

A Council of the Nehiyaw Pwat reported by Little Thunder (1827)

On August 11, 1827 the treaty of Butte des Morts was signed on the Fox River in Wisconsin. It completed the system of Indian boundaries, which was commenced by the treaty of Prairie du Chien, on the 19th of August, 1825, and continued by the treaty of Fond du Lac of the 5th of August, 1826.

These three conferences, which may, from their having been concluded in the month of August of the respective years, be called the *Augustie* treaties, embody a new course and policy for keeping the tribes in peace, and are founded on the most enlarged consideration of the Indigenous right of fee simple to the soil.

Henry Schoolcraft was at this treaty and then returned to Sault Ste. Marie where he encountered a number of Pembina and Red River Chippewa and Michif who were doing summer visiting and trading.

The following story is recounted by Annamikens, or Little Thunder, a Red River Chippewa Michif, also called Joseph, whose face had been terribly lacerated in a contest on the plains west of Pembina, with grizzly bears. The wounds were now closed, but the disfiguration was permanent. He told the following story of a Treaty process which occurred sometime before this interview:

The Sioux, Chippewas, Assiniboines, Crees, and Mandans, called by him in general Miggaudiwag, which means fighters, were at variance. About 400 half-breeds and 100 Chippewas went out from Pembina to make peace, and hunt the buffalo.

On the fourth day's march they reached the open plains, and met a large body of Assiniboines and Crees encamped. Their camp was fixed on eligible ground, and the lodges extended across the plain. Annamikens and his followers encamped with them. After they had encamped, they observed every hour during the night that fresh arrivals of Assiniboines and Crees took place. On the third day of their encampment he was sent for to Cuthbert Grant's tent, where he found a large circle of Indians formed, and all things in readiness for a council of the three nations, Assiniboines, Chippewas, and Crees. Grant was the trader of Pembina Metifs, and had followed them out. In the centre of the ring, buffalo robes were spread, and he with others was given a seat there. The object of this council was to decide upon a plan to attack a body of 200 Sioux lodges, which had been discovered at half a day's ride on horseback distant. The principal chiefs, and warriors were agreed as to the propriety of an attack. He was asked to unite with them. He said he felt not only for the chiefs and young men, but also for the women and children, hereby expressing his dissent. Two of the principal chiefs stood up, each holding a pipe. He was then asked to take one of the pipes and hand it to the bravest man, giving him the power to elect the war chief. He gave it to one he knew to be brave.

This chief had no sooner received it than presented it to Francis, his brother, to hand it round, thereby hoping that he would not refuse to smoke the war-pipe when handed by his brother. He took the pipe in both hands and smoke, then

handed it to his brother, who also smoked it, and handed it to a chief who stood next to him, and it went round. He said, however, after smoking, "I do not consent to go to war, I am against it." After some talk the council broke up, it was beginning to be late. At night he heard that some movement was on foot. He went to the quarter of the camp indicated, and used his influence against the plan. He had scarcely reached his tent when other reports of a like nature were brought from various parts of the camp, and he was most of the night busied in controverting the war spirit.

In the morning he made a descent through the camp, speaking openly against the meditated attack on the Sioux, and concluded by saying that for himself and the Metifs, he had one thing to say, that they wished to preserve peace with all, and they should join and fight for the nation first attacked, and against whoever might raise a war-club. About 100 Crees, however, were determined to go, and in about four hours the whole camp was broken up and dispersed. He broke up his camp rather in anger, mounted his horse, put his family in the cart, and set out for home. Many followed him. Francis, not seeing his brother go, also set out, and many followed him, a greater number in fact than had followed Joseph. At night the hunters from each party met, and they found the two parties had travelled the same distance. On hearing this Francis sent a dispatch in the morning to his brother, but they found he had departed, and, the country being a grassy plain, they could not exactly tell their course.¹



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¹ Henry Schoolcraft. *Personal Memoires of a Residence of Thirty Years with the Indian Tribes on the American Frontiers*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1851: 169-70.