

Great American Lives

of Nineteenth Century Missouri

Sans Nerf



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Before the arrival of Europeans, the land we know as Missouri was home to a tribe of Indians known as the Osage. Fierce warriors, the Osage roamed freely, controlling all of present day Missouri and sections of the Great Plains where they hunted buffalo.

But after Europeans arrived in the New World, life began to change for the Osage. Suddenly, they were forced into close contact with the white man as he explored the land and **encroached** on the Indians' territory.

The establishment of Harmony Mission near present day Nevada, Mo., was one attempt by the whites and Osages to co-exist peacefully. But the **mission** was a disaster and became another example of the problems created when two different cultures collide.

SOMETHING IN RETURN

As whites moved farther west, the government began making **treaties** with the Osage and other Indian tribes to take their lands for settlement. In 1808, the Osage signed the first of many treaties to cede their land to the United States.

The Osage did not want to give up their land, but they didn't have much choice. They also realized they could benefit from a relationship with the whites.

In 1820, an Indian named Sans Nerf and his party of Osages went to Washington, D.C., to ask Thomas McKenney, the superintendent of Indian trade, to set up a mission for his people. McKenney sent a message with the request to the United States Foreign Missionary Society.

In November 1821, approximately 40 people under the Reverend Philip Milledoler traveled to present day Vernon County, Mo., to establish Harmony Mission. The mission consisted of a set of log buildings near the Big and Lit-

tle Osage Rivers. It was one of the first white settlements in the area.

DIFFERENT MOTIVATION

For the whites, the purpose of Harmony Mission was to **Christianize** the Osages and encourage them to **conform** to the white man's way.

For Sans Nerf and the Osages, however, Harmony Mission was a source of trade goods like blankets, steel tools and gunpowder. They also wanted their children to receive an education to learn how to deal with the white man.

Osage children brought to the mission school were bathed, given American clothing and American names. The students, including Sans Nerf's two grandchildren, learned spelling, writing, and arithmetic. Boys learned farming, carpentry or **blacksmithing**. Girls learned practical skills such as cooking and cleaning, sewing and **spinning**.

At first, the Osages and the missionaries got along well. Soon, however, misunderstanding and conflict set in. The Osages were interested in white goods, but not in adopting the Christian religion. They had their own faith.

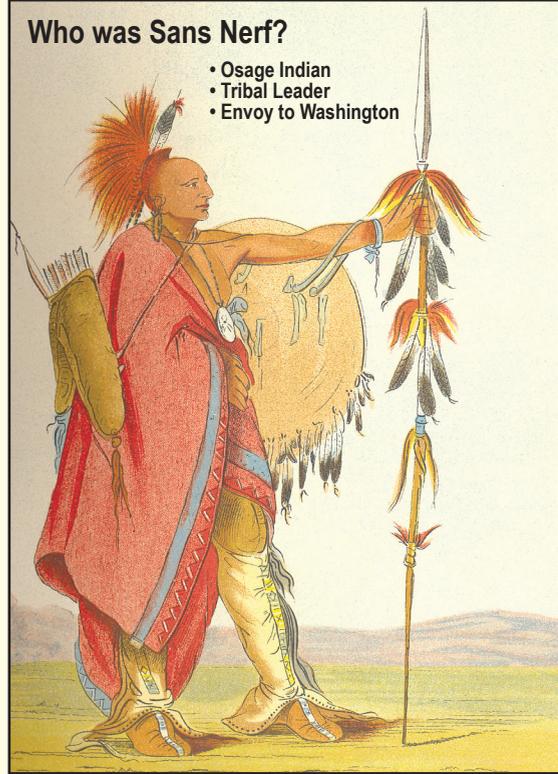
Differences of lifestyle also caused problems. The whites wanted the Osages to quit the practice of polygamy, or having multiple wives. They also wanted the Osages to abandon their **nomadic** lifestyle of hunting and adopt an agricultural lifestyle that would keep them tied to one place.

The Osages resisted. They stopped going to church services and withdrew their children from the mission schools. The conflict **intensified** to the point that Sans Nerf and the Osages eventually moved their main village into Kansas to escape the missionaries.

In 1837, the government officially closed all missions to the Osage. This included Harmony Mission, whose name, in a touch of **irony**, suggested a peaceful co-existence with the Indians.

Who was Sans Nerf?

- Osage Indian
- Tribal Leader
- Envoy to Washington



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Although no picture of Sans Nerf has survived, he probably dressed much like the Osage warrior in the drawing above. Note the many decorative items he is wearing. Blankets, earrings, his metal spearpoint, and body paint are some items Indians obtained through trade with the whites. A peace medal, awarded by the U.S. government, hangs around his neck.



Vocabulary

Match the vocabulary word with the correct definition, then write a sentence using each word.

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|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blacksmithing | A – The process of twisting a fiber, such as wool or cotton, into thread or yarn |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spinning | B – The process of working with iron, or making tools out of iron |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mission | C – To teach someone the Christian religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Encroached | D – A figure of speech in which the literal meaning is the opposite of the intended meaning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nomadic | E – Negotiated agreements between nations or people |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intensified | F – To increase or become worse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conform | G – A group of people sent somewhere to perform a specific service, such as providing religious instruction |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Irony | H – Trespassed or intruded on the rights or possessions of another |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Christianize | I – To adopt or take on a certain code of behavior, dress, thoughts, etc. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Treaties | J – Moving from place to place based on the supply of food available |

■ Sans Nerf is French for "without nerve." The name was probably given to him by a French fur trader to indicate bravery or fearlessness.

■ The founders of Harmony Mission included citizens from a variety of backgrounds, including religious missionaries, mechanics, machinists, farmers, a doctor & teachers.