



12-15-1981

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### Recommended Citation

Montgomery, Robin (1981) "Cynthia Ann Parker, The White Indian Princess," *Westview*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 2 , Article 13.  
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol1/iss2/13>

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# INDIANS

ILLUSTRATION BY LINDA FICKLING



CYNTHIA ANN PARKER, THE WHITE INDIAN PRINCESS

— Robin Montgomery

On May 19, 1836, several hundred Comanche and Kiowa Indians attacked Fort Parker. During the next half hour in what is now Limestone County, Texas, the frenzied warriors broke inside the gates of the fort and nearly decimated the extended Parker family. Herein was the framework upon which developed one of the most heart-rending dramas in American History; a drama destined to delay until 1875 the closing of the Indian Wars in Texas.

This massacre proved to be the breeding ground for the saga of Cynthia Ann Parker. As a nine-year-old girl, amidst the groans of her dying relatives and the blood-curdling screams of the Indians, Cynthia Ann was lifted upon a pony and carried away to become the white princess of the Comanches. She lived with these Indians for twenty-four years and seven months during which time she married the Great War Chief, Peta Nocona. This marriage lasted until the Battle of Pease River in 1860, when Captain Sul Ross and the Texas Rangers killed Peta Nocona and captured Cynthia Ann, returning her to the white settlement. The drama was not to end here, however, for her two sons survived the Pease River encounter, one of them becoming the last and possibly the greatest war chief in the annals of Indian Warfare. This was Quannah Parker who, after finally submitting to the white man, uttered the rhetorical and all too true declamation from his tepee in the foothills of Anadarko:

When the white man captured the Indian Princess and shut her away from the open plains and the teepees of her tribe, the star of my race went down in gloom to shine no more. I am the last great chief of the Comanches, just as my mother Preloch (Cynthia Ann) was the last great princess of my people.

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THE BALLAD OF CYNTHIA ANN

— Vera Holding

The hills have a rhythm all their own  
Against the buffalo wallows  
And spring greens on each pitch and swell  
It doesn't depend on the swallows.  
And there sometimes when the evening comes down  
And war-bonnet feathers appear  
To frame the gold of the dying sun  
And the moon, like a crystal tear,  
Hangs on the misty cheek of night  
A spirit-wind softly comes  
Warm and sweet as a woman's smile  
To usher in roll of drums.

The phantom drums of the long ago  
To soothe like a gentle hand,  
When placed on the brow of the troubled past  
As peace falls over this land.

Sometimes when the teepes are asleep  
And the campfires burn to embers  
A night bird calls and a coyote howls  
A lonely heart remembers.

Time was when John Parker led his clan  
To the New Caanan — Promised Land,  
Called Texas — big as a cowman's dream  
With the shape of a rope-burned hand.

The Indian frontier had been pushed back,  
The soldiers sent far away.  
John Parker dozed in the springtime sun  
Watching his grandchild at play.  
Sweet Cynthia Ann — sandaled with joy,  
Light as an April willow,  
Gold as the morning, bright as the noon,  
With a bundle of charms for her pillow.

No moon-signs, no thickening veil of mist  
Was shrouding the midday sun.  
No screech owl warning from liveoak trees,  
Foretold how much blood would run  
Knee-deep in the valley where peace had dwelt  
Where the new fields, scented with clover,  
Lifted their faces up to the sky  
With a southwind blowing over.  
For suddenly, like some weird mirage,  
Comanches came swooping in  
Their painted bodies made a noose  
Around the fort. And the din  
Of their blood-curdling whoops, the women's screams,  
The rattle of bullet hail,  
The zoom and zing of arrow hate  
Scattered the band like quail.

Over and over the savage tide  
Was pushed back. And the pioneers  
Crouching there in the riddled fort  
Lent blood to the women's tears.

Poor Cynthia Ann was snatched away,  
Unheeded were her cries  
As stampeding mustangs thundered retreat,  
She was a chieftan's prize.  
In arroyas deep and war-paint walled  
Where savage tribes could hide  
They took poor Cynthia Ann and there  
She might well have lived and died.

## PART TWO

The painted-leaf moons had faded away  
And redbuds, like Gypsy girls,

Had danced in the woods for many a spring  
And summers filled lakes with pearls.  
The sun loosed ribbons of scarlet and gold  
To bind back the waterfall.  
The wind combed the white-petalled yucca folds  
And the Llano re-echoed the call  
Of coyotes mating on ledges of rock  
Under skies thumb-tacked by stars  
Where tales — many legends had their birth  
Of ghost-winds that soothes battle scars.  
Of roving Kiowas, riding like corks  
On the crest of its torrent at flood  
Comanches, too, as fluid as air,  
Wading through rivers of blood.  
A chief, brave Nacona, had won his bride,  
Pale Cynthia, now fully grown.  
Her price in bright trinkets having been paid,  
He claimed her for his own.

He headed the brave Kwahado band  
Of Comanches on river bend  
Two swarthy sons were born to them  
Whose blood was of redman's blend.

A Texan, while traveling, paused to rest  
With Chief Kwahadi's band.  
He found them friendly and peaceful enough —  
A paradox in this land.

The Texan, perplexed, saw the woman was white,  
Her hair held a golden sheen,  
Blue eyes held a story in their depth  
Of all the years between  
That day at Ft. Parker, long years past,  
When Cynthia, the lost Parker child  
Was captured by Indians. Now, at last  
Was this she in this lonely wild?

The Texan talked to her, tried to explain  
By signs that he'd take her away.  
He'd pay any price the chief might ask,  
But her will he could not sway.  
She loved this mighty chief and his band  
And her two sons. "No, no. . .  
Now this is my home," She tried to say,  
"I do not want to go."  
No conqueror could tame.  
This mother wolf with cubs on the run,  
Whose chief battled hand to hand,  
Until Texas Rangers led by Sul Ross  
Took over in high command.

He pushed back the Indians, stemming the tide  
On the blood-crested river, Pease,

Put down savage warfare, but there, they say  
Ghost forms still raid every breeze.

That horror-filled battle on river bank  
Where death mowed them down like weeds  
With upflung hands as in last salute  
They toppled from fear-crazed steeds.  
Save one, racing bullets, fleet as the wind,  
Fluid as smoke-signalled air,  
A bright crimson blanket failing to hide  
Long braids of golden hair.  
The bullets were whining a warning to her,  
More soldiers raced from the wood,  
Her mount reared and plunged as she held aloft  
Full proof of her womanhood —  
A tiny baby she clutched to her heart  
With anguished eyes, yet tender,  
Her hands reached out in supplication  
A hostage to surrender.

### PART THREE

The rain sobbed a dirge from the alien sky,  
The wind moaned the sad day long,  
No solace for Cynthia Ann could be found  
She listened for wild drum-bong.  
When blue bonnets carpeted valley floors  
And mockers laced hours with song,  
Cynthia Ann's people came from the south  
To take her where she'd belong.

Again no screech owl wailed from a tree  
No hound-dog bayed the moon,  
No Redman's sign warned that Prairie Flower  
Would waste away and soon.  
"Oh God," cried Cynthia, "White man's God,  
Why torture such as I?  
You know I'm a stranger in this land,  
Oh Death do not pass me by.  
Oh Great Spirit nothing is left for me —  
My dreams, my life my song  
Are dust in my throat in this bleak land  
Oh take me where I belong."

And God of the prairies, God of the plains,  
God of the billowing sea  
Of prairie grasses, answered her prayer  
And Cynthia Ann was set free.

In death there shone victory through her defeat,  
Her Quannah, now mighty chief,  
Led army men circling throughout the land —  
Was wily beyond belief.  
The sky — the blue of the Llano sky,



Her eyes having spoken, he knew she'd stay  
Where the winds sweep the prairie floor  
A chieftan's wife she wanted to be  
And would be forevermore.

Long months stretched to years, became history.  
Red raiders made frontiers flame.  
A warring mystery, Cynthia Ann,  
The long taut string of his bow,  
Still held him captive, the last of his line —  
Proud, unchanging foe.

What dread, what ghostly nameless dread  
Made him surrender? What call?  
He answered in bringing his remnant band  
Where hills cup waterfall?  
Where the Wichitas shoulder an Oklahoma sky,  
With white cloud stallions racing by  
Where night tiptoes on prairie floor  
Where the little winds hum and the teepees snore  
The tribes settled peacefully, built their homes,  
Their cattle grazed every hill  
Chief Quannah sat in what man's courts,  
Helped push the Statehood bill.

With pride in his own white heritage  
He went to the Big Teepee  
As guest of honor in long parade,  
Chief Joseph, the Nez Perc, and he  
Rode with the great white chief, Roosevelt  
Down the Capitol's Avenue  
Comanche Chief and white president  
To show all wars were through.

And there, sometimes when evening comes down  
And war-bonnet feathers appear  
To frame the gold of the dying sun,  
And the moon like a crystal tear,  
Hangs on the misty cheek of night —  
A Spirit-wind softly comes,  
Warm and sweet as a woman's smile  
To usher in roll of drums.  
The phantom drums of the long ago  
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When placed on the brow of the troubled past  
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