

Adventures on the American Frontier

PIONEER TRADERS

Part Two
Trader Kinzie and
the Battle of Fort Dearborn



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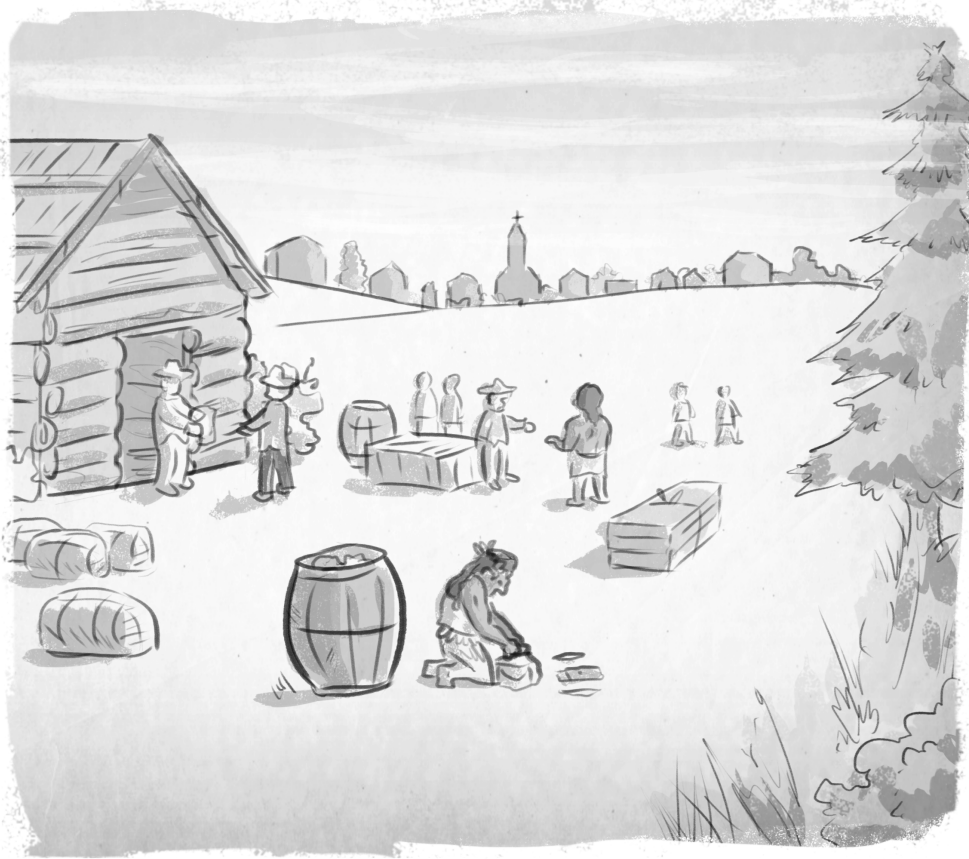
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In the late 1700s, settlers were pushing west into the wilderness of America, building trading posts along the way. A trading post along a river or at a crossroads was often the heart of a new settlement, and its business kept a town alive and growing.



But the Native Americans were not happy about the new settlements that were springing up farther and farther to the west. They knew they had to do something about it or lose their lands entirely.

In 1804, John Kinzie was taking his family west to the small settlement of Chicago when he heard about a Native American chief named Tecumseh. Chief Tecumseh was traveling around, trying to gather all of the Native Americans into one great fighting force to battle the white people



for their hunting grounds and homelands.

“We don’t need to worry,” John told his wife Eleanor. “Where we’re going, a new fort has just been built, and we can go into it for protection if we need to.”

He showed her his map. The Chicago River had two arms—one coming from the north and the other from the south. They joined each other east of Lake Michigan and then flowed together into the lake. The fort was on the south bank of the river just before it reached the lake.

John had brought with him a good stock of trading goods and his tools. Eleanor had packed clothing for herself, her daughter, and her infant son. There was room in the wagon for little else.

“Look!” John told her as they at last came in sight of the little settlement. “Someday this will be a great city.” There were only four houses besides the fort, and beyond them a village of Native American huts.

John went on. “We’ll have the finest



of those four houses. The natives already know it as a trading post because it was built by the first settler here.”

Eleanor’s eyes rested on the house that was to be her home. Two tall poplar trees guarded its front door. A path led down a little slope to the river, and right across the river was the fort. The house was as good as she could have hoped to find in a wilderness settlement, but she wondered how John could see this place as the beginning of a city.