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DAYS OF DARKNESS: THE WICHITAS IN INDIAN TERRITORY AND KANSAS, 1859-1867

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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ABSTRACT

DAYS OF DARKNESS: THE WICHITAS IN INDIAN TERRITORY AND KANSAS, 1859-1867

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Most of what is known about the history of the Wichita peoples is scattered throughout the works of historians Earl H. Elam and F. Todd Smith, as well as anthropologist W. W. Newcomb, Jr., leaving this historiography of the tribe relatively short. Though the Wichitas appear fleetingly in the works of other historians, little has been done to build upon the works of Elam and Smith since they wrote their comprehensive histories of the tribe in 1996, 2000, and 2008 respectively. All three of these works (one by Elam and two by Smith) are relatively short and contain only brief descriptions of the tribe during the period of the Civil War. Muddying the waters further is the fact that accounts of the tribe during the aforementioned period are conflicting, particularly in concerns to how the tribe spent their time in Indian Territory following their removal from Texas as well as their brief stay in Kansas throughout the duration of the war.

This project intends to correct this array of issues. It will do so by presenting a clear narrative that encompasses the Wichita peoples' time spent in Indian Territory, including a clearer presentation of the factors that led to their removal from Indian Territory to Kansas around the outbreak of the Civil War. The factors include abandonment by the Union, a failed relationship with the Confederacy, failure to produce crops that could sustain their population, and hostile neighbors in the form of Union-allied native bands and old enemies from Texas. The combination of these conditions led Confederate soldiers to march the Wichitas north to Kansas, where they

were essentially abandoned by both warring governments. This project will also encompass their time in Kansas and will detail how the negligence of both governments, combined with failed agricultural ventures, a terrible flood season, and rampant disease, led to the sharp decline in the tribe's population before they returned to Indian Territory in 1867 following the conclusion of the war.

Introduction

The Wichitas are a people with a history that spans over thirty-five hundred years, beginning when their ancestors moved out of the northern forests of the North American continent and settled along the river valleys on what is today known as the Great Plains. This group of ancestral Wichitas, Caddoan-speaking peoples who are also related to the Pawnee and the Arikaras, spent the ensuing centuries expanding their vibrant culture and splitting into several lineage-based family groups themselves. From approximately 1400 to 1600, they lived in central and southern Kansas, around present day Arkansas City. Then, as they spread, the people who fell under the umbrella of the Wichitas came to settle in what is now southern Oklahoma and North Texas, arriving in these regions long before the first Europeans—Spaniards under the leadership of Francisco Vazquez de Coronado—swept through in the sixteenth century looking for cities of gold they would never find.[1]

At the time of their contact with Coronado, historians estimate that the Wichitas, which by then were just beginning to divide into the five tribes that comprise the modern Wichita peoples, numbered some two hundred thousand strong. These five sub-tribes were the Guichita from whom the Wichita peoples derived their name, the Kichais, the Taovayas, the Tawakonis, and the Wacos. They were related to other Caddoan peoples, such as the Pawnee and Caddo Nation, through a shared language, religion, and culture. All together, the Wichita tribes subsisted on raising crops and hunting the various game found on the plains, such bison and deer. They also remained mostly sedentary, dwelling in the large villages of grass houses for which they would become known among European explorers and settlers, until conflicts with larger native tribes like the Osage

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[1] F. Todd Smith, *The Wichita Indians: Traders of Texas and the Southern Plains, 1540-1845* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 3; Thomas A. Witty, Jr., "Back to Kansas," *Plains Anthropologist* 51, no. 200, (2006): 813.

forced them to abandon their homeland in Kansas to live in close proximity to the Red River in modern Oklahoma and North Texas. However, by 1859 some three centuries later and just before the outbreak of the Civil War, the number of Wichitas decreased to approximately eleven hundred; and by the end of the war, the Wichitas had a population of around seven hundred.[2] The appalling loss of Wichita lives can be pinned to a number of factors, most of them conflicts with European settlers in Texas, encroachment from these settlers ever further into their lands, and rival native groups like the Comanches and the Osage.[3] However, the tribe's numbers began to decline at an even more alarming pace once they were pushed out of Texas into Indian Territory, setting off a chain of events that would see them transformed into outcasts by both the Confederate States of America and the Union and left at the mercy of the elements, where rampant starvation and disease very nearly wiped the tribe out before the conclusion of the Civil War.

The historical account what happened to the Wichitas during this period—how they spent their time, the troubles they encountered, and how they eventually left Indian Territory for Kansas—is contradictory at best and convoluted at worst. This problem arose out of, in part, a lack of historical scholarship focusing on the Wichitas. Contrary to the 1976 assertion of anthropologist W. W. Newcomb, Jr., the historical literature on the Wichitas is not "fairly extensive" (though he is right to note that what history there is written is scattered and obscure). At the time he wrote those words, he could only name a single monograph dedicated to the Wichitas' history: an account of their mythology written by George A. Dorsey in 1904. The other three scholarly sources were

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[2] Ibid, 3-5; F. Todd Smith, "Wichita Locations and Population, 1719-1901," *Plains Anthropologist* 53, no. 208, (2008): 407.

[3] The Wichitas, for most of their history, typically maintained strong tied with the Comanches and frequently traded with them. However, certain bands of Wichitas in Texas frequently fell into conflict with Comanches.

short articles on the tribe or larger monographs that mentioned the Wichitas in passing, usually where the tribes encountered larger native groups such as the Comanches.[4]

Since then, a slow trickle of Wichita histories were written. The foundational works in Wichita history come from historians Earl H. Elam and F. Todd Smith. Smith's two volume history of the Wichitas spans from 1540 to 1901, while Elam's history of the Wichitas and their associated tribes—the most recent monograph written on the subject—spans 1757 to 1859. Both works touch upon the Wichitas during the Civil War. However, mentions of this period are fleeting in Elam's work, appearing towards the end due to the book's purview; and, while Todd dedicates a chapter to the Wichitas in the Civil War, it is a broad-strokes chapter that details very little of the Wichitas' stay in Kansas and contradicts other histories, such as Elam's, on the reasons why the Wichitas left Indian Territory for Kansas in the first place. Todd also wrote an article for *Plains Anthropologist* in 2008 that tracked the population and movements of the Wichitas throughout their vast history, which is useful for visualizing the decline in the Wichitas' population during the Civil War, but does little to provide details on their stay or the exact specifics of their plight. That being said, Todd can hardly be faulted for this omission, as the subject was not the focus of his article.[5]

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[4] W. W. Newcomb, Jr., *The Wichita People* (Phoenix: Indian Tribal Series, 1976), 101-102. For the other sources suggested by Newcomb, see: Edward S. Curtis, "The Wichita," *The North American Indian* 19, no. 20, (1930): 35-104; Elizabeth A.H. John, *Storms Brewed in Other Men's Worlds, The Confrontation of Indians, Spanish, and French in the Southwest, 1540-1795* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1975); W. W. Newcomb, Jr., *The Indians of Texas, From Prehistoric to Modern Times* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961).

[5] See F. Todd Smith, *The Wichitas: Traders of Texas and the Southern Plains, 1540-1845* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000); Smith, *The Caddos, the Wichitas, and the United States, 1846-1901* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996); Earl H. Elam, *Kitikiti'sh: The Wichita Indians and Associated Tribes in Texas, 1757-1859* (Hillsboro: Hillsboro College Press, 2008); Smith, "Wichita Locations and Populations, 1719-1901."

The Wichitas' plight in Indian Territory and Kansas, before and during the Civil War respectively, also comes up in Stan Hoig and Gary Anderson's respective studies of the tribal wars taking place on the southern plains during the nineteenth century. Their works certainly help provide clues as to what happens to the tribe during this period. However, as their works do not focus on the Wichitas specifically, the tribe is often overshadowed and sidelined in favor of larger tribes—such as the Comanches and the Lipan Apaches—and their American adversaries.[6]

Taken together with the works of Elam and Smith, these four monographs, along with one scholarly article, represent all the historical literature that exists on the Wichitas during the period the tribe dubbed "the Days of Darkness." While that might initially seem like a plethora of scholarship on the matter, mentions of the aforementioned period are brief, contradictory, and scattered throughout them, convoluting the historiography and creating a profound sense of uncertainty and confusion between the varying accounts.[7] In order to correct the inconsistencies in the historical timeline and fill in the empty spaces that have been left by past historians of the Wichitas, an examination of precisely what those inconsistencies are is required.

Wrinkles in the Timeline

The mid-to-late nineteenth century on the Southwest Plains was hectic and bloody; and the story of the conflicts that took place there can be convoluted from the perspective of a historian. However, as it pertains to the Wichitas, the story goes as follows. By 1852, Texas was becoming

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[6] See Stan Hoig, *Tribal Wars of the Southern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); Pekka Hämäläinen, "The Western Comanche Trade Center: Rethinking the Plains Indian Trade System," *Western Historical Quarterly* 29 (Winter 1998): 485-513; Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005); Pekka Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

[7] It is worth pointing out, that while the historical literature on the Wichitas are scant, the archeological literature on the tribes is a bit more extensive. However, there still exists somewhat of a gap during the period of the Civil War.

increasingly inhospitable for the Wichitas. Despite having lived in the region since the fifteenth century, long before the first Spaniards arrived, white settlers—citizens of the newly christened State of Texas—were now forcing them further and further north, until almost all of them crossed the Red River to join their kin along Rush Creek. Only a small band of Wacos remained behind in Texas; they were settled along the Brazos River. According to historians, the Wichitas were understandably bitter about being forcibly removed from their homes and retaliated against the Texans who had driven them there, raiding down across the Red throughout 1852 and the subsequent year. As violence between the two groups rose to fever pitch, the Texas state government realized it could not turn a blind eye to the Indians any longer. In 1853, the state government set aside land along the Brazos for the federal government to use to care for the tribes and protect them from white settlers. Thus, in the following year, the Brazos Reserves were born.[8]

However, Texas' foray into the reservation experiment was doomed from the onset. For one, the parcels of land that the federal government set aside for the Wichitas were often located near white settlements; and, though the government promised the tribe protection, as well as to strictly enforce trade laws and regulations between the two communities, these assurances were rarely put into practice. Furthermore, and unbeknownst to the Wichitas themselves, the people in charge of the reserves, namely Major Robert S. Neighbors, did not truly intend to protect the Indians there. They saw themselves as "civilizing agents," echoing the intentions and desires of former President Andrew Jackson, whose goals were to "convert [the Indians] to the ways of the white man." The federal government even opened schools on the Reserve, precursors to the Indian boarding schools that would come along decades later, to assist in forcibly westernizing the Wichitas and their Caddoan kin. Finally, the Reserve was also close to Comanche camps. This

[8] Smith, *The Caddos, the Wichitas, and the United States, 1846-1901*, 34-35.

meant that the Wichitas had no sooner than settled into their new land than the Comanches began to raid them from the north. A mixture of Texas Rangers and federal troops attempted to repel the invaders, but Comanche raids continued unimpeded throughout 1856 and the following year, on both Wichita settlements and white settlements nearby. As violence escalated, white settlers placed the blame for their woes on the Indians of the Reserves.[9]

The Wichitas attempted to prove their friendliness and good will towards their white neighbors by assisting federal troops in repelling further Comanche incursions. This alleviated the settlers' fears (and those of the federal government) for a time, so much so that Major Neighbors' administration of the Brazos Reserve was praised for the "moral rehabilitation" of the Indians under its charge. However, any goodwill they had accrued from their white neighbors collapsed in 1858 when a group of white settlers ambushed a Caddo camp that was preparing for another campaign against the Comanches. The settlers who perpetuated the attack accused the Indians of the Reserves of pulling the wool over their eyes and being responsible for the deaths of hundreds of white settlers in the past. Because of these perceived grievances, they took full responsibility, but offered no apology, for the massacre.

Though the Wichitas and the Caddos promised not to retaliate for the killings, white citizens of the neighboring counties believed an Indian war was on the horizon and vacated their homes. This combined with the unwillingness of Texas law enforcement to seek justice for the murdered Caddos, the fact that marauders were raiding the Reserve and robbing it of its stock, and the rumors that white settlers were gathering to attack and disband the Brazos Reserve, forced the federal government's hand. In 1859, the new commissioner of Indian affairs, A. B. Greenwood, authorized Major Neighbors to take whatever measures were necessary to remove the Reserve

[9] Ibid., 40-54.

Indians to Indian Territory. Neighbors carried out this order and moved the Wichitas and their Caddoan relatives north of the Red in late 1859, settling them at Fort Cobb along the Washita River in the Leased District, which was a plot of land that had been granted to the Choctaws and Chickasaws in treaties signed in the 1820s and 1830s, but which both tribes allowed the U.S. federal government to use—following an agreement in 1855—for the resettlement of the Comanches, Kiowas, Wichitas, and "whatever tribes the federal government desired."[10]

These events are pretty much agreed upon by all the historians who have written on the removal of those bands Wichitas and their Caddoan kin still in Texas. The details of their removal are important, as the Wichitas' lingering animosity with Texans would shape their stay in Indian Territory as much as it did on the Brazos Reserve. However, once the Wichitas and the Caddos cross the Red River into Indian Territory in 1859, the historical timeline begins to wrinkle and inconsistencies emerge. The water gets muddier following the advent of the Civil War, when the tribe crosses over into their ancestral homeland of Kansas. As the historiography currently stands, five different accounts of the Wichita's stay in Indian Territory and Kansas exist, and these accounts agree on some matters, disagree on others, and outright contradict one another at times, as well.

For instance, the account found in Todd Smith's monograph cites hostile Texans and neighboring Indian tribes, a lack of rations from the Union, as well as a desire to live apart from the whites in the region and joining the booming cattle industry in Kansas as reasons why the Wichitas fled north to Kansas, against the wishes of the Confederacy; the tribes usually moved

[10] Ibid., 43, 57-61; The Leased District was a large plot of land in what is now western Oklahoma, which included the Washita River and Fort Cobb, where the Wichitas and the Caddos initially settled following their removal from Texas.

north in smaller bands and alongside other Indian groups rather than all at once.[11] Anthropologist W. W. Newcomb, Jr.'s account contradicts Smith's by citing fear of Confederate retaliations, wrongly aimed at the Wichitas, from Comanche raids on the Leased District as the primary motivation for the Wichitas to flee north to Kansas, where they settled along the Arkansas River.[12] Historian Stan Hoig's account of the flight from Indian Territory postulates that the Wichitas abandoned their Agency for Kansas due to the failure of the Union to protect them from both the raids of hostile native tribes as well as increasing hostilities from the Texans to their south. In his version of the story, Hoig suggests that the Wichitas frantically gathered what food and supplies they could before hastily making the journey north towards Kansas.[13] Meanwhile, historian Earl H. Elam assigns the outbreak of the Civil War as the event that forced the Wichitas to flee north to Kansas under "federal escort."[14] Finally, historian Gary Anderson places most of the blame for the Wichita's departure from Indian Territory on two things: hostile Texans, who blamed the Wichitas for raids and murders down across the Red River and continually harassed them as a result, and the Wichitas' fear of Comanche bands (some of whom had allied themselves with the U.S. Army in 1858 and 1859) to their north.[15]

All the above accounts agree that the Wichitas in Indian Territory were under pressure from Texans to the south and the Comanches to the north. They also mostly agree that the increasing tensions between the Union and Confederacy played a role in their departure, though they all differ on what that role was, which government was ultimately at fault, and in what manner the Wichitas left the Leased District from Kansas. As convoluted as those five narratives might appear, there

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[11] Ibid., 70-90.
[12] Newcomb, *The Wichita People*, 76-77.
[13] Hoig, *Tribal Wars of the Southern Plains*,187-189.
[14] Elam, *Kitikiti'sh*, 347.
[15] Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 331-335.

are just as many differing and contradictory accounts of the Wichitas' time in Kansas during the Civil War, along with an additional problem: accounts of this period are slim and do not receive much coverage in the existing historiography.

Smith's work indicates that the Wichitas' "suffering increased" in Kansas and implies that this was mostly due to insufficient rations from the federal government. According to Smith, the Indian Agent assigned to them at the time, Elijah Sells, suggested moving the Wichitas back to the Leased District, but these petitions and any calls for further supplies were ignored by the federal government until after the Civil War concluded.[16] On the other hand, and rather shockingly, both Smith and Newcomb's works suggest that a "temporary Wichita agency" was established near Beaumont, Kansas. None of the other historians who have written on this period of Wichita history ever mention this agency and a lack of citations in this portion of Newcomb's work in particular makes it difficult to track down the origin of his claim. He also posits that the Indians were left destitute and without resources by both governments during the war.[17] Hoig's account introduces a disease epidemic, mostly cholera, that plagued the Wichitas during their time in Kansas and drastically reduced their numbers by the time they arrived back in the Leased District following the conclusion of the war.[18] Elam's monograph says almost nothing about the Wichitas' time in Kansas, save to mention that disease and death by "natural causes" made their population dwindle.[19] Finally, Anderson's work mostly agrees with Hoig's and Elam's, suggesting that rampant disease and extreme cold plagued the Wichitas in Kansas, devastating their economy and killing hundreds.[20]

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[16] Smith, *The Caddos, the Wichitas, and the United States, 1846-1901*, 90-91.
[17] Ibid., 87; Newcomb, *The Wichita People*, 77.
[18] Hoig, *Tribal Wars of the Southern Plains*, 242.
[19] Elam, *Kitikiti'sh: The Wichita Indians and Associated Tribes in Texas, 1757-1859*, 347.
[20] Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875*, 337.

The historiographical accounts of the Wichitas' time in Kansas all agree that the tribe suffered unimaginably during the Civil War, though they differ on how and why. Most strikingly, however, is that all these works spent very little time speaking to what the Wichitas actually did during their brief stint in Kansas, preferring to simply detail their suffering and state that they returned to the Leased District when it was all over. Furthermore, while government involvement in said suffering was hinted upon, none of these works are willing to posit whether the government (or which government specifically, for that matter) was directly responsible for any suffering the Indians experienced.

Ironing Out the Wrinkles

The inconsistencies, contradictions, and gaps—what this work shall refer to as *wrinkles*—in the historiography make it difficult to make any sense of the Wichitas' plight following their removal from Texas. There is no sense of exactly what or who was responsible for the dramatic decline in the Wichitas' population during those years. Furthermore, most of the existing accounts of this period relegate the Wichitas' to helpless victims. They appear as a static people who are merely acted upon rather than actors who numerously and actively attempted to improve their conditions right up until their return to the Leased District following the Civil War.

There are two explanations for this problem. The first and the largest is that only three works that span this period in history have been written on the Wichitas specifically. Other mentions of the period come from works that deal with Native Americans on the Southern Plains in general, and tend to dedicate more time to the larger tribes, such as the Comanches. Those Wichita-specific works are short, broad-strokes overviews of Wichita history and spending too much time in any one area would break the flow and pacing of the overall narrative. Moreover, except for one (the monograph belonging to historian F. Todd Smith), these histories terminate

around 1859, just before the Wichitas make the trek to Kansas, regulating all mentions of this period to a sentence or two in the conclusion of the work. The second, related reason is that no historian that has written on the Wichitas has completely gone through all of the Wichita Agency files located in the archives at the University of Oklahoma in Norman.

The aim of this work is to iron out the wrinkles and fill the gaps in the historiography by positing that the Wichitas were forced out of the Leased District due to a combination of factors: the abandonment of Fort Cobb by the Union and its subsequent occupation by military forces from Texas, a failure on the part of the Confederacy to uphold its treaty agreements with the tribe after the Union's departure, poor crop yields as a result of a terrible drought that affected the area during this period, continual raids from government-allied Indian tribes (such as the Comanches), and harassment from Texans to the south. As a result of this mixture of factors, the Wichitas returned to their ancestral homeland in Kansas, under escort by federal troops, where an indifferent government, rampant disease, and poor growing seasons contributed to the decimation of their population until they were allowed to return to the Leased District following the conclusion of the Civil War. It will also show that the Wichitas were not entirely helpless throughout their time in both the Leased District and Kansas and tried to improve conditions for themselves by negotiating with foreign powers, attempting a Euro-American style of agriculture, and getting involved in the booming cattle trade in Kansas.

To accomplish this task, this work uses mostly letters sent to and received from the Indian Office, which are then compared against the secondary literature to expose where the inconsistencies and the gaps within the existing historical narrative. Unfortunately, no native sources were found that could be used in this project and their exists a greater need to include native voices when recounting the tale of the Wichitas' experiences during the Civil War. The

closest this work could come to including native voices is the use of their term for this period. "Days of Darkness" is the name the Wichitas and Affiliated Tribes have assigned to the period between 1820 and 1934. The period is so-named for the dramatic loss of Wichita lives that begin in 1820, when the tribe numbered barely 1,400 strong, and span the tribes' time in Texas, Indian Territory, in Kansas, which would see their population dip to approximately 822 members. This work continues the use of the name specifically for the aforementioned time-period because the greatest loss of Wichita life occurs at the hands of white settlers, starvation, and disease between the times that they are brought to Indian Territory and the time that they return to Indian Territory from Kansas.[21]

To that end, Chapter 1 will detail the lives of the tribes in the Leased District from 1859 until 1862. It will show how, amidst attempts to avoid conflict with neighboring white settlers and hostile Indian groups, the Wichitas attempted to settle into life in their new home along the Washita River. However, a drought rendered most of their attempts at agriculture a failure, and continued pressure from the Comanches to the north and Texans to the south, as well as the collapse of a peace treaty with the Confederacy, ultimately forced the federal government to remove them to Union-controlled Kansas.

Chapter 2 will pick up the story in Kansas and will detail the Wichitas' time spent as government orphans, despite promises of rations from the Union, from 1862 until 1867. It will show how the Wichitas tried and failed in their agricultural ventures, which were meant to supplement what little rations they had from the Union. It will also show how they attempted to get in on the growing cattle trade in Kansa to increase their prosperity. However, due to the Union's

[21] See "Days of Darkness: 1820-1934." Wichita and Affiliated Tribes. http://www.wichitatribe.com/history/days-of-darkness-1820-1934.aspx (December 11, 2019).

indifference, a terrible flooding season, harsh winters, and rampant disease, the Wichitas were mostly decimated and returned to the Leased District in the fall of 1867 with a fraction of the population they had when they moved to Kansas.

Chapter 1: Indian Territory, 1859-1862

The Wichita and Affiliated Tribes were no stranger to the lands north of the Red River by the time the Texas reservation system collapsed. In 1854, they began moving from Texas into Indian Territory, in what is now the State of Oklahoma, when around the Kichais, Tawakonis, and the Wacos fled across the Red escaping increasing hostilities with Texans, the Kiowas, and the Northern Comanches. Once in Indian Territory, they established settlements in such places as East Cache Creek, Rush Creek, and the Western Cross Timbers, where they successfully began to plant and grow crops, becoming prolific farmers. Their migration to Indian Territory officially brought an end to many Wichitas living south of the river for a few years. However, this changed in the late 1850s, when the federal government established two reservations on land along the Brazos River, which had been set aside for it by the Texas state government, prompting bands of Wichitas—namely groups of Tawakonis and the Wacos—to venture across the river and try their luck in Texas one last time.[22]

But, as with previous ventures into Texas, violence followed and, finally, in 1859, the Wichitas on the Brazos Reserve were completely removed by order of the newly appointed commissioner of Indian affairs, A. B. Greenwood, who instructed Major Neighbors to "take measures forthwith for the removal" of the Indians on the Brazos Reserves to the Leased District in Indian Territory.[23] Neighbors complied with the order and, by August 8, the Reserve Indians had been safely moved across the Red River. Their trek lasted seventeen days and spanned one hundred and fifty miles, during which the caravan withered blistering heat and challenges from

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[22] Smith, "Wichita Locations and Populations, 1719-1901," 412.
[23] A. B. Greenwood to Robert S. Neighbors, June 11, 1859, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.

hostile natives and Texans alike, resulting in six deaths and causing Major Neighbors to relate the experience, in a letter to his wife, to "the children of Israel [crossing] the Red Sea."[24]

The Wichitas would spend only twenty months in the Leased District before the outbreak of the Civil War and its immediate consequences forced them to relocate to their ancestral homeland in Kansas. These twenty months would be marred by tension between the Wichitas, neighboring native tribes, and Texans to the south; as well as an ever-shifting political environment as the Union and the Confederacy vied for control of Indian Territory, often neglecting their charges in the process; and a generally poor growing season, which left the Wichitas without the necessary food to feed themselves.

The Leased District

The Leased District was a swath of land sandwiched between the South Canadian River and the Red River, as well as the 98th and 100th meridian, in the southwestern region of Indian Territory. The land was given to the Choctaw and Chickasaws in the 1820s and 1830s, but the United States government obtained it via treaty in 1855. The Choctaw leased the land to the federal government the following year and the government began making plans to turn its new acquisition into a series of reserves for removed Native American tribes, including the Kiowas, the Comanches, the Cheyennes, and the Arapahos. The Wichita and affiliated tribes from the Brazos Reserves in Texas were also among the tribes for whom these lands were intended.[25]

In 1859, after crossing the Red River under the supervision of Major Neighbors, the Brazos Reserve Wichitas were escorted to the northern banks of the Washita River in what is now Caddo

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[24] Neighbors to his wife, August 8, 1859, *Robert Simpson Neighbors Papers, 1838-1935*, BL; Smith, *The Caddos, the Wichitas, and the United States, 1846-1901*, 90-91.
[25] See Jon D. May, "The Leased District," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=LE002.

County, near the mouth of Sugar Creek, where an agency had been established for them. Around the same time, and under pressure from hostile Kiowas and Comanches who had also been moved to the Leased District, the Taovayas and the Kichai—who had remained behind in Indian Territory while their Tawakoni and Waco relatives ventured back to Texas—left their creek-side homes and were escorted to the newly established Wichita Agency by Agent Samuel Blain where they rejoined their kin on the Washita, arriving on August 19. At last, all four Wichita groups were together again and would continue to live in close proximity to one another for the remainder of the nineteenth century.[26]

In the Leased District, the Wichitas saw an opportunity to settle down, return to the settled communities they had inhabited before colonization and westward expansion, and forge their lives without the constant harassment and violence they experienced in Texas; and they had every reason to be optimistic. Despite the harsh conditions they faced in their trek to the Washita from the Brazos Reserves, the journey was an overall success that saw minimal casualties and no violence from either nearby rival tribes or the Texans (though some Texans did accuse them of theft just before they crossed over the Red River into Indian Territory).[27] The success of the journey pleased both Major Neighbors and the headsmen of the major Wichita tribes, who found the land waiting for them to be to their complete satisfaction. This is likely because the land in question had belonged to their ancestors in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Neighbors himself believed that the land was particularly suited to farming and posited that it was well-suited supporting a large and dense population—a perfect reserve for the Wichitas and their affiliated tribes.[28] Furthermore,

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[26] Smith, "Wichita Locations and Populations, 1719-1901," 412.
[27] Kenneth F. Neighbours, "Indian Exodus out of Texas in 1859," *WTHAYB* 36 (Oct., 1960): 82-84.
[28] Neighbors to Greenwood, September 3, 1859.

the Taovayas and the Kichais had established themselves as capable farmers of crops such as "corn, pumpkins, beans, and melons" in the fertile valleys of Rush and East Cache Creeks, while their kin had been away in Texas, and saw no reason why they could not replicate this success on the lands surrounding the Washita.[29]

Increasing the Wichitas' optimism were promises of protection from federal troops. The tribes were leery of a lingering Comanche and Kiowa presence "hovering" around their new home, and the hatred of white frontier settlers from Texas was never far away, even this far across the Red River.[30] Furthermore, Major Neighbors, who had been a staunch ally of the tribes, returned to Texas after they were settled, where he was assassinated by Texans who hated him for his friendship and advocacy for the Indians, robbing the Wichitas of a powerful southern friend.[31] Answering these anxieties, Major William H. Emory arrived on October 1 with two companies from the First Calvary (formerly the First Dragoons) and one from the First Infantry and created Fort Cobb approximately three miles upstream from the place where Neighbors had left the Wichitas to establish their camp.[32] With federal troops in place to protect them, the Wichitas felt free to disperse throughout the land they had been given and formed a series of what they hoped would be permanent villages. The final location of the Wichita Agency was then built on the site of Neighbors' camp.[33]

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[29] Randolph B. Marcy, *Exploration of the Red River of Louisiana in the Year 1852* (La Vergne, Lightning Source Inc., 1854), 83-87.
[30] Quoted in Smith, *The Caddos, the Wichitas, and the United States, 1846-1901*, 79.
[31] Kenneth F. Neighbours, *Robert Simpson Neighbors and the Texan Frontier, 1836-1859* (Waco: Texian Press, 1975), 283.
[32] The location of the Wichita Agency changed several times due to Wichita and Caddo anxiety over attacks by Comanches and Kiowas, and only settled when Fort Cobb was decided upon and occupied by federal troops. See Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 448.
[33] Muriel H. Wright, *A History of Fort Cobb* (Whitefish: Literary Licensing, LLC, 2011), 55-56; Wilbur Sturtevant Nye, *Carbine and Lance: The Story of Old Fort Sill* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), 31.

Unfortunately, the Wichitas' optimism was sorely misplaced. For one, their headsman (and Major Neighbors) had misjudged the fertility of the lands around the Washita River. It was not their fault; they lacked the knowledge that an early exploration of the area that was to become the Wichita Agency, conducted by the Superintendent of the Southern Superintendency Elias Rector, deemed the land unfit to be the location of an agency. In an 1859 letter to Commissioner Greenwood, which reached the commissioner too late due to a slowness in message transmission, Rector detailed that the land in question was best suited for pasturage, as the streams were polluted, prone to flooding, and the area in general was difficult to defend.[34] Absent Rector's information, the Wichitas were forced to find out about the lessons he had learned the hard way. To make matters worse, they were unable to grow any crops at all during their first winter at the agency, which made them dependent on the federal government to supply them with rations to feed their population, setting off the chain of events that would lead them to leave Indian Territory for Kansas a short time afterwards.[35]

The Problem of Food

The United States federal government was not pleased about having to feed the Indians living on the Wichita Agency. Despite promises to protect and feed the natives there, the government ultimately saw moving the Wichitas to the Leased District as an experiment in training Indians to be self-sufficient farmers and wanted to be able to wean them off of all forms of government-issued rations. Likewise, Superintendent Rector did not share Major Neighbors' friendly disposition towards the Wichitas and their kin. In January 1860, in the midst of their first winter on the Washita River, Rector dispatched Agent Blain to speak with the headsmen of each

[34] Rector to Greenwood, July 2, 1859, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.
[35] Blain to Greenwood, March 31, 1860, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.

of the Wichita tribes and instruct them to "prepare for farming," as he did not expect the government to continue providing the Wichitas with rations through the end of the year.[36]

Another reason for the government's lack of willingness to feed the Wichitas came from a woeful unpreparedness on its part. Though it had months to prepare for their arrival in Indian Territory, it had done little to store up its rations and was ill-equipped to feed the masses of Indians coming across the Red River from Texas. Partly, this was because the government had been counting on the Indians being capable of growing their own crops and raising their own livestock—a plan that, of course, fell apart when winter wiped out any chances of a bountiful growing season.[37]

For their part, the Wichitas took the news in stride. They were eager to again begin planting their own crops (as they had been raising corn for centuries prior to this time) and raise their own livestock, ridding them from any need to depend on the government for food. To that end, they began designing pens and fences for corralling cattle and horses. Shops designed for the repairing of wagons and the production of metal tools were also constructed with the aid of Agent Blain. They built plows and began to store corn and sweet potato seeds in preparation for a renewed growing season the following spring. However, the Leased District was not as good for growing food as it initially seemed and harsh weather conditions, beginning with the winter of 1859 to 1860, only worsened the Wichitas' ability to provide for themselves and avoid using government rations.[38]

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[36] Quoted in Smith *The Caddos, the Wichitas, and the United States, 1846-1901*, 80.
[37] Blain to Rector, October 25, 1859, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 298.
[38] Blain to Greenwood, March 31, 1860, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 298.

Unfortunately, harsh winters were the least of the Wichitas' problems. For thirty-two years from 1849 to 1880, harsh drought conditions descended upon the Midwestern United States, particularly the Corn Belt, as part of a spree of long-lasting droughts that plagued the Great Plains throughout the nineteenth century. Although Indian Territory—now the modern state of Oklahoma—is not traditionally included in the Corn Belt, it was close in proximity to states like Kansas which were and, thus, suffered similar conditions. In 1860, these hot and dry conditions reached the Wichitas on the Leased District.[39]

The Wichitas had heeded the advice of Agent Blain and begun to plant fields of corn to feed themselves and stave off the need for government rations. Combined with the Caddos, who shared their lands along the Washita River, the tribes farmed approximately 389 acres of land, which was split up disproportionately among them.[40] But all their efforts were in vain, because the drought killed their corn fields and prevented them from yielding enough food to support the approximately eleven thousand people they brought with them from Texas. This meant that the federal government was forced to renew its ration agreements with the Wichitas. However, circumstances beyond the control of both the federal government and the Wichitas themselves would soon make these new agreements next to meaningless.[41]

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[39] The "Corn Belt" refers to an area of the Midwestern United States that dominated the production of corn since about the 1850s. See Michael C. Stambaugh, et al., "Drought duration and frequency in the U.S. Corn Belt during the last millennium (AD 992-2004)," *Agricultural and Forest Meteorology* 151, No. 2 (February 2011), 159.

[40] The Kadohadachos had 84 ½ acres, the Nadacos had 76 ½, the Whitebeads had 14, the Taovayas had 141, and the Wacos, Tawakonis, and Kichais combined their efforts to farm 73 acres. See Smith, *The Caddos, the Wichitas, and the United States*, 1846-1901, 80.

[41] Rector to Greenwood, August 9, 1860; Leeper to Rector, September 26, 1860.

The Wichitas and their Neighbors

Though the United States federal government had no control over the circumstances that voided its agreements with the Wichitas, it was certainly at fault for making them possible. This was because it deliberately chose the location of the Wichita-Caddo agency in the rather nefarious hopes that the Texas Indians would serve as a buffer between the tribes of eastern Indian Territory and persistent raids from the Kiowas and the Comanches that were plaguing them. Their decision to do so put the Wichitas at the mercy of their old enemies, whom they had hoped to have escaped upon leaving Texas. Consequently, the Wichitas' feud with the Kiowas and the Comanches put them in the crosshairs of Texans south of the Red River, reigniting a conflict the federal government had hoped to advert by moving the Wichitas off the Brazos Reserves in the first place.[42]

Conflicts with the Kiowa and the Comanches were present almost from the start of the Wichitas' tenure in the Leased District. The Wichitas had previously had amicable relationships with the Comanches as a whole, and frequently traded with them. However, this trade relationship broke down in 1858.[43] Conversely, the Wichitas had always been at odds with the Kiowas. Both tribes stalked (though they initially took no action) the Wichitas as they arrived in Indian Territory; and, with the Wichitas now in the way of their usual targets, they became the focus of both tribes' raids throughout the remainder of 1859 and into the early parts of 1860. However, in January 1860, the Kiowas and the Comanches broke off their attacks on the Wichita Agency and began raiding south into Texas again, leading to a series of incidents that would ultimately come back to haunt the Wichitas despite their innocence in both matters.

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[42] Blain to Rector, October 25, 1859, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 298.
[43] As previously mentioned in this project, though, some Wichita bands came into conflict with the Comanches during their stay in Texas.

Perhaps the worst of these came the following month in 1860 when a band of renegades swept into Erath and Bosque counties and stole some four hundred horses. In the process, they killed seven people and kidnapped two young women "belonging to the Lemley family." They raped the Lemley women repeatedly over the course of several days before abandoning them "naked but alive." When law enforcement arrived and interviewed the girls, they learned that the renegades both spoke and understood English and "were not Plains Indians." However, their identities were never discovered. The Texas public did not receive this information well and, perhaps due to the recent renewal of raids on the Texas frontier by the Kiowas and the Comanches, assumed that Indians were behind the gruesome attacks. Specifically, they blamed the Wichitas and the other former tribes of the Brazos Reserves who had left the year prior and focused their outrage on the Wichitas. Texas frontiersmen were so enraged that they even sent "petitions demanding action" and further protection from U.S. troops to President James Buchanan.[44]

Sam Houston, recently reelected as governor of Texas, responded to the public outcry by sending a letter in March to Agent Blain to see if the Wichitas were truly involved in the horrific incident. Upon receiving the letter, Blain summoned the chiefs of the Wichita Agency to inform them of the accusations that had been levied at them.[45] The chiefs reacted with surprise—they were innocent in the affair and unaware it had even happened—and outraged by Houston's accusations, wrote back to Houston that they "had always fought for the security" of both Texans and their own people against hostile forces, such as the Comanches and other frontier vagabonds. The chiefs

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[44] For a more detailed accounting of this incident, see Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875*, 330-331; Smith, *The Caddos, the Wichitas, and the United States*, 1846-1901, 80-81; Thomas W. Cutter, ed. "My Wild Hunt After Indians: The Journal of William W. Lang, 23 April-7 September 1860"; Milton Jack to President James Buchanan, February 4, 1860; and J. B. Standeft to Buchanan, March 4, 1860.
[45] Smith, *The Caddos, the Wichitas, and the United States*, 1846-1901, 80-81.

were bitter that they had been wrongly accused of the theft, murders, and rapes by Texans after having been wrongly removed from their reserves along the Brazos River. They also claimed to have protected Texas many times since their removal by halting raiding Indian parties from crossing through their land into Texas by way of the Red River.[46]

However, Governor Houston was unmoved by their response. He had been "elected because of [Governor Hardin Richard] Runnel's failure to stabilize the frontier" and knew he needed to act to appease the angry white settlers on the Texas frontier, regardless of who was truly to blame for the Lemley incident. To that end, Houston decided the Wichitas needed "to be punished" and organized several units of Texas Rangers to carry out justice. He petitioned the U.S. Secretary of War, John B. Floyd, to provide these units with thousands of revolvers and rifles to carry out their charge. His petition was denied, but it alerted the War Department to the fact that there were still issues between the Indians and the Texans that distance had not solved.[47]

In June 1860, despite having no jurisdiction in Indian Territory, a detachment of Texas Rangers led by Captain Middleton Tate Johnson arrived at the Wichita Agency to carry out an investigation into the rape of the Lemley women. They found conditions in the Leased District to be bleak. Drought continued to plague the agency, leaving corn fields destroyed. Agent Blain had left the agency without permission, having distributed very little rations before his departure. But the Rangers cared little for the Wichitas' plight and proceeded to invade their homes in search of evidence that would implicate them in the rapes of the Lemley women. They also examined the herds of horses tended by the tribe, hoping to locate the four hundred that had gone missing in the attack. Their investigation and blatant invasion of Wichita homes lasted two months.

[46] Blain to Houston, April 23, 1860, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 298.
[47] Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875*, 331.

Unsurprisingly, the Rangers came away with nothing, having succeeded only in harassing the Wichitas. Without any evidence to use to justify the punishment of the Wichitas, and needing to take action against *someone* for political reasons, Governor Houston turned his sights on the northern Comanches and ordered his rangers to set out for their camps near Bent's Fort in Kansas.[48]

Afterwards, the Wichitas made efforts to prove their friendly intentions to their southern neighbors by joining together with the Texas Rangers to repel hostile Kiowas and Comanches along the Canadian River. This joint venture did nothing to soothe the tensions between the three tribes, but the Wichitas were hopeful that working with the Texas Rangers would finally alleviate Texan anger directed at them and secure them another ally against their bitter foes. However, their hopes were unfounded. As a whole, Texans were simply untrusting of the former Brazos Reserve Indians and, and thus the Wichitas, problems with the Texans extended well into the late summer of 1860. For example, a Wichita man named Iesh was accused by "civil authorities of Palo Pinto County" of stealing a mule. Authorities demanded that he be surrendered to Palo Pinto County to stand trial and the commissioner of Indian Affairs was more than happy to oblige these demands. However, the new Wichita agent Matthew Leeper, who replaced Blain, advocated for Iesh. After some back and forth with Commissioner Greenwood, the issue was dropped and Iesh was allowed to remain with his people.[49]

Accusations from Texans remained common throughout the subsequent fall and winter, and indeed well into January of the following year, but winter of 1860 in particular brought with it the renewed threat of starvation and attacks from neighboring enemy tribes. In October 1860, Agent Leeper noted that "wild Indians," the Kiowa and the Comanches, were lingering around the

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[48] Ibid.
[49] For a fuller account of this story, see Smith, *The Caddos, the Wichitas, and the United States*, 1846-1901, 82-83.

borders of the Wichita Agency and threatened to "overwhelm" it. Indeed, by December, these two tribes unleashed a reign of terror upon the residents of the Leased District by resuming their raids against the Wichitas.[50] The Kiowas were particularly vengeful towards the Wichitas for the role they played in the death of a prominent member of their tribe, Bird-Appearing, during their summer joint campaigns with the Texas Rangers.[51] As a result, they "killed and scalped" a Wichita man named Dutch John around Sugar Creek. They also ambushed Wichita women returning from the agency to their village.[52]

Throughout all these encounters with Texans and other native tribes, the U.S. military was absent in protecting the Wichitas on their new lands, despite initial assurances that they would. Though Agent Leeper was a better Indian agent than Blain, and often spoke out for and defended the Wichitas whenever the Texans harassed them, his track record in defending them from hostile tribes or providing them with the rations to supplement their continued bad luck with growing crops was about the same. Overall, this combination of woes led to widespread discontent, poverty, fear, and hunger in the Leased District. But, as bad as things were, they were about to get even worse, because the following year the Civil War broke out, bringing with it a dramatic change to Indian Territory.

The Civil War on the Leased District

The Civil War began on April 12, 1861 when the Confederate States of America bombarded the Union at Fort Sumter, South Carolina. Traditionally, the war is thought of as a conflict that primarily affected the states along the eastern coast of the United States, with not

[50] Bradley R. Clampitt, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Indian Territory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).
[51] Nye, *Carbine and Lance: The Story of Old Fort Sill*, 32.
[52] Smith, *The Caddos, the Wichitas, and the United States*, 1846-1901, 82.

much thought given to how it affected the interior of the continent, though recent scholarship is beginning to change this trend. However, the Civil War drastically changed the dynamics on the southern Plains and this was particularly true in Indian Territory. There, conflicts between the Union and the Confederacy, who both hoped it would serve as a buffer zone preventing invasion by the other, once again dragged the Wichitas and other Native peoples into a Euro-American conflict they had nothing to do with. Ultimately, the war, combined with the other woes they faced up until then, cost the Wichitas their homes in the Leased District and left them abandoned in Kansas, unwanted and uncared for by either government.[53]

Just before the onset of the war, signs of trouble were already manifesting in the Leased District. In the east, it was clear that tensions were mounting between the rebel government and the Union and both sides were in the midst of preparing for the inevitable conflict. In March 1861, these preparations reached the Leased District. Lieutenant Colonel Emory, who had manned Fort Cobb since shortly after the Wichitas' arrival, was ordered by General Edward Davis Townsend to take his garrison and join with the Union forces assembling at Fort Washita. The U.S. government's plan was to allow the Wichitas to temporarily move to Fort Washita as well; however, the Wichitas were preparing to plant their crops for the next growing season, and were hopeful that this year would be an improvement on the previous two. They were also reluctant to be taken out of homes they had only just secured.[54] Agent Leeper believed that leaving the Wichitas unprotected at the agency would have disastrous consequences and pleaded with Emory to leave troops behind at Fort Cobb to oversee the situation. Emory complied and left behind two

[53] Hoig, *Tribal Wars of the Southern Plains*, 187.
[54] Clampitt, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Indian Territory*, 30.

companies of cavalry whose purpose it was to defend the agency from raids by the Kiowas and the Comanches.[55]

By the time Emory and his men made it to Fort Washita, Confederate troops from Texas had crossed the Red River and begun engaging Union forces at their military forts in the southern portions of Indian Territory. Emory knew he and his contingent did not stand a chance against the sheer number of enemy forces pouring across the Red. So, on April 16, he decided to abandon Fort Washita and fall back to Fort Cobb. He was joined there by the garrison of Fort Arbuckle, who were also in full retreat in the face of advancing Confederate forces out of Texas.[56] However, Emory would never stay at Fort Cobb again. En route to the fort, he received direct orders from Washington to evacuate Indian Territory for Fort Leavenworth, Kansas with all Union troops. As Emory passed Fort Cobb on May 9, he found the garrison there already in the process of leaving and added them to his procession. No consideration was given for the Wichitas, who were abandoned to fend for themselves as the Union fled north. In the meantime, Texan forces arrived the following day and occupied the fort, leaving the Wichitas at the mercy of their old enemies.[57]

The Confederacy spent most of the rest of the year attempting to consolidate its control over Indian Territory with only mixed results. It retained a powerful grip on the southern portions of Indian Territory, but the northern regions closer to Kanas maintained a heavy Union influence due to Union presence on the Arkansas River. The tribes there still depended on the Union for food and protection and supported the Union's military efforts against the rebel government in return. This divide turned all of Indian Territory into a battleground with the Wichitas in the Leased District initially caught in the middle of the struggle. They did not want to anger the Confederate

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[55] Leeper to Emory, March 31, 1861.
[56] Emory to Townsend, May 19, 1861, *Compilation of the Official Records*, Series I, 1: 648.
[57] Ibid; *Lawrence Republican,* June 13, 1861.

troops in the region, as most of them were Texans, but they also did not want to fight against the Union because of the rumors that Union-allied native tribes were receiving food rations and clothing.[58]

The Wichitas moved quickly to remedy this situation and approached Colonel William C. Young of the Confederacy to strike a new alliance. They agreed to be peaceful towards Confederate forces so long as the Confederacy supplied and protected them "as had been done by the United States government." But not all Wichitas were agreed with this new arrangement. They remembered how cruel Texans could be and did not trust them to uphold their side of the agreement. As a result, many abandoned the Leased District to search for safety elsewhere in Indian Territory, while others fled north to Kansas to rejoin the Union forces they knew to be there. Nevertheless, Confederate General Albert Pike wrote Agent Leeper, asking him to remain as the Wichita agent; and, when he accepted, the general's first order was to have Leeper assure the Wichitas that he would indeed protect and supply them in accordance with their new arrangements. This was a false promise. The Confederates faired about as well as the Union when it came to honoring their agreements.[59]

Even so, Pike initially attempted to assuage the Wichitas' fears. He ordered the Texans garrisoning Fort Cobb not to harm the Wichitas. He also gave the tribe approximately two thousand dollar's worth of gifts. The tribes were wary of the Confederacy's intentions, but they had little choice but to ally with them. The Union was to the north in Kansas, and the fighting between the two in Indian Territory threatened to destroy the Wichita Agency, not to mention leave them at the

[58] Hoig, *Tribal Wars of the Southern Plains*, 198-199.
[59] Quoted in Smith, *The Caddos, the Wichitas, and the United States*, 1846-1901, 84.

mercy of the Kiowas and the Comanches. Therefore, the headsmen of the Wichita tribes signed a treaty with the Confederacy on August 12, 1861.[60]

The Wichita alliance with the Confederacy was a fragile one that was doomed from the outset. Despite General Pike's gifts and promises of protection, the fact that Texans continued to occupy Fort Cobb was problematic for the Wichitas, who could never forget the hardships and hostilities Texans had forced upon them. Furthermore, the tribes did not fully trust the Confederate government to protect them from the Texans should the Texans ever get out of control. To make matters worse, the Wichitas continued to be raided by their enemies, the Kiowas and the Comanches, and the Confederate troops assigned to the Leased District routinely failed to stop them, making their promises of protection meaningless. As the relationship between the Leased District Indians and the Confederacy decayed, the Texan troops garrisoning Fort Cobb were ordered to abandon it and the Confederacy instead armed and supplied a small regiment of natives to watch over the fort in their stead.[61]

By September, the situation in the Leased District was dire. The Union had attempted to convince the Wichitas to side with them as they marched south from Kansas into Indian Territory against the Confederacy, but the Wichitas declined the offer—a costly mistake on their part, as there were rumors that a group of Shawnees, Osages, and Delawares were on their way to kill Agent Leeper, the Tonkowas, and anyone allied with the Confederacy.[62] To make matters worse, the Wichitas once again failed to produce any crops to sustain themselves, as the drought from previous years continued to linger. Unable to feed themselves, and with poor rations coming in

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[60] Ariel M. Gibson, "Confederates on the Plains: The Pike Mission to the Wichita Agency," *Great Plains Journal* 4 (Fall 1964): 7-16.
[61] Wright, "A History of Fort Cobb," 59.
[62] J. B. Thoburn, "Horace P. Jones, Scout and Interpreter," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. II, No. 4, December 1924, 383-385.

from the Confederate government, many Wichitas and Caddos decided to flee their agency. Those that fled did not make it far, as they encountered the rumored Union-led expedition of native peoples who were en route to destroy the Wichita Agency. The attack came on October 23, while Agent Leeper was away in Texas with his family, and saw the Wichita Agency, as well as Fort Cobb, burned to the ground. The Confederates chose not to reoccupy Fort Cobb in the aftermath of the attack, leaving the Wichitas effectively orphaned by both governments.[63]

The ensuing winter of 1861, followed by worsening drought conditions in 1862, devastated the Wichitas on the Leased District. No longer was it just a failure to grow corn that was plaguing them, but a decline in bison and pony herds they depended on for trade and food. Trade from New Mexico, which the Wichitas relied on to obtain corn tortillas among other things, became impossible as a result, as the Wichitas could no longer supply the buffalo coats they had once traded in exchange. Furthermore, the harsh winter had cut off most communication with the Confederacy in the eastern portions of Indian Territory. When word reached them that the Union had finally secured funds to purchase rations in Kansas, the Wichitas could no longer justify remaining in the Leased District; and, in September 1862, those Wichitas and Caddos that remained on the Washita River were given a federal escort north to the Arkansas River.[64]

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[63] Nye, *Carbine and Lance: The Story of Old Fort Sill*, 28.
[64] Stahle and Cleveland, "Texas Drought History Reconstructed"; Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 336-337.

Chapter 2: Kansas and the Civil War, 1862-1867

The Wichitas and their escorts arrived near the Fall River in Kansas in December 1862. The new agent appointed to them, a man named Edwin H. Carruth, established a temporary Wichita agency at nearby Beaumont, Kansas to assist in feeding and supplying the Wichitas and their affiliated tribes. However, from the very start, the tribes under Agent Carruth's care were tense and uneasy. Part of their uneasiness might have stemmed from fighting nearby the temporary agency involving the Cherokee government and a dissident faction of Cherokees. The two groups of Cherokees had joined with the Union and Confederacy respectively and were threatening to war with one another, which forced Carruth to reluctantly work with Confederate forces and agents to avert a civil war within the squabbling tribe, which would have caused more problems for both sides as the Civil War progressed out east.[65] This combined with anxieties about living in close proximity to white settlers, after what they had experienced in Texas and in Indian Territory, led some of the Wichitas and Caddos, to winter along the Arkansas River.[66]

Despite these early tensions, word that the Union had secured rations for the Indians living in Kansas turned out to be true. In May 1863, Agent Carruth dispensed some of these rations, though meager, to the Wichitas at a council meeting he called, which also invited them to live in Woodson County, Kansas. Again, the Kadohadachos abstained, citing their mistrust of white settlers due to the "troubles between them and us" arising over land, crops, and ownership of ponies. They insisted their share of the rations be dispensed to them at the mouth of the Little Arkansas River, where they were camped alongside the Penateka Comanches, and Agent Carruth

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[65] Carruth to Col. William G. Coffin, July 19, 1862, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.
[66] Carruth to Col. William G. Coffin, September 6, 1863, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.

was left with no choice but to acquiesce their demands.[67] Their distrust of whites and separation from their fellow Wichitas continued for at least a year following this council meeting, during which time they remained living alongside the Penateka Comanches.[68]

However, it quickly became apparent to the Wichitas that the rations the Union had managed to secure would not suffice to feed their population. In addition to the Wichitas, Agent Carruth was also responsible for overseeing the aforementioned Cherokees, as well as the Penateka Comanches, to whom the meager rations were also meant to feed. As a direct consequence, the Wichitas were forced to look elsewhere for the means to supplement these rations.[69] To accomplish this, Wichita women almost exclusively returned to the fields and began to attempt success in agriculture where they had failed at the Wichita Agency, whereas Wichita men turned to the booming and unregulated cattle industry that had taken root in Kansas as a means to further alleviate their hunger.[70]

The Wichitas, the Kansas Cattle Trade, and Early Setbacks

With the Civil War mostly raging in the east, there was a large demand from both sides, as well as white settlers in Kansas itself, for cattle products. The Union, Confederacy, and white settlers in Kansas wanted greater quantities of beef and were willing to pay high prices. Furthermore, with the opening of the Kansas-Pacific Railway in the 1860s, the movement of animal products further west had been made much easier for participants in the trade. For the Wichitas, this was too great an opportunity to pass up and would theoretically allow them to

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[67] Carruth to Col. William G. Coffin, June 5, 1863, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.
[68] Smith, *The Caddos, the Wichitas, and the United States*, 1846-1901, 87.
[69] Carruth to Col. William G. Coffin, July 19, 1862, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.
[70] Carolyn Garrett Pool, "Reservation Policy and the Economic Position of Wichita Women," *Great Plains Quarterly* 8, no. 3, Summer 1998: 160.

acquire the funds they needed to purchase food to supplement the Union's rations.[71] They must have considered it so, because many Wichitas actually voluntarily returned (albeit briefly) to the Leased District in Indian Territory to round up their own cattle to drive back to Kansas for sale, much to the chagrin of their chiefs.[72] Some were willing to go as far south as Texas and drive cattle to such places as New Mexico and Colorado. This did not go unnoticed by white settlers who, upon seeing the dedication of the Indians to driving cattle, offered them vast sums of money to venture out in the lands previously inhabited by the Creek and Cherokee tribes to drive cattle from there, as well. As cattle began to flow with abundance from Texas and Indian Territory, more white settlers flocked to Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico to take advantage of the Indians who were willing to drive and sell them. According to communications from the agents to the Indian Office, this did not sit well with Wichita chiefs, who were wary of the intentions of these white settlers and feared future conflict with them over cattle, but the temporary Wichita Agency did nothing to stop them. Their suspicion would later, unfortunately, be vindicated.[73]

The first of many setbacks for the Wichitas began when Agent Carruth "expired" on April 23, 1864. Though the manner of his death was left out of Colonel Coffin's letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington, he did express the urgency with which Coffin required a "successor" for Carruth to "be appointed." Coffin knew that, without an agent, the Wichitas would quickly grow restless and become concerned about the future of the rations and clothing that had thus far been provided by the federal government. However, because he suspected

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[71] KC Olsen, "Development of the National Cattle Trade," *Rangelands* 23, no. 5, October 2001: 3.
[72] Milo Gookins to Col. William G. Coffin, October 24, 1864, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.
[73] Milo Gookins to Col. William G. Coffin, October 20, 1864, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928; Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 347.

that it would be some time before Agent Carruth's successor was appointed, Coffin stepped up and took the "precaution" of filling the position of temporary agent until a new one could be appointed by the government.[74] Coffin's tenure as the Wichita agent was short, and none of it was recorded in letters, because the federal government responded quicker than the colonel expected. By July 1864, only three months after Agent Carruth's death, Commissioner William P. Dole appointed Milo Gookins as the new agent to the Wichitas and dispatched him to relieve Colonel Coffin in Kansas.[75]

One of the first things Agent Gookins noticed upon arriving in Kansas was how wealthy the Wichitas appeared to be, a trait he attributed to their success in the cattle trade (their sale of cattle had allowed them to acquire other goods, such as alcohol, weapons, and furs). But the Wichitas' newfound wealth attracted new problems from white settlers, just as their chiefs had predicted. Namely, hordes of Kansas whites descended upon the Wichita Agency to sell the Indians alcohol. In the process, these white settlers stole from the Wichitas, taking everything from horses to money, until they had plundered "everything they [had] worth selling." This left the Indians with nothing to rely upon but the rations supplied to them by the federal government, and those rations were coming with less frequency than they had under Agent Carruth. The thefts had the additional effect of making the Indians "[grow] hostile" towards the whites living around them. They retaliated by raiding into the white communities in the hopes of stealing back the horses the whites had taken from them, but these raids did little to dissuade white settlers from continuing to steal from Wichita communities. To make matters worse, neither the Gookins nor the federal

[74] Col. William G. Coffin to William P. Dole, April 27, 1864, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.
[75] William P. Dole to Col. William G. Coffin, July 30, 1864, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.

government acted to protect the Wichitas from further disenfranchisement at the hands of the white communities, despite their initial promises to do exactly that. Then, when cold winds inevitably rose and swept across Kansas at the start of winter, the Wichitas were left with insufficient food and clothing. As a result, many died from exposure while others were severely weakened before fresh rations could arrive in January 1865.[76]

The increasing hostilities between the Wichitas and their white neighbors, as well as the rampant starvation and death by exposure that was beginning to set in on the Wichita Agency, caused Agent Gookins to beseech the Department of Indian Affairs to help the Wichitas by sending additional supplies. He also offered to hold a council to ebb the violence that he feared would break out between the Wichitas and their neighbors, but was unsure how effective this meeting would be, given how restless the chiefs were becoming because of their increasingly hopeless situation.[77] The Wichitas had grown tired of the oppression and thievery of their white neighbors, as well as the length of time they were having to wait for supplies that had been promised to them. They were growing increasingly hostile towards both their neighbors and the federal government itself for its inaction. In fact, Agent Gookins even went so far as to question their "loyalty" to the federal government after the tribes initially refused to attend his proposed council. Once more, he "[strongly] recommended" that the federal government send the Indians supplies to quell their dissatisfaction. He also hoped that fresh supplies would rekindle their loyalty to the Union.[78]

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[76] Col. William G. Coffin to William P. Dole, September 24, 1864, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928; Gookins to Coffin, October 11, 1864, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928; Gookins to Col. William G. Coffin, October 18, 1864, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.
[77] Gookins to William P. Dole, October 18, 1864, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.
[78] Gookins to Col. William G. Coffin, October 17, 1864, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.

By its silence, the federal government did not appear to share Gookins' hopes. By late October, the Bureau of Indian Affairs had still not replied to his multitude of requests for supplies and he noted that both the Indians and the white settlers living around them were beginning to grow "rebellious." To his credit, Agent Gookins realized that the majority of the problems at the Wichita Agency were being caused by the nearby white settlers, who continued to provoke the Indians. He noted that the land surrounding the agency was "so infested with rebels, robbers, and thieves" that it was nearly impossible for the Wichitas to farm the land or sell their cattle to replenish their revenue, and he requested the authority to have these problematic white settlers "arrested" in the hopes that it would show the Wichitas that their claim to the land was "legitimate" and to prevent any further escalation of tensions. Gookins did not want a repeat of the situation that had unraveled on the Leased District, which caused the Wichitas to move in the first place, but that scenario was becoming more likely due to the federal government's indifference towards the Indians' plight in Kansas.[79]

Perhaps because of his willingness to approach the federal government on their behalf, Gookins was eventually successful in calling the Wichita tribes to council to discuss their recent woes. During the council, and at Gookins' prodding, the chiefs of the tribe co-authored a letter to the federal government, specifically President Abraham Lincoln, reaffirming their loyalty to the United States of America and stating their intentions to be friendly to both the government and the white settlers surrounding them. In the letter, the chiefs also outlined their tribes' suffering, personally informing the federal government of the widespread starvation and increasing number of deaths that were occurring at the Wichita Agency. Their intention was likely to supplement

[79] Gookins to Col. William G. Coffin, October 27, 1864, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.

Gookins' accounts of the events transpiring in Kansas in order to encourage the government to make good on its promise and send further supplies, as well as to assure the federal government that they would never take up arms against the United States.[80] However, when Commissioner Dole finally replied to their pleas, he was only able to dispense clothing enough for some of the women and children who had been left without their men as a result of starvation or exposure to the elements. Perhaps due to earlier reports that the Wichitas were faring well off the cattle trade, he believed that the repeated calls for aid were excessive and, thus, the supplies he sent were only for those he considered "most needy." With Dole's response, it was clear that, despite their obvious need, the Indians at the Wichita Agency would receive little more aid from the federal government and were virtually on their own.[81]

Disease, Desertion, and Desolation

Disease had afflicted the Wichitas since early contact with French traders, but it was again an issue eating away at their population upon their arrival in Kansas. In 1863, for instance, an epidemic of small pox, coinciding with the winter months, swept through the tribes and killed a large number of their population.[82] However, in late 1864, the Wichitas were now virtually abandoned by the United States federal government and disease was persistin. With no other choice, the tribes abandoned Woodson County for what they believed would be more fertile lands out west in present day Cowley County. They settled along the Arkansas River, where their relatives, the Kadohadachos had been living since the previous year. The Penateka Comanches, who had previously lived alongside the Kadohadachos, had since returned to Indian Territory and

[80] Wichita and Affiliated Tribes to President Lincoln, October 14, 1864, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.
[81] William P. Dole to Gookins, October 27, 1864, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.
[82] Smith, *The Caddos, the Wichitas, and the United States*, 1846-1901, 88.

settled along the Washita River at Fort Arbuckle. The Wichitas hoped to subsist on the buffalo and deer that could be found there, hoping that these animals would rid them of the need to use government rations. Colonel Coffin gifted the Wichitas with one last shipment of flour and ammunition before they departed from the agency; however, afterwards, they were given no supplies whatsoever from the federal government.[83]

The Wichitas quickly set about forging new villages in their new home, but old enemies soon beset them and ruined what was initially a peaceful new arrangement. These enemies were, of course, the white settlers who had harassed them back at the agency and who were now free to terrorize the Indians with impunity since they lacked the protection of the United States federal government. Like before, these white settlers were mostly nameless. The Wichitas who complained of them to Agent Gookins only referred to them as "bad white men" and Gookins, for his part, never made any discernable effort to uncover their identity or hold them accountable for their actions. As a result, they robbed and cheated the Indians at every opportunity. The Wichitas sent word to Agent Gookins about their troubles along the Arkansas, but neither Gookins nor Coffin sent any military aid to alleviate the problem. Instead, they granted the Indians the authority to expel any white person without good reason to be on their lands. After hearing of their plight, Gookins attempted to contact the nearest military encampments to aid the Wichitas, but no troops were dispatched to aid them. Gookins also attempted to have supplies sent to the Wichitas in Cowley County, but Colonel Coffin preferred to prioritize the infighting Cherokee nation and

[83] Col. William G. Coffin to William P. Dole, September 24, 1864, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.

dismissed the Wichita complaint of antagonistic whites, stating that they were quite safe in their new homes along the Arkansas River.[84]

For the second time that year, the Wichitas were left with no other option but to move their villages in hopes of getting as far away from white settlements as possible. Forced to move just as winter was beginning to take the land, they accompanied bands of Shawnees and Delawares, who were themselves moving west, and settled at the mouth of the Little Arkansas River.[85] But life on the Little Arkansas was even more miserable for the Wichitas than it had been on the Wichita Agency. They possessed very little food—what little they did have they often fought over—and they were barely able to hunt enough buffalo to trade for fur pelts and other warm clothing to protect them from the harsh winter, let alone to purchase the food that would prevent them from starving. To make matters worse, small-pox returned to ravage the Wichita community and a new disease epidemic came with it: cholera, which, though less impactful to Indian communities than small pox, was still a deadly force that killed hundreds of Wichitas.

Cholera had already infected and begun to spread through the populations of the "Pawnees, Western Sioux, Southern Arapaho, and Comanches" by the mid-nineteenth century, killing an estimated thousands of Indians, and the Wichitas, who moved into close proximity of several of these groups during their numerous moves across the Kansas plains, were exposed as well. It is also believed that the Wichitas were exposed to cholera by the white settlers and troops that lived nearby their villages. Already struggling to survive the harsh conditions of winter and to stave off the effects of a small-pox epidemic, cholera hit the Wichita population hard. From its introduction onward, the Wichita population began to decline dramatically and, meanwhile, the federal

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[84] Gookins to Col. William G. Coffin, October 20, 1864; Col. William G. Coffin to Gookins, October 27, 1864.
[85] Smith, *The Caddos, the Wichitas, and the United States*, 1846-1901, 90.

government—fully aware of their plight—did little to nothing to ease their suffering. An estimated 1,200 Wichitas alone perished as a result of the cholera outbreak, most of whom were buried in mass graves around present day El Dorado, Kansas in Butler County. However, due to the tribe moving again to distance themselves from whites and disease, hundreds of Wichitas remained unburied and were discovered years later by a party of travelers, who named the creek where they found the Wichitas' bodies "Skeleton Creek." Even "if reduced by half," these travelers wrote, the number of dead among the Wichitas was inconceivable, especially when compared to the mortality rates of the white population. But the white population had access to medical supplies and doctors with some knowledge of how to treat cholera, whereas the Indians, orphaned by the government that had promised to protect and supply them, had none of this and paid the price for it. Combined with the small pox epidemic, the outbreak of cholera was mostly responsible for the large number of Indian deaths while the Wichitas lived in Kansas.[86]

However, the remaining Wichitas were resilient. Even amid widespread disease, starvation, and death, they continued to attempt survival against the odds so clearly stacked against them. By the time spring arrived in 1865, they had returned to the cattle trade, as they attempted to make up for the money that had been stolen and cheated from them by white settlers. But even these attempts were met with failure and ruin. In April, Agent Gookins, who had been keeping tabs on the Wichitas throughout the winter and early spring, noted that the tribes had completely run out of cattle to run and nothing to trade with their neighbors. More distressing, they had run out of the last of their funds to purchase these supplies for themselves. Additionally, the influx of white settlers into the region had driven off most of the buffalo that the Wichitas were using to obtain

[86] Ramon Powers and James N. Leiker, "Cholera Among the Plains Indians: Perception, Causes, Consequences," *Western Historical Quarterly* 29, no. 3, (Autumn 1998): 317-331.

coats and pelts, as well as use for food. By the early fall of 1865, the buffalo herds had moved too far away from the Wichita camps to be accessible to hunting.[87]

Historians such as Gary Anderson have suggested that the overhunting of bison herds by white settlers, in combination with "catastrophic droughts" and extreme winters, might have also lead to increasing starvation in Kansas and on the Southern Plains. Specifically, this period of overhunting coincided with the beginning of another major drought plaguing the plains, which rapidly depleted the buffalo herds in the mid-to-late 1800s. American and New Mexican hunters competed for game and not only decreased the buffalo population on the plains, but pushed what little herds remained further and further away from Indian population centers, making it increasingly difficult for them to hunt for food and furs. Adding to the problem, members of the United States armed forces would also slaughter the bison in an attempt to punish and drive away troublesome tribes. This naturally had a negative impact on the tribes who were not violent, as well, such as the Wichitas. By 1865, the buffalo herds were so diminished that the animal had virtually "vanished" from Kansas and the Southern Plains. Some tribes were able to recover from the disappearance of the buffalo by radically changing their economy to focus on the trade of cattle and horses; they also restructured their diets, including corn tortillas from New Mexico, in addition to coffee and American tobacco; but those who could not, like the Wichitas, were doomed to suffer starvation and extreme death tolls.[88]

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[87] Gookins to William P. Dole, April 24, 1865, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928; Gookins to Sell, September 18, 1865, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.

[88] The Wichitas were involved in the cattle trade, but they faced competition from lager tribes, like the Comanches, making it difficult for them to repeat the success they had once enjoyed. See Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 345-346. For more on this issue, see Andrew C. Isenburg, *The Destruction of the Bison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 124-142; Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850," *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 2 (September 1991); David D. Smits, "The Frontier Army and the

Agent Gookins took note of the success the Comanches in adapting to the situation on the plains and urged the Wichitas to give agriculture a chance once again. He appealed to the federal government to supply the Indians with agricultural tools to ease their labor, but he received no response to his requests. He then traveled to meet with Colonel Coffin, hoping to secure his favor and the funds to buy the Wichitas the supplies the federal government failed to provide, but found the colonel missing from Fort Leavenworth. Left with no other choice but to procure the supplies himself, Agent Gookins spent nine hundred dollars on seeds and other farming equipment and personally delivered them to the Wichitas and their neighbors on the Little Arkansas River. The Indians were overjoyed at the agent's intervention and set to work carrying out his advice to attempt agriculture again. But the Wichitas' hopes were dashed almost immediately when rising flood waters from the nearby river swept in and wiped out the crops they had been laboring to grow all summer.[89]

After this final effort to provide support for the ailing Wichitas, and realizing there was nothing more he could do for the Indians without the support of the federal government, Agent Gookins finally relented. In his report to Washington about the state of the Indians in Kansas, Gookins admitted that the Wichitas were in a sore state of affairs and that their populations were being drastically diminished.[90] In fact, due to the combination of exposure, starvation, and disease— caused almost entirely by the government's neglect of their promises to the tribes—the Wichitas' population declined by almost a third in Kansas, going from approximately "1,100

Destruction of the Buffalo: 1865-1883," *Western Historical Quarterly* 25 (Autumn 1994): 312-338.

[89] Gookins to William P. Dole, April 24, 1865; Gookins to Sell, September 18, 1865, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.

[90] Gookins to Sell, September 18, 1865, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.

people" when they arrived "to just below 700." Only "280 Taovayas, 123 Kichais, 135 Wacos, and 157 Tawakonis" survived the ordeal and made beyond the end of the Civil War.[91]

The End of the Civil War and Final Relocation

Following the conclusion of the Civil War, Elijah Sells took over as the superintendent of the southern district for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Together with Agent Gookins, he petitioned the federal government to move the Wichitas and their affiliated tribes backed to the Leased District in Indian Territory. They reasoned that the end of the conflict would also mark the end of some of the disputes the Wichitas encountered during their last stay in Indian Territory and that conditions would be better there for them than in Indian Territory. Even the chiefs of the Wichita tribes were desperate for a permanent home away from their woes and agreed with the Indian agents that a return to the Leased District would be best for their tribes. But the federal government ignored these pleas for the rest of the year and all of the following year, as well.

In 1866, while the Indians hoped and waited for some sign of a response from the president in Washington, they continued to try to plant new crops—such as squash and other vegetables—to sustain themselves, moving up into Butler County, Kansas to get away from the flood waters that had destroyed their previous yield of crops. However, Agent Gookins noted that the tribes in general seemed defeated and lacked the motivation they previously had shown when it came to planting crops and sustaining themselves.[92] Furthermore, their movement into Butler County did nothing to end their troubles with the surrounding white population. White settlers continued to cheat them out of their money by selling them overpriced whiskey, which became a rampant sight

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[91] Smith, "Wichita Locations and Population, 1719-1901," 413.
[92] Gookins to Cooley, March 29, 1866, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928; Gookins to Cooley, May 2, 1866, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928; J. J. Chollar to Colonel James Wortham, October 19, 1867, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.

throughout Wichita camps, and they also continued to steal horses from the natives. To his credit, Agent Gookins attempted to quell the tension between the white community and the natives by arresting some of the whites who were accused of stealing from the Indians, but this action did not have the effect he intended. In fact, it only escalated the tensions between the two communities—a tension that escalated more each day due to the increasing number of white settlers moving into the area. Again, Gookins appealed to Washington to remove the Wichitas to Indian Territory and again his requests went unanswered.[93]

By the summer of 1866, the Wichitas finally had a breakthrough and had some luck in planting their crops. Their fields were doing "very well," but rations were still scarce enough to convince some members of the tribe to make the long trek west in pursuit of the buffalo tribes that had long been driven off and dwindled by the increasing settlement of the white community. But it was not hostile whites that the Wichitas encountered when they finally reached the buffalo herds in the west. Instead, it was other hostile native bands—namely Cheyennes and Arapahos—who prohibited the Wichitas from hunting the buffalo "and robbed them of what little they did have." When those Indians returned empty-handed from their ventures out west, they found the crops that had previously been growing well on the Little Arkansas destroyed again by the flooding they had sought to escape.[94]

They also returned to find that Agent Gookins had been replaced by a new Wichita agent, Henry Shanklin. The new Agent Shanklin was appalled by the sorry state of the Wichitas on the Little Arkansas and was overwhelmed by the sheer number of requests he was receiving for food,

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[93] Gookins to Cooley, May 10, 1866; Gookins to Cooley, June 2, 1866, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.
[94] Smith, *Caddos, Wichitas, and the United States*, 92, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.

clothing, and aid. Like Gookins before him, he desperately appealed to Washington for assistance while appealing to the Wichitas to try to hunt the buffalo again. But, this time, the Wichitas refused; they were too afraid of the white community and the other hostile native bands they would encounter if they tried their luck with the buffalo again. Washington was seemingly indifferent to both Shanklin and the Wichitas' pleas, because Elijah Sells, the superintendent of the region, stated that the Wichitas "must suffer the horrors of both hunger and cold," which indicated that he was well aware of their troubles but that help from the federal government was not on the way.[95] Another government agent was cited as having said that "the Indians" (referring to the Wichitas) "have had no reason to complain on the part of the government." In fact, the government did not respond to any of the calls for aid until the very end of the summer, in August, when it finally sent relief in the form of daily rations. The relief in Kansas was palpable, not only for the Wichitas, but for neighboring Indian tribes, some of whom journeyed all the way from Indian Territory to obtain the food they needed to survive.[96]

The Bureau of Indian Affairs must also have been terribly tired of these persistent requests out of Kansas and finally relented to earlier suggestions by Agent Gookins to move the Indians back to Indian Territory. J. J. Chollar was appointed as the "special agent for removing the Wichita" and was instructed oversee the Wichitas and their affiliated tribes' movement out of Kansas and back to Indian Territory, but did not begin to carry these orders out until over a year later in October 1867. By the time he was ready to move the Wichitas back to a more permeant settlement in Indian Territory, the tribes had moved yet again, and were now living "in the vicinity

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[95] Shanklin to Wortham, September 1, 1876; Shanklin to Sells, July 6, 1866, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.
[96] Smith, *Caddos, Wichitas, and the United States*, 92, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.

of Green Bay" in Butler County. Chollar was frustrated with the Wichitas, because the tribes all refused to be removed from Kansas until they had time enough to harvest their crops. He "used every means in [his] power" to convince them to move without their crops, because cholera was once again spreading through Kansas and threatened to wipe out even more of their diminished population, but the Wichitas were adamant to stick by their crops—likely because they knew how often the government broke its promise over providing them with food rations. It should be noted that Chollar was not concerned for the Indians' health, but rather the cost for transporting their sick, which he estimated would be approximately "$1832.13" and that, "if it had not been for the sickness among them, the expenses would have been considerably less."[97]

Attempts to move the Wichitas back to the Leased District initially proved disastrous. The rainy season made crossing the Arkansas River difficult and at least "one of the Indians was drowned" in the journey. Furthermore, Agent Shanklin was concerned that the supplies the government had purchased would perish if continued attempts to venture to Indian Territory were made while the season persisted. The cost of these supplies, in his mind, was already too great, so he delayed the tribes for a better crossing-time. Another outbreak of cholera, just as Special Agent Chollar had predicted, also slowed their removal. This outbreak was so bad that both Shanklin and Chollar opted to leave the Wichitas behind and escort the "Shawnees, the Caddos, and the Delawares" to Indian Territory first before coming back for the Wichitas. Colonel James Wortham attempted to take over the removal operations, as he was frustrated by the special agent's progress,

[97] J. J. Chollar to Colonel James Wortham, October 19, 1867, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 928.

but the cholera outbreak worsened and he found himself in the same boat: completely unable to move the Indians himself. [98]

Despite these setbacks, and via escort by Special Agent Chollar, some of the Wichitas finally made it back to the Leased District by October 19, 1867. The rest would arrive in the middle of the following month, following a mostly uneventful journey from Kansas. Chollar was optimistic that life for the remaining Wichitas would be better in Indian Territory. He found them to be "industrious" and thought that, if they were provided with the right supplies by the federal government, they would be able to sustain themselves in their new permanent homes by raising crops and livestock.[99] Shanklin, on the other hand, derided the tribes almost to the point of disgust for being so heavily reliant on the federal government and for being "obnoxious" towards the white population that had lived around them in Kansas. He hoped that having removed them to their new homes in the Leased District would put an end to the government needing to supervise their actions and behavior (despite the fact that the federal government was ignoring them outright throughout much of their troubles).[100]

On the Leased District again, the Wichitas set about trying to replicate the success of the Brazos Reserve in Texas before outside forces compelled them to leave. Despite dwindling population numbers, they were optimistic that the woes they experienced in Kansas would not be repeated now that they had land they could call their own. The federal government also made grand promises to the Indians that its new reservation system would be a massive success and that it

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[98] Shanklin to Colonel James Wortham, September 1, 1867, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 929.
[99] J. J. Chollar to Colonel James Wortham, October 19, 1867, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 929.
[100] Shanklin to Colonel James Wortham, September 1, 1887, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 930.

would protect them from hostile whites and neighboring native tribes. As with previous government promises, though, this rarely tended to be the case. The Wichitas did face hostility from neighboring tribes, such as the Shawnees, and were at one point forced to give up their fields in favor of raising livestock due to the brewing conflict. Nevertheless, the Wichitas were adamant to make their new situation work. They were forced to submit their children to an American education, learn English, and endeavor to assimilate to the Western European against their wishes. Agents of the federal government worked to destroy the Ghost Dance religion and other aspects of Wichita culture to try and move this assimilation along. But despite their continued troubles with the federal government, the Wichitas would not be forced to move again and would remain on their agency for the next thirty-four years.[101]

[101] As was previously mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, the Wichita population hovered at about 700 in 1859, some two years after they returned to Indian Territory; Smith, *Caddos, Wichitas, and the United States*, 94; Elam, *Kitikiti'sh: The Wichitas and Associated Tribes, 1759-1859*, 348.

Conclusion

The story of the Wichitas' journey from Texas to Indian Territory to Kansas and back to Indian Territory again provides critical insight into the role the United States federal government played in the suffering that was endured by the Wichitas, their associated bands, and other native tribes in Indian Territory and Kansas before and during the Civil War. In numerous sources, but perhaps best exemplified in the letters of Special Agent J. J. Chollar and Agent Henry Shanklin, the federal government reveals that it is fully aware of the Wichitas' suffering and of their declining population numbers, but that it chose to do nothing for them because it viewed them as obnoxious and over-reliant on food and clothing from the government. While this does not imply that the federal government—at least in the case of the Wichitas—had a *direct* hand in killing off over a third of the Wichitas' population, it certainly held a significant portion of the blame by refusing to send them the supplies and aid they were promised in the first place. It also failed to protect the Indians from hostile white settlers, which was part of its initial arrangements with tribes, including the Wichitas. The government's, particularly the Bureau of Indian Affairs', outright indifference towards the tribes, despite dozens of letters from both Indian agents and the native chiefs themselves, allowed preventable conflicts and starvation to happen; it also prevented treatable diseases from being addressed by medical professionals, which only fueled the suffering on the plains.[102]

But the Wichitas' story does not just paint a picture of suffering at the hands of an indifferent federal government. Rather, it demonstrates that, even when faced with such bleak circumstances as they faced in Texas, Indian Territory, and Kansas, the Wichitas continually

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[102] J. J. Chollar to Colonel James Wortham, October 19, 1867, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 929; Shanklin to Colonel James Wortham, September 1, 1867, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*, reel 929.

looked for new ways to improve their own circumstances. Despite the accusations of men like Agent Shanklin, and the Wichitas' own profession of absolute loyalty to the government of the United States, the tribes proved to be autonomous when the situation required it; they numerously moved to avoid conflict with white settlers, attempted to plant their own crops with or without government-issued supplies, and even tried to carve out a niche in the growing trade of cattle in Kansas. Several bands even purposely moved off the Wichita Agency to live on their own, or among other native bands, finding their own way to sustain themselves in the face of a severe lack of government-promised rations. Their story demonstrates that they were not helpless victims but were actors who made important decisions that were meant to better their own lives, though outside forces ultimately worked to undermine those decisions.

The Wichitas' story also highlights issues with the historiography surrounding them. Though several monographs have covered the Wichitas' time in both Indian Territory, and at least mention the tribes' stay in Kansas during the Civil War, almost none of them agree on the conditions that forced the tribes to leave the Leased District—though each of them gets an element of the story correct. For instance, historian Todd Smith's work attributes the departure to repeated attacks by enemy tribes and hostile Texans.[103] Historian Earl Elam's account attributes their departure to "political events beyond their control" and is the only account to mention that the Wichitas received a "federal escort" from Indian Territory to Kansas.[104] Finally, anthropologist W. W. Newcomb, Jr.'s admittedly short account attributes their departure to "marauding Indians" and fear of Confederate soldiers.[105] The first two accounts use, much like this work, sources from the Wichita Agency, while the third has no citations at all, throwing into question where the

[103] Smith, *Caddos, Wichitas, United States*, 86.
[104] Elam, *Kitikiti'sh: The Wichitas and Associated Tribes, 1759-1859*, 347.
[105] Newcomb, *The Wichita People*, 77.

information originated. This suggests two issues: that historians simply have not gone through all of the papers required to present a full narrative of the Wichitas' story in Indian Territory and Kansas and that historians of the Wichitas have not consulted each other's work to improve upon and streamline the narrative. Comparing these narratives in addition to digging further into the source material, as this work shows, reveals that the Wichitas not only faced threats from hostile tribes and Texans, but that they were also prevented from sustaining their crops, were plagued by drought and harsh winters, and were continually neglected by both the United States federal government and the Confederate government. Hunger ultimately forced their hand to move north to Kansas under federal escort.

Inconsistencies in the historiography persist into the Kansas narrative, though for different reasons. Of the aforementioned scholars, only Todd Smith develops any significant narrative around the Wichitas in Kansas.[106] For both Elam and Newcomb, the narrative is condensed to a paragraph or two at the end of their respective accounts.[107] The inconsistencies in these accounts appear to be caused by both their brevity and the limited number of sources used to construct them, as well as a lack of consultation with other works that touch upon this time period. Though difficult to track down, a wealth of scholarly articles (including some outside the field of history) and a few monographs exist that touch upon the Wichitas' time in Kansas, which not only helped to reveal leads to unlikely sources but to piece together clues that cannot easily be deduced from letters between Indian agents and indifferent politicians in Washington D.C. The best example of this is in the climate data found in the work of Michael C. Stambaugh, a scholar of natural resources at the University of Missouri, and his colleagues, which helped to provide the scope and the

[106] See Smith, *Caddos, Wichitas, United States*, 87-94.
[107] For Elam, this may be because the Kansas narrative fell beyond the purview of his project. See Elam, *Kitikiti'sh: The Wichitas and Associated Tribes, 1759-1859*, 347-348.

consequences of the massive droughts that impacted the Wichitas both in Indian Territory and in Kansas.[108] Another example, this one from within the field of history, can be found in the work of historian Ramon Powers and James Leiker, who revealed the horrors that cholera wrought upon the Wichita population. This is significant because the effects of cholera on the Wichitas is often downplayed, in comparison to other disease outbreaks, particularly the small pox epidemics that were known to be breaking out on the plains while the tribes were in Kansas.[109]

Collectively, the Wichitas and their affiliated tribes were a critically important tribes who had a profound impact on the history of the southern United States. They were responsible for some of the earliest interactions between Spaniards and French explorers and the native populous of North America. They served as military allies, guides, traders, and emissaries to larger bands of natives, even when it meant working alongside deep-seated enemies like the Texas Rangers, and always presented themselves as peaceful friends of the United States of America when it came onto the world stage and began to expand west in its quest to reach the west coast. As a result, they were arguably one of the most influential native tribes active on the plains of the United States. Yet, despite their influence and importance, the Wichitas are receive a lack of focus in in the historical community despite the wealth of sources that describe them. Instead, larger native tribes, such as the Comanches, receive the bulk of scholarly attention. Because of this, gaps and inconsistences, like those described in this work, have persisted for decades. Moving forward,

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[108] See Michael C. Stambaugh, et al., "Drought duration and frequency in the U.S. Corn Belt during the last millennium (AD 992-2004)," *Agricultural and Forest Meteorology* 151, No. 2 (February 2011), 159.

[109] Powers and Leiker were interested in studying the cholera outbreak's effects on Plains Indians, but their work *does* touch upon the Wichitas and is not a source cited in other works, which might explain why cholera is downplayed in these works in comparison to diseases like small pox. See Ramon Powers and James N. Leiker, "Cholera Among the Plains Indians," *Western Historical Quarterly* 29, no. 3, (Autumn 1998): 317-331.

historians—particularly those who study the history of Native Americans—must dedicate more time to understanding the history of the Wichitas and the tribes' contributions to borderlands history, as well as the study of the history of the southern plains of the United States. Doing so can not only shed light on who these important peoples were, and how they lived their lives, but also on the role that the United States federal government played in their dwindling population and its interaction with the tribes around them.

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