

WILLIAM LOVELY'S PURCHASE

Perhaps William Lovely, now Cherokee sub-agent for the Missouri Territory, was attempting to relive the glory of his Revolutionary War campaign, after all he had participated in the successful battles of Saratoga and Yorktown. At Saratoga, the Colonists not only defeated the British, but embarrassed them by marching 5700 captives to Boston and sending them back to England on ships after a pledge not to bear arms against the colonies. Or perhaps he recalled the jubilation at Yorktown, when the British surrendered, but in any event, Lovely was about to embark on a campaign of his own design, to stop bloodshed between the Osage and Cherokee tribes.

In 1813, Major William Lewis Lovely and his wife Persis had moved to western Arkansas and taken up residence in an abandoned Osage village. As recently appointed Sub Agent for Missouri Territory, among other responsibilities, his assignment was to arbitrate disagreements between tribes. Lovely was attempting to resolve issues related to a policy initiated by Thomas Jefferson to establish an Indian colonization zone west of the Mississippi. The process of tribal removal had begun shortly after 1800 with a series of treaties. The one Lovely was attempting to resolve, that affected the Cherokee and Osage tribes, had been ratified in 1810, and was known as the Treaty of Fort Clark, now Fort Osage, located on the Missouri River. The terms of that treaty provided for the Osage to be paid for lands in western Arkansas and eastern Oklahoma, territory that had been their hunting grounds for hundreds of years. The Osage had disputed the treaty from the beginning, and payments were not received in a timely manner. To compound the problem, the government had given assurance to the Western Cherokees that the land was theirs in exchange for land in Georgia. By the time William and Persis arrived, disagreement between the two tribes had escalated into violent clashes.

But now in 1815, two years after his arrival, Agent Lovely had developed a plan that would provide a buffer zone between the two tribes. He proposed to negotiate the purchase of approximately three million acres of land from the Osage in what later became northwestern Arkansas and northeastern Oklahoma. This agreement would provide the Cherokees with land in exchange for regions disputed by the Osage in Arkansas Territory....a buffer of sorts.

Of course this idea, Lovely's Purchase as it was to become known, was observed closely by white farmers in the territory. And, at Salina the Chouteau's watched anxiously, since their new fur trading industry was dependent on Osage hunters. Further south at Three Forks, other merchants were also concerned about their businesses. However, on July 9, 1816, Lovely succeeded in negotiating the treaty between the two warring tribes. Major William Lewis Lovely, veteran of the victories at Saratoga and Yorktown, had orchestrated a compromise victory of his own.

Unfortunately, winning usually comes at a price and, in this case it was the price of three million acres. While promoting "Lovely's Purchase," Sub Agent Lovely had neglected to obtain approval from government officials to finance the project! Consequently, as the Osage once again awaited payment for their hunting grounds, anxieties grew. Sporadic clashes between the tribesmen became more frequent, first at the trading posts and finally

escalating into a massacre of Chief Clermont's Osage villagers by Cherokees and their allies in the fall of 1818. That incident caught the attention of government officials and soon set in motion the construction first of Fort Smith and later Fort Gibson in order to protect both settlers and the Indian tribes from each other.

Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, Agent Lovely died in 1817, leaving Widow Persis to mourn his passing. But, in this case, his good intentions did not go unheeded. Although Lovely's Purchase was not financed, his idea obviously had merit because in 1819, the government did approve substantially the same arrangement. A few years later, in 1828, Congress set the current boundary of the new state of Arkansas, ordering all whites to resettle east of the Arkansas boundary and all Indians to the west. And, for a short time the region in Arkansas around Fayetteville became Lovely County in honor of William. In 1835, the region west of Arkansas, part of Lovely's Purchase, became known as "Indian Territory," a term credited to missionary Isaac McCoy.

An exception was made to the earlier Executive Order mandating the movement of whites. Persis Lovely was permitted to remain on the land she and William had farmed and did so until her death in 1841. Ironically, one official who approved that arrangement was future president Andrew Jackson, architect of the Indian Removal Act, the antithesis of Lovely's attempts at a peaceful solution to one Indian issue.

