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The Kanza: People of the South Wind

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GRANDMOTHER MCCAULEY
Courtesy Kansa Museum Kaw Nation

Greenwood County, established in 1855, was named in honor of Alfred B. Greenwood, a U. S. Congressman from Arkansas who was named Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1859. During his short tenure – he resigned in 1861 when Arkansas seceded from the Union - he negotiated the Greenwood Treaty, the treaty that concentrated the Kanza tribe onto a diminished reserve and allotted plots to individual tribal members for the purpose of farming. For centuries before, the Kanza had hunted in much of the new state that had adopted the tribe's name. But by the time Kansas entered the Union in 1861, settlers had flooded the state with little regard for traditional Kanza lands. The Kanza maintained a presence in the Butler and Greenwood County areas even after they were relegated to a diminished reserve near Council Grove. In 1861, William Griffith reported to Governor Charles Robinson that a "company of men living on the Walnut and other places, stole a lot of Ponies from the Kaw Indians."

The Kanza: People of the South Wind

The Kanza descended from a much older Mississippi Valley Siouan culture. Along with their close cultural relatives the Quapaw, Omaha, Ponca, and Osage, the Kanza are members of the Dhegiha (pronounced: they-GEE-hah) branch of Siouan peoples. Following the rivers, these tribes migrated toward the Great Plains sometime between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries.

By the nineteenth century, the tribes had parted ways and the Kanza or "people of the south wind" were living on the vast prairie lands of the Great Plains, including most of what is now Kansas. While on the plains, the Kanza tribe gradually developed its own language, culture, and traditions. A uniquely Kanza way of life had arisen, and the tribe subsequently enjoyed a long period of independence and cultural maturity.

Unfortunately, it was during this time of traditional self-actualization that the threat of Euro-American invasion first became a reality. Smallpox, a disease introduced to the continent via European invaders, arrived in 1755. The affliction killed the Kanza without mercy for over a century. In the first ten years after exposure to smallpox, for example, one of every two Kanza males had died.

But disease was not the only problem facing the tribe. American bureaucracy and greed had also reached the plains. Unbeknownst to the Kanza and many other tribes, all of their lands had been sold to one foreign nation by another in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Euro-Americans pushed deeper into the interior to take advantage



KANZA MEN 1870
*David Lindley, Thomas Francis, Chief
Rovlinch, and Cashon*
Courtesy Kansa Museum Kaw Nation

of the wide-open spaces and seemingly endless resources. Many tribes were driven westward during this period of American expansion. Some of these tribes were forced onto Kanza lands, despite drastic cultural differences and the fact that some were openly hostile to the Kanza.

In addition, American settlers took residence throughout the Kanza hunting territories, demanding more and more land to raise crops and make cities. The U.S. government obliged as often as it could and busied itself renegotiating treaties, selling off lots, and avoiding commitments. Each new treaty drastically reduced the size of the Kanza homeland,

once estimated at approximately twenty million acres. Finally, after nearly seventy years of bureaucratic warfare, the United States government forced the tribe to cede all lands in Kansas. The tribe was moved en masse to a roughly 100,000-acre site in Indian Territory, which the Kanza purchased from the Osage with funds from the sale of their former Kansas holdings.

It is plain to see that in recent history the Kanza tribe suffered great tragedies and insults to its traditional way of life. While on their way to a new home in Oklahoma, the Kanza lost more than 300 people, 37.5 percent of the tribal population, including many elders and children, to typhoid. Among those who survived, depression was rampant and the children that remained were sent to a Pawnee boarding school.

During this period the tribe shifted from a semi-nomadic hunting lifestyle to one of subsistence agriculture. Prior to European contact, the Kaws were very mobile, with bands moving in several different directions within the tribe's area

of influence, making and breaking camps, following herds, and defending its borders. They were taught from childhood the importance of adaptability. In a rapidly shrinking world, and with diminished prospects for following herds and hunting for food, the Kanza were forced to adapt to an agricultural lifestyle, a strange way of living for people who had always respected the land but did not own it. In 1886, the tribe was nearing extinction with only 201 Kanza People recorded by the U. S. Government.

In the decades that followed, the Kanza had to fight to sustain not only their culture but their existence as a tribe. They established the village of Washunga where they founded their own school that allowed their children to return home from a Pawnee boarding school. With the signing of allotment papers, they lost the right to be Indians through a hidden government agenda to abolish Indian tribes in Oklahoma. In the 1920s, Lucy Eads, the first female Chief of the Kaws and adopted daughter of Chief Washunga, won back tribal

rights lost in the allotment. In the 1960s and 1970s the tribal people fought the federal government again over a flood-control program that converted Kansa land to Kaw Lake. After a successful court battle over the watersheds, the Kaw established the working constitution in the 1980s. A new constitution was adopted in 2012.

The Kanza People began working to establish a relationship in Kansas in the 1990s. In 2000 they purchased lands that were once part of their last reservations in Kansas. Since then they have collaborated with the State of Kansas to reestablish a Kanza presence back in their original homelands. We hope in the future that the Kanza People of the Kaw Nation and the people of the State of Kansas will be as one in a homeland that is so dear to the memory of our ancestors.

Crystal Douglas is the Kanza Museum Director and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Kaw Nation. She has earned degrees in Anthropology and Human Remains Archeology and was recently inducted as an honorary member of the Kaw Tribe.