

Early Conflicts War of 1823

A part of a national policy to show Indian nations the strength of the United States, the government requested that tribal people be brought to the east as representatives of their nations. In some cases, it was an effort on the part of the explorers and traders to show case their discoveries. The result of this policy can be seen with the incident at Leavenworth.

The incident began when explorers Lewis and Clark negotiated the trip that sent the Sahnish village chief, Ankedoucharo (Eagle Feather) to Washington, D.C. where he died. There was no explanation of how and why he died. Lewis and Clark, fearing the wrath of the Sahnish, did not tell them until a year later. When the Sahnish found out about his death, they became rightfully angry. President Thomas Jefferson tried to appease the Sahnish with the following eulogy: He (Chief Ankedoucharo) consented to go towards the sea as far as Baltimore and Philadelphia. He said the chief found nothing but kindness and good will wherever he went, but on his return to Washington he became ill. Everything we could do to help him was done but it pleased the Great Spirit to take him from among us. We buried him among our own deceased friends and relations. We shed many tears over his grave. (Delegates in Buckskins). The President's explanation did not impress the Sahnish.

For the next twenty years they were hostile to white people. The inexplicable death of their chief was the major reason for their so-called belligerence. The most notable of these hostilities was in the 1823 battle where the Sahnish took revenge for the death of their chief on General Ashley and his men who were coming up the river from St. Louis. The Sahnish killed several men, took some of their goods, and set their boats adrift in the river. The attack angered the white military forces and they set out with soldiers, artillery, cannons and 800 to 900 Sioux for Leavenworth to "teach the Arikara (Sahnish) a lesson." (Leavenworth Journal). The Sahnish had fortified their villages well. The Sioux were first into the battle, and when they met the Sahnish, they both lost lives. The Sioux, fearing Leavenworth was losing the battle met with the Sahnish. It was presumed they wanted to join the Sahnish. They then left the battle taking with them corn and other crops of the Sahnish leaving Leavenworth's forces to their own tactics. The Sahnish were surrounded by the United States military who lobbed cannonballs and other artillery into the village of men, women, and children. The Sahnish, realizing they were outnumbered and at risk, began negotiating for surrender. Before the battle could be settled, every man, woman, child, horse, and dog disappeared during the night.

According to a traditional story told among the people, a sacred dog led the people under the river and to safety. This time in history was a turning point in the relations between the Sahnish and whites. Prior to this battle, traders and travelers had described the disposition of the Sahnish towards the whites as "friendly." After this war, there were reports of hostilities and murders on both sides. The result of the Leaven worth battle infuriated the traders who further antagonized the Sahnish worsening the already deteriorating relationship between the Sahnish and the whites.