

1786: MACKINAC COMPANY IN THE ILLINOIS

[Letter from John Edgar to Gen. George Rogers Clark, dated Oct. 23, 1786. MS. in Wisconsin Historical Library, Draper MSS., 53J55.]

SIR—I Rec^d. yours by Express of the Eighteenth Instant and Observe the Contents of your Letter and am very happy to find that you put Confidence in me. There is nothing that I would not do to Serve General Clark, & my Country.

And you may Depend on me that I will Execute your Order or any other Orders, that you may think proper to enfaire on me, to the last tittle that is in my power. the inhabitants of these Villages is very much disaffected to the United States, owing much to the Michilamackinac Company, which holds a large Trading House at Cahokia for the suply of the Savages.⁵³

⁵³ The origin of the Mackinac Company is obscure. In 1779 the majority of the merchants trading at Mackinac formed themselves into a "General Store" to protect their goods and traders from the ravages of the Indians who had gone over to the Americans; but this association only lasted a year (until July 31, 1780)—see *Mich. Pion. and Hist. Colls.*, x, pp. 305, 367, 499, 600, and *Canadian Archives*, 1888, p. 61. Before the treaty of Paris had been formally signed, Mackinac merchants had established themselves at Cahokia, with a view to the Missouri River trade, and to dealings with the merchants of Spanish Louisiana; see narrative of J. B. Perrault in H. R. Schoolcraft, *Indian Tribes* (Philadelphia, 1853), iii, pp. 353-356. The company seems to have been formed about 1784, contemporaneously with the North West Company, and appears also to have been composed of much the same mercantile firms; although some members of the Mackinac Company, such as James Aird, Charles Patterson, and Robert Dickson were not members of the North West. The Mackinac Company operated almost entirely in American territory, from Cahokia on the south to the sources of the Mississippi on the north; and by means of St. Peters River did a considerable business in Spanish Louisiana, reaching out toward the farther Sioux branches—Yankton and Teton. They operated through all of Wisconsin, northern Illinois, Iowa, and most of Minnesota. After the Americans took possession of Mackinac, the company continued to operate, having rights under the clause of Jay's treaty protecting the British fur-trade. The British post was on the island of St. Joseph's, but most of the merchants still maintained some kind of establishment on Mackinac Island. After the Louisiana pur-