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Indian Fall

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White-settler activity flourished in this shortgrass country during the 1890's. Populations became sufficiently large so that small towns sprang from the prairie. Several appeared near the Antelope Hills. One, Durham, became the adopted home of Oklahoma's Grandma Moses, Augusta Metcalf. The Hills were one of her favorite painting subjects.

Another fledgling town, north of the Antelopes, was touted as the "Queen of Oklahoma Territory." Grand was her name and the residents obviously had something grand planned for the town. Those plans, unfortunately, never materialized and the community has since disappeared.

It was also during those years that the Antelopes were touched by the same gold craze that had earlier spurred thousands to California. An 1899 issue of the DAY COUNTY TRIBUNE flashed a front-page tale about a local prospector who had found "color" in a canyon adjacent to the Hills. (Day was a county of Oklahoma Territory, of which Grand was the county seat, that disappeared after statehood.) Even the U.S. government was into the gold act. Official maps of the region showed several sections near the Antelope Hills that had been set aside as possible mineral locations. But nothing ever came of the expectations. Gold was never found and all prospecting activity ceased.

The taming of western Oklahoma was rapid as white populations increased. Typical societal conveniences appeared; new roadways were constructed. Overland travel became easier. Dependence on the Antelope Landmarks for guidance was over. No longer would travelers look to them for direction.

Today, one can easily motor to the Hills by taking a graveled road north off State Highway 33 about twenty-five miles northwest of Cheyenne, the current county seat of Roger Mills County. Standing atop any of the buttes is like taking a journey into Oklahoma's past. Imagination can easily revive lost sights and sounds. The "gee-haws and whoa-haws" from oxen drivers can almost be heard from the California Road below. The twang of Comanche bows and popping Colt .45's seem to be coming from the low hills to the west. By squinting northward through the swirling Canadian River sands, one can almost see the column of Custer's mounted soldiers in blue, their sheathed sabers rattling in cadence with their shuffling horses.

Yet, with a blink, those imaginary scenes disappear. But those events did happen and they were recorded for Oklahomans to know and to remember. The Antelope Hills should not remain the lost hills of Oklahoma.

INDIAN FALL

—by Carol Rothhammer Lackey

(Apology from Managing Editor: In the Fall Issue of WESTVIEW, Carol Rothhammer Lackey's "Indian Fall" was inadvertently published in reverse order. To show our respect for our contributor's submission, we herewith present the poem as it should have been.)

Hilly plains accept this sunset,
 Infinite color combinations,
 Autumn's late greens, yellows, oranges,
 Colors tossed against the pale blue heavens
 In shining golds, dark blues, tinges of pink.
 Here my world takes on a ceaseless reality.
 Here I'm loose from fetters
 Of close enclosing buildings,
 The trees, rocks, open fields invite me
 To a permanent feeling —
 Here my dreams turn loose.
 I see the duck's formations overhead
 And hear their mournful, searching cries.
 I dream of ascension.
 Here I see the small brown hills beyond
 And picture in clear colors
 Indian dwellings two hundred years ago —
 Brown horses, brown dogs, brown buffaloes,
 Brown men fearing white men's pale eyes.
 A curved white sliver of moon peeks
 Through the sky's darkest dusk blue.
 Here the repetitious whippoorwill song
 and the evening language of cows
 Going home create a rustic music —
 Dredging up tales I've heard of rustic farmers,
 Self-sufficient, going to town in buggies
 Just once a month — tales that seem like memories.
 Here my childhood springs to life in sharp relief:
 Running free, barefoot, miles from nowhere,
 Without care, among the miles and miles of oaks
 And pines and creeks to wade, up to my knees —
 Plucking huge round bouquets of wild
 Small-fragile violet blossoms, faint aroma,
 Climbing oaks with vast, sprawling limbs —
 Sleeping there in the limbs some afternoons.
 Now here in this fertile, not-yet-desecrated
 Field, my past and peaceful present meet
 Within a teeming brain of familiar sounds and smells.
 Above, criss-cross patterns of jet-stream clouds
 Emit vague jet motor sounds.
 Beyond, harsh barbed-wire cages fence field after field
 As far as my eyes can see each direction —
 Partitions for God's fields of praise.
 High above, on the tallest hill,
 A television antenna towers high,
 Raising its ugly head above the natural landscape,
 To taunt the dreams of yesterday,
 To mute the glimmerings of tomorrow's escape,
 To bring to these quiet, still hills
 Sixty minutes of today's outstanding atrocities.