



NEWS

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Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History February 1 - 7, 1854 (2004)

As February arrived in 1854, the Konza or Kansa Indians were living in winter camp on their reserve near what is now Council Grove in Morris County. When painter George Catlin visited the Kansas 20 years earlier, before they were assigned a reservation, he guessed they numbered 1,560 in their settlement, which was on the Kansas River between the future towns of Topeka and Manhattan. Contact with European, Asian, and African diseases and the loss of their hunting lands continually reduced their numbers. By the time they were moved again in 1872 to Indian Territory south of Kansas, only 600 people remained.

The Kansas, natives of the Great Plains, had adapted few characteristics of white culture or of the eastern Indians who'd been resettled among them. They struck American travelers as particularly fierce and wild looking. Catlin remarked on the men's intricate hair styling. Nearly all cut their hair quite close to the scalp leaving a short tuft they called the scalp lock. Within this tuft they left a small braid of long hair tucked up with a bone and ornamented with shocks of deer and horsehair dyed red, eagle feathers and other decorative items. Kansa men painted their faces and shoulders with swaths of vermilion paint, startling Easterners who never expected to encounter literal red men.

When artist Alfred Jacob Miller visited them in the late 1830s he noted the buffalo herds that had provided food, clothing and shelter were roaming to the west on the hunting lands of other, more aggressive tribes. The Kaws lived on the sparse small game left and "on recollections of the past: the future for them is entirely hopeless." [275 words]

George Catlin, *North American Indians* (Edinburgh, Scotland: John Grant, 1926) pages 27-8

Marvin C. Ross, *The West of Alfred Jacob Miller* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968) pages 16, 41.