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Special Report

Medicine Lodge Peace Treaty Site, Medicine Lodge, Kansas

Theme XV: Westward Expansion

Subtheme: Military and Indian Affairs

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Medicine Lodge Peace Treaty Site, Medicine Lodge, Kansas

Location: Immediately south and east of Medicine Lodge, Barber County, Kansas. Generally the property is located in Sections 13 and 14 of T 32 S, R 12 W, and Sections 17 and 18 of T 32 S, R 11 W, and includes the treaty signing site near the confluence of Medicine Lodge and Elm Creeks and the campground of most of the Indian participants on the north and south sides of Medicine Lodge Creek. Beginning at the northeast corner of the property at 98° 32' 16" Longitude and 37° 18' 26" Latitude, the boundary line runs due west to 98° 35' 36" and 37° 17' 53", then in a southeasterly direction to 98° 35' 12" and 37° 17' 10", then due east to 98° 32' 16" and 37° 17' 10", and then due north to the point of beginning.

Ownership: Various private and public. Contact Mr. John W. McGregor, Medicine Lodge, Kansas

Statement of Significance

In October of 1867, United States Commissioners met with about 5,000 Kiowa, Commanche, Plains Apache, Arapaho and Southern Cheyenne Indians near the confluence of Medicine Lodge and Elm Creeks in southern Kansas. From the conference emerged the Medicine Lodge Peace Treaty, a milestone in the development of United States Indian policy, since it was the first to contain provisions aimed at civilizing the Plains Indian and absorbing him into American society rather than merely removing and isolating him from areas of white settlement. Relatively undisturbed in more than a century, the treaty conference site lies south of the town of Medicine Lodge in Barber County, where at five-year intervals citizens present an elaborate Peace Treaty Pageant.

History

During the Civil War, the Plains Indians had things pretty much as they wanted them. They were relatively free to raid and plunder and to keep channels of travel and communication closed; the small garrisons left in the West were unequal to the task of containment and control. Following the end of the war, the Nation again looked westward, and the more southerly tribes soon became conscious of the presence of military authority and the pressures of white advance. At once symbolic and representative of the renewed interest in settlement were the new rail lines that began to push across the Central Plains to bisect traditional hunting grounds of the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho. The construction of the Kansas Pacific Railroad meant that the whites would come to claim the land as their own, and the Central Plains tribes contemplated this and other encroachments with intensified hate and hostility.

Reports of depredations by the Cheyenne and Kiowa Indians spurred Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock to action in the spring of 1867. As commander of the Department of the Missouri, Hancock led a punitive expedition into Kansas but succeeded only in burning the village of a departed band of Cheyennes of dubious hostility The chief results of the incendiary act were to inflame the Cheyennes and their allies and generate heat among eastern

humanitarians and Indian Bureau officials. Using the Hancock expedition as an example of incitive military policy, peace advocates called for a new approach to the problem and were so successful in their campaign that discussions with the Plains tribes became a political necessity.

By the summer of 1867, officials concerned with the Indian problem had developed the outline of a policy that promised to restore peace to the plains immediately and eventually to "civilize" all the aborigines of the West. The proposal initially called for the establishment of two large reservations, one north of Nebraska and one south of Kansas. Removed from areas cut by main thoroughfares and penetrated by settlements, the Plains tribes might live in peace, protected against exploitation and commended to virtue through careful supervision. Thus isolated, concentrated and inculcated, they could be taught to earn a living with the plow, to imitate their guardians, and, ultimately, to achieve the privileges and obligations of U. S. citizenship.

Lt. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, commander of the Division of the Missouri, gave his support to the plan, because it coincided with military objectives. Sherman wanted the area between the South Platte and the Arkansas cleared of Indians, and he was not

particular about the method of removal. "It makes little difference," he said, "whether they be coaxed out by Indian commissioners or killed." Commissioner of Indian Affairs Nathaniel G. Taylor transmitted the proposal in a letter to Congress on July 13, and two days later Sen. John B. Henderson of Missouri, chairman of the Committee on Indian Affairs, introduced a bill creating a Peace Commission to "remove the causes of war; secure the frontier settlements and railroad construction; and establish a system for civilizing the tribes." The bill passed both houses on July 20 and became law five days later.

Members of the Peace Commission named in the act were Senator Henderson; Commissioner Taylor; Samuel F. Tappan, a former officer of the Colorado militia who had headed a military investigation of the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864; and John B. Sanborn, one of the negotiators of a treaty with the Cheyenne and Arapaho in 1865. Military members of the commission appointed by the President were Lieutenant General Sherman, Maj. Gen. William S. Harney, a retired Indian fighter who had successfully led a punitive expedition against the Sioux and Cheyenne more than a decade before, and Maj. Gen. Alfred H. Terry, commander of the Department of the Dakota, who knew Sherman as his immediate superior.

Leaving St. Louis early in August, the Peace Commission headed for Fort Laramie, (now in southeastern Wyoming) to meet with the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne. At North Platte, Nebraska, where the commissioners tarried to talk with Spotted Tail and his band of Brule Sioux, word reached the party that Red Cloud and the Oglalas would probably boycott the conference. Consequently, the commissioners decided to postpone the meeting and concentrate on a conference previously arranged with the Central Plains tribes to convene in mid-October on Medicine Lodge Creek in southern Kansas. When President Johnson suddenly called General Sherman to Washington on special business, Maj. Gen. C.C. Augur, commander of the Department of the Platte, replaced him as a member of the commission, and General Harney succeeded to command of the military delegation.

The commissioners reached the meeting place on October 14. A place sacred to the Indians of the region, the treaty site was about 70 miles south of Fort Larned in a small natural basin where Medicine Lodge and Elm Creeks joined. The Cheyenne had refused to come any closer to the string of military posts on the Arkansas River. The Peace Commission entered the valley from the northwest, where the Arapahoes had encamped. Beyond them were the Plains Apaches. Opposite the Plains Apaches on the south side of Medicine Lodge Creek were the Comanches, and

farthest downstream were the Kiowas. Most of the Cheyennes were camped on the Cimarron River making medicine and would come in later. At the height of the proceedings, about 5,000 Indians participated.

The actual negotiating site was on the north bank of the Medicine Lodge near the Arapaho camp, about one mile upstream from where the commissioners pitched their sleeping tents. Thomas Murphy, head of the Central Indian Superintendency, was in charge of local arrangments and had everything in readiness. A large area had been cleared of trees and undergrowth and a 20-foot-high brush arbor constructed. Under the arbor commissioners found folding tables and camp stools placed for their convenience. Indian conferees sat on logs facing the Commission.

The Kiowas and Comanches were the first to consider the document.* Unlike earlier treaties, this one contained a provision that made it incumbent upon the Plains tribes to take reservation lands and farm them, and convincing the Kiowas and Comanches of the desirability and necessity of it was no easy matter. The Kiowas war chief Satanta tersely summarized the Indian point of view. "When the buffalo leave this country," he said, "we will

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*Although the discussions with each of the tribes resulted separate treaties the terms of each of them are so nearly identical that for purposes of simplification, they are referred to in this report as a single entity.

let him /the Great White Father/ know. By that time," he continued, "we will be ready to live in houses." Finally on October 21, when the Commission conceded the right to hunt outside the reservation but south of the Arkansas, the Kiowas and Comanches agreed to occupy a 4,800-square-mile reservation in what is now southwestern Oklahoma. Four days later the Plains Apaches affixed their signatures to the document, wherein they agreed to occupy the same reservation.

The Cheyennes came in on October 27. They had not forgotten Hancock's destruction of the village on Pawnee Fork, and a summer of successful warfare had not made them anxious to sue for peace, but wiser men among them, including Black Kettle, appreciated white might and wanted to hear the commissioners out. Surprisingly enough the Cheyennes and Arapahoes signed the document the following day, apparently as the result of a deal made orally with Senator Henderson. In his own account of the affair, Henderson stated that he told the Cheyennes they need not reside on the reservation immediately, and that they could continue to hunt between the Arkansas and the South Platte as long as there were enough buffalo to justify it. Henderson did not, however, make written changes in the treaty, and the provisions did not appear in the document later ratified by the Senate.

In signing the Medicine Lodge Treaty, the Cheyennes and Arapahoes agreed to live on a reservation bounded on the north by the southern border of Kansas, on the west by the Cimarron River, and on the east by the Arkansas. In return for a school for their children and other utilitarian buildings, farm implements and seeds, a physician and blacksmith, and a yearly supply of clothing and other necessities, they agreed to permit the construction of the Kansas Pacific Railroad and not to molest the white settlers they might encounter. Article VI provided that any head of a family could select 320 acres of land within the reservation for private use. There is abundant evidence that the Indians did not have a very clear understanding of the treaty they were asked to sign.

The Senate did not ratify the Medicine Lodge Treaty until July 25, 1868. In terms of its usefulness, the treaty was little more than a temporary peace. Shortly after the Senate approved it, war once again came to the Central Plains. And yet despite its ineffectiveness, the Medicine Lodge Treaty stands as a milestone in the development of United States Indian policy. For the first time in the history of the American West, provisions aimed at "civilizing" the Indian had been included in a peace treaty. The Medicine Lodge Treaty was the first clear and definite enunciation

of a decision lately determined: that the white man intended to remake the Indian in his own image. As Douglas Jones put it:

> The intention was not simply to remove the Indian from the areas whites would eventually desire to settle, but to change him, to make him fit the pattern of white civilization, to put a plow in his hand and a wooden roof over his head.

In the decades that followed, treaties concluded with the Plains Indians all contained similar provisions and similar pronouncements. The Medicine Lodge Treaty did not stop war on the frontier but it did mark the beginning of a new period in the conflict. The war between red man and white became not only a struggle for land but a struggle for cultural identity.

Condition

In 1926 a 77-year-old Kiowa returned to Medicine Lodge at the request of local historians to locate the site of the signing of the 1867 treaty. I-See-O, after some deliberation, found the place--a flat, swampy clearing in the midst of an elm grove on the east bank of Elm Creek and the north side of Medicine Lodge Creek, a short distance from the point of confluence. As an 18-year-old, I-See-O had been there when the Commissioners had induced the Central Plains tribes to agree to terms. According to the Kiowa, the treaty site is perhaps 300 yards east of the

southern extremity of the old concrete bridge at the end of South Main Street, about one-quarter to one-half mile from the center of town and U.S. Highway 160. Just as it was over a century ago, the river bottom is heavily wooded, swampy, and at times virtually inaccessible. Presently, farmers cultivate some of the lowlands on the north side of Medicine Lodge Creek in the vicinity of the site. Several years ago, it appeared that oil might be an underground resource, and one developer sunk four small wells near the juncture of the rivers, three of them on the east side of Elm Creek. Apparently the high sulphuric content of the oil was enough to discourage further drilling. The access road to the wells runs parallel to Elm Creek and brings the visitor within about 50 yards of the confluence and the treaty site.

One-and-one-half miles directly east of the treaty site is Memorial Peace Park and a natural amphitheater, where at five-year intervals the citizens of Medicine Lodge present a pageant depicting the treaty signing and the settlement of the area in later years. The amphitheater faces Medicine Lodge Creek and the lowlands where some of the Indian participants camped during the proceedings. Looking west from the amphitheather toward the treaty site, the visitor sees a Skelly Oil refinery and beyond it the tree-lined banks of Medicine Lodge and Elm Creeks.

Townsfolk produced the first Medicine Lodge Treaty Pageant in 1927. The most recent performance in the series occurred in 1967 and featured a cast of 1200, including several hundred descendants of the Plains Indians who gathered there a century before. Owned by the Medicine Lodge Peace Treaty Association, Memorial Peace Park consists of about 400 acres. The north half of the property serves as the city golf course, while the south half includes the amphitheater and some bottom land.

References: Douglas C. Jones, *The Treaty of Medicine Lodge* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1966); Donald J. Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes* (Norman, 1963); Work Projects Administration *Kansas: A Guide to the Sunflower State* (New York, 1939); Robert Athearn, *William Tecumseh Sherman and the Settlement of the West* (Norman, 1956); Loring B. Priest, *Uncle Sam's Stepchildren: The Reformation of United States Indian Policy, 1865-1887* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1942); Henry B. Fritz, *The Movement for Indian Assimilation, 1860-1890* (Philadelphia, 1963); Charles Kappler, *Laws and Treaties*, 58 Cong., 2 sess., 1904, *Sen. Doc.* 319, Indian Affairs (Washington, 1904); Special Peace Treaty Edition, *The Barber County Index* (Medicine Lodge, Kansas), October, 1967; Interview with John W. Mac Gregor, President of the Medicine Lodge Peace Treaty Association, Medicine Lodge, Kansas, March 31, 1969.

MEDICINE LODGE

Creek

(Anthony)