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Trails over Oklahoma

by Nina Q. Barnes

Once in ancient days, an old Indian and a few braves stood on the crest of the Washitas. Sweeping his arm before him from south to north as their gaze followed westward, the Indian indicated the valley of the North Fork of the Red River, where the rolling river snaked between jagged red granite bluffs, and mused that someday the white man would make a big lake there. A dust cloud grew toward them from the southern horizon, pebbles rolled under their feet, the roar of millions of hooves thundered up the valley, bouncing from wall to wall, as the very mountains shook. Further speech was impossible. The old man waved his arm, forward, in the timeless gesture, "Follow, quickly," gathered his quiver and bow and lept like a bobcat, from boulder to boulder, down to the valley floor. He would teach, the braves would learn, the difficult art of felling the buffalo with arrows, skinning it with knives made of flint, stretching, and drying, the hide for robes. When the buffalo milled in the river, the first arrow flew.

The Indian band followed and hunted, reaching the great salt lick and buffalo wallow where the sun beat down in ribbons of reflected white light, as far as the eye could see. Here they gathered salt in pouches of deer-skin, to carry back with them to their home in the Washitas. It was an ancient place, known to their tribes for many moons. They had named it: "Salt Fork of the Arkansas River."

1540-41. "El Turco," an Indian held captive by a Tigua warrior in the Tigua pueblo on the Rio Grande, boldly offered himself as guide to Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, the young captain-general of a Spanish expedition. Though he was angry and disappointed by fail-

ure to find the Seven Cities of Cibola, still the lust for wealth dulled his common sense. "The Turk" described the great cities of Quivira, far across the pastures of the buffalo, where immense treasures of gold and silver and precious stones could be had for the taking. In the spring of 1541, two hundred and fifty mounted Spanish soldiers, fifty-foot soldiers, and several hundred Indians, set out for Quivira. From the Rio Grande they marched eastward to the border of the present Texas panhandle, where the Turk misled them to the southeast, hoping to lose them forever in a timberless, waterless land. He longed for his home and the freedom he enjoyed among his own people, and he sought the opportunity to escape. Ypsopete, a Quivira captive of the Tigua, enlisted as a second guide, now passionately denounced the Turk as liar. Coronado put the Turk in irons, and sent back most of his troop, retaining only forty men traveling "by the needle" (his magnetic compass).

They marched due north, crossing the prairies and the Beaver River, entering into present-day Kansas at the site of Liberal, marching on to the Great Bend of the Arkansas, where they arrived on St. Peter and Paul's day, June 29, 1541. Marching onward to the northeast three days, they found on July 2, Quivira (Wichita) Indians who were hunting. Ypsopete spoke to them in his and their own native language. During the next twenty-five days, they found several villages of up to two hundred grass dome-shaped huts, the Indians engaged in raising corn and beans, and not precious metals or gems. Ypsopete was set free. The Turk was murdered. The troop crossed back over the plains (of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, to New Mexico and Arizona), returning to the Rio Grande of Nuevo Galicia province in Western Mexico. There Coronado outfitted a Franciscan priest, Fray Juan de Padilla. Accompanied by a small party, he returned to Quivira as a Christian mis-

sionary. Legend of Fray Padilla is that he Christianized and was loved by the Quivira: they with "many arrows" did slay him when he attempted to move into the Guas country to Christianize the enemy. Padilla was the first recorded martyr.

1601. Juan de Onate led a second Spanish expedition; like Coronado he was impressed with the agricultural opportunities of the fertile soil in Quivira, and potential value for Spain. He encouraged founding the town of Santa Fe, to serve as capital and trading center for Spain's northernmost possessions in the American interior. There is no record of further contact between the village Indians and the Spanish. But the horses, either lost or strayed from the the Spanish, swiftly multiplied in the habitat, providing the stimulus to revolutionize the Indians' way of life. (*Kansas: A History*. Kenneth S. Davis. NY: W.W. Norton & Co, Inc. 1984, 1976.)

(Through study of fossils of the horse, zoologists proved that the horse evolved on the North American Plains, migrated over the land bridge to Asia, then disappeared from this continent for six thousand, five hundred years. While Americans of Eurasian stock have been associated with the horse since Biblical times, we often tend to forget that Native Americans were pedestrian before Spanish exploration of the 1400s and 1500s re-introduced the horse.)

1739. French brothers Paul and Pierre Mallet are believed to be the first white men to travel overland between Missouri River trading posts and Santa Fe. It is believed that they followed Coronado's route below Liberal into present day Oklahoma: they reported finding on the riverbank, stones with Spanish inscriptions. France claimed all this area as part of Louisiana, by right of exploration. Spain claimed all the area by right of discovery. The Comanche claimed all the land by right of

occupation and ability to control and defend. Previous mountain people of the Rockies (Wyoming), the Comanche were nomads living in teepees and using dogs for pulling travois, when they captured the wild horse. Within two or three generations, they displaced the fierce native Apache and Pawnee with their overpowering ferocity and superior horsemanship.

1762. France ceded lands from the Mississippi River to the Rockies to the Spanish. 1763. France ceded Canada to the British.

1803-4. Louisiana Purchase. Thomas Jefferson, President, ordered an expedition headed by Merriwether Lewis and William Clark to explore this land which doubled the size of the United States, up the Missouri, into the Northwest. They were to gather map data and information on the fur trade.

1806. Gen. James Wilkinson, governor of the Louisiana Territory, ordered an exploring expedition sent out from St. Louis, led by Lt. Zebulon M. Pike of the U.S. Army. He continued into Colorado, discovering "Pike's Peak."

1819-20. Expedition under the command of Maj. Stephen H. Long, and a detachment headed by zoologist Thomas Say. They created a mapping and scientific report so badly in error, it produced a map which designated the entire Great Plains as: The Great American Desert. His descriptions included the phrases "...soil generally dry and sandy, with gravel..." compared to "...sandy deserts of Africa," "...the scarcity of wood and water," "...leave the prairies...to the wandering and uncivilized aborigines of the country." (Davis 24, 25).

1824. Fort Gibson established, built on Grand River.

1832. Well-known author, Washington Irving, returned from Europe after seventeen years, made friends of Latrobe and Pourtales aboard ship, escorted them in

America. Chance meeting on a steamboat on Lake Erie with Henry L. Ellsworth, (appointed commissioner to the western Indians), who, during conversation, invited Irving's group to join him, he asked Irving to serve as secretary. Irving and the others were delighted to accept this offer of a guided tour of the unknown within the Louisiana Purchase and eagerly landed at Ashtabula with Ellsworth, crossed Ohio, arriving at Cincinnati on September 13, a passage of twelve days river travel on the Ohio River. They proceeded by horseback via Independence to the Arkansas; they visited the frontier line of Harmony, Neosho, Hopefield and Union missions, arriving at the southwestern outpost, Fort Gibson, on October 8. With a company of Rangers, they began their foray beyond human habitation.

Irving wrote to his brother, Peter, "I should have an opportunity of seeing the remnants of those great Indian Tribes, which are now about to disappear as independent nations, or to be amalgamated under some new form of government. I should see those fine countries of the 'far west,' while still in a state of pristine wildness, and behold herds of buffaloes scouring their native prairies, before they are driven beyond the reach of a civilized tourist." (*A Tour on the Prairies*. Washington Irving, 1832. Reprinted: Norman, OK. University of Oklahoma Press 1956, 1962, 1971. Introductory Essay, p. xvii. Washington City, December 18, 1832.)

Of Ellsworth, he writes, "Our party was headed by one of the Commissioners appointed by the government of the United States to superintend the settlement of the Indian tribes migrating from the east to west of the Mississippi. In the discharge of his duties, he was thus visiting the various outposts of civilization."

Washington Irving was unique among American authors, in that he had been accepted on The Continent. His works had been appreciated by a ready audience,

and he was of some renown in his native America. This narrative was originally published in the *London Athenaeum* (1833), 137-38; reprinted in the *New York Commercial Advertiser*, and copied from the latter by the *Arkansas Gazette*, June 26, 1933.

We should here, pause, and reflect, upon the astonishing import of the revelations imparted to the civilized world by the American author, Washington Irving, first to The Continent, via London, to the New World, via New York, and to the American Frontier via an Arkansas Outpost publication. Previous expeditions and mappings had resulted in fearful contradictions regarding the terrain and its inhabitants; even to the extent of labelling the area as akin to the Great Sahara Desert: The Great American Desert, a deadly uninhabitable region.

Here, in untrodden Oklahoma, vivid paintings of the earth, the waters, the peoples, the skies, were spun from the pencil of this man of optimism, good humor, enthusiasm, and high expectations, fanning flames of the same hope within the bosom of the thousands of migrant fearless parents, the wild outdoorsmen, and daring entrepreneurs, who made of that vast region, the pulse, heart-beat, and conscience of America, breadbasket to the world! Perhaps never has a populace been so influenced as by the descriptions of this one man, of the great beauty of the area, of the great bounty of the prairies, streams, and skies, quickly followed by similar published articles by Ellsworth, referred to as the Narrative; and by Benjamin Henry Latrobe's full report of the adventure with Irving and Pourtales in *The Rambler in North America*, 1832-1833 (2nd edition 2 volumes in 1, London, 1836) and *The Rambler in Mexico* (New York, 1836.)

1862-65. Civil War destruction took place in the eastern half of the territory. Many battles were fought, strife. Indians were punished for joining rebels.

1874. The Red River War stifles resistance and convinces the Indians to accept the sedentary life imposed upon them by the government. Troops from Texas, New Mexico, Kansas and Indian Territory, including Fort Sill garrisons, subdue Indian hostility.

1878. September. Northern Cheyenne led by Dull Knife left the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation for their northern homeland, pointing up the need for military enforcement of reservation law.

1879. March. Cantonment was established on the north fork of the Canadian River near the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation.

THE TROUBLE WITH KANSANS

Selected excerpts from *The Burden Enterprise, Cowley County, Kansas*: Levi Quier, C.E. White, W.D. Kella and several others went to the territory last week on a hunting expedition. They bagged one deer and a lot of small game. September 13, 1883.

Levi has gone to the nation with some other parties on his annual hunt. November 22, 1883.

Levi returned from the territory last Tuesday morning, having killed 10 deer and a bag full of birds. Levi was the daring hunter of these parts. January 3, 1884.

1884. Fall. Subpost of Fort Reno was set up north of present-day Guthrie at Skeleton Creek and the Cimarron River. Named Camp Russell, it was intended for winter operations against the Boomers, intruders into the unoccupied lands. Mostly black soldiers of the 9th Cavalry, they were vigilant in obeying orders. (When intercepted, these Boomers were escorted to the Kansas line, and were not prosecuted.)

1884. September. David L. Payne dies. Boomer leadership was taken by William L. Couch. He led 200 people to Stillwater Creek in December 1884. Dwellings were built. They were armed and determined to stay and "squat."

1884. December 21. Lt. M.W. Day led troops from Camp Russell, arrived Boomer camp at Stillwater 24 December. Day requested reinforcements. Boomers sent telegram to President Chester A. Arthur asking him to consider the validity of their claims. Arthur refused.

1885. January 11. Col. Edward L. Hatch left Caldwell, Kansas with a detachment of soldiers bound for Camp Russell and the Stillwater camp. Driving rain, bitter cold swept plains; they arrived January 17. Cavalry and infantry arrived from Fort Reno; Hatch moved on the colony 24 January, intercepting supplies and preparing armed conflict. Almost out of food, and to avoid war, Boomers surrendered. They were escorted to Kansas border. They continued to lobby for the opening of Oklahoma.

1885. June. Patrols continued to intercept isolated parties of settlers, apprehending and evicting them at Kansas border. They found few intruders, and the opening of Oklahoma to settlement seemed imminent. They received orders from Fort Reno for the abandonment of Camp Russell; troops left banks of Cimarron on June 27 and returned to Fort Reno.

The Burden Enterprise. We understand that Henry Quier started to The State with a wagonload of game to sell, and was to go back for Levi and the other boys and more game, but the soldiers mistook the old man for a Boomer and kept him 5 days, while they were rounding up more Boomers, and the game was all spoiled when they got to the state. December 3, 1885.

April 1889. Burden residents made the Run into Oklahoma Territory: Cameron Graham, Lewis W. Graham, William and Daniel Quier.

Mr. William Quier prepared to start for Oklahoma where his family will make their future home. Feb. 27, 1890.

Mr. William Quier of Crescent City, Okla. Territory,

who has been in the city for the past three or four days started for his home Monday. He came up for seed oats and corn. Rosanna Quier married Ben F. Mock Friday Feb. 20, 1891 at the office of Judge Berger at Guthrie, Indian territory. She is the daughter of Mr. William Quier who for many years was a resident of Cowley Co. February 26, 1891. Levi Quier donated .50 to the Wellington cyclone sufferers.

Spirit of the West, June 10, 1892.

Levi Quier and W.L. Hutton performed a duet at the G.A.R. banquet Tuesday evening, their performance was encored. *Spirit of the West* January 6, 1893.

Author's note:

In 1934, my father "skidded" a two room house across the wooden oil-derrick studded prairie, adding it to our humble home: a primitive garage, dirt floor covered with pine planks, tar-papered, divided and converted to a kitchen and living area. This doubled the size of our living quarters. After sealing together the two modest dwellings by cutting into each a common door, Daddy purchased 1x10s, cutting and building a bookcase from floor to ceiling in a corner of the new rooms. We children took from a box, his and mother's prized possessions, their books, one of which was a well-worn, faded, cloth-bound slim volume of Washington Irving.