

By the Kansas Historical Society

Meet the Osage

The Osage are American Indians who once lived in the eastern part of Kansas and the western part of Missouri. Today they live all over the world. The Osage tribal headquarters is in Oklahoma. Some Osage still live in Kansas.

Originally, the Osage lived in the woodlands of the Ohio River Valley. Americans who wanted more land pushed the Osage west. By the time Kansas became a state, the Osage were living in southeastern Kansas.

The Osage were a sedentary tribe. This meant they lived in permanent villages. Osage houses were not portable. They were made with hickory saplings that were set into the ground on one end. Two hickory saplings were bent until they came together in an arch. These arches were tied together with other saplings into a frame. The frame was then covered with buffalo hides.

The Osage hunted buffalo, but much of their food came from plants and small animals they could kill near their homes. They had gardens where they grew corn, beans, squash, and pumpkins. Sometimes they traded these crops for buffalo meat.

Twice a year the entire Osage village would go on a buffalo hunt. When they were away on the hunt, they lived in structures similar to their permanent homes. A series of wood lodge frames were in place across their hunting grounds. Each lodge was a day's travel from the next. As the Osage reached each structure they would cover it with buffalo hides to make their temporary house.

In the eastern part of Kansas there is more water. Trees grow along the rivers and creeks. Just below the ground surface, the soil has moisture nearly year-round. The Osage lived in this region where people could stay in one place longer. They could grow crops and gardens because they knew there would be enough rain to keep them growing. There also were many types of wild plants that people could use for food. Many types of animals lived in this region, so people could hunt often for meat.

When people live in one place for several months or even years at a time, they are called *sedentary*.



Mr. Sibley's Report

In the 1820s the Osage lived on lands that later became part of Kansas and Missouri. The government assigned Indian agents to work with tribes. George Sibley was the Indian agent assigned to the Osage. He worked at Fort Osage in present-day Missouri. On October 1, 1820, he wrote the following report.

They raise annual small crops of corn, beans and pumpkins. These they cultivate entirely with the hoe, in the simplest manner. Their crops are usually planted in April, and receive one dressing before they leave their villages for the summer hunt in May. About the first week in August, they return to their villages to gather their crops, which have been left unhoed and unfenced all the season.

Each family, if lucky, can save from ten to twenty bags of corn and beans, of a bushel and a half each, besides a quantity of dried pumpkins. On this they feast, with the dried meat saved in summer, till September, when what remains is [saved], and they set out on the fall hunt, from which they return about Christmas. From that time, till some time in February or March, as the seasons happens to be mild or severe, they stay pretty much in their villages, making only short hunting excursions occasionally, and during that time they consume the greater part of their [saved food].

In February or March, the spring hunt commences; first the bear, and then the beaver hunt. This they pursue till planting time, when they again return to their village, pitch their crops, and in May set out for the summer hunt, taking with them their residue, if any of their corn.

This is the circle of an Osage life, here and there indented with war and trading expeditions, and thus it has been with very little variation their twelve years past. The game is very sensibly diminishing in the country which these tribes inhabit; but has not yet become scarce. Its gradual diminution seems to have had no other effect on the Indians than to make them more expert and industrious hunters, and better warriors.

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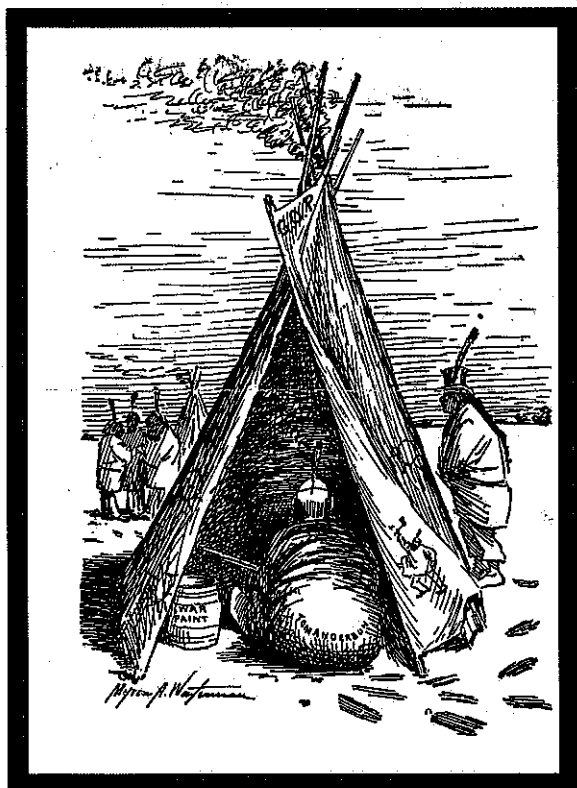
Meet the Kiowa

The Kiowa are American Indians who once lived on the high plains of Kansas. Today they live all over the world. Their tribal headquarters is in Oklahoma. Some Kiowa still live in Kansas.

In the 1700s the Kiowa lived in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Before Kansas became a state they migrated to the high plains of Kansas. The Kiowa were a nomadic tribe. They followed the animals they hunted.

The Kiowa are part of a group of people known as "horse nomads." Horses allowed the Kiowa to travel greater distances and to move heavier loads and more things. The Kiowa also rode horses to hunt.

The Kiowa lived in tipis. A tipi is a moveable home. The frame is made of long wooden poles that are tied together at the top and spread apart in a circle at the bottom. The base of a tipi was as wide as the tipi poles were tall. The frame was covered with buffalo hides. Kiowa tipis were decorated with designs to show events and important things about the people who lived in them. Everyone would know which tipi belonged to whom by the designs on each tipi.



To move their villages, the Kiowa used a travois pulled by a horse. Tying two of the long tipi poles together at one end makes the travois. The other ends of the travois poles would drag along the ground. Plains Indians did not have wheels or carts.

The Kiowa depended on buffalo for meat. In addition to eating buffalo meat, the Kiowa hunted smaller animals and gathered wild plants, fruits, and nuts. Since they did not grow gardens, they traded buffalo hides and meat for corn, beans, and squash grown by people in eastern Kansas.

On the high plains there was little water and the soil was dry, so gardens would not grow. There were few trees to build house frames or burn as fuel. The Kiowa lived on the high plains. All of these environmental conditions meant that people could not stay in one place for very long. Instead they would move to find more resources.

When people move from place to place they are called *nomadic*.

Satanta's Speech

Satanta was a Kiowa chief. He negotiated with the U.S. government at a time when the Kiowa were being forced to give up their lands for reservations. In 1867 he represented the Kiowa at the Medicine Lodge Treaty negotiations. In the following speech Satanta describes the Kiowa's traditional lifestyle. A newspaper reporter from St. Louis attended the negotiations and wrote down the speech.



All the land south of the Arkansas [River] belongs to the Kiowa and Comanche, and I don't want to give away any of it. I love the land and the buffalo and will not part with it. . . . I want the children raised as I was.

I have heard that you want to settle us on a reservation near the mountains. I don't want to settle. I love to roam over the prairies. There I feel free and happy, but when I settle down I grow pale and die.

A long time ago this land belonged to our fathers; but when I go up river I see camps of soldiers on its banks. These soldiers cut down my timber; they kill my buffalo; and when I see that it feels as if my heart would burst with sorrow.

This building of homes for us is all nonsense. We don't want you to build any for us; we would all die. Look at the Penatekas! Formerly they were powerful, now they are weak and poor. I want all my land, even from the Arkansas south to the Red River. My country is small enough already. If you build us houses the land will be smaller.

Why do you insist on this? What good will come of it? I don't understand your reason. Time enough to build us houses when the buffalo are all gone. But you tell the Great Father that there are plenty of buffalo yet, and when the buffalo are gone, I will tell him. This trusting agents for food I don't believe in.