How the West Was Stolen: A Closer Look at the St.Louis Treaty of 1804

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Introduction
A Sauk tribe member was arrested for murder of three white settlers near the Cuivre River Neighborhood settlement on November 3, 1804. On that same day, the Treaty of St. Louis was signed. This treaty ceded 50 million acres of Sauk and Fox tribal land. The alleged murder coerced the tribe into coming to Saint Louis. The arrest and imprisonment of the Sauk tribe member forced the few Sauk tribe members present at the St. Louis meeting, to sign a treaty for his release. He was not released upon treaty signing, he was murdered by James Major James Bruff six month later when the Sauk and Fox returned to St. Louis to retrieve their fellow tribe member. US. Officials pardoned him and their official statement was that he was killed because he escaped.

Methodology
I primarily focused on establishing the credibility of the murder claims as an entity to be either proved or disproved. Then, I focused on the creditability of the persons involved based their associations financially with Pierre Chouteau and how each person benefitted from the St. Louis Treaty of 1804.

My research was done through land records in 1804, burial records from St. Charles Historical Society and Pierre Chouteau’s account book located at Missouri History Museum Archives.

Results
In addition to documenting payments made to the three key individuals who reported the murder of the three white settlers, Warren Cattle, Major James Bruff and Mackay Wherry from Pierre Chouteau’s account book in 1804, there is no historical record of Cuivre Neighborhood Settlement, no burial records matching the description of the alleged victims and I was able to confirm all persons who owned land on Cuivre river in 1804 and then cross reference their death dates. None of the landowners died in 1804. Also, in the back pages of Pierre Chouteau’s account book from 1804 is a handwritten drawing of Cuivre river at the Mississippi At the 3-mile mark, where the Cuivre River Settlement was said to be located, is a hand drawn floodplain. For comparison is a Platt map of the Cuivre River from 1880.

Conclusions
There was never a murder by a Sauk Tribe member on the Cuivre river.

The U.S. government and Pierre Chouteau a local wealthy and powerful fur trader in St. Louis, staged the murder to coerce the uncooperative Sauk and Fox tribe to sign the St. Louis Treaty of 1804, ceding 50 million acres of Sauk and Fox tribal land.

Nervous that he would be caught in a lie, Major James Bruff, who oversaw the Sauk prisoner, murdered him and told U.S. officials that he was killed while escaping. Congress had pardoned the Sauk tribe prisoner a week before he was murdered.

Pierre Chouteau, in order to keep his land claims under the new American government, orchestrated a plan to help the Americans obtain the Sauk and Fox territory and keep his land claims along with full trading rights.