



PRESERVATION NEWS

Wichita County Historical Commission

Robert Palmer, Chairman

Bill Steward, Archivist

Wichita County Archives

720 Indiana Avenue

Wichita Falls, Texas 76301

Telephone 940-763-0020

Hours of Operation: Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 10:00am - 12:00pm & 1:00pm - 4:00pm

E-mail Address - archives@co.wichita.tx.us

www.wichitacountyhistoricalcommission.org/

Wichita County Texas Archives is on Facebook

AGENDA FOR MEETING

Lunch at 11:30AM

Meeting 12:00 Noon - 1:00pm

1. Call to Order 2. Introduction of Guests 3. Business 4. Program 5. Adjourn

Location: Luby's

Reservations no longer needed

Volume XCII

March 1, 2018

From the desk of Robert Palmer

Our area is fortunate to have many communities, rivers, and counties with names based on history. During my life, many times, I have explained, "That I was from Wichita County." Most times, I had to then explain where the word "Wichita" came from. Most of us know it is a Native American term. What else does it describe?

An easy answer is it's the name of a tribe. Well, that's not entirely true. The "Wichitas" were, for most of their history, a confederation of many groups of Native Americans, not a single, specific tribe. Over time, they began to develop common characteristics and to consolidate in distinct areas of the plains. What became what we consider Wichita have been around for over 2000 years. They did not call themselves "Wichita". That term developed toward the end of their development.

As they developed, they spoke the Caddoan language. Their distinct variation became to be what, at the end, was called Wichita. Early on, they were hunters and gatherers. They slowly became agriculturally based, even though for much of their history, they would leave their villages and follow the buffalo in the winter. They grew maize, beans, squash, marsh elder, and tobacco. They gathered walnut, hickory, plum, hackberry, and grape. They locally hunted bison, deer, pronghorn, rabbit, squirrel, possum, mice, quail, turkey, and waterfowl. All village excavations found dog bones. After the Spanish came, they kept horses. Although they lived near rivers and streams, they didn't fish.

George Wilkins Kendall in his NARRATIVE OF THE SANTA FE EXPEDITION OF 1841, described the men as being short and stocky. He described the women as being extremely pretty. They wore clothing of hides on their lower torso and their exposed upper torso, both women and men, were heavily tattooed. This produced naming from other tribes. The Kiowa called them "Thoe-Khoo", tattoo faces. The Pawnee called them "Kirikuurks", bear-eyed people. They called themselves "Kitikiti'sh", raccoon-eyed people. The French called them "Panis Piques", Black Pawnees, because of their tattooing

PROGRAM

Bill Steward, WCHC Archivist

Tom Pickett

practice.

Their villages were quite large characterized by the very large beehive type grass covered lodges. Behind the lodges was a high platform available by a ladder device. At night the young women slept on the platform and the mothers removed "the ladder!" Each village had a "council circle" in the center. It was formed by circular dirt ridges. Excavation revealed materials from other sources; such as Spanish armor, glass shards, and iron pieces in the circles. Historians differ greatly on their explanations of the purpose of the circles. Almost certainly, it was ceremonially based.

After the 17th century, the numbers greatly decreased. Introduced disease was the reason. At the time of Coronado, it was estimated there were well over 200,000 Wichita. By 1790, their number had declined to 3,200 total. By 1868, it was 572. The census of 1937 showed 100.

The word "Wichita" first appeared in American documents in The Camp Holmes Treaty of 1835. It appeared to be a combination of the Choctaw word "Wia", meaning "Arbor" and "chitah" meaning "big". This would describe their large lodges. The famous story of "Wee-shee-tah", meaning "waist deep", is a great story and makes a really great attraction in the Wichita River. It certainly implants a beautiful image of the Wichita in our minds. Be proud you are from Wichita County!

Question of the Month

How did The Wichita tattoo themselves?

Wichita County Archive News

March 2018



EARLY LAW OFFICER—Tom Pickett, former Wichita County sheriff, could well have been the hero in a western novel, for in real life Pickett helped to write the living legend of the West. Pickett and his men took part in this area's last gunbattle between peace officers and organized gunfighters when, in 1895, they put an end to the Joe Beckham gang in an all-night shoot-fest near the present site of Frederick, Okla. Pickett began his career as Wichita County peace officer on March 27, 1881. He died on Sept. 9, 1933.

Two Tom Pickett's were born in 1859 in adjoining counties in Texas, Wise and Tarrant. One went on to broad fame as a compatriot of Billy the Kid in Lincoln, New Mexico, the other to less notoriety here in Wichita Falls. The lack of notoriety didn't prevent our Tom Pickett from being a witness and participant in many of the early day events in and around Wichita Falls, many of them notorious events. His associations with early lawmen and outlaws, as well as a longtime affiliation with Burk Burnett, was his vehicle into our history books but also our interest. We won't spoil the story by giving details; you'll have to come to the WCHC meeting to hear it all.

Two looks at the past

