The Kansas Indian Claims Commission of 1879

by Ramon S. Powers

The story of the flight of the Northern Cheyenne from Indian Territory across western Kansas to northwestern Nebraska and Montana in 1878 has been told many times. One of the first formal accounts was related by Helen Hunt Jackson in her book A Century of Dishonor, and more recently the episode was included by Dee Brown in Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee. The most evocative description of the Northern Cheyenne trek was written by Mari Sandoz in her book Cheyenne Autumn, later made into a movie with the same title.¹

Most writers have either ignored or discounted the complexities underlying the Northern Cheyenne’s escape from Indian Territory and their subsequent flight across western Kansas. The conflict between the Northern Cheyenne and white settlers was primarily the consequence of the vast difference in their respective cultures, the results of which proved to be devastating for both peoples. The victims in the confrontation between the United States government and the Northern Cheyenne were both the Cheyenne and the numerous settlers in western Kansas who occupied areas through which the Northern Cheyenne traveled in their escape north.

The confrontation between the Northern Cheyenne and western Kansas settlers resulted in the loss of life and property on the Kansas frontier, the extent of which was not immediately discovered. An Indian Claims Commission was created in 1879 to inventory the losses. Before describing the origins of the commission, its activities in surveying the aftermath of this Indian-white confrontation on the Plains, and the significance of the documentation submitted to the commission, it is necessary to describe the background of the Northern Cheyenne’s presence in western Kansas in 1878.

Until the 1870s, the Northern Cheyenne remained relatively insulated from the intrusion of white settlers into the American West. However, the settlement of the upper Great Plains led to a policy of pacifying the tribes in that area and placing them on reservations. The government was determined to place the Northern Cheyenne with their southern brethren on a reservation in Indian Territory (present-day western Oklahoma).

Following the Great Sioux War and the pacification of the tribes involved, including the Northern Cheyenne, the government persuaded (or tricked) a total of 937 Northern Cheyenne into going south to Indian Territory in May 1877. In Indian Territory the northerners suffered from lack of food and medicine and resisted the assimilation that the government attempted to impose on them.²

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This map designating the route traveled by the Northern Cheyenne through Kansas was prepared by George W. Martin, secretary of the Kansas State Historical Society from 1899 to 1914. In 1905–6, Martin solicited opinions on and map designations of the route from western Kansans who had been in the region when the Northern Cheyenne traversed the state in 1878.

On September 9, 1878, under cover of darkness, 353 Northern Cheyenne fled the reservation to return to their Montana homeland. They entered Kansas on September 14 and left the state on October 1 or 2, continuing in a northward direction and disappearing into the sandhills in northwest Nebraska. There the band divided, and those who remained in the area under Chief Dull Knife surrendered on October 23. The remaining Northern Cheyenne went on to Montana, where they surrendered to military authorities in the spring of 1879. The government's decision to return Dull Knife's group to Indian Territory led to the Northern Cheyenne's futile escape from their barracks prison at Fort Robinson, Nebraska, on January 9, 1879. This desperate escape attempt culminated in the death of sixty to seventy Northern Cheyenne men, women, and children as troopers pursuing the fleeing Indians sought to capture them.

En route north through Indian Territory, Kansas, and Nebraska, the Northern Cheyenne fought off the trailing military and lived off the countryside. They killed at least forty-one whites during their trek through Kansas. They also attacked cattle camps and

Governor George T. Anthony, Leavenworth Republican, served as governor of Kansas from January 8, 1877, to January 13, 1879. He was in office at the time of the Northern Cheyenne's escape from Indian Territory and their flight across western Kansas in 1878. Anthony was much criticized by western Kansans for not protecting the frontier from attacks of Indians.
This photograph was taken in Dodge City on April 30, 1879, apparently at the initiative of Franklin Adams, first secretary of the Kansas State Historical Society. Adams, who appears on the top row, was traveling with a photographer, according to a newspaper account of the pair's visit to Dodge City. Accession records at the Society suggest that the photographer was J. R. Riddle, who was known to have been affiliated in the 1880s with the Topeka photography firm of Leonard and Martin. In June 1879 Riddle donated not only the stereograph but also several other photographs of southwestern Kansas taken in late April 1879. The individuals are identified as follows: first row, left to right, Wild Hog (5); George Reynolds, interpreter (8); Old Man (6); Blacksmith (7); second row, left to right, Frizzle Head (or Frizzly Hair, 1); Left Hand (2); Crow (or Old Crow, 3); Porcupine (or White Antelope, 4); rear, Franklin Adams.

Settlements, taking horses to provide fresh mounts and killing cattle to sustain themselves.

In the days following the Northern Cheyenne attacks on camps and homesteads in southwestern Kansas and on settlements in northwestern Kansas, white settlers angrily denounced state and federal officials. One westerner wrote to Gov. George T. Anthony of Kansas: "I am very sorry to say you're censured very much throughout the west as it is not known whether you manifest any interest in behalf of the frontier."

The governor responded by demanding that the federal government surrender the most prominent Northern Cheyenne chiefs for trial and punishment under Kansas law. He also requested more troops from the War Department to increase the security of property in southern and western Kansas. There is no record of any immediate action taken by Governor Anthony to redress the losses sustained by western Kansas, although the owners of a sheep herd asked the governor for aid "in obtaining from the General Government or other sources satisfaction for our losses." The first official notice of governmental action to repair the damage caused by the Northern Cheyenne in Kansas was articulated in newly elected Gov. John P. St. John's message to a joint session of the Kansas legislature on January 16, 1879. After stating that no


5. Gov. George T. Anthony to the Secretary of War and Anthony to Gen. P. H. Sheridan, November 11, 1878, in Letter from the Secretary of War, to the Chairman of the Committee on Indian Affairs, Communicating Information in Relation to the Escape of the Cheyenne Indians from Fort Robinson, 45th Cong., 3d Sess., 1879, Sen. Misc. Doc. 64, 17-18 (Serial 1883).

6. Letter of November 29, 1878, Records of the Governor's Office, Gov. George T. Anthony, 1877-1879, Correspondence Received, folder 16, box 2, Archives Department, Kansas State Historical Society.
person within Kansas “gave the slightest provocation” for the outrages committed in Kansas, the governor described how Indians had crossed the western part of the state “killing . . . about forty citizens, destroying and carrying away large amounts of property, and committing outrages upon defenseless women and children, so brutal, heinous, and revolting in their nature as to never be forgiven or forgotten.”

The governor expressed concern about the future of the state because the “doors of Kansas have been thrown open wide”; moreover, he insisted that the state had to “protect the lives and property [of Kansans] against every invasion by predatory bands of lawless savages. . . .” In concluding his speech, Governor St. John recommended that a committee be appointed to determine the extent of damages sustained by western Kansas settlers from the Indian raid and the steps to be taken to secure payment for the settlers’ losses.8

In response to the governor’s recommendation, Senate Joint Resolution 1, “relating to losses sustained by citizens of Kansas by the invasion of Indians” in 1878, was introduced and adopted early in the 1879 session.9 The resolution created a commission of three “distinguished” citizens and directed the commissioners to investigate the “murder” of citizens residing on the frontier. The charges to the commission were detailed, and the resolution specified that the commission members were to meet in Dodge City, Hays City, and Norton Center.10 The commission’s investigation would begin in May 1879, and a final report was to be submitted to the governor and the U.S. Secretary of

7. Biennial Message of John P. St. John, Governor, to the Legislature of Kansas, 1879, 4-6. No effort was made in Nebraska to create a commission to audit claims, although the Northern Cheyenne destroyed property in that state.

8. Ibid., 5-6.
10. Ibid., 217.
Governor John P. St. John, Olathe Republican, was governor from January 13, 1879, to January 8, 1883. He recommended the creation of the Indian Claims Commission in his inaugural address. After the 1879 legislature authorized the commission, St. John appointed its members and received its report. He also pursued payment of the claims by the Congress.

the Interior. Members of the Kansas congressional delegation would be sent copies with the request that they adopt legislation to pay the claims "if necessary, by withholding the amount thereof from the annuities and the goods or presents which are due or may become due to the tribe or tribes who committed said depredations." (This was not the first time that such a commission had been created to audit claims of settlers who had suffered losses brought about by Indians. In 1869 and 1872, three-member commissions had been formed in Kansas under similarly worded resolutions.)

The governor appointed R. E. Stevenson of Olathe as chairman of the commission. Also appointed were A. W. Mann of Burr Oak and W. R. Adams of Larned. Each man was a prominent civic leader in the community. Appointment to the commission was a matter of considerable interest, leading the governor to state that "there is at least fifty hats for every peg."

Western Kansas settlers became aware of the

11. Ibid., 218.

Robert E. Stevenson of Olathe was appointed by Governor St. John as chairman of the Indian Claims Commission. Stevenson, trained in medicine, had been elected to the state legislature in 1868 and 1874 to represent the Olathe district. He was a prominent civic leader and a Civil War veteran.

A. W. Mann of Burr Oak, Jewell County, was part owner of the firm of Mann, Feidley and Gilbert, dealers in general merchandise, agricultural implements, and country produce. Mann, who was later elected to the state legislature, also served in the Civil War.
commission's existence, and Jackson Leatherman of Sheridan County wrote the governor asking "if it is necessary to engage an Attorney to attend to it [the claim] for us and pay him one third for collecting."14 Leatherman went on to note that "we are poor men on the frontier at least those of us that was cleaned out by the Indians." The governor in reply reassured him that a written statement under oath would suffice to substantiate his claim.15 It does appear from the claims documents that most claimants had some type of legal assistance, as most of the claims used the same format. Writing many years later, J. W. McNeal, who resided in southwestern Kansas at the time, recalled that "there was a general attempt made to get people [to] file claims for loss of property and while I think most of us made out some kind of a claim at the instance of some Attorney, I do not think any of them unless it was [J. A.] McCarthy ever followed it up to try and secure the allowance to their claim."15

After the governor's appointees received their commissions, they met in Topeka and began to examine the claims. Afterward they went to Dodge City, where they held sessions until testimony on all claims had been taken. The commissioners then traveled to Hays City, where testimony was taken "in the few cases presented." The remainder of their time was spent examining and auditing claims presented at Dodge City.

From Hays City the commissioners proceeded to Norton Center. A large number of claims were submitted in Norton, and many of the claimants and wit-
The commission report listed thirty-two persons who were killed by the Northern Cheyenne. The names and ages of twenty-seven were given, in addition to the names and ages of surviving members of the family and their relationship to the deceased. The report did not specify the area or county in which each individual was killed. It is possible to determine that eleven whites were killed in southwestern Kansas and twenty-one in northwestern Kansas. Five persons killed in Clark and Barber counties were listed as "unknown." Subsequently, other persons were identified as killed by the Northern Cheyenne, although they were not counted in the commission report.20

After receiving the report, the governor forwarded it to Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz and the Kansas congressional delegation. In acknowledging receipt of a copy of the report, Sen. Preston Plumb of Kansas wrote the governor that he would do all that was in his power to ensure the adoption of congressional measures to address the Indian claims issue.21 Senator Plumb suggested that the "evidence" in support of the claims be published. It is not clear what arrangements were made for printing the evidence; however, a version of the report, with a lengthy listing of each claim (forty-three pages), was published by the state printer in 1879.22

The Kansas legislature never considered directly reimbursing the settlers for their losses. Early in the 1879 session, the Kansas House adopted House Current Resolution 32 "instructing our Senators and Representatives in Congress to procure legislation against Indian outrages on the frontier."23 Also, as noted earlier, Senate Joint Resolution 1 directed the Kansas congressional delegation to adopt legislation paying the claims audited by the Indian Claims Commission.

The process by which these claims were handled by the government is difficult to reconstruct. During 1879, Senator Plumb wrote to a man named J. V. Admire of Osage City that the government officially distinguished between Indians who were hostile to the government and those who were subject to treaty stipulations and thus under its charge.24 According to

23. Kansas, Senate, Journal, 1879, 378. In addition, the Kansas House Committee on State Affairs directed an inquiry into the "said Indian raid and outrages, and what, if any measures were taken by the Governor and others in authority to prevent said raid and outrages, and to punish the guilty Indians." The committee issued a report on March 6, 1879, which was critical of the federal government for its failure to protect citizens on the frontier and of Governor Anthony for relying on U.S. military officials. Kansas, House, Journal, 1879, 365.


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17. "To His Excellency John P. St. John, Governor of Kansas," R. E. Stevenson, Chairman; A. W. Mann; and W. R. Adams, July 1, 1879, Topeka, in Records of the Governor's Office, Gov. John P. St. John, 1879-1883, Correspondence Received, State Department, Subject File, Claims: Indian Raid of 1878, Commission to Examine, 1879, folder 6, box 2.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. A typewritten insert in the published copy of the report in the Kansas State Historical Society Library contains additional information on the number killed. That information was supplied by William D. Street of Oberlin in a letter to Historical Society Secretary G. W. Martin, September 28, 1910. Street stated that "the report of the Indian Commission that investigated the losses during that raid places the number killed at 32. Later investigation by private parties fixes the loss, including those who died of their wounds, at not less than 41 men." Five of those not on the original list had been killed on Prairie Dog Creek in Rawlins County and four on the Sappa in Decatur County. Indian Raid of 1878: The Report of Commission Alphabatial in Pursuance of the Provisions of Senate Joint Resolution No. 1, Relating to Losses Sustained by Citizens of Kansas by the Invasion of Indians During the Year 1878, 1-58.


22. Ibid.

Senator Preston B. Plumb, Emporia Republican, served as U.S. Senator from Kansas from March 4, 1877, to December 20, 1891. He was active in promoting payment of the claims of Kansans who were presented to the U.S. government in the 1879 Kansas Indian Claims Commission report. Plumb also was a member of the Select Committee of the U.S. Senate that investigated the Northern Cheyenne escape from Indian Territory and submitted a 327-page report to the full Senate in June 1880.
Senator Plumb, the problem of Indian claims resulted from "the extension of our frontier" during the previous twenty years. That extension led to conflicts between Indians and whites and consequently to the destruction of property. The senator noted that during this twenty-year period, millions of dollars in claims had accumulated.25

Senator Plumb stated that by its failure to act upon the pending claims, Congress had "practically denied the liability of the Government." That denial of liability was based more on the size of the claims than upon any conscious policy decision. Senator Plumb had brought these Kansas claims to the attention of the Secretary of the Interior who had, in turn, promised to report them to Congress. Concurrently, at the very time Plumb was warning the governor that he would pursue the claims submitted by the commission, he was writing Admire that "of course I will do all I can to obtain the payment of the claims by Congress, but I cannot in fairness say that I think the chances first rate, still an earnest effort may effect it."26

Former Gov. Samuel J. Crawford was an agent representing Kansas in its dealings with the federal government in the period 1880 to 1885. He reported to Governor St. John in 1880 that a bill was pending in Congress that authorized the president to appoint a commission and audit all claims for horses and other property captured or destroyed by Indians in Kansas and Nebraska.27 It is unclear to what legislation Crawford was referring, since both Senator Plumb and Representative D. C. Haskell had introduced legislation concerning expenditures and debts incurred by the state to repel invasions and suppress Indian hostilities.28 In the same time frame, Representative Thomas Ryan presented a petition of citizens of Kansas, "for pay for losses sustained on account of the raid of Cheyenne Indians in 1878," to the Committee on Indian Affairs.29

In all likelihood, Crawford was referring to Senate Bill 80, which Plumb's committee on Military Affairs had introduced accompanied by a report.30 The bill did not pass. However, Kansas was still seeking payment of claims for expenditures incurred in 1867 and 1868-69 when the state sent the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Kansas Volunteers against the Plains Indians who had harassed settlers and obstructed construction of the Union Pacific Railroad, Eastern Division.

Earlier, in 1859, Congress had repealed the prior pledge of payment of claims arising from Indian attacks (called depredation claims) from the U.S. Treasury.31 An 1888 report of the House Select Committee on Indian Depredation Claims asserted the obligation to pay instead from annuities due to tribes whose members had committed the depredations. Problems surrounding the payment arose because the government "inhibited" payment of claims unless authorized by a specific appropriation. The Interior Department could be directed to examine a class of claims and report to Congress. The 1888 report maintained that even though reports were made periodically, action taken in response to them had been slow and, in essence, had denied the claimants their entitled compensation.32 By 1888, claims of $15 million had accumulated. The 1888 report confirmed Plumb's assessment of the 1879 depredation claims in Kansas.

A U.S. House of Representatives Executive Document (1882) listing twelve claims "caused by Northern Cheyenne" in 1878 reveals that these claims had been presented by the Secretary of the Interior to the Indian Bureau on September 29, 1880.33 The Indian Bureau had sent the claims to the Indian agent (probably John D. Miles at the Cheyenne-Arapahoe Agency in Indian Territory), apparently for verification. The Indian Bureau sent its report or letter back to the Secretary of the Interior on October 4, 1880. The secretary then submitted the list of claims to Congress on March 15, 1882.34

In an act dated June 27, 1882, Congress included in the "appropriations for the current year and contingent expenses for payment of the Indian Department" authorization for payment for damages perpetrated by the Northern Cheyenne Indians in September 1878. The funds would come from the "unexpended balances of treaty funds belonging to the Northern Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians."35 The sixteen claimants listed in the appropriations legislation were paid

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25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Military Affairs, Senate Report No. 139, 46th Cong., 2d Sess., 1890. S. Rept. 139 to accompany S. Bill. 80, 1-3 (Serial 1895).
32. Ibid., 2.
34. Ibid., 1-37.
During the period of time that encompassed the creation of the Indian Claims Commission to the mid-1880s, when some of these claims were finally paid, Kansas governors continually received correspondence from survivors who were anxious to obtain the money they believed was due them. For example, a frontiersman wrote from Sheridan on behalf of those settlers whose properties were RAIDed by the Indians in 1878. He asked the governor if "there would be any probability of us ever getting anything for our losses." Margaret Smith, who lost her husband and her property, wrote the governor in 1880: "My claim was put in the time the commissiums met but I have wated a year here nothing about it and we will hav to suffer if I cant get any help soon on account of Drouth and no means to by breed with."93

The type of material contained in the individual claims and statements presented to the Indian Claims Commission is of significant value. Descriptions in the claims documenting Northern Cheyenne atrocities make it possible to trace more precisely the movement of the Northern Cheyenne through Kansas in 1878. For example, C. A. Martin stated in his claim: "I was the furthest south of any one. They struck my ranch among the first in the state."94 From information in other claims it appears that the Northern Cheyenne attacked Martin's ranch on September 14.

Many of the claimants cite the day, and in some cases even the time of day, when the Northern Cheyenne appeared in the particular area. For example, a cowboy with the Smith and Savage herd in Sheridan County on the Ogallah Trail recalled seeing the Indians approach at approximately 5:30 P.M. on September 29, 1878. The Indians scattered the herd and pursued the herders until dark.95

Information in the claims documents provides considerable detail about the holdings of those who lived in the various parts of western Kansas. In southwest-

35. "An act making appropriations for the current and contingent expenses of the Indian Department, and for fulfilling treaty stipulations with various Indian tribes, for the year ending June thirtieth, eighteen hundred and eighty-three, and for other purposes." U.S. Statutes at Large, 45th Cong., 1881-82, ch. 163, 29-37.
36. "An act making appropriations for the current and contingent expenses of the Indian Department, and for fulfilling treaty stipulations with various Indian tribes for the year ending June thirtieth, eighteen hundred and eighty-five, and for other purposes." U.S. Statutes at Large, 46th Cong., 1883-85, ch. 180, 23-55.

38. Ibid.
40. Letter of June 8, 1880, ibid.
41. All of the claims are on file in Records of the Governor's Office, Gov. George T. Anthony, 1877-1879, Correspondence Received, Subject File. Claims, 1878 Indian Raid, box 2, hereinafter cited as Claims, 1878 Indian Raid, with folder number and county name(s). It is not clear why these claims are filed in the Anthony records instead of the St. John records, where they logically belong. I wish to express my appreciation to Jerry Harmon of the archives staff for locating these materials.
42. Claims, 1878 Indian Raid, folder 17, Barber, Clark, and Comanche counties.
43. Claims, 1878 Indian Raid, folder 21, Rawlins and Sheridan counties.
ern Kansas, a number of cattle camps were attacked by the Indians. In some cases the herds were large and the losses extensive. For example, the H. T. Spencer cattle operation in Clark and Comanche counties lost 132 cattle out of a herd of 650 head. The Evans Hunter-Evans cattle operation in Comanche County submitted a claim for $23,075; $18,000 for 1,000 head of cattle killed or lost, each valued at $18 per head. The 5,200 head of cattle of Chapman and Little, "cattle dealers" of Ford County, were destroyed over a large area. Four hundred sheep were killed in Clark County out of a flock of 2,368 sheep. A number of cowboys and herdsmen made claims for losses of personal property including clothing, equipment, guns, and other items. One herder submitted a claim for four promissory notes totaling $330 "destroyed by said Cheyenne Indians."

A few claims also were submitted by small homesteaders in southwestern Kansas. For example, J. H. Cruzen of Clark County claimed $270 for the following: four acres of corn, $20; two acres of melons, $50; one and one-half acres of pumpkins, $25; one acre of Irish potatoes, $50; 3,000 sweet potato plants, $125.

The claims submitted by settlers in Hodgeman and Ness counties were filed by homesteaders living on relatively small acreages. Almost all of these claims were for losses that occurred when the settlers fled their homesteads and roaming cattle destroyed their unattended property. Incidentally, the claims from Hodgeman and Ness counties reveal that most of the settlers gathered at the home of Dr. W. W. Bowman. He told the commissioner: "I fed 90 people on the average for 4 days. One day we cooked for 191 people..." He estimated that $125 worth of groceries were used to feed these people during the scare.

No settlers in the area were located directly in the path traveled by the Northern Cheyenne from Ford County north to Sheridan County. In Sheridan County, the cattle firm of Smith and Savage suffered losses brought about by the Northern Cheyenne and, as a result, submitted a claim of $17,153. On the Solomon River in Sheridan County, a settler who operated a post office and store escaped with his family but sustained considerable property loss.

In Decatur and Rawlins counties many lives were lost and property destroyed in the settlements in the Sappa and Beaver valleys. The amount and types of property that were held and lost varied greatly. Susanna Walters of Decatur County submitted a claim for $145 which included $100 for "one log house, 14 x 16" and $45 for various items destroyed (i.e., household furniture and provisions). George Kious of Sheridan County submitted a claim for $972.75 for such items as two beds, clothing, dishes, cooking utensils, bridles, harnesses, lamps, livestock, cash, food, books, family pictures, chickens, damage to wheat, damage to house and furniture, and so forth. Julia Lang in Decatur County submitted a claim for $2,663.56 for 104 items, which included $250 for 2 horses, $400 for money taken, $10 for 10 blankets, $12 for 12 dresses, $15 for library and school books, and many other items. G. B. Street of Decatur County claimed losses totalling $191.05 for 62 items ranging from $25 for a feather bed and tick to $.25 for matches.

One claim submitted to the commissioner is suggestive of the practices of itinerant physicians on the frontier. The claim of H. R. Fowler of Dowlow County, Texas, for losses that occurred somewhere in southwestern Kansas appeared in the printed version of the claims commission report; no signed statement was found in the claim files. Fowler's claim was for the following items:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One complete set of instruments to treat diseases of ladies</td>
<td>$250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One set of surgical instruments</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One set of dental instruments</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One microscope</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One flexible stethoscope and sounder</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One syringe, scope and lens</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical books, etc.</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silverware and jewelry</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine wardrobe for two ladies</td>
<td>950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$2,570</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

44. Claims, 1878 Indian Raid, folder 17, Barber, Clark, and Comanche counties: folder 19, Ford and Meade counties. In reference to the large claims of some cattle ranchers in southwestern Kansas, one source commented that "even at a fancy five dollars a head for them Texas longhorns, the Indians'd oughta been fat as badgers — around three hundred Indians eatin' better'n ten thousand head a beef in less'n a month" (quoted in Sandoz, Cheyenne Autumn, 270). The source of the comment is undocumented, and it merely reflects the exaggerated notions of certain frontiersmen. The number of cattle killed by the Northern Cheyenne probably did not exceed one hundred; many claims were for missing cattle that were lost after being scattered by the Indians. The extent to which claims were inflated is difficult to determine. However, as will be noted later, the reports of the army's investigation of losses are similar to the claims for losses presented to the Indian Claims Commission.

45. Claims, 1878 Indian Raid, folder 17, Barber, Clark, and Comanche counties.

46. Claims, 1878 Indian Raid, folder 20, Ness County; folder 19, Ford and Meade counties.

47. Claims, 1878 Indian Raid, folder 21, Rawlins and Sheridan counties.

48. Claims, 1878 Indian Raid, folder 21, Rawlins and Sheridan counties; folder 18, Decatur County.
The commissioners' only comment on this claim was the note that "after hearing the testimony, the Board disallowed this claim.”

A number of settlers told the commission that the losses they sustained had imposed a severe economic hardship on them. Jackson Leatherman of Sheridan County submitted a claim for $987.50. What the Indians had not taken or destroyed, roving cattle had demolished by eating and tramping down wheat or grain in the field. When Leatherman returned to his homestead, he found that "I had nothing to eat and nothing to wear and I had to work my horses very hard to maintain myself and family and consequently they [the horses] died from it." A number of women in northwestern Kansas whose husbands had been killed by the Indians were left destitute (many of these women signed their claims with an "x").

The Northern Cheyenne attacks also had a demoralizing impact on settlers on the frontier. Although

49. Indian Raid of 1878, 16.
50. Claims, 1878 Indian Raid, folder 21, Rawlins and Sheridan counties.
51. Claims, 1878 Indian Raid, folder 17, Barber, Clark, and Comanche counties. B. W. Phillips, a rancher in Comanche County, told the commissioners that "when the Indians came into their [area] they completely demoralized everybody."

the Northern Cheyenne did not directly attack settlements in Hodgeman or Ness counties, as a result of the Indian scare numerous women suffered from various disorders and complications. Seven claims from this region included extensive descriptions of the sicknesses these women experienced. The previously mentioned Dr. Bowman supported the claim of one woman by describing her as suffering from "nervous prostration bordering on hysteria" resulting from the Indian scare. Claims for reimbursement for medical treatment often included a description of the source of illness. Otto F. Hayden of Ness County reported that his wife was "taken unwell soon after the raid and has never been well since." He listed in his claim $100 for doctor bills and other expenses during Mrs. Hayden's sickness "caused by the Indian scare." The loss of life had a devastating impact on the affected families. A number of claimants sought payment for damages resulting from the murder of the head of the household. For example, in Decatur County, Susanna Walters asked for $5,000 for the loss of her husband Frederick, and Mary Abernathy requested $3,000 for the death of her husband Moses.

52. Claims, 1878 Indian Raid, folder 20, Ness County.

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 Attached to an affidavit by George L. Kious, a farmer in Sheridan County, was an Indian ration card found by a Thomas Smith on September 30, 1878, about one-fourth mile west of Sheridan Post Office. Sheridan Post Office was located on the north fork of the Solomon River east and south of present-day Selden, Kansas.
Mary Hamper’s claim of $6,000 for the death of her husband Frederick Hamper was supported by the statement of James Bailey: “From my knowledge of what it costs to raise a family and taking the fact that Mrs. Hamper’s youngest children is 11 days [old] and the oldest 10 years I would say it would take $500 a year to support them and to educate them.”

Along with claims for the loss of life, testimony was presented to the commission by Barbara Springler, Mary Janosek, and Catharine Voscasek of Rawlins County, members of a Bohemian settlement, who described being raped by Northern Cheyenne braves. They were also first forced to witness the murder of Peter Janosek, Hynek Janosek, and Rudolph Springler. Frank Voscasek submitted a claim for $2,000 for having been “damaged by the reason of... raping of his... wife.” He claimed that he had suffered “great mental agony” from ostracism by his neighbors in connection with the rape, which ultimately forced the family to relocate.

As noted, the testimony in the claims documents provides extensive detail about the white settlers’ version of the Northern Cheyenne escape across western Kansas. This detailed information helps trace the movements of the Northern Cheyenne, although it tells very little about the Northern Cheyenne’s version of their trek north. W. D. Nelson, who was in charge of the Evans-Hunter-Evans cattle herd in Comanche County, made the statement that “the Indians killed and wounded people on all sides of us and seemed to kill the cattle purely out of a [desire to] destroy whatever they could.” The comment is made in various claims that the Indians destroyed “everything of value” about the camps and at the settlers’ homesteads.

A question arises as to the reason for the Northern Cheyenne’s behavior, as reflected in the random destruction of property and the killings described in the claims filed by white settlers. Various accounts have attempted to explain the Northern Cheyenne’s actions as retaliation for the attack on a Southern Cheyenne village on the Sappa Creek in 1875. It has been argued that the killings and destruction of property were “the result of cultural shock with random reprisals against any and all manifestations of white culture.” Information in the claims documents appears to support that contention.

The claims documents also contain interesting personal descriptions of events involving the Northern Cheyenne. Frank Hough was living in Meade City, in Meade County, in southwestern Kansas, on September 22, 1878, when 200 to 250 Northern Cheyenne Indians appeared “about sunrise in the morning.” According to Hough, the Northern Cheyenne “took everything they could lay their hands on... A crowd of them got around me and went through my pockets. They stole everything we had about the town except a 1/4 of a beef we had about. They compelled me to grind their knives on the grind stones which I did without protest.” Why the Northern Cheyenne did not harm the residents of Meade City is not clear. Hough suggested that “we invited them in and treated them as nice as possible and tried to make them believe we were not afraid of them.”

In Decatur County in northwestern Kansas, Watson Smith described how he and his father, James G. Smith, were in the field stacking hay on September 30, 1878. Watson, who was twenty-seven years old, explained that “the Indians were within 1/4 of a mile from us before we knew of their approach. . . . The Indians rode up to us where we were making hay and commenced shooting at us. My [father] stood in front of me — the Indian in back of me — he shot over my head — I saw my father fall — saw him after he was dead. He was shot by both bullets and arrows — twice I believe with bullets and 3 or 4 arrows.” Watson and a neighbor managed to escape.

Louise Stemmer told the commissioners that on the morning of October 1, 1878, at sunrise, the Northern Cheyenne appeared. She was standing outside the house and “saw them [the Northern Cheyenne] shoot Pa. The Indian [who shot him] had a light gray shirt. He had something on his head — it glittered. He dressed different from the other Indians.” After the Indians killed her father they whipped Louise, but she managed to escape into a creek bed, “I had the other children [there were ten children] with me — went into a draw and was there from Tuesday to Thursday — had nothing whatever to eat or drink — first was a crust of bread a soldier gave my little brother.”

Despite the general historical significance of the

53. Claims, 1878 Indian Raid, folder 18, Decatur County.
54. Claims, 1878 Indian Raid, folder 21, Rawlins and Sheridan counties.
55. Claims, 1878 Indian Raid, folder 17, Barber, Clark, and Comanche counties.
claims, the validity of the monetary information in the documents is a matter of concern. Although the commission had required verification of the claims when they were submitted, no independent, on-site audit was made of those claims. In October 1878, immediately after the Northern Cheyenne exited Kansas, a survey of losses caused by the Northern Cheyenne was conducted by the military, which sent two officers out from Fort Wallace and Fort Dodge. The losses reported to the military officers were similar in nature and amount to the claims submitted to the Indian Claims Commission. There is no evidence, however, that the commission had access to the reports of the officers. No mention is made in any testimony before the Claims Commission of the military's inventory of losses. The narrative descriptions in the claims documents are corroborated by numerous eyewitness accounts.

In conclusion, the Indian Claims Commission of 1879 gathered a substantial amount of information about the impact of the Cheyenne attacks on cattle camps and settlements in western Kansas. This information has not been used previously in any of the accounts of the Northern Cheyenne's escape from Indian Territory and their flight across western Kansas. Although the documentation presented to the commission by claimants was submitted for the purpose of receiving some compensation for losses, it reveals important information about the settlers' responses to the attacks and the extent of destruction left by the Northern Cheyenne in their flight across the state.

The U.S. government's policy of compensating settlers' losses was based on the desire to civilize the frontier. That policy, as expressed in a congressional report, was as follows: "To no class of its citizens is the American Government more indebted than to the heroic men and women who, as pioneers of our civilization, abandoning homes of comfort and ease, risked life and property to secure homes, wealth, and progress as the heritage of those who should follow in their pathway." The pioneers of civilization on the frontiers such as western Kansas were reassured that the government would compensate them for the risks of "life" and "property." With respect to damages inflicted by the Northern Cheyenne, only a small number of settlers who submitted claims for losses received compensation. Even approval by a state commission that audited the claims did not assure payment. The government took from the tribe the funds necessary to compensate the claims that were paid. Eventually the courts overturned that practice.

The values and assumptions that formed the basis of the government's policy of removing the Northern Cheyenne to Indian Territory to be "civilized" were unquestioned by those who made and implemented the policy. The Northern Cheyenne resisted that policy, and in their resistance they left a trail of depredation across Kansas. Just as the Northern Cheyenne were the victims of the governmental policy of civilizing the Indian tribes, the settlers of western Kansas were the victims of Northern Cheyenne resistance to that policy. Neither the Northern Cheyenne nor the settlers fully understood their tragic part in the civilization of the Plains.

60. It is quite possible that the claims submitted by large cattle firms for the loss of stock were exaggerated. In fact, there is no record that any of the large claims for the loss of cattle were ever paid. The claims of Indian traders for compensation for goods supplied to tribes are described in Robert A. Tremain, Indian Traders on the Middle Border: The House of Eating, 1827-54 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981). The claims described by Tremain were made in the first half of the nineteenth century under considerably different circumstances.

61. James Van Vleet, October 29, 1878, report of Capt. William G. Wedemeyer on Cheyenne depredations, to the Assistant Adjutant General, Military Department of the Missouri, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. This report is divided into two sections: depredations north and depredations south of the Arkansas River. Typescript copy in Walter S. Campbell (Stanley Vestal) Papers, box 120, Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman (copy supplied by the university).