

**How God Brought the Gospel to Missouri:
A History of Baptist Missions to Native Americans in Missouri**


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The state of Missouri, being centrally located in the United States, has been ral in many major developments of the country. This was particularly true during the 1800s when Missouri was declared a slave state to satisfy the desires of other northern states. Also, during this century Native Americans were forced to travel from the East and through Missouri to resettle in the West. The presence of conflict in this state provided fertile soil for missionary work; God brought up several men to minister to the people of Missouri, one of them being Isaac McCoy. The state that is now full of Christians is the same state lone missionaries once walked; the job they had to be a light to the world is the same job Christians have today. Most importantly, the God who worked then is the same God working now. Christians should not take for granted the ways that God spread His good news through the state of Missouri.

The early 1800s found the Native Americans needing to migrate West. Decades had passed since America had obtained freedom from England. Generations of Englishmen, Frenchmen, and other immigrants laid the foundations for the country of America. By the 1800s most of the citizens that were a part of America had been born there, and it was all they knew. It was their home, but it was still the home of the Native Americans too. Sharing of land had never been fair between the Natives and the immigrants, with the immigrants claiming that what was found was theirs, but now the consequences of their theft were being reaped. Not only did relational tension reach its peak with the War of 1812, but the Natives themselves were deteriorating as a result of the theft of immigrants from over a century before. The Natives were forced to be confined to impoverished reserves, which led to the death of many of them by starvation and illness.

A certain man, Isaac McCoy, analyzed the situation of his country and decided it would be best if the Native Americans would move to a land where they would be free to prosper. He

feared that under their current conditions, they might become extinct. In 1823, he determined that to preserve the Native American people, they would need to find a place to settle West of Missouri (Ella 7, McCoy, Wyeth 362). Some biographers of McCoy find it hard to agree with his perspective because they do not understand the context in which he came to this conclusion. They fail to realize his true motive: love (Ella 35).

It is safe to say that McCoy had a call to minister Christ to Native Americans, namely those traveling through Missouri. Christ changed Isaac McCoy's own life in 1800 when he was seventeen years old (McCoy, Wyeth 52-53). Very soon after his conversion, he began to pursue work in ministry. Around the year 1809, he started pastoring a church in Kentucky, Maria Creek Baptist Church (McCoy 55, McCoy, Wyeth 54). Through this experience, he developed into an ideal man for pioneer missionary work. Even early on his Christian walk, God began to prepare him for the work he was to do. His wife also had a growing desire to minister to the Native Americans. As a child, the Ottawans had held members of her family captive for a time. By God's grace, this filled her heart with compassion seeing their need for a savior (Ella 43). As years went by, her desire to share the good news with them grew. It is God who puts holy ambition in our hearts, whether to work them out in our lives or not, and it is beautiful when God puts the same desire in the hearts of a husband and wife to see His kingdom come. This is a way one can see how God ordained McCoy to accomplish the work that he did.

Another sign that this was the path God wanted for McCoy is the confirmation he had from other believers. McCoy's desire to evangelize among the Natives grew until 1817 when he applied for missionary status (Ella 10). He then wrote to the Baptist Missionary Convention, and they consented to support him. Other Calvinistic Baptist groups and individuals supported him as well (Wolever ix, 292-293). It is biblical for one to seek wisdom from the church when looking

for God's direction in life. Not only did the Baptist Missionary Convention agree that a missionary in Missouri was needed, but they gave him the job of overseeing mission stations in the Native American territory and conducting the relocation of the Native Americans (McCoy 39, Wolever 299, BHPS). Congress also supported him to explore the West of the United States searching for suitable land for the Native Americans (McCoy 179). Eventually, this allowed him to be able to move his family to Missouri in 1829. There were many doors that God opened for McCoy to accomplish his dream of helping the Native Americans, both physically and spiritually. Each door required a step of faith, and McCoy failed from time to time to have faith that God would provide. McCoy spent much time as a missionary begging for and borrowing more money than he could repay (Wolever 295-296). Throughout his life, he had to learn that when God didn't open a door for him, God had a reason. Initially, McCoy asked to serve in St. Louis, Missouri. In May 1817, it seemed that he was receiving the okay to do that, but then it was decided that two different missionaries should be sent there, John Mason Peck, a protestant preacher, and James Welch, (Ella 60-61, Rister 35-37, MHR 483-484). Months later, in 1820, McCoy hoped to secure Peck as his co-worker at another station, but it was not the will of God (McCoy 71). Despite his frustration at the moment, it later became evident that God knew where each man would serve best, and He had control over the entire situation. Even amidst McCoy's doubting, God was always faithful to provide.

When the Kickapoo and Delaware tribes were assigned to migrate to Missouri in 1819, it inspired Isaac McCoy to establish a mission field among them (McCoy 12-13). Congress had begun to lay a route for Native Americans to travel through Missouri, though some tribes ended up settling within the state (McCoy 480). McCoy traveled along this route, scouting the land to see where it would be suitable for tribes to settle. As he traveled, he kept a journal of the

situations of the Native Americans in Missouri. He also spent time writing to government officials asking for support in his endeavors to help the Native people of America. He said that at the end of December 1818 he “further made application through Mr. Taylor, member of Congress, for permission to establish missions among the Kickpoos and the Delawares, when those tribes should become settled on the lands which had been assigned to them in the State of Missouri” (McCoy 63). Unfortunately, not all the tribes had the government's support. The Osages were one tribe that was neglected by the government, and as a result, grew extremely poor. To feed their starving families, they tried to find refuge in Missouri, but the settlers already living there forced them away, even shooting some to death (535-538). In 1808, the federal government made the Osages leave Missouri, possibly to end the conflict between them and the settlers there, and had them move to the junction of the Missouri and Kansas rivers (Rister 57, McCoy 358).

McCoy’s travels were not confined to one trip. In his Autobiography, *History of Baptist Indian Missions*, McCoy gives accounts of his most important trips. On September ninth, 1828, he set off toward St. Louis (343). On the twenty-fourth, he arrived at the Shawanoes settlement, which was along the east Missouri line, and made camp there (347). Two months later, he arrived at St. Louis, and he stayed with the tribes that were there. He did not stay long though; his mission was to head West (McCoy 352-353, McCoy, Wyeth 190-191). Over the next few weeks, he traveled three-hundred miles west. During this trip, he was able to minister to Native Americans. He witnessed resurrection life in many of the Natives (McCoy, Wyeth 194). He even rescued and cared for a little Native American girl who was an exile from her tribe (McCoy 390). On December the seventh, he completed his mission and decided to head back to St. Louis, where he arrived on December twenty-fourth (McCoy, Wyeth 198-199). This is just one example

of a trip he took across Missouri. In the year 1829, he decided it would be prudent to move his family to Missouri so that he would not need to be so far from them all the time. His adult son had already secured a home and was prospering in Fayette, Missouri, which is near the Kansas and Missouri border (393). On the first of June, he and his son-in-law, Johnston Lykins, also a missionary, set out with their families to find a home in Missouri. They had settled in Fayette by the end of the year (McCoy 393, McCoy, Wyeth 205-206).

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world”(Jn 6:33, ESV). Being a pioneer is dangerous, and McCoy’s family suffered many trials during their missionary work. Only one of his fourteen children survived McCoy, many of them falling to the hands of deathly illness. One of these tragedies occurred in 1832. On June sixth of that year, his entire family had set off on an out-of-state trip (McCoy, Wyeth 214). During the trip, McCoy found he had business back home, but, so that he might disrupt his travels, his son, Dr. Rice McCoy, offered to return to Missouri for him. While in Missouri, he became so sick that he had to stay there (McCoy, Wyeth 223-224, McCoy 427). Most of the family quickly returned home to join him upon hearing the news, but McCoy was forced to continue doing business out of town. It wasn’t until June 1832 that he was able to return to Missouri. He stopped in St. Louis to see if any news of his son had been sent to him. He did receive a letter, but it was heartbreaking. His son had passed away, and he had not been with him during his last days (McCoy 449-450, McCoy, Wyeth 231, Rister 302).

Isaac McCoy accomplished significant mission work in Missouri, making many sacrifices along the way. There are numerous accounts of McCoy’s success among the Native Americans (Ella 53) McCoy appointed other missionaries to work in Missouri, such as the sisters

Eliza and Sarah Osgood (Wolever 312). He was also an inspiration and mentor to a young missionary man who eventually became his son-in-law.

Johnston Lykin was ordained as a minister on October eighteenth, 1835 (McCoy 492). The relationship with his mentor, Isaac McCoy, became even stronger when he married his daughter, Delilah McCoy (McCoy 302, Wolever 302). These families stuck very close together during their work in Missouri. Lykin settled on land near the Shawanoe tribe and built missionary buildings on his property (McCoy 422). With the help of another man, Mr. Evans, Lykin started a school there. It wasn't long afterward that Isaac McCoy also purchased land adjoining the Shawanoes, and built a house for his family (McCoy 422, McCoy, Wyeth 233).

His influence probably contributed to the establishment of the Missouri Baptist Indian Mission Association in 1845 (Douglas 207). Their mission was "to preach the gospel in destitute places in Missouri", and to inspire churches to preach on the need for evangelism among Native Americans (169, 174). It is interesting that though McCoy's most significant work was done in Missouri, there is little record of what he did in this state (315). However, there is evidence of the work he did from the ripple effect it had on the people that he inspired.

With his dying breath, McCoy spoke these words, "Tell the brethren, never to let the Indian mission decline" (Ella 552). The evangelistic work that McCoy did in Missouri should inspire others to look for the lostness in their own country and see where God might use them. God can use even a situation brought about by sin to work out His plans. God knew that Natives were already here when pilgrims, like McCoy's ancestors, came to America. He knew the pain that would be caused because of the unfairness pilgrims imposed upon the Natives when taking their land. Members of Missouri should remember the ways that God has worked to bring the gospel to this place, and they should praise Him for it.

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