

The Kanza Reserve 150 Years Ago

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This is the 14th in a series of monthly articles by Ron Parks about the Kanza Indians and Council Grove 150 years ago.

They Came Every Summer

In September of 1859 Topeka merchants did a brisk business in a lucrative market niche—sales to Kanza Indians. The business of one merchant in particular, Harvey G. Young, thrived that September by exchanging goods for credit with Kanza customers. With September his best month, altogether Kanza trade, starting June 8 and culminating on October 5, had produced a credit balance for Young of \$1,248.90.

Young's twenty-five-page ledger book lists the names of 94 Kanza customers, the dates of their purchases, and the names, amounts and prices of trade items. The document reveals that by 1859 the Kanzas were highly dependent on Euro-American goods. Clearly, by one hundred fifty years ago, the tribe had become integrated into the American cash economy.

One of Young's steady customers was chief Kahegawatiangah, known as "Fool Chief" by white people. Fool Chief had just recently succeeded Pegahoshee as chief of the Kanza village located near present Dunlap. James McClure, who lived near a Kanza camp in the late 1850s, described Fool Chief as "the finest-looking Indian I have ever seen. He was quite young, handsome, and well-proportioned" possessing "a dignified and refined appearance."

Fool Chief patronized Young's Topeka business five times in September, 1859, purchasing a total of 200 pounds of flour at \$10.00, 16 pounds of sugar at \$2.00, 12 pounds of coffee at \$2.00, seven pairs of shoes for \$1.25, 10 yards of calico at \$1.67, one blanket for \$4.00, one shirt for \$2.00, and four plugs tobacco at \$1.00.

Altogether, starting on June 8 and ending on October 2, Fool Chief purchased items from Young on ten separate occasions, running up a bill totaling \$62.92. He bought the same items listed above, except on July 8 he also acquired 14 1/3 pounds pork, eight pounds dried apples, and 20 pounds of salt, all for \$1.00 each.

Fool Chief was responsible for feeding and clothing eight people inhabiting his lodge. His wife, Hehojame, was described by McClure as a beautiful Indian woman who "in her manner and dress displayed her superiority over the other squaws." Also living in the lodge were two men, one woman, two girls and one boy.

Fool Chief and his band of Kansas would have known the Topeka area well. From 1830 to 1846, his father, Fool Chief the Elder, had presided over a large Kanza village located at present-day North Topeka, so the young Fool Chief would have grown up there.

Although in 1847 the tribe relocated 65 miles away to the Council Grove reservation, in subsequent years the Kansas frequently returned to the Topeka area for prolonged visits. Bear in mind that several generations of Kanza people had lived and hunted in the Kansas River valley, so in a sense, these were trips back home. Additionally, their immediate ancestors were buried here, a fact of profound significance to Kanza spiritual sensibilities.

These visits were facilitated by the presence a few mixed-blood Kansas—Bellemards, Pappans, and others—who continued to reside on their property located along the north bank of the Kansas River between Topeka and Lecompton. This land had been assigned to the mixed-bloods by the Treaty of 1825.

According to an early resident of north Topeka, “...The Indian relatives...came every summer from their own reservation, at Council Grove, and encamped in the dooryards and around the premises” of these mixed-bloods.

An additional inducement for the Kansas’ presence in and around Topeka was that by September 1859 life for the Indians on the Council Grove reservation had become much more difficult since their land had been overrun by white squatters.

This explains why when early-day ethnographer, Lewis Henry Morgan, came to the Topeka in May of 1859, he was able to observe several Kansas and to interview, with the assistance of the mixed-blood interpreter, Joseph James, an unnamed full-blood Kaw chief, most likely Fool Chief.

Morgan was impressed with most of the Kansas he observed: “They are said to be a tall, well formed, wild and fearless race. Those I saw were characteristic Indians. One was a tall, powerful man over six feet with a large mouth, wide set eyes, high nose, knotty forehead, and very dark skin.”

“The other who was a chief, had small eyes, a dark skin, but he was thin and not marked by a high degree of intelligence. I liked him, however, better and better the more I saw him. His wife was very dark and wild in her look. Her eye glittered but she would not look me in the face beyond a glance.”

“The son of the tall one was a splendid specimen of the wild Indian. He was tall already at 16, with regular features, a bright keen look, and a very dark skin. His hair was shaved pretty close except the scalp lock which was long and braided.”

The journey to and from Topeka and Council Grove would have been over what white people in that area knew as the Kaw Trail. This was a fairly straight route via Mission Creek in the northeast and the upper Rock Creek watershed in the southwest. It would have passed in the vicinity of present-day Dover, Keene, and Eskridge.

The Kaw Trail was shorter in distance than the more traveled route from Topeka to Council Grove, which roughly followed the course of the Kansas Turnpike before joining the Santa Fe Trail in the Wilmington area.

But for travel by animal-drawn wagons favored by white people, the Kaw Trail was less than desirable. In a letter from Council Grove signed by "HONAS" to the *Topeka Tribune*, published on November 19, 1859, dissatisfaction with the Kaw route is evident:

"I should like to say a word about the road from Topeka to Council Grove via Mission Creek...Suffice it to say, that we have been eight days on this new route, while we could have got here by way of Brownville and Wilmington in four."

"In short, there was no road or track to be seen except the Kaw Trail, which we followed the whole way—the wheels of the wagons cutting into the prairie sod from six to twelve inches, uphill and down. Finally, if you wish to do humanity and ox-flesh a kindness, advise everybody to come here by way of Wilmington."

What took "HONAS" eight days by ox-drawn wagon was considered an ordinary day's journey by Kanza men traveling on foot. A settler living a few miles west of Dover, William K. Beach, got an eyeful of Kanza pedestrian speed and endurance in May, 1863.

One day about 70 young Kanza men accompanied by their recruiting officer, marched by Beach's farm, en route on the Kaw Trail from Council Grove to Topeka, where they were mustered into Company L, Ninth Kansas Cavalry, although initially mounts were not available to them.

The next day about noon, Beach "looked over toward the road and saw a big Kaw Indian streaking it back toward Council Grove. He was moving right along at a good gait and every bit of clothing he wore was a new army hat....He had a bundle strapped to his shoulders, but the hat was the only clothes he was wearing. Later I saw other Indians passing in the same manner."

Later the recruiting officer told Beach that every one of his men had "...hit the back trail to Council Grove to show their Indian friends their new clothes. They took their clothes off and tied them in bundles while traveling, so they would be clean and unsoiled when shown to other members of the tribe...they all returned to service in the regiment."

SOURCES: *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs from the Kansas Agency, 1862-64*; "Taking the Census in 1855," by James R. McClure, *Kansas Historical Collections*, Volume 8, pp. 247-249; "The Kansas Indians in Shawnee County After 1855," by Fannie E. Cole, *Kansas Historical Collections*, Volume 8, p. 481; *The Indian Journals, 1859-62*, by Lewis Henry Morgan, pp. 33-37; "They Walked Then," *Topeka Journal*, October 23, 1916.