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PASTIMES

OF

QUANAH

PARKER

—By Gwen Jackson

Some called him Skunk. Others called him Serpent Eagle, but most knew him best as Quanah Parker. He became chief of the Kwahadi Comanches when he was twenty-two years old and led his band of warriors on many attacks against white settlers.

In 1875, Quanah suddenly brought his people in from the plains, turned over his arms, and settled with his band at the foot of the Wichita Mountains in Indian Territory.

In the late 1800's, three cattlemen had lumber brought from Harold, Texas, to build "Star House" for Quanah. The Indians were interested in the construction, so many moved their tepees into the yard to watch. Quanah also endorsed this watchful pastime. He didn't move into Star House for nearly a month after it was completed; in fact, he was so proud of

the fourteen white stars painted on the roof that he just sat outside and looked at them. They signified that he was "Eagle of the Plains"—just as the generals at Ft. Sill were chiefs.

In 1907, John and Katy Parker and their children traveled by wagon from Waurika to Comanche for the annual Fourth of July celebration. A relative, Quanah Parker, was billed as the feature attraction. They camped in Comanche City Park and planned to stay three days. The vendors sold corn on a stick and buffalo barbecue. A merry-go-round of brightly painted, wooden horses was pulled round and round by a dapple gray mare.

On the afternoon of the Fourth, the red shale hills thundered with hoofbeats of Indian ponies. Warrior whoops, shields, and spears signaled the wagon master to circle the wagons in defense.

Barbed-wire fence was stretched in arena fashion around the center of the park. Buckboards and wagons parked behind the fence restrained crowds of eager people watching Quanah Parker and his braves converge on the wagon train. They attacked with life-and-death seriousness. This Fourth of July event was something Etta May Parker never forgot. Her older sister took a picture of Quanah and his braves to record the event.

Quanah's old pastimes as warrior of the plains, watcher of Star House, and leader of mock attacks are history. Quanah Parker is now at peace.

In keeping with Comanche custom, a spear-shaped cedar, pointing the way to heaven, was planted at the head of his grave. Upon his red granite headstone, from the Wichita Mountains nearby, is this inscription:

Resting here until day breaks, and shadows fall, and darkness disappears.

(GWEN JACKSON has been a Chapter 1 Reading Teacher at Amber-Pocasset Elementary School. After 27 years of teaching, she retired in May, planning to devote more time to writing.) *

Design by Marc Williams



QUANAH PARKER is in the middle with shield. Photograph was taken by Etta Mae Parker's Sister in 1907.