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The Fox Wars and the Fur Empire: French and Native Campaigns against the Fox in the Great
Lakes Region: 1701-1712

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Abstract

At the turn of the 18th century King Louis XIV of France ordered a reduction of trading posts throughout North America and narrowed the locations to New Orleans, St. Louis, Chicago, and Detroit.¹ Detroit served as the base of settlement for thousands of natives, including eventually the Fox and their Mesquakie allies. Shortly thereafter fighting broke out among natives and France was caught in the crossfire. The goal of New France was to sustain a relationship with the natives in order to engage in trade. However, France is forced to choose between aiding the Fox or their enemies. French officials became embroiled in hostile Indian politics that left the leadership with little choice but to aid in the elimination of the Fox instead of losing the powerful Native allies who threatened violence for any hospitality given to the Fox or their allies; French officials chose the former. French correspondence of the war serves as the main research base for this paper, along with the works of several credited historians.

¹ Robert Bieder, *Native American Communities in Wisconsin: 1600-1960* (Madison: Univeristy of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 51.

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Introduction

The North American continent was exploited mainly by three major European nations—Great Britain, Spain, and France. Though thousands of Europeans would eventually come to settle in North America, these nations arrived with drastically different plans to achieve maximum potential as they saw it. Great Britain was a relative latecomer to the continent and eventually established settlements along the east coast in present day Virginia, Massachusetts, the Carolinas, and everywhere from Georgia to Maine. Settlement was the main goal of the English crown, hoping to provide abundant land and resources for the English people who came from squalid conditions in crowded and socially polarized cities across the Atlantic. Here in this “new world,” the English crown saw an opportunity to expand its’ empire and create an English world.

Spain was the earliest of these nations to establish economic interests in the continent. They pursued gold and silver in large quantities, which they found in Central and South America, but had less luck north of the Rio Grande River. One of the earliest explorers or conquistadors known to have traveled through North America was a man named Francisco Vasquez de Coronado. History holds that Coronado led his men from Mexico where gold and silver were found into the southwestern and central part of the United States to what is today Kansas. Unfortunately for the indigenous people of the American southwest, exorbitantly rich cities did not exist and Coronado demonstrated his frustration by leaving a wake of death and destruction wherever he went. Spanish experiences in the North American continent were marked by vicious treatment of Native people and murderous campaigns which claimed thousands of lives and often left villages decimated. Cruelty and violence are the hallmarks of

Spanish occupation in North America, strikingly different than the experience of the French, at least at first.

The history of France has played witness to several unthinkable violent events from Julius Caesar's genocidal campaigns into Gaul, to French involvement in the bloody Thirty Years War, and even the decapitating end of the French Revolution. While these renowned events have consistently appeared in textbooks and are remembered as some of the most notable events in France's history, one event has been expunged from our curriculum that demonstrates a particularly brutal side of French conquest, an event that has been generalized as the Fox Wars.

In 1710 at the request of Cadillac the Fox Indians with their Sac, Mascoutin and Kickapoo allies traveled to Detroit from their home in the Fox River Valley near Green Bay, Wisconsin. The Fox were longstanding trade partners with the Frenchmen who traveled along their home river. This move seemed advantageous to the Fox for several reasons. First it would position them further from their powerful enemies the Sioux,² second it would place them closer to British agents who offered a plethora of goods for cheaper prices,³ and they thought that because they had answered the request to resettle at Detroit that "Onontio"⁴ would grant them special favors."⁵ As it happens this is not how events take shape once the Fox reach the settlement.

Soon after the Fox arrive, quarrels break out between nations. These quarrels quickly devolved into a full on war that will leave nearly 1,000 Fox, Mascoutin and Sac men, women, and children dead. The sheer level of violence displayed at Detroit is reminiscent of previous

² David Edmunds and Joseph Peyser, *The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 61.

³ French goods were more expensive because a few organizations held a monopoly over the trade of furs and would charge a tax of ¼ the cost of the item.

⁴ Governor General of New France.

⁵ Edmunds and Peyser, 62.

French campaigns mentioned earlier. The question driving the research for this paper is how the situation at Detroit became so volatile that the Fox people and their allies were seen as unmanageable and complete annihilation became the solution. Based on letters sent between Fort Pontchartrain⁶ and Montreal or Paris I have surmised that French officials became embroiled in hostile Indian politics that left the leadership with little choice but to aid in the elimination of the Fox instead of losing the powerful Native allies who threatened violence for any hospitality given to the Fox or their allies; French officials chose the former. To cement this argument the interests of French officials will be examined regarding trade, native alliances, and the continual struggle for dominance over the continent with Great Britain. This combination of factors, focusing on economic and diplomatic pursuits, would eventually be the cause of the bloodiest affair to strike this region in known history.

⁶ The fort at Detroit.

Historiography

One of the earliest historians to cover the conflicts was Louise Phelps Kellogg in her book *The French Regime in Wisconsin and the Northwest*. In this account, Kellogg is critical of the actions taken by interim head of Fort Pontchartrain Jacques-Charles Renaud Dubuisson, who she writes “unwisely espoused the cause of the Hurons and Ottawa, allowing them to take refuge within the fort and encouraging them to raid the Fox village” (Kellogg, 280). Though Kellogg places much of the blame for the results of the conflict on Dubuisson, her general argument suggests that the actions taken against the Fox were to insure their claim for trade in Wisconsin and farther west. Kellogg writes that after the conflict, the Fox River Valley was open “to exploitation and occupation by the French” once again (289). Their ultimate goal of reaching the Sioux nation would lead the French to bypass the unruly Fox en route west. Any resistance was to be dispelled in order to preserve future trade with the Sioux people. Though Kellogg was one of the first historians to detail the Fox Wars in the 1920s, the early 1990s produced a revival of the study of the topic. Richard White and David Edmunds are among the most credited authors for their work regarding the French-Fox conflicts.

In 1991 Richard White published his book *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, and immediately made an impact with his explanation of the conflict. White argues that during their quest to organize and exploit land farther west, France found itself stuck between a rock and a hard place, or more appropriately stuck between rival groups of Native Americans. White suggests that after Cadillac invites the Fox, Kickapoo, and Mascouten Natives to Detroit, quarrels break out between them and the other French Native allies already residing at Detroit. He writes that despite multiple pleas for

mediation between warring groups, French commander Dubuisson failed to dispel the clashes upon refusal of mercy from Native allies, namely Saguima the Ottawa war chief and Makisabi, chief of the Potawatomis. These men were entrenched in their hatred of the Fox so much so that they refused to offer mercy, even towards women and children. White claims that Dubuisson's lack of action to prevent war led to the near annihilation of the Fox people at Detroit.

Shortly after White released his extensive book, David Edmunds released his own, titled *The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France*. Edmunds' account of the conflict attempts to take a neutral position in explaining the events that took place. While White and Kellogg structure their arguments from a French perspective, Edmunds attempts to detail both sides of the conflict and explain why events happened the way they did based on both French and Fox standpoints. He too, however, attributes much of the prolonged conflict to economic ambitions. Not just those of the French though, but of their native allies as well. Due to the tradition of exacting revenge for fallen kinsmen or women, the conflicts would continue into Wisconsin with the remaining Fox seeking any opportunity to raid French traders or French-allied Natives. The effects of this continuous war were felt throughout the region, as Edmunds writes, "the warfare paralyzed the fur trade" (Edmunds, 77). The Fox people consistently disrupted French trade, before and after the events at Detroit, and were often viewed as troublesome. This agitating presence would prove to be enough, according to Edmunds, to have led the French and their Native allies on a mission to destroy the Fox people altogether. But while these earlier accounts of the Fox Wars seem fairly straightforward, Brett Rushforth introduces an idea not previously suggested.

In his 2006 piece titled *Slavery, the Fox Wars, and the Limits of Alliance*, Rushforth presents to the reader the "behind the scenes" aspects of the conflict. What is relatively

unknown about this time period is that Fox people made up the majority of slaves in the Saint Lawrence River Valley in the 1710s and 20s (Rushforth 54). Including several factors in his argument, Rushforth claims that French and Native demand for slaves altered the actions taken towards the Fox people. Not only were these people meddlesome regarding trade and intertribal affairs, but a profit could be reaped by selling them as a commodity. This information is excluded from French correspondence, which would explain the late arrival of the argument, but nonetheless quite useful in understanding Native-French relations during this time. Pressure to meet demand for this forced labor, Rushforth argues, pushed French authority to seize Fox women and children (and the men spared) and sell them into servitude. As recent as 2013 there has been released an extensive study of Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac and the outbreak of the Fox Wars.

Richard Weyhing's piece "*Gascon Exaggerations*": *The Rise of Antoine Laumet dit de Lamothe, Sieur de Cadillac, the Foundation of Colonial Detroit, and the Origins of the Fox Wars* was published in *French and Indians in the Heart of North America, 1630-1815*. This examination takes an in depth look at the rise of Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac and his role played during the outbreak of the Fox Wars. The paper argues that Cadillac's aspirations to create an Indian army at Detroit were farfetched and unrealistic. Critics of Cadillac suggest that the Indians' alliances on which he based his assertions were too fragile for peace to be maintained. In hindsight it appears his critics were correct. The overall argument of Weyhing's piece is that King Louis XIV, being in France, was too distanced from North America to be personally well informed and instead had to rely on his officers and officials. Cadillac was inept for this task and his ambitions proved to be a stretch, especially once he was removed from the

post. Poor leadership and lack of communication was the result of this bloody affair in the eyes of Richard Weyhing.

While each of these authors offers a different perspective on the events at Detroit in 1710, they all present common elements that help explain how such violence came to fruition. Based on their arguments, as well as heavily from French correspondence, this paper will attempt to explain how and why the Fox wars came to be and why they were carried out in the manner they were; more specifically, the argument will focus on the outbreak of fighting at Detroit in 1710. While the conflict continues intermittently for the next twenty to twenty-five years, it is this first encounter that drives this paper to answer the question, why did this happen?

Here Comes France

In the waning years of the 17th century the French monarchy pursued ways to reduce costs in their North American trade empire and make the venture more profitable. In 1698, Antoine de Lamothe Cadillac came to the Royal Court in France and convinced King Louis XIV to grant him the opportunity to “mobilize thousands of Indian warriors at Detroit,” the crossroads between Lake Erie and Huron.⁷ Just two years after the order to reduce the western trading posts⁸, Cadillac, a relatively unknown official who had recently engaged in illicit trade, established himself as the head of the “Paris of America” as he would later call it.⁹ Cadillac was able to justify this post at Detroit to King Louis by claiming the English were “trying to seize upon (the land) in all sorts of ways” and that it would require “only about a hundred or a hundred and fifty men”¹⁰ to be commanded by an experienced officer. Undoubtedly Cadillac had this position in mind for himself.

The location suggested by Cadillac was a militarily strategic area that could be easily defended with waterways on both ends. Lake Huron to the North provided access to the west and Canada, while to the east Lake Erie would flow into Lake Ontario, allowing further progress to be made down the Saint Lawrence River and eventually provide access to the Atlantic Ocean. These series of waterways would make it possible Frenchmen and women to access the interior of the continent and as far west as had been traveled at that time. The banks of Detroit seemed to

⁷ Richard Weyhing, “‘Gascon Exaggerations’: The Rise of Antoine Laumet dit de Lamothe, Sieur de Cadillac, the Foundations of Colonial Detroit, and the Origins of the Fox Wars,” in *French and Indians in the Heart of North America, 1630-1815*, ed. Robert Englebert and Guillaume Teasdale (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 78.

⁸ The reduction of trading posts was undertaken to raise the price of beaver pelts because the French market had become oversaturated with them.

⁹ Kellogg, 272.

¹⁰ Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac, “The Necessity of a Post at Detroit,” in *Michigan Historical Collections Vol. XXXIII*, ed. Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society (Lansing: Robert Smith Printing Company, State Printers and Binders, 1904), 43.

offer more possibilities for trade and expansion than did the previous location north at Michilimackinac, an isolated fort located on the northern tip of the Michigan peninsula. Not only would weather be warmer in Detroit, but the journey for many French Native allies would be shorter. Some of the earliest native nations to join Cadillac at Detroit were Huron, Ottawa, and Pottawatomi, though French correspondence usually refers to their native allies as *nations des lacs*, or “nations of the lakes.”¹¹ While the French may have referred to their indigenous allies as a singular group, it was obvious that these people saw stark differences in one another and often did not like each other.

After the fort at Detroit was finished, Cadillac began inviting several native nations to settle near the new trading post. Since the closing of the western trading posts in 1696, natives had to travel to Montreal in order to exchange their pelts for goods. This establishment at Detroit offered the same goods at a much shorter distance. Also, Montreal lay far to the east near Iroquois country. In the past the five nations of the Iroquois made up arguably the strongest military might on the continent. Even though the Iroquois had been reduced by war and disease since their time of dominance, they still posed a major threat to rival nations. Settling at Detroit would expedite the travel of information and personnel given its location on Lake Erie but would keep the *nations des lacs* far enough away from the Iroquois to increase their safety. While this new settlement provided distance and a sense of security from the eastern Iroquois threat, the real spark of conflict would arise from the west—with a personal invitation nonetheless.

The initial motives of French explorers and traders were to engage in trade with the natives and exploit the natural resources. Kellogg writes that the “fur trade was older than the colony” of New France. Fisherman who crossed the north Atlantic near the beginning of the 16th

¹¹ Richard Weyhing, 93.

century “at once began to barter with the natives and to add to the profits.”¹² These negotiations would take the form of an annual congregation of natives from the entire colony at Tadoussac, which served as the center of these early trades. Over the years the location moved along the St. Lawrence River and would eventually be established at Montreal in 1642. Here each summer “great fleets of western tribesman...set up their skin or mat tents...and prepared their packs of peltry for sale.”¹³ This was seen as a prosperous location for trade and served as such for several years. However, around 1645 a group of local merchants created “the Company of the Colony,” and contributed one quarter of their profits to the Company of New France, which resulted in a monopoly of all the furs coming out of the west.¹⁴ For five more years the company would flourish until the destruction of the Huron settlements¹⁵ and increased attacks on flotillas that carried the trade goods would cease all trade in the area for four years.¹⁶

Around 1653 however, the western nations defeated the Iroquois and trade resumed as it had in years past. It was at this time that Ottawa aspirations to play “middle man” between France and the western Algonquian¹⁷ nations came to fruition and in 1654 they returned to their ancestral home in Wisconsin, accompanied by two young Frenchmen who were sent to establish alliances with some of these nations. These men would return nearly two years later, with news of the many native peoples in the west and the great opportunities for trade there were to be had.¹⁸ The present location of trade at Montreal served well during the early years of the campaign, but had become entrenched in intertribal warfare with the Iroquois and the stability was shaky. Montreal was also very distant from these western Algonquian nations living in

¹² Louise Phelps Kellogg, *The French Regime in Wisconsin and the Northwest* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1925), 101.

¹³ Kellogg, 101.

¹⁴ Ibid 102.

¹⁵ This was likely the results of an increase in hostility by the Iroquois.

¹⁶ Kellogg, 103.

¹⁷ Algonquian refers to the language base that many Midwestern native nations derive their unique languages from.

¹⁸ Kellogg, 103.

present day Wisconsin, Illinois, and Michigan. If the trade network was to expand and survive, it only seemed logical that a new location was necessary to accommodate the growing empire. But until such a location was to be found, business must continue.

French occupation of North America began along the eastern coast of Canada, moving inland along the St. Lawrence River east of the Great Lakes. Their expanse stretched across modern Canada and south into the Great Lakes region and continuing to the Gulf. Much of this land would later be known as the Louisiana Territory and would be purchased by the third President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson. The Louisiana Territory was virtually untouched by French explorers during their time on the continent and most of their early activity took place along the St. Lawrence River. The ultimate goal for France was to trade goods like firearms, blankets, tobacco, cloth, hatchets, knives, and animal pelts, mainly beaver.¹⁹ Tasked with feeding a voracious market in Europe for beaver skins to make hats mostly, France made this their chief ambition when interacting with Native Americans, who were much more proficient at trapping and skinning beaver than were the French.

Explorers traveled the extensive river system of the Great Lakes and eventually found their way to Wisconsin. Where the Ottawa once served as middle men between the French and the western nations, the Pottawatomie now took on this role for the Green Bay tribes, including Miami, Illinois, Kickapoo, Mascouten, and Fox people.²⁰ Though the French had not yet directly made contact or conducted trade with these nations, the Fox in particular, they were discovered to be in possession of several French goods like blunted hatchets and knives.²¹ What this shows is the distance which French trade items have traveled and the desire of these people to possess

¹⁹ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, empires, and republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 136.

²⁰ Kellogg, 127.

²¹ Ibid 127.

such tools. Given this demand for superior goods and possibility for new alliances, it was deemed necessary to extend the network into the west so as to increase the influence of the Crown as well as the contents of the Crown's coffers.

From here French traders set up small trading posts throughout the region to attract local Natives into exchanging their pelts for the French goods that they needed. In the last decade of the 17th century three posts at Duluth (eastern Minnesota), Perrot (western Wisconsin), and Le Sueur (southern Minnesota) produced so many furs that "the farmers of Canada reported that the skins on hand were sufficient for ten years to come."²² This influx of beaver saturated the market and reduced the value of the skins, limiting the purchasing power of the Native Americans as well as reducing profits for French merchants. It wasn't until 1696 when the French crown ordered a reduction of the trading posts to just four locations: Chicago, St. Louis, New Orleans, and Detroit.²³ From these locations the crown felt it could maximize trade and reduce costs of operation greatly. Montreal served as the capital of New France and sitting in the seat of power was Governor Pierre de Rigaud, Marquis de Vaudreuil. It is from here that correspondence would arrive from Paris, the home of King Louis XIV. It was thought that these locations would be sufficient to provide enough pelts for France to consider the operation viable. It was also thought that by centering trade in these places, Natives would be forced to conduct trade under French circumstances, whereas typically trade was done in the Natives' territory.²⁴ This would serve to acculturate the Natives to French ways.

After the order to reduce the trading posts came in, it became necessary to construct a post that would serve as a mid-point between the western nations and Montreal. Previously the only center of trade in the area was far north at Michilimackinac, a small island located at the

²² Kellogg, 257.

²³ Bieder, 51.

²⁴ Ibid 51.

divide between Lake Michigan and Lake Huron. Due to the geographic isolation of this area from intended areas of expansion, a new location was deemed more suitable for long term trade. In 1701 the settlement of Detroit took place and it was thereby established as a major trading center for French and Native Americans in the area.²⁵ Detroit's location along Lake Huron placed it in the middle of French affairs, between Montreal and France's Native allies to the east and the great western frontier which provided great opportunities for further trade and allies, including the large Sioux Nation of the Great Plains. French ambition was never in short supply during this time. However, their luck may have waned as French resources were becoming thinly stretched across the vast expanse of New France.

It is common knowledge that the area consisting of New France for a good portion of the year is frozen in torrential snow, with fewer chances for successful hunts and even less of a chance of growing sufficient crops. For these reasons New France was sparsely populated. Even as late as 1750 the population of New France was only around 54,000, whereas the population of New England at the time was closer to 1.5 million.²⁶ This abysmally low population for such a large extent of land is a contributing factor for the consolidation of trading posts, along with a decline in demand for furs in Europe. Philippe de Rigaud Vaudreuil, governor of New France at the time, looked west for more Native nations with which to align, yet it was no longer economically viable to rely on traders to make the journey inland to extract trade; in fact much of the trade that was occurring in the west was illegal and led to "irregularities" in the trade.²⁷ The overall goal of France in this context is economic success while monitoring the motives of their British adversaries, as well as keeping tabs on the native-

²⁵ Richard White, 49.

²⁶ Andrew Sturtevant, *American Empires: Natives Encounter the Europeans*, October 1, 2014.

²⁷ Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac, "The Necessity of a Post at Detroit," in *Michigan Historical Collections* Vol. XXXIII, ed. Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society (Lansing: Robert Smith Printing Company, State Printers and Binders, 1904), 43.

British alliances.²⁸ In order to maintain an advantage over their rivals, France would look west for greater opportunities; specifically France would explore the possibility of establishing a central post at Detroit, a post which was eyed eagerly by British agents as a prime location.²⁹

The central proponent of the settlement at Detroit was this man Cadillac, whose true intentions are as mysterious as the man himself. Cadillac arrived in the colonies sometime in the 1683 as an immigrant from rural Gascony (France), “and spent five years roaming the eastern seaboard as a vagabond smuggler before assuming a false noble title and entering the service of the state during the Nine Years’ War (1688-1697).”³⁰ Despite his humble beginnings in rural France, Cadillac teemed with ambition and soon set his sights on the settlement of Detroit. Cadillac claimed that the reasons for settling here were to “facilitate the trade of the inhabitants of Canada with the savages, and especially to prevent the English from seizing it.”³¹ Many of Cadillac’s critics at the time attempted to warn the King of his “ulterior designs to master the contraband fur trade in the Great Lakes region,” and also denounced the proposed Indian alliances in the area, claiming them to be “far too fragile to be relied upon for such grand imperial plans.”³² However, Cadillac made an appeal to the court assuring them that he could “mobilize thousands of Indian warriors at Detroit,”³³ creating a reliable and effective military force that was loyal to France. Years past had shown continual wars between the western nations and the Iroquois, who were considered the most formidable fighting force on the continent at the time. The waning years of the 17th century proved to be successful for the

²⁸ “1706: Intertribal Relations; French Policy,” in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, vol. 16, ed. Wisconsin Historical Society (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin), 240.

²⁹ Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac, “The Necessity of a Post at Detroit,” in *Michigan Historical Collections Vol. XXXIII*, ed. Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society (Lansing: Robert Smith Printing Company, State Printers and Binders, 1904), 43.

³⁰ Weyhing, 78.

³¹ Cadillac, “The Necessity of a Post at Detroit,” 42.

³² Weyhing, 78.

³³ *Ibid* 78.

western nations and encroachments by the Iroquois were reduced. Without this constantly looming threat of an Iroquois attack, many of the alliances between the western nations began to fray for there was no longer that mutual threat.³⁴ But Cadillac persisted and was named commander of Michilimackinac³⁵ in 1694. Once there Cadillac became disgusted, claiming it to be “the most terrible place imaginable.”³⁶ Despite never actually visiting the place, Cadillac called for a relocation of the French post to the “Milder climate” and “more fertile farmlands” of the Detroit area.³⁷ Not only would Detroit serve as a more central location for trade, but it offered the prospects of a handsome return for Cadillac if he was to establish a successful outpost. In order to do this though, he must make trade available to more groups of natives. For this, he would turn his eyes westward.

West of Detroit in what is today Wisconsin, France would encounter several Algonquian nations, including the Kickapoo, the Mascoutens, and the Fox. In an effort to make trade easier for these nations, Cadillac invited them to reside at Detroit to be closer to the center of trade. Also invited to Detroit had been long standing Native allies of the French, including the Huron, Potawatomi, Ottawa, and Miami people. By 1705 “Detroit was flourishing” with a great number of natives and Frenchmen alike living in close vicinity and engaging in regular trade.³⁸ For the Fox, the move offered many advantages. The move would further remove the Fox from the Sioux, who for generations encroached on Fox land and pushed them further east towards Lake Michigan. The chance to vacate their home in Wisconsin for a seemingly safe home near Detroit, where they thought “Onontio would grant them special favors,”³⁹ seemed like an

³⁴ Weyhing, 78.

³⁵ This was the original French post, located on Mackinac Island in the northern parts of Lake Huron.

³⁶ Edmunds and Peyser, 55.

³⁷ Ibid 55.

³⁸ Ibid 57.

³⁹ Ibid 62.

opportunity they should seize upon. Not only would this move separate them from their sworn enemies, but it would put them closer to British posts, where trade goods were cheaper and could mean more opportunities for trade.

For the French, this move would cut down on travel costs greatly and would ideally help establish Detroit as what Cadillac referred to as the “Paris of America.”⁴⁰ By concentrating trade in one area, exchange would be expedited and simplified, at least in the mind of Governor Vaudreuil. For this expedited trade to occur, Cadillac thought it best to invite several Native nations from the west to Detroit, including the Fox, Mascouten, and Kickapoo peoples. With this congregation of Natives, it was thought by Cadillac that peace would prevail and trade would lead to prosperity for all. French policy at this time stressed peaceful relations with Natives as war ran the risk of destabilizing fragile alliances which would result in a loss of annual trade.⁴¹ The entire French mission in America for economic dominance could potentially go up in smoke if alliances with Native Americans fell through. This is why peace was necessary to attain, even if that meant by way of force.

⁴⁰ Kellogg, 272.

⁴¹ “1706: Intertribal Relations; French Policy,” in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, vol. 16, ed. Wisconsin Historical Society (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin), 240.

Here Come the Fox

Shortly before the Fox and their Kickapoo and Mascouten allies reached Detroit, Cadillac had been reassigned to the governorship of Louisiana.⁴² The reasoning behind this is unclear, yet it may deal with a general dislike of the commander. In reports of inspections done of the western trading posts in America at the request of the King, it is reported that there is near universal dislike for Cadillac by Natives and Frenchmen “in consequence of the tyranny which he exercises over the entire settlement.”⁴³ This dislike stems from high charges incurred on residents, despite brandy and ammo being “the only profitable articles of commerce.”⁴⁴ Cadillac found himself in a precarious position; without sufficient manpower he could not harvest resources, without resources he had little to trade, without trade goods there was no money to be had for food, clothing, or anything. Governor Vaudreuil preferred to handle Indian affairs as an authority figure, whereas Cadillac had adhered to many native customs, a subscription in which the Governor did not agree. Despite his efforts to bring in multiple Native nations, it was thought that the consistent outbreaks of violence proved to be too much for Cadillac and he was sent to New Orleans. With the departure of Cadillac comes the introduction of his replacement, Jacques-Charles Renaud Dubuisson⁴⁵, and a different era for French-Native affairs.

Two villages of Fox left the eastern valley of Wisconsin for Detroit, traveling south along the banks of Lake Michigan. After the long trek from the west, the villages arrived at the headwaters of the St. Joseph and Grand Rivers.⁴⁶ Led by Makkathemangoua and Oninetonam,

⁴² White, 70.

⁴³ “1708: Summary of Inspections of Posts of Detroit,” in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, vol. 16, ed. Wisconsin Historical Society (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin), 251.

⁴⁴ Ibid 251.

⁴⁵ Dubuisson was a temporary replacement for Cadillac. Francois Dauphin de la Forest was named Cadillac’s replacement, but due to health concerns his voyage was delayed.

⁴⁶ Edmunds and Peyser, 62.

one of the villages would continue on to Detroit in the winter of 1710-1711. The other village, led by Lalima and Pemoussa, would remain at the headwaters.⁴⁷ No sooner after the Fox arrive, complaints were brought forward to Dubuisson. After a failed attempted naval attack by the English had lured the majority of western nations to Quebec at the Governor's request, Vaudreuil took advantage and inquired as to the conditions of the West.⁴⁸ At this meeting "the Foxes were sternly rebuked for their attitude toward the other tribes and warned to leave Detroit."⁴⁹ Another common complaint was of the arrogance of the Fox people, who were said to consider themselves "masters at that place"⁵⁰ due to their previous occupation of the area before they were pushed west by the Iroquois wars.⁵¹ Some of the agitation came from Fox pilfering of French livestock, which was a highly valuable commodity given the low population and importance of animal byproducts for protein. A Canadian officer by the name of Charles Juchereau experienced firsthand the "piracy" of the Fox people. While exploring the "Fox-Wisconsin route" around 1706, Juchereau and his party were raided by a Fox band and left with little to no supplies; the party would later perish in its entirety from Malaria.⁵² The rest of the complaints mostly came from French Native allies, in particular the Ottawa and Pottawatomi, who quarreled with the Fox sporadically. One example of these quarrels took place at the Fox settlement at the St. Joseph and Grand Rivers. Here the Fox and their Mesquakie allies fought with the Illinois Confederacy, Miamis, and Hurons.⁵³ Dubuisson wrote to Governor Vaudreuil, detailing the situation at Detroit. In his letters he wrote that the Fox had "brought nothing but

⁴⁷ Edmunds and Peyser, 62.

⁴⁸ Kellogg, 279

⁴⁹ Kellogg, 279

⁵⁰ Ibid 63.

⁵¹ Richard White, 153.

⁵² Kellogg, 273.

⁵³ Edmunds and Peyser, 62.

disorder.”⁵⁴ Vaudreuil responded by requesting that the Fox, along with their Kickapoo and Mascouten allies, venture to Montreal. When they arrived in March 1711, Vaudreuil admonishes the Fox for their disruption of business and suggests that they return to Wisconsin “where the bones of your fathers are, and a great part of your people also.”⁵⁵ The Fox, a notoriously proud people, refused to leave given that they were invited by the now absent Cadillac to reside at Detroit. This advice from Governor Vaudreuil was all too prophetic and if heeded could have prevented the grisly outcome.

Dubuisson found himself in the middle of some exceptionally complex Native affairs, most of which were deeply rooted in history that he did not fully understand. One example of this deep seeded hatred towards the Fox may stem from an early Fox chief named White-Robe. This was a man who indulged in the torment of others and was “continually slaying people.”⁵⁶ From Fox oral histories, we have seen just how monstrous this man was. In an attempt to control this man’s thirst for violence it is said that he was asked to be chief. To this he responded, “All right, only let me kill just these people who now have come. And then truly will I begin being chief.” His desire proved too strong as his violent streak continued, even when contact was made with Frenchmen. About this the text reads, “They slew them all. Yet there were two, perhaps three whom he did not slay; he sliced off both their ears; he sliced off their noses; and he sliced off both their hands. ‘A few more of you should come,’ he said to them.”⁵⁷ This seemingly inhuman desire for mutilation and disfigurement certainly brought about a reputation that undoubtedly was soon applied to the Fox as a group. The saying goes “one bad apple can ruin the bunch” and with White-Robe it has never been truer.

⁵⁴ Edmunds and Peyser, 64.

⁵⁵ Ibid 63.

⁵⁶ William Jones, *Fox Texts*, ed. Franz Boas (Leyden: Late E.J. Brill Publishers and Printers, 1907), 9.

⁵⁷ Ibid 9.

There are other instances of Fox behavior being taken poorly, usually when younger Fox males would openly boast of the belts they received from the English. To make matters worse, one of the men confessed that the Iroquois had asked them to “cut the throats of the French garrison.”⁵⁸ Not surprisingly these campfire conversations propelled the Fox into the sights of the natives who were extremely loyal to the French. Fox children were traditionally raised to embrace their independence and explore their surroundings, which would often lead to free spirited children getting into trouble.⁵⁹ This type of child rearing was viewed as unruly by European standards and would often lead to Fox youth engaging in antagonizing behavior. This could range from stealing food to murder. Not only are Fox children raised in a more free-flowing environment, but they lacked a certain social etiquette deemed proper by their French allies. As these conflicts boiled over it became clear the Fox were not welcome; Makkathemangoua and Oninetonam would begin planning their departure from Detroit in the early part of 1712.⁶⁰

After some time had passed and these skirmishes between the Fox and the other French Native allies continued, Ottawa war chief Saguima decided to take matters into his own hands. If the Fox would not listen to the “Onontio”⁶¹ then they would send their own message. Saguima recruited the aid of Pottawatomi chief Makisabi to conduct a raid on the Fox who still resided at the headwaters of the St. Joseph and Grand Rivers. In the late winter of 1711-1712, the war party mistakenly attacked a village of Mascoutens, slaughtering the prisoners they took and destroying the village. This aggression is indicative of the hatred felt towards the Fox and unfortunately it was released in the form of murder, killing over 150 women and children and 60

⁵⁸ Edmunds and Peyser, 64.

⁵⁹ Ibid 37.

⁶⁰ Edmunds and Peyser, 65.

⁶¹ Onontio translates to “Great Mountain” and is used to reference the Governor of New France, at this time being Vaudreuil.

male warriors.⁶² Following these attacks the Fox villages headed by Makkathemangoua and Oninetonam abandoned the settlement and reestablished themselves among the Seneca who resided further east.⁶³

When spring arrived following the winter of the attack, the Mascoutin fled to Detroit where they sought the assistance and mediation of Dubuisson. Saguima and Makisabe, however, had reached Dubuisson first and refused to consent to protection of the Mascoutin or their allies. Saguima threatened to attack the French if aid were given to the Mascoutin or Fox.⁶⁴ Prior to the attacks at the headwaters, Makisabi enlisted the aid of the Miamis and the Illinois Confederacy, strengthening their ability to influence French policy.⁶⁵ Dubuisson, charged with a garrison of no more than thirty men, seemingly had little choice but to submit to the Ottawa threat of attack. The settlement at Detroit was formed to accommodate the presence of thousands of natives who might align and “encircle the English and their Iroquois allies, trapping them.”⁶⁶ If the Ottawa and Pottawatomi abandoned the French and/or turned on them, Dubuisson would surely fall to the superiorly numbered natives.

Word of the attack had reached Pemoussa and Lalima, who had already left towards Detroit to follow Makkathemangoua and Oninetonam on their way to the Seneca. Instead of continuing their journey, Pemoussa was infuriated by the news of the attack and instead looked for someone to blame; he would place blame on France, who failed to deliver justice for the slain Mascoutens.⁶⁷ Dubuisson was oblivious to the scheme crafted by Saguima and Makisabe,

⁶² Edmunds and Peyser, 66.

⁶³ Edmunds and Peyser, 65.

⁶⁴ White, 155.

⁶⁵ Edmunds and Peyser, 65.

⁶⁶ Weyhing, 95.

⁶⁷ White, 156.

chalking up the massacre to “God, who has suffered these two audacious nations to perish.”⁶⁸ He was surprised when the Fox set up a makeshift fort which they fortified for defense. Due to mistrust between the Fox and the French⁶⁹, the Fox assumed that the French had sponsored the attacks on the Mascoutin village. Infuriated by the news of the slaughter, Fox chief Pemoussa led an attack on a nearby Ottawa village and set part of it on fire. During the raid the Fox also took several women hostage, including the wife of Ottawa war chief Saguima.⁷⁰ The tradition of mourning wars was taking on an entirely new meaning. Given their French allies, the Ottawa and Pottawatomi were determined to destroy the Fox, who they reviled. The Fox had fortified their fort and surrounded Fort Pontchartrain and were firing on anyone who tried to leave the structure. However, the Fox were too few and could not properly surround the entirety of the Fort, leaving room for messengers to escape in Canoes. Dubuisson sent for help from the Ottawas and Hurons, who were hunting nearby.⁷¹ The first shots had been fired and the siege had begun.

⁶⁸ Dubuisson to the Governor General of Canada, “1712: Siege of Detroit by Wisconsin Indians,” in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, vol. 16, ed. Wisconsin Historical Society (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin), 267.

⁶⁹ Tensions between the Fox and French stretch back to the 1660s when Fox people traveled to Montreal to trade with French merchants, only to receive scorn and ridicule. The Fox did not take kindly to this treatment.

⁷⁰ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 267.

⁷¹ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 269.

The Siege at Detroit

For nineteen days the two sides fired their muskets and arrows on each other, slowly accumulating corpses as they went along. Thanks to the surprise attack by the Fox, they were able to surround the fort before French food stores could be replenished from the crops located outside the barricaded walls.⁷² Soon after, French Native reinforcements arrived, entering the Fort, manning the palisades and eventually cut off the Fox from the river, the only source of drinking water nearby. The Fox would shoot fire arrows over the walls and burn the thatched roofs of the French structures, to which Dubuisson said he found himself “very much embarrassed.”⁷³ Moral was low on both sides, with French allies complaining and doubting any kind of victory over the obviously brave Fox people. But Dubuisson pressed on, rallying his garrison to replace the burned thatch with “bear-skins and deer-skins.”⁷⁴ On the other side of the line the Fox were without water, food, cover, or any way of escaping. They had become encircled by their enemies and cut off from all access points. The situation was dire, indeed.

Several times Pemoussa went to Fort Pontchartrain seeking a ceasefire for the sake of their women and children.⁷⁵ French policy says that peace needs to be maintained with the Indians, so a truce was seemingly their way out of war. But the hatred held by Saguima and his allies for the Fox was so strong that each time Pemoussa would enter he would refuse mercy and express his desire to destroy the Fox. The Fox had taken his wife and killed his kinsmen and threatened to take trade from them; the abhorrence for the Fox is understandable and any grief stricken husband would likely want to kill his wife’s abductors. The problem with this situation

⁷² *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 269.

⁷³ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 278.

⁷⁴ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 279.

⁷⁵ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 278.

is that the French were caught in the middle of the whole thing. When Pemoussa would ask for mercy, Dubuisson would concede their fate to his Native allies, including Saguima. Whereas Cadillac had an interest in defusing these skirmishes so as to ensure his position and secure his profits,⁷⁶ Dubuisson thought the best way to make peace was to appease his allies, even if that meant undertaking an all out war against a people who had been invited to live and trade with the French.⁷⁷

Dubuisson's ineptness at mediating Native conflicts is reflected in the gory outcome of these battles. Undoubtedly the actions he took, or rather did not take, were the best decisions available in his mind. His garrison was abysmal, there was warfare all around and he was tasked with running a successful trading post among these Native people. The options he had, as he saw, were to reproach the Ottawa and Pottawatomi and Fox for their actions and risk being attacked and likely overrun by the Ottawa, or give in to their demands and join in the assault of the Fox people. Despite the horrid outcomes, his decisions are not unfounded, especially when considering the difficulties associated with aligning with the Fox.

Besides their upbringing, the Fox agitated other Natives and the French by displaying a level of arrogance seen as rude and uncouth. Examples of this behavior are seen upon the Fox arrival at Detroit. Viewing them as original masters of the land, the Fox immediately demanded that they be traded superior French goods and often complained about the fluctuating market for their trade goods.⁷⁸ The longer that the Fox traded with the French the more dependent they became on certain goods like guns, ammunition, metal cook pots, clothing, and more. Before the migration to Detroit, the Fox were situated near modern day Green Bay along the Wolf and then Fox Rivers. This location in Wisconsin set the Fox between two longstanding rivals to the north

⁷⁶ Michigan Historical Collections, 98.

⁷⁷ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 280.

⁷⁸ Edmunds and Peyser, 44.

and west in the Chippewa and Sioux, respectively. Having been pushed further east, the Fox found themselves increasingly dependent on firearms and ammunition to continue to defend against incursions made by their enemies. This location also placed the Fox at a disadvantage for reaching French trading posts. Many Natives would simply travel by water from Green Bay to Michilimacinack, the original trading post in Michigan, or even all the way around to Detroit. The Fox, however, preferred to travel by land and not water. Given this dislike for aquatic travel, the Fox were quite limited in their interactions with French traders.⁷⁹

Many times French fur traders, often operating illegally, would travel down the Fox River en route west to trade with the Sioux, an expansive and populous people with more goods to trade than the Fox. In the past French traders would stop and barter with the Fox, but because of this waterway the Fox would often be passed over for the more profitable Sioux.⁸⁰ When the Fox would be in need of supplies and French traders would try to pass, often the Fox would either raid the traders of their goods or charge them a toll for passing, leaving the trader with little to barter with at his final destination.⁸¹ Though this behavior seems unruly and disquieting, Cadillac is reported to have encouraged this kind of plundering in an attempt to halt illegal trade with the Sioux who were viewed as the enemy at the time due to their relations with the British. Cadillac also wanted to discourage trade from being taken away from the Detroit settlement.⁸² When Cadillac leaves he takes with him his willingness and personal interest in reconciling Native disputes. Dubuisson makes minimal effort to maintain peace, despite declaring “I beg you to live in peace, union, and good intelligence together, as well as among your different

⁷⁹ “1701: New Trading Posts to be Established in the West,” *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, vol. 16, ed. Wisconsin Historical Society (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin), 209.

⁸⁰ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 209.

⁸¹ Kellogg, 273.

⁸² Edmunds and Peyser, 60.

nations as with the French people.”⁸³ While this sounds pragmatic, for Dubuisson, this means live in peace or die in vain.

During the siege, the Fox “covered the palisades with scarlet blankets,” indicating to Dubuisson that “they wished the earth was all covered with blood” and that they now considered themselves allied to the English.⁸⁴ Pemoussa voiced his confusion several times, reminding Dubuisson that they were invited to Detroit as friends and were now on the receiving end of a bloody and brutal battle. Pemoussa repeatedly made attempts to end the fighting, removing the red blankets and instead displaying a single white flag. Pemoussa spoke with Dubuisson under terms of protection about ending the fight, saying:

“I am dead; I see very well that the heaven is clear and beautiful for you only, and that for me, it is altogether dark. When I left my village, I hoped that you would willingly listen to me. I demand of you, my father, by this belt, which I lay at your feet, that you have pity on your children, and that you do not refuse them the two days that they ask you, in which there shall be no firing on either side, that our old men may hold a council, to find a means of turning away your wrath. It is you that I now speak, you, other children, listening to the advice of our father; this belt is to pray you to recollect, that you are our kindred. If you shed our blood, recollect, that it is also your own; endeavor then to soften the heart of our father, whom we have so often offended. These two slaves are to replace, perhaps, a little blood that you may have lost.”⁸⁵

Despite the heartfelt appeal to Dubuisson and the French-aligned natives, Dubuisson refused to relent until the Fox gave up the three women whom they held hostage, one of them being the wife of Saguima, the Ottawa war chief. Pemoussa returned with the assurance that his village would not be fired upon “during the day, on condition...that no one should leave it to

⁸³ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 273.

⁸⁴ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 275.

⁸⁵ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 276.

seek water,” otherwise the truce would be broken.⁸⁶ Two hours later three chiefs returned to the Fort with the three captive women, hoping that finally they may be spared from the horrid conditions in which they were living. When they entered, they asked for respite and allowance to leave to find food and water, for “many die every day of hunger.”⁸⁷ In spite of the circumstances, Dubuisson writes that he “did not care any longer to keep fair with them.”⁸⁸ Instead, Dubuisson ceded the response to his allied natives, who in turn responded:

“Now listen to me ye nations who have troubled all the earth. We perceive clearly by your words, that you seek only to surprise our father, and to deceive him again, in demanding that we should retire. We should no sooner do so, but you would again torment our father... You are dogs who have always bit him... You have thought, wretches that you are, that we did not know all the speeches you have received from the English, telling you to cut the throats of our father, and of his children, and then to lead his children into this country. Go away, then... we are determined to die with our father... we know your bad heart, and we would not leave him alone with you. We shall see from this moment, who will be master, you or us; you have now only to retire, and as soon as you shall re-enter your fort, we shall fire upon you.”⁸⁹

The battle continued. Arrows and musket balls were exchanged for three or four days as the French and their allied Indians continued their relentless assault on the Fox fort. The Fox displayed great courage and determination, persisting in the face of death. Their persistence was so great that many of the French-aligned natives wanted to withdraw and end the fighting. Also determined was Dubuisson, who convinced his allies to “endeavor” when they were “just on the point of destroying these wicked nations.”⁹⁰ Despite more attempts to surrender, Dubuisson and his army of Indians continually rejected such pleas from the Fox people. On day nineteen of the

⁸⁶ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 277.

⁸⁷ *Ibid* 277.

⁸⁸ *Ibid* 277.

⁸⁹ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 278.

⁹⁰ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 280.

siege, however, a bright opportunity would come in the form of a terrible thunderstorm, which pushed the French and their Natives into shelter, giving the Fox an opportunity to escape under cover of night.⁹¹ The following morning, upon discovering the Fox had abandoned their fort a French-Native coalition gave chase, eventually catching up to the encampment along the shore of Lake Huron at Grosse Point, just north of the Detroit encampment.⁹² The Fox fought valiantly for four days, despite exhaustion, hunger, and depleted numbers. On the fourth day, the commanding officer of the expedition Vincennes assured the Fox that if they laid down their weapons he would “grant their lives and safety.”⁹³ Fox chief Pemoussa had tried several times throughout the siege and this battle to surrender in order to save the lives of women and children, though he was turned down each time, usually at the decision of their Native enemies. This time, Vincennes told them he would spare their lives once they abandoned their weapons and came forward. When this happened, the French-Native coalition advanced and slaughtered the Fox warriors. It is reported that “all were killed except the women and children, whose lives were spared, and one hundred men, who had been tied, but escaped.”⁹⁴

In his report, Dubuisson purposely leaves out the deception by which the Fox were defeated. This suggests that the governor general, Vaudreuil, would disapprove of the method for capture, otherwise why leave it out. This also suggests that Dubuisson was concerned with how the end results might reflect upon his ability to command. The three week long siege does not make for fanciful headlines and instead implies that Dubuisson lost control over the situation. In order to ensure that this type of embarrassment would not happen again, Dubuisson continued to push for a complete annihilation of the Fox people, who had caused enough trouble for the

⁹¹ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 283.

⁹² *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 284.

⁹³ Edmunds and Peyser, 74.

⁹⁴ Edmunds and Peyser, 74.

French. This capturing of women and children was intended to feed the slave trade while the men, including Pemoussa, were being brought back to the settlement to be tortured. The women and children were distributed among the French and different nations as either slaves or captives.⁹⁵ Despite the lucrative possibilities of the slave trade, on the journey back “their amusement was to shoot four or five of them every day. The Hurons did not spare a single one of theirs.”⁹⁶

During this period of colonization, slaves accounted for a great deal of the labor done in this sparsely populated area. The most common people to be sold as slaves were Fox.⁹⁷ Governor Vaudreuil, writing to the crown in Paris, boasted of his successful prevention of attacks on Fox villages and wrote that he had encouraged peace among the Natives.⁹⁸ What he failed to mention was the number of Fox slaves living and laboring at his residence in Montreal. Vaudreuil had an interest in preserving peace in order to maintain a profitable trade in New France.⁹⁹ If the crown were to learn that the situation was far worse than Vaudreuil expressed, that fighting was rampant and Natives were being sold into slavery, certain positions may have been replaced, including the Governor. Governor Vaudreuil specifically ordered Dubuisson to “give all his attention to preventing the Indian allies from making war on one another.”¹⁰⁰ This was certainly not the reality of the situation, as Richard White writes that Governor Vaudreuil let the west become a “scene of bitter and festering conflicts,”¹⁰¹ a very unappealing prospect to a King investing large sums of money to reap profits from the fur trade. In fact, Fox men, women, and children made up the “primary source of enslaved labor in the Saint Lawrence River Valley

⁹⁵ Edmunds and Peyser, 75.

⁹⁶ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 284.

⁹⁷ Brett Rushforth, “Slavery, the Fox Wars, and the Limits of Alliance,” in *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 63, No. 1 (Jan., 2006), 55.

⁹⁸ Rushforth, 54.

⁹⁹ Rushforth, 53-80.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid* 59.

¹⁰¹ White, 151.

during the 1710s and 1720s”.¹⁰² This demand for slave labor may have contributed to the relentless pursuit of the Fox. It is also possible that the Fox became the best source for slave labor given the near universal distrust and hatred of them by many of the native nations, including the Miamis, Illinois, Huron, Ottawa, as well as many others.

Slaves were also taken to replenish populations that had been diminished from war, disease, or raids.¹⁰³ This was a common practice by native groups well before the incident at Detroit and continued long after. Not only was there a demand by French colonists to possess Fox people as servants, but likely an even greater demand by other native nations. Brett Rushforth argues that Fox people were taken captive and sold to the French as slaves in an attempt to drive “a deep and eventually fatal wedge between the French and their erstwhile Fox allies.”¹⁰⁴ He continues to contend that increasing demand for Fox slaves made befriending them less profitable than selling them. This idea of profits again emerges as superior to the value of human life. Whereas a mutual alliance had existed between the Fox and the French, an advantageous situation appeared that resulted in a dehumanization of the Fox. This pursuit of annihilation would continue after the massacre at Detroit.

Pemoussa and the other Fox who escaped captivity after the standoff at the Presq’ isle, returned to Wisconsin and informed their kinsman of the betrayal and murder of their people.¹⁰⁵ Enraged by this news, the remaining Fox, Mascoutin, Kickapoo, and Sac warriors in Wisconsin made it a point to ambush French traders and French-aligned natives to retaliate for their losses. Governor Vaudreuil writes to the Minister that “it is no longer possible to deal gently with that nation without incurring the contempt of all the others, who are informed of the wrongs done us

¹⁰² Rushforth, 54.

¹⁰³ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 276.

¹⁰⁴ Rushforth, 57.

¹⁰⁵ “1712: Another Account of the Siege of Detroit,” *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, vol. 16. ed. Wisconsin Historical Society (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin), 295.

by the Renards (Fox).”¹⁰⁶ The problem, which seemingly was resolved following the siege of Detroit, once again popped up on the radar of French officials. While the Fox no longer resided at Detroit, these disruptions in the west resulted in a loss of trade. French native allies in Wisconsin reportedly were afraid to leave their encampments for fear of a Fox attack, and none of the neighboring nations were willing to declare against the Fox, who were extremely motivated by vengeance and were very dangerous.¹⁰⁷ This reduction of trade is evidenced by the unusually low number of furs being brought to Michilimakinac.¹⁰⁸ New France would flounder if not able to conduct trade west of Detroit, so it seemed necessary that the Fox be destroyed.

Plans were made in 1714 to campaign against the Fox in Wisconsin near the Fox River. The first steps taken to achieve this were to align the Illinois Confederacy and the Miamis, who were both longstanding enemies of the Fox. Next, the newfound fragile alliance between the Fox and Sioux needed to be quashed. Once these steps were taken, Sieur de Louvigny would march on the Fox village, ordered to “cut their corn, burn their cabins, and encamp on the ground.”¹⁰⁹ This total war was a new concept to Native Americans and reflects the intent to obliterate the Fox once and for all. What is clear from this plan of attack is that the French viewed the Fox as a threat to their fur trade empire and could no longer be dealt with by any other means besides force. The majority of French-aligned natives despised the Fox and made it clear that they would not take part in trade with France if they continued their allegiance to the Fox. With few options available, French and Native forces combined to undertake total war against the Fox, one that would leave the Fox people nearly nonexistent.

¹⁰⁶ Vaudreuil to Minister, “1713-1714: Foxes are Unruly and Lawless; should be Destroyed; French Renegades,” in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, vol. 16, ed. Wisconsin Historical Society (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin), 298.

¹⁰⁷ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 295.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid* 298.

¹⁰⁹ Vaudreuil and Begon to the French Minister, “1714: Plans for Campaign against the Foxes,” in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, vol. 16, ed. Wisconsin Historical Society (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin), 306.

Conclusion

The difficulty in dealing with the Fox seemingly became too much for Dubuisson and in his eyes it made more sense to rid the land of these treacherous beings and once again instill peace in trade. Perhaps more importantly in the eyes of the French crown however, was besting their European nemesis Great Britain on the continent and creating a more successful, expansive, and stable campaign. When the Fox arrived at Detroit, many Natives complained about the way they would brag about the goods they had received from the English and about how in the future they will continue this partnership.¹¹⁰ This boasting angered many of the other Natives in the area. The Fox arrive at Detroit and would inevitably take trade goods from the French, who could have traded them to other Natives. Yet they continued to brag about how they benefitted greatly from trade with the English, making them seem greedy to many.

The French had been in a constant battle with Great Britain not only for territorial control, but for the most lucrative trade partners. Britain had already threatened French trade near the Saint Lawrence River valley and continued to pursue French targets like the Sioux. For these reasons and many more, Dubuisson was convinced that the Fox would abandon their trade with the French and instead engage with Great Britain. Unknown to Dubuisson, the Fox were involved in infrequent talks with British aligned Natives who tried to convince the Fox to join the trade. Nevertheless, Dubuisson's paranoia led him to believe that the Fox were impossible to deal with. Rather than lose the Fox and their allies to the British, Dubuisson allowed his Native allies to continue this war of attrition. French officials became embroiled in hostile Indian politics that left the leadership with little choice but to aid in the elimination of the Fox instead of

¹¹⁰ Edmunds and Peyser, 63.

losing the powerful Native allies who threatened violence for any hospitality given to the Fox or their allies; French officials chose the former

These wars resulted in an attempted genocide of the Fox people by France and their Native allies, particularly the Ottawa and Pottawatomi. These bloody campaigns were carried out amidst a complex context that involved several Native nations, France, and Great Britain. From this research, it is clear that this campaign stemmed from a French desire to expand and protect their claim in the fur trade as well as maintain the trade empire they had built. These economic ambitions combined with a lack of dexterous leadership, unruly nature of the Fox people, and a constant threat of British incursion would lead to a near total annihilation of the Fox people at the hands of their former French allies. Not only was this event a complete tragedy in the history of the Great Lakes, but too often forgotten by scholars. Thousands of Fox men, women, and children lost their lives or freedom during these campaigns and it is for their memory that this story must be told.

Annotated Bibliography

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Appendix

Antoine de Lamothe Cadillac

Proponent of the settlement at Detroit and commanding officer until 1710, when he is reassigned to the governorship of Louisiana. Has the idea that many native nations can come together as one fighting force for French purposes.

Jacques-Charles Renaud Dubuisson

Temporary replacement for Cadillac at Detroit. Did not share in the belief of a pan-Indian community at Detroit and instead aided and engaged in the killing of the Fox people. Dubuisson provides the majority of the correspondence during the time of the siege.

Pierre de Rigaud, Marquis de Vaudreuil

Governor General of New France. Oversaw all French-Indian affairs in North America. Much of the correspondence from Dubuisson is address to the Governor General.

Fox Nation

Aggressors and victims. Aligned with the French, yet a notoriously proud and unruly people who engaged with the British as well. Disliked by the majority of native nations. Allied with Kickapoo, Mascouten, and Sac. Enemies with Ottawa, Huron, Miami, Pottawatomi, Illinois, Chippewa, Sioux, and others. Chiefs are Lalima, Pemoussa, Makkathemangoua and Oninetonam.

Huron Nation

Strong allies of the French, main aggressors against Fox. Threaten France with attack for aid given to Fox.

Illinois Nation

Allied with the French. Make alliance with Miami against Fox.

Kickapoo Nation

Fox allies and Kinsmen. Travel to Detroit with Fox and continually aid throughout the siege.

Mascouten Nation

Fox allies and Kinsmen. Travel to Detroit with Fox and continually aid throughout the siege. Are mistakenly attacked by Ottawa outside of Detroit, sparks siege.

Miami Nation

French allies, aid in future campaigns against Fox.

Ottawa Nation

Strong allies to French; despise the Fox. Chief is Saguima, whose wife is taken captive by Fox. Devise and carry out plan to attack Fox at headwaters of St. Joseph and Grand Rivers, but mistakenly attacks Mascouten village.

Pottawatomi Nation

French allies, present during Fox pleas for surrender. Chief is Makisabi, who assists in the planning and perpetration of the attack at the St. Joseph and Grand River.

Sac Nation

Fox allies and kinsmen. Travel to Detroit with Fox.