Dimock and Gould found an excellent customer for their products right on the island. The woodenware company provided wooden barrels, tubs, pails, and other wooden products for the Rock Island Prison Barracks. Later, wooden buckets, pails, barrels, etc., were replaced by galvanized (coated with rust-resistant zinc) metal products.
In 1862, when Congress passed an act establishing a National Arsenal at Rock Island, Dimock, Gould and Company, plus several other parties who had received grants for temporary property leases, were notified by the War Department to leave the island. By 1867, it became evident to the two parents that they were not going to receive a permanent title to the property which they had developed on Rock Island. Neither Dimock or Gould submitted a claim for monetary settlement to the federal commission that handled the final settlement proceedings. Instead, the firm packed its equipment and re-established itself at a new location on the Moline side of the Mississippi River. It was at this new location that Dimock, Gould and Company developed their famous paper pail. Dimock, Gould and Company outlasted its founders. For over a century, the company which the two brothers-in-law initially started on Rock Island continued to operate in Moline and the surrounding communities.

The presence of squatters on Rock Island, however, had a negative effect on the island. They damaged Rock Island’s timber by cutting and stealing wood. Joseph M. Street, U.S. Indian agent for the Sauk and Fox Indians after the Black Hawk War, notified the War Department that the island, though once well-timbered, had been nearly cleared of its original growth by the public. The squatters destroyed young and old trees and also took possession of favored spots of land on the island. After being informed regarding the squatters and wood stealing at Rock Island, president Martin Van Buren issued a statement instructing the marshal to remove the squatters from the military reservation at Rock Island and, if necessary, to take additional legal steps against the trespassers. Nevertheless, the U.S. marshals and other civil officers were, for the most part, ineffective in their attempts to remove the offenders. In addition to squatters cutting clearings in the island’s timber; and other trespassers pilfering wood for fuel, railroad workers in 1853 began clearing a 100 foot wide path across the island in preparation for laying track.
First Bridge Across the Mississippi River

Plans for a transcontinental railroad had long been a dream of railroad men in America. But, before the dream could be a reality, major obstacles had to be overcome. Several of these obstacles were man-made, such as the right of each state government to grant charters and to regulate railroad construction within the boundaries. Southern politicians attempted to block the advancement of the northern rail route across the United States. Northern Congressmen, in turn, were successful in vetoing a southern rail route to the Pacific Coast. In 1853, Jefferson Davis, Secretary of War in the pro-southern administration of President Franklin Pierce, arranged to buy the Gadsden Purchase from Mexico. This strip of 30,000 square miles in New Mexico and Arizona provided the missing link in a proposed New Orleans to San Diego railroad. Davis, smarting from the congressional defeat of a southern rail route to the Pacific Coast, was extremely active in delaying the northern route to California.

A proposed Chicago to San Francisco rail route crossed the Mississippi River at Rock Island, an island under control of the War Department. Secretary of War Davis attempted to halt construction by involving the bridge company in litigation over the company’s right-of-way across the island.

Other interests, besides southern politicians and southern railroad men, were against the building of a rail route across the heartland of America. Steamboat and river town interests received the railroad as a threat to their inland waterway commerce. The Mississippi River and its tributaries provided a natural north-south trade route for the Midwest’s agricultural products and raw materials. St. Louis became the clearing-house for such trade. From St. Louis, merchants shipped trade goods up the Ohio River to Pittsburgh or transported the cargo down river to New Orleans.

The arrival of the railroad on the east bank of the Mississippi River at Rock Island, however, offered Midwest farmers of Iowa and Northern
Illinois a direct east-west trade route to Chicago and to urban markets farther east. The St. Louis Chamber of Commerce could see its city being replaced by Chicago as the new “hub of the Midwest”. The clash between these two powerful centers of commerce for control of the Midwest’s commercial shipping occurred at Rock Island.

It was not by accident that the railroad came to Rock Island. In June 1845, Colonel George Davenport had hosted a meeting at his island estate to discuss bringing a railroad to Rock Island. Prominent citizens from the Rock Island area such as Antoine LeClaire and Judge James Grant attended the meeting. These enterprising men realized the commercial benefits which would result from railroad and bridge construction at Rock Island. Although Colonel Davenport was murdered two weeks after the meeting, others who attended the event continued to formulate plans to bring a railroad to Rock Island. On 27 February 1847, they succeeded. The Illinois General Assembly granted them a charter to construct a LaSalle to Rock Island railroad line.

LaSalle was the community at the end of the Illinois and (Lake) Michigan Canal from where Rock Island and LaSalle Railroad Company began and was initially managed by local tri-city investors. Judge James Grant of Davenport was elected president of the company. Among the directors of the new line were Napoleon B. Buford, Rock Island; Ebenezer Cook, Davenport; and Charles Atkinson, Moline. However, they lacked experience in railroad construction so the Rock Island and LaSalle Line developed slowly.50

Fortunately, Mr. Henry Farnam, an experienced railroad man and investor, took an interest in the project as an extension of his Michigan and Southern Railroad and got other railroad men to invest in the line. Interest in the line increased sharply after the directors followed Mr. Farnam’s suggestion and extended the line east to Chicago. On 1 October 1851, under its new name, the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad Company began to build westward from Chicago towards Rock Island. As the railroad advanced in the direction of Rock Island, it attracted additional investors. The prospect of linking Chicago and
Lake Michigan with the Mississippi appealed to many investors. However, the additional prospect of Rock Island becoming the site for the first bridge to span the Mississippi River certainly sweetened the investment.

For years, Rock Island had been recognized as the best point at which to bridge the Mississippi River. Mr. A.C. Fulton, a noted civil engineer, among others, surveyed the river crossing at Rock Island and endorsed it as the best site for the first bridge. Engineers of the railroad company preferred Rock Island for numerous reasons. The Mississippi River was narrow at that point, and the shores were bedrock. However, the key attraction seemed to be the island of Rock Island. Using the island as a stepping stone to cross the river appealed to the engineers. The bridge’s construction would be easier, therefore more economical. Rock Island’s location, 180 miles directly west of Chicago, made it less expensive to build than, for instance, in the Galena, Illinois area.

Ironically, an 1859 study, performed by a board of engineers after the construction of the first bridge, cited the location as a poor choice. Notations on a map prepared by the engineers to accompany their report to the War Department had “Bad location for a bridge” written besides the original bridge. A better choice was further downstream, at the old ferry crossing from the city of Rock Island to the Davenport levee. Two main criticisms of the bridge’s original site were that it was too near the rapids, and that its draw span did not line up with the current of the main channel.51

The M & M Bridge Company

Three corporations had to be formed in order to build a railroad that would span the Mississippi River at Rock Island. The Chicago & Rock Island (C&RI) Railroad Company’s charter only applied to constructing a railroad within the boundaries of the state of Illinois. Several directors from the C & RI Railroad joined with a group of Iowa investors to organize the Mississippi and Missouri (M&M) Railroad Company.

The M&M Railroad Company’s charter empowered them to construct a railroad from Davenport, Iowa, on the west banks of the
Mississippi River, to Council Bluffs, Iowa, situated on the east banks of the Missouri River.

The C&R Railroad and the M&M Railroad formed a subsidiary firm named the M&M Bridge Company. The bridge company had interlocking directors from the two railroad firms as officers. The officers of the two companies agreed to cooperate in building a bridge across the Mississippi River and to jointly finance the project. In January 1853, the M&M Bridge Company acquired a charter from the state of Illinois to construct a railroad bridge across the Mississippi River to the Iowa Side. The two railroad lines that composed what was, in reality, one railroad were later allowed to merge. The Chicago & Rock Island track was complete in 1854. The Mississippi & Missouri Railroad, organized in 1853, finished its route from Davenport to Council Bluffs in 1869. By then the company had become the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad Company.

The bridging of the Mississippi River required three phases: first, the construction of a span across Sylvan Slough (southern channel) to Rock Island; second, the laying of a railroad bed in a northeast direction across the island, past Colonel Davenport’s property, to the north shore of the island; and third, constructing the bridge over the main or northern channel.

The Act of 1852 granted rights-of-way through public lands to railroads and road building companies, and the M&M Bridge Company directors assumed that Rock Island was public land and proceeded to survey the river and the island. The island’s status, however, seemed uncertain at that time because of past announcements and rumors of its sale.

Description of the Bridge

The company went ahead and hired two private contractors to build the bridge at Rock Island. The John Warner Co., a local firm, received a contract to contract the piers and establish the grade for the railroad bed across the island. Stone & Boomer Co., of Chicago, constructed the superstructure of the bridge using specially fabricated Howe Truss-type spans.
Description of the Original Bridge

The original bridge had a Howe-Truss-type superstructure with a single track. The superstructure was constructed of timber and consisted of five wooden spans, plus a draw span. Its draw span, the heaviest and largest of its time, was located in the middle of the river. The timber cords of the bridge were protected with two coats of white paint. The bridging of the Mississippi was a major technological achievement. Nothing of that size or status had yet been constructed in the area.

United States vs. Railroad Bridge Company, et al (and others)

By June 1854, the John Warner Company had the stone abutments in place on both sides of Rock Island, plus the stone piers in the south channel (Sylvan Slough) finished. At this point in the bridge’s construction, an officer from Washington, accompanied by two U.S. marshals, appeared at Rock Island. On behalf of the Secretary of War, the officer notified the contractors that they were trespassing on federal property. The officer then instructed the contractors to halt their work and remove all their buildings and other property from Rock Island within 15 days. Directors of the M&M Bridge Company decided to ignore the order. They ordered the contractors to continue their work on Rock Island. Construction work did continue but at a slow pace because of the uncertainty of the situation. Railroad and bridge interests considered Rock Island to be public land, since there was no military presence on the island. They hoped that the Act of 1852 would substantiate their claim to a right-of-way for construction of a railroad across the island.

After lengthy legal correspondence between the War Department and the railroad, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis ordered the U.S. District Attorney in Northern Illinois to begin litigation against the M&M Bridge Company. The district attorney applied for a court injunction to prevent the construction of a railroad across the island and also to prevent the building of bridges over the river. In its suit, the government charged the bridge company with trespassing on federal property and
In July 1855, the case, titled “The United States vs. Railroad Bridge Company, et al., (and others),” came before the United States Circuit Court. Judge John McLean, an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, presided over the case. After listening to testimony from both parties, Judge McLean ruled against granting an injunction sought by the War Department. The judge cited the Congressional Act of 1852 as part of his reasons for refusing to grant the United States Government its application.

Influx of Squatters on Rock Island

Judge John McLean’s decision to reject the government’s request for an injunction to halt bridge and railroad construction on Rock Island had an impact on another issue, that being whether or not Rock Island would be open to civilian settlement, or reserved for a future military purpose. Settlers interpreted the judge’s ruling to mean the island would soon be offered for public sale.

For years a cloud of uncertainty in regard to Rock Island’s future hung over the island. The Secretary of War’s Office had argued with Congress and squatters alike over the future of Rock Island. Finally, in 1848, Secretary of War, William March offered the island property for sale at public auction. He succumbed to pressures applied by persistent squatters and influential land speculators. Curiously, no announcements of the auction date appeared in the local Rock Island area. Only after someone “spotted” an advertisement announcing 5 January 1850 as the day of the auction did area citizens become aware of the plan. Local residents feared the sale was a scheme, whereby St. Louis and New York land speculators could acquire title to the land they held on Rock Island.

Not all area residents favored civilian development of Rock Island. Many local people supported the building of a National Armory on Rock Island. These local citizens immediately wrote their congressmen and sent a spokesman to Washington, D.C. to protect the sale and promote their cause. The hostile mood of some of the local citizens prevented the sale. Squatters, who occupied land on Rock Island without legal title, posted warnings that any bidding by outsiders on
their claims would be at their own peril. After being
alerted to the potentially volatile situation at Rock
Island, officials in Washington telegraphed the
auctioneer to postpone the sale. Private parties
who had an interest in the private commercial
development of Rock Island hired several attorneys
to present their case in court. Abraham Lincoln was
one of those attorneys who unsuccessfully
attempted to win title claims for some of
the squatters.

With this past history in mind, and with news
of Judge McLean’s decision allowing the railroad
and the bridge to be constructed across and on
Rock Island, squatters converged on the island.
The number of applications for preemption to Rock
Island property filed with the Register of the
General Land Office in Springfield rose sharply
after McLean’s decision was announced. Squatters
literally flocked to Rock Island and staked out their
claims. Quarrels developed over which party was
occupying which quarter section. Major D.W.
Flagler stated in his work, History of the Rock
Island Arsenal that “one man, Mr. Shaub of
Davenport, who had a house near the present site
of the commanding officers quarters, had his house
torn down, loaded on a raft, set on fire, and sent
downstream.”

From the late 1850s until the beginning of
the Civil War in 1861, squatters on Rock Island
continued to seek legal confirmation of their
preemption claims to land on the island. However,
when the Civil War began, the attentions of the
Squatters and the nation turned to the more urgent
issue of preserving the Union. A majority of the
private parties who had occupied land on Rock
Island relinquished their preemption claims when
Congress passed an act establishing a National
Arsenal there. Others agreed to vacate the island
once the Federal Government actually began
occupying the island. Eventually, the Federal
Government established a commission to hear and
settle monetary claims filled by certain squatters.

However, prior to the establishment of an
arsenal at Rock Island, The Rock Island Bridge
Company was involved in yet another landmark
court case. The railroad bridge at Rock Island
enhanced the island’s attractiveness to Congress as a potential site for a National Arsenal. First, the bridge company had to survive a court battle waged by commercial steamboat interests.

**Effie Afton Incident**

The railroad arrived on the eastern bank of the Mississippi River in the midst of the steamboat’s golden era. Transportation of the upper Mississippi River Valley was controlled exclusively by St. Louis steamboat interests until the railroad’s arrival. Steamboat owners watched developments at the bridge and waited anxiously for an opportunity to confront the railroad and bridge builders in court. They considered the bridge at Rock Island to be a threat to their packet and ferry business, which operated on the upper Mississippi River.

On 22 April 1856, the first locomotive to span the Mississippi River crossed the railroad bridge at Rock Island. Two weeks later, the incident that the steamboat owners had hoped for occurred. On 6 May 1856, the steamboat *Effie Afton* departed the town of Rock Island bound for St. Paul, Minnesota. As the steamer entered the main channel of the river, she collided with a ferryboat. Receiving only slight damage, the *Effie Afton* proceeded through the bridge’s draw span. Once the vessel had cleared the span her side paddles stopped churning. The swift current of the upper rapids carried the ill-fated *Effie Afton* crashing back against the railroad bridge. Shortly after the crash, nearby boats rescued the passengers, some luggage, and the boat’s crew. While the *Effie Afton* lay against the bridge, a fire ignited the boat and spread onto the bridge, burning portions of the bridge’s wooden superstructure. Newspaper articles of the incident stated that the steamboats along the shore blew their whistles, some as a warning to other boats traveling the river, and others as an act of celebration.

Mr. James Hurd and Associates, owners of the *Effie Afton*, filed a lawsuit against the bridge company for damages. Steamboat owners hoped that this test case would hinder other bridge building ventures along the Mississippi River Valley. They believed a favorable verdict would discourage investors from financing future bridge building on the Mississippi River. Officially, the
Below: In 1865, the railroad bridge at Rock Island was completely rebuilt using heavier timber. This second superstructure was replaced by an iron double deck bridge, when the location of the bridge was changed to its present site in 1872. (AMSAS-HI Archives)

case was titled “Hurd et al., (and others) vs. the Railroad Bridge Company”, but it became popularly known as the “Effie Afton Case”. The Hurd lawsuit came to trial in Chicago before the federal district for Northern Illinois. The presiding officer was Judge John McLean, who had earlier ruled against the Federal Government’s request for an injunction to halt railroad and bridge building operations across Rock Island. The M&M Bridge Company obtained Abraham Lincoln who argued the case. Two plaintiffs, Mr. Hurd and Associates, solicited two prominent Midwest lawyers, H.M. Wead and T.D. Lincoln, to argue their cases. The two Lincolns, however, were not related. Abe Lincoln, then a young, rising Springfield attorney, had been generally credited with winning the case. However, court records show the trial actually ended in a hung jury; nine jurors stood in favor of the bridge, and three members of the jury opposed the structure. Legally, the case as subject to retrial, but the steamboat interests decided to submit another case to a different federal court.

On 7 May 1859, the steamboat attorneys filed a suit against the M & M Bridge Company in the U.S. District Court in Southeast Iowa. The objective of this suit was to have the federal court declare the bridge at Rock Island to be a public nuisance and to receive a court order its removal. Judge John M. Love ruled in favor of James Ward, a St. Louis steamboat owner. Judge Love declared the bridge a nuisance and ordered those portions of the bridge which extended into Iowa be removed. The M & M Bridge Company promptly appealed the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court. In December 1862, the highest court in the land set aside the lower court decision and nullified the order.

Still, steamboat owners continued to harass the bridge builders with law suits until the U.S. Congress passed a law declaring a similar type of bridge in Clinton, Iowa, to be a legal structure. After this congressional decision, the judge dismissed lawsuits that were still pending against the bridge.54

Both Chicago and St. Louis newspapers, as well as the respective Chambers of Commerce, actively supported their city’s interest during the
trials. The St. Louis Chamber of Commerce took an especially active interest in the trials. St. Louis businessmen actively raised money for lawyers’ fees and court costs to battle the bridge. In addition, the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce dispatched its own committee to Chicago to present its arguments to the public during the Effie Afton trial.

The St. Louis Chamber of Commerce’s strong commitment to removing the bridge at Rock Island may have led some of its members to use criminal means in accomplishing this objective. Two men were arrested at Rock Island and charged with attempted arson of the railroad bridge at Rock Island. Although the two were not convicted, it was generally believed by tri-city residents that they had been recruited by the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce to set the bridge on fire.55

Despite these efforts to remove the bridge, the structure endured. The first bridge superstructure lasted for nearly ten years. During the 1850s, portions of its timbers were destroyed by fire and damaged by ice jams and windstorms. After only three years, the bridge’s wooden spans needed strengthening due to the volume of trains and vehicles that used the bridge. More powerful, heavier, stronger spans were needed to support this additional weight.

Eventually, in 1865, the bridge company completely rebuilt the bridge using heavier timber. The new span was constructed over and around the old chords, and then the original timbers were removed. This procedure allowed the bridge to remain open during the building of the new span.

A stone memorial commemorating the site of the original railroad bridge across the Mississippi
The Government Bridge of 1872 was made of iron with a rail deck above the wagon deck. It was situated in the present location of the Government Bridge to Davenport, Iowa. (AMSAS-HI Archives)

River is presently situated near the Colonel Davenport House, along the northwest shore of the island.

In 1866, the Federal Government proposed to the M & M Bridge Company that the location of the bridge be changed to its present site. The government offered to share the expense of the building the new bridge. Brigadier General Thomas J. Rodman, the second Commanding Officer of the Rock Island Arsenal, drafted the plan which satisfied the requirements of both the railroad company and the United States Government. The railroad company agreed to give up its old right-of-way across Rock Island and remove its tracks and bridges in exchange for a new bridge, which would be built at the extreme west end of the island. The railroad tracks across the island were relocated to allow the Arsenal to fully develop the interior of Rock Island. Also, the tracks were connected to an arsenal trackage. The bridge was finally completed and turned over to the Rock Island Arsenal in February 1873. General Rodman's commitment to the relocation of the rail tracks and the construction of a new bridge at the northwest end of the island was a key to the success of the project. In 1869, General Rodman ordered surveys of the Mississippi riverbed and measurements of the river current velocity at various stages. He then determined the sites for the bridge abutments and piers. Letters written by General Rodman to his superiors reveal the energy and thought he had put into the bridge project.

Initially, the bridge was to be a double track bridge with an extra deck for wagons. However, estimated costs for such a bridge exceeded congressional appropriations. General Rodman carried on a lengthy correspondence with the Chief of Ordnance and the Secretary of War seeking the additional funds necessary to build the bridge. Unfortunately his persistence led to the transfer of the bridge construction to the Engineering Department. Major Daniel Flagler, his successor as Commanding Officer of the Rock Island Arsenal, stated: “General Rodman was deeply interested, and took great pride in his work, and its (bridge construction) transfer to other offices was a serious blow to him.”

General Rodman remained interested in the bridge after its transfer to the engineers. Periodically, he recommended changes in its construction. His suggestions included such
Basic revisions as the placing of the wagon road deck under the railroad tracks, rather than above it, as initially planned.\textsuperscript{56}

**Description of the 1872 Bridge**

The 1872 iron bridge which connected Arsenal Island to Davenport measured slightly over 1,500 feet in length.\textsuperscript{57} The bridge had five spans 220 to 260 feet long, plus a draw span of 368 feet in length. The superstructure of the bridge was a double Whipple truss with two decks. The bridge stood thirty seven feet and two inches tall from the top of the piers to the top bracing. The width of the structure was a narrow sixteen feet, considering it was for two way wagon traffic. The posts and the top chords of the bridge were wrought-iron and the ties were flat iron bars. The Baltimore Bridge Company erected the superstructure, and the Phoenix Company manufactured the iron work. Two vertical hydraulic jacks, operated by steam power, swung the 368 foot draw span. (For a more detailed description of the 1872 iron bridge consult Chapter V of Major Flagler’s *A History of the Rock Island Arsenal*, published in 1877).

**U.S. Government Bridge 1896**

By the 1890s, locomotives and rail cars had become too large and heavy for the old 1872 iron bridge. A replacement was needed and, in 1895, construction began on a stronger bridge of steel structure, capable of supporting the increasingly heavier traffic. Ralph Modjeski, Chicago, Illinois, was the design engineer for the new bridge. Completed in 1896, the new bridge was constructed on the old piers. Eventually, it accommodated street cars, as well as railroad cars, vehicles, and foot traffic. Known as the Government Bridge, the 1896 bridge is still used today between Arsenal Island and Davenport, Iowa.\textsuperscript{58}

**Citizen Support for an Arsenal at Rock Island**

Area residents periodically campaigned for the establishment of the Arsenal at Rock Island. In 1859, the Iowa State Legislature joined the cause by sending a memorial advocating such a plan to the U.S. Congress. A joint resolution of the Iowa State Senate and House of Representatives, approved in 1861, called for the Congressional...
Legislators from Iowa to work for the establishment of an arsenal on Rock Island. During the same year, Governor Yates of Illinois, and other state officials, sent a letter to the Secretary of War encouraging him to support the location of an armory at Rock Island. The destruction of the federal armory at Harper’s Ferry by Confederate troops in April 1861 dramatically demonstrated to Congress the need for a replacement site secure from enemy attack.

In 1861, Bailey Davenport, son of Colonel George Davenport and Mayor of Rock Island, marshaled local support in a well organized effort to attract congressional votes favoring Rock Island as the replacement site. Local newspapers contributed articles promoting the island as a site for a national arsenal. Mayor Davenport persuaded the Rock Island City Council to appropriate funds for the printing of a promotional pamphlet. The pamphlet stressed the potential waterpower and rich resources found in the upper Mississippi River Valley and nearby regions. It also emphasized Rock Island's strategic location, which made it relatively impervious from invasion and its excellent access to river and rail transportation. The pamphlet went on to cite the plentiful supply of inexpensive labor and food found in the Rock Island vicinity. Another argument noted the patriotism of the local citizens. A series of foldout maps of the area were also attached to the pamphlets. The pamphlets were freely distributed to congressmen.

A committee of ten men, led by Bailey Davenport, served as the executive committee for the campaign. The committee members came from the tri-cities, with half the representatives from Rock Island, and the remaining five from Davenport, Iowa, and Moline, Illinois. Major H.C. Connelley, a prominent Rock Island attorney, conducted a tour through the Midwest to promote the case in other communities. Committee members also traveled to Washington, D.C. to lobby for the adoption of Senate Bill No. 352, which called for the creation of an arsenal on Rock Island and which had been sponsored by one of the Iowa Senators. James W. Grimes, Illinois Senator, however, favored other locations elsewhere in Illinois, such as Chicago. An amendment to the bill
reduced the Arsenal to a repair and deposit arsenal, rather than a manufacturing arsenal. The amendment increased the number of arsenal sites to three. These sites were Indianapolis, Indiana; Columbus, Ohio; and Rock Island. The amended bill passed both houses and became law on 11 June 1863.

The present day Rock Island Arsenal officially recognized the year 1862 as the beginning date of the Arsenal. Congressional approval of the Act of 11 June 1862 set off a chain of events that had considerable impact on the future of Rock Island. Within a year after the Congress had approved the Act of 1862, the U.S. Army had re-established its military presence on Rock Island. The next year Congress approved the Act of 19 April 1864, which authorized the army to clear the island of all property claims made by private parties and by the local communities. A Board of Commissioners, appointed by the President of the United States, reviewed the more legitimate claims and settled them. By 1868, the U.S. Government had acquired a clear title to the island. These actions provided the necessary space needed for the establishment of a grand national arsenal for manufacturing.

Two separate army commands began constructing on the island that year. The Ordnance Department broke ground for the first permanent arsenal building in September 1863. The Quartermaster Department, in turn, began erecting a prison barracks for captured Confederate soldiers in August of that same year.

The removals of settlers and squatters from the island and disputes with soldiers assigned to the prison barracks were two conflicts that confronted the first Arsenal Commander, Major C.P. Kingsbury. These and other topics will be examined in Part II of this history.

Present day Rock Island is the “Heart of the Quad Cities” area. Its bridges are the arteries which provide the flow of commerce and people through the local communities. The establishment of an arsenal at Rock Island, rather than the opening of the island to civilian development, has protected the historical landmarks of Arsenal Island from commercial exploitation and encroachment. Today local citizens visit such historic sites as the Colonel George Davenport House and the Confederate Cemetery in a “park like” setting. While operating as a vital manufacturing arsenal for our national defense, the Rock Island Arsenal has been able to maintain the island as a national historic site.