

Meskwaki Settlement

From the Meskwaki Education NetWork Initiative located at <http://www.menwi.org/meskwaki-nation.html>



In response to expressed concerns and unique among American Indians at the time, Chief Mamenwaneke lead the Meskwaki to acquire land in Iowa upon which they could settle. Subsequently, on July 15, 1856, the General Assembly of the State of Iowa approved their residential status. Shortly thereafter, a collection of \$735.00 was gathered by the Meskwaki residing in Kansas and was sent with Mamenwaneke's brother, Patacoto and four of Mamenwaneke's council to effect a land purchase. James. W. Grimes, then governor of Iowa, was petitioned to act as their trustee and acquire 80 acres. The first purchase was \$1000.00, with the difference met by granting to those parties selling the land, permission to cut down timber.⁶ The historic deed

was signed and recorded on July 13, 1857.⁷

The first group to make their way back to Iowa was reportedly composed of eleven Meskwaki households numbering approximately 76 individuals. Meanwhile, in Iowa, a runner was sent from one of the Meskwaki camps in hiding to inform the others that their chief had purchased land. They were to join the main group at their new home, what would become the Meskwaki Settlement.⁸ The General Assembly of the State of Iowa urged the federal government to pay the Meskwaki their share of annuities in accordance with past treaties. Although no physical force was employed, by refusing to pay, the US government attempted to influence the Meskwaki to return to Kansas. Without annuity payments until 1867, the Meskwaki remained in Iowa.⁹

Because the Meskwaki had both formal federal recognition and, due to private land ownership, a continuing relationship with the State of Iowa, their jurisdictional status was unclear for almost 30 years.



Virtually ignored by federal and state policies, the Meskwakis were subsequently able to live an independent, autonomous existence compared to their American Indian counterparts confined to reservations. The ambiguous matter of jurisdiction was eventually resolved in 1896, when the State of Iowa ceded

control of the Meskwaki to the federal government, who placed their lands in trust.^{**10**} Augmented over the years through additional land purchases, the original 80 acres acquired in 1857 now serves as the nucleus for more than 7,395 acres.^{**11**} Numbering about 200 in 1856, enrollment in the Meskwaki Nation is now more than 1,250, with approximately 650 of that number residing on the Settlement.^{**12**} New France and the French monarchy no longer exist, yet the Meskwaki remain.

6. Waseskuk 2000:66.
7. Ward, Duren J. H. 1906. Meskwaki. *Journal of Iowa History and Politics* 4(2):179-189; 186.
8. Waseskuk 2000:67.
9. Purcell, L. Edward. 1974. The Mesquakie Indian Settlement in 1905. *The Palimpsest* 55(2):34-54; 35-36.
10. Purcell 1974:42.
11. Visitor Information Guide. Sac & Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa. Compiled by the Historical Preservation Project. Meskwaki Settlement, Iowa: Meskwaki Print Shop, 2001.
12. 2000 U.S. Census Bureau.