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Historic Indian Sites Of Western Oklahoma

by Marshall Gettys

There are numerous sites in Western Oklahoma related to known historic Indian tribes. Unlike the tribes of Eastern Oklahoma, most tribes in the western portion of the state had at least some familiarity with the area in which they were forced to settle. Some of the tribes in this portion of the state include the Fort Sill Apache, Kiowa, Cheyenne, Comanche, and Arapaho.

Some types of the sites related to these tribes and included on the National Register of Historic Places are battlefields, schools, graves of well-known and highly respected Indian leaders and the homes occupied by some of those leaders.

Possibly the best-known site in Western Oklahoma is that of the Battle of the Washita. This site, located in central Roger Mills County, was the scene of an engagement be-

tween the Seventh Cavalry of the United States Army, led by Colonel George Custer, and the Southern Cheyenne. Here 800 men of the Seventh Cavalry participated in the surprise attack on the Southern Cheyenne Village of Black Kettle, the noted peace leader of the Southern Cheyenne. Over 100 Cheyenne warriors were killed and 53 women and children were taken prisoner. This massacre was a tremendous psychological blow to the Indians. Until this time the Indians had relied on the winter for protection from the army. This same battle provided a psychological boost to the cavalry by proving that a successful winter campaign could be conducted.

Today the town of Cheyenne occupies part of the battle area; however, a small but significant portion of the battlefield is a state park. This area is situated along highway 47 west of

This two-story house on the grounds of the Darlington Game Farm is constructed of adobe and covered with clapboard.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY: SAKCHAI LAIVADHANA

Cheyenne in such a manner that most of the significant locales of the battle can be seen and a good sense of the battle obtained.

Several residences of Indian leaders are still standing in Western Oklahoma. Perhaps the most famous of these is the "Star House" of Quanah Parker. The house is so named because of the stars painted on the roof.

Quanah Parker, the last Comanche leader to surrender to the United States, was the son of a captured white girl, Cynthia Ann Parker, and the Comanche Chief, Peta Nokoni. Quanah Parker was a noted war leader of the Comanche until he sensed the futility of resistance and surrendered in 1875. Although he ceased armed resistance, Parker continued as an important influence in the Comanche tribe. At various times he served with the Indian Police, as a judge on the Court of Indian Offenses and as a tribal delegate to Washington, D.C.

The Star House was constructed around 1890 by Quanah Parker to house himself and several of his wives. The house was a large one by the standards of the day and included between twelve and twenty-two rooms, depending on how they are counted. Eight of the rooms were bedrooms. According to tradition, all bedrooms for the wives were furnished alike to avoid complaints. Although Quanah Parker had eight wives in his life, there are documentary indications that he limited himself to five at any one time.

The name is derived from the stars painted on the roof of the house. Tradition holds that these stars were painted on the house to impress a general at Fort Sill and were related to the stars on the uniforms of generals of the army. Two stars were reportedly painted on the smokehouse and two on a summer house. Unfortunately neither of these structures has survived.

Another very important residence is the only remaining Comanche chief's house. Located in Comanche County, near Elgin, this structure represents part of a program to reward those Comanche leaders who were friendly toward the United States government during Comanche Indian Wars of 1874-1875. Built as part of a program to pro-

vide houses for select Comanche chiefs, this house is the only one of 15 (2 stone and 13 picket logs) remaining.

Known historically as the Penateka House (the Comanche word for *honey eaters*, the name of the band whose headman was to occupy the house), this structure was built in 1877. This house was intended for the use of Tsee-aht-sinne-kah, then headman of the Penateka. Apparently the houses were not in continuous use by the leaders of the tribe and thus others used the structure, including Army scouts and other transients.

Built of stone, this structure is a "saddle bag" floor plan in which two adjacent rooms, each with a fireplace, share a common chimney. This structure consists of an 18 foot wide, 30 foot long stone residence with walls 14 inches thick. All of the materials used in the house were obtained locally, with limestone quarried from a nearby outcrop and mortar produced in a kiln built on the property.

Schools have also played an important role in the history of many of the tribes in the western portion of the state. One was the Seger Indian School. Established by John Seger, this school was part of a settlement that later became the town of Colony, Oklahoma.



The Order of Eastern Star built Darlington Chapel when the boarding school for homeless children was in operation.

This red brick structure, today on the property of the Cheyenne-Arapaho tribe, was built by Seger and his helpers with bricks and mortar manufactured on the grounds. Construction of the school building was supervised by Seger, who has been described as a "master of all trades." This would certainly apply to the construction of the school.

There is no indication that Seger ever employed any construction specialists in his building project, even though the project required such complex skills as building and operating a brick kiln, building and operating a lime kiln and, of course, the construction itself.

At one time, there were more than 1200 acres under cultivation and the colony was nearly independent. Although many of the original buildings have been destroyed, those that remain testify to the strong will of John Seger and his loyalty to the Arapaho.

The Fort Sill Indian School was established in 1871 to serve students of the Plains Indian tribes. Lawrie Tatum, a Quaker, was the first agent and came to the area in 1869. The first school building, a frame structure, burned in 1885. After being closed for a few years, the school reopened in a different location (today in Northeast Lawton). Some of these buildings were eventually placed on the National Register. At the time of occupation, the school was not located in the main part of Lawton, but it attracted its own commercial interests, including the well-known "Red Store," a nearby agency store.

Until its recent closing, the school served Indian students from the entire country but particularly the tribes of the South Plains. Alumni of the school have served with distinction in World War One, World War Two, Korea, and Viet Nam.

Building 309, the girls' dormitory, is the oldest remaining structure. Built in 1904, it was the first of several stone buildings to be constructed during this period. Unlike other buildings constructed at this time, this one had indoor plumbing and was wired for electricity. The basement contained the bath facilities, a playroom, and the boiler room. The first and second floors were dormitories and house-mothers' residences (one per floor); the attic was used only for storage.

Another important agency site is Darlington, which has served a variety of functions in the state, including that of Indian Agency, Children's Home, and State Game Farm. The structures on the site today represent all of these occupations.

Originally named "The Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency," the Darlington Agency was founded by Brinton Darlington, one of the first Quaker Indian agents appointed by President Grant. He served as the agent for only three years until his death in 1872 but was so respected by the tribes in his charge that the agency name was changed to honor him. In 1909, the services of the Darlington Agency were moved to Concho. Even at this late date the feeling was so strong concerning Darlington that a petition was filed by the tribes to have the name of Concho changed to Darlington.

Of particular interest here are two residences related to the agency period. These structures were both built in the 1870's and are of adobe construction, although they have been

covered with clapboards after construction. Both of these houses have been in continuous use from the time of their construction.

In 1910 the Agency was purchased by the Masons for use as a children's home and retirement home for Masons. The site served in this capacity until 1922 when the Masons moved to Guthrie. However, during the tenure of the Masons at Darlington, the order of Eastern Star erected a chapel that is also on the National Register. Also built during this period and listed on the National Register is a three-story dormitory constructed as part of the children's home complex.

Taken over by the state, the facility served as a drug rehabilitation center for three years and was then abandoned. Still property of the state, Darlington was taken over in 1932 by the Oklahoma Game and Fish Commission as a bird hatchery and research station. It continues in the same role today.

Although normally considered a military site, Cantonment was never formally named as a military post by the United States Army. Established in 1879, the post was in active use for only three years before it was abandoned in 1882. Today a single building, one of three built by the military, remains at the site. This structure, built of local stone and brick, was originally officers' quarters. It has also served as the Agency building for the Cheyenne-Arapaho and as part of two school complexes, an early one associated with the Mennonites and a later one operated by the Department of Interior. The officers' quarters were gutted by fire in the early 1960's, but restored in the 1970's by the owners, the Cheyenne-Arapaho tribes. With its location near the dam of Canton Reservoir, the site has been utilized as part of a recreation area by these tribes. Hopefully this will assure that the site will be preserved.



The Penateka House near Elgin was constructed by the federal government for use by Comanche leaders.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY: SAKCHAI LAIVADHANA

Although gravesites are not commonly placed on the National Register, some of special significance are so listed. One of the most important graves related to Native Americans is that of Black Beaver, the well-known scout. For 35 years, Black Beaver served the United States government as scout and interpreter. He spoke English, French, and Spanish as well as eight Indian languages.

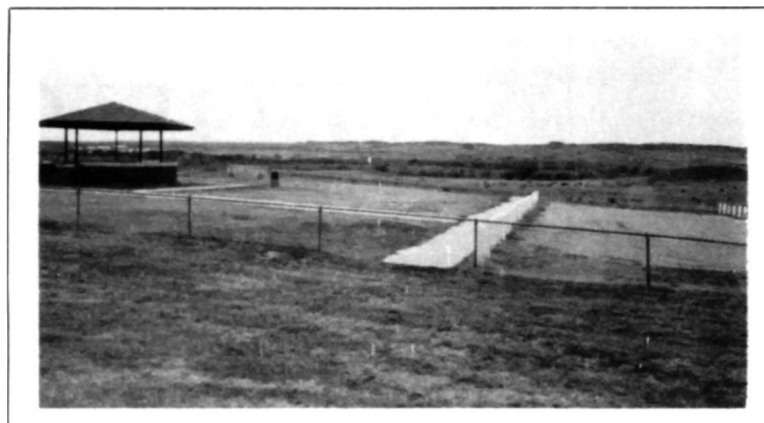


This building, constructed by John Seger, with almost exclusively local materials, is one of the few that remain of Seger Colony Mission School.

He served with Marcy, escorting gold-seekers to the West Coast, with Emory and the Union forces during the Civil War, and after the war with several Indian agents. All who served with him praised both his character and his intelligence. In the words of Israel G. Vore in 1879, "He served the United States under Generals Harney, Marcy, Belknap, Emory, Sacket and Standly and various other officers and Agents and Superintendents of Indian Affairs, as guide and interpreter--none of whom ever charged him with falsehood or a dishonorable act."

In 1834, the famous artist George Catlin painted a Wichita village encamped at Devils Canyon in what is now Southwest Oklahoma. Although nothing remains at this site today, it is still important because it is one of the few occupation sites that can be positively related to the Wichita tribe, a tribe of great importance to the history of early Oklahoma. Although the site was not visited again until 1852, at which time it had been abandoned, the description of the extensive village and the related farmland in combination with the known occupation by this tribe make this an important site.

The sites described above do not constitute even a small fraction of the sites in Western Oklahoma important to native Americans. Many sites of great importance have not yet



Today, this park provides a viewing area for the Washita Battlefield, one of the most significant sites related to Native American history.

been researched and nominated to the National Register. Hopefully this brief review will serve to generate interest in placing additional sites on the register. The history of the American Indian is so interwoven with the broad sweep of our nation's past that the two cannot be separated. With the recognition and preservation of each Native American site, all Americans have another small bit of assurance that their history is preserved and its importance appreciated. **W**

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