

The Kanza Reserve 150 Years Ago (February article)
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Four Reservation Villages

Late in the evening of February 2, 1859, Hezekiah Brake and his companion, Mr. Alexandro, rode into Council Grove in a mule-drawn buggy. Here the men spent four days getting their animals ready and laying in a supply of everything needed for their upcoming journey to New Mexico.

“Seth Hayes, so well-known as the first trader in the present county of Morris, Kansas,” wrote Brake in his book, *On Two Continents*, “kept a store and an outfitting station at Council Grove at this time. He had in keeping now six small Mexican mules, a good pony, a large wagon, and various other necessary acquisitions to our outfit.”

Brake and others spent a few evenings with Hays, and he remembered “...stories caused much laughter as we sat listening to them around Mr. Hayes’s fire.” He also noted “An old negress who worked for Mr. Hayes, roasted coffee, made cakes, and gave us a keg of pickles and sauerkraut as relishes.” Doubtless this is Sarah Taylor, Hays’ slave, commonly known as “Aunt Sally.”

“The few business houses at this time were mostly log cabins, and there was very little attempt made by the citizens to follow the fashions,” Brake observed. On the morning of February 7 Brake left Council Grove “in grand style,” his small party having acquired a huge, well-filled prairie-schooner.

Two days later, Kansas Territorial governor Samuel Medary signed an act passed by the Kansas Territorial Legislature incorporating the Council Grove Town Company.¹

Although a clear, comprehensive picture of the newly-chartered Council Grove and environs is difficult to discern, some fact-laden documents of that era allow inferences to be made:

- The territorial census of 1859 recorded the population of Morris County at 569, “199 of which are legal voters—and one negro.”
- The October 17, 1859, *Council Grove Press* editor Samuel Wood declaimed about the “800 citizens” then illegally squatting on the Kanza Reservation, which then encompassed much of Morris County, a good-sized strip of Breckinridge (Lyon) County, and fragments of Chase and Wabaunsee counties.
- The federal census of 1860 reported 770 inhabitants of Morris County.
- According to the U.S. government survey of January 1861, Council Grove “...contains about (30) thirty houses and one hundred and thirty inhabitants...a grist and saw mill, school house, hotel, blacksmith shops, carriage shop, carpenter shop, wheelwright shop, etc.”

The August 6, 1859 issue of the *Kanza News* (Emporia), gave this optimistic assessment: “Council Grove is the county seat and chief town in Morris county, and is one of the best

business points south of the Kaw river. Several new and substantial buildings have been erected there during the present summer...”

But then the newspaper editor identified the proverbial elephant in the room: “...and there can be no doubt that if the Kaw Indian title was extinguished, Council Grove would speedily become a first rate town.”

The fact is that in February 1859, there were four villages located on the 20-mile-square Kanza Indian Reservation, but only three of these—the Kanza Indian villages--had a solid legal basis for their existence as encoded by the Kansas Indian Treaty of 1846.

Despite its recently bestowed territorial Kansas charter, Council Grove, as clearly established by the survey of December 1856, lay well within the bounds of the Kanza Reservation and so well outside the sanction of federal law.

Indeed, it was not until September 1, 1863, following the Treaty of 1860 that diminished the Kanza Reservation to one-third its original size that a federal land patent signed by President Abraham Lincoln was finally issued to the Council Grove Town Company.

What then, do we know of the three legitimate villages?

For one, these villages were not stationary because there were three Kanza bands occupying zones of the reservation but never becoming fixed in place. Ordinarily, these bands would establish their villages in desirable locations providing wood, water, and grass for their ponies. Here the bands would remain until the surrounding pastures were eaten down and filth accumulated, at which time they would move to other sites.²

This mobility explains why historians and archeologists have never succeeded in pinpointing the locations of long-term Kanza villages on the Neosho Reservation.

Prior to coming to this reservation in 1848, the Kansas resided in permanent villages along the Kansas River. However, at that time their habitations were earth lodges, whose solidity and mass provided comfortable homes but ruled out relocation.

On the Neosho Reservation the Kanza first lived in lodges whose frames were six to eight feet long green, limber saplings “...stuck into the ground; canvas of various colors, hides, buffalo robes, etc., are tied around the same; and, drawing them tighter towards the top, they bring the saplings together, leaving room, however, for the smoke...to escape.”³

Later in the 1860s and early 1870s it appears traditional buffalo hide tipis served as the tribe’s primary habitations. Both kinds of lodges were easily taken down and removed to another place.

The village of Ishtalasa (Speckled Eye) occupied the northern part of the reserve, situated primarily on Big John Creek. Although his was the smallest of the three villages, Ishtalasa was considered the principal chief of the tribe from about 1860 until his death in 1865.

The central portion of the reserve was the domain of Kahhegawatiangah's (Fool Chief's) band. This village would be located somewhere on Rock Creek.

Finally, the largest village, that of Kahegawacheha (Hard Chief), occupied the southern section. This band, which after 1860 was headed by Allegawaho, ranged along Kahola Creek, and was sometimes known as the "Kahola Band."

In November 1857 there were 1,015 Kansas; by December 1860, the tribe's population had declined to 803, equal to the number of whites living on the reservation.

As white encroachment on their land increased in the late 1850s, the Kansas spent less time in their reservation villages and more time living in hunting camps in central Kansas.

Veteran Indian traders Northrup and Chick of Kansas City summed up the situation in May 1857: "The Kansas Indians formerly raised some corn before the whites took the country within and around it...Having no fences the Indians can raise no crops—hence the buffalo is their only reliance against starvation."

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1. Kenneth McClintock, "When Council Grove Began," unpublished paper, (1995).
 2. Joab Spencer, "The Kaw or Kansas Indians: Their Customs, Manners, and Folk-lore," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society*, v. 10 (1908), p. 373.
 3. *Herald of Freedom*, Lawrence, May 22, 1858.