

## ***Native Americans and Early Exploration***

Of course, Native Americans were the first inhabitants of Sparta area. The Sauk and Fox Indians were among the first Native American inhabitants of the area. They were using the nearby forested oak for hunting when the French entered and explored the upper-Mississippi River Basin in the late 1600's and 1700's. In years 1685-86, Nicolas Perrot, a French explorer and trader, journeyed up the Mississippi River and established a fur trading post thirty-five miles west of Sparta at Mount Trempealeau. Perrot's expedition brought the Sauk and Fox Indians and other neighboring tribes into the French orbit. Together the Indians and the French fur traders exploited west central Wisconsin for its fur-bearing animals, most likely including the LaCrosse River Valley where Sparta is situated today. [Koehler, 1967; 1-8; and Koehler, 1977: 1-3.]

The Sauk and Fox Indian's territorial rights to the Sparta area and elsewhere generally continued after Great Britain won the Seven years War (1756-1763). By the American Revolution, the Sauk and Fox were centered south of Sparta. The shifting of the Sauk and Fox Indians to southern Wisconsin left a temporary vacuum, which the Winnebago Indians living in northeastern Wisconsin quickly filled. By 1820, Winnebagos claimed all the territory west of Lake Winnebago to the Black and Mississippi River.

Eventually, the pressure of American settlement forced both the Winnebago and the Sauk and Fox from Wisconsin. In a series of treaties (1822, 1824, and 1830), the Sauk and Fox Indian confederacy ceded all their territory in southern Wisconsin. However, not all Sauk and Fox Indians wished to leave the area. Those who chose to ignore the treaties remained and were crushed and defeated in the Black Hawk War of 1832—a running battle with American militia led by General Henry Atkinson. The Sauk and Fox Indians were then dispossessed from their former territories and removed to Iowa. [Ibid.; Josephy: 211-253 and Hagan: passim.]

By 1837, a few years after the Black Hawk War, the Winnebagos living in the Sparta area faced a similar fate. Under pressure from settlement, the Winnebagos also ceded their territorial claims east of the Mississippi River and moved west to Iowa and Minnesota. However, many Winnebagos could not adjust to the environment in these areas. Slowly, many members of the tribe adjust to the environment in these areas. Slowly, many member of the tribe filtered back into Wisconsin territory, including the area surrounding Sparta. When settlers first arrived in the Sparta area, members of the Winnebago tribe were occupying and using some of the region for hunting and other purposes. [Ibid.]