

The Kanza Reserve 150 Years Ago

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(This is the tenth in a series of monthly articles written by Ron Parks about the Kanza Indians and Council Grove 150 years ago.)

As Though He Were a Full-blooded White Man

“They are original and untamed Indians,” wrote naturalist Lewis H. Morgan, describing his May 1859 encounter with a small group of Kansas near the small village of Topeka. “They are the original inhabitants of the territory so far as we know, and have given to the rivers and streams their names. Hence we must look to their language for the geographical names of the territory.”

Morgan was especially fascinated by the interpreter, a mixed-blood Kanza named Joseph James, sometimes called “Jo-Jim.” “He is half French and half Kaw, and bright and intelligent...He is married to a Pottawatamie woman, and lives in a good log house on the banks of the beautiful Kansas river...I took dinner with them and it was very good.”

James, whose Kanza name was Gihegazinga (Little Chief), arranged for Lewis to interview a full-blooded Kanza chief and his family members. Morgan was one of the first to apply scientific methods to the study of Indian culture, and his observations about the Kansas and other tribes are distilled in his book, *The Indian Journals, 1859-62*.

When Morgan sat down with Jo-Jim and the chief, “they had just commenced upon a bottle of whiskey holding near a quart. As we talked they drank....It opened their hearts and tongues and I got with readiness and ease what at another time it would be hard to draw out of a Kaw Indian. They are a wild and untamed race.”

One of the things Morgan learned was that the Kansas males often changed their names. When a young man first goes out on a war party his childhood name is taken away and a new one is bestowed on him. “Jo-Jim says his name has not yet been changed...He however has no tribe as his father was a Frenchman.”

In fact, according to the census of 1843, Joseph James was a member of the Kanza tribe, listed as the head of a lodge inhabited by two adult males, one adult female, and four children.¹ However, since the Treaty of 1825, the socio-political order of the Kansas had fragmented, and one of the deepest schisms was between the full-blooded and mixed-blooded factions, this lasting well into the 20th Century.

Joseph James became a mediator between the whites and Kansas. But with one foot in the white world and the other in the Indian's, James' position proved both advantageous and precarious.

Jo-Jim's residence on the Kansas River was the result of the terms of the Treaty of 1825 setting aside for each of the 23 Kanza mixed-bloods a section of land on the north bank of the Kansas River between

present Topeka and Lawrence. The Kansas had been removed to the Council Grove reservation in 1848, but as owner of one of these 23 contiguous sections, James maintained a part-time residence in the Kaw valley while at the same time living with the tribe on their 20-mile-square reservation in the Neosho valley. He sold his Kaw valley section in the 1860s.

The mixed-blood's talent for functioning in the white man's world was recognized by the first governor the Kansas Territory, Andrew Reeder, who had, shortly after coming to Kansas Territory in 1854, attempted to purchase James's section of Kaw valley land.

"Joseph James...is among the most intelligent of his tribe, Reeder wrote. "He follows, on a moderate scale, farming and raising stock, buying and selling, when necessary, speaks English, Indian and I think some French, and is quite as keen and shrewd in his bargains as though he were a full-blooded white man, instead of a half-breed."²

At the time Morgan interviewed James, he had served nearly a year as the official U.S. interpreter for the Kansas, having been hired by Kanza agent John Montgomery on June 16, 1858, at an annual salary of \$400.00.

In this capacity, James translated at formal councils between the chiefs and the agent. But more importantly, the presence of the interpreter in close proximity to the agent enabled ordinary Kanza people to express a broad range of needs to their agent on a daily basis, among them requests for medical treatment, complaints about white encroachment and timber poaching, reports of thefts, appeals for food and clothing, information about whiskey peddlers and so on.

To facilitate this communication, in 1861 the government built a stone house for the interpreter and his family immediately east of the agent's house and office. It is unclear for how long—or even if—James occupied this structure during his thirteen years as Kanza interpreter. However, the Kaw Nation has preserved the limestone walls of the interpreter's house, and it can be seen today at the Allegawaho Memorial Heritage Park 3 1/2 miles southeast of Council Grove.

The services provided by Joseph James went far beyond language translation. A critical event each year, usually in October, was the agent's distribution of the annual payments, called "annuities," to the heads of each Kanza household. Special commissioner Hugh Walsh recorded his observations of the October 1860 Kanza annuity payment:

"The half breeds were not there and Col. Dickey [Kanza agent] had to remain idle until Joseph James the interpreter who is one of the half breeds arrived and he [James] then proceeded to enroll the tribe in which I was of some assistance—he proceeded to take the names of each man, woman, and child, taking one band at a time and each family separate, with the names of each individual male and female distinguishing men from women, boys from girls..."

The third agent for whom James worked, Hiram Farnsworth, assessed the interpreter's limitations while preparing for a treaty-making trip with Kanza chiefs to Washington D.C. in November 1863:

“Joseph James, the U.S. interpreter...understands the Kaw language very well, but his knowledge of English is very limited and he has not comprehensive ideas enough, to interpret in making a treaty. Yet I would like him there, because he has Indian blood in him and would understand sufficiently to assure the Indians that everything is right.”

James did accompany the Kanza delegation to Washington, but the actual translation duties were assigned to Thomas Huffaker, in whom Farnsworth had great confidence. Farnsworth asserted that he kept the interpreter on “because of his misfortunes,” James having lost one arm and several fingers from the other hand.

In May 1865, the interpreter asked Farnsworth to write to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs on his behalf, claiming unpaid back salary dating to 1861: “Joseph James desires me to say to you that he is a poor man with but one arm; that his salary is not adequate to his support, and that he has to feed hungry Indians, and cannot help it; therefore, he needs every dollar which is his just due.”

In 1867, James accompanied another delegation of Kanza chiefs to Washington to negotiate a new treaty. But as before, Huffaker acted as interpreter. A treaty document was formulated and signed by the three Kanza chiefs and government officials stipulating the removal of the Kanzas to Indian Territory (Oklahoma), but it was never ratified. Significantly, Article Nine set aside one quarter section of reservation land for each of four Kanzas: the three chiefs and Joseph James.

From this point on Joseph James’ life appears to have taken a downward turn. The October 1868 census lists him as the sole occupant of a lodge. On April 28, 1870, newly-appointed Kanza agent Mahlon Stubbs reported that James had been dismissed as interpreter. However, on March 15, 1871, he apparently had resumed his official duties because he was listed as interpreter on a letter from Kanza chiefs to the Office of Indian Affairs.

But then on August 10, 1871, Stubbs wrote Superintendent Enoch Hoag: “I recommend that Joseph James be removed from acting as U.S. interpreter the 15th of this month; cause Drunkenness and entire neglect of duty.” At the same time, Stubbs recommended that his son, Addison, be appointed to James’s position.

Although only sixteen at the time of his appointment, Addison Stubbs became an effective and trusted interpreter, a performance no doubt augmented by his having grown up with Kanza children. In a May 18, 1873 report, special agent J. W. Byers implied a less-than-flattering assessment of Joseph James: “The chief and council informed me that he [Addison Stubbs] was the only interpreter they have had for many years that would always talk to them and the white man the same talk...”

In June 1873, Joseph James and the approximately 600 remaining Kanzas journeyed to their new reservation in Indian Territory. Fourteen years later only 193 Kanzas remained, seven of whom were over sixty. At 69, the eldest was former head chief Allegawaho. Next oldest, living with his ten-year-old son, Frank, was 68-year-old Joseph James.³

Unless otherwise noted in the text, the primary sources are the *Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received from Kansas Agency, 1855-1873*.

1. Louise Barry, "The Kansa Indians and the Census of 1843," Kansas Historical Quarterly 56 (Winter 1973): p. 483.
2. *Herald of Freedom* (Lawrence), May 5, 1855.
3. Bradford Koplowitz, *the Kaw Indian Census and Allotments*, p. 6.