During his trek through the Ozarks in 1818 and 1819, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft frequently commented on Indian–White encounters in the region, particularly American fear of the Osage. Much of the Osage presence had been removed by the 1808 treaty with the United States, but an ongoing, bitter conflict between the Osage and the Cherokee kept tensions high throughout the Ozarks.

In May 1818, six months before Schoolcraft set out across the Ozarks, US Secretary of War John C. Calhoun informed the territorial governor of Missouri, William Clark, that President James Monroe demanded an end to the hostilities between the two tribes and thus ordered the Missouri governor to achieve a peace accord. “As this is a subject of considerable importance,” Calhoun charged Clark, “you will give it immediate attention, and take such measures for the adjustment of their difference as you may judge best.” Believing that the Cherokee had bested the Osage in the pursuit of access to western hunting lands then owned or blocked by the Osage, the secretary of war ordered the territorial governor to make “the arrangement favorable to the Cherokees,” considering that the president was “anxious to hold out every inducement to the Cherokees, and the other Southern nations of Indians, to emigrate to the West of the Mississippi.” The policy of Indian removal commenced in earnest during the administration of James Monroe—more than a decade before the 1830 Indian Removal Act.
In October 1818, only weeks before Schoolcraft departed Potosi for the rest of the Ozarks, Governor Clark informed Secretary Calhoun that, “knowing the views of the Government on the Subject of Indian emigration to the West of the Mississippi,” he had secured peace between the Osage and the Cherokee with “much difficulty.” At a council in St. Louis, delegations of both tribes agreed to a “solemn treaty,” whereby twenty-eight signatories representing the “several bands of the Great and Little Osage nation” again relinquished another massive chunk of land, in this instance, the Ozarks region of northern Arkansas.

While the US government was dispossessing the Osage in 1818, it also achieved the same objective that year with tribes elsewhere in Missouri, as well as in Ohio and Michigan. In Missouri, the Shawnee and Delaware residing in now Perry County and outside of then Cape Girardeau informed Clark of their desire to relocate westward. “This together with the cession now made by the Osages,” Clark enthusiastically declared to Calhoun, “places an immense Country at the disposal of the United States.”

Calhoun could not have been more sanguine. As Schoolcraft headed westward, the secretary of war informed President Monroe that the 1818 Osage Treaty appears “to be formed upon advantageous terms.” Calhoun also notified Gen. Andrew Jackson, a successor to the policy of Indian removal, that the extensive tracts of land just acquired by the United States “may hereafter become the means of exchanging for lands held by the Southern Indians” on the east side of the Mississippi River. President Monroe then directed Jackson to prevent white settlement in the territory taken from the Osage, and to remove any white settlers already in that region, in preparation for future Indian removals.

Schoolcraft knew of the 1818 Osage Treaty, as he jotted in his journal in late November of that year about how the “Indian title has been extinguished by purchase by the United States,” and thusly the stream he was crossing that day “will no longer be included in their hunting-grounds. It was claimed by the Osages.” He also was aware of the peace treaty Governor Clark brokered between the Osage and the Cherokee. As such, it behooves us to commemorate another important, yet tragic, bicentennial in our state’s history: that of Native American removal. These destructive events cannot go unremembered as we commemorate our state’s admission into the Union. Schoolcraft’s bicentennial can attest to this very fact.

To date, there are no plans to commemorate the bicentennial Osage Treaty, but stay tuned. The MHC’s Native American Heritage program will not remain silent on this pivotal part of our state’s history.
While on the subject of bicentennials and Native Americans, there are a number of pertinent sesquicentennials arriving on our doorstep that should be recognized and commemorated in various manners. Over the past three years, readers have been introduced to one of our several heritage programs, Missouri’s Civil War Heritage—particularly the U. S. Grant Trail, the annual Grant Symposium, and the general (no pun intended) history of Grant in Missouri. Thus, the sesquicentennial of Grant’s election to the presidency in November of 1868 and of his two terms in the White House from 1869 to 1877 offers us a number of commemorative and heritage opportunities.

For one, the Grant administration initiated a significant transition in federal Indian policy, one that ultimately saw the final military defeat and subjugation, and near destruction of Native Americans. With the creation of the Board of Indian Commissioners in 1869, the Grant administration advocated major changes in the management of Indian affairs in hopes of maintaining peace and improving conditions for Indians—albeit in white terms only, by enforcing the Policy of Concentration, removing all Indians to established reservations where Indian culture could be eradicated permanently.

Yet, beginning with the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie and the brutal 1868–1869 winter campaign of General Sheridan and continuing with the 1874 Red River War with the Southern Plains Indians and the 1876 Great Sioux War with the Northern Plains Indians, Grant’s “Peace Policy” turned into some of the bitterest and bloodiest conflicts between the United States and the Plains Indians. This struggle of arms—and cultures—terminated in 1877, Grant’s last year in the White House, leaving the United States in complete control of Indian policy and, for that matter, the future of Indians altogether. Grant’s “Peace Policy” destroyed the last vestige of self-determination by the Indian tribes resisting Concentration, who had dominated the middle of America and now found themselves confined to alien life on reservations. Thus, the end of the Indian Wars in 1877 and of Grant’s administration concluded one long chapter of US–Indian relations—the policy of Concentration to solve the Indian question—and commenced another, the attempt to eradicate Indian culture itself.

Grant’s presidency also witnessed the end of the Reconstruction era, ultimately overturning the post-Civil War era of civil rights for which General Grant had been a leading advocate. In 1877—again, Grant’s last year in the White House—the Reconstruction Amendments, also known as the Civil Rights Amendments, that is, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, had become essentially ineffective by a number of now infamous Supreme Court and federal court cases. Missouri played a central role in this destruction of civil rights—namely via the 1867 Supreme Court case of Cummings v. Missouri, resulting in a century of Jim Crow laws and segregation.

In 1877, the Grant administration and the Reconstruction Era came to an end. And so, too, did the way of life of the American Indian and the civil rights of the freedmen. It is the sesquicentennial of this pivotal and transformative period in our history, and the century of rebuilding that followed, that we must not forget, and so the MHC will offer the appropriate programs, projects, and partnerships to address this pivotal period in our history.

A CALL FOR
SESQUICENTENNIALS