PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-41

Coquillard's Potawatomi emigrating party of 1840: the records place its gathering and departure at South Bend, not Potato Creek

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SUMMARY

Chapman's *History of St. Joseph County, Indiana* (1880) says that Alexis Coquillard of South Bend, "appointed in 1840 to carry through a Pottawatomie emigration, ... established a rendezvous at Potato creek." Later accounts of Potato Creek repeat it. The records of 1840 place the party elsewhere. Gen. Hugh Brady, who directed that year's emigration, wrote from "South Bend, Indiana" on 10 June and 10 August 1840. In the August letter he says that "Mr. Coquillard, who leaves here in a few days in charge of an emigrating party," would call on the commissioner. The *South Bend Free Press*, quoted in the *Daily National Intelligencer* of 8 September 1840, reported that the Potawatomi "were to leave that place on the 17th inst., under the charge of Mr. A. Coquillard," and that "something over 500" had consented to go. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs reported that 536 set out for the Osage River sub-agency, of whom 526 were delivered there on 6 October. None of these records names Potato Creek.

THE RECORD

1. **Charles C. Chapman & Co., *History of St. Joseph County, Indiana* (Chicago, 1880), p. 465**

   > *"Having been appointed in 1840 to carry through a Pottawatomie emigration, he established a rendezvous at Potato creek."*

   Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/historyofstjosep00chap)

2. **Gen. H. Brady, letter dated "South Bend, Indiana, August 10, 1840," in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* (1840)**

> *"Mr. Coquillard, who leaves here in a few days in charge of an emigrating party, will visit you."*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/1826-report-from-the-indian-office)

3. ***Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* (1840), the Potawatomi emigration**

> *"Of the latter, 536 set out for the Osage river sub-agency, of whom 8 deserted and 2 died; and there arrived at the place of their destination, and were delivered to the sub-agent, on the 6th October last, 526."*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/1826-report-from-the-indian-office)

4. ***Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington), 8 September 1840, p. 3**

> *"The South Bend (Ind.) Free Press states that the Pottawattamie Indians were to leave that place on the 17th inst., under the charge of Mr. A. COQUILLARD, for their new homes west of the Mississippi. The number that had consented to go was something over 500."*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn83026172/1840-09-08/ed-1/?sp=3)

WHAT IT CHANGES

Chapman's "rendezvous at Potato creek" has stood in the local record unchallenged since 1880. The contemporary letters and press of 1840 put the party's gathering and departure at South Bend and never mention the creek, so Chapman's statement rests on Chapman alone.

LIMITS

The 1840 records do not describe every camp the party used, and an absence of the creek from them does not prove that no camp stood there. The 536 and 526 of the commissioner's report are given for the emigrants who set out for the Osage River sub-agency. That they were Coquillard's party is a reading of the dates and numbers, which agree with the *Free Press*'s "something over 500." Brady's June letter is cited for its place of writing.

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

The Commissioner of Indian Affairs' reports for 1840 and 1841; Chronicling America, 1838–1842; Chapman (1880); Howard (1907); Edmunds, *The Potawatomis* (1978); Clifton, *The Prairie People* (1977); the Internet Archive's full text for Coquillard with Potato Creek.

Our standard for calling a finding new is set out in How we research (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/), and how we weigh each kind of record in Scrollsigns (projectscroll.com/scrollsigns/).

"New" means new to print as far as we can tell. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will credit it here and raise the note's version.

WORKS CITED

Earlier work, catalogues and databases named in this note, besides the records quoted above.

1. Michael Urbanski, "Before the lake at Potato Creek," *Project Scroll* (2026). https://projectscroll.com/news/before-the-lake-at-potato-creek/

2. R. David Edmunds, *The Potawatomis: Keepers of the Fire* (Norman, 1978). https://archive.org/details/potawatomiskeepe00edmu

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THE FULL STORY

The finding is set out in context, with the rest of its sources, in Before the lake: the farms of Potato Creek (projectscroll.com/news/before-the-lake-at-potato-creek/). In the discoveries register:

- `pc-coquillard-1840` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#pc-coquillard-1840)

HOW TO CITE THIS NOTE

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