

# Men of Peace

Settling the Southern Plains, especially Indian Territory, did not come easily. Blood flowed frequently as whites and Indians struggled over land. Factions and dissensions within the tribes and battles between tribes, along with the troubles caused by the removals, resulted in many bloody battles, from the eastern rivers to the western plains. The early settlers, like the fierce Osage, resented other tribes moving into their broad hunting ranges. They vented their anger against the intruders. For example, the Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians, which began in 1832, called the year of 1833 the “Year of the Cutthroat Massacre.” The year was named for the *massacre* of hundreds of Kiowa old people, women, and children by the warring Osage.

All the elements of violence were there. Indian tribes had been shoved further and further west by the ever increasing white settlements. Whole tribes were removed to Indian Territory from nearly every section of the nation. The newly settled lands were always smaller in area than the lands that they had given up. Treaties called for food, farming equipment, annuities, sometimes arms and *ammunition*, and other provisions to compensate the Indians for their loss of land.

To whites, Indians were a barrier to progress. The land needed to be productive, railroads needed to be built, and safe passage was necessary for the flow of settlers and goods moving westward.

To Indians, the white concept of land use was an assault on Mother Earth. They resented being forced to conform to a different way of life by the need for more and more land for white settlements. They feared the destruction of their way of life. They feared the extinction of the life-sustaining buffalo, as well as the extinction of the tribes themselves.

The battles that were fought all across the Northern and Southern Plains were battles where both the Indians and whites were protecting their ways of life.

From those battles, recorded history appears to favor the warriors and the fighting cavalymen who made names for themselves through heroic feats. The names of the warrior-chiefs—such as Geronimo, Roman Nose, Satank, Satanta, and Quanah Parker—struck fear in the hearts of the early settlers. The names of military leaders—such as



Chivington, Sherman, Sheridan, and Custer—were recorded in history because of their victories at Sand Creek and the Battle of the Washita. Hundreds of Cheyennes perished under the guns and swords of the cavalrymen in those battles.

Unfortunately, the peacemakers are too frequently overlooked, and there were men of peace on the Southern Plains. There were the early missionaries and their wives and children who came to live among the various tribes so that Indian families could be Christianized and Indian children could be educated. There was Major Edward W. Wynkoop, whose friendship with Black Kettle and whose efforts to avoid bloodshed among the Plains Indians, made him a trusted white man among the Western Tribes. There was Black Kettle, the great chief of the Southern Cheyenne tribe. He tried to live at peace with whites but died at the Battle of the Washita. Also, there was Chief Kickingbird of the Kiowas and Standing Bear of the Poncas. It was Standing Bear who sought justice in the federal courts. Because of him, a judge declared that Indians were indeed human beings with personal liberties and rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States.

Settlement by whites and by Indians had been bloody, before and after the Civil War. Citizens began to exert great pressure upon government officials to find a solution to the Indian problem. The Plains Tribes were interfering with western emigration. They interfered with the mail, with trade goods being transported overland, and with the building of railroads across the Plains. They even interfered with the cattle herds being driven across Indian Territory to *railheads* in Kansas and Missouri. The tribes were obstacles to new settlements on the prairies and to land openings in unoccupied lands.

On the frontier, many army commanders believed that the Indians had to be isolated or destroyed. Many Indian chiefs were urging war. Others sought a more peaceful, humane solution. Two who sought peaceful solutions were Wynkoop and Black Kettle.

In 1866, the American expansion westward had just begun, and Congress had reorganized the Union Army into an Indian-fighting force to protect those involved. The whole state of Kansas was under the command of Major General Winfield Scott Hancock. One of his problems was dealing with threats to the Kansas Pacific Railroad by the hostile Plains tribes.

General Hancock and one of his officers, George Armstrong Custer, were fresh from their victories in the Civil War. They had little under-

standing of their opponents on the Plains.

Wynkoop had been commander of Fort Lyon, Colorado, and had come to know and respect the Plains Indians. He had formed a close personal relationship with Black Kettle. Because of his friendship with the Indians, he was appointed agent to the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes. He quickly arranged a meeting between General Hancock and the tribal chiefs.

The meeting went badly from the beginning. A late spring blizzard had struck the area, causing the Indians to be late. Threats were exchanged, and the meeting ended abruptly when General Hancock stated his intention to move his command closer to the Indian village. With the memories of the Sand Creek Massacre fresh in their minds, the chiefs became alarmed and left.

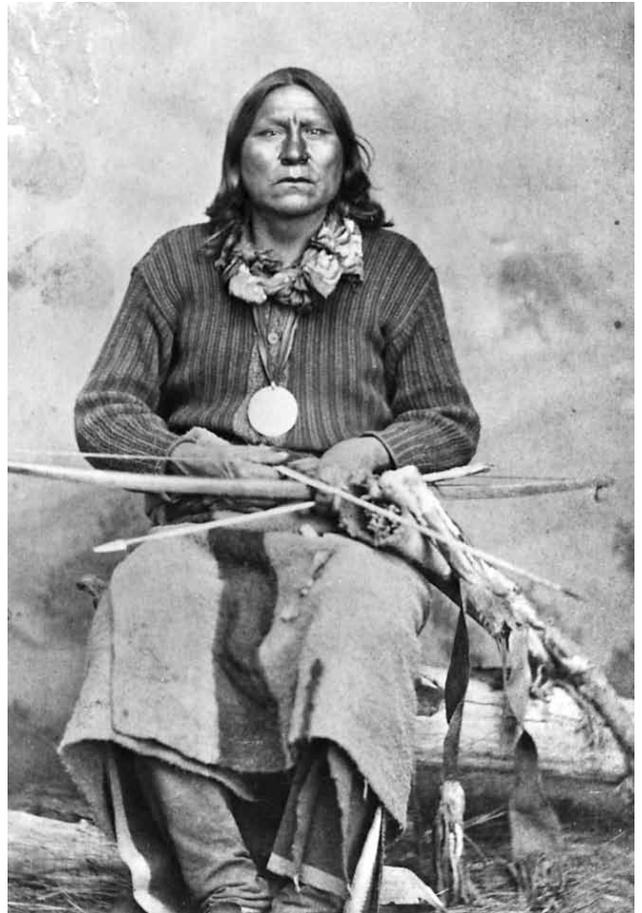
Although Wynkoop tried to dissuade Hancock from following the Indians, Hancock moved his command closer to the village. There he was visited by Sioux Chief Pawnee Killer and Cheyennes White Horse and Bull Bear. They agreed to meet again the next morning.

When noon came and the chiefs had not arrived, the impatient general ordered his cavalrymen to move toward the village. Within a few miles, he came face to face with several hundred Cheyenne and Sioux warriors and chiefs.

A battle was about to take place when Wynkoop rode forward to talk with Chief Roman Nose. An impressive Cheyenne warrior chief, Roman Nose stood almost six feet, four inches tall and carried himself with the dignity of a king.

The battle was avoided, but General Hancock felt tricked by the chiefs when he learned that all the women, children, and old people had been moved from the camp. He and Custer continued to pursue the Cheyennes as they moved from one site to another.

It was Wynkoop who arranged for the meeting at Medicine Lodge Creek to sign treaties with the hostile tribes. Wynkoop and General William S. Harney spoke and openly criticized Hancock's campaign against the Cheyennes and the burning of Cheyenne villages. As all Plains



**White Bear  
(Satanta),  
Kiowa Chief  
Oklahoma Historical  
Society**

Indian chiefs listened carefully, Wynkoop talked at great length about the campaigns against the Cheyenne and the Sioux. He made charges of fraud in the handling of annuities and in the bad condition of the provisions given to the Indians.

The chiefs of the nations had come in full dress, impressive in their feathered headdresses and colorful robes. The powerfully built chief of the Kiowas, Satanta, or White Bear, spoke as did Silver Broach of the Comanches, Poor Bear of the Apaches, and Ten Bears of the Comanches. However, Black Kettle remained silent.

Finally, all the Plains Tribes except the Cheyennes had signed the Treaty of Medicine Lodge Creek, an important step in bringing a peaceful settlement to the Plains. Then, under great duress, Tall Bull signed for the Cheyennes.

Wynkoop continued to struggle to fulfill the terms of the treaty, urging strongly that the government keep its promises to provide arms, provisions, and annuities. It was Wynkoop who had to meet with thousands of Plains Indians to tell them when supplies, especially the promised guns and *ammunition*, were missing from the shipments. As soon as he was successful in getting supplies, a band of renegade Cheyennes killed some white settlers. Once again talk of war spread through the camps. It was Wynkoop who demanded that the Cheyennes hand over the guilty braves. He knew that such an action

was unthinkable and was unlikely to happen.

Wynkoop then suggested that the peaceful Cheyennes be separated from the warring parties and be protected by federal troops. He felt that was the only way to protect the peaceful Cheyennes in the event of war.

The wars came. Wynkoop worked hard to bring about peace. He criticized Congress for failing to send the provisions they had promised. As he prepared to go to Washington where he could make his fight public, he learned that Custer had attacked the village of his old friend, Black Kettle. Black Kettle and hundreds of peaceful Cheyennes had been slain. Wynkoop angrily denounced Custer for his action. He called the battle a *massacre* of friendly Indians. The name it was given was the Battle of the Washita.



**Kickingbird,  
Kiowa Chief  
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General William Tecumseh Sherman answered Wynkoop's charges against Custer with attacks on the character of Black Kettle. He claimed that the Cheyenne chief was one of the most active chiefs in starting acts of war. Sherman defended Custer's actions by saying that, by killing Black Kettle, Custer had put an end to one of the most troublesome, dangerous Indians on the Southern Plains.

Wynkoop appeared before the United States Indian Commission to defend his old friend, Black Kettle:

His innate dignity and lofty bearing, combined with his sagacity and intelligence, had that moral effect which placed him in the position as a potentate [ruler]. The whole force of his nature was concentrated in the one idea of how best to act for the good of his race; he knew the power of the white man, and was aware that thence might spring most of the evils that could befall his people, and consequently the whole of his powers were directed toward conciliating [ending hostilities with] the whites, and his utmost endeavors used to preserve peace and friendship between his race and their oppressors.

Disappointed by his inability to effect peace, Wynkoop resigned his position as agent to the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes. The Cheyennes were beaten. The Sherman-Wynkoop quarrel over the death of Black Kettle and hundreds of Cheyennes brought to the public a better understanding of the problems and injustices. The public outcry after the Sand Creek Massacre and after the Battle of the Washita brought pressure on military commanders.

Although the Kiowas and Comanches fought on for a while longer, hostilities grew less and less as settlement came. Near the closing years of hostilities, Custer paid for the attack on Black Kettle. At the Little Big Horn, the Sioux under Crazy Horse and a band of Northern Cheyennes under Dull Knife killed Custer and every trooper with him.

One of the Kiowa chiefs at the council at Medicine Lodge Creek was Kickingbird. He had accompanied Lone Wolf, Satank (Sitting Bear), and Satanta (White Bear). Satanta's eloquence won him the title of "Orator of the Plains." Satanta described himself as a friend to the white man, but he wanted the lives of the Kiowa children to be as his own youth had been — free to roam over the beloved prairies. With great reluctance and despite their protests, Satanta, Satank, and Kickingbird signed the Treaty of Medicine Lodge Creek. Lone Wolf refused to

sign.

Lone Wolf became the Principal Chief of the Kiowas, and the tribe split into war and peace factions. According to historian James Mooney, “Sparks of friction flew in the Kiowa camps and produced a white heat of division.” Satanta was siding with the war faction, but Kickingbird asked for patience.

Called a coward for his stance, Kickingbird led his braves into Texas to raid and to fight the army. His leadership and personal courage were such that no one ever accused him of cowardice again. As a result, many Kiowas listened to Kickingbird’s arguments for peace.

Meanwhile, Satanta, Satank, and Big Tree led a raid on a wagon train in Texas. After proudly confessing their roles in the raid, the leaders were arrested and taken to Texas to stand trial. Satank sang his death song, the Song of the Ten Bravest, and painfully freed himself from his bonds, grabbed a knife and an army carbine, and died under a hail of rifle fire, as he had wanted. Satanta and Big Tree were imprisoned and sentenced to be executed by being hanged.



In Indian Territory, Kickingbird was working tirelessly for peace, trying to convince the Kiowas that they had to adapt or die. Even Lone Wolf was attempting to maintain more peaceful relations. Both Kickingbird and Lone Wolf promised to keep the peace if Satanta and Big Tree were

returned to their people.

The public also pressured the government to release the Kiowas. The Indian Bureau claimed that their acts were acts of war, not murder. In 1873 they were released on condition that they were never to take a single step off the reservation.

When Big Tree and Satanta returned to the reservation, General Sherman demanded that a roll call of all Indians capable of bearing arms be taken every Thursday. Anyone who didn’t answer roll was de-

clared hostile.

Satanta, Big Tree, Lone Wolf, and Sky Walker left the reservation and hid out in the north and in the Texas Panhandle. Kickingbird stayed on the reservation. While the warring chiefs fought skirmishes and were hunted, Kickingbird held to his vision for a better way of life and continued to urge peace. He feared the complete destruction of the Kiowas. His influence was such that he kept more than two-thirds of the Kiowas from going on the war path.

Eventually, the warring chiefs surrendered. Satanta was returned to the Texas State Prison at Huntsville to serve a life sentence. There the free-spirited old chief took his own life in October, 1878. He was buried in Huntsville. (In 1963, his grandson, James Auchiah, one of the famous “Kiowa Five” artists, wore Satanta’s ceremonial regalia, including Satanta’s feathered headdress, when Satanta’s body was reburied at the Fort Sill Cemetery.)

The government then ordered Chief Kickingbird to turn over a list of names of troublemakers who would be sent in *exile* to Florida. The twenty-six names Kickingbird selected, except for Lone Wolf, Sky Walker and four other war chiefs, were those of the least influential Kiowas. He took great care in his selections, sparing those that he thought would work for the welfare of the tribe. Kickingbird was determined that he and his people would go to war no more.

When the twenty-six were loaded on railroad cars for their long journey, Kickingbird rode up and apologized for being unable to spare them. He promised to work for their return. Sky Walker threatened Kickingbird, saying that the peaceful chief would not live long enough to do anything.

Sky Walker, a Kiowa medicine man, prayed for the death of Kickingbird. He told his fellow exiles that his medicine would bring death to Kickingbird, but that he, too, would die. Less than a week later, Kickingbird died with severe cramps. Sky Walker himself died shortly after reaching prison in Florida. The post surgeon at Fort Sill claimed that Kickingbird had been poisoned, but the Kiowas who heard Sky Walker’s threat believed that Sky Walker’s strong medicine killed both the Kiowa chiefs.

Big Tree assumed leadership and convinced his captors of his rehabilitation. He gathered his tribesmen in the Wichita Mountains area, and Big Tree, who had sat in council with the Kiowa chiefs through the most turbulent times, became a deacon and a Sunday School teacher in the

Rainy Mountain Baptist Church.

The peace that Kickingbird sought in life came to the Kiowas soon after his death.

Though at peace, for the most part, the Indians still did not have full rights as citizens. Most tribes were wards of the United States Government. Every day, citizens seek redress in the courts of the land under the Constitution. They have the right to redress because they are persons under the law. Such was not so for the Indian.

In April, 1879, a Ponca Indian chief sought justice in the courts, but first he had to prove that he was a human being.

The Ponca lands in the Dakotas had been ceded to the Sioux. The Poncas were moved to a reservation on the Niobrara River in Nebraska, and they had lived peacefully with their neighbors there. The Poncas had adapted to farming very well and had signed treaties with the government, giving up land for the promise of a permanent home on the Niobrara.

Troubles increased between the Sioux and the Poncas, with the Sioux trying to drive the peaceful Poncas off their own land. The government refused to protect the Poncas but then decided to remove them to Indian Territory.

The Poncas never liked the warm lands of Oklahoma. Walking 150 miles in the July heat, the Poncas arrived on the Arkansas River. By the end of the year, a third of the tribe had died. One of them was Chief Standing Bear's son. When the son lay dying, he asked Standing Bear to promise that his body would be taken back and buried in the tribal burial grounds near the Niobrara. Standing Bear promised.

Placing his son's body in a box on a wagon, Standing Bear left for the Niobrara in the midst of a blizzard in January, 1879. The burial party was looked upon as runaways and orders were given to arrest them. From his jail cell, the *destitute* old chief said, "I thought God had intended us to live, but I was mistaken. God intends to give the country to the white people, and we are to die."

The plight and the condition of the Poncas spurred Omaha ministers to circulate petitions for their release. John L. Webster and Andrew J. Poppleton, two attorneys for the Union Pacific Railroad, volunteered to represent the Indians in the court of Federal Judge Elmer S. Dundy. It was an unprecedented (no previous example like it) case of civil rights — the case of Standing Bear v. Crook.

The Federal District Attorney argued that the Indians' right to the

writ of habeas corpus should be denied on the grounds that Indians were not persons within the definition of the law.

For hours, the opposing attorneys argued whether or not all human beings are entitled to the writ. Finally, Standing Bear was allowed to speak for himself. Through an interpreter, Standing Bear spoke of both red men and white men as creations of God:

I have learned...that God wishes us to love Him and obey His commandments, follow the narrow road, work for Him on earth, and we shall have happiness after we die...Oh, my brothers, the Almighty looks down on me, and knows what I am, and hears my words. May the Almighty send a good spirit to brood over you, my brothers, to move you to help me.

If a white man had land, and someone should swindle him, that man would try to get it back, and you would not blame him. Take pity on me, and help me to save the lives of the women and children.

My brothers, a power, which I cannot resist, crowds me down to the ground. I need help. I have done.

For a moment, there was silence in the courtroom. Then there was a rush to Standing Bear in support of the proud Ponca.

Judge Dundy himself was visibly moved by Standing Bear's eloquence. After a two-day hearing the judge declared:

An Indian is a person within the meaning of the law and has therefore the right to sue a writ of habeas corpus in a federal court... The Indian possesses inherent [part of being human] rights of expatriation [living away from one's own country] as well as the more fortunate white race and has the inalienable right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness so long as they obey the laws and do not trespass on forbidden ground.

Standing Bear continued his journey and buried his son with his tribal ancestors on the Niobrara River in Nebraska. Thirty years later, the old chief was also buried there.

## **Do You Know?**

**On the evening of March 25, 1948, a tornado roared through Tinker Air Force Base, near Midwest City, Oklahoma, causing considerable damage, a few injuries, but no fatalities. However, the destruction could have been much worse. A few hours earlier, Air Force Captain Robert C. Miller and Major Ernest J. Fawbush correctly predicted that atmospheric conditions were ripe for tornadoes in the vicinity of Tinker AFB. This first tornado forecast was instrumental in advancing the nation's commitment to protecting the American public and military resources from the dangers caused by natural hazards.**