

= Battle of Apple River Fort =

The Battle of Apple River Fort , occurred on the late afternoon of June 24 , 1832 at the Apple River Fort , in present @-@ day Elizabeth , Illinois , when Black Hawk and 200 of his " British Band " of Sauk and Fox were surprised by a group of four messengers en route from Galena , Illinois . One of the couriers was wounded in the thigh as the riders quickly made for the protection of the nearby stockade . Fred ed Dixon rode ahead to warn some 70 settlers of the approaching Sauk and Fox , thus saving their lives. The small company of militia at the fort , about 30 men and boys led by Captain Clack Stone , fought off Black Hawk 's 150 @-@ man war party in an action that lasted about an hour . The withering pace of the gunfire eventually convinced Black Hawk that the fort was too heavily defended to lead a direct attack , and he and his band of warriors retreated .

After the battle , certain individuals were honored above the others for their bravery in assisting the numerically inferior force . Among them was Elizabeth Armstrong . She rallied the settlement 's 40 or so women and children , who had taken shelter inside the fort . The women and children were divided into two groups : one to mold musket balls and another to roll pre @-@ measured gun powder into cartridges . Some of the married women reload weapons so that the militia could keep up with the pace of the battle . Fr Though the fort was torn down around 1847 , a replica was built in its place and still stands in Elizabeth . George Herclerode was the only fatality inside the fort .

= = Background = =

As a consequence of an 1804 treaty between the Governor of Indiana Territory and a group of Sauk and Fox leaders regarding land settlement , the Sauk and Fox tribes vacated their lands in Illinois and moved west of the Mississippi in 1828 . However , Sauk Chief Black Hawk and others disputed the treaty , claiming that the full tribal councils had not been consulted , nor did those representing the tribes have authorization to cede lands . Angered by the loss of his birthplace , between 1830 ? 31 Black Hawk led a number of incursions across the Mississippi River , but was persuaded to return west each time without bloodshed . In April 1832 , encouraged by promises of alliance with other tribes and the British , he again moved his so @-@ called " British Band " of around 1000 warriors and non @-@ combatants into Illinois . Finding no allies , he attempted to return to Iowa , but the undisciplined Illinois militia 's actions led to the Battle of Stillman 's Run . A number of other engagements followed , and the militias of Michigan Territory and Illinois were mobilized to hunt down Black Hawk 's Band . The conflict became known as the Black Hawk War .

The period between Stillman 's Run and the Battle of Apple River Fort was filled with war @-@ related activity and events . A series of attacks at Buffalo Grove , the Plum River settlement , Fort Blue Mounds and the war 's most famous incident , the Indian Creek massacre , all took place between mid @-@ May and late June 1832 . The week preceding the Battle of Apple River Fort was an important turning point for the militia : between June 16 ? 18 two key battles , one at Waddams Grove and the other at Horseshoe Bend , played a key role in changing public perception about the militia after its defeat at Stillman 's Run .

= = Prelude = =

Following the militia 's disastrous defeat at Stillman 's Run on May 14 , settlers in the lead @-@ mining region around Galena panicked ; many left the area altogether . The exaggerated claim that 2 @,@ 000 " bloodthirsty warriors were sweeping all Northern Illinois with the bosom of destruction " sent terror through the region . At the Apple River Settlement , the situation prompted residents to form a 46 @-@ man militia tentatively under Captain Vance L. Davidson . By late May Davidson was at the Plum River settlement (present @-@ day Savanna , Illinois) and Captain Clack Stone had taken over command ; under his lead the Apple River Fort was completed by May 22 , 1832 . In the days immediately preceding June 18 , 1832 , Apple River Fort 's horses were raided and stolen were stolen during the night . This incident was one of several around that time that led Illinois militia officer James W. Stephenson to clash with British Band warriors at " Stephenson 's Fight " (later

erroneously named Waddams Grove on June 18 .

On June 24 , 1832 , a supply wagon from Galena arrived at Apple River Fort around noon . Unknown to the men traveling with the wagon , Black Hawk and his British Band , also en route to the fort , had fallen in line with them . Black Hawk 's forces were able to elude detection until the time they opened fire . As the wagon team unhitched , four men traveling on the trail from Galena passed by ; the women inside the fort were eager to hear their news of the conflict with Black Hawk .

There were 28 @-@ 30 armed militia inside Apple River Fort at the time of the attack . Another 40 women , children and other settlers were resident in the Apple River Settlement . Captain Stone was in command of the garrison stationed at the fort , some of whom were not present for the battle .

= = Battle = =

The group of men , George Harkleroad , Fred Dixon , Edmund Welch , and J. Kirkpatrick were formed as a military message escort known as an " express " . They were travelling from Galena to Dixon , stopped briefly at the fort and then continued on their way . The group was about 900 feet (274 m) east of the fort when the only man with a loaded gun , Welch , was ambushed by Black Hawk 's warriors . He was shot in the hip and fell from his horse . His companions aimed their unloaded weapons at the band , putting themselves between the wounded man and his attackers . The group recovered Welch and moved away from their assailants toward the fort . Fred Dixon , covered the retreat of his fellow express men as they raced for the fort . Three of the expressmen attained the safety of the fort , while Dixon fled on horse Apple River and the nearby farm of John McDonald , only to find it overrun by Native Americans as well . Dixon then abandoned his horse and walked to Galena , where he reported the Apple River Fort to be under attack .

The settlers took shelter inside the fort while the men and boys took up their positions at the portholes inside the fort . A vicious firefight erupted , involving around 150 of Black Hawk 's British Band . The battle raged for about an hour with heavy gunfire from both sides . At the battle 's onset many of the settlement 's women had been huddled in the cabins , but one woman , Elizabeth Armstrong , rallied the others to provide support to the soldiers . She assumed command of the women , assigning them to such tasks as molding musketballs and reloading the weapons while the soldiers tried to keep up their stream of gunfire .

The ferocity of the fight convinced Black Hawk that Apple River Fort was impossible to defeat the hold @-@ outs and he abandoned the fight . His band raided cabins near the fort for much @-@ needed horses , flour , and clothing . He then retreated . Casualties were few , given the intensity of the battle . Harkleroad was shot in the neck early in the battle and died ; it has been documented that he was killed while peering over the stockade wall 's pickets . Besides Welch , the only other garrison casualty was Josiah Nutting , who suffered a non @-@ lethal wound to the side of his head . The number of Sauk casualties is unknown .

= = Aftermath = =

The defenders at Apple River Fort awaited the next move by Black Hawk , holding their positions through the night , but dawn came without incident . On the day following the battle , June 25 , a relief party consisting of two companies of mounted rangers arrived at the fort from Galena . The next day Black Hawk 's band would encounter Major John Dement and his detachment at the Second Battle of Kellogg 's Grove . The only militia member killed in the fighting , Harkleroad , was buried near the fort ; there is no trace of his grave .

Elizabeth Armstrong was praised by some as a heroine for her actions during the battle , displaying the kind of courage under fire the militia had so badly lacked during the first months of the Black Hawk War . Her actions , in part , helped give Black Hawk the impression the Apple River Fort was heavily defended and a frontal attack would be inane . There has been disagreement regarding the name of the woman who assumed command at Apple River Fort ; a 1900 collection from the Wisconsin Historical Society misidentified her as " Mrs. Graham . " The same source stated that

Armstrong was " cursing & swearing like a pirate " throughout the battle ; so angry that even Black Hawk 's band purported to hear her . The same collection described such action as " profane " and " a great drawback upon her credit . "

The fort was demolished around 1847 and its timbers used to construct a barn . Today , the fort and its three buildings have been reconstructed by the Apple River Fort Historic Foundation . The Apple River Fort Site is listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places for its military and archaeological significance .

On January 1 , 2001 , the state of Illinois took over operation of the reconstructed Apple River Fort and its interpretive center . The state now operates the area as the Apple River Fort State Historic Site . Illinois ' purchase was funded , in part , through a US \$ 160 @, @ 000 grant from the state of Illinois .