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Silent tongues, black robes: Potawatomi, Europeans, and
settlers in the southern Great Lakes, 1640-1850

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them would be less strong when those things and places were at a distance than if directly in view."⁴⁵ However, before departing for Chicago the St. Joseph wkama met in council. They agreed to reject all offers to sell their land. They refused to accept dislocation.

Southwest Michigan Potawatomi were the most adamantly opposed to removal. Violence was threatened against any wkama who signed a treaty ceding land. Most of the St. Joseph Potawatomi camped on lands that bordered the village where the negotiations were taking place.⁴⁶ Their opposition was so strong that the government was forced to later negotiate a separate treaty with them. Ultimately, the government, through threats of force and increased annuity payments, was victorious. That victory remained clouded by the provision that the Potawatomi could remain on their land until two years after the treaty's ratification by the Senate. In addition, others were allowed to move to claim lands in northern Michigan "on account of their religion."

The treaty's lack of a clear cession timetable was further complicated by the rectangular bounds of the ceded land. The boundary lines of Michigan, Indiana, and

⁴⁵ Wolcott to Cass, January 1, 1821, M1, Roll 8, 5-6; Wolcott to Cass, March 31, 1821, M1, Roll 8, 244-46. Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, Records of the Michigan Superintendency, 1814-1850.

⁴⁶ Anselm J. Gerwing, "The Chicago Indian Treaty of 1833," Journal of the Illinois Historical Society 57 (Summer 1964): 117-42.

Illinois had unsuccessfully imposed a grid on a geographical area long defined by the confluence of rivers. Each treaty further complicated the problem. Smaller grids were now superimposed on the state boundary-line grid (see Figure 5.14).

For over a decade chaos ensued. Misunderstandings arose because treaty terms were unclear and deliberately misrepresented. Many Potawatomi believed that they were entitled to remain on their land. There were also large numbers of Potawatomi who did not attend the Chicago negotiations. They believed that they retained clear title to their land from previous treaties. Many *wkama*, like Menominee, refused involvement in further treaty negotiations.⁴⁷

The decade from 1830 to 1840 was marked by frequent and repeated Potawatomi movement. Some voluntarily moved north to Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Others moved west on their own initiative. A few signed up for removal. Still others simply moved to areas where Potawatomi *wkama* like Menominee had refused to sell their lands.

Native Americans also made legal land purchases. They used the specie from annuity payments to purchase land at the public land office, where they found it useful

⁴⁷ Edmunds, *Potawatomis*, 265.