

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF WYANDOTTE COUNTY

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Something like two thousand years ago the Caddoan Linguistic family of North American Indians occupied the Great Plains, what is now Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas, most of Louisiana, and the land up the Ohio to the Wabash. In this great Indian family there were many tribes---among them the Pawnee, Arickaree, Wichita.

The great Siouan Linguistic family then lived astride the Appalachian Mountain chain, their country extending far down valleys on either side. Many of the groups of this family decided a simultaneous migration westward to the country of the buffalo herds, where meat was plenty and easily secured---the only known instance of a voluntary westward migration of a great group of North American Indians. The Siouan Dhegiha group, in this great movement, descended the Ohio River. At its mouth a division appeared. Some wished to go up the Mississippi---some down. Finally one band went down, taking the name of this action---quapaw, going with the current, going down stream. This band fought its way into Caddoan territory and occupied parts of what is now Arkansas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.

The other division went up the Mississippi. It was called Omaha, pushing up against the current. It came on and ascended the Missouri to the mouth of the Osage. There it stopped, on the west side of the river. For that was the first stream heading out in the Great Plains---the treeless ranges of the buffalo herds. There it settled and remained. In the course of time, as the mother band grew, groups broke off, and became tribes for themselves---the Omaha, the Otoe, the Ponca, the Kansa. The Osage remained at the mouth of the river of their name, hunting out on the Great Plains and driving from their country the Pawnee, the Wichita, and other Caddoan tribes. They claimed the most of Missouri, Arkansas down to the Arkansas River, and Kansas south of the Kansas River Valley.

The Kansa, when that tribe broke off, followed up the Missouri, living on the east bank. They may have crossed over at the mouth of the Kansas River, laying claim to that valley, and fighting with little success against the Pawnees, who had owned it from time immemorial. The mouth of the Blue, at the present Manhattan, was their most westerly point of residence. But they hunted on the Plains and claimed the Valley. They may have had a town in Wyandotte County, on the Malott farm near White Church, though that may have been first a Pawnee Village,---archeological research alone must tell.

In 1825 the Kansa ceded the Kansas River Valley to the United States, then needing new lands for the old tribes of the East.

The Algonquin Linguistic family extended from the Atlantic to the crest of the Rockies, but on the west it stood north of the Siouan and Caddoan families. To this Algonquin stock belonged the Delawares and Shawnees---wonderful warriors. At the close of the Revolution these tribes were in Ohio, whither pressure from white settlements had pushed them. The Spanish settlements on the Mississippi, with headquarters at St. Louis, suffered from attacks of the Osages. They felt themselves unable to resist the Osages. To protect themselves they induced parts of the Delaware and Shawnee tribes to cross the Mississippi and take lands about Cape Girardeau---and fight off the Osages. This was in 1793. By 1815, the Osages had ceased to trouble Missouri, and the Delawares abandoned their Cape Girardeau lands and went to live on the White River, about what is now Springfield, Mo. And they were soon followed by the Shawnees. In 1825 the Shawnees ceded their Cape Girardeau lands in exchange for lands on the south side of the Kansas River for a home for all the Shawnee people---These lands were to extend from the Missouri state-line to a point west of the present Topeka.

In September, 1829, the Delawares ceded all their lands in Missouri for land in the fork of the Missouri and Kansas Rivers for a home for all the Delaware people. This tract extended to Fort Leavenworth, which had been founded the year before, and up the Kansas River to a point west of Lawrence, with a ten-mile strip extending from the northwest corner into the buffalo herds.

The Shawnees thus owned the south side of the Kansas Valley and the Delawares owned the north side---the river the

dividing line. The Shawnees began to move into their reservation in 1825. The Delawares began to arrive in 1829, and many of them were on the reservation by the end of 1830.

When Fort Leavenworth was founded, in 1828, there was immediate need for a road to Fort Gibson, on the Arkansas, and one was laid out. This road crossed the Kansas River on the line between sections twenty-one and twenty-eight, township eleven, range twenty-four, and near the west lines of said sections. It was known as the Delaware Crossing. The community known as Secondine was in the sections immediately west.

Cyprian Chouteau followed the Shawnees to their new home to trade with them. He built a trading-post on the south side of the Kansas River at the Delaware Crossing. Perhaps he built on the Shawnee side for the reason that the Delaware had not yet taken their lands, and there was no trade on that side of the river, though it had the better location for a trading house.

As soon as it was known that the Shawnees were on their new lands, the M. E. Church began plans for their benefit. In 1830 Rev. Thomas Johnson was sent among them to found a Mission. This he did, placing it on the slope, beyond the bottom, south of Chouteau's trading-post, where supplies could be obtained. It remained there until 1839---in Wyandotte County. Then it was moved to its present location, near Westport. It is now known as the Old Shawnee Mission, and is owned by the State. It is in the care and custody of the Kansas State Historical Society.

The Baptist Church sent Rev. Jotham Meeker to continue a Baptist Shawnee Mission commenced by Isaac McCoy and others on the highlands some three or four miles west of the Missouri line.

Meeker brought with him a small printing-press on which he printed books suitable for Mission work and Indian schools. A small newspaper was published. This printing was in the Indian tongue and was the first printing done in Kansas.

Ira D. Blanchard visited the Shawnee Baptist Mission and conceived a desire to set up a Delaware Baptist Mission. He went among the Delawares and learned their language. He began teaching Delaware children, about 1833, on his own account. The Church took over his work and a Mission was later founded at the present Edwardsville, where there was a Delaware town. Buildings were put on the bottom-lands at this Delaware town, and a residence erected on or near the site of the old Williamson red-brick house. This Mission became a considerable establishment, but the great flood of 1844 washed away the Delaware town and the Mission buildings. The residence was not injured. The timbered bottoms had all been flooded and the receding waters had left the carcasses of thousands of drowned buffalo there. The loss of the buildings, together with the stench from the dead buffalo, caused the Mission to be moved to higher land. The Delawares of the lost town had moved to the uplands. Rev. John G. Pratt re-established it at what later became Maywood, Wyandotte County. He moved the Mission residence and it became the central structure of the fine residence later erected there by Major Pratt.

Rev. Thomas Johnson, founder of the Shawnee Methodist Mission, had a brother, Rev. William Johnson. In 1832 he established a Delaware Methodist Mission at what is now White Church. This was a frame structure and painted white, this circumstance giving name to the locality. Camp-meeting grounds were laid out

in a walnut grove about a large spring. This grove was a part of the English estate when I was County Clerk of this county, in the eighties. I believe some of the trees are still standing. The church-building was in use until May 11, 1886, when it was blown down by a tornado.

There has been an indefinite impression that there were four trading houses at some time at old Tiblow, now Bonner Springs. There may have been a small trading-station at that point prior to the coming of the Delawares. There has been found no proof of the existence of this trading-station beyond mere mention in modern histories of a popular nature. The American Fur Company may have had some agency there for trading, but until the coming of the Shawnees and Delawares, there were few Indians to be found there with whom to trade. There is no evidence that any portion of any tribe lived in that locality before the arrival of the Indians as stated above, though the Kansas Indians might have brought furs there for barter. Whatever was done there had little influence on the Indian trade and none whatever in the development of Wyandotte County. No name has been found connected with the enterprise.

There was a trading establishment on the site of Old Quindaro, on the west bank of the Missouri River. It was a considerable station, and it is to be regretted that so little is known of it. On a map in the library of the Kansas State Historical Society it appears as the trading-house of "Ely & Curtis---1826." What this signifies is not explained. It was in active operation before 1826, as shown by Beckwourth, who was in the service of General William Ashley. He reached it in the fall of 1823 in a state of exhaustion after being lost for several days. His com-

panion was not able to keep pace with him and was left in the wilderness, but was sought and found by Kansa Indians on the way to the fort to sell furs, and who had come upon Beckworth by accident. When I was County Clerk of this county some portion of the old buildings could be seen. There were remains of a stone wall, with part of roof resting on it. This present year a fine specimen of the wilderness or fur-trader sword was found there and is now in the museum of the Kansas State Historical Society. The history of this old trading-house is not yet fully known.

At this point it is proper to consider the matter of the first dwelling for white people erected in Wyandotte County. We have seen that Blanchard built a log house at what is now Edwardsville in 1834, or possibly in 1833. Moses Grinter was sent by the United States Government to Kansas to establish and maintain a ferry at the Delaware Crossing. He arrived at the ferry in January, 1831. His descendants have told me that he came from Beardstown, Kentucky, but I am of the opinion that he came from Bardstown, county-seat of Nelson County. He established and maintained this ferry for some years. He married a Delaware woman named Anna Marshall and settled on the north side of the Kansas River, a little west of the ferry. He lived in that vicinity until his death in 1878. I have not the date of the marriage of Moses Grinter to Anna Marshall, but he must have erected a residence soon after the marriage and it is probable that he got his house up and was living in it before Blanchard went among the Delawares. But this is by no means a settled historical fact. It is conceded, I believe, that Moses Grinter was the first white settler of Wyandotte County, but when he put up his first dwelling-house has not been fully established.

A closely connected history of Wyandotte County begins with the arrival of the Wyandot Indians in 1843. The Wyandots have a wonderful history. They are of the Iroquois Linguistic family and were cousins to the Senecas and other tribes of the Six Nations of the State of New York. The Wyandots lived about the Georgian Bay of Lake Huron in Canada and were early visited by the Jesuits who wrote enough concerning them and the Mission work among them to make many volumes of the great publication known as the Jesuit Relations. The Iroquois were the most warlike of the American Indians. Those in New York made war on their kindred about Lake Huron. This lake took its name from the Wyandots who were by the French called Hurons from Hures, the stiff standing bristles along the backs of the wild bears of Europe. The warlike head-piece of the Wyandots stood up erect as these bristles and suggested the name.

The Huron Confederacy was destroyed by the Iroquois of New York and the remnants of the tribes fled westward along the Great Lakes. They wandered for years in those wastes but finally took form as a tribe on the groundwork of the Wyandot social and political systems. They retained the wyandot name for the tribe although it was made up of fragments of many tribes. In the course of years they increased in number and began to descend the Great Lakes, stopping at the point where Detroit was afterwards founded. From there they spread into Ohio and lived along the south shore of Lake Erie. The Six Nations had made a conquest of the Ohio Valley and had reduced into subjection all the tribes of the Valley. Some years before the Revolutionary war the Six

Nations established a Northwestern Confederacy of Indian tribes with the Council Fire in the Wyandot tribe. The Wyandots were set to administer for the Six Nations all the western country. In this capacity they permitted the Delawares who had been expelled from their home in Eastern Pennsylvania to settle in what is now Ohio. They also gave the Shawnees a home along the Scioto River in Ohio. The pressure of white settlers into the Ohio Valley insured wars with the Indian tribes and they were finally forced to relinquish their lands and look for homes in the far west. we have seen how the Delawares and Shawnees were forced across the Mississippi. In the thirties of the nineteenth century the Wyandots ceded their lands in Ohio for 148,000 acres to be selected in what is now Kansas. In 1843 they came by steamboat to the mouth of the Kansas River and encamped there while their head men went to examine and to definitely locate this tract of 148,000 acres. The government had made some reservation for them on the Neosho in the vicinity of the present towns of Iola and Chanute. The Wyandots were civilized and educated through the Mission which had been established amongst them in 1816 and did not look with favor on these lands for the reason that they were too far from civilized communities. They then returned and negotiated with the Shawnees. The result of this negotiation was that the Shawnees sold the Wyandots a strip of land seven miles wide bounded on the east by the state-line of Missouri and on the north by a line running due east from about the town of Argentine to the Missouri River. Just how far south the tract extended I do not have in mind at this time, although I have the deed made by the Shawnees in my private papers. When this deed was submitted to the Indian office

for approval it was rejected, probably at the instance of the Methodist and Baptist Shawnee Missions as it included these Missions.

When this transaction failed the wyandots turned to the Delawares and purchased thirty-nine sections of land in the immediate forks of the Missouri and Kansas Rivers. The Delawares gave three sections of land, making forty-two sections. This land extended westward from the mouth of the Kansas River to a point near the present Muncie, where a line was established from the Kansas River north to the Missouri River. This was the Kansas home of the Wyandot Indians. They took possession of this tract of land in the winter of 1843-44. They had brought with them the membership and records of the Old Wyandot Mission at Upper Sandusky, and they set up this Mission in what is now Kansas City, Kansas. They brought a missionary with them and the church later furnished other missionaries. One of the first buildings erected on the reservation was a church. It was, in fact, the revival of the Ohio Wyandot Mission, as the members of the church were all members of the old Mission in Ohio. This building was superintended by Squire Grayeyes and stood on the highland formerly owned by Mr. Kerr and immediately west of what was once Chelsea Park.

Thus it comes that the aboriginal ownership of what is now Wyandotte County, was as follows:

First. The Caddoan Linguistic family, the immediate tribe being the Pawnee.

Second. The Siouan Linguistic family---Dhegiha group---Kansas tribe.

Third. Algonquin Linguistic family---north of the river, the Delaware tribe. South of the river, the Shawnee tribe.

Fourth. The Iroqueian Linguistic family for the Wyandot Purchase. Immediate tribe---the Wyandot.

The Wyandots brought with them a code of laws for the government of their tribe. The officers of the tribe were elective. Their system embraced most of the elementary principles of the English Common Law. They had judges and courts and administered estates. They put up a council-house which was in fact their court-house. This council-house stood just east of Fourth Street in what is now the alley between Minnesota Avenue and State Street. In going through this city I find that the location of this council-house is marked two or three blocks too far to the north. In this council-house were administered the affairs of the Wyandot Nation until the establishment of Kansas Territory. A murder was committed in the Nation by a young man under the influence of whisky, and he was tried, convicted, and duly executed under the laws of the Wyandot Nation. The Wyandots inflicted the death penalty by shooting. The firing squad was composed of six Wyandots. Five of the guns were loaded and one had a blank charge. The execution was in the Missouri-river bottom a quarter of a mile above the mouth of Jersey Creek. I have talked with one man who was in the firing squad and a number of old wyandots who saw the execution. The boy rode in a wagon on his coffin from the jail, which stood near the council-house. His grave had been dug. At the discharge of the guns he fell forward, spasmodically grasped his hands full of sand and weeds, arose, stood erect a minute, and fell back dead beside his coffin. I have in my collection of

papers the death warrant of this boy and his confession. You will find an account of the trial in the published "Journals of Governor William Walker." These are in my book, The Provisional Government of Nebraska Territory. Governor Walker defended the young man and sets down in his journal that he ought not to have been convicted of murder. Under this same code the Wyandots had executed a man in Ohio for murder, and I have the death warrant of that execution in my private papers.

Time does not permit a review of the history of the Wyandot Nation before the organization of Kansas Territory. It is one of the most interesting episodes in Kansas history. The division of the Methodist Church was fought out in the Wyandot Nation more bitterly than in any other body of people in America. The old church finally prevailed although as a result of that division the M. E. Church South exists in this city. The succession belongs to the Methodist Episcopal Church, but the M. E. Church South has the same heritage, for the Mission founded at Upper Sandusky was the first Mission ever founded by the Methodists in the world. If the succession remains with the M. E. Church it may be said that the Washington Boulevard M. E. Church is the legal successor of the Wyandot Mission at Upper Sandusky. I have among my private papers the Quarterly Conference Minutes of the church from 1827 down to about 1866.

The Wyandots did not have printed for them the Bible or any other literature in their own language. The Wyandot language was used for worship in the church long after the Nation came to Kansas. Their songs were the old Methodist hymns translated into the Wyandot tongue, and I have a number of these old song books, among them those of Aunt Lucy B. Armstrong and Chief John D. Brown.

Some years ago I delivered an address before this Society in which I called attention to the wonderful history of this county. I said at that time that Wyandotte County, considered from a national standpoint, was the most important county historically in the state. I repeat that assertion at this time. And for this reason. In 1852 the Wyandot Nation, realizing that the improvement of their lands, the increase in the value of these lands, the establishment of schools for the education of their children, demanded that their reservation be made a part of a state. They began a movement for the accomplishment of that object. They elected Abelard Guthrie, who was an adopted member of their tribe, to Congress October 12, 1852. He moved for the organization of Nebraska Territory, which was to include all of what is now Kansas and Nebraska and a portion of what is now Colorado. In doing this he ran counter to the interests of the slave power which had agreed to the establishment of a line at 36 30, north of which there should be no slavery. But this power saw that the country west of Missouri had lain dormant as long as the American people would permit and that some form of organization would be provided by Congress. In order to hold their own this organization, the Democratic party, which had been seized upon by the slave power, repealed the Missouri Compromise and organized two territories, Kansas and Nebraska, with the hope that one would be made a slave state and the other a free state, thus continuing the equilibrium of the voting strength in the United States Senate. From that little meeting of the Wyandot Nation in the council-house standing on the hill above the Missouri River flowed the Repeal of the Missouri Compromise, the establishment of the Republican party, and the precipitation of the Civil War.

This is the merest outline of the history of this County of Wyandotte. In area it is the smallest in the State. In historical importance it is the greatest in the State---one of the greatest in America. All the glorious history of Territorial Kansas flowed from what was done here. This is the fountain-head from which the current of Kansas history runs. And more than that. What was done here in the Wyandot Nation shook the Federal Government to its foundation, changed its course, injected into it moral issues, and sent it forth renovated to become in fact what our Revolutionary fathers had dreamed---a beacon to light up the way of mankind.