

THE REPUTATION OF THE KANSA INDIANS

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AN INTRODUCTION

Although the Kansa Indians gave their name to the state of Kansas and the Kansas River, most Kansans know little of the tribe itself. Not until 1971 was a full length study of the Kansa available. In that year William Unrau, of Wichita State University, published his book The Kansa Indians: A History of the Wind People 1673-1873. This book has since become the standard work on Kansa history. In this study Unrau examines practically every known aspect of the tribe's history except one, the reputation of the Kansa Indians.

Before 1825 most whites considered the Kansa Indians a brave and noble people. The early relations with whites did produce occasional uneasy feelings, but on the whole, those who knew the Kansa recorded favorable opinions of them. By 1860, however, whites and Indians alike characterized the Kansa as dirty, wretched thieves - the dregs of humanity.

In 1825 the Kansa signed their first major treaty with the United States and in 1860 the small reservation of the Kansa was allotted in severalty and the remainder sold to white settlers. During this period from 1825 to 1860, the Kansa faced a number of outside influences which threatened their traditions and forced them to modify their way of life. As a result of their new lifestyle the Kansa became the object of scorn from nearly all who knew them demonstrating a direct relationship between the two.

The experiences of the Kansa, in facing changes brought about by contact with white civilization, exemplify the problems of many other tribes. Every Indian tribe that lived in the path of white civilization suffered major changes in their lifestyle. Although many tribes reacted differently to the situation, the experience of the Kansa provides insight into the decisions faced by all.

This study is divided into two major chapters. The first chapter examines the period of Kansa history before 1825 including their origins, their relations with whites, their culture and their early reputation. The second concentrates on the period from 1825 to 1860 and studies the pressures on the Kansa during this period, their reaction to them, and their resulting reputation.

CHAPTER ONE - HISTORIC BACKGROUND

By 1825 the Kansa Indians already had over 100 years of dealings with Europeans. An important tribe in the region, the Kansa played a large role in the development of the fur trade. During this time some whites grew to hate the Kansa but those who knew the tribe generally thought highly of them.

Origins

Before the arrival of white men into the North American interior, the Kansa Indians established themselves along the banks of the Missouri and Kansas Rivers as a hunting-farming-village people. This area wasn't their original homeland - the Kansa had migrated to this region from the east. The Kansa, also, weren't always a separate people. At the time of the migration, the Kansa comprised only one band in a much larger group, known as the *qegiha* branch of the Siouan - speaking peoples.¹ The Kansa together with the Quapaws, the Omahas, the Poncas and the Osage moved westward and split up around 1650, each band settling in a different area.

Many observers later noted the similarity between the Kansa and the other tribes of the *qegiha* group, particularly the Osage. One of the first to remark on this was Zebulon Montgomery Pike. In 1808 Pike stated, "The Osage Indians appear to have emigrated from the north and east, and from

their speaking the same language with the Kans [Kansa].... together with the great similarity of manners, morals, and customs, there is left no room to doubt, but that they were originally the same nation."² A few years later another traveler, George Catlin, noted the resemblance between the tribes. "This tribe [the Kansa]" wrote Catlin, "has undoubtedly sprung from the Osages, as their personal appearance, languages, and traditions clearly prove."³ Over a century later Waldo Wedel remarked, in his 1946 study of the Kansa, "In what we know of their social and political organization and their religious practices may be seen a close similarity to the customs of their semi-sedentary Siouan speaking neighbors, notably the Osage."⁴

Upon their arrival into the region, the Kansa claimed the area around the mouth of the Kansas River with the Osages to the south and the Omahas to the north. In adapting their woodland culture to the harsher environment of the prairie the Kansa turned more to hunting, farming became a secondary subsistence activity. With their arrival in this new territory the Kansa also acquired some new enemies. Most notably, the Pawnee resented the Kansas' intrusions into their traditional hunting grounds. Competition for hunting grounds also developed between the Kansa and the members of the former migratory group. Although never a large tribe, the Kansa held their own against their usually more powerful enemies.

Early History

The first white men in the area merely noted the existence of the Kansa, but by the early 18th century more and more whites became interested in the Kansa fur trade. Believed to be a key tribe in the region, French and Spanish traders courted the friendship of the Kansa who soon learned the ways of European barter and commercial competition.⁵ As the competition for Kansa trade grew keen the tribe played one trader against another to achieve good prices for their furs.

With their usual success among Indians, the French traders soon developed a good trading relationship with the Kansa. The French established Ft. de Cavagnial near the principal Kansa village, just north of present Ft. Leavenworth, because "the friendly Kansa were a dependable source of high grade furs."⁶ Relations between the French and Kansa grew so close that, in the 1750's, the French Commandant Macarty persuaded a "sizable body of Kansa warriors" to travel east to help in the defense of Ft. Duquesne during the French and Indian War.⁷

The coming of European traders proved to be a mixed blessing for the Kansa. The acquisition of the horse around 1724 greatly increased the buffalo hunting abilities of the tribe. Now trading for guns the Kansa improved their hunting prowess to the point where they could not only provide for their own needs but produce much larger quantities of furs

for trade. Ranging farther west onto the buffalo hunting grounds, the Kansa became involved in more battles with the Pawnee and other Plains tribes. More battles meant more casualties and a decrease in military power.

The spread of disease among the Kansa also accompanied European contact. The intermittent outbreaks of disease served only to reduce their numbers further. The increased warfare and the waves of disease severely limited Kansa population growth in this period of relative economic prosperity. The French Governor of Louisiana, Louis Billovard de Kerlerec, wrote in 1758 "They [the Kansa] had been very numerous, but wars with the Pawnees and smallpox had greatly reduced them."⁸

In the February 10, 1763 Treaty of Paris, France ceded to Great Britian all the territory east of the Mississippi River. As British traders moved westward they tried to draw some of the Kansa trade away from the French. The rivalry for Kansa trade developed quickly and grew more intense as the traders realized the strategic location of the Kansa. Situated around the mouth of the Kansas River, the Kansa controlled, to a certain extent, the trade with the western and northwestern tribes. These tribes in turn trapped the rich fur areas of the Rocky Mountains. The Kansa settled into a prosperous period of trade, again playing one trader against the other. The Lt. Governor of Upper Louisiana Pedro Piernas estimated the valuable Kansa trade in 1775 at over 7,500 lbs. of furs.⁹

By the late 1770's, due to the increasing numbers of traders and their desire for expansion, many traders started bypassing the Kansa to trade directly with the tribes upstream. The Kansa also fell victim to a number of unscrupulous and unlicensed traders. As a result of this turn in events, the Kansa grew increasingly hostile to all but the well established traders. In 1777, Francisco Cruzat, Lt. Governor of Louisiana, commented on the problem. "As a general rule," wrote Cruzat, "this tribe [the Kansa] is hostile to the tribes of the said Misury river...For this reason they generally cause a great deal of harm to the traders who are sent to these tribes, for they do not allow those traders to ascend the river in order that those tribes may be supplied with guns and ammunition."¹⁰

The Kansa quickly realized the futility of their position and concentrated on developing their own trade. They did occasionally commit depredations upon traders but these were few and usually prompted by revenge. Although some whites, (usually the victims of mistreatment), detested the Kansa, the general opinion of the tribe seems to be summed up in the comments of French writer Francois Marie Perrin, who in 1802 spent twelve days at the Kansa village. Perrin wrote that the Kansa "are tall, handsome, vigorous, and brave....active and good hunters, and trade is carried on with them by the whites without danger."¹¹

In 1803 the French ceded their territory west of the

Mississippi River to the United States in the famous Louisiana Purchase and the first effort of the United States to discover just what they had bought came with the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804-1806. Traveling up the Missouri River, the expedition would have surely met the Kansa had the tribe not already moved west up the Kansas River to the Big Blue village, near present Manhattan. Lewis and Clark, therefore, received their information concerning the Kansa from some disgruntled traders who "were much afraid of meeting with the Kansas."¹² In his journal Meriwether Lewis noted "at present they [the Kansa] are a dissolute, lawless banditti; frequently plunder their traders and commit depredations on persons ascending and descending the Missouri river."¹³ Although the expedition saw only a deserted Kansa village, Lewis wrote "I am told they [the Kansa] are a fierce and warlike people."¹⁴

In 1806 another expedition set out to explore the new western territory. The expedition was under the command of Captain Zebulon Montgomery Pike. During his journey Pike arranged a truce between the Kansa and the Osages, who had long been at odds. While in council at a Pawnee village, Pike made the Pawnees raise an American flag. "This gave great satisfaction," wrote Pike, "to the Osages and Kans, both of whom decidedly avow themselves to be under American protection."¹⁵ Pike later commented "The Kans are a small nation, situated on the river of that name, and are in language,

manners, customs, and agricultural pursuits, precisely similar to the Osage...But in war, they are yet more brave than their Osage brethren, being (although not more than one third their number) their most dreaded enemies, and frequently making the Pawness tremble."¹⁶

Following Pike's successful meeting with the Kansa the federal government, in 1808, established Ft. Osage (originally Ft. Clark) on the Missouri River downstream from the mouth of the Kansas River. This government factory was under the direction of factor George C. Sibley. Federal Indian policy determined that Indian tribes should trade only with licensed traders at the government factories. The Kansa, having moved their village west around 1800, were over 100 miles from the trading post. Disgruntled at having to make the long journey, after years of having the traders come to them, the Kansa "became insolent and resorted to robbing and abusing the few traders who dared to enter Indian country in defiance of the government embargo."¹⁷

With their furs piling up the Kansa finally decided to make the long journey to Ft. Osage. Upon their arrival at the fort, the Kansa apologized to Sibley for their past offenses and said they wanted to trade peacefully. Sibley allowed the group of over 1,000 Indians to camp near the fort but only six days later their insolent and violent conduct "caused him to bar them from the post."¹⁸ On December 2, 1808 Superinten-

dent of Indian Affairs William Clark reported that Sibley's policy of refusing to trade with the Kansa was having "a very good effect" and they were "becoming very humble" and had "given up several horses, to pay for the horses and property which they have robbed the citizens of this territory of lately."¹⁹

The establishment of Ft. Osage increased the number of licensed (and unlicensed) traders in the territory resulting in more and more goods available for Indian trade. In response to this the Indian tribes stepped up their hunting activities to meet the increased demand for furs. The Kansa, in contention with the Pawnee for the buffalo hunting grounds around the Republican River, intensified their raiding activities there. In the summer of 1809 a band of over 100 Kansa warriors fell upon a Pawnee village on the banks of the Republican River killing over 50 persons. The Pawnee, forced to temporarily retreat northward, abandoned this prime hunting area. Reflecting on this event and the situation in general, Dr. Peyton Thomas wrote, "The Cansas have long been the terror of the neighboring Indians...they rob, murder and destroy when opportunity offers; fortunately for their neighbors, they are few in number, and their daily outrages serve to lessen their number still more." Thomas went on to say that the Kansa were "hardly less savage" than the animals they hunt.²⁰

In an effort to bring peace to the Kansa and increase his influence over the tribe, factor Sibley journeyed to the Kansa village in May of 1811. Upon his arrival, Sibley was greeted with enthusiasm, a pleasant surprise after his recent harsh dealings with them, and held a series of talks with the prominent men of the tribe. Impressed with their seemingly peaceful intentions, Sibley reported that the Kansa were quickly reforming their hostile ways. "I assure you," wrote Sibley to William Clark, "that I have great hopes of the Kansas becoming one of the best tribes in your agency."²¹

During Sibley's stay at the Kansa village he formed a high opinion of them. Sibley later reported that the Kansa were a "stout, hardy, handsome people fast reforming from their brutal state."²² Sibley commented on the neatness of the village and wrote "[they] are by no means insensible to the virtue and importance of cleanliness."²³ When Sibley observed the Kansa he stated all was "bustle, busy hum and merriment" because the tribe was preparing for the summer buffalo hunt which was "the greatest enjoyment of their life."²⁴

In 1819, some members of the Stephen H. Long expedition visited the Kansa at their Big Blue village. The Kansa received the party, led by zoologist Dr. Thomas Say, with "the utmost cordiality."²⁵ During his stay at the Kansa village, Dr. Say made many observations on Kansa culture and life which he recorded in his diary (some of which will be cited later).

Later in the same year, Agent Benjamin O'Fallon summoned the Kansa to a meeting to face charges of mistreating traders. Agent O'Fallon and the Kansa chiefs had a big talk and reached a satisfactory agreement. Upon the conclusion of the meeting Agent O'Fallon wrote, "A proper, and I doubt not, a lasting understanding was effected - They made the fairest promises - I believe they are about to change - This nation is at war with most of their neighboring Tribes of Red Skins, which has produced much distress upon them, within the last two or three years."²⁶ The relative peace brought by this council was, however, short lived. The federal government in 1822 abolished the factory system. The Kansa were now left to fend for themselves amidst the cut-throat competition of private traders. Removed so far from the nearest Indian Agent the traders had no fear of trouble from that quarter. The inevitable result was increased hostilities on the part of the Kansa towards traders.

This strain on friendly relations did not, however, restrict the Kansa from welcoming Prince Paul Wilhelm of Wuerttemberg to their village in 1823. Prince Paul stayed with the Kansa for a few days in early summer before he continued on his hunting expedition in the North American wild. Prince Paul was generally impressed with the appearance and character of the Indians and recorded his favorable observations in his diary.²⁷

The United States in 1825 was in the process of developing an overall Indian policy. The tribes east of the Mississippi River posed a problem and the only answer seemed to be relocation to a permanent Indian territory in the west. In order to make room for the immigrant tribes the government made a series of treaties with many of the prairie tribes. The chiefs of the Kansa nation met in St. Louis with William Clark and agreed to relinquish title to much of their land. The Kansa retained a reservation 30 miles wide, extending west from 20 leagues west of the mouth of the Kansas River to an undetermined western boundary. This sale of hunting grounds left the Kansa with only the core of their original lands and a \$3,500 annuity for a period of 20 years.

The treaty of 1825 also included provisions to help the Kansa adopt the ways of white civilization. The government was to provide for the education of Kansa children and hire a blacksmith and a farmer to help the Kansa raise crops. The government also promised to supply farming tools, 300 cattle, 500 chickens, and 300 hogs to help the tribe get started.²⁸

Kansa Culture

For the Kansa the treaty of 1825 signalled the beginning of the end for their way of life. In 1825, though, Kansa culture was still functional, vigorous, and very much alive. The observations of several travelers of that time provide a some-

what detailed picture of Kansa life.

The culture of any people is largely based on the nature of their subsistence activities. Since the Kansa migrated from the east their reliance on the buffalo and other game developed to such a degree that farming became only a secondary subsistence activity. The buffalo hunts, in turn, became a paramount feature of Kansa society. Many rituals and ceremonies grew around the hunt and reliance on buffalo meat and by-products developed to the point where successful hunts and the survival of the tribe became one.

The hunt, however, was far from a grim task of survival. On the contrary, it was a time of gaiety and reaffirmation of Kansa culture. "All things considered," writes Unrau, "the hunt was a happy and meaningful experience for all concerned. The excitement of the chase, the realization that a bountiful nature had assured a measure of economic security for the months ahead, and the satisfying character of these expeditions"²⁹ formed an intricate part of Kansa society and the mainstay of their way of life.

The adoption of the horse increased the Kansa capacity to hunt and the acquisition of guns increased it further. The problem was that the Kansas' enemies also had horses and guns. The Kansa, widening their range onto the western hunting grounds, became involved in an increasing number of confrontations with their enemies. The key to holding their hunting grounds rested

upon the ability of the Kansa warriors in battle. Developing along the general lines of Plains culture, warfare was an important institution among the Kansa. Since the survival of their people depended upon the success of their fighting men, the warriors were held in high esteem, and success in warfare became a prerequisite for manhood.

Not limited to open battle, raiding and horse stealing were also the feats of an accomplished warrior. Young men grew eager to participate in these activities. "Raids to seize captives and horses were common," writes Unrau, "in some cases necessary to prove male maturity and achieve economic status in the Kansa social order."³⁰

As mentioned before one of the old enemies of the Kansa were the Pawnee. With the increased competition for furs, hostilities between these two tribes became a tradition of the first order. "One of the old traditional questions handed down in the Kansa nation to modern times," wrote George Morehouse, "and a question that was first asked of a returning war party was Pah-ne-its-es-skah?" or "Did you kill a Pawnee?"³¹

Traditionally the Kansa resided in one main village. There was one main chief who with a council of the important men, constituted the political structure of the tribe. Usually, the power of the chief was limited to the role of a counselor. The position of chief was hereditary but as to his powers Dr. Say observed "he possesses nothing like monarchical authority,

maintaining his distinction only by his bravery and good conduct."³²

The conduct of individuals and groups was determined by public opinion and pressure which relied, to a large extent, on tradition. Among his observations of the Kansa Pike commented "although there is no regular code of laws yet there is a tacit acknowledgement of the right."³³ The institution of the kindred was a strong element in Kansa society and nearly all disputes were channelled through the families. Dr. Say observed that "controversies are decided amongst themselves; they do not appeal to their chief, excepting for council."³⁴ Discussing this aspect of Kansa society Unrau writes "...a powerful sense of family identity - which one observer described as stronger than that of contemporary white society - regulated the matter to such a firm degree that outside authority was not generally required."³⁵

The Kansa adhered to a strict system of ethics and morals. Relationships such as marriages were important institutions.³⁶ Incest taboos restricted the marriage between kindred members³⁷ and the families carried out marriage negotiations and ceremonies in the formal manner dictated by tradition.

Children in Kansa society also adhered to strict cultural norms. Dorsey wrote "The girl was kept in a state of subjection to her mother, whom she was obliged to help when the latter was at work." If the girl became disobedient she

"received a blow on the head or back from the hand of her mother."³⁸ Until married, the daughter was kept under the strict eye of her mother. "The chastity of the young females," wrote Dr. Say, "is guarded by the mother with the most scrupulous watchfulness, and a violation of it is a rare occurrence, as it renders the individual unfit for the wife of a chief, a brave warrior, or good hunter."³⁹ "Fornication," noted Dorsey, "is not practiced."⁴⁰

The treatment of boys in Kansa society was a different matter. Dr. Say observed that "the males are very disobedient, and the more obstinate they are, and the less readily they comply with the commands of their parents, the more the latter seem to be pleased, saying, 'He will be a brave man, a great warrior, he will not be controlled.'"⁴¹

The Kansa placed a high value on individual integrity. Each individual had his place in the society and was expected to do his part. Everyone worked together in time of need. The Kansa, like other tribes in North America, maintained the delicate balance between collective responsibility and individuality.

Individual conduct and appearance among the Kansa was a point of great concern. The ideal individual controlled his emotions and channelled them into socially approved avenues of release, such as warfare. When among their own they maintained a collected and reserved attitude. "They bear sickness

and pain with great fortitude," wrote Dr. Say, "seldom uttering a complaint; bystanders sympathize with them, and try every means to relieve them."⁴² Many observers commented upon the attention the Kansa applied to their appearance and dress. Factor Sibley, Dr. Say, Prince Paul and George Catlin (in 1832) all commented upon their concern for the proper appearance. Personal cleanliness was also important as witnessed by the fact that the Kansa took baths daily.⁴³

Among the Kansa, sharing and generosity was an important gauge to an individual's integrity as demonstrated through feasts and gift giving. Dr. Say observed that "civil as well as military distinction arises from bravery or generosity."⁴⁴ Impressed with Kansa generosity, Dr. Say commented "During our stay with these Indians they ate four or five times each day, invariably supplying us with the best pieces, or choice parts before they attempted to taste the food themselves."⁴⁵ Sharing food or other goods was only natural in Kansa society. No one went hungry as long as there was food in the camp. Older persons who could not work were cared for as were the disabled. Dr. Say noted, "The blind are taken care of by their friends and the nation generally, and are well dressed and fed."⁴⁶

One of the most distinguishing aspects of Kansa culture was their reluctance to drink liquor. "Drunkenness," wrote Dr. Say, "is rare and is much ridiculed; a drunken man is said to be bereft of his reason, and is avoided."⁴⁷ Prince

Paul, during his visit with the Kansa, was surprised when a Kansa chief politely refused his offer of a sip of brandy. He later wrote, "I must say in honor of the Indians [the Kansa] that I did not see one of them drunk, although the opportunity was not lacking...."⁴⁸ George Catlin also observed this feature of Kansa culture and commented that the use of whiskey among the Kansa was "almost uniformly rejected."⁴⁹

For the Kansa, religion was a strong social bond. Little is actually known about their beliefs because they usually would not talk about it to strangers but there are many testaments to their deep-set faith. As late as 1868, when the Cheyenne and the Kansa warriors were fighting near the Kansa village, Rev. Joab Spencer observed a dance by the women and wrote "such an expression of earnestness, reverence, and solicitude I think I have never witnessed in anyone." The women were praying for the success of their warriors. The group was led by an old woman about whom Spencer commented, "I have never felt more respect for the religious devotions of anyone than I did for that old heathen woman and her company of devotees."⁵⁰

The observations of various visitors to the Kansa and recent scholars demonstrate that as late as 1825 Kansa culture was alive and vital. Their way of life gave them great satisfaction and fulfillment. Some of this enthusiasm was passed on to the observers, such as Dr. Say, who formed high opinions of the Kansa. By 1825, however, some whites considered the

Kansa to be an insolent and lawless band of Indians. These observers were usually the ones mistreated by the Kansa (usually for revenge) or they obtained their information from those who had been. Many whites hated the Kansa simply because they were Indians.

The general reputation of the Kansa in the mind of most whites by 1825 rested somewhere between the two. It is interesting, though, that those whites who best knew the Kansa considered them to be a noble people while those who had little or no first hand experience with the tribe, did not.

CHAPTER TWO - TRANSITION AND CHANGE

After the treaty of 1825, in which they signed away a large portion of their land, the Kansa came under increasing pressures to abandon their traditional lifestyle. During the period of 1825-1860, the tribe met these challenges the best way they could, always keeping to the old ways as much as possible. One of the most powerful attacks on the Kansa way of life were the recurring waves of disease.

Disease and Population Loss

The Kansa had been the victims of disease long before 1825, but only after that time did disease have a serious effect on their lifestyle. As noted earlier, in the late 18th century the spread of disease and warfare served to limit Kansa population growth. As they entered into the 19th century the observations of Pike, Sibley and Say place the total Kansa population between 1,300-1,600.

In 1827 the outbreaks of disease began their continual battle with the Kansa. In that year, Agent John Dougherty reported that while at the agency the greater part of the Kansa tribe fell ill and at least 70 persons died.⁵¹ Superintendent William Clark also commented on the epidemic and stated that two thirds of the tribe was sick and many had died. This outbreak continued through 1828 when Father Joseph Anthony Lutz wrote that over 180 Kansa died by the fall of

that year.⁵² Smallpox and cholera hit again in 1831 and raging until 1833 took over 300 victims.⁵³ This epidemic from 1831-33 was widespread among the surrounding tribes, especially the Pawnee.

Slowly, and not always surely, the federal government came to the aid of the Indians. In 1832, Congress provided for the vaccination of Indians against smallpox.⁵⁴ Although this move proved to be a great help to some tribes, the Kansa benefited from it little. Not until the spring of 1838 did most the Kansa receive their vaccinations. The government officials were plagued with contaminated vaccine and inefficiency in getting to the people who needed it most.⁵⁵

As if in defiance of the governments vaccination move, the smallpox again struck the Kansa in 1839. This time, the Kansa would not trust the agents and their vaccine. Most of the tribe fled to the Plains to find fresh air, fresh meat and an escape from the dreaded disease.⁵⁶ Agent Richard Cummins reported in 1839 that "This tribe has been exceedingly sickly this season; many of them died..."⁵⁷ Later that year Rev. Thomas Johnson observed the Kansa and wrote in early 1840 that the Kansa "suffered dreadfully with sickness" and over 100 died.⁵⁸ The epidemic continued through 1840 when missionary William Johnson stated, "While we were sick at the mission, the Indians were suffering equally as much. In some families as many as five died. But few families escaped disease; and

the number of deaths was great in proportion to the number sick... The last two summers have been sickly here though we have always considered the country very healthy."⁵⁹

After 1840 the disease seemed to subside only to strike again in 1845. In that year Agent Cummins reported over 200 Kansa dead from disease.⁶⁰ A few years later in 1849 cholera swept through the Kansa ranks claiming over 100 victims.⁶¹ This outbreak continued through the summer of 1851.⁶²

After the recent epidemic Agent John Whitfield in 1854 reported the Kansa population at 1,375.⁶³ The following year, however, the double punch of smallpox and cholera hit the Kansa with devastating force, killing over 400 in the summer of 1855.⁶⁴ The disease continued to ravage the Kansa until 1860 when Agent Dickey reported, in a careful count, 803 Kansa still alive.⁶⁵

Between the years 1825-1860 the Kansa lost half their population to disease, the 1855 epidemic taking about 1/3 their original number. Up to the 1855 epidemic the Kansa maintained their numbers with remarkable resiliency but 1855 proved too much for them. Finally believing that they were in disfavor with their gods the Kansa became demoralized and lost faith in themselves.⁶⁶ By 1860 most of the surviving Kansa turned their back on their traditional way of life and prepared to walk the white mans road.

Traditional Authority

Despite the great population losses due to disease the Kansa retained their hereditary lines of chiefs. The chiefs who retained power from 1825 to 1860 drew their authority from their fathers and their grandfathers. The most important families of chiefs were those of White Plume and Fool Chief. White Plume and his son ruled as head chiefs of the Kansa from the early 1820's to 1838. The Fool Chief then became head chief and transferred his position to his son Fool Chief II in 1845. Fool Chief II retained power until after the Kansa removal to Oklahoma in 1873. Other prominent lines of chiefs were those of American Chief and Hard Chief who held power during the whole period of 1825-1860.

Although the Kansa did not experience a large turnover in principal chiefs there was a decline in respect toward the hereditary chiefs. The fur trade had long before cracked the traditional chain of command as traders bypassed the head chief to do business with anyone in the tribe. This caused the rise of different factions within the tribe.

The problem grew to a head when in 1830 the Kansa abandoned the Big Blue village and moved east to form three villages where before there had been only one.⁶⁷ Although all three villages acknowledged the same head chief, his traditional power was severely undermined. Another sign of the slow degeneration of traditional Kansa authority were the

constant raiding activities of the young men. While the older chiefs, who had already established their status, tried to keep their young men in check, the not-yet-warriors were anxious to prove themselves and could not be stopped from raiding and stealing horses.

Warfare

As illustrated before, the Kansa were a fighting people. Their way of life demanded that they fight for survival. As Joshua Gregg commented "War seems to be the element of the prairie Indians."⁶⁸ Between 1825-1860, however, conditions slowly forced the Kansa to abandon their fighting way of life.

The Kansa, in the 1830's maintained their fighting tradition with little apparent change. In March of 1831, 50 young Kansa warriors raided a Pawnee village and returned with the scalps.⁶⁹ Again in the summer of 1838 about 80 Kansa and Osage warriors attacked a party of Pawnees near the Arkansas river killing and scalping many enemies.⁷⁰ Agent Cummins commented in his annual report for 1839 that "The Kansas when in the prairie or buffalo ground consider themselves at war with all the prairie of wild Indians that they feel able to manage."⁷¹

Later in 1839 the head Kansa chief White Plume and four warriors died from fever on the fall hunt. Missionary William Johnson commented on the situation after the return of the tribe to their villages. "During the fall hunt" wrote Johnson

in a letter of February 2, 1839, "the first chief of the nation and four braves died...such is their savage sentiments, that they must shed blood or commit depredations upon some other tribe, as a satisfaction for the loss which the Great Spirit has caused them to sustain. To gratify this savage spirit nearly all the males in the nation, who can bear arms, will march in a few days against the Pawnees." Johnson continued "they carry on a perpetual war with the Pawnees, their next neighbors to the west; and hence, dexterity in war is the only certain road to honor according to the teachings of the wise men of the nation."⁷²

Although Johnson distastefully expounded upon the intentions of the Indians he touched upon a couple of very important points. First the planned raid upon the Pawnee would be more than just a raid, it would reinstate the Kansa as a people in the eyes of their gods and themselves. For a fighting people to take the loss of their chief lying down would be an affront to their way of life. For the Kansa to retain their self-respect as a people the insult must be revenged. Secondly, war being an important road to manhood the impending raid would provide a good opportunity for some of the restless young men to prove themselves as the defenders of their people. All in all the raid on the Pawnees was to be anticipated as an important function of Kansa society.

Despite the remonstrance of Missionary Johnson the raid

went on. The Kansa, en masse, attacked a village of Pawnee and killed over 60 people. They took 11 prisoners and all the horses they could find.⁷³ Upon the return to their villages the Kansa spent several days celebrating this victory which meant so much to them and their way of life.

The Pawnee raid of 1840 proved to be about the last major military victory for the Kansa. The Kansa and Pawnee raided back and forth for many more years⁷⁴ but victory proved to be fleeting for the Kansa. The reason was that the military strength of the Kansa began to falter.

By the 1840's the constant loss of warriors to disease and warfare started to take its toll on Kansa military strength. Even though the Kansa population seemed relatively stable through the late 1840's the actual make up of the population produced serious consequences for the Kansa military. As an increasing number of warriors died the percentage of women and children rose. Established warriors left younger boys to take their place. This placed the Kansa at an increasing disadvantage with their larger enemies who could absorb their losses with ease. Faced with more powerful enemies, the Kansa lost more and more battles which, in turn, weakened them further. Even when the Kansa won a battle, the loss of a few warriors meant even more of a disadvantage the next time.

The decline in Kansa military strength did not hamper the small raiding and horse stealing expeditions of the warriors.

It did, however, put a serious strain on their ability to defend themselves when on their annual buffalo hunts.

The Hunt

As noted in an earlier section, Kansa food income was largely based on their annual buffalo hunts. These hunts provided not only meat and domestic products but valuable trade items. Next to a brave warrior the highest status in Kansa society went to the accomplished hunter who provided food for the tribe. "Besides war," wrote Gregg, "hunting seems the only creditable employment in which a warrior can engage."⁷⁵

Before 1825 the Kansa held their own on the buffalo grounds but after the treaty of that year, events started to close in on the tribe. By 1830 the tribe abandoned the Big Blue village and moved to a new area near present Topeka. The reasons for this move were twofold. First, they needed to be closer to the government agency to collect their annuities and keep the trading lines open. Second, they came under increasing pressure from hostile Plains tribes, such as the Pawnee and the powerful Cheyenne. Although the new location was somewhat safer the Kansa now found themselves twice as far away from the buffalo. The increased journey to the hunting grounds made the Kansa more vulnerable to enemy attack.

Added to the increased distance and danger was the fact that the buffalo supply had begun to wane. The Indians

and the whites slowly drove the buffalo westward as they stepped up their hunting activities. This resulted in significantly less buffalo to go around and competition for the buffalo grew keen. Josiah Gregg commented on the buffalo situation in the 1830's, "Were they [Buffalo] only killed for their food, however, their natural increase would perhaps replenish the loss; yet the continual and wanton slaughter of them by travelers and hunters, and the still greater havoc made among them by the Indians, not only for their meat, but often for the skins and tongues alone (for which they find a ready market among their traders) are fast reducing their numbers and must ultimately effect their total annihilation from the continent."⁷⁶

The decline of the buffalo herds had serious consequences for the Kansa as well as many other tribes. As early as 1830 the effects were evident. Agent John Dougherty reported on January 30, 1830, "[as to] the condition of the Indians in Missouri [Agency] generally, I can only say, that the Kanzas, Iowas, Omahas, Ottoes, and the Yankton band of Sioux, from the diminution and scarcity of game in this country, starve at least half the year, and are very badly clad."⁷⁷

With the longer journey to the hunting grounds, the Kansa found it increasingly difficult to prepare for the trip. Disease prevented many good warriors and hunters from leaving for the hunt. Occasional enemy horse raids decreased the Kansa supply of good horses and reduced their mobility.

Agent Marston G. Clark noted in 1831 that "the severity of the winter prevented them [the Kansa] from hunting and destroyed nearly all their horses, which rendered them incapable to resume their hunting..."⁷⁸

As the competition for the buffalo grew more fierce, fighting on the hunting grounds became more important. In a letter of June 16, 1835, Rev. Thomas Johnson wrote of the plight of the Kansa. "Their only dependence for meat is on the chase," commented Johnson "and the deer have extremely disappeared from the prairies. They have to go 250 miles, or farther, to find the buffalo and then are frequently driven back by their stronger enemies; and should they succeed in finding the buffalo, if they bring any of the meat home, it has to be packed by their owmen, for many of them have no horses to ride; and their means of support are becoming more difficult every year, for the buffalo, are fast retiring."⁷⁹ As a result of the increasing difficulty of hunting the Kansa could, by the late 1830's only manage one hunt per year and that was not always successful.⁸⁰

Despite the difficulties afforded them by their continued reliance on the buffalo hunts as their main source of food income, the Kansa clung to their traditional way of life with a passion. The way of their fathers was not to be forgotten because of lean times. After years of poor hunts the Kansa still relied on the buffalo as noted by Agent Cummins

in his 1845 annual report. "As usual they follow the chase," wrote Cummins, "...They have neither hogs nor cattle, and are compelled to go to the buffalo grounds for meat; this they have been in the habit of doing ever since they have known themselves."⁸¹ The Kansa continued to hunt the buffalo until their last hunt in 1873 although it had long ceased to be an important part of their economic lives.⁸²

When the buffalo hunts started to fail in the 1830's the Kansa food income dropped significantly. Many whites thought this turn of events would force the Indians to accept the white man's way of farming and way of life. This, however, did not prove to be the case.

Farming

Traditionally farming was a woman's activity and provided only a supplement to the usual diet of buffalo meat. Far above farming the Kansa warriors considered it degrading to do woman's work. Even when the hunt could not provide enough food the Kansa refused to farm. Agent Richard Cummins reported starvation conditions among the Kansa in 1835 and observed that there were less than 20 bushels of corn left for the whole tribe.⁸³

By the late 1830's, faced with poor hunts and no meat, the Kansa warriors had to choose between tradition and starvation. Distastefully, some Kansas warriors tried thier hand at farming with the women. Rev. Henry Gregory cheerfully

reported that in 1839 "...nearly every head of a family is beginning to engage in agriculture... They are abandoning their filthy wigwams of earth and beginning to erect dwellings of logs. Several of them have recently fenced and cultivated little fields of their own."⁸⁴ Later that year Agent Cummins commented that "This tribe [Kansa] have raised more corn than is usual for them. I suppose they have raised a plenty to do them until the new crop comes in, if taken care of."⁸⁵

This sudden agricultural prosperity was, however, short lived. Being farmers did not suit the majority of Kansa men. Raised as hunters and warriors they saw no honor in farming. It was with enthusiasm, then, that most of the men decided to go on the Pawnee raid of 1840.

The raid itself, as mentioned earlier turned out a complete success and gave a much needed boost to the morale and enthusiasm of those who wanted to follow the old ways. Missionary William Johnson, who tried in vain to abort the raid, observed the scene upon the return of the raiding party. "Since the Indians came in," reported Johnson, "the war song and scalp dance constitute their daily employment. All other matters ... are laid aside. The effect of this massacre upon all our operations, is now felt to an alarming extent. There are but few men...of the Kansas now disposed to think of anything but defense against the attacks of the Pawnees." Johnson went on

to write "The upper village of Kansas have fled from their town, and expect to wonder to and fro for the balance of the year. They talk of planting a little corn, but even that is uncertain. The village near the mission are so elated with their past act of bravery, that they have done little else than dance since they came in. The few families who were building houses near the mission are now the subjects of laughter and sport by the new made braves."⁸⁶

The raid of 1840 had far reaching effects upon the Kansa and their acceptance of farming. Many Kansa advocated the abandonment of farming and a return to the ways of their fathers. They argued that there was no honor in farming and hence no fit occupation for a man. Most Kansa were simply afraid to farm because it left them vulnerable to attack. It was much safer in the village or on the hunt with others than out working in a field by ones self. In 1842 Agent Cummins wrote "The Kansas render many excuses for not turning their attention to agricultural pursuits the present year; the principal one is they say they are afraid to work for fear the Pawnees would come on them and kill them all off."⁸⁷

By 1843 a succession of poor buffalo hunts placed the Kansa in a state of starvation. Their total food income was simply not enough to feed their people. Faced with the grim reality of starvation again the Kansa went to Agent Cummins and presented him with a "pressing request" for help. Cummins

observed that the Kansa had been "almost in a state of starvation" and had "subsisted a part of the year on roots." Cummins delivered to them 8 oxen and 30 bushels of each potatoes and corn. The agent also hired 18 hands to cultivate corn and potatoes for the Kansa after they promised to plant and tend as much corn as they could. Later that year Cummins noted that "they themselves raised more than they have done for many years."⁸⁸

Now that the Kansa, out of necessity, decided to give farming another chance they were beset by bad luck and bad advice. In the spring of 1844 the Kansas River valley flooded. The land selected by the government farmers for the Kansa fields was the first to be flooded and the flood swept away all their fences and houses. Later in the year hoards of army worms and other insects invaded the Kansa crops.⁸⁹ With their crops virtually destroyed the Kansa had to turn to the hunt. In his annual report for 1844 Agent Cummins noted "I asked them how they were going to live this year. They replied that they could not tell; that their only dependence was on the buffalo and other game."⁹⁰ In September of that year trader David Adams and a small party observed some Kansa returning from an unsuccessful hunt and fight with the Pawnees.⁹¹

Conditions did not improve for the Kansa over the next few years. Crop failures and poor hunts continued to impoverish them. Finally in 1846 the federal government nego-

tiated a treaty with the Kansa to sell the remainder of their land along the Kansas River. In 1847, Agent Cummins selected an area on the Upper Neosho River as the new reservation for the Kansa. Coming into the Ft. Leavenworth Agency prior to their move to the new reservation in 1847 the Kansa were in a miserable state. Agent Cummins reported "On arriving here, they [the Kansa] had nothing to eat and were the most greedy people for provisions I ever saw."⁹²

Upon their arrival at the new reservation in 1847 the Kansa requested their new Agent, James Rains, to provide them a farmer to help them raise crops. Agent Rains complied and reported "They say they are going to work like their neighbors... These people appear to be well aware of how far they are behind the other tribes in points of civilization."⁹³

Many of the Kansa again took up farming, although they despised it. The poor educational efforts of the government farmers and the lack of proper implements, however, did not impress the Kansa with the white man's way of farming. As a result, what crops the Kansa raised, they tended in the old way with the traditional prayers and ceremonies to help the crops grow.

Between the continual crop failures the Kansa occasionally raised enough to feed themselves. In extra good years they even had a small surplus to sell. In 1852 Agent Francis Lea reported that the Kansa had enough corn for themselves and a little to sell to traders.⁹⁴ Traveler William Carr Lane noted

in his diary that in 1853 his stage driver bought some corn from the Kansa. "Their numbers," wrote Lane, "are said to be on the increase and their condition improving."⁹⁵

The semi-prosperous period enjoyed by the Kansa came to an abrupt stop with the epidemic of 1855. With over 400 dead or dying, few Kansa could work the fields and even fewer had any desire to do so. The morale of the Kansa hit an all time low. Superintendent of Indian Affairs in St. Louis Cummins wrote in 1856 that the Kansa "are now, by force of circumstances, reduced to a state of vagabondage."⁹⁶ Gradually drifting back to their fields the Kansa again took up the task of farming. Now demoralized and subdued the Kansa quietly worked their fields. By 1858 Agent John Montgomery reported that due to good crops and a moderately successful hunt "they will be enabled to pass the coming winter in comfort, peace, and plenty."⁹⁷

With the loss of so many to disease it was hard for the survivors to remember the old days of glory. "An optimistic outlook toward life, based on the traditions of the past and the promises of the future," writes Unrau, "became all but impossible."⁹⁸ The Kansa finally resigned themselves to growing crops in the white man's way.

In 1859 the Kansa raised just enough food for themselves and due to severe drougth in 1860 their crops again failed. When their Agent, M. C. Dickey, filed his annual

report in the fall of 1860 the Kansa were out hunting, facing the prospect of another hungry winter.⁹⁹

Begging and Stealing

With the destruction of their main source of food income, the hunt, and the difficulty involved in raising crops, the Kansa often went hungry. The feeble attempt of the government agents often did little to relieve the situation and the Kansa had to find other means of survival. Many Kansa turned to begging and stealing. Unrau writes that after 1829 it became "ever more difficult for the Kansa to maintain their traditional level of economic abundance. Circumstances largely beyond their control dictated that begging and a degrading reliance on the inadequate assistance provided by the federal government"¹⁰⁰ characterized their economy.

Stealing and begging was certainly nothing new to Kansa society nor was it dishonorable. Stealing had long been an important key to survival upon the prairie. Horse raids were common and great honor went to the accomplished thief. Stealing from an enemy was an honorable occupation and since all those not specifically friends of the Kansa were technically their enemies, including most whites and immigrant tribes, stealing from them was an accepted practice. Horse stealing not only served to bring honor and economic status to the thief but increased the tribe's horse herd and hence their ability to go on the annual hunts.

Begging was also a long accepted practice among the Kansa and prairie tribes in general. The concept of sharing stretched far back into Kansa culture and remained a tradition for many years. In order to maintain their traditions the Kansa shared whatever they had with virtuously any friendly tribe or traveler.¹⁰¹ In 1839 after producing a sizable corn crop, Agent Cummins reported that "they [the Kansa], however, are very generous in dividing with the Indians of other tribes that visit them for the purpose of begging; they will give anything to eat as long as they have, and think it very strange that provisions are ever sold, but they never refuse to give."¹⁰² Agent Cummins commented on this trait again in 1845. "I consider them the most hospitable Indians that I have any knowledge of. They will sometimes ask a white that they have respect for, to eat almost every hour in the day. They never turn off hungry white or red, if they have anything to give them; and they will continue to give as long as they have anything to give."¹⁰³

The tradition of sharing among the Kansa remained strong even through their years of hard times. In 1872 the Kansa vested their generosity on a visiting group of Pawnees (now at peace) as witnessed by the Rev. Joab Spencer. "When ready to leave for thier own reservation" observed Spencer "many presents of ponies, guns, and other valuables were made by the Kans to their visitors. It was said the demand on Kaw

liberality was so great on this occasion that when their visitors had departed the Kaws were almost bankrupt."¹⁰⁴ This was the way of the Kansa. When others needed or simply asked for help the Kansa shared whatever they had. They felt it only natural to share and expected help in return when they needed it.

Whites and immigrant tribes in the area did not feel the same way as the Kansa. In 1830 the leaders of the small bands of Piankeshaw, Wea, and Peoria Indians, recent immigrants to the area, wrote to Superintendent of Indian Affairs William Clark of the bothersome Kansas. "Our neighbors, the Kansas," they complained "infest us constantly; they beg everything from us, and what we do not give them they steal from us, they are now commencing on our corn fields; we cannot lay a hoe or an axe down, but what they steal it, and strip our horses of all our bells."¹⁰⁵

Begging from passing whites for supplies and various articles also became a practice of the Kansa. Traveler John Townsend remarked in 1834 that he was impressed by their propensity for "asking unhesitatingly, and without fear of refusal, for any article that happen[ed] to take their fancy." ¹⁰⁶

Towards the end of the 1830's, begging and stealing took on more of a serious tone. The lack of food often left the Indians with no other means of survival. In 1837, Rev.

Thomas Johnson "met some 4 or 500 of the Kansas Indians going to the white settlements to beg provisions, for they had nothing to eat at home..."¹⁰⁷ Again in 1846 traveler Francis Parkman observed a group of "Kansas" on a begging expedition to Westport.¹⁰⁸

Stealing the stock of travelers was also a common activity of the Kansa although the victims sometimes made an effort to recover their animals. In 1844 some Kansa stole a few horses from an Oregon-bound wagon train. A small party from the caravan journeyed to the village of the head chief (Fool Chief) and demanded the return of their property. The chief, ignorant of the theft, promised to help return the horses.¹⁰⁹ Another Oregon-bound wagon train encountered the Kansa in 1847. "The first trouble we had with the Indians" wrote traveler James Findla, "was at Caw village, when they stole some of our cattle. We kept two of the Indians prisoners, and as they started to run away, they were killed by the guard."¹¹⁰ Many other incidents occurred in Kansa country during the 1830's and 1840's, most of them were unrecorded. Only in a few cases, though, did the victims see the return of their stock.

In 1847 the Kansa moved to their new reservation on the Upper Neosho River and settled near Council Grove, an important post on the Santa Fe road. Being about the last place where the traders could find shade, water and lumber, most caravans stopped in Council Grove before their long

journey west. The large volume of traffic along the road supplied the Indians with a steady stream of livestock to steal and soon many Kansa became accustomed to stealing from the caravans on a regular basis.¹¹¹

By 1853 the problem of Kansa stealing reached a high level. In his annual report of 1853, Commissioner of Indian Affairs George W. Manypenny wrote "They [Kansa] are adept in the art of stealing, and their location is such, being on the leading Santa Fe road, that they annoy the trains which pass that way."¹¹² In the same year Agent John Whitfield reported on the many complaints made against the Kansa. "They are located on the Santa Fe road," wrote Whitfield, "...and since I have had charge of this agency scarcely a train has passed but what complaints have been made against them..."¹¹³

Conditions did not improve with time. Commissioner Manypenny commented in 1856 that the Kansa "continue to infest the Santa Fe and other roads in the territory."¹¹⁴ Richard Cummins, now Superintendent of Indian Affairs in St. Louis wrote in the same year, "The Kansas tribe of Indians...may annually, be found upon the Santa Fe and other roads in the territory, begging and sometimes, I presume, committing petty thefts."¹¹⁵

The disturbances created by the Kansa did not go unnoticed by the military authorities who received loud complaints from the victims. Occasionally a military expedi-

tion left Ft. Leavenworth to recover stolen horses and stock from the Kansa. One such expedition of 50 dragoons left Ft. Leavenworth in 1851 under the command of Major Chilton.

Percival G. Lowe, who was later to write of his experiences, was a seargent in this company. The dragoons arrived at the Kansa village and the major had a big talk with the chiefs. Taking four of the principal chiefs prisoner the company returned to Ft. Leavenworth and held them until the stolen animals were returned shortly thereafter.¹¹⁶

In response to the continuing thefts committed by the Kansa the company again under the command of Major Chilton left for the Kansa villages in 1853. Upon arriving at the villages the Major demanded the return of some 20 stolen horses and returned his company to a camp a few miles away. The next morning St. Lowe and a small group of dragoons entered the Kansa camp and kidnapped the chief. They then returned to their company only to find the 20 horses had already been brought in.¹¹⁷ The repeated attempts by the military did little to curb the activities of the young Kansa men. In 1854 a newspaper reporter wrote that the Kansa were still giving immigrants "considerable trouble from all accounts."¹¹⁸

Faced with a disappearing food supply many Kansa turned to begging and stealing for survival. It was, after all, an established part of Kansa culture as well as prairie culture

in general. Confronted with pressures beyond their control the Kansa chose traditional ways of survival rather than adopt the civilization of the whites.

Illegal Trade

Ever since the first contacts with whites the Kansa had their share of problems with unscrupulous traders. Despite the many rules and regulations imposed by the Indian Office, a significant number of unlicensed traders continued to cheat the Indians. The Kansa had early experience with these types of traders and generally had some success in keeping them away. Not until the late 1840's did the problem grow serious.

Upon their arrival at the Upper Neosho reservation, their proximity to the Santa Fe road exposed the Kansa to a wide variety of frontier types. The new reservation removed them even further from their agent who had little or no control over the illegal trade in the first place. Not until 1855 did the federal government establish a separate agency for the Kansa near the reservation but by this time the damage had been done.

The arrival of the Kansa near Council Grove at first disgusted the whites but they later realized the profit to be made. Under the treaty of 1846 the Kansa received \$8,000 annually. This annuity money was a great attraction to many whites who schemed for ways to separate the Indians from their money. One of the most popular means of doing this was the

whiskey trade.

As mentioned before the Kansa generally opposed the use of liquor. This aspect of Kansa culture is well documented with the writings of Dr. Say and others. Despite the urgings of traders the Kansa remained true to their beliefs as late as 1849. In that year Agent Charles Handy noted that "they [Kansa] drink but little."¹¹⁹

A year later, however, the Kansa succumbed to the persistent whites who used "every stratagem in their power to get the Indians to drink."¹²⁰ In 1850 Agent Handy stated "The Kansas Indians have become great whiskey dealers as well as drinkers; they often travel a distance of two or three hundred miles for whiskey, making it convenient to steal a pony or two as they pass along the line for whiskey."¹²¹ Although the Indians had taken to whiskey, as Handy reported, they did not need to travel that far to get it. "After the tribe moved to the Upper Neosho Reservation," writes Unrau, "whiskey was obtained with little difficulty from soldiers stationed at nearby Fort Riley or from merchants at Council Grove."¹²²

The location near Council Grove and the Santa Fe road proved to be a poor choice on the part of government officials. In 1852, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, L. Lea noted that "little can be done for their welfare whilst they remain liable to the pernicious associations that await them there

[near Council Grove]."¹²³ The situation was no better in 1855 when Commissioner of Indian Affairs George Manypenny wrote "The Kaws or Kansa Tribe of Indians residing within the Council Grove Agency, in consequence of their proximity to the trading posts on the Santa Fe road, where they can procure intoxicating beverages from traders and immigrants passing through their country, have become addicted to the habits of intemperance and indolence..."¹²⁴

The establishment of the Council Grove Agency in 1855 did little to help protect the Kansa. The Agent John Montgomery had practically no power to enforce the laws on liquor sales to the Indians. In his annual reports Agent Montgomery complained every year about the situation but nothing came of it. In 1857 Montgomery wrote "I am willing to admit that about one-half [of the Kansa annuity money] is expended among the licensed traders for flour, bacon, sugar and coffee almost as soon as it is paid to the Indians; whilst at almost every side and corner of the Indian reservation...are the little whiskey shops, supplied, open, and ready to catch the remaining half of their money, which they never fail to do."¹²⁵

Government Indian Agents

The failure of Agent Montgomery to improve the liquor situation is exemplary of the federal government's efforts to help the Kansa during the period from 1825-1860. When the Kansa signed the treaty of 1825 they came under the wing of

the United States and the terms of that treaty stated that the government would provide full assistance to help the Kansa adjust to a farming way of life. This provision was loosely enforced and mostly ignored by federal Indian Agents. "An important aspect of Kansa history in the period following the treaty of 1825," writes Unrau, "was the careless, indeed illusive, manner in which the governments promises were fulfilled."¹²⁶

Many factors kept the federal government from providing the much needed assistance to the Kansa. A major reason was the constant reshuffling of the tribe from one agency to another. The Kansa were under the authority of the Council Bluffs Agency in 1825, the Kansa Agency in 1827, the Ft. Leavenworth Agency in 1834, the Osage River Agency in 1848, the Sac & Fox Agency in 1851, the Potawatomie Agency in 1853, and finally the Council Grove Agency in 1855. During this constant shifting of responsibility for the Kansa, the tribe came under the authority of a number of different agents. During the period of 1848 to 1855 the Kansa had a total of nine different agents.¹²⁷ It is not surprising then, that the government could not carry on any kind of program with the tribe.

The distance between the agencies and the Kansa villages also posed a problem. None of the agencies between 1832 and 1855 were closer than 50 miles to the tribe.¹²⁸

Being so far away it was impossible for the agents to regulate trade and determine just what help the Kansa needed. In the 1849 report of Agent Charles Handy (Osage River Agency) he commented "This tribe [Kansa] is so remote from the Agency that it is impossible to give them the attention they require..."¹²⁹

Another source of difficulty was the constant hagaling between traders and agents.¹³⁰ Disagreements over prices, trading stations and licenses took up so much of their time they seemed to forget about the Indians.

The Kansa did not always receive the goods and services due them simply because many agents did not care if they got them or not. The agents' salaries were not large and did not come on a regular basis.¹³¹ The agents, furthermore, were far more likely to spend their time and efforts helping tribes who demonstrated a desire to learn the arts of civilization. Agent Francis Lea commented in 1852 that "they [Kansa] possess not a single feature towards civilization and seem not to desire any."¹³²

Missionaries

The government agents failed to help the Kansa and the missionaries who worked with the tribe had no more success. After the 1825 treaty, Rev. William Johnson, a Methodist Episcopal Minister, became the missionary for the Kansa. Johnson served among the Kansa for seven years with little

without converting a single Indian, language being a major problem. Johnson then received an "appointment to work with the more cooperative Delawares in 1832."^{133, 134}

In 1833 the Rev. William D. Smith visited the Kansa (now without a missionary) on a tour of Indian tribes in the area to scout out possible sites for a Presbyterian mission. Rev. Smith was shocked with the condition of the Kansa and felt they needed help more than any other tribe he visited. He did not, however, recommend a mission for them because they were too far away from the white settlements and their economy of hunting was not conducive to rapid and lasting alteration. He also predicted that there was little chance of getting any immediate government funding for a mission.¹³⁵

Leaving the Kansa to the ways of the wild seemed a sin and in 1834 Rev. William Johnson was again appointed missionary for the Kansa. He was not, however, able to set up his mission until 1836. Back for a second try Johnson was somewhat encouraged upon his return to the villages. In a letter of June 7, 1836 Johnson wrote:

In the midst of all, we have some things to encourage us to persevere. They seem willing to learn. They are fond of talking, and do not try to conceal their views on any subject. They are more serious and devoted than many other tribes, and better informed. They fast and pray and attend to many ceremonies, in a solemn manner, yet in all their worship there is no confession of sin or knowledge of a Savior. If they only knew Jesus, in the regeneration of their souls, and would worship

in his name with the same promptness that they attend to their own ceremonies, they would doubtless be a happy people.¹³⁶

After six more years of working with the Kansa, William Johnson died on April 8, 1842 of pneumonia.¹³⁷ The work of the mission, though, continued until the Kansa moved in 1847. During the eleven years the mission was in operation not one convert was reported.¹³⁸

Now on their new reservation with no spiritual guidance, the Methodist Episcopal decided to try a third time. In 1850 the church established the Kansa Methodist Mission and Manual Labor School under the direction of Rev. Thomas S. Huffaker.¹³⁹ The school and mission had no more success than the previous attempts and closed down in 1854 with no converts to report.¹⁴⁰ G. P. Morehouse later observed "The Indians were never in sympathy with the movement."¹⁴¹ Morehouse also wrote "The better element of the Kaws or the pure Indian type of that wild tribe, refused to send their children to the mission school... They considered it very degrading and a breach of true, old Indian dignity and aristocracy to adopt and follow the educational methods of their white brothers."¹⁴²

Kansa Reputation

By 1860 the reputation of the Kansa as dirty, wretched thieves was well established. The Kansa, turning to begging and stealing for survival, aroused the ire of many. Both whites and "civilized" immigrant Indians alike thought these

activities to be disgusting and degrading. On his journey through Kansa territory in 1846, traveler Francis Parkman spotted a group of Kansa going begging and wrote, "They filed past in rapid succession, men, women, children: some on foot, but all were alike squalid and wretched...they were the dregs of the Kansas nation...on a begging expedition to Westport."¹⁴³

While begging Indians were aggravating, stealing by Indians posed a bothersome problem. The whites and Indians to the Kansa consistently complained about the thievery of the tribe. Complaints grew loud enough to reach the ear of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs George Manypenny who in 1853 commented "complaints are loud against these Indians, not only from the white people who pass through their country but from all the neighboring tribes."¹⁴⁴

Also contributing to the low opinion of the Kansa was the common belief that they were a particularly savage group of Indians. After decades of contact with white civilization the Kansa clung to the shattered remains of their traditional way of life. They would not give up the chase and accept white farming methods, stop their incessant warfare with the Pawnee, or accept the teachings of the Christian missionaries. Compared to other tribes just to the east the Kansa seemed especially savage and backwards. In 1840, Superintendent of Indian Affairs Joshua Pilcher commented that "The report of Major Cummins indicates an essential improvement in the physi-

cal condition of all the tribes under his superintendence, with the exception of the Kansas...."¹⁴⁵ Two years later Agent Cummins reported in 1842 "I take great pleasure in stating to you that all the tribes within this agency, except the Kansas, are in prosperous condition."¹⁴⁶ The next year in 1843 the new Superintendent of Indian Affairs in St. Louis, D. D. Mitchel stated that most of the Indians under his authority were becoming good farmers. "The Otoes and Kansas" wrote Mitchel, "form the only exceptions; they are to all appearances, as poor, wild, and savage, as they were twenty years ago."¹⁴⁷ Despite continued contact with whites the Kansa continued to reject the white man's way. In 1856 Commissioner of Indian Affairs Manypenny bemoaned "But little improvement has been made in the habits or condition of the Kansas tribe of Indians."¹⁴⁸

Although the apparent savagism of the Kansa often bewildered government agents it also aroused the disgust of other observers. Reviewing his journeys in 1846 Francis Parkman wrote "Indeed the Shawanoes have made greater progress in agriculture than any other tribe on the Missouri frontier; and in both appearance and in character form a marked contrast to our late acquaintance with the Kansas."¹⁴⁹

One of the peculiar aspects of Indian reputations is the begrudging respect accorded those Indians who fought to keep their land and way of life. This was the charitable attitude accorded a fierce enemy. The Kansa, though, never

fought any big battles with the whites. Whatever small skirmishes occurred served only to aggravate the whites. Considered by many to be fierce warriors when fighting their Indian enemies the Kansa became the objects of scorn as they witnessed the confiscation of their land and the destruction of their way of life at the hands of whites, seemingly without a struggle. Francis Parkman noted in 1846 that nothing was to be feared from the degraded Kansa.¹⁴⁰

The visibility of the degraded tribe also added to the contempt of whites for the Kansa. If the Kansa had remained to themselves and quietly starved their neighbors would have had little cause for complaint. The constant begging expeditions of the Kansa to white settlements and the Santa Fe road, though, placed them continually under the eyes of their critics. Each successive sighting of these degraded Indians served only to reenforce their poor reputation.

After the move to the new reservation in 1847, many travelers on the Santa Fe road looked upon the mere presence of the Indians with disgust. In 1847 trader Philip Ferguson saw the newly arrived Kansa at Council Grove and wrote "There is a village of Kaw here - dirty, lazy set, whose doleful songs at night disturbed my slumbers."¹⁵¹ Two years later traveler Augustus H. Heslop commented that "The Grove is the headquarters of the Kansas or Caw Indians...a filthy, lazy, thieving, worthless set of beings."¹⁵²

Such was the general opinion of the Kansa Indians. The reputation of the Kansa can, however, be summed up with the comments of newly arrived Agent John Montgomery in his annual report of 1855.:

Immediately after they received one thousand dollars worth of provisions which was paid to them about the middle of June last, the small-pox broke out amongst them and has continued fatally with the greater number of them, it seems to the great satisfaction and admiration of all those who have any acquaintance with the Kaw... I am constrained to say that the Kansas are a poor, degraded, superstitious, theivish, indigent, tribe of Indians; their tendency is downward, and, in my opinion, they must soon become extinct, and the sooner they arrive at this period, the better it will be for the rest of mankind.¹⁵³

CONCLUSION

Before 1825 the Kansa maintained a reputation as noble and proud people. Their early relations with whites produced, at times, uneasy feelings but on the whole most observers recorded favorable impressions of this Siouan language tribe. With the treaty of 1825, however, the Kansa lost much of their land and entered upon a period of debasement.

Throughout the period of 1825-1860 the Kansa Indians experienced many pressures to abandon their traditional way of life. Population loss due to disease and warfare demoralized the tribe and reduced their effective military strength. Fierce competition among the stronger plains tribes for the rapidly retreating buffalo forced a decline in the annual

hunts. With the destruction of their main subsistence activity many Kansa distastefully turned to farming. The tribe would not, however, adopt the farming methods of the whites. Struck with floods, insects, and crop failures the tribe only occasionally raised enough crops to feed themselves. Faced with little and sometimes no food income many Kansa turned to begging and stealing for survival. The condition of the Kansa was debased further by their proximity to the Santa Fe road after 1847, where unscrupulous whites preyed upon the Indians and their annuities. During the whole period from 1825 to 1860 the Government Indian Agents responsible for the Kansa did little to help the tribe, and missionaries found no way to alter the declining status of this group.

Through all adversity the Kansa tenaciously clung to their traditional lifestyle. When their principal means of food income (hunting and farming) failed they turned to other culturally sanctioned activities (begging and stealing) for survival. Although a portion of the Kansa did survive, their modified lifestyle aroused the disgust and disrespect of their neighbors showing the direct relationship between the two.

By 1860, when Kansa lands were allotted in severalty and the remainder sold to settlers, the tribe had acquired a reputation as dirty, wretched thieves - the dregs of humanity. Before 1825, those who thought badly of the Kansa usually had little or no contact with the tribe. By 1860, however, those

who knew the tribe well were the first to denounce them.

Did the Kansa deserve their poor reputation? Most whites and "civilized" Indians saw only that the Kansa rejected white civilization and largely lived by begging and stealing. This was enough for them to consider the Kansa a degraded and disgusting people. What they did not see, or care to see, was the desperate struggle of the Kansa, over the course of 35 years, to perserve the once proud and noble traditions of the Wind People.

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THE REPUTATION OF THE KANSA INDIANS

by

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Before 1825 the Kansa maintained a reputation as noble and proud people. Their early relations with whites produced, at times, uneasy feelings but on the whole most observers recorded favorable impressions of this Siouan language tribe. With the treaty of 1825, however, the Kansa lost much of their land and entered upon a period of debasement.

Throughout the period of 1825-1860 the Kansa Indians experienced many pressures to abandon their traditional way of life. Population loss due to disease and warfare demoralized the tribe and reduced their effective military strength. Fierce competition among the stronger plains tribes for the rapidly retreating buffalo forced a decline in the annual hunts. With the destruction of their main subsistence activity many Kansa distastefully turned to farming. The tribe would not, however, adopt the farming methods of the whites. Struck with floods, insects, and crop failures the tribe only occasionally raised enough crops to feed themselves. Faced with little and sometimes no food income many Kansa turned to begging and stealing for survival. The condition of the Kansa was debased further by their proximity to the Santa Fe road after 1847, where unscrupulous whites preyed upon the Indians and their annuities. During the whole period from 1825 to 1860 the Government Indian Agents responsible for the Kansa did little to help the tribe, and missionaries found no way to alter the declining status of this group.

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