ILLINOIS HISTORY©

(revised 7.17.97)

[Note: This is a single part of what will be, by my classification, about 240 compact tribal histories (contact to 1900). It is limited to the lower 48 states of the U.S. but also includes those First Nations from Canada and Mexico that had important roles (Huron, Assiniboine, etc.).

This history's content and style are representative. The normal process at this point is to circulate an almost finished product among a peer group for comment and criticism. At the end of this History you will find links to those Nations referred to in the History of the Illinois.

Using the Internet, this can be more inclusive. Feel free to comment or suggest corrections via e-mail. Working together we can end some of the historical misinformation about Native Americans. You will find the ego at this end to be of standard size. Thanks for stopping by. I look forward to your comments... Lee Sultzman.

Illinois Location

Prior to 1640, the state of Illinois including both sides of the Mississippi River from Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin to the mouth of the Ohio, and then south along the west bank to the Arkansas River. The dominant tribe in the region before 1655, their hunting territory extended into western Kentucky and across Missouri and Iowa, the latter provoking occasional skirmishes with the Pawnee and Wichita on the plains (from whom the Illini learned the calumet ceremony). The Osage migration to the lower Missouri River (sometime between 1450 and 1650) isolated the Michigamea and Chepoussa from the other Illini. The approximate distribution of the Illini in 1640 was:

Cahokia:
Cahokia, Illinois including most of central and southern Illinois.

Chepoussa:
northeast Arkansas and southeast Missouri.

Coiracoentanon:
Des Moines River in southeast Iowa.

Kaskaskia:
upper Illinois River near Utica extending into southern Wisconsin.

Michigamea:
northeast Arkansas between St. Francis and Mississippi Rivers.

Moingwena:
mouth of Des Moines River (Riviere de Moingwena) extending into southeast Iowa and northeast Missouri.

Peoria:
northeast Iowa, southwest Wisconsin, and northwest Illinois.

Tamaroa:
both sides of Mississippi at the mouths of the Illinois and Missouri.

Tapouaro:
eastern Iowa and western Illinois near the mouth of the Iowa River.

After the Beaver Wars reached the western Great Lakes during the 1640s, refugee tribes from Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio were forced west. By 1655, the Fox, Sauk, Kicapoo, Miami and Mascouten had occupied lands claimed by the Illini in southern Wisconsin, while groups of the Shawnee had relocated to central Illinois. That same year, the Illini were attacked by the Iroquois and by 1667 had retreated west of the Mississippi. They began returning to Illinois after the French made peace with the Iroquois that year but did not range as far east as before. After 1673 they were concentrated between the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers, but many of their villages were still west of the Mississippi, with one band located near Green Bay, Wisconsin. By 1680 most groups were living along the Illinois River near the new French trading post.

Except for two years west of the Mississippi after another war with the Iroquois in 1680, the Illini remained close to the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers, but their territory steadily diminished. The Osage and Missouri drove them from northern Missouri and southeast Iowa (1690-1700), and the Quapaw forced the Michigamea and Chepoussa to leave northeast Arkansas (1693-98). The refugee tribes never surrendered the areas of southern Wisconsin they had occupied during the 1650s and began to expand into northern Illinois after 1690. By 1755 the Illini were confined to southern Illinois and, after their near-extermination in 1769, the vicinity of the French settlement at Kaskaskia. In 1803 they ceded all claim to their homeland and placed themselves under American protection. They surrendered their last Illinois lands and moved to Missouri in 1818, and in 1832 eastern Kansas. After merging with the Wea and Piankashaw in 1854, they moved to northeast Oklahoma in 1867, where their descendents still live.

Population

Early French estimates of the Illini population vary considerably because the different bands were constantly moving in and out of the large villages. Father Gabriel Dreuillettes in 1658 (written in Montreal) listed 20,000 Illini with 60 villages, but a few years later, Father Dablon at Sault Ste. Marie gave them only 2,000 and five villages. Marquette (1674) and Hennepin (1682), who actually visited them, both said there were 9,000, but neither included the Michigamea and Chepoussa bands in Arkansas. The best answer seems to be somewhere around 12,000. However, few would disagree that their population loss afterwards was dramatic. By the conclusion of the Beaver Wars in 1701, only 6,000 Illini and five of the original tribes remained. Epidemic and war continued their terrible toll, and the French in 1736 counted only 2,500. After neighboring tribes nearly destroyed them in 1769, the Illini were less than 1,800, only of whom 600 survived. Their number continued to fall: 480 in 1778; 250 in 1800; and 84 in 1854 when the remnants merged with the Wea and Piankashaw to become the United Peoria, Kaskaskia, Wea, and Piankashaw. The 1910 census listed the combined tribe at 128, but by 1937 the Peoria had grown to 370. Current enrollment is nearly 2,000.

Names

Illinois is the French version of their own name Illiniwek meaning "men" or "people" which is sometimes shortened to Illini. Various spellings were: Aliniouek, Aliniwek, Eriniouai, Hileni, Illiniwek,

Illiniouck, Ilinoue, and Inoca. Other names included: Chicktaghick, Geghdageghroano, and Kighetawkigh Roanu (Iroquois); Oudataouatouat (Wyandot); and Witishaxtanu (Huron).

Language

Algonquin. Virtually identical to Miami and closer to the dialect spoken by the Ojibwe, Ottawa and Potawatomi than that of the neighboring Shawnee and Kickapoo. The Michigamea language is said to have differed somewhat from the other Illini.

Sub-Nations

Cahokia, Kaskaskia (Cascacia, Casquasquia), Michigamea (Kitchigami, Metesigamia, Mitchigamea), Moingwena, Peoria (Peroveria, Pewaria, Pewarea), and Tamaroa.

Bands

Chepoussa (Chipussea), Chinkoa (Chinko), Coiracoentanon, Espeminkia (Ispeminkia), Maroua (Maroa, Omouahoa), and Taporoua (Taponero, Tapouaro, Tapuaro). Other names associated with the Illini but not specifically identified: Albiui (Albivi), Amonokoa, Matchinkoa, and Negawichi (Negaouichiriniouek).

Villages

At contact, there may have had as many as 60, but few names have survived: Cahokia, Grand Illinois, Grand Kaskaskia, Immaculate Conception, Kaskaskia, Matchinkoa, Moingona, Moingwena, Peoria, Pimitoui, and Turkey Hill.

Culture

Composed originally of as many as twelve distinct bands, the Illini Confederation was a grouping of related tribes bound to each other through kinship and a common language and culture. Although not nearly as cohesive as the Iroquois League, their political unity was sufficient to dominate other tribes in the region. In most ways, Illini closely resembled the neighboring Miami. So much so, the French got them confused at first, although these two confederacies were hostile to each other before 1730. Both the Illini and Miami have characteristics which may link them with the region's earlier mound building cultures (Adena, Hopewell, and Mississippian) The Illini did not recall a earlier migration from some other place, and the Kaskaskia chief,Jean Baptiste Ducoign informed George Rogers Clark in 1780 that it was his ancestors who had built the Great Mound at Cahokia and provided a fairly accurate description of the site's layout and purpose.

Whatever their connection with the mound builders, the Illini lifestyle in 1670 was a woodland culture similar to neighboring tribes. Their larger villages were gathering points for socializing and trade with the different bands coming and going without a fixed pattern. The locations chosen, however, were almost always in river valleys because of the richer soil for agriculture. After planting, the Illini usually separated to hunting villages and returned in the fall for harvest. More than their neighbors, the Illini depended on the large buffalo herds found on the northern Illinois prairies as a food source. Buffalo were so common there during the 1670s, the French took to calling them the "Illinois Ox." Annual buffalo hunts by the Illini were a large affairs conducted by their patrilineal clans involving up to 300 people. Without horses, the usual methods were the "surround" or firing the prairies to trap the huge animals. Although there many rivers in their homeland, the Illini were not especially fond of fish. Canoes were dugouts rather than the lighter birchbark variety used by the tribes in the northern Great Lakes.

Men were primarily hunters and warriors while women tended the fields and gathered. Beyond this division of labor, women had important roles as shamans and leadership roles which paralleled those of the men. Although not common, there was some soral polygamy (a man marries more than one sister). Punishment of a man for adultery was rare, but unfaithful wives were either mutilated or killed. Before 1670 traditional Illini enemies included the Pawnee, Dakota (Sioux), Winnebago and Osage. Afterwards, the list of enemies expanded to include the Iroquois, Fox, Sauk, Kickapoo, Shawnee, Mascouten, Ottawa, Ojibwe, Potawatomi, Miami, Winnebago, Menominee, Chickasaw, Quapaw, Osage, Missouri, Iowa, and Dakota. Their only allies, besides the French, were themselves, and the French were little help to them after 1763. With a shrinking population to defend a homeland coveted by their neighbors, the result was predictable.

The destruction of the Illini after contact is one of the great tragedies in North American history. By the time American settlement reached them during the early 1800s, the Illini were nearly extinct and replaced by other tribes. For the most part, the blame for this could not be placed on a war with the Europeans or the Illini refusal to adapt themselves to a changing situation. Actually, few tribes had adapted as much or attached themselves more closely to the French. This made it easy to place responsibility for the fate of the Illini on their native enemies, or perhaps even nature itself, and for this reason, their sad story became a favorite romanticized explanation of the Native American's "ride into the sunset" to prepare the way for the advance of "civilization." However, stripped of this embellishment, the story of the Illini's decline is a chilling indication of how the European presence, regardless of purpose or intention, unleashed destructive forces upon North America's native peoples which reached far beyond the immediate areas of their colonization.

History

Originally feared and respected by their neighbors, the Illini Confederation dominated the mid-Mississippi Valley before contact, but the first effects of the Europeans reached them long before they met their first white man. These actually may have benefited them at first. Epidemics left by the De Soto expedition (1539-43) depopulated much of the southeast United States. As neighboring tribes moved south to fill the empty spaces created by massive die-offs of the original population, some bands of the Illini apparently were able expand south along the Mississippi into northern Arkansas. However, the later effects of the fur trade and the Beaver Wars soon erased these earlier gains.

Although 1628 is the official date for the beginning of the Beaver Wars, increased intertribal warfare to control trade with the Europeans had started as soon as the first furs had been exchanged between the Micmac and European fishermen in the Canadian Maritimes in 1519. By the time the French established their first trading post in New Brunswick in 1604, Algonquin-speaking Micmac, Algonkin, Montagnais (Innu), and Malecite (Etchemin) had forced the Laurentian Iroquois (either Huron or Iroquois) to abandon the lower St. Lawrence River at Quebec where Cartier had first found their villages in 1534. When the French soon afterwards shifted their trade to the St. Lawrence, the Algonkin and Montagnais had allied with the Huron and were fighting with the Iroquois League for control of the upper river. The French unwittingly decided to intervene in this war and in 1609 joined an Algonkin war party which defeated the Mohawk (Iroquois) in a battle fought at Lake Champlain. Within two years, the Algonkin had driven the Iroquois from the upper St. Lawrence, but the French had made a dangerous enemy.

Rather than quietly disappear, the Iroquois after 1610 began trade with the Dutch along New York's upper Hudson River. Their rival in this trade was the Mahican Confederation concentrated near present-day Albany. After a series of wars, the Iroquois defeated the Mahican in 1628 and became the dominant Dutch trading partner. At the same time, during a war in Europe between Britain and France, a fleet of British privateers (some would say pirates) captured Quebec in 1629 which cut the flow of French trade goods to the Algonkin and other French trading partners. Taking advantage of this, the Iroquois attacked the Algonkin to retake the St. Lawrence Valley marking the official start of the Beaver Wars (1629-1701). By the time Quebec was returned to the France in 1632, the Iroquois (whose trade with the Dutch

had not been interrupted) had driven the Montagnais and Algonkin from the upper St. Lawrence and were threatening to cut the trade route through Ottawa River Valley to the Great Lakes.

To restore the balance of power in favor of their allies, the French began selling firearms and ammunition in limited amounts to the Huron and Algonkin. These weapons, as well as steel hatchets and knives, soon spread to other tribes, and the Dutch responded by providing guns to the Iroquois. Meanwhile, the Swedes along the Delaware River and the British in New England were arming other tribes. An arms race developed, in which tribes providing the most fur had a military advantage over those which did not. The initial confrontations during the 1630s took place in the eastern Great Lakes, mainly between the Iroquois and Huron, but as the trading tribes exhausted the beaver in their homelands, they began seizing hunting territory from others, and the Beaver Wars spread west.

One would think that with 700 miles separating them from this conflict, the Illini along the Mississippi would have been immune, but this was not the case. During the late 1630s, French allies, armed with firearms and steel weapons, moved into lower Michigan to take hunting territory from the resident Fox, Sauk, Mascouten, Kickapoo, and Potawatomi, and by first part of the 1640s, these tribes were being forced to seek refuge across Lake Michigan in Wisconsin. The first groups of refugees were relatively small, and apparently did not disturb the Illini. However, the Winnebago at Green Bay had been fighting the southward expansion of the Ojibwe for some time previous to this and were unwilling to accept the newcomers. When the first group of Potawatomi attempted to settle near Green Bay in 1641, the Winnebago forced them north. Shortly afterwards, they attacked the Fox who had settled on the west side of Lake Winnebago.

At this point, the Winnebago were hit by a series of disasters. Enroute in their canoes to attack the Fox, a Winnebago war party was caught on a lake by a storm, and 500 of their warriors were drowned. This loss gave the Fox the upper hand, and for defense, the Winnebago withdrew into a single large fortified village at Green Bay. However, the refugees had brought more than themselves to Wisconsin, and the crowded conditions inside the Winnebago fort were perfect for the epidemic which struck them with devastating effect. Decimated and surrounded, the Winnebago were unable to harvest their corn and were in danger of starvation. Apparently, there had been a long history of confrontations between the Illini and Winnebago over southern Wisconsin, but at this point, the Illini took pity on their old enemies and, perhaps hoping for an alliance against the refugee tribes which were overrunning their own homeland, they sent 500 warriors with a large supply of food to the besieged Winnebago.

The Winnebago welcomed their benefactors and staged a large feast in their honor. However, their memories of previous wars proved too strong for the Winnebago, and in the midst of the celebration they secretly cut the bowstrings of their guests and then murdered them to appease the spirits of their warriors who died in earlier battles with the Illini. Afterwards, the Illini bodies became part of the Winnebago feast. The Illini did not suspect what had happened until their warriors failed to return the following spring, but when warriors were sent to investigate, they discovered their bones littering the abandoned Winnebago village. Anticipating retaliation, the Winnebago moved to a fort on an island in the middle of lake, a perfect defense since it was impossible for the Illini to carry their heavy dugout canoes all the way to Wisconsin to attack them. The Illini, however, proved patient and waited until the lake froze over that winter.

A large war party was dispatched to take revenge, but after it swept across the frozen lake into the village, it discovered that the Winnebago were absent on a winter hunt. After a six-day pursuit, the Illini caught the Winnebago in the open and almost annihilated them - only a few escaping to find refuge with the Menominee. The Illini took 150 prisoners (mostly women and children) back to their villages as slaves and, after several years of hard usage, allowed them to return to their relatives in Wisconsin. Fewer than 500 Winnebago survived this war of extermination by the Illini to provide a core for their tribe's survival. The Winnebago never forgave the Illini but were too few at the moment to threaten the Illini Confederation. They were also too few to resist the flood of refugee tribes into Wisconsin during

the 1650s, and in taking their revenge, the Illini had also eliminated one of their few possible allies against the newcomers.

Back east, the Iroquois overran and destroyed the Huron Confederacy in 1649 and then turned on their allies. During the next two years, they overwhelmed the Tionontati, Algonkin, and Neutrals and after swelling their ranks with thousands of adopted captives, they signed a peace to keep the French neutral and in 1653 attacked the Erie in northern Ohio. Although they lacked firearms, the Erie proved a tough opponent, and it took the Iroquois until 1656 to subdue them. In the meantime, their war parties swept into lower Michigan and finished expelling what remained of its resident tribes. The flow of refugees became a flood with the Miami being pushed into northern Illinois and eastern Iowa and groups of Shawnee relocating to central Illinois. Although the timing is uncertain, it also appears that the Dhegiha Sioux (Osage, Quapaw, Kansa, Omaha, and Ponca) were forced to leave their original homes along the lower Ohio and Wabash Rivers for new locations west of the Mississippi. The Omaha, Ponca, and Kansa continued up the Missouri River and were not an immediate problem for the Illini, but the very aggressive Osage settled along the lower river in central Missouri and became a threat for the Illini west of the Mississippi. The Quapaw moved into Arkansas and would eventually force the Chepoussa and Michigamea to abandon the area.

The Illini appear to have accepted most of these relocations with a certain amount of grace, and it was this initial generosity which eventually got them into trouble. Some groups of the Tionontati, Neutrals, and Huron escaped the Iroquois and managed to flee west. Unlike the Algonquin-speaking refugees, these small bands constituted a major threat to the Iroquois League, since as long as these remnants of their former Iroquoian enemies remained free, the Iroquois were in danger of an insurrection from the thousands of their tribesmen they had adopted. For this reason, the Iroquois were relentless in their pursuit of the Tionontati-Huron (Wyandot) and in 1653 attacked their village at Green Bay, Wisconsin. The Illini troubles with the Iroquois began after they had given refuge to some Tionontati-Huron (and possible Neutrals) in 1650. The Seneca (Iroquois) soon learned of this and demanded the Illini surrender them. When this was refused, the Seneca raided an Illini village in 1655. The Seneca did not find any of the Huron, who apparently had left to join their relatives at Green Bay, but Illini warriors quickly gathered and, despite the superior Iroquois arms, defeated them. However, the Iroquois were not inclined to quit after a single setback, and their war parties kept coming back. By 1656 the Illini had been forced to move their villages west of the Mississippi River, a formidable barrier which the Iroquois would never overcome.

The destruction of the Huron in 1649 had left the French fur trade in shambles, and with less than 400 French in North America at the time, they were in no position to challenge 25,000 well-armed Iroquois. When the western Iroquois (Seneca, Cayuga, and Onondaga) offered peace in 1653, the French accepted and, to protect the fragile agreement, halted their travel to the Great Lakes. However, they stopped short of giving the Iroquois a trade monopoly and continued their fur trade by encouraging former native trading partners to bring their furs to Montreal, a source of considerable irritation to the Iroquois. They were also annoyed by the presence of French Jesuits in their villages ministering to adopted Huron converts. The Iroquois tolerated this until the conclusion of their war with the Erie and then tried to rid themselves of the missionaries which were creating serious divisions within the League.

Following the murder of a Jesuit ambassador in 1658, war between the French and Iroquois resumed along the St. Lawrence. Despite this, the Ottawa and Wyandot were collecting furs at Green Bay and Chequamegon (Ashland, Wisconsin) from other tribes (including the Illini) and, using large fleets of canoes to fight their way past the Iroquois on the Ottawa River, were bringing them to the French at Montreal. Unable to stop this, the Iroquois went after the source and began attacking tribes the refugee tribes in Wisconsin. After years of living in fear, the French decided on serious measures to deal with the Iroquois. Alarmed by the British conquest of New York from the Dutch in 1664, the French king took control of Canada (a private commercial venture before) and sent a regiment of regular soldiers to Quebec. Their first offensive against the Iroquois homeland failed, but the French learned quickly and soon had the Iroquois on the defensive. Meanwhile, the French resumed their travel to the Great Lakes.

The first French were fur traders and missionaries, both of whom would play important roles in the destruction of the Illini. In 1665 the fur trader Nicolas Perrot, Jesuit Claude-Jean Allouez, and six other Frenchmen accompanied 400 Ottawa and Huron on their return to the western Great Lakes. They reached Green Bay in September and spent the winter. Perot remained at Green Bay, but Allouez wanted to contact the Wyandot and Ottawa converts the Jesuits had made before the disaster in 1649, and proceeded to their village at Chequamegon on the south shore of Lake Superior. It was here in 1667, that he met with a group of Illini which had come to trade fur, the first known meeting of the Illini and Europeans.

By 1667 repeated attacks by French soldiers on their homeland had forced the Iroquois to make peace. Their agreement with the French was significant in that it also extended to French native allies and trading partners, including those in the Great Lakes. This brought a much-needed relief from the constant war that had afflicted the region and allowed the Illini to begin a cautious return to Illinois. Some bands remained west of the Mississippi, but the Kaskaskia and others established villages on the Illinois River with one band (Negawichi) locating near Green Bay to trade with the French. Although increased amounts of fur reached Montreal, not everything was "hunky-dory" with this new situation. Increased trade aggravated the crowding of the refugee tribes in Wisconsin as rival hunters competed to supply fur to the French. Over-hunting stressed the over-used resources of the region, and as hunting expanded west to meet demand, it led to warfare between the refugees and the Dakota (Sioux).

Adding to the tension, the Ottawa, Wyandot, and Potawatomi preferred the earlier arrangement where they profited as middlemen and tended to view French fur traders at Green Bay and Sault Ste. Marie as competitors. This situation worsened after the French arranged a truce between the Dakota and Saulteur Ojibwe in 1680 and then began direct trade with the Dakota. Arming their enemies did not endear French to the Ottawa, Wyandot, Potawatomi, Kickapoo, Mascouten, Fox, and Sauk in Wisconsin, and this often led to the murder or robbery of French traders. Despite this, the French established permanent trading posts and missions in Wisconsin, and using their power as the supplier of the trade goods, assumed the role of mediator in intertribal disputes and began dominating the relations between the tribes in the upper Great Lakes.

The Illini at first traded with the French at Green Bay and occasionally joined with the Wisconsin refugee tribes in their wars against the Dakota (an old Illini enemy), but as an original resident of the region they had conflicting claims to territory in the area. Their location was also well south of Green Bay, and they were obviously outsiders to the inner circle of the French alliance which was just taking shape during the 1670s. The fact that they were tolerated rather than accepted would have serious implications in the future. Meanwhile, through a treaty signed at a grand council at Sault Ste. Marie in 1671, the Great Lakes tribes consented to Simon Daumont's formal annexation of the region for France. The French had annexed territory they had never seen, so there was immediate interest in exploring it. Hearing of the "Great River" to the west, the Jesuit Jacques Marquette and fur trader, Louis Joliet, accompanied by five Miami guides and canoe paddlers, set off in 1673 from St. Ignace (Mackinac) to find it.

Their route took them west to Green Bay, up the Fox River to Lake Winnebago, and then used the Fox Portage to reach the Wisconsin River. Following this,, they entered the Mississippi at Prairie du Chien. Travelling downstream they entered the Illini homeland, encountering the Peoria in eastern Iowa and the Moingwena further south at the mouth of the Des Moines. In fact, Marquette and Joliet met few tribes besides Illini (the exception being the Missouri and Osage on the lower Missouri River) until they encountered Spanish trade goods at the Quapaw villages located at the entrance of the Arkansas River and turned back. Their return journey deviated from the original path and followed the Illinois River to the portage at the south end of Lake Michigan. Marquette found Illini villages scattered the length of the river, now including, to his surprise, the Peoria and Moingwena, who, encouraged by their earlier encounter, had left the Mississippi and moved east to the Illinois. He was also startled to learn the Illini already had firearms and were using them against them Shawnee.

Marquette developed a special love for the Illini and was determined to establish a mission for them. Preparations began after his return to St. Ignace, and late in 1674 he set out on his return. Caught by the winter, he stopped at Chicago where he became ill. Pressing on that spring, he reached the "great village" of the Illini (Grand Kaskaskia) near present-day Utica, where he founded his mission. His illness became serious, and he was forced to return to St. Ignace. He died enroute and was buried on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan at the mouth of the Marquette River. His Ottawa converts from St. Ignace visited his grave a few few years later and, as was their custom for one of their own people, took his bones back with them to St. Ignace.

One may wonder about the zeal which drove men like Marquette to push their missionary efforts to point of death, but for many it was a race against time to thwart their countrymen whose fur trade was wreaking havoc and corruption among the native populations. Jesuits had witnessed the devastation created while working among the Huron and had no wish to see this repeated among the native populations in the interior. However, their protests to Paris went unanswered, especially after Louis XIV became involved in a dispute with the Vatican in 1673. The missionaries remained committed to stopping the expansion of the fur trade, but they failed. Their most serious adversary was Louis de Buade, comte de Frontenac. who became governor of Canada in 1672. Frontenac is remembered as a poor administrator, but a strong proponent of French expansion. His protege was René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle.

Educated in France by the Jesuits, La Salle became their worst nightmare soon after his arrival in New France in 1666. By 1669 he was exploring the Ohio Valley for new areas to open to trade. When Frontenac built Fort Frontenac (Kingston, Ontario) in 1675, La Salle served as its first commandant. Visiting France in 1677 as Frontenac's personal representative, La Salle recruited an Italian soldier of fortune named Henri de Tonti. He returned to Canada in 1678 with royal authority to explore the western areas of New France and establish as many trading posts as required. The following year, he built Fort Conti near Niagara Falls and then the Griffon, the first sailing vessel on Lake Erie. With this advantage in transport, La Salle was redirecting the flow of fur across the southern lakes to Fort Frontenac and bypassing the old route down the Ottawa Valley to Montreal. Needless to say, his innovation met strong opposition from the merchants at Montreal, French traders at Green Bay, and the Jesuits. However, with Frontenac's backing, they could not legally stop him, but New France was soon divided into two hostile commercial camps.

La Salle's attention turned towards the Illinois country which, because of its distance from Green Bay, was largely untapped. After years of waiting for the French to establish direct trade, the Illini were eager, but competition between rival French traders could be as treacherous as any intertribal rivalry. Taking advantage of the traditional animosity between the Miami and Illini, the French at Green Bay in 1679 encouraged the Miami and Mascouten to settle near present-day Chicago to block La Salle's access to the Lake Michigan-Illinois River portage. The Mascouten chief Manso even went so far as to claim he was speaking for the Iroquois and warned the Illini not to allow La Salle to establish posts in their territory. La Salle, accompanied by Father Louis Hennepin, Henry de Tonti and about 30 other men (many were Sokoni Abenaki) slipped past and during the winter of 1679-80 built Fort Crevecoeur on the upper Illinois.

It would be an understatement to say the Illini merely welcomed La Salle. They (and several other tribes) quickly relocated nearby, but this concentration of potential enemies drew notice from the Iroquois in New York. Their peace with the French had lasted for thirteen years, but one reason was they had been engaged in long war with their last Iroquian-speaking rival, the Susquehannock in Pennsylvania. When this ended, their attention once again turned west, and they were disturbed by what they found. After La Salle's arrival, Illini hunters started moving into Indiana, Ohio, and lower Michigan (lands claimed by the Iroquois) and taking every beaver they could find. This was bad enough, but the Illini were even killing the young beaver which meant there would no breeding stock to replace the population. But the Iroquois also valued the peace, so they resorted first to diplomacy to resolve the

situation, and the Seneca chief Annanhaa met with the Illini at an Ottawa village near Mackinac. An argument developed, and the Illini murdered Annanhaa. After this, peace was impossible.

This was the beginning of the Beaver Wars' second phase. The Seneca delayed their retaliation until August after the corn had ripened. They gathered together 500 warriors and started west to teach the Illini a lesson they would never forget. Enroute, they added 100 Miami warriors and headed for Grand Kaskaskia and Fort Crèvecoeur. A large war party like this could not travel undetected, and warnings of its approach reached the Illini. La Salle had left that spring (excellent sense of timing) to start construction on a new ship to replace the Griffon (lost in a storm) leaving Tonti in charge. Upon learning the Seneca were coming, most of Tonti's men promptly deserted leaving him with no way to defend the fort. The Shawnee nearby (temporarily at peace with Illini for trade) also took off leaving the Illini to fend for themselves.

Some Illini wisely chose the traditional method of dealing with the Iroquois and retreated west of the Mississippi, but 500 Tamora, Espeminkia, and Maroua warriors (perhaps emboldened by the 100 guns they had received from the French) stayed. With only 400 rounds of ammunition, it was a fatal mistake. Tonti knew this and dispatched messengers to Cahokia asking for help, but the Cahokia were holding a religious festival at the time and did not respond. The Illini managed to ambush the Iroquois at a point between the Illinois and Vermillion Rivers, but the Iroquois regrouped and kept coming, finally arriving at Grand Kaskaskia in September. Tonti (called Iron Hand by the Illini because he had lost his right hand in a European war and replaced it with an iron replica covered by a glove) attempted to intervene in the only manner remaining and boldly walked towards the Iroquois battle line displaying a wampum belt to negotiate a truce. Stabbed by an Iroquois warrior for his effort, he lay on the ground wounded as the battle began. The five other French who had stayed grabbed him and hurriedly left the scene. After reaching Lake Michigan, they went on to Green Bay, but the French there could have cared less about the trouble their rivals had gotten into down in the Illinois country. Tonti and his men would have starved that winter if the Potawatomi, angry with the French at Green Bay over their trade with the Dakota, had not sheltered and fed them through the winter.

Despite the defections, the number of warriors on both sides was fairly even, and the battle for Grand Kaskaskia lasted for eight days. In the end, the superior firepower of the Iroquois prevailed. The village was overrun, and no mercy was shown. Even by their own standards, the Iroquois were unusually brutal. Prisoners were tortured and burned alive, burial scaffolds pulled down, and the bodies horribly mutilated. Before the battle, the Illini had sent their women, children, and old people six miles down the river to hide on an island. The Iroquois found them and a great slaughter followed. After completing their deadly work, the Seneca left. When La Salle returned that December, the ground was still littered with the remains of thousands of Illinois. Men, women, and children ...no one was spared. Only a few Tamora and Maroa survived, and there is no mention of the Espeminkia afterwards. The few who escaped the holocaust fled down the Illinois River and then crossed the Mississippi. Not satisfied, the Seneca returned the following year with only slightly-less devastating effect, but this was only because there were fewer Tamaroa for them to kill.

By June of 1681, Tonti had recovered from his wounds and joined La Salle at Mackinac. However, neither was in a hurry to return to Illinois because travel on the Illinois River was extremely dangerous that summer with the constant threat of Seneca war parties. But the Iroquois could not venture that far during winter, and in December, 1681 La Salle and Tonti led another expedition south to rebuild their post on the upper Illinois. The location they selected was a natural fortress, a sheer outcrop of rock overlooking the river opposite Grand Kaskaskia. At the time, the French called this place Le Rocher (the rock), but a later tragedy would change its name forever to Starved Rock. In the spring, La Salle and Tonti left Fort St. Louis to explore the Mississippi. In April La Salle reached the Gulf of Mexico, and in the manner of all great explorers, claimed the entire region (Louisiana) for his king and country without bothering to consult the native peoples who lived there.

La Salle received the credit for the discovery, while Tonti, his loyal and relatively unknown Italian assistant, went back to Illinois to chop logs and fend off the Iroquois - with one hand no less! Fort St. Louis took more than a year to complete but was formidable when finished. However, Tonti did not have enough men to defend it by himself, and it took considerable encouragement to convince the Illini, in light of their recent experiences, to agree to locate nearby and help defend it. Efforts to add more tribes for its defense were aided by the Iroquois themselves. On their return to New York from their raid in 1681, the Iroquois had attacked a Miami hunting party near the mouth of the Ohio, and Miami prisoners were taken back to New York as slaves. The motivation for this attack on an ally seems to been that the Miami had allowed Shawnee (Iroquois enemies) to settle among them. The Miami demanded reparation and sent 3,000 beaver skins to obtain the release of the captives. The Iroquois kept the skins and the prisoners.

Furious, the Miami switched sides in 1682 and allowed La Salle to arrange a peace between them and the Illini. Then they moved close to Fort St. Louis for trade and defense. Almost 3,000 Shawnee also came swelling the population in the vicinity to almost 20,000. La Salle and Tonti had created a real "bear trap" for the Iroquois if they chose to attack again. La Salle had also added Louisiana to the French empire but mattered little after Frontenac was replaced as governor of Canada by Joseph Lefebvre de La Barre. La Barre ordered La Salle to surrender control of Fort St. Louis which forced him to return to France to seek relief from the king. La Salle never returned to Illinois and was killed by his own men during an abortive attempt to establish a French settlement in the Texas in 1687.

As usual, Tonti was left in command during his absence. The Seneca could not ignore forever the presence of 20,000 Algonquin trading with the French at Fort St. Louis, and in the spring of 1684 they returned in force. Their attacks first hit the outlying Miami villages in northern Indiana, which provide ample warning of their approach, and then swept west into Illinois. Many of the Illini left when news of the impending attack reached them, but Tonti was able to convince those who remained to fortify their village and fight. The Iroquois besieged the fort for six days but after heavy losses were forced to retreat. This battle is generally regarded as the turning point of the Beaver Wars and the limit of Iroquois expansion. However, for the Illini, it was a pyrrhic victory. Their population never recovered, and the tribes the French had gathered at Fort St. Louis soon proved to have been allies against a common enemy and not friends.

Elated by this victory, the French attempted to organize an alliance to take the offensive against the Iroquois, but this proved premature. When the fighting had began in the Illinois country, the French at Green Bay and Sault Ste. Marie made no effort to intervene and not-so-secretly hoped the Iroquois would wipe La Salle and Tonti from the face of the earth. Having discovered a rich source of fur in the Dakota homeland, whatever fate befell the Illinois was of no concern. They also had enough problems of their own. The Wisconsin and upper Michigan tribes (Ottawa, Wyandot, Ojibwe, Potawatomi, Fox, Sauk, Kickapoo, and Mascouten) were angry because of French trade with the Dakota and near revolt. Another war with the Iroquois for defending the Illini - and many felt the Illini were getting what they deserved for the murder of a Seneca chief - was the last thing they wanted, since it would endanger their ability to take their fur to Montreal through the Ottawa Valley. They chose neutrality and focused instead on their war with the Dakota along the upper Mississippi. However, the war between the Illini and Iroquois spread north, and in 1683 the Seneca attacked the Ottawa villages near Mackinac which drew the northern tribes into the fighting.

In 1683 Governor La Barre sent Nicolas Perrot (he had left Green Bay in 1671 and was living in Quebec) back to Wisconsin to fix relations with the northern tribes. Perot succeeded, and after the Iroquois defeat at Fort St. Louis the following year, La Barre instructed him to obtain their support for campaign against Iroquois. Similar orders were sent to Tonti at Fort St. Louis, who collected 200 Illini warriors, but after years of non-cooperation the offensive was so poorly coordinated, it ended in failure. La Barre panicked and signed a treaty with the Iroquois conceding most of the Illinois country. He was replaced by Jacques-Rene Denonville who renounced the treaty and began creating a Great Lakes Algonquin alliance which could cope with the Iroquois. He ordered rival French traders to end their

bickering, strengthened existing forts, added new ones, and provided firearms and ammunition to tribes willing to fight the Iroquois. By 1687 his strengthened alliance was ready to take the offensive.

However, French enthusiasm in many cases exceeded that of their allies. Tonti in 1685 had been forced to reconcile a dispute by giving presents to both the Illini and Miami to keep them fighting the Iroquois rather each other. By 1688 even this proved inadequate, and the Miami left Fort St. Louis and moved east to northern Indiana - a matter of concern to the French since it was feared they would ally with Iroquois. This eased as warriors from the French alliance swept east and began driving the Iroquois back across the Great Lakes to New York. By 1690 the Iroquois were on the defensive, but after the failed offensive in 1684 and La Barre's concession of their homeland, the Illini did not entirely trust the French. At their best moments, they proved a reluctant ally, and in 1687, Tonti could only find 85 Illini warriors willing to participate in the war. At their worst, the Illini (especially the Peoria) could be a "pain in the neck for the French efforts to maintain unity because their main problem was ridding themselves of the French allies who were squatting on their land.

As the Iroquois retreated east, the Illini could not understand why the refugee tribes simply did not go back where they had come from. The reason was the French fur trade. The Iroquois were not only a dangerous enemy but, because of their ties to the British, a potential commercial rival. If the French allies returned to their old homes, there was a distinct possibility some would have traded with the Iroquois and even allied with them. For this reason, the French refused to open new trading posts in the east and actively discouraged their allies from leaving Wisconsin. In so doing, they forced the refugees to look elsewhere for relief from their crowded conditions and inadvertantly focused their ambitions on the beaver and rice lakes of the Dakota in the west and the fertile soils of the Illini in the south. Meanwhile, the large population in the vicinity of Fort St. Louis had exhausted the firewood and caused a drastic decline in the buffalo herds. The Illini were heavily dependent on buffalo, and their defense of this dwindling resource in 1689 provoked a confrontation with the Shawnee. The Shawnee left to join their relatives in Tennessee, but afterwards they retained an intense dislike for the Illini and frequently returned to raid their villages.

Tonti did not learn of La Salle's death until 1689 and immediately applied for his trade concession in the Illinois country. Since Frontenac was once again governor of New France, his request was quickly granted, but the departures of the Shawnee and Miami had not erased the problem of the exhausted resources near Fort St. Louis. After consultations between Tonti and the Illini, it was decided to abandon Fort St. Louis and Grand Kaskaskia and relocate everything downstream at Peoria Lake (called Pimitoui or "fat lake" by the Illini). Fort Pimitoui was built during the winter of 1691-92, and the following year, the Jesuits built a mission. This increased tensions, since their missionary efforts were usually at odds with the fur traders. Other missions followed at Chicago, Cahokia and then Kaskaskia. In general, the priests wanted to banish the French from Illinois, but in time they were forced to accept intermarriage (performed in a church).

The last part of the Beaver Wars coincided with the King William's War (1689-97) between Britain and France, and for this reason, this major conflict is rarely assigned its proper importance in history. As victory followed victory, the French and their allies gained control of ever-greater portion of the beaver country in the Great Lakes, and despite the warfare, fur reached Montreal in unprecedented amounts. However, the success of the French fur trade ultimately was its undoing. With too much beaver fur on the European market, supply exceeded demand, and the price fell. As profits plunged, Louis XIV decided it was finally time to listen to Jesuit complaints and in 1696 issued a royal proclamation suspending the French fur trade in the Great Lakes. The result was chaos just as the French were on the verge of crushing the Iroquois and dominating the British colonies along the Atlantic coast.

The fur trade held their alliance together, and without it, the French lost the ability to control their native allies. This was immediately apparent in their efforts to make peace with the Iroquois. The King William's War ended with the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697. Since this agreement placed the Iroquois League under British protection, the French were anxious to end the fighting in the Great Lakes to

preclude the possibility of another war with the British, but their allies could sense the Iroquois were on the verge of collapse and refused to stop. Using all of their diplomatic skills, it took the French until 1701 to get them to agree to peace. Elsewhere, native traders did not understand the price drop caused by a European fur glut. What they saw instead was the French were giving them less trade goods for the same amount of fur which was perceived as greed and selfishness. French traders were robbed and killed as a result, and as posts closed after the royal decree, the situation became worse.

In Illinois, a religious dispute turned ugly, and the Peoria attacked and severely wounded Father Jacques Gravier (he late died of his wounds). The French responded by refusing to sell gunpowder to the Peoria who in turn retaliated by attacking French traders. The irony was that, because of the collapse of the fur trade, the Peoria did not have gunpowder in the first place and had been forced to use bows and arrows in the attack on the priest. Fort Pimitoui did not last long after royal decree. Tonti became discouraged and closed it in 1700. He left Illinois and went south to join Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d' Iberville's effort to establish a French colony and trading post at the mouth of the Mississippi. The Queen Anne's War (1701-13) erupted in Europe between Britain and France and spread to North America. However, the fighting was confined to New England and the Canadian Maritimes and little happened in the Great Lakes.

The Iroquois kept their promise made in the peace treaty signed with the French earlier that year and remained neutral (with the exception of the Mohawk), but they had been quick to notice the havoc the fur trade suspension had created within the French alliance and offered their former enemies access to the British and Dutch traders at Albany. In so doing, they came closer to destroying the French through economic subversion than they had by war. With the French unable to compete, British and Iroquois traders made inroads into the French monopoly. The fur trade continued, although not at previous levels, and with it intertribal competition for hunting territory. The Illini homeland never had many beaver, and their attempts to expand in 1680 had brought war with the Iroquois. They were able to compensate somewhat by providing another commodity the French needed, captured native women and children slaves. The Illini soon gained a reputation as experts at this and raided the Pawnee so often that Pani (French for Pawnee) became synonymous in New France for a Native American slave.

The Illini had lost heavily during the 1680s in Beaver Wars, but far more serious problems developed after 1690 after the French alliance was forcing the Iroquois back towards New York. Neighboring tribes began seizing large portions of what had once been the Illini homeland. During ten-years of warfare at this time west of the Mississippi, the Osage and Missouri had forced the Moingwena, Peoria, Tapouaro, and Coiracoentanon to surrender hunting territory in northeast Missouri and then abandon their villages along the Des Moines in southeast Iowa. Relocating to northern Illinois, the Moingwena were absorbed by the Peoria while the Tapouaro and Coiracoentanon disappeared into the Kaskaskia. Perhaps to compensate themselves for this and gain access to territory with more beaver, Illini warriors began joining the Fox, Kickapoo, Mascouten, and Miami in the war which had erupted along the upper Mississippi with the Dakota during the 1690s. Since the French were also arming the Dakota, the Algonquin made few gains against the Dakota and their Iowa allies, but the Illini earned severe punishment from these old enemies who could strike swiftly by riding the current downstream, while the Illinois were forced to fight the current upstream to retaliate.

However, the division between the tribes which traded La Salle and Tonti the Illinois or the Green Bay traders remained. Even more significant were the different interests of the original residents versus the refuges, so rather than gratitude, the Illini participation in these wars against the Dakota only earned suspicion because of prior Illini claims to southern Wisconsin. The Potawatomi during the 1690s had already occupied the western shore of Lake Michigan as far south as Chicago, and groups of Mascouten, Wea (Miami), and Piankashaw (Miami) were beginning to move south into the Wabash River Valley. These shifts generally occurred without confrontation, but between 1695 and 1700, the Fox and Winnebago combined to drive the Kaskaskia from their last villages in southern Wisconsin and then began to press them in northern Illinois.

While other Illini bands were being forced to surrender territory to the west, north and east, the Chepoussa and Michigamea along the St. Francis River in Arkansas came under attack by the Quapaw in 1693, and by 1698 these southernmost bands of the Illini had relocated to Illinois where the Chepoussa were absorbed by the Michigamea. They first attempted to settle in southern Illinois, but the hostile Shawnee and Chickasaw made this area dangerous. Moving north to the upper Illinois River, the Michigamea found themselves in the Kaskaskia's war with the Fox and Winnebago. At about the same time Tonti closed shop at Fort Pimitoui in 1700, the Kaskaskia left northern Illinois, and the Michigamea went with them. After a short stay near the Cahokia and Tamaroa, both bands moved further south along the east bank of the Mississippi and finally settled near the Jesuit mission at the mouth of the Kaskaskia River. By 1703 almost all of the Illini were confined to the lower Illinois Valley and the east side of the Mississippi between Cahokia and Kaskaskia. Only the Peoria stubbornly clung to the upper Illinois Valley which only 25 years before was the center of the Illini homeland.

Meanwhile, the French alliance had been falling apart after the suspension of the fur trade in 1696. By the start of the Queen Anne's War in 1701, the loyalty of many French allies was doubtful due to the inroads of British and Iroquois traders, and since they were outnumbered by the British in North America, the French needed these tribes to defend Canada. For this reason, the French crown relented in 1701 and allowed the establishment of single new trading post to retain the allegiance of the Great Lakes tribes. In June, Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac arrived at Detroit and began construction of Fort Ponchartrain and invited the Ottawa and Wyandot to settle nearby. However, with only one post to compete with the British, Cadillac was forced to invite more and more tribes to Detroit to prevent them from trading with the British. By 1710 there were 6,000 Wyandot, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Ojibwe Miami, Peoria, Osage, and Missouri living in the vicinity of Detroit, and this concentration soon exhausted the resources. Even the friendly Wyandot, Ottawa, and Ojibwa were skirmishing with each other over territory.

The final straw was added that year when Cadillac invited the Fox. 1,000 Fox came east from Wisconsin bringing many of their Mascouten and Kickapoo allies. This inflamed the situation, since the Fox were returning to what had been their homeland before the Beaver Wars and were not the least bit shy about informing other tribes about this. Life near Detroit was already difficult without giving the Fox the special privileges they were wanted, and French allies soon were demanding that the French send them back to Wisconsin. This was ignored and in the spring of 1712, the Ottawa and Potawatomi took matters into their own hands by attacking a Mascouten hunting party. The Mascouten fled to Fox, and as the Fox prepared to retaliate, the French attempted to stop them. At this point the Fox had had just about enough of the French and attacked Fort Ponchartrain, beginning of the First Fox War (1712-16). The French were trapped inside their fort when a large relief force from the other tribes arrived and fell upon the Fox from behind. Very few Fox escaped the massacre which followed to join the Mascouten and Kickapoo retreat to Wisconsin. However, when they got there, the survivors joined with the Fox who had remained and began taking revenge on the French and their allies for the massacre at Detroit.

The Fox Wars were actually a civil war of the French alliance and probably a source of amusement for the Iroquois who were being treated to the spectacle of their enemies fighting among themselves. With the French ability to mediate disputes hampered by trade restrictions, many tribes had old scores to settle. This was very true of the Illini and Fox, since the Fox had recently driven the Kaskaskia and Michigamea from southern Wisconsin aggravated by the continual encroachment of the Fox into northern Illinois prairies to hunt buffalo. For this reason, the Peoria warriors who participated in the Detroit massacre took special delight in torturing Fox prisoners. This brutality and the proximity of Peoria villages to the Fox in Wisconsin focused their retaliation on the Illini. The French were unable to deal effectively with the Fox until the trade restrictions were lifted in 1715 after the death of Louis XIV. Once these were removed, the French were able reconcile disputes between the Illini and Miami and the Ojibwe and Green Bay tribes and then prosecute the war against the Fox. In 1715 a joint French-Potawatomi expedition defeated the Kickapoo and Mascouten allies of the Fox forcing them to make a separate peace. The Fox were alone.

In 1716 the French sent another expedition after the Fox in Wisconsin, but it failed to take their fortified village. The French offered peace, which the Fox accepted, but hatreds from the war did not end. This was especially apparent between the Fox and the Peoria. Throughout the conflict, there had been a mutual exchange of atrocities with the Fox torturing their Illini prisoners and the Peoria returning the compliment. French visitors to fortified Peoria villages were treated to the sight of rotting Fox bodies hanging from the walls. The cycle of revenge soon took on a life of its own and did not cease in 1716 with peace between the Fox and French. The Peoria, out of pure spite, refused to return Fox prisoners, and the Fox hunters continued to intrude into Illini territory to hunt buffalo. A French attempt to mediate failed, and confrontations continued.

With the end of trade restrictions in 1715, the French opened a series of posts during the next five years: Mackinac, La Baye, Ouiatenon, Chequamegon, St. Joseph, Pimitoui, Miamis, Niagara, De Chartres, and Vincennes, but the damage was done, and their trade in the region never recovered. Competition from British traders continued to grow, and after the British opened a new post at Oswego (New York) in the Iroquois homeland in 1727, 80% of the beaver on the Albany market came from French allies. Detroit and the other French posts established a new trade pattern which ignored the Illini. The old route from Lake Michigan down either the Wisconsin or Illinois Rivers to the Mississippi had become dangerous during the Fox Wars, and after 1701 the French started using the Maumee and Wabash in lieu of the Illinois to reach the Ohio and lower Mississippi. The Illini, who had relatively few beaver, were bypassed and no longer important.

The separation was completed in 1718 with the reorganization of the French administration in North America, and the Illinois country became part of Louisiana. Louis XV granted a charter and trade monopoly to the Company of the Indies which included a grandiose scheme for the colonization of the Mississippi Valley. The idea was first proposed by a Scotsman named John Law and won the support of French nobility interested in quick profits. Before the "Mississippi Bubble" burst in a frenzy of speculation in 1720, the first French colonists had arrived at Kaskaskia and construction of a new fort (de Chartres) and trading post had begun. Aside from the tiny settlement which developed near the Sulpician mission at Cahokia, Kaskaskia, and St. Genevieve across the Mississippi in Missouri, would be the center of French occupation of Illinois until the founding of St. Louis in 1763. Because of the Jesuit mission and French population, the Kaskaskia and Michigamea nearby soon became heavily Catholic and intermarried with the French. The Jesuits, however, had less success with the Peoria who chose to remain in the north as traditional "sauvages."

Although they had been hit by smallpox in 1704, up to this point, war had dealt the Illini harsher blows than epidemic. However, sometime around 1710, the combination of French settlement on the lower Mississippi and increasing travel from there to the Illinois country introduced malaria to the Illini. This became really serious after the French began to settle permanently in Illinois which apparently brought carriers of this disease to the region. Only certain types of mosquitos can spread this parasitic blood infection, and Illinois and Indiana apparently had the right variety. Both the Illini and Miami populations fell dramatically between 1718 and 1736 while other tribes just to the north were relatively unaffected. Known as "the ague" to the Americans who settled there during the 1800s, it was endemic to the region until the 20th century.

The peace between the Fox and the French in 1716 was a temporary truce, and the Fox continued to annoy the French with actions detrimental to their interest. Foremost was the continuing Fox war with the Peoria, which after 1716 only increased in ferocity. In 1722 the Illini captured Minchilay, the nephew of the Fox chief Oushala, and burned him at the stake. The Illini were not liked by their neighbors, so the Fox had few problems recruiting the Kickapoo, Mascouten, and Winnebago as allies. Outnumbered, the Peoria retreated to their natural fortress at the site of old Fort St. Louis, and sent messengers to the French at Kaskaskia for help. The Fox surrounded them, but the position was impregnable, and they lost heavily in the assault. The French and Other Illini assembled a relief force at Fort de Chartres and marched north to relieve the Peoria. The Fox withdrew before it arrived but were forced to leave over 100 of their dead.

West of the Mississippi, the Fox had also become embroiled in a war with the Osage and Missouri which disrupted French trade along the Missouri. This forced the French to hold a series of councils during 1723 to arrange peace between the Kansa, Pawnee, Comanche, Nakota (Yankton Sioux), Osage, Missouri, Otoe, Iowa, Fox, and Dakota. Their effort had a certain measure of success among the Missouri River tribes, but new fighting erupted along the Des Moines River in southeast Iowa between the Fox and Iowa and the Osage and Missouri. The peace councils in 1723 also had a result which the French never intended. To fight their enemies, the Fox needed allies, and from their meetings with the Dakota at these councils, the Fox were able to form an alliance with them against the Illini. The Fox and Dakota had been hostile since the 1660s, so their sudden alliance made the French instantly suspicious. Convinced the Fox could not possibly be creating this much trouble on their own, they suspected the British were encouraging the Fox to form a secret alliance against themselves.

It was suspicion the Illini did not discourage, but the truth was the Fox simply did not like the French, and there was no British plot. However, it was enough to convince the French in 1726 to launch a coordinated punitive expedition against the Fox. Since there were not enough soldiers in the Illinois country to undertake this by themselves, the French in Canada dispatched an expedition west, while a second force of 20 French soldiers and 500 Illini warriors gathered at Fort de Chartres under the command of Desliettes. However, the Fox withdrew before the two columns could link up, leaving the French, as they had so many times before, frustrated. At meetings the following year, the French made their first proposals of genocide. The anger against the Fox was so great that this met with few objections from their allies (including the Illini), although this did not become official policy until approved by the king in 1732. The French did decided on war but first took the precaution of using diplomacy to isolate the Fox from their allies. By the time the Second Fox War (1728-37) began, the Kickapoo and Mascouten were the only allies the Fox had left.

The first French expedition against the Fox failed (as usual), but soon afterwards, the Fox managed to "shoot themselves in the foot" by murdering some of their Kickapoo and Mascouten allies after an argument over French prisoners. Furious, the Kickapoo and Mascouten signed a separate peace with the French, and the Fox once again were alone. Under attack from all sides in 1730, about 1,000 of them decided to accept an offer of sanctuary from the Iroquois and leave Wisconsin. The only problem was that to get to New York, the Fox first had to pass through Illini territory in northern Illinois. Although uncharacteristic for the Fox, they had their women and children with them, and they actually sent an envoy to the Illini to ask permission to cross. However, an argument developed, and it was denied. With little choice, the Fox came anyway, and perhaps as their way of saying goodbye to the Illini, they captured several Cahokia (including the son of a chief) and burned them at the stake. The Fox continued east across the prairies of northern Illinois with Illini warriors in pursuit but were slowed by their woman and children. They stopped just east of present-day Bloomington, Illinois and threw up a temporary fort for defense.

It would have been better if they had kept going. The Illini surrounded them and sent for help. The French and their allies descended on the Fox fort from all directions. Orders arrived from the governor of Canada that no mercy was to be shown to the Fox. Surrounded by as many as 1,400 warriors, there was no escape. After 20 days of siege, the Fox were starving and attempted a break-out one night during a thunderstorm. The French and their allies caught up and killed all of them. All that remained were the 600 Fox in Wisconsin who fled to the protection of the Sauk west of Green Bay. Negotiations were held to end the war, but in the end, the French decided 600 Fox were 600 too many and sent an expedition to the Sauk village to demand their surrender. This was refused, and during the battle which followed the Sauk and Fox escaped and fled west across the Mississippi into eastern Iowa. Another French expedition went after them there in 1736, but their Kickapoo guides had no taste for genocide and led the French in circles.

The French planned another effort for 1737, but the Kickapoo were not their only ally who had had enough of this. The Illini voiced the general concern that if the Fox could be destroyed like this, who would be next? As things turned out, they had reason to worry. At a meeting in Montreal in the spring of

1737, the Menominee and Winnebago asked the French to show mercy to the Fox while the Potawatomi and Ottawa made a similar request for the Sauk. Faced with revolt of their alliance, the French had to agree. War had just broken out in Minnesota between the Ojibwe and Dakota. The French tried to stop this and failed. British and Americans also had their chance, but fighting continued until the 1850s.

The more immediate concerns for the French were the Chickasaw and Natchez on the lower Mississippi. The Natchez had risen in revolt in 1729 killing 200 French at Fort Rosalie. During the next two years, the French, with the help of the Choctaw, crushed the Natchez, but many fled to the Chickasaw. Like the Sauk and the Fox, the Chickasaw had refused demands to surrender the Natchez, and by 1736 there was war. The Chickasaw were well-armed by the British and controlled the east side of the Mississippi between the Ohio and northern Mississippi. They closed the river to French commerce isolating the Illini and the Illinois country from the rest of Louisiana. The French reluctantly made peace with the Fox and Sauk in 1737 but were forced to turn their attention south and deal with the Chickasaw strangle-hold on their trade. The Peoria and Cahokia had reoccupied Pimitoui and Grand Kaskaskia in 1733, but this was their only gain. Neither the Fox or the Sauk ever forgot the massacre on the Illinois prairie in 1730. As was the result of their war against the Winnebago nearly a century before, the Illini had a bad habit of making unforgiving enemies.

The Illini were aware of their growing predicament, and with the instincts of a drowning man, they attached themselves to the French. Unfortunately, like a teacher who sees a child picked on by his classmates, there was little the French could do but fend off the worst blows. However, in attaching themselves to the French cause in their war with the Chickasaw, the Illini spent their last blood with little gain. Although seldom receive proper credit, the Chickasaw were probably the most formidable warriors east of the Mississippi. They fought with almost everyone and never lost a war until they picked the wrong side during the American Civil War. The French and Illini were among there victims, and between 1731 and 1752, no combination of the French and their allies from both north and south of the Ohio River could dislodge this relatively small, very tough tribe from their homeland between the Tennessee and Mississippi Rivers in western Kentucky, Tennessee and northern Mississippi.

But the Illini, especially the Kaskaskia and Michigamea, bled themselves dry fighting the Chickasaw for the French. Two major French offensives against the Chickasaw in 1736 and 1740 ended in disaster and defeat. Frequent raids by small war parties from Detroit, St. Joseph, Wabash Tribes, and the Illini were also tried, but the Chickasaw ate up most of these. Meanwhile, while the Illini were steadily losing their warriors on these attacks, Chickasaw reprisals against Illini villages took a heavy toll of their women and children. The fighting sputtered on for over 20 years, but was interrupted by the King George's War (1744-48). As with the earlier Queen Anne's War, most of the fighting in this conflict was in New England and the Canadian Maritimes. Participation by the Illini and other French allies from the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley was limited to sending warriors east to help defend Quebec from a British invasion. This never came, but a British blockade of the St. Lawrence cut the supply of trade goods, and French authority (and their ability to defend the Illini) collapsed.

Almost immediately other tribes descended on the Illini. Not trusting the French after 1737, the Sauk had remained in Iowa after the Fox Wars, but in 1743 they recrossed the Mississippi and started expanding south. In the meantime, the Ojibwe had driven the Dakota from northern Minnesota and south of the Minnesota River. To compensate themselves, the Dakota had taken territory from the Iowa and forced them south. This, of course, ended their traditional alliance, and trapped between the Dakota and Osage, the Iowa had allied with the Fox and Sauk, adding another enemy for the Illini. The Kickapoo were also moving south, but in 1746 the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, Menominee, and Mascouten combined to force the Peoria from southern Wisconsin. In danger of being annihilated, the Peoria fled south to the French at Kaskaskia, and were so desperate for allies, they asked the Osage in Missouri for help. The Osage had their own war going with the Winnebago and Menominee and no love for the Illini. They refused, but the French managed to arrange a truce which allowed the Peoria to return to northern Illinois. Their lands in Wisconsin, however, were lost forever.

British traders used the shortage of French goods to their advantage and by 1746 were entering Ohio with Iroquois permission for direct trade with French allies. The Sandusky Wyandot of chief Orontony were the first to break with the French and trade with the British. By 1748 this became open revolt when Orontony burned his French trading post and asked the Detroit Wyandot to join him. His movement collapsed upon his death, but a far more dangerous conspiracy formed under the leadership of the Miami chief Memeskia (La Demoiselle or Old Britain). The Miami had joined Orontony's revolt against the French and in 1748 signed a treaty and trade agreement at Lancaster, Pennsylvania with the British and Iroquois giving permission for trading posts at their villages. The Wyandot dropped out after Orontony's death, but angered by the lack of annual presents from the French, Memeskia burned his French trading post in 1750 and moved his people east to a new village at Pickawillany (Piqua, Ohio).

After a British post was built, Memeskia began inviting other Miami to come for trade. About the only positive outcome from the malaria in Illinois and Indiana after 1718 had been that the Illini and Miami had ended their former hostility. For this reason, invitations were also extended to the Illini. Despite their loyalty to the French, this was difficult to resist. French goods were not only in short supply, but British goods were cheaper and better quality. However, Memeskia anticipated the French would not meekly accept the British takeover of trade in the Ohio Valley, and he began to circulate a wampum belt to create a secret alliance against them. The plot included groups of the Illini, and the French became aware something was very wrong when many of their allies suddenly ceased their attacks on the Chickasaw. The arrest and imprisonment at Fort de Chartres of several Kaskaskia and Piankashaw (Miami) for attacks on French traders in the Illinois country confirmed the existence of a wide-spread plot.

After Memeskia ignored demands to expel his British traders, the French in 1751 tried to induce the Detroit Tribes (Potawatomi, Ottawa, Wyandot, and Ojibwe) to attack Pickawillany. However, even these allies were considering switching to the British, and using the excuse of a smallpox epidemic which struck the Ohio Valley that year, they declined. At this point, the French realized how serious the situation had become In desperation, the French were forced to reach far to the north for allies, and Charles Langlade, a Métis (mixed-blood), organized a war party of 250 Ottawa and Ojibwe at Mackinac which in June, 1752 attacked Pickawillany killing Memeskia and 30 other Miami. The British trading post was looted and burned, while Langlade's warriors cooked and ate Memeskia's body. The attack left little doubt among other French allies what might befall them if they broke with the French and began trading with the British.

The Illini and other rebels promptly apologized, pledged their loyalty, and renewed attacks on the Chickasaw. However, Illini participation in the plot and the arrest of some Kaskaskia at Fort de Chartres were a clear indications the Illini had fallen from the good graces of the French. This resulted in "feeding frenzy" by neighboring tribes. During 1751 the Osage had gotten themselves into serious trouble fighting with the Pawnee and Comanche and sent representatives to the Illini asking for an alliance. Remembering the Osage refusal to help them when they were under attack in 1746, the Illini had refused. A year later the Illini had reason to regret their decision. In June, 1752 (the same month Pickawillany was attacked), over 1,000 Sauk, Fox, Kickapoo, Winnebago, and Dakota warriors came down the Mississippi in canoes and destroyed the Michigamea village south of Cahokia.

Almost 80 Illini were killed in the attack, and before withdrawing, the raiders also burned the Illini village at Cahokia. Afterwards, the Michigamea moved closer to Fort de Chartres and merged with the Kaskaskia. They disappeared from history afterwards in every way except their name would appear later on some of the treaties signed with the Americans. The Potawatomi and Mascoutin were concerned about reprisals from the Peoria for the raid, but other tribes were not so shy about taking Illini lands. While the Sauk seized large areas along the Mississippi north of St. Louis, the Ojibwe, Kickapoo, and Winnebago grabbed parts of northern Illinois. Even the Piankashaw (part of the Memeskia conspiracy) tried to take over the upper Kaskaskia River, but the Illini managed to defend their claim to this important hunting territory. It was to be their last military success. The French asked the other tribes to

stop. The Sauk made a perfunctory apology and rejoined the French alliance in 1753 but kept the territory taken from the Illini. Other French allies did likewise.

The French followed the attack on Pickawillany by lowering their prices and increasing the supply of trade goods. As the rebellion collapsed and their allies returned to the fold, they began construction of a line of forts across western Pennsylvania to block British access to Ohio. An attempt in 1754 by Virginia militia commanded Major George Washington to remove these forts touched off the French and Indian War (1755-63). The Illini had fewer than 500 warriors at the beginning of the war and needed them to defend what remained of their homeland from their neighbors. However, they were also anxious to redeem themselves to the French for their uncharacteristic lapse of loyalty, so Illini warriors went east and participated in Shawnee and Delaware attacks against British settlements in Pennsylvania and Virginia. They also participated in the Marquis de Montcalm's campaign in northern New York in 1757 during which their warriors contracted smallpox and brought back to their villages when they returned that winter.

The epidemic swept through French allies in the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley that winter and took many of them out of the war. Meanwhile, the tide turned in favor of the British, and after the fall of Quebec in September, 1759, the French were finished in North America. Montreal surrendered the following summer, and British soldiers occupied French forts throughout the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley with one exception - Fort de Chartres and the Illinois country remained under French control until October, 1765, over two years after the Treaty of Paris formally ended the war between Britain and France in February, 1763. After taking control of the Great Lakes, the British made no moves to capture Louisiana and chose to concentrate their efforts to seize the French possessions in the West Indies. This meant that for the next three years, the British were nominally in control of French native allies who were technically still at war with them.

To deal with this, Sir William Johnson, the British Indian commissioner, met with the tribes of the French alliance at Detroit in 1761. All attended with the notable exceptions of the Illini and Mackinac Ojibwe. Johnson's intention was to continue to French system of annual presents and trade, but he was overruled by Jeffrey Amherst, the British commander in North America. Amherst had a disdain for American colonials so his opinion of Native Americans is not hard to imagine. As an economy measure, Amherst ordered an end to the giving annual presents to treaty chiefs (bribery in his opinion) and then raised prices on trade goods and restricted supply, especially gunpowder and ammunition. Having become dependent on these items to feed themselves, nothing Amherst could have done could have more antagonized the western tribes. He left Johnson to handle this, and trouble started immediately. At the Detroit meeting in 1761, Johnson learned the Seneca were circulating a wampum belt calling for a general uprising. Johnson was able to squash this, but other belts followed: one by the Caughnawaga (Christian Iroquois near Montreal) and another from the Illini.

However, neither of these tribes had enough influence to unite the tribes of the old French alliance, and as the British learned of these failures, they grew over-confident. A drought in the summer of 1762 brought famine that winter and increased discontent. At the same time a new religious movement of Neolin took hold among the Delaware and spread to the other tribes. Preaching a rejection of trade goods and a return to traditional native values, its most important convert was Pontiac, the Ottawa chief at Detroit. The leader of one of the most important tribes of the French alliance, Pontiac's mother was an Ojibwe, and he was also an important member of the Metai (Grand Medicine Society), a secret religious society in most of the Great Lakes tribes. Turning Neolin's religion into a call for revolt against the British, Pontiac sent messengers to the tribes assuring them of French support and received pledges from most, including the Illini. The British heard rumors but ignored them. When it hit in May, 1763, the Pontiac Rebellion captured nine of the twelve British forts west of the Appalachians.

Three forts held, and as the British recovered from the initial shock, they brought troops back from the West Indies, and the uprising began to collapse. Especially critical was Pontiac's failure to capture the British post at Detroit. After a six-month siege, Pontiac learned of the peace between Britain and France.

After agreeing to a truce, he withdrew to northern Indiana. That winter he made plans to salvage the situation, but as British troops advanced west the following summer, his allies deserted him and make their own peace. Pontiac, however, still had a considerable following in the west. Hoping to organize another rebellion in the west, he dispatched war belts to French allies on the lower Mississippi asking them to prevent the British from coming up the Mississippi to take the Illinois country. The Choctaw and Tunica responded, and the British had to fight their way past Baton Rouge, but, with this resistance, they went little farther.

The Illini had a desperate stake in French control of the Illinois country and had supported the rebellion, but it was with words rather than warriors. With French authority virtually nil, the Sauk had been pressing the Illini, and there had nearly been war between them during 1761. This was particularly frustrating for Pontiac, since the Illini were reluctant to commit warriors to his fight which were needed to defend themselves from neighboring tribes. He was finally won their promise of support only after threatening to attack them himself if they refused. With this very reluctant alliance, Pontiac then proceeded to Fort de Chartres with 400 warriors to to ask the French for supplies and gunpowder, but there was none. Captain Louis St. Ange de Bellerieve was an officer with a fort, and little else. His troops had been evacuated to New Orleans in July taking their powder they had with them. St. Ange was waiting patiently for the British to arrive and advised Pontiac to make peace.

Pontiac had some success in 1764 when the Kickapoo forced a British force sent to take the surrender of Fort de Chartres to turn back. The following May, a second expedition commanded by George Croghan was attacked by Mascouten and Kickapoo warriors near the Wabash. Groghan was captured, but three Shawnee chiefs in his escort were killed. Rather than risk war with the Shawnee, the Kickapoo turned Croghan over to Miami and asked them to ask the British to "cover the dead" with the Shawnee. While he was with them, the Miami arranged a meeting with Pontiac at Fort Ouiatenon., and heeding St. Ange's advice, Pontiac agreed to "bury the hatchet" and accompanied Croghan to Detroit in October to sign a peace. With Pontiac's surrender and the Kickapoo suddenly beholden to the British, the way was open to the Illinois country. That same month, St. Ange surrendered Fort de Chartres to Captain Thomas Stirling. The takeover happened so fast the Illini were caught by surprise and had no time to organize a defense. The Illini never lost their dislike of the British and harassed the garrison at Fort de Chartres (and later Fort Gage) for the next ten years.

This did not endear them to the British, but the Illini reserved a special hated for Pontiac, not only for the threats he had made, but for what they regarded as a betrayal which had allowed the British to take control of the Illinois country. At meeting with William Johnson in New York in 1766, Pontiac confirmed his earlier agreement at Detroit and promised never again to fight the British, but his reputation had suffered. At a meeting in Ontario that year, Ottawa warriors defied him, but far worse was the violent argument he got into during which he stabbed the Peoria chief Matachinga (Black Dog). The wound was not fatal, but the incident fueled the already considerable anger of the Illini. Despite this, Pontiac still enjoyed a large following in the west and left Detroit in 1767 for the Kankakee River in northern Illinois. After the Iroquois ceded the Ohio Valley at Fort Stanwix in 1768, there were rumors he was organizing a second rebellion.

The Illini may have been unprepared for the British takeover, but the French were not. A secret last-minute agreement before signing the treaty with Great Britain in 1763 had passed the ownership of Louisiana to Spain and denied it to the British. The Spanish were a little overwhelmed by this sudden bequest, and Don Antonio de Ulloa did not arrive in New Orleans to take formal possession of Louisiana until March of 1766. Even then, most of the administration and trade of Louisiana continued under the same French officials as before. There had also been a general exodus of the French population from the Illinois country across the Mississippi to the new town of St. Louis. Although they had lost their Jesuit missionaries when the order was disbanded in France in 1764, the Illini still had the large number of French who remained at Kaskaskia. Pontiac's differences with the Illini only worsened after his move to northern Illinois, and there were more bitter arguments with them at councils held during 1768.

In April, 1769 Pontiac went to St. Louis to visit his old friend St. Ange who was now working for the Spanish. To mark the occasion, he wore the French officer uniform given him by Montcalm in 1757. After a few days, Pontiac declared his intention to visit Cahokia, the mixed French-Illini village across the river. He was warned this might be dangerous, but accompanied by his bodyguards, he went anyway. After considerable drinking, his party ended up in the establishment of a British trader named Williamson where Pontiac got into an argument with a young Peoria warrior named Pina, who, as it would turn out, was a nephew of Matachinga the Peoria chief Pontiac had stabbed. Pontiac left and walked outside, but Pina followed and tomahawked him from behind. Pontiac's bodyguards started tearing the place apart looking for the killer, but the Illini drove them from the town.

Pontiac would probably been amazed at how much more revered he was in death than he had been in life. Rumors flew the assassination was part of a British plot, and Williamson had bribed Pina with a barrel of whiskey to kill Pontiac - possible, but there was no proof. However, in keeping with the temper of times, proof was not needed. Minavavana, the Ojibwe chief at Mackinac, came to Cahokia looking for Williamson who had the good judgement to be absent. Not finding him, he killed two of his employees. British involvement was unclear, but there was no doubt of Illini responsibility, and the wrath of the old French alliance fell upon them. A war followed against the Illini during which the Ottawa, Ojibwe, Potawatomi, Sauk, Fox, Kickapoo, Mascouten, and Winnebago all united to avenge Pontiac. For some, the motivation was genuine. For others, it was just an excuse to destroy the Illini and take their land.

In any case, the Illini were nearly exterminated. The Peoria retreated to their traditional stronghold at the old site of Fort St. Louis which had served them well so many times before. They were soon surrounded by Potawatomi and other warriors, but the vertical walls of this isolated outcrop beside the Illinois River made it an impregnable position. Their enemies, however, were able to cut the ropes on the buckets the Peoria threw down to the river for water. After a ten-day siege, the defenders were dead from either thirst or starvation, and this sad place has ever since been known as Starved Rock. Only 200 Peoria managed to reach safety with the other 400 Illini at the French settlement at Kaskaskia. The protection of the French is probably the only thing which prevented annihilation. The victors afterwards divided the Illini lands among themselves. Of the participants, only the Ottawa and Ojibwe passed on the opportunity to expand their own territory.

Although 600 Illini had survived, most were women and children. As late as the 1780s, the women outnumbered their men at least four to one, and this meant that the Illini had trouble assembling 60 warriors. Heavily Christian as a result of Jesuit missionaries, their population was siphoned off through intermarriage with the French. After the Iroquois cession of Ohio at Fort Stanwix in 1768, white settlement poured across the Appalachians, and the focus of confrontation shifted to the upper Ohio in western Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Kentucky. The Illinois country was distant from this struggle, but to fight the influx, the Shawnee during 1769 made overtures of alliance to all tribes in the region, including the Illini. Meetings were held at the Shawnee villages on Ohio's Scioto River in 1770 and 1771, but by this time the Illini had almost been exterminated, and the last thing on their minds was an alliance with the people who had done it. William Johnson was able to block the Shawnee alliance forcing them to stand alone against an army of Virginia frontiersmen during Lord Dunmore's War (1774).

Besides threating of war with the Iroquois if an alliance formed, Johnson was also instrumental in invalidating the claims of the Wabash Land Company to the lower Wabash Valley which pleased the Wabash Tribes (Kickapoo, Mascouten, Wea, and Piankashaw) and kept them from aiding the Shawnee. The Illini were no longer significant, but they would still play an important role in the region's history. Although they were no longer controlled their original homeland, the British took advantage of their claims to it and reduced condition to gain land cessions at bargain prices. In July, 1773 ten Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Peoria chiefs signed an agreement with the Illinois Land Company ceding two large tracts of Illinois in exchange for five shillings and a big pile of trade goods. The British lost interest in the Ohio Valley after Johnson's death in 1774 and as more serious problems developed with the approach of

the American Revolution (1775-83). In general, they withdrew their garrisons in the area and sat back to watch the "fur fly" between the native tribes and American frontiersmen.

With the outbreak of war, their attitude changed, and they began arming the Ohio tribes and encouraging them to attack the American settlements. While war raged along the upper Ohio River, the Illinois country sat quietly uninvolved under the control of a token British garrison at Kaskaskia. The Americans in Kentucky, however, became aware of the British weakness in Illinois, and with the blessing of Governor Patrick Henry of Virginia, George Rogers Clark departed from the falls of the Ohio (Louisville) with 175 Kentucky militiamen in June, 1778 to capture it. Leaving his boats at Fort Massacre (Fort Massac), Clark and his men marched overland and in July captured Kaskaskia without firing a shot. After assuring the French population France and new United States were now allies, Clark won their allegiance, and as a consequence, also that of the Illini nearby. Clark then was able to take the smaller settlements at Prairie du Rocher and Cahokia, and after one of his detachments occupied Fort Sackville at Vincennes, the Americans, with minimal effort, had taken control of the Illinois country.

In August Clark met with the Illini and other tribes of the region, who because they hoped American success would restore French rule, offered their services to help take the British post at Detroit. Unfortunately, Clark was an "Indian fighter" who hated Native Americans and spurned the offer. A golden opportunity slipped away, and by October the British had reacted. Colonel Henry Hamilton, the British commander at Detroit (known in Kentucky as the "hairbuyer" because he paid for American scalps) assembled a group of 175 French and 60 Detroit warriors and captured Fort Sackville in December. Clark made a daring mid-winter march to Vincennes with 200 men (half Illinois French) in February and, after a siege, forced Hamilton to surrender. British and French prisoners were spared, but Clark and his men executed the warriors with tomahawks.

Although Clark had received offers of cooperation from almost every tribe in the Illinois country, this brutal act turned most against the Americans. In the spring of 1780, the British launched an offensive designed to seize the entire Mississippi Basin. One column left Detroit under the command of Captain Henry Bird left Detroit and, gathering strength as it moved south through Ohio, left a trail of death and destruction through the American settlements in Kentucky that summer. At the same time, a second British force commanded by Captain Emanuel Hesse departed St. Joseph (Michigan) and proceeded down the Illinois Valley to attack the Spanish at St. Louis - Spain having entered the war on the American side. Because of Clark's brutality the year before, Hesse encountered little resistance from the tribes in Illinois.

The Spanish, however, had ample warning of his approach and were able to prepare. When the attack came in May, it was repulsed with heavy losses to both side. Before they withdrew, the British burned parts of Cahokia on the American side of the river. By 1782 the exchange of raids and atrocities between the Ohio tribes and Americans had extended the war and few tribes were neutral. Most joined the British, including the Peoria. Only the Kaskaskia and Milwaukee Potawatomi remained friendly to the Americans. The Treaty of Paris ended the war in 1783 and, because of Clark's victories (and much to the discomfort of Spanish officials in Louisiana), the western boundary of new United States became the Mississippi River. There was a general lull in the fighting in the Ohio Valley when the British asked their allies to stop attacks on American settlements. However, they also were urging them to form an alliance to keep the Americans out of Ohio. The Western Alliance formed at a meeting of the Ohio tribes at Sandusky in 1783. Afterwards, the British provided arms to the alliance and refused to abandon their forts on American territory until the Americans paid the claims of British loyalists as required by the treaty.

To pay these, as well as other obligations from the war, the Americans had to sell the lands in Ohio but first needed to reach an agreement with the resident tribes. The British knew this and, by arming the Ohio tribes, hoped for the return of their rebellious American colonies through economic collapse. After forcing the Iroquois in 1784 to confirm their earlier cession of the Ohio Valley, the Americans tried to reach an agreement with the Ohio tribes on the boundary of the frontier with treaties signed at Fort

Mcintosh (1785) and Fort Finney (1786). However, these agreements were signed by representatives of individual tribes rather than the Western Alliance with which the Americans refused to negotiate because it was a British plot (which it was). The boundaries agreed upon did not represent the consensus of the alliance no more than the American representatives represented the will of their frontier citizens.

American frontiersmen ignored the boundary and moved onto native lands. When alliance warriors tried to forcibly evict them, there was war. Although most of the fighting was along the Ohio River between Ohio and Kentucky, American encroachment along the lower Wabash erupted into fighting during 1786. The French residents managed to stall while the Americans forted up. George Rogers Clark came to the rescue that fall with Kentucky militia, but by this time the Kickapoo and Miami had departed, and there was no one for him to fight. Half of his men promptly deserted, but Clark dispatched a detachment to Kaskaskia to arrest a trader and three Frenchmen as "Spanish agents." Just as Clark was about to start a really serious war, the American military commander, Colonel Josiah Harmar, ordered him to disband and go home. Bad feelings between the Wabash Tribes and Americans continued.

In one of its final acts under the Articles of Confederation, Congress passed the Northwest Ordinance in 1787 which prescribed rules for establishing territorial government and eventual statehood for the Northwest Territory (Ohio Valley). The legislation also promised to respect native claims to their land which was not to be taken without their consent. A final attempt to obtain this "consent" from the Ohio Tribes through treaty occurred at Fort Harmar in 1789, but by then the situation was out of control. The Kickapoo attacked an army convoy at the mouth of the Wabash, and in response to raids on the Kentucky settlements, Patrick Brown's militia attacked the Wabash villages that summer. The fighting spread to the Illinois country when the Kickapoo and Piankashaw moved west to Kaskaskia and began raiding American settlements in the area. At this point, the Americans decided to obtain "consent" by force, but their first attempts, Harmar (1790) and St. Clair (1791), ended with the worst defeats ever inflicted on an American army by Native Americans. President Washington sent General "Mad" Anthony Wayne west to take command, and after two years of careful preparation, Wayne fought and defeated the alliance at Fallen Timbers in August, 1794. After burning their villages in northern Ohio, Wayne retired to winter quarters at Fort Greenville and waited for the alliance to come to terms.

In November, the British signed the Jay Treaty with the United States agreeing to leave their forts on American territory. Without British support, the alliance realized further resistance was useless. In August, 1795 the alliance chiefs assembled at Fort Greenville and surrendered all of Ohio except the northwest. Although they neither participated in the war nor owned any of the territory in question, the Illini also attended and signed. In exchange for $500, the Kaskaskia ceded 150,000 acres and four small tracts for the construction of American forts. After Fort Greenville, a relative calm settled over the region, for everyone except the Illini. The Osage made frequent visits across the Mississippi to steal horses, and several other tribes were also inclined to victimize the Illini. No reasons appear to have been necessary for this. A Mascouten chief living along the Wabash River in 1788 told an American that every year he sent a war party against the Illini at Kaskaskia to support the French!

The American hunger for land did not slow after Greenville. The Indiana Territory was created in 1800, and William Henry Harrison arrived as its first governor with instructions to extinguish native land titles through treaty. He proved very good at this and within ten years had succeeded in signing agreements for the cession of 21 million acres of native lands. Although they were problems with other tribes, the most serious for the Illini were the Shawnee who had settled in southeast Missouri near Cape Girardeau. Hostile ever since the Illini had forced them to leave Illinois in 1689, the Missouri Shawnee frequently hunted in Illini territory east of the river or crossed it without permission to visit their relatives in Ohio. In 1802 this erupted into open warfare when the Shawnee attacked a large Kaskaskia and Tamaroa hunting party. The Illini gave as well as they took in this battle, but casualties were heavy on both sides. The Shawnee had enough warriors to replace their losses, but the Illini did not. So few Tamaroa remained afterwards that they merged with the Kaskaskia.

Without enough warriors to defend their land, the Illini placed themselves under American protection. At Vincennes in August, 1803, the Kaskaskia chief Jean Baptiste Ducoign (DuQuoin), representing the Kaskaskia, Cahokia, Michigamea, and Tamaroa, signed a treaty with Harrison ceding his people's remaining Illinois lands (almost 9 million acres) for $12,000 and two small tracts of 250 and 1280 acres near Kaskaskia. Ducoign got a house and 100 acres for his role. Since the Illini only controlled a fraction of this territory, their cession of it was a sweet revenge upon the tribes living there who had taken these lands from them in 1769. It took Harrison several additional treaties to straighten this out with the other tribes, but the Illini cession had opened the door. American expansion continued with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 which put the Illini at the center of the United States rather than its western boundary. In 1809 Illinois was separated from Indiana and became a separate territory.

Harrison's success in extracting land cessions finally provoked the rise of Tecumseh and his brother, The Prophet. With a call for unity to oppose further land cessions to the Americans, Tecumseh soon built a large following, especially among the tribes in Illinois country. Considering their terrible experience with Pontiac and how little land they still had, the Illini rejected his overtures and supported the Americans during the War of 1812 (1812-14). The conflict ended in stalemate between Great Britain and the United States, but for Native Americans, it meant total defeat with the Americans able to deal with the tribes east of the Mississippi in whatever manner they chose. What they chose was for Native Americans to be moved west Mississippi and away from white settlement. This included tribes as small and acculturated as the Illini.

Illinois joined the union as the 21st state in 1818, and the Illini met with Ninian Edwards and Auguste Chouteau, at Edwardsville in September and signed away their last holdings in Illinois for about $6,000 and agreed to move across the Mississippi to St. Genevieve, Missouri. The Peoria, who had not been a party to the treaty at Vincennes in 1803, also signed, but were not required to move since they had already relocated west of the river on their own initiative. This was only temporary. After Missouri became a state in 1821, pressure by white citizens soon had the federal government looking for new places in the west to relocate eastern tribes. In October, 1832 the leaders of 140 remaining Illini met with William Clark (George Rogers' kid brother) at Castor Hill (St. Louis) and in exchange for all their claims to land in Illinois and Missouri, were given 150 sections in eastern Kansas.

This was a great deal of land for so few people, and the fact that the location was just south of the Shawnee did not seem to bother them. The Illini moved that year, and a Methodist mission was built for them on the north side of the Marais des Cygnes by the Reverend James Slavens. At the same time, a separate reserve was established for their neighbors, the closely-related Piankashaw and Wea, just to the east. To facilitate the construction of a transcontinental railroad, Kansas and Nebraska were opened to white settlement in 1854. This effectively took more than half of what had once been reserved for the eastern tribes as the Indian Territory. Since the boundaries of their reserves were established by treaty, the emigrant tribes were not forced to surrender their land, but those with excess land (and this was all of them in the opinion of the government) were pressured to sell the excess for white settlement. Since the heavily-armed whites arriving in Kansas to fight each other over black slavery were inclined to just take unoccupied native lands, few tribes argued.

Since all of them had acquired large debts with government traders, the Illini, Wea and Piankashaw decided to merge into a single tribe, the United Tribes of the Kaskaskia and Peoria, Piankashaw and Wea for negotiations. In 1854 the combined group signed a treaty agreeing to 160 acre allotments with ten sections to be held in common as tribal property. The excess was to be sold for settlement, but the violence of "Bleeding Kansas" and the American Civil War interrupted this. Kansas became a state in 1861, and it was time once again for the Illini to move. This was delayed until after the Civil War and the federal government was able to punish the Cherokee and other Oklahoma tribes for their support of the Confederacy during the war by forcing them to accept the relocation of the Kansas tribes onto their lands. Harassed by Kansas taxes illegally levied on their allotted land, the Confederated Peoria, Kaskaskia, Wea, and Piankashaw in 1867 signed an omnibus treaty with the other Kansas tribes in which they agreed to dispose of their remaining Kansas holdings and move to lands to be purchased

from the Quapaw in northeast Oklahoma. A few families chose the citizenship permitted by the treaty and remained in Kansas.

Their new lands in Oklahoma did not last long. Allotted between 1893 and 1907, the remaining lands were given to Ottawa county, Oklahoma for white settlement. Fraud and corruption soon too the rest. Oklahoma was admitted as a state in 1907, but by this time there was no longer any place left to move native peoples to keep them away from white settlement. The Peoria finally got to stay. Perhaps because it had heard the story that the last Illini had died at Starved Rock in 1769, the federal government terminated the Peoria's tribal status in 1950. Claims for the massive fraud that had accompanied the sale of their Kansas lands were finally settled in 1974, but federal recognition was not restored until 1978. With a current enrollment of nearly 2,000 and 39 acres of tribal land, the Peoria Tribe of Oklahoma is located in Miami, Oklahoma.

First Nations referred to in this Illinois History:

Algonkin
Delaware
Erie
Fox
Huron
Iroquois
Kickapoo
Mascouten
Menominee
Miami
Micmac
Montagnais
Neutrals
Ojibwe
Ottawa
Potawatomi
Sauk
Shawnee
Tionontati
Winnebago

Comments concerning this "history" would be appreciated. Direct same to Lee Sultzman.

The Illini Confederation

Histories Site

First Nations Index
