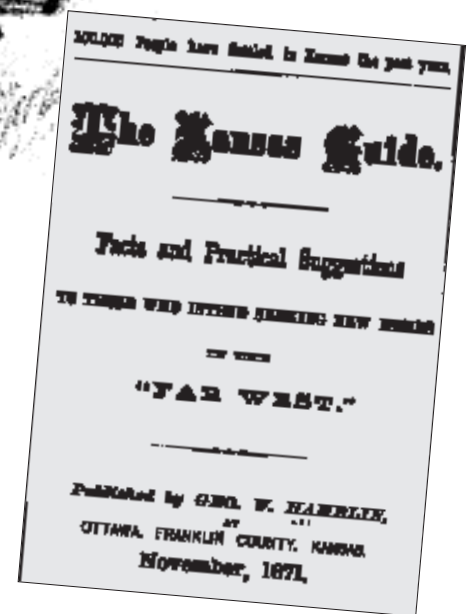


# KANSAS SETTLERS ON THE OSAGE DIMINISHED RESERVE



# A Study of Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie*

by Penny T. Linsenmayer

Laura Ingalls Wilder's widely acclaimed "Little House" series of children's novels traces her life with her parents and sisters from the late 1860s until her marriage to Almanzo Wilder in 1885. The primary focus of Wilder's third novel, *Little House on the Prairie*, was the interaction between the pioneer settlers of Kansas and the Osage Indians. Wilder's family settled in Montgomery County, Kansas, in 1869–1870, approximately one year before the final removal of the Osages to Indian Territory. The novel depicts some of the pivotal events in the relations between the Osages and the intruding settlers during that time period.<sup>1</sup>

The Osages ceded much of their Great Plains territory to the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century and finally were left in 1865 with one remaining tract of land, a fertile 4.8 million acres in southeastern Kansas that became known as the Osage Diminished Reserve. Within a few years intruding settlers were creeping onto the reserve lands in increasing numbers. Although many, if not most, of the Osages recognized that it was inevitable they would cede this land and remove permanently to Indian Territory, they also were not pleased at being prematurely pushed off their land by encroaching settlers.<sup>2</sup>

The tension between these two groups steadily escalated in intensity after the Osages signed the ill-fated Sturges Treaty in May 1868. Both settlers and Osages had cause to complain about the inaction of the federal government during the next two years as Congress debated

the Sturges Treaty in the context of public land policy. Each side committed acts of violence and property destruction against the other, but historical evidence supports the proposition that the majority of both Osages and settlers favored and actively promoted peaceful relations. However, the overall relationship between the parties was marked by an unavoidable degree of tension. The settlers who promoted peaceful relations desired that the land be opened up to them for settlement, and even the Osages who favored a speedy removal to Indian Territory merely tolerated the intruders.

The Ingalls family arrived in Kansas with a large tide of other squatters in the summer and fall of 1869, a point at which relations between settlers and Osages were most strained. Wilder wrote that her father settled a few miles over the line on the Osage reserve by mistake, and scholars have thus far not questioned Ingalls's motives to any real extent. Yet, the Ingalls family settled so firmly in the bounds of the Osage Diminished Reserve that it is doubtful they were unaware they were intruding on Indian lands. Wilder's novel depicts her family as the victim of a capricious and overreaching federal government. Was Charles Ingalls instead one of the thousands of pioneers who pushed settlement westward, forcing the removal of the various Indian tribes of the Great Plains? It is clear from Wilder's writings that although her father favored peaceful relations with the Indians, he also believed that the land would, and significantly, *should*, be opened up for settlement by white pioneers. Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* chronicle provides an important backdrop for evaluating the relationship between and perspectives of both squatters and Osages as their fundamental conflict of interest played out on the Kansas prairies.

Wilder's novels trace her family's role in the great westward settlement movement that gathered force in the years following the Civil War. The United States acquired large tracts of new territory in the eighteenth and nine-

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1. Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 1953).

2. U.S. *Statutes at Large* 14 (1865): 687; see also Louis F. Burns, *A History of the Osage People* (Fallbrook, Calif.: Ciga Press, 1989), 380.

*Although most Osages recognized that it was inevitable they would cede the Diminished Reserve and remove to Indian Territory, they were not pleased at being prematurely pushed off their land by encroaching white settlers. Osage chief Little Whitehair (right) warned of the potential for the Osages to resort to violence.*



teenth centuries as foreign countries and Indian tribes ceded land to the federal government. As soon as the government took title, this ceded land became part of the public domain, and squatters and speculators alike rushed westward to claim it. Squatters, who often were short of capital or in need of all available capital to improve their claims and feed their families, were at a distinct disadvantage at public land auctions. Land speculators were thus able to acquire large tracts of public land at auction. Congress responded to this problem by passing a series of preemption laws for a number of specific localities. These laws entitled a squatter to preempt (have the first opportunity to purchase) the land on which he had settled. In 1841 Congress enacted a general preemption statute applicable to all surveyed public lands.<sup>3</sup>

The Preemption Act of 1841 offered the head of a family, a widow, or a single male over twenty-one years of age a one-time opportunity to preempt up to 160 acres of land within the public domain. The law required that the preemptor be a United States citizen or have filed a declaration of intent to become a citizen. In addition, a preemptor could not own more than 320 acres in any state or territory. The statutory preemption price was \$1.25 per acre, except in the case of land located within the alternating sections of the railroad land grants. In that case, a claimant could only preempt a maximum of eighty acres and at a preemption price of \$2.50 per acre.<sup>4</sup>

The Homestead Act of 1862 provided an eligible person with up to 160 acres in return for five years' residency and an aggregate of eighteen dollars in filing fees. Any individual who was the head of a family or at least twenty-one years old (or who had performed military service for the United States) could take up a homestead claim under the Homestead Act. A homesteader was required to settle his claim within six months of filing with the land office and prove up by no later than seven years from the filing

date. Like preemption, an individual was only entitled under the law to make one homestead claim.<sup>5</sup>

There were, however, significant limitations on the public land available for homesteading. The government gave substantial tracts of public domain land to the railroad corporations for the construction of railroad lines and to the individual states and territories for public schools and other purposes. Perhaps the greatest limitation on the land available for homesteading was the vast reserve of property still not ceded to the federal government by the Indians. This property remained outside the public domain for many years and could not be preempted or homesteaded prior to cession.<sup>6</sup>

**T**he Osage tribe began ceding tracts of their Great Plains territory to the United States government in 1808. The first significant cession, the 1825 treaty, left the Osages with a substantial tract of land in southern

3. Paul W. Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development* (Washington, D.C.: Zenger Publishing Co., 1968), 238–39; Everett Dick, ed., *The Lure of the Land: A Social History of the Public Lands from the Articles of Confederation to the New Deal* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 68–69.

4. U.S. *Statutes at Large* 5 (1841): 453; see also Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development*, 238–39; Dick, *The Lure of the Land*, 68–69.

5. U.S. *Statutes at Large* 12 (1863): 772; see also Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development*, 394–99; Dick, *The Lure of the Land*, 139. To “prove up,” a homesteader simply had to demonstrate to land office officials that he/she had fulfilled the obligation of the act—at least five years of residency and improvements. Clear title or patent then was issued.

6. Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development*, 394–99.



*The Ingalls family favored peaceful relations with the Osages but nonetheless settled firmly within the bounds of the Diminished Reserve. At left is a photo of Charles and Caroline Ingalls, taken several years after they moved from their Kansas home.*

Osage Ceded Lands from homestead entry and pre-emption sales. The Osage Trust Lands were to be surveyed and sold at no less than \$1.25 per acre. These cessions left the Osage tribe with 4.8 million acres in southern Kansas, the Osage Diminished Reserve.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, with each cession of land by the Indians, settlers continued to advance beyond the borders of ceded territory. By the fall of 1867 the Office of Indian Affairs was receiving reports that settlers were beginning to intrude onto the Osage Diminished Reserve. Tensions between the intruding settlers and the Osages continued to mount during the late 1860s. Osage agent George C. Snow requested federal troops to keep peace between the growing number of pioneers and the Osages after he received a letter from Osage chief Little Whitehair that warned of the potential for the Osages to resort to violence. Despite his pleas, troops were not sent to the Osage lands at this time, and squatters continued to move onto these lands throughout 1867.<sup>9</sup>

The Kansas state government, under the direction of Governor Samuel J. Crawford, openly supplied firepower and ammunition to these intruders. Hoping to avoid a situation in which the Osages would be provoked to violence, Agent Snow continued to press his superiors to take action to remove the intruders. Although troops were requested and sent to the Diminished Reserve in the spring of 1868, Governor Crawford intervened, and the intruder removal order was revoked. In the spring of 1868 the Osage chiefs and headmen communicated their desire to go to Indian Territory and select choice lands for the eventual settlement of their tribe. They viewed removal to Indian Territory as inevitable and wanted to take the opportunity to choose the most suitable land before other tribes made their selections.<sup>10</sup>

8. *U.S. Statutes at Large* 14 (1865): 687; see also Burns, *A History of the Osage People*, 380.

9. Christianson, "A Study of Osage History Prior to 1876," 228, 231–34.

10. David Parsons, "The Removal of the Osages from Kansas" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1940), 138–44; Osage Chiefs and Headmen (by interpreter T. S. Huffaker) to Nathaniel Parker, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, April 30, 1868, 37–38, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1868–1869, Office of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, RG 75, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Missouri and southern Kansas. In 1839 the federal government and the Osages entered into a treaty whereby the government agreed to provide the Osages with an annual annuity of twenty thousand dollars for twenty years in exchange for additional territorial cessions. In 1859 the annuity payments under the 1839 treaty ceased, and the outbreak of the Civil War in early 1861 precluded progress in further negotiations. Without its annuity payments for more than seven years, the tribe was in severe economic straits by the end of the Civil War.<sup>7</sup>

On September 29, 1865, the Osages ceded two additional tracts of their remaining land to the United States. The federal government agreed to pay the Osages three hundred thousand dollars for the first tract of land, which comprised 843,927 acres in southern Kansas (the "Osage Ceded Lands"), and to place the sale proceeds generated by the second tract of land (3.2 million acres in southern Kansas) in trust for the benefit of the Osages (the "Osage Trust Lands"). The 1865 Treaty specifically barred the

7. *U.S. Statutes at Large* 7 (1825): 240; *ibid.* 7 (1839): 576; James R. Christianson, "A Study of Osage History Prior to 1876" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1968), 204–8; *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 2d sess., 1870, 42, pt. 4: 3742.

*Osage lands in Kansas after 1865 cessions.*

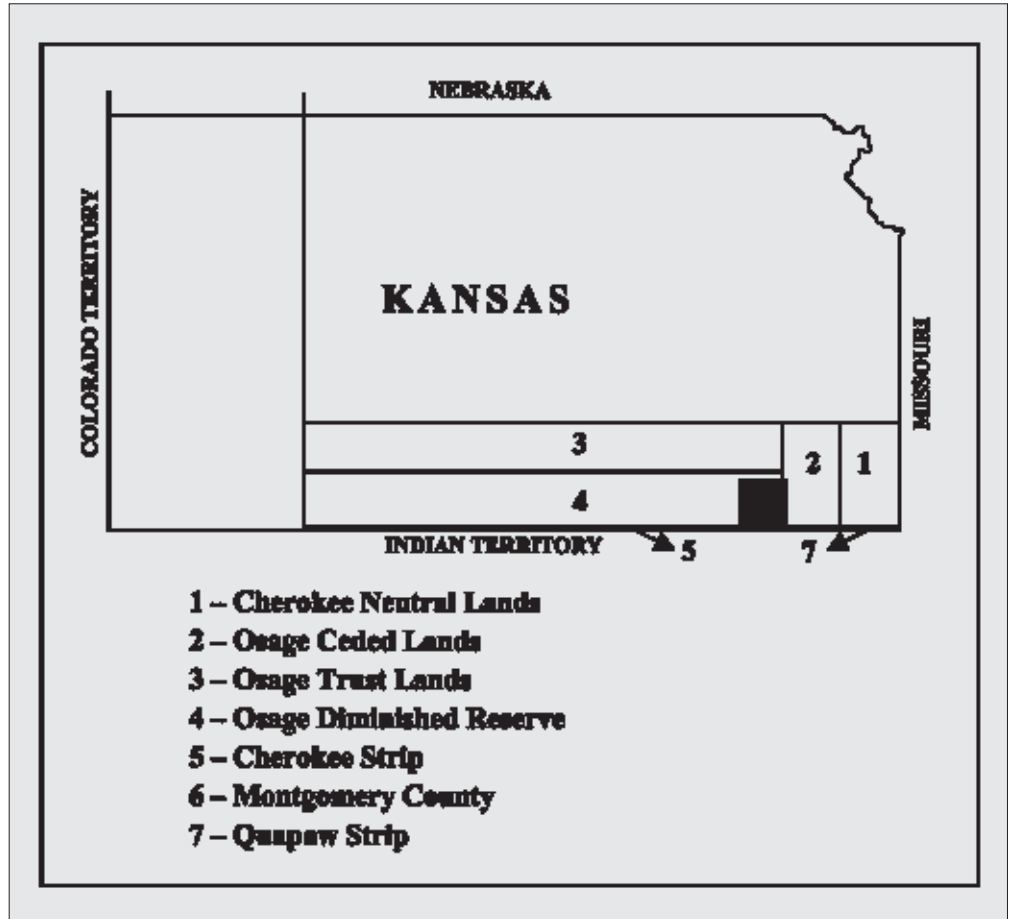
The Senate did not ratify the 1865 Treaty until January 1867, and the Osages did not receive any income from the sales of the Osage Trust Lands until 1873. While the Osages attempted to comply with government requests to refrain from hostilities with settlers and other Indian tribes, their plains enemies (the Arapahos in particular) took advantage of their peaceful stance, stealing significant property from them and destroying many of their homes. The Osage chiefs and headmen wrote to Agent Snow in January 1868 to report that, as a result of the thefts and property destruction by their plains enemies and their own lack

of annuities, much of their tribe might starve that winter without government aid. The Osages bore their poverty as a mark of pride in some measure, noting that it was their utmost respect for the white man and their desire for peace with their enemies that had reduced them to such dire conditions.<sup>11</sup> In reporting on their extreme situation in early 1868, Agent Snow declared that "Something must be done for these people at once." The tribe's economic situation did not improve that year, and in October 1868 Secretary of the Interior Orville Browning noted that the Osages "are in a suffering condition at present, needing subsistence more than anything else."<sup>12</sup> The desperate economic condition of the Osages, coupled with their concern over continued encroachment on their lands by the intruding settlers, no doubt contributed to their willingness to accept the less than favorable terms of the Sturges Treaty in May 1868.

President Andrew Johnson appointed a commission to negotiate with the Osages relating to the cession of the Di-

11. Burns, *A History of the Osage People*, 384; George C. Snow to Thomas Murphy, December 18, 1867, 195, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1868–1869; Louis P. Choteau to Ulysses S. Grant, March 1871, 857–59, *ibid.*, 1870–1871.

12. George C. Snow to Thomas Murphy, January 13, 1868, 209, *ibid.*; Osage Chiefs and Headmen to Snow, January 10, 1868, 210, *ibid.*; Orville Browning to unidentified, October 2, 1868, 172–73, *ibid.*



minished Reserve and their removal to Indian Territory. At a council with the Osages held at the mouth of Drum Creek in Montgomery County, Kansas, and beginning in mid-May 1868, the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston Railroad Company (LL&G) offered to pay the Osages \$1.6 million for the Diminished Reserve. Despite the counteroffer of \$2.0 million from the Missouri, Fort Scott and Santa Fe Railroad Company, the commission recommended the LL&G offer to the Osages.

After much deliberation over the LL&G offer, the Osages expressed their desire instead to sell the Diminished Reserve to the federal government for \$1.25 per acre (approximately ten million dollars), with the land to be sold to settlers rather than to railroad companies. At this point in the negotiations, it was reported that an unprovoked Osage party had murdered two white settlers on Big Walnut Creek. The brother of one of the murdered men testified before the council. The Osages later said they feared that the small contingent of soldiers on hand would be unable to protect them from the angry mob of settlers present at the council grounds. This event, they later claimed, played a large part in their decision to accept the LL&G offer recommended by the commission rather than press-

ing their own counterproposal to sell the Diminished Reserve directly to the government.<sup>13</sup>

On May 27, 1868, the Osages signed what would become known as the Sturges Treaty, named for William Sturges, president of the LL&G. The Sturges Treaty provided for the sale of the Osage Diminished Reserve to the LL&G for \$1.6 million (equivalent to nineteen cents per acre). The railroad was obligated to pay the Osages one hundred thousand dollars in cash within three months and to issue unsecured bonds for the remainder of the purchase price, with the bonds to be payable in increments of one hundred thousand dollars per year (plus interest at 5 percent) for fifteen years. The Osages would remove to Indian Territory (specifically to Cherokee lands west of the ninety-sixth meridian).<sup>14</sup> Following the news of the signing of the Sturges Treaty, pioneers poured into southern Kansas at an even more rapid rate than before. Apparently they were not dissuaded from selecting claims by the fact that the Sturges Treaty provided for the sale of the Diminished Reserve to a railroad company, which would doubtless have meant inflated prices for the land.

Despite the desire of the Osages to remove to Indian Territory and the surge of intruders into southern Kansas who were anxious to stake claims before the land officially was opened for settlement, the Sturges Treaty stalled in Congress. This treaty, together with several other pending Indian treaties, exacerbated growing tensions between the legislative and executive branches of the government over United States land policy. Many members of the House believed the executive branch was trying to usurp Congress's power to regulate United States lands through improper use of the executive treaty-making power. The primary issue, at base, was political control of the public domain.<sup>15</sup>

Prior to the Civil War, treaties between the United States and various Indian tribes implicitly recognized that the Indians held only a right of occupancy to the lands they ceded to the United States. Once the Indians ceded land directly to the United States for an agreed price, the lands be-

13. Parsons, "The Removal of the Osages from Kansas," 22–40; Thomas Murphy to Charles Mix, June 2, 1868, 265–67, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1868–1869, reports that two white settlers were murdered on the Osage Trust Lands and that the Osages surrendered two braves to Kansas authorities.

14. Parsons, "The Removal of the Osages from Kansas," 23, 34–35. The government's treaty with the Cherokees in 1866 penalized the Cherokee involvement with the Confederate cause during the Civil War by permitting the government to settle friendly Indian tribes on Cherokee lands in Indian Territory. See *U.S. Statutes at Large* 14 (1866): 799.

15. Parsons, "The Removal of the Osages from Kansas," 43; H. Craig Miner and William E. Unrau, *The End of Indian Kansas: A Study of Cultural Revolution, 1854–1871* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), 122–24.

came part of the public domain (and subject to the then-current preemption and homestead laws). By contrast, following the Civil War, the government entered into several treaties with Indians under which the latter authorized the United States to sell the land in trust for them. In these cases, the Indians sold their land to the settler purchasers or railroad corporations, and the government merely acted as the facilitating middleman. Thus, because the United States did not actually purchase or take title to the ceded lands under these treaties, the lands did not become part of the public domain and were not subject to the preemption and homestead laws. Under this treaty system, large tracts of land passed into the hands of speculators and corporations in contravention of the intent of the preemption and homestead laws.<sup>16</sup>

In June 1868 the House passed a resolution that condemned the Sturges Treaty on a number of grounds and threatened to withhold appropriations for the treaty if the Senate ratified it.<sup>17</sup> In December 1869 Kansas Representative Sidney Clarke introduced a resolution condemning the sale of Indian lands by treaty, which was adopted by the unanimous vote of the House. On February 4, 1870, the Sturges Treaty was at last withdrawn from the Senate's consideration on the order of President Ulysses S. Grant. Later that month, the bill to remove the Osages from Kansas was introduced in the Senate.<sup>18</sup>

It was during this unsettled period of great debates over the Sturges Treaty and the final removal of the Osages that Charles Ingalls settled his family on the Osage Diminished Reserve. The timing of his move to southern Kansas would seem to indicate Ingalls was most motivated by the lure of free land or, at a minimum, cheap

16. Parsons, "The Removal of the Osages from Kansas," 47, 54, 56; Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development*, 370.

17. *Congressional Globe*, 40th Cong., 2d sess., 1868, 39, pt. 4: 3256–58. The House report to the Senate included a specific reenumeration of its objections to the Sturges Treaty, including: (1) that the Osages were fraudulently induced to sign the treaty, (2) that the price was grossly undervalued, (3) that a competing railroad interest had in fact offered a higher price, and (4) that the settlers who had entered the Osage lands in good faith that they would be open for settlement would be at the mercy of land speculators. Noting that the Osage Diminished Reserve lands comprised one-sixth of the lands of Kansas, the House report also condemned the attempt of the Sturges Treaty to concentrate those lands in a single railroad corporation. See *Osage Indian Treaty*, 40th Cong., 2d sess., 1868, H. Rept. 63, 1–2.

18. *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 2d sess., 1869, 42, pt. 1: 153; Parsons, "The Removal of the Osages from Kansas," 98, citing James D. Richardson, comp., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, vol. 7 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902): 47; *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 2d sess., 1870, 42, pt. 2: 1535.

A team of government surveyors assesses the Osages' land in 1866 in preparation for white settlement. Although the Osages were promised title to the reservation in Kansas "as long as the grass grows and water flows," the tribe was forced to move to Indian Territory in 1871.



land, under the Preemption Act.<sup>19</sup> He paid \$11.25 per acre for his property in Missouri, and the most probable explanation for his quick sale of the Missouri property

and migration to Kansas would be that he believed he could acquire land more cheaply in Kansas. The 1865 Treaty prohibited preemption and homestead entries on the Osage Ceded Lands, and, as previously noted, the Osage Trust Lands never entered the public domain and likewise were not subject to these laws. If Ingalls was aware of these limitations on settling other former Osage lands in southern Kansas, it is unclear why he might have believed that preemption and/or homestead claims would be permitted on the Osage Diminished Reserve once the land was opened to the settlers. Ingalls probably chose to squat on these lands rather than take up a preemption or homestead claim in some other area of Kansas because much of the available land in eastern and central Kansas was already held by railroads, the state, and speculators and advertised at prices far above the preemption rate. Thus, like many others, Ingalls's lack of capital likely dictated his decision to squat on the Osage reserve.<sup>20</sup>

The rate of intruders squatting on the Osage Diminished Reserve increased markedly during the summer and fall of 1869.<sup>21</sup> Although area newspapers acknowledged

19. Homestead land often was referred to as "free land," because a settler need only pay nominal filing fees (eighteen dollars) in exchange for 160 acres of property. Ingalls's granddaughter, Rose Wilder Lane, wrote a novel entitled *Free Land* (published in 1937) in which she illustrated the number of problems faced by homesteaders which exacted a high price for the alleged "free land" promised by the Homestead Act.

20. U.S. *Statutes at Large* 14 (1865): 687; see also Burns, *A History of the Osage People*, 380; Vernon Carstensen, ed., *The Public Lands: Studies in the History of the Public Domain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 323–24.

21. Paul Franklin Harper, *Surely It Floweth with Milk and Honey: A History of Montgomery County, Kansas to 1930* (Independence, Kans.: Independence Community College Press, 1988), 15. Montgomery County includ-

ed approximately six hundred white settlers at the time the county was formed in June 1869. See also *Girard Weekly Press*, November 11, 1869; *Fort Scott Monitor*, June 16, November 24, 1869. By the time of the federal census in August 1870, 7,638 white settlers were recorded as residents in Montgomery County. Paul Franklin Harper, *Pashe to Wah, Bred and Pize for Saile Hwer: A History, Atlas, Index, and Description of Montgomery County, Kansas to 1880* (Independence, Kans., 1983), 41.

that the Osage Diminished Reserve had not yet been opened for settlement, they observed that it was customary frontier practice for pioneers to settle on Indian lands after the federal government had commenced negotiation of a treaty for the sale of such lands to settlers. In this case, settlers such as Charles Ingalls likely were relying on reports of impending congressional approval of the Sturges Treaty and other assurances from governmental authorities. In several instances in *Little House on the Prairie*, Wilder wrote that her father had received communication from the federal government that the Osages would be removed and their land would be open to settlement.<sup>22</sup>

The Ingalls family migrated from Wisconsin (perhaps settling for some span of months during 1869 in Chariton County, Missouri) to Kansas sometime in late 1869 or early 1870. They were definitely in Missouri in late August 1869 when Ingalls executed a power of attorney in Chariton County, Missouri, and they were listed as residents of Montgomery County, Kansas, when they sold their Missouri property back to the original seller in February 1870. It seems most probable that they left Missouri prior to the onset of the winter months, perhaps settling in Kansas

22. Thomas Murphy to Nathaniel Parker, May 7, 1869, 915–17, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1868–1869; Sidney Clarke Collection, Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center, University of Oklahoma, Norman, includes no record of any communication to or from Charles Ingalls.

sometime in September or October 1869.<sup>23</sup> In *Little House on the Prairie*, Wilder wrote that the Indians were not in their camps when her family settled in Kansas. This absence of the Osages at the time of their settlement further supports the conclusion that the Ingalls family arrived in the autumn of 1869. The Osage Indian tribe traditionally went on two long buffalo hunts each year: once in the summer months and again in the fall.<sup>24</sup> As they were in Missouri in late August 1869, the Ingalls family probably arrived in Kansas when the Osages were away on their fall hunt.

Wilder wrote, and it since has been widely accepted, that Charles Ingalls mistakenly settled his claim on Indian land because the Osages were away when the family arrived in Kansas. *Little House on the Prairie* gives the impression that her family settled a mere “three miles over the line” on Indian land; however, they settled well within the Osage Diminished Reserve.<sup>25</sup> All of Montgomery County, except for a strip of territory approximately three miles wide that ran along the eastern border of the county, was part of the Osage Diminished Reserve. Given the location of his settlement, wrote Great Plains scholar Frances W. Kaye, Charles Ingalls “can scarcely have believed in good faith that any land near him had been officially open to settlement.”<sup>26</sup>

23. Power of Attorney (signed and notarized in Chariton County, Mo.), August 26, 1869, Miscellaneous Records, vol. A, 342–43, Pepin County Courthouse, Durand, Wis.; deed from Charles and Caroline Ingalls, residents of Montgomery County, Kansas, to Adamantine Johnson, February 25, 1870, Warranty Deed Book 11, 381, Chariton County Courthouse, Keytesville, Mo.; warranty deed from Gustaf R. Gustafson to Henry O. Quiner, November 30, 1869, Deeds, Book G, 162, Pepin County Courthouse. The Quiner family was back in Wisconsin by late November 1869, suggesting that the Ingalls and Quiner families might have resided in Chariton County for some brief span of months in 1869 and parted ways toward the end of August 1869.

24. Willard H. Rollings, *The Osage: An Ethnohistorical Study of Hegemony on the Prairie-Plains* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 19–21. After planting their gardens and crops near their semipermanent prairie villages in the spring months of March, April, and May, the Osages most typically departed for their summer buffalo hunt in late May or early June. They returned to their prairie villages by early August to harvest and gather their crops. They then left on the fall hunt in late September or early October, settling along the river bottoms by December for the winter months and again returning to their prairie villages in March.

25. Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 316. Ingalls states he never would have settled three miles into Indian lands if he had thought the government would not open the land to settlers. William T. Anderson, *Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Biography* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 35, asserts that the Ingalls family members knew they were in Rutland Township of Montgomery County but were unaware they had chosen a site on the Osage Diminished Reserve. Harper, *Pashe to Wah, Bred and Pize for Saile Hwer*, 1, shows boundaries of the Osage Diminished Reserve.

26. Frances W. Kaye, “Little Squatter on the Osage Diminished Reserve: Reading Laura Ingalls Wilder’s Kansas Indians,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 20 (Spring 2000): 137. While Kaye’s general point is correct, her estimation of their location within the Osage Diminished Reserve is incorrect. The Ingalls family settled fourteen miles west of the Osage Ceded Lands and six miles north of the southern boundary of the Diminished Reserve.

Wilder also was confused about the exact location of her family’s cabin. In several places in *Little House on the Prairie* she states that they were living forty miles south of Independence, Kansas (which would place the family in present Oklahoma). It is unclear how she obtained this misimpression of the distance since the family Bible recorded the birth of her sister Carrie on August 3, 1870, in Montgomery County, Kansas. The 1870 census records the Ingalls family within Rutland Township, one of the westernmost townships within Montgomery County. Research into the census taker routes and local land records later pinpointed a likely location for the Ingalls cabin in section thirty-six of Rutland Township.<sup>27</sup>

Wilder’s *Little House on the Prairie* recounts that her family’s cabin was located in the path of a much-traveled Osage trail—a trail that Charles Ingalls ostensibly ignored when he settled that tract of land while the Osages were away on a hunt. If this was the case, the proximity of the trail no doubt contributed to the frequent interaction between the Ingalls family and the Osages as described in *Little House on the Prairie*. Although the novel also describes the Ingalls’s cabin as being located in the near vicinity of Osage camps in the bluffs to their north, none of the eight known Osage villages during this time period was located in Rutland Township. A village of one of the Claremore bands of the Osages was situated about two to three miles east of her family’s claim in Independence Township, and perhaps it was this encampment that she or her family remembered.<sup>28</sup>

While the Osages were away on their semiannual hunts, a number of squatters “jumped” vacant Osage lands and took “claims,” and many Osages responded to these claim jumpers by tearing down the settlers’ recently constructed cabins and demanding that they vacate the land. Hunger caused the Osages to frequently beg or steal

27. William T. Anderson, comp., *Laura’s Album: A Remembrance Scrapbook of Laura Ingalls Wilder* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), 19; U.S. Census, 1870, Kansas, Montgomery County, Rutland Township, 9; Margaret Gray Clement, *Research on ‘Little House on the Prairie’* (Independence, Kans.: Independence Chamber of Commerce, 1972), identifies the southwest quarter of section thirty-six, township thirty-three, range fourteen, Rutland Township, Montgomery County, Kansas.

28. Eliza Wycoff, “Reminiscences of Early Days in Kansas,” *Descender* 9 (August 1976): 17; Harper, *Surely It Floweth With Milk and Honey*, 3–4; Louis F. Burns to author, November 11, 1999, private collection of Penny T. Linsenmayer, Houston, Tx. With this letter, Burns enclosed an enlarged photocopy of Montgomery County from William G. Cutler and A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, vol. 2 (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), 1563, that was marked to indicate the location of this village of the Claremore band in section twenty-nine of Independence Township, Montgomery County.



Laura Ingalls (far right) stands beside her two sisters Mary (center) and Carrie. Researchers have speculated that the beads on Carrie's necklace might be the Osage beads gathered by Laura and Mary according to the *Little House on the Prairie* novel. Photo taken ca. 1879.



food from the settlers.<sup>29</sup> Agent Snow recommended that action be taken to relieve the Indians' economic suffering and end the "high-handed stealing from them that we may have peace on the border." In early 1869 the Osages posted a notice requesting that the intruders vacate the Diminished Reserve, and apparently many of the settlers responded that they would not abandon this land other than under military force. In early April 1869 the Osage chiefs wrote an impassioned letter to President Grant to request that the government send troops to protect their rights on the Diminished Reserve and avert the potential for violent conflict. When the government did not send troops to enforce the peace, both the Osages and the intruders continued to steal from and inflict property damage on each other with increasing regularity as tensions mounted between the two groups.<sup>30</sup>

In a letter printed in the *Girard Weekly Press*, one Montgomery County settler confirmed the overall ill treatment of the Osages, detailing continued instances of settlers overtaking the Osage cornfields, occupying their cabins, forcibly taking their land, and stealing their ponies.<sup>31</sup> The new Osage agent, Isaac T. Gibson, reported several depredations against the Osages in January 1870:

One had his hogs driven off by two white men and when he followed them, they drew their rifles. Another [Osage] had been assaulted by a settler with an axe because he would not give up the cabin he had built. . . . I sent several letters by complaining Indians to the settlers giving them the law . . . as I cannot see them all personally. One of them said he would shoot me if I sent him another dispatch.

29. Wycoff, "Reminiscences of Early Days in Kansas," 15–16; see also *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 2d sess., 1870, 42, pt. 4: 3246; *Chetopa Advance*, February 24, March 10, 1869; *Southern Kansas Advance* (Chetopa), January 26, 1870. In a chapter entitled "Indians in the House" in *Little House on the Prairie*, Wilder described a visit from two Osages who asked her mother to fix them a meal and then stole some of the family's provisions. See Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 132–46.

30. George C. Snow to Thomas Murphy, June 24, 1868, 287, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1868–1869; Osage Chiefs to Ulysses S. Grant, April 5, 1869, 1008–9, *ibid.*; Secretary of the Interior in relation to the Encroachment of White Settlers upon the Lands of the Osage Indians in Kansas to the House, 41st Cong., 2d sess., 1870, H. Doc. 179, 3.

31. *Girard Weekly Press*, March 3, 1870.

Describing the settlers as "oppressive trespassers," Agent Gibson emphasized his inability to effect justice for the Osages, and he predicted that they might soon take matters into their own hands. He observed that the settlers were "evidently desirous of provoking some resistance from the Osages, so that they might claim justification for the extermination of the tribe, which they boastfully declare they are able to do."<sup>32</sup>

Although they too must have harbored hope for the eventual removal of the Osages, a large number of settlers favored peaceful relations with the Indians. Based on Wilder's writings, the Ingalls family subscribed to this view. *Little House on the Prairie* has been sub-

32. Isaac Gibson to Enoch Hoag, January 10, 1870, 167, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1870–1871; Gibson to Hoag, February 19, 1870, 191, *ibid.* In writing his 1940 doctoral dissertation, David Parsons indicated that the diaries and other papers of former Osage agent Isaac Gibson were located with Gibson's descendants in Pawhuska, Oklahoma. John Joseph Mathews, *The Osages: Children of the Middle Waters* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), relied on Agent Gibson's papers and noted that

jected to considerable criticism in recent years, with challengers arguing that it contains an unfavorable portrayal of Native Americans and unfairly shifts the blame for tensions from the intruding squatters to the government. Wilder does give voice to her mother's innate prejudice against Indians, but at the same time, her own progressive views shine through the narrative. Even though her father clearly believes that the Diminished Reserve lands should be given over to the pioneering settlers, he is sympathetic to the plight of the Osages, and he unequivocally advocates peaceful relations between the settlers and the Indians.<sup>33</sup>

Comporting with Wilder's descriptions in *Little House on the Prairie*, early pioneer Eliza Wycoff recalled that while some Osages were angry with the intruders, many of the Indians were quite friendly to the settlers. These reminiscences are echoed in the letters of two settlers from March 1870 in which each independently confirmed that hundreds of settlers were living on the Osage Diminished Reserve on the encouragement of the Osages and paying the Osages a periodic tax or rent ranging from three to six hundred dollars. Superintendent of Indian Affairs Enoch Hoag acknowledged that the majority of the squatters were peaceful, but he urged the commissioner of Indian Affairs to take immediate steps to remove those settlers who were provoking hostilities with the Osages.<sup>34</sup>

Kansas senator Samuel Pomeroy blamed rising tensions between the impoverished Osages and the encroaching white settlers on Congress's failure to act on the Sturges Treaty. Senator Pomeroy, however, was actively in favor of ratifying the Sturges Treaty, despite the opposition of the majority of Kansas citizens and the condemnation of the

the papers were then in the possession of Dr. David Parsons of Levelland, Texas. After ascertaining that Dr. Parsons died in 1978, this author contacted the attorney that represented Dr. Parsons' estate, Mathews's descendants; all Gibsons in the Pawhuska, Oklahoma, phone listings; the Osage Tribal Museum in Pawhuska, Oklahoma; the Oklahoma Historical Society; the University of Oklahoma Western History Collections; and the Kansas State Historical Society. None of the individuals or institutions contacted had any further information regarding the current location of Agent Gibson's surviving papers. Online card catalogs and manuscript collections of various universities in Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas were also searched without success. Burns to author, November 11, 1999, indicated that he also had been unable to locate Agent Gibson's papers for his own research.

33. John E. Miller, "American Indians in the Fiction of Laura Ingalls Wilder," *South Dakota History* 30 (Fall 2000): 310–16, 320.

34. Wycoff, "Reminiscences of Early Days in Kansas," 14; Alexander H. Baird to Jacob D. Cox, March 26, 1870, 47–50, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1870–1871; Parsons, "Removal of the Osages from Kansas," 157, citing A. A. Stewart to Sidney Clarke, March 16, 1870, Clarke Collection; "Enoch O'Brien's Diary," *Descender* 9 (November 1976): 17 (five dollars secured a prairie claim and ten dollars a timber claim); Enoch Hoag to Nathaniel Parker, February 25, 1870, 187–88, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1870–1871.

Kansas press. The local newspapers alternated between placing blame on Congress for failing to approve the previously negotiated treaty and on the Office of Indian Affairs for failing to secure a speedy removal of the Osages to Indian Territory.<sup>35</sup>

While many Osages apparently initially regretted signing the Sturges Treaty, some began to support ratification as increasingly large numbers of squatters crowded onto their lands and as they remained in economic distress. Agent Snow met with the Osages in April 1869 and reported their principal complaints were that the Sturges Treaty was languishing, settlers continued to pour onto their Diminished Reserve, many settlers were stealing their ponies and destroying their property, and their annuity payments under the 1865 Treaty were not being made on time or in cash.<sup>36</sup>

In August 1869 Sidney Clarke visited the Diminished Reserve and personally convened a council of the Osages for the purpose of ascertaining their thoughts regarding the Sturges Treaty and removal from Kansas. One Osage chief, Chetopah, spoke out against the Sturges Treaty, noting that the Osages had been deceived into signing and were opposed to its ratification.<sup>37</sup> In a report to Ely S. Parker, commissioner of Indian affairs, Clarke reported that the Osages were not in favor of ratification of the Sturges Treaty but did want to sell their reserve to the government for ultimate settlement under the preemption laws. Kansas senator Edmund G. Ross sent Commissioner Parker a contradictory report indicating the Osages desired to remove immediately to Indian Territory after their autumn hunt in 1869.<sup>38</sup>

In light of these conflicting findings, Commissioner Parker directed Superintendent Hoag to convene another council with the Osages. Hoag, with Agent Snow, Neosho agent Jonathan Richards, and Snow's appointed successor as Osage agent, Isaac Gibson, met with the Osages on Sep-

35. *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 2d sess., 1870, 42, pt. 4: 3246; Parsons, "The Removal of the Osages from Kansas," 85; *Southern Kansas Advance*, February 23, 1870; *Cherokee Sentinel* (Baxter Springs), February 19, 1870. The media might well have echoed the prejudices and sentiments of many or most of the area settlers when the *Independence Pioneer* queried whether the House of Representatives thought "a few hundred degraded, ignorant, stupid, squalid Indians are to keep possession of eight million acres of fair and fertile land, simply to hunt upon?" See *Independence Pioneer*, July 2, 1870.

36. Parsons, "The Removal of the Osages from Kansas," 70–73, 81; George C. Snow to Thomas Murphy, May 1, 1869, 919–22, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1868–1869.

37. Abstract of speeches from Clarke's Council with the Osages from the *Daily Tribune*, August 5, 1869, 762–63, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1868–1869.

38. Parsons, "The Removal of the Osages from Kansas," 86–89.

The location of the Ingalls family cabin on this 1869–1870 map places their home well into the Osage lands.

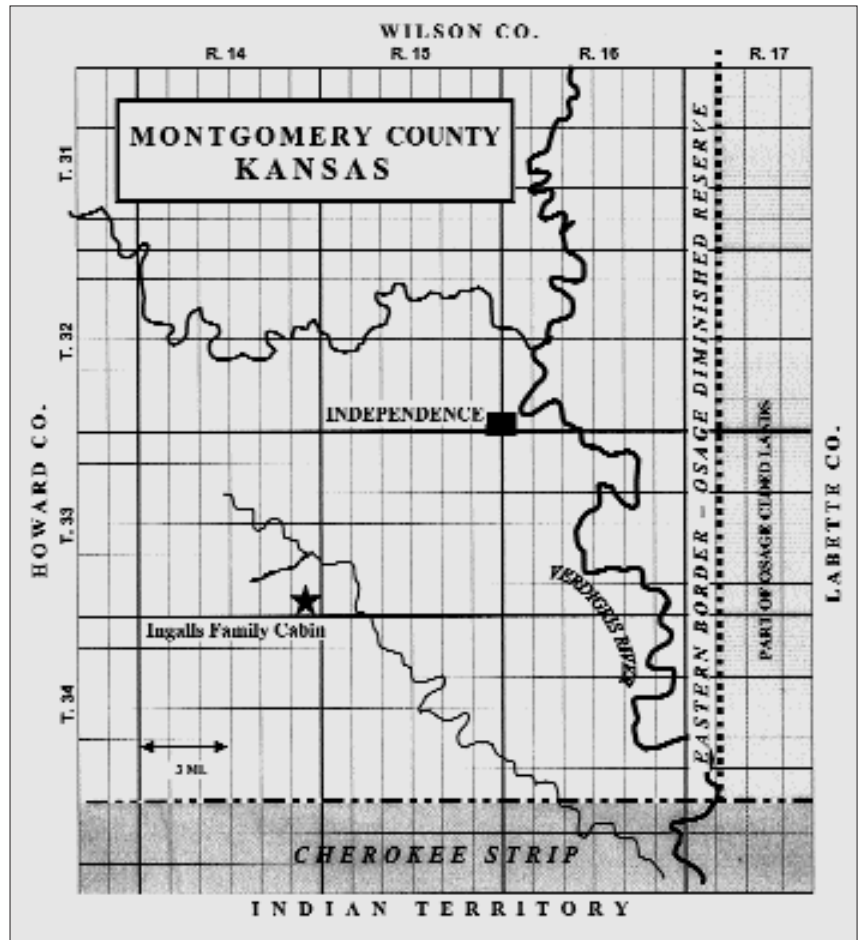
tember 26, 1869. They soon discovered that the Osages were not in agreement among themselves. Superintendent Hoag eventually concluded in his report to Commissioner Parker that the majority of the Osages did not favor ratification of the Sturges Treaty because of the offered price but were anxious to sell their reserve lands and remove to Indian Territory at the earliest possible time.<sup>39</sup> Based on the reports from Clarke and Hoag that the majority of the Osages did not support ratification of the Sturges Treaty, Commissioner Parker wrote to Secretary of the Interior Jacob Cox in January 1870 and requested that he urge President Grant to withdraw the treaty.<sup>40</sup>

In January 1870 Agent Gibson began ordering settlers who had taken claims during the previous summer to vacate in favor of the rightful Osage owners. In his first request for immediate removal of the Osages to Indian Territory, Agent Gibson observed that relations between the Indians and the settlers had deteriorated rapidly in the later months of 1869. To emphasize that immediate action was needed, he predicted that the Osages “could massacre the inhabitants of this valley in a few hours; and if they should be driven to do so this spring, I would not be surprised.” On January 28, 1870, Superintendent Hoag also recommended speedy action to remove the Osages: “If this is long delayed, war may result therefrom.” Commissioner Parker echoed these sentiments in a letter to Secretary of the Interior Cox, and he requested that Cox urge Secretary of War William Belknap to deploy troops to the Diminished Reserve.<sup>41</sup>

39. Enoch Hoag to Nathaniel Parker, October 11, 1869, 805–9, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1868–1869. Chiefs and Headmen of the Nation of the Great and Little Osages to Ulysses S. Grant, February 1873, 768–73, *ibid.*, details attempts by Cherokee agents to obtain compensation for allegedly influencing members of Congress to reject the Sturges Treaty in 1870.

40. Nathaniel Parker to Jacob Cox, January 21, 1870, 135–38, Report Books: August 1869–September 1870, Office of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, RG 75, National Archives.

41. *Southern Kansas Advance*, January 26, 1870; Isaac Gibson to Enoch Hoag, January 8, 1870, 160, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1870–1871; Berlin B. Chapman, “Removal of the Osages from Kansas,” *Kansas Historical Quar-*



Just how dangerous was the situation? Agent Gibson obviously was quite concerned for the safety of the settlers; one can sense the urgency of the situation in his request that troops be sent without delay. The *Cherokee Sentinel* reported that the Osages were prepared to take matters into their own hands and forcibly remove the settlers from their lands if the federal government declined to protect their rights.<sup>42</sup> In *Little House on the Prairie*, Wilder wrote of the long sleepless nights her family spent as the Osages debated:

When shadows began to gather on the prairie and the wind was quiet, the noises from the Indian camps grew louder and wilder. . . . [The nighttime] yelped with Indian yells, and one night it began to throb with Indian drums. . . . The next night, and the next night, and the next night, were worse and worse. Mary and Laura were so tired that they fell asleep while the drums pounded and the Indians yelled. But a war-cry always jerked them awake in terror.<sup>43</sup>

*terly* 7 (August 1938): 290; Nathaniel Parker to Jacob Cox, January 27, 1870, 145–46, Report Books: August 1869–September 1870.

42. *Cherokee Sentinel* (Baxter Springs), February 19, 1870.

43. Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 287, 295.

While the Ingalls claim was not located in the immediate vicinity of any known permanent Osage villages, they may have been close enough to the Claremore village to hear Osage nightly debates. In addition, Walnut Creek flowed through the quarter section on which the Ingalls family was living, and Agent Gibson wrote that he had received reports of the Osages assuming a hostile stance near the mouth of Walnut Creek in mid-January 1870. He stated that Osage chiefs Hard Rope and Chetopa had ordered all settlers in that area to vacate. The chief of the Great and Little Osages, Whitehair, died in late December 1869, and the Osages also may have engaged in debates regarding his successor during that time frame.<sup>44</sup>

In response to Agent Gibson's urgent pleas, on January 27, 1870, Commissioner Parker requested that the secretary of war send troops to southern Kansas to act as peacekeepers. The War Department dispatched federal troops to Montgomery County in February 1870 to police increasingly tense relations between the Osages and the settlers. Agent Gibson did use the troops to remove some of the intruders from contested claims in March 1870. However, Commissioner Parker sent word in March that the troops should be used solely to maintain the peace and not for the removal of intruders from the Osage lands.<sup>45</sup>

Wilder wrote that the war cries, which kept her family awake night after night, took place in the days or weeks prior to the Removal Council. Although the Osages certainly debated whether to sign the treaty for final removal in September 1870 (and perhaps even in the months leading up to that time), the presence of federal troops likely precluded the shrill violent debates of the Osages as described in *Little House on the Prairie*. It seems more likely that the Osage nightly debates she remembered took place in the November 1869–February 1870 time frame when tensions were at their highest.<sup>46</sup>

44. Isaac Gibson to Enoch Hoag, January 13, 1870, 162–65, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1870–1871; *ibid.*, 140.

45. Special Order No. 16 from Major J. P. Roy, Headquarters Post, Fort Scott, Kansas, to Major J. J. Upham, February 15, 1870, 13–14, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1870–1871, orders Upham to proceed immediately with Company I, Sixth Infantry, to the Osage Diminished Reserve for the purpose of “preserving the peace between the whites and the Indians.” See also *Southern Kansas Advance*, February 23, 1870; *Cherokee Sentinel*, February 19, 1870; *Girard Weekly Press*, February 24, 1870; Nathaniel Parker to Enoch Hoag, March 11, 1870, 14–15, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1870–1871.

46. Mathews, *The Osages: Children of the Middle Waters*, 689. Mathews argues that Hard Rope and several other disgruntled Osage chiefs had seriously talked of allying themselves with other Plains tribes and fighting the settlers for their Kansas lands. Whether these were rumors or actual threats, no other historical source corroborates the *Little House on the Prairie* account of shrill Osage debates in the nights prior to the Removal Council in September 1870. One recent author has suggested that the Ingalls family heard pre-hunting rituals and songs by the Osages, which

Wilder wrote of a great Osage (whom she identified as Le Soldat du Chêne) who ultimately persuaded his fellow Osages to peacefully accept removal from the Diminished Reserve. From surviving correspondence between Wilder and the state historical societies in Kansas and Oklahoma, it is evident that she remembered stories of a particular Osage and his role in the peace process and was seeking assistance in identifying him. A researcher at the Oklahoma Historical Society supplied the name Le Soldat du Chêne in response to Wilder's query, but it is unclear where the researcher obtained this information. There is no known record of this Osage in Kansas during this time period.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the presence of federal troops, relations between the Osages and the settlers apparently did not improve significantly during 1870. The Osages continued to express interest in removing to Indian Territory under a new treaty. In May 1870 governor of the Osage Nation Joseph Paw-ne-no-pashe wrote to Agent Gibson and asked that he arrange for the federal government to appoint a commission to negotiate a new treaty with the Osages. He suggested this council could be convened on or about Au-

they misinterpreted as “war cries.” See Kaye, “Little Squatter on the Osage Diminished Reserve,” 134. Kaye also posits that the stories of the Osage “war cries” might have been invented by Charles Ingalls to spice up his campfire stories of their time in Indian Territory. She argued that if the Ingalls family heard anything from the Osage camps, it was most likely the mourning cries of the Osage women as they prepared to remove to Indian Territory. See *ibid.*, 136. As noted in the text of this article, this author believes that the more likely explanation is that the “war cries” heard by the Ingalls family occurred earlier in the year, prior to the arrival of federal troops in Montgomery County.

47. Oklahoma Historical Society, Muskogee, Oklahoma, to Laura Ingalls Wilder, July 5, 1933, Little House on the Prairie—Background Material, Rose Wilder Lane Collection, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa. Wilder wrote a follow-up letter to the Kansas State Historical Society, apparently seeking confirmation of the name Le Soldat du Chêne and the chief's Indian name. A fragment of the response from the Kansas State Historical Society, dated January 10, 1934, has survived: “I do not find any record of the story you are looking for about the Osage chief in 1870–1871. The name Le Soldat du Chêne, is of course French, and if he had an Indian name as you suggest, I have not been . . . [the fragment ends here],” Laura Ingalls Wilder Collection, University of Missouri, Columbia. It would seem that Wilder, nonetheless, decided to use the name given by the Oklahoma Historical Society researcher in lieu of leaving him without a name or making one up. In her recent article relating to the interaction between the Osages and the settlers as depicted in Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie*, Frances Kaye misinterprets this same correspondence. She questioned why Wilder would have corresponded with someone in Muskogee, Oklahoma, regarding the history of the Osage tribe since Muskogee was the “home of the Creeks and Seminoles and not particularly likely to produce accurate information about the Osages, who were headquartered at Pawhuska, Oklahoma.” Kaye must not have realized that the Oklahoma Historical Society was based in Muskogee at the time Wilder wrote to them for historical research assistance (1933–1934).

48. Joseph Paw-ne-no-pashe to Isaac Gibson, May 20, 1870, 263–64,

The location of the Osage villages show the Ingalls's home in close proximity to the camp of the Claremont band.

gust 20, 1870, after the Osages returned from a short summer hunt. Reports of violence by some of the settlers against the Osages continued, and in late July the *Southern Kansas Advance* reported rumors that the Osages had allied themselves with other Plains Indian tribes for the purpose of retaking the Diminished Reserve lands by force.<sup>48</sup>

Congress debated the bill relating to the sale of the Diminished Reserve to settlers and the removal of the Osages from Kansas for much of the first half of 1870. Congressman Clarke introduced removal legislation in January 1870, and his proposal contemplated that settlers could purchase the Diminished Reserve and Osage Trust Lands at the preemption rate of \$1.25 per acre. Senator Lot Morrill of Maine asserted that the settlers could only be described as “trespassers,” despite the pendency of the Sturges Treaty. A vocal champion of the rights of Indians, Senator Morrill proclaimed that any troops sent to southern Kansas should be directed to protect the Osages from the depredations of the trespassers rather than protecting the settlers from the Indians. Noting that the 1865 Treaty provision required that the Osage Trust Lands and the Diminished Reserve be sold at no less than the preemption rate of \$1.25 per acre, Morrill was stridently critical of the provision in the proposed removal legislation that would allow the government to purchase the entire tract of Osage Trust Lands and the Osage Diminished Reserve for a mere \$1.6 million.<sup>49</sup>

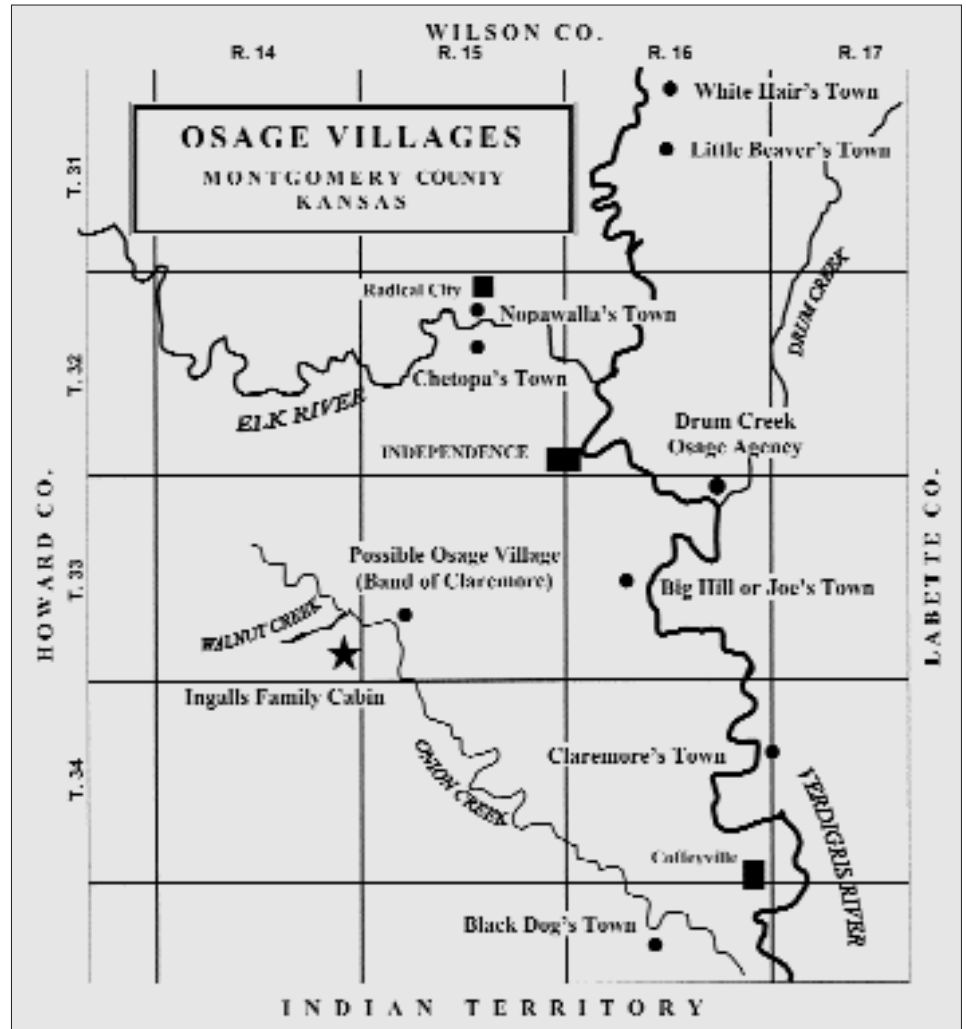
Letters, Neosho Agency: 1870–1871; Affidavit of Alexander Beyett regarding certain assaults against Osages and half-breeds by the settlers, June 23, 1870, 9–13, *ibid.*; *Southern Kansas Advance*, July 20, 1870.

49. *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 2d sess., 1870, 42, pt. 1: 916, *ibid.*, May 5, 1870, 42, pt. 4: 3246–51; *ibid.*, May 24, 1870, 42, pt. 4: 3742–47.

50. *Ibid.*, pt. 2: 1089, 1673; Parsons, “The Removal of the Osages from

Kansas,” 181–84.

51. *U.S. Statutes at Large* 16 (1870): 362; see also *Appendix to Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 2d sess., 1870: 736–37; *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 2d sess., 1870, 42, pt. 6, 5583–85, 5589, 5625. Agent Gibson was still in Washington at the time the removal legislation was passed. Parsons stated that Gibson’s diary referred to intervention by President Grant that secured passage of the removal legislation. While Gibson’s diary was not



The removal legislation provided for the sale of the Osage Trust Lands and the Osage Diminished Reserve at the preemption rate of \$1.25 per acre (to be sold to actual settlers in portions not exceeding 160 acres per settler); the payment of the proceeds from such sales to the Osages with interest at the rate of 5 percent per year; the reservation of sections sixteen and thirty-six in each township to the State of Kansas for public school purposes; and the removal of the Osages to Indian Territory.<sup>52</sup> If sections sixteen and thirty-six in any township had already been settled, an alternate section in the Diminished Reserve was to be allotted to the State of Kansas for that purpose.<sup>53</sup> This legislation was subject to approval by the Osage tribe. President Grant appointed three commissioners to negotiate the removal legislation with the Osages. Shortly after Congress passed the removal legislation, Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs W. F. Cady directed Agent Gibson to select the lands from the Cherokee portion of Indian Territory to be allotted to the Osages and begin negotiation for the removal of the tribe.<sup>54</sup>

Agent Gibson and government representatives convened a council on Drum Creek on August 20, 1870, to discuss the Osage approval of the removal legislation. However, most of the Osages were still away on their summer hunt and the council was necessarily postponed. At a meeting of settlers on September 2, 1870, they passed resolutions condemning the actions of those settlers who committed depredations against the Osages or their property. After several other delays, the council (with most of the Osages present) assembled on September 9, 1870.<sup>55</sup>

One of the chief concerns advanced by the Osages at the Drum Creek Council related to the government's plans to protect the new Osage reserve in Indian Territory from intrusion by advancing settlers. Prior to the convening of the Drum Creek Council, the Osages had learned that

explicit as to the nature of the intervention, Parsons surmises that Grant must have threatened to call Congress into special session if they were unable to pass the legislation on the last day of the regular session, July 15, 1870; see Parsons, "The Removal of the Osages from Kansas," 188.

52. *U.S. Statutes at Large* 16 (1870): 362.

53. Burns, *A History of the Osage People*, 422.

54. W. F. Cady to Enoch Hoag, July 22, 1870, Letters Received, Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1870, Office of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, RG 75, National Archives.

55. Resolutions passed at a meeting of settlers of Montgomery County, Kansas, September 2, 1870, 591–92, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1870–1871; Parsons, "The Removal of the Osages from Kansas," 240. Burns, *A History of the Osage People*, 416–17, discusses several plausible and legitimate reasons for the Osage delay in returning from the hunt that year in response to arguments that the Osages deliberately delayed the Drum Creek Council in late summer 1870.

56. William F. Cady to Jacob Cox, August 3, 1870, 449–50, Report

white settlers were on Indian Territory land to be allotted to them, and they had stated that they would not approve the removal legislation or remove to these new lands until those intruders were removed. The Cherokee census taker had noted several hundred settler families in the Cherokee lands during July 1870.<sup>56</sup> In early August 1870 General William T. Sherman instructed General John Pope, Commander of the Department of the Missouri, to send a cavalry force to the Cherokee lands in Indian Territory for the purpose of removing intruders.<sup>57</sup>

At least one southern Kansas newspaper appears to have misinterpreted this order. In an August issue of the *Kansas Democrat*, the editor clearly stated that federal troops were being called in to remove squatters from the Osage country.<sup>58</sup> This newspaper had reasonably substantial circulation, and it is certainly possible that Ingalls and other settlers might have interpreted this editorial to mean that troops were being sent to remove settlers from the Osage Diminished Reserve.

Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* ends with the threatened removal of the settlers from the Osage lands in Kansas by federal troops. In the novel, Charles Ingalls elected to leave Kansas and return to Wisconsin rather than face potential removal by force. Since Wilder had, earlier in the *Little House on the Prairie* narrative, described the Osage procession as the tribe left Kansas for the last time, readers may wonder why the government would eject settlers from the very lands it had just freed up for settlement. In evaluating this question, it is necessary to explore whether the ending was a function of the fictional medium: was this ending engineered to serve the antigovernment intervention message of this novel? *Little House on the Prairie* was written in 1933–1934, at a time when both Wilder and her daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, were stridently critical of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his administration's New Deal policies. Although it certainly aids in the book's antigovernment theme, it does not appear that the ending was created with this purpose in mind. In Wilder's unpublished autobio-

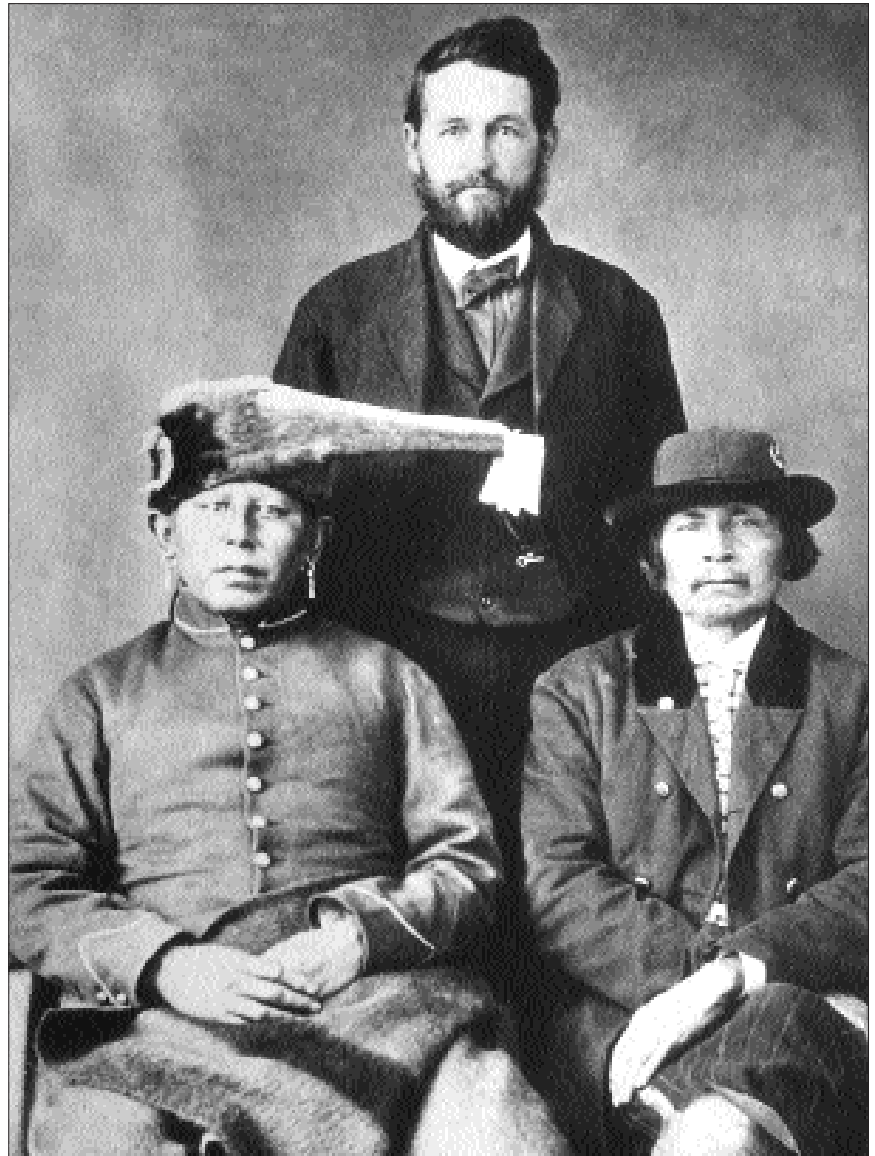
Books: August 1869–September 1870; Nancy Hope Sober, *The Intruders: The Illegal Residents of the Cherokee Nation 1866–1907* (Ponca City, Okla.: Cherokee Books, 1991), 42–43.

57. Order from General William T. Sherman to General John Pope, Commanding General, Department of the Missouri, August 6, 1870, 525, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1870–1871, specifies that intruders are to be removed from Indian Territory south of the southern border of Kansas.

58. *Kansas Democrat* (Oswego), August 11, 1870.

59. Compare conclusions of Kaye, *Little Squatter on the Osage Dimin-*

In this 1870 photo, Osage agent Isaac Gibson stands behind Chief Chetopah (left) and an interpreter, Sam Bevenue.



graphical memoir "Pioneer Girl," written years before *Little House on the Prairie* and before the election of Roosevelt and the advent of the New Deal, the Ingalls family also left Indian Territory in the face of threatened removal by federal troops.<sup>59</sup> Were the settlers actually faced with potential expulsion by force from the Osage Diminished Reserve?

Before the Drum Creek Council there may indeed have been some rumors that the government would send troops to remove the settlers from the Diminished Reserve. General Pope had ordered Captain John Poland to accompany Captain John Craig, an army officer then serving as Cherokee agent, to the portions of the Cherokee lands in which the intruders were settled.<sup>60</sup> At the request of Cherokee agent Craig, Captain Poland issued a written notice warning the intruders to voluntarily remove from Indian Territory or face expulsion by military force. Agent Gibson printed and distributed several hundred copies of this notice in Montgomery County:

Headquarters Post, S.E. Kansas  
Montgomery County, Kansas  
August 26, 1870

The Government has determined to remove all settlers and intruders in the Indian Territory, and to execute the treaty with the Cherokees of 1866. By article 27, all persons not in the military service of the United States, nor citizens of the Cherokee nation, are

prohibited from coming into the same, or remaining on the same.

All such settlers are hereby summoned to quit the limits of the Indian Territory in the shortest possible time, and all immigrants are forbidden to enter the same, on penalty of removal by force.

By order,

J. S. Poland  
Captain, 6th Infantry, Commanding Post<sup>61</sup>

It is possible that Poland's order created some confusion among the settlers. Agent Gibson's distribution of this

*ished Reserve*, 138.

60. "Reminiscences of Marietta Little," supplement to *South Kansas Tribune* (Independence), July 1901. Little remembered that the white settlers were uneasy during the summer of 1870 as there were many rumors of the impending removal of these settlers by the government. Poland was told that he and his troops were merely to act under the direction of the Cherokee agent (Indian reservations were then under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Office of Indian Affairs); Parsons, "The Removal of the Osages from Kansas," 220–22.

61. Letters, Neosho Agency: 1870–1871, 526. Parsons, "The Removal

61. Letters, Neosho Agency: 1870–1871, 526. Parsons, "The Removal of the Osages from Kansas," 225–26, notes that a copy of this notice also was published in the *Daily Kansas State Record* (Topeka) on September 3, 1870.



*In January 1870 Osage chiefs Hard Rope (left) and Chetopah ordered all white settlers on their lands to vacate. In February federal troops arrived in Montgomery County but only to keep peace and not to remove white intruders.*

alleged boundaries of the Osage Indian Reservation or other Reservations in South Eastern Kansas."<sup>62</sup>

It seems more likely that *Little House on the Prairie's* dramatic but inaccurate ending can be attributed primarily to Wilder's reliance on her own dim memories of family lore. She may have remembered family stories relating to a potential removal of the settlers by government troops (particularly if her father and other settlers were in fact confused by Poland's intruder removal order). Although the initial requests for research assistance have not survived, it can be gleaned from the responses received by Wilder and Lane from the Kansas and Oklahoma historical societies that they asked for information regarding the removal of settlers from an area forty miles south of Independence, Kansas. The researchers contacted by Wilder and Lane inadvertently steered them in the wrong direction, based on the misinformation regarding the location of the Ingalls's cabin. Had these researchers realized that the Ingalls family settled in Montgomery County, Kansas, they might well have informed Wilder and Lane that soldiers were sent in as a peacekeeping measure in February 1870 but did not remove settlers from the area. Instead, in a letter to Lane dated March 27, 1933, Grant Foreman of the Oklahoma Historical Society reinforced Wilder's misimpression when he reported his findings about the removal of intruders from the Cherokee lands in Indian Territory in September 1870.<sup>63</sup>

On September 3, 1870, Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs W. F. Cady telegraphed Agent Craig to direct the troops at his disposal to remove the intruders. Captain Poland and a contingent of troops from the Seventh Cavalry departed for the Osage reserve in Indian Territory by September 9, 1870. He left a detachment of troops at the southern border of Kansas to prevent any further intrusions or re-intrusions by those removed from these lands. He later reported that the intruders left willingly and no

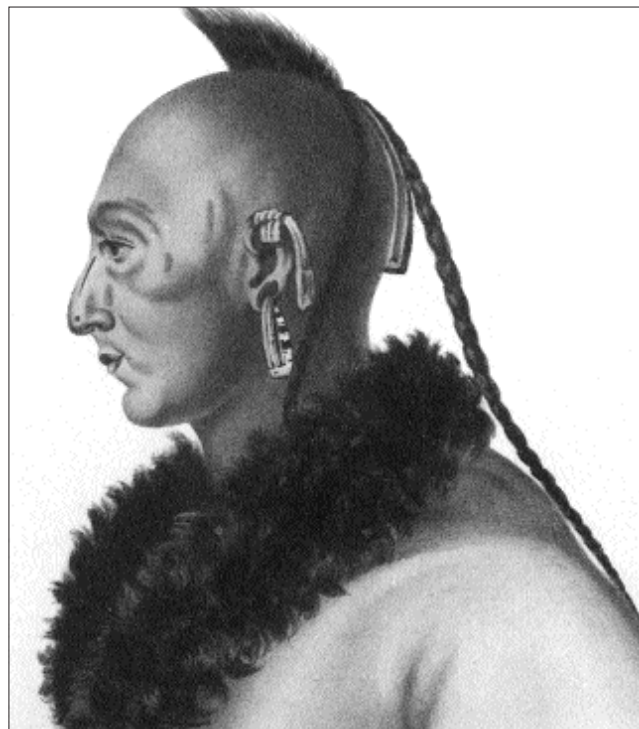
62. Notice to the Commanding General, Department of the Missouri, from the Adjutant General's Office of the War Department, October 12, 1870, 42, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1870-1871.

63. The responses received from the Oklahoma Historical Society and the Kansas State Historical Society are in the Rose Wilder Lane Collection.

order in Montgomery County likely was motivated by a desire to confirm to the Osages the government's intention to honor its promise to keep intruders out of their new lands in Indian Territory. But, even though the order specifically referenced the lands of the Cherokee Nation, the intruders on Osage lands, operating in a highly charged atmosphere, may have rashly misinterpreted its purpose. Further, since the term "Indian Territory" referred to both the land within present Oklahoma and the remaining Indian reserve lands in Kansas, some of these intruders (and Ingalls may well have been one) may have assumed that the reference to Indian Territory was intended to include settlers within the bounds of present Kansas. In an order from the War Department in October 1870, Adjutant General E. D. Townsend informed the commanding general of the Department of the Missouri that he and his officers had some discretion in removing settlers from "the



*Le Soldat du Chêne (right) was a prominent Osage in the 1820s and unlikely to be the great Indian featured in Wilder's novel. There is no known record of any other Osage with this name in Kansas during the relevant time period.*



military force was necessary in executing the removal order. Superintendent Hoag read Sherman's order to the Osages at the council, stressing that the federal government had every intention of honoring its promise to remove all trespassers from the Osage allotment in Indian Territory and to police the Kansas and Indian Territory border to prevent further trespasses. The Osages consented to the removal legislation on September 10, 1870.<sup>64</sup>

Wilder wrote evocatively of the departure of the Osages from Kansas in *Little House on the Prairie*. The removal was effected in stages, with the bulk of the tribe departing for the autumn hunt in September or October 1870. Agent Gibson led the remaining Osages, mostly women, children and older people who were unable to join in the tribe's hunt, to Silver Lake in Indian Territory for the winter of 1870–1871. The main body of the tribe returned to Kansas briefly in March 1871 before proceeding on to their new reserve in Indian Territory.<sup>65</sup>

Based on historical evidence, it is possible that the Ingalls family could have observed the Osages as they left Kansas. When Agent Gibson and his party selected the Osage lands in Indian Territory in August 1870, they followed a route that closely parallels present Highway 75 from Independence through Caney and into Indian Territory. This route would have passed in close proximity to the Ingalls's claim, and it seems probable that Gibson followed this same route when he led the first band of Osages to Silver Lake in the fall of 1870. The remaining Osages likewise may have followed this same route in the spring of 1871.<sup>66</sup>

Although the Ingalls family was known to be in Montgomery County, Kansas, in February 1870 when they sold

their Missouri property and in August 1870, it is not entirely clear when they departed Kansas. No local tax or voting records, which might have established a more definite time frame for the family's residence in Kansas, have survived from these early days of Montgomery County.<sup>67</sup> The family left Kansas sometime between August 1870 and May 1871 (Ingalls revoked the August 1869 power of attorney in Wisconsin in late May 1871).<sup>68</sup>

**L**ittle House on the Prairie cited impending forced removal as the primary reason for the family's decision to abandon its Kansas claim. It is possible that Ingalls misunderstood Poland's intruder removal order and packed his family up in late August or September 1870. However, a surviving earlier draft of *Little House on the Prairie* outlines a chronology that supports an argument that they remained in Kansas until sometime in the spring of 1871. This early draft relates the birth of Wilder's sister Carrie Ingalls (which occurred in August 1870), and a brief return of the Indians in the spring before they left for their new lands (in Indian Territory), followed soon thereafter

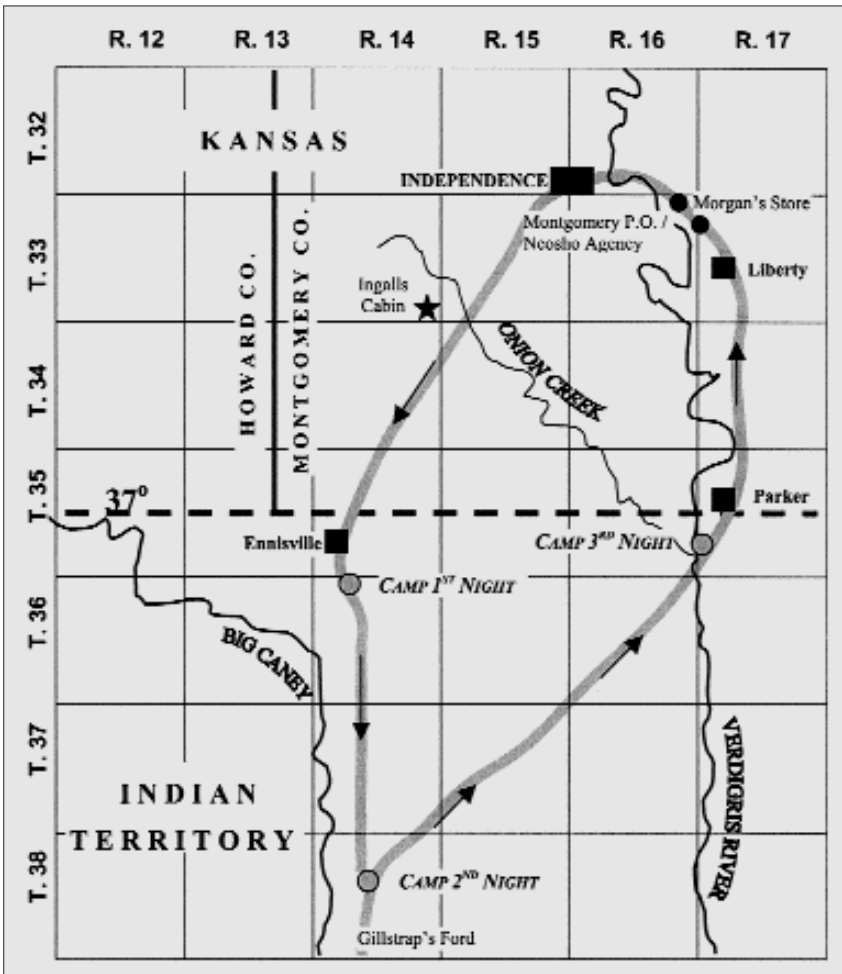
64. Parsons, "The Removal of the Osages from Kansas," 228, 231–37; William F. Cady to Enoch Hoag, September 2, 1870, Letters Received, Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1870. The telegram stated that troops had been dispatched to southeastern Kansas to act under the direction of Agent Craig to remove trespassers from the Cherokee lands. See also Burns, *A History of the Osage People*, 418. Consent and Agreement of the Chiefs and Headmen of the Nation of the Great and Little Osages to Sections 12 and 13 of the Indian Appropriations Act passed July 15, 1870, September 10, 1870, 531, Letters, Neosho Agency: 1870–1871.

65. Burns, *A History of the Osage People*, 449; Parsons, "The Removal of the Osages from Kansas," 279–80.

66. Parsons, "The Removal of the Osages from Kansas," 283.

67. Although early local histories reference voting records from November 1869 and November 1870, as well as a tax levy in September 1870, these records were not located in a search at the Montgomery County Courthouse in Independence, Kansas.

68. The revocation of this power of attorney was filed of record in Pepin County on May 30, 1871, and clearly recites that Ingalls was then a resident in Pepin County, Wisconsin. See Miscellaneous Records, Volume A, 342–43, Pepin County Courthouse.



The likely route of the Osages from Kansas to Indian Territory, 1870–1871.

by the departure of the Ingalls family. In this same draft, Wilder relates that she was four years old when the family was temporarily living in northern Missouri and waiting for the high waters to recede so they could continue on to Wisconsin. She would have been four years old in early February 1871.<sup>69</sup>

If the Ingalls family did remain in Kansas until the spring of 1871, they certainly would have been aware that the former Osage lands soon would be open for legitimate claims. The federal survey of Montgomery County was conducted that same spring. Settlers were first able to obtain clear title to land in the former Osage Diminished Reserve in June 1871.<sup>70</sup> While the Diminished Reserve land was open to preemption, homestead claims could not be made under the terms of the removal legislation, which re-

quired that payment of not less than \$1.25 per acre be made to the Osages. Finances, which were the probable motivation for Ingalls's initial move west, are also the most compelling reason why he would choose to backtrail east at a time when the Diminished Reserve land at last was opening up to legitimate settlement. Moving and resuming ownership of his Wisconsin property must have made more financial sense to Ingalls than attempting to secure financing to pay the preemption rate on his Kansas claim.

While the Ingalls family chose to abandon their claim on the Kansas prairies, many other squatters remained to take out preemption claims and continue their struggle for a stake in the great westward movement of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Wilder's depictions in *Little House on the Prairie* of the overall relationship between the settlers and the Osages during that final critical year of Osage residency in Kansas are largely confirmed in the historical record. Although her novel exudes a

strong underlying current of tension and danger, it also clearly illustrates that a large faction of both settlers and Osages worked to promote harmonious relations. The Osages were not indifferent to the expansive encroachment on their lands; however, a good number of the tribe had long ago recognized the inevitability of their removal to Indian Territory. Similarly, the squatters were not uniformly dismissive of the rights of the Osage people, with many of their number hoping to co-exist in peace with the Indians until the land was officially ceded to the government. That a potentially divisive and violent conflict on these prairie lands was averted must be attributable to both parties: the settlers who respected that the Diminished Reserve lands did still rightfully belong to the Osages and the Osages who favored peace with the settlers while they negotiated favorable terms for their final home in Indian Territory.

69. Draft of *Little House on the Prairie*, Wilder Collection; *Kansas Democrat* (Independence), April 13, 1871, reported that the Verdigris River was high as a result of heavy rains to the north.

70. Harper, *Surely It Floweth With Milk and Honey*, 57.

