
Remembering the Battle of Punished Woman's Fork: The 2013 Scott City Symposium

Edited by Ramon Powers and James N. Leiker

Introduction

by James N. Leiker

On Friday and Saturday, September 27 and 28, 2013, the community of Scott City commemorated the 135th anniversary of the Battle of Punished Woman's Fork, site of the final military engagement between the United States Army and Native Americans in the state of Kansas. This battle occurred in the context of a set of events known variously by whites as "Dull Knife's raid," and by Northern Cheyennes as "the homecoming trail," or—the consensus term used by academic and public historians—the Northern Cheyenne Exodus. Following the Cheyennes' alliance with the Lakota Nation that culminated in the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876 and their subsequent surrender in 1877, the army relocated nearly a thousand tribal members from their homeland in Montana and Wyoming to Indian Territory. Within a year, beset by disease, poor nutrition, bad relations with fellow natives, and simple homesickness, 353 Northern Cheyennes led by Chiefs Dull Knife (Morning Star) and Little Wolf left their southern reservation and fled north toward their native land.¹ Companies of the Fourth U.S. Cavalry and Nineteenth Infantry gave chase, and after a series of clashes in Indian Territory and southwest Kansas, confronted the fleeing Indians in present-day Scott County. The pages that follow do more than tell the story of that confrontation; they record for *Kansas History* readers, and indeed for posterity, the spirit of the 2013 symposium.

I was privileged to be among the scholars invited to participate in the event, which for people in the Scott City area took decades to achieve. Located in far western Kansas, the remoteness of Battle Canyon (named for the fight at Punished Woman's Fork, a tributary of the Smoky Hill River) places it "off the radar" of many Kansas history enthusiasts. But Scott County residents have always known of the place, with generations of children playing "cowboys and Indians" in its canyons while their parents searched for stray bullets and arrowheads. Such was the process by which the pioneers' descendants relived the drama, and perhaps absorbed some of the ideology of nineteenth-century Manifest Destiny. For Northern Cheyennes themselves, descendants of the chiefs who led the trek north, the place evokes a different

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1. Known colloquially to nineteenth-century whites as "Dull Knife," his Cheyenne name translates more accurately into English as "Morning Star." Both names are employed in this collection of essays.

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Northern Cheyenne traditional dancers, Scott City Symposium, September 2013. Courtesy of Leo Killback, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona.

memory, that of brave ancestors desperately leading their families home. Of all episodes in American history, few offer a stronger contrast in how different peoples understand and interpret the past than the Plains Indian Wars. As Ramon Powers and I contended in *The Northern Cheyenne Exodus in History and Memory*, residents of towns such as Scott City and Oberlin share a legacy of violence with natives of the Northern Cheyenne reservation in Montana.² But the tyranny of distance and the fragmented nature of storytelling through tribal, local, and family memory has obscured this shared past, producing people who do not know each other—until this event, that is. Through the labor and donations of community leaders both in Scott City, Kansas, and Lame Deer, Montana, the 2013 symposium brought two buses of Northern Cheyennes to the site, where they joined hundreds of locals for two days of dedications, music, pow-wows, lectures, reenactments, and food sampling. The following section includes select addresses from the second day—modified for publication—by scholars Jerome Greene, John Monnett, and Ramon Powers; a summation by journalist Rod Haxton; and the native voices of tribal historians Jennie Parker, Jace Killback, and Rubie Sooktis, as well as Leo Killback, assistant professor of history, Arizona State University.

Readers are encouraged to look for two themes, the first being reconciliation. Several participants described the symposium as providing closure, a sense of cultural and spiritual healing in which both Euro-Americans and Native Americans acknowledged the bravery demonstrated by and the injustices imposed on both sides. Yet true reconciliation requires understanding, hence the importance of the second theme, oral versus written history. Comparing the works of scholars, who emphasize empirical evidence and methodology, with the sacred recollections of indigenous people reveal fundamental differences not only in how history is communicated but in how the past is perceived. One must wonder, given how culture predisposes us to various worldviews, if genuine understanding—something beyond superficial friendliness—is possible. Yet the effort must be made. In fall 1878 violence drew whites and Indians to Battle Canyon; in the fall of 2013 an attempt at forgiveness and commemoration drew them back. One hundred and thirty-five years is not too late for a start.

Jim Leiker is professor and chair of the Department of History and Political Science, Johnson County Community College.

2. James N. Leiker and Ramon Powers, *The Northern Cheyenne Exodus in History and Memory* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011).

Scott City Meets the Northern Cheyennes, 2013

by Rod Haxton

The pages that follow do more than tell the story of that confrontation; they record . . . the spirit of the 2013 symposium.

The Battle of Punished Woman's Fork has been one of the untold, under told, and mistold events in the history of the Indian Wars on the Great Plains. When Kansas artist Jerry Thomas first began digging into the history surrounding the events leading up to and following the battle, he admits that it seemed a daunting adventure. It also became an all-consuming passion for the native of Scott City. "My goal was to bring together the largest and finest collection of Battle Canyon artifacts and historic pieces in one location—to make this a focal point for people wanting to learn more about the battle and the journey of the Northern Cheyenne," he said.¹

One important element of that goal was construction of the Jerry Thomas Gallery and Collection in Scott City, which features the most complete collection of historic items related to the site and the people who were involved. Thomas, however, took that a step farther by organizing the first-ever symposium that brought together Northern Cheyenne descendants who were part of the northern exodus, descendants of a military officer involved in the battle, along with historians and visitors from throughout the region. The two-day symposium was held on the 135th anniversary of the battle that took place on September 27, 1878. Perhaps the biggest surprise for Thomas in organizing the event was how few Northern Cheyenne had ever visited Battle Canyon. "Probably 99 percent of them had no idea what we had here," said Thomas, referring not just to the battle site itself, but the historic collection of artifacts related to the battle.²

As interest in the event grew among the Northern Cheyennes, instead of only ten to fifteen making the trip south to Scott City, Thomas found he had to make arrangements for between 120 and 140. Staging the event also required a significant financial commitment of more than \$80,000, which was shared by the city of Scott City, Scott County, Scott Community Foundation, Scott County Historical Society, and personal donations. Two tour buses were provided for the Northern Cheyennes and all meals and lodging were also paid once the group arrived in Scott City. "Getting the Northern Cheyenne to commit to this was significant," Thomas emphasized. "We wanted this event to tell a complete story of the Northern Cheyenne journey, what occurred at Battle Canyon and the events that followed as they continued north into Nebraska." "It was pretty fascinating to see things come together," he added. "The more I visited with members of the Northern Cheyenne tribe the more often they'd talk about ancestors who had told them of a place where they held off the soldiers. But they didn't know the name of the place or where it occurred. This was an opportunity for them to connect with that part of their history."³

The opening ceremony was 135 years to the day and time that events unfolded at Battle Canyon. It was in the late afternoon that Lieutenant Colonel

1. *Scott County Record*, September 19, 2013.

2. Jerry Thomas, interview by author, April 7, 2015.

3. *Ibid.*

William H. Lewis led the Fourth U.S. Cavalry and Nineteenth U.S. Infantry as they first engaged in battle with the Northern Cheyennes who were led by Chiefs Little Wolf and Dull Knife. Commemorative events included a blessing of the site by the Northern Cheyennes. Representatives of the Nineteenth Infantry and the Fourth Cavalry were also in attendance. The evening ceremonies moved to the El Quarteletejo historic site where there was a pow-wow by the Northern Cheyennes. Saturday's events featured a number of guest speakers under an outdoor tent at the El Quarteletejo Museum in Scott City.⁴ Also among the day's highlights was the unveiling of a



a painting featuring Lieutenant Colonel Lewis, along with the only known photo of the lone fatality in the battle. "When I started this more than sixteen years ago, there were several key elements that I was after," noted Thomas. That involved hunting down a number of details regarding the U.S. military side of the event, such as who made the trek from Fort Dodge, who took Lieutenant Colonel Lewis' body back to Fort Wallace, and who was at Fort Wallace. Once his nearly two-decades-long investigation finally turned up the photo of Lewis, Thomas said he had the "linchpin to make this a major, major event."⁵

Among the symposium speakers who had long advocated for such an event was Ramon Powers, a native of Gove and a former executive director of the Kansas State Historical Society. In addition to the commemorative activities, Powers was pleased that the symposium offered a "scholarly, more in-depth sense of what happened here. When we talk about the Indian Wars, we need to more fully hear the voices from the native people," he explained.⁶

The symposium was the first opportunity for Conrad Fisher, Cheyenne tribal historian and preservation director, to view Battle Canyon at Punished Woman's Fork. Prior to this, it was a place he had only heard about through oral histories or read about in books. "It was a tremendous opportunity to view the site," he said. "I think because of the amount of time that has elapsed,

Jerry Thomas, Kansas artist and symposium organizer, addressed those gathered for the event on the historic battle site. His desire to explore the history of the Northern Cheyenne experience led to the construction of the Jerry Thomas Gallery and Collection in Scott City that features the most complete collection of historic items related to the site and the people who were involved. Courtesy of Leo Killsback, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona.

4. Following the Spanish Reconquista of New Mexico in the 1690s, many Pueblo and Plains Apache relocated northward and established El Quarteletejo near present-day Scott City. Eighteenth-century accounts describe it as a large trading settlement. The El Quarteletejo, also spelled El Cuarteletejo, archaeological site consists of "the remains of a small seven-room pueblo and an extensive Plains Apache village." See "El Cuarteletejo, Scott County," kansapedia, Kansas Historical Society, <https://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/el-cuarteletejo-scott-county/12026>; for more on the El Quarteletejo Museum and the Jerry Thomas Gallery and Collection see <http://www.elquarteletejomuseum.org/>.

5. Thomas, interview by author, April 7, 2015.

6. *Scott County Record*, May 2, 2013.

“For some [the Scott City event] will bring closure; for others, healing. For everyone, it is a chance to look at a part of our history.”

sometimes our memories fade and people, our elders, carry that information with them to the next world. It was an opportunity for me to maybe answer some of the questions I had, but I think realistically, it was a great opportunity to pay homage and honor those that fought here.” For Fisher, it was as if he could go back in time. The battle site today looks much the same as it did when his Northern Cheyenne ancestors arrived in late September 1878. “I think what I was really feeling was . . . wow, this was the place that Punished Woman’s Fork battle really occurred and to be here and see how strategic that location was, you couldn’t find a better site if you are going to fight off people that are going to capture or kill you. And the cave was such a nice place to house the women and children. You could feel the sacredness of the area,” he continued, “feel the presence of many of the spirits, the actual peoples’ spirits . . . the presence of the ancestors that were here. You’re really awed by the area itself.” Fisher believed the Friday and Saturday events to be a healing experience for both the Cheyennes and for the state of Kansas. He stated that “For some it will bring closure; for others, healing. For everyone, it is a chance to look at a part of our history,” he explained. “It is maybe a time to remember, to remember the ancestors when they came to that location. A time to remember the people that died for them so that they could give us a place back in the northern country . . . those that sacrificed their lives, that wanted to come home to a beautiful place in Montana. It’s such a powerful, powerful feeling and a drive to want to go back to that place.”⁷

Local historians have been working not just to bring more attention to the significance of the battle, but to overcome inaccuracies about the event as depicted in books and movies. For many historians, the focus on the exodus of 353 Northern Cheyenne warriors, women, and children from the Darlington Agency, near El Reno, Oklahoma, to their homeland near Lame Deer, Montana, has been more about the tragic events that occurred at Fort Robinson, Nebraska. It’s taken longer for history to recognize the significance of the Battle of Punished Woman’s Fork. “I think there have been more books written about this in the last ten or fifteen years than before,” said Jerry Snyder, a Scott City historian who has done extensive research on the site. “People are starting to realize this is an important part of history.” Thomas said that Scott City and Lame Deer “share a sister city status” that will lead to further recognition of the battle site. “There’s not a week goes by that I’m not hearing from someone (in Lame Deer) or getting messages asking about something. It’s an ongoing relationship that’s very strong,” said Thomas.⁸

Plans are in the works for a three-phase ride retracing the journey of the Northern Cheyennes. The first phase of the 1,500-mile trek will take participants from the Darlington Reservation to Punished Woman’s Fork. The following year will resume from the battle site and end at Fort Robinson while the third year will finish in Lame Deer. Thomas emphasized that with his return trips to Lame Deer he has continued to build relationships with young members of the Northern Cheyenne tribe to help them learn more about the Battle of Punished Woman’s Fork and its significance. “They’re the ones who will be responsible for continuing what we’ve started and building

7. *Scott County Record*, October 3, 2013.

8. Jerry Thomas, interview by author, April 7, 2015.

on it for many, many more years after we're all gone," said Thomas.

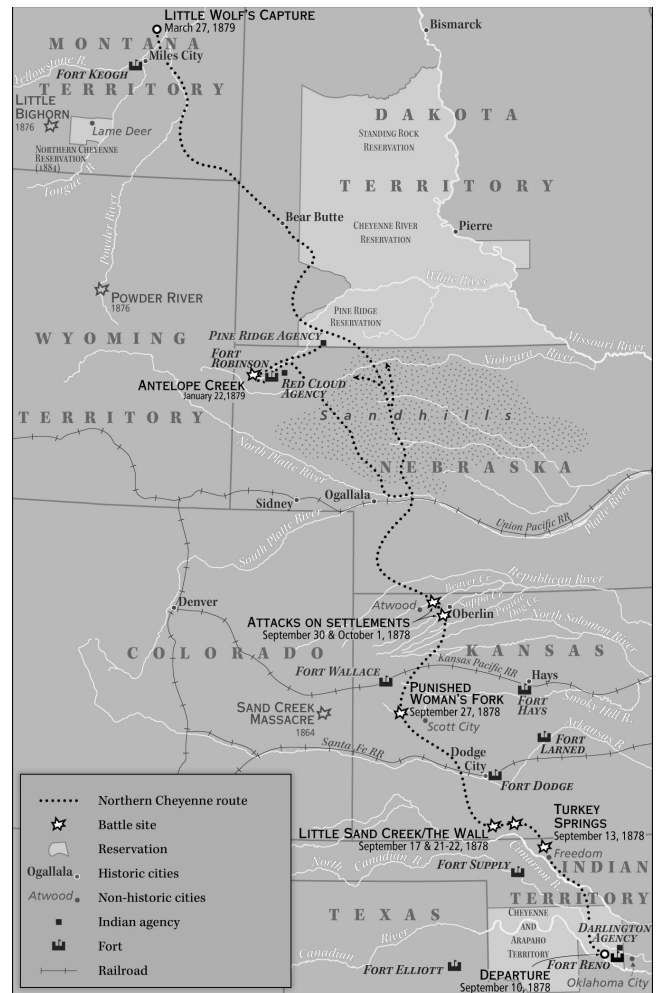
Rod Haxton is the editor of the Scott County Record, Scott City, Kansas, a newspaper he has owned and operated for more than twenty years.

The Coming Home Trail

by Jerome A. Greene

The story of the 1878–1879 flight of the Northern Cheyenne Indians under Chiefs Morning Star and Little Wolf to reach their Montana homeland from the Indian Territory is an epic of American history. It was the subject of a novelized history by Mari Sandoz in 1953 and of a major motion picture based on her book in 1964.¹ The Cheyenne ordeal has also received inclusive scholarly treatment through the works of Father Peter Powell, John Monnett, Stan Hoig, Vernon and Albert Maddux, and, most recently, James Leiker and Ramon Powers.²

The Punished Woman's Fork engagement, a riveting element of this story, occurred late on Friday, September 27, 1878, and involved elements of the U.S. Army's Nineteenth Infantry and Fourth Cavalry regiments, as well as the Northern Cheyennes and their revered leaders. Briefly stated, beyond a significant opening charge by warriors, the encounter mostly involved long-range skirmish action between the forces, wherein the Cheyennes, entrenched in the surrounding bluffs and canyons, attempted to thwart the approaching soldiers while securing and protecting their women and children. Colonel William H. Lewis finally deployed his forces and advanced over the heights west of the stream to close on the Cheyennes' position, and much shooting occurred during the three-hour combat. Lewis was severely wounded and later died, and several more soldiers were wounded. One warrior was reported killed. Under a threatening storm and increasing darkness, the fighting waned. During the night, the Indians, with minimal losses,



Route of the Northern Cheyenne exodus. Courtesy of the University of Kansas Cartographic and GIS Services, Darin Grauberger and Travis White.

1. Mari Sandoz, *Cheyenne Autumn* (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1964), originally published by McGraw-Hill in 1953.

2. Peter J. Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain: A History of the Northern Cheyenne Chiefs and Warrior Societies, 1830–1879, with an Epilogue, 1969–1974*. 2 vols. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981); Peter J. Powell, *Sweet Medicine: The Continuing Role of the Sacred Arrows, the Sun Dance, and the Sacred Buffalo Hat in Northern Cheyenne History*. 2 vols. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969); John H. Monnett, "Tell Them We Are Going Home": *The Odyssey of the Northern Cheyenne* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001); Stan Hoig, *Perilous Pursuit: The U.S. Cavalry and the Northern Cheyennes* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002); Vernon R. Maddux and Albert Glenn Maddux, *In Dull Knife's Wake: The True Story of the Northern Cheyenne Exodus of 1878* (Norman, Okla.: Horse Creek Publications, Inc., 2003); James N. Leiker and Ramon Powers, *The Northern Cheyenne Exodus in History and Memory* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011).

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advantaged themselves of landscape features and successfully escaped the field, effectively eluding the troops and continuing their passage north.³

At the present time, the Punished Woman's Fork site comprises one of the few largely pristine Indian wars encounter sites in the nation. Thanks to Scott City's own Jerry Snyder and his wife Margaret, along with former Scott County Commissioner Larry Hoeme, the site has most deservedly been nominated and included on the National Register of Historic Places. Punished Woman's Fork, of course, was but one episode in the lengthy struggle of these Cheyennes to reach Montana. In 2001–2002, as a historian with the National Park Service, I was part of a team sent out to help evaluate the significance of several trails associated with army-Indian campaigns in the Trans-Mississippi West. One of them was this approximately 1200-mile-long trail associated with the Cheyennes' pilgrimage of 1878–1879. We termed it "The Northern Cheyenne Exodus Trail," and it ran from near El Reno, Oklahoma, to Fort Keogh, Montana. One of our Northern Cheyenne colleagues, Steve Brady, properly suggested to us that the trail might better be termed a homecoming trail rather than an exodus trail, in that the Northern Cheyennes viewed the journey as coming to their homeland, rather than departing from Indian Territory.⁴

The history of this trail is of primary significance to the Northern Cheyennes because it encapsulates much of the trauma of their existence during the troubled times following the warfare with the army in 1876–1877, which also involved the Lakota Sioux. It was a time they will never forget, and its context here is important. In November 1876 the Cheyennes—Tsistsistas ("the People")—under their Old Man Chief, Morning Star, and their Sweet Medicine Chief, Little Wolf, had endured the brunt of a surprise U.S. Army assault in Wyoming's Big Horn Mountains that killed many of them. In April 1877, even as Lakota surrenders proceeded, the Northern Cheyennes found themselves escorted by army troops to join their kinsmen at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, Indian Territory.⁵ The people had lived on the northern plains for decades, and the removal of 937 of them to what was in many respects a foreign environment in the Indian Territory affected them profoundly. Over the next year, under guard of police at Darlington Agency and soldiers at nearby Fort Reno, they languished from starvation, disease, and homesickness in the hot dry climes. The winter of 1877–1878 was especially brutal, and dozens perished. On the night of September 9, 1878, 300-plus Northern Cheyennes led by Chiefs Morning Star and Little Wolf started north from Darlington in a desperate gambit to reach Montana.

3. For these details, see, in addition to the above titles, Albert G. Maddux and Vernon R. Maddux, *The Battle of Punished Woman's Fork* (Scott City, Kans.: Scott Country Historical Society, 1996).

4. National Park Service and the Western History Association, *The Clash of Cultures Trails Project: Assessing the National Significance of Trails associated with U.S. Army/American Indian Campaigns in the Trans-Mississippi West* (Denver, Colo.: National Park Service, 2002), available online at <http://www.nps.gov/nhl/learn/themes/ClashOfCultures.pdf>.

5. For particulars of the army assault on Morning Star and Little Wolf in November 1876, see Jerome A. Greene, *Morning Star Dawn: The Powder River Expedition and the Northern Cheyennes, 1876* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003).

The movement brought a rapid military response as troops ultimately converged to stop the people and turn them back. Army and Indian maneuvers over the next several weeks took on campaign appearances, with the principal route delineated by the Northern Cheyennes as they wended their way generally north through Kansas and Nebraska, and with secondary routes forged by the pursuing commands coming from various directions. Several times the comparatively few Cheyenne warriors skirmished en route with the soldiers, losing but few of their number while delivering significant losses among troops and citizens. In major actions occurring at Turkey Springs, Indian Territory, and at Punished Woman's Fork, Kansas, as well as in several smaller skirmishes, the tribesmen carried out carefully prescribed offensive warfare at pre-selected positions that stymied the army forces, enabling them to continue on their course. Against their leaders' counsel, warriors raged against white citizens in their flight, particularly after the encounter at Punished Woman's Fork, helping themselves to livestock and food resources and sometimes killing settlers. (These attacks on settlers, principally in Decatur and Rawlins counties, Kansas, helped neutralize public opinion that had previously largely favored the Cheyennes, and some of the leaders later faced charges for the depredations committed.)

As they plied the country north of the Platte River in Nebraska, Morning Star desired to join relatives among the Lakotas while Little Wolf wanted to proceed to Montana and the Tongue River lands. In mid-October, the people separated. About 150 followed Morning Star toward the old Red Cloud Agency in northwestern Nebraska, while the remainder stayed with Little Wolf and passed much of the winter in the Nebraska Sand Hills before trudging on to skirt the Black Hills and return to Montana. On March 25, 1879, Little Wolf's people turned themselves in to a contingent of troops near Fort Keogh on the Yellowstone River and were eventually permitted to remain at that post.⁶

Meantime, those under Morning Star fared worse. Soon after their separation from Little Wolf's followers, they encountered a cavalry patrol from Fort Robinson in northwestern Nebraska. On October 25, after much negotiation, anxiously hungry and surrounded by artillery hurried forward from the post, the Indians went under escort to Fort Robinson. The government anticipated returning Morning Star's people to Darlington, but they refused to go back. The dispute lasted for weeks. Finally, the post commander confined the people to an empty unheated barrack without food to force their compliance. Later he cut off water. The onset of freezing weather compounded their agony, and during the night of January 9—four months to the day after leaving Darlington—the poorly armed prisoners, all in anticipation of dying, staged a hopeless breakout from their prison. While troops responded quickly, many of the Cheyennes succeeded in scattering among the hills and ravines around Fort Robinson. For almost two weeks, cavalrymen scoured the Nebraska countryside, intermittently skirmishing with small groups of escapees. The final engagement occurred northwest of

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6. Aspects of the movement of the Northern Cheyennes from the Indian Territory are thoroughly discussed and documented in one or another of the several histories cited in note two above.



Little Wolf (standing) and Dull Knife, or Morning Star, the two principal Northern Cheyenne leaders of the 1878 exodus, journeyed east to Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., in November 1873. This photograph was made by Alexander Gardner during the delegation's stay in the nation's capital. Courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society.

the post on January 22, when one hundred and fifty soldiers surrounded thirty-three of the people along Antelope Creek, killing half of them, including several women and children. Altogether, Cheyenne fatalities among those who fled Fort Robinson totaled sixty-four people. Seventy-eight others were captured.

For Morning Star's followers, that bloody affair climaxed their escape from the Indian Territory. Published news of their tragedy evoked sympathy for the Cheyennes across the nation, and the surviving people were ushered to Pine Ridge Agency and permitted to reside with the Lakota Sioux. Eventually—but not until after the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890—the government allowed the remaining Pine Ridge Cheyennes to join their brethren in Montana.⁷

While devastating in its history, the nonetheless hopeful Northern Cheyenne Trail of 1878–1879 comprises a major example of a resource meriting preservation and interpretation as it signifies the determination of the Indians to fight and to survive the circumstances confronting them. When Morning Star and Little Wolf departed the Indian Territory, it was with full realization that their flight would be countered by U.S. Army troops. The Northern Cheyennes' movement became for them a military

necessity with the objective to reach Montana, and they repeatedly waged warfare of tactical substance against better-armed soldiers and civilians to affect that goal. In 1907 the War Department formally sanctioned the collective army movements as the campaign against the Northern Cheyennes, 1878–1879.⁸

The Northern Cheyenne Trail is rife with significance for several reasons. While it sustained their conflict with the army as in previous years, the forced relocation of the people from the northern plains to a country so ill-suited for them typified the government's punitive policy of removing tribes for deeds considered inimical to the nation's interests; in other words, the Northern Cheyennes had been condemned thusly for their fighting alliance with the Sioux in 1876–1877. Although their escape from the Indian Territory responded to existing conditions there as well as to the people's nostalgia for their Tongue River lands, it moreover represented an expression of outrage

7. Material regarding of the breakout of Morning Star's people from the freezing barrack at Fort Robinson in January 1879 appears in the above cited volumes, but see also Thomas R. Buecker, *Fort Robinson and the American West, 1874–1899* (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1999); and especially Peter J. Powell, *The Killing of Morning Star's People, Lecture II, Distinguished Lecture Series* (Chadron, Nebr.: Mari Sandoz Heritage Society, 1994).

8. General Orders No. 170, War Department, August 15, 1907, as cited in "Report of the Adjutant General, October 17, 1907, pp. 160–61. See Jerome A. Greene, *Indian War Veterans: Memories of Army Life and Campaigns in the West, 1864–1898* (New York: Savas Beatie, 2007), xxv–xxvi.

over the cultural dilemmas that had consumed them over the past two decades. This was manifested in their repeated striking out against aspects of white society wherever encountered on the route north. Although the people needed food and animals to prolong their movement, it also explained the destruction directed against settlers in their path.

Significantly, in the precise manner of their execution, the stands that the warriors made at Turkey Springs, Punished Woman's Fork, and elsewhere exemplifies important qualities. Of all the encounter sites on the trek north, Punished Woman's Fork is consequential because of the tactics employed as well as the incisive planning, readiness, and commitment that the Cheyennes demonstrated in their chosen course. Their well-orchestrated combat at Punished Woman's Fork thus embodied an important difference from most army-Indian encounters on the plains. But what followed for Morning Star's people after their surrender to army authority at Fort Robinson—including their subsequent bolt from imprisonment there—signified the depths of their despair as well as their resolve under intolerable conditions.

Indeed, the odyssey of Morning Star and Little Wolf continues to resonate within Northern Cheyenne society today. The Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council recently passed a resolution endorsing the concept of the Northern Cheyenne Trail as a National Historic Trail. The Northern Cheyenne tribe has shown an abiding initiative when it comes to the interpretation of their history for their people and especially for their children. I was at Fort Robinson in January 2013 on the anniversary of the breakout there. It was a very cold night, but the Northern Cheyennes were there with many of their schoolchildren, teaching them about their history and this particular event. And I am not surprised. They have always shown profound interest and respect for their past. I've been fortunate to have been involved with the people in work on Sand Creek, Washita, and Little Bighorn, and most recently Rosebud and Wolf Mountains Battlefields and Deer Medicine Rocks (which are now National Historic Landmarks). Throughout, I've been repeatedly heartened by the people's enthusiasm and dedication, as well as by their overall leadership in the field of historic preservation.

Finally, the Northern Cheyenne Trail is associated with various themes identified in the National Park Service's most recent thematic framework. Two of them are especially noteworthy. Under the theme entitled "Peopling Places," the Northern Cheyennes' flight from the Indian Territory embodies not only the efforts by the United States government to relocate Indian people away from their ethnic homelands, but also the unremitting desire of those same people to return to them. Under the theme "Expressing Cultural Values," the Northern Cheyennes' journey to return to Montana remains and will always remain a seminal episode in their long and extraordinary history.⁹ It should therefore not come as a surprise that the people, the Northern Cheyennes, have managed to retain and to occupy the country they have loved so well, for so long.

Jerome A. Greene, *who once taught history at Haskell Indian Junior College (now Haskell Indian Nations University) in Lawrence, is a retired National Park Service*

9. "Significant Themes associated with the History of U.S. Army / American Indian Conflict in the Trans-Mississippi West," chapter 4, in *The Clash of Cultures Trails Project*, 19–20, 23.

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historian. He is widely known for his many publications on American Indians and the Plains Indian wars including the recent book, *American Carnage: Wounded Knee, 1890*, published by the University of Oklahoma Press.

Little Wolf's Finest Hour

by John H. Monnett

Little Wolf and Morning Star led one of the most epic odysseys in American Indian history as well as one of the most important episodes in Cheyenne memory.

In the healing memorialization of the Battle Canyon historical site, it is important to remember and honor those individuals who made possible the success of this remarkable quest for freedom. Little Wolf is one of those at the top of this list. Ochumgache or Ohkomhakit, Little Wolf, more accurately, Little Coyote (born c. 1820) is one of the most honored leaders in Cheyenne and American history. As Sweet Medicine Chief of all Cheyennes, Little Wolf and Morning Star led one of the most epic odysseys in American Indian history as well as one of the most important episodes in Cheyenne memory. The journey northward of almost 1,500 miles from Indian Territory during the fall and winter of 1878–1879 brought the Cheyennes through Indian Territory, Kansas, Nebraska, Dakota, and eventually Montana. Only the more widely publicized exodus of Chief Joseph's Nez Perce` in 1877 equaled the Cheyenne trek. But unlike Joseph's 1877 run through deep sheltering mountain wilderness, the Cheyennes traversed open plains and recently settled country in newly organized counties of Kansas. They had to cross the Santa Fe, Kansas Pacific, and Union Pacific railroads, where converging troops and resources from two federal military departments quickly amassed against them. When troops caught up with the Indians, they stopped and fought and then continued their march north.¹

Morning Star's band, which eventually split off from Little Wolf's band, has undoubtedly received the most attention in the literature because of his peoples' dramatic escape from Fort Robinson in the January snow and their determination to sell their lives or gain their freedom in the grim fighting in the Hat Creek Breaks, which culminated in the bloody last stand on Antelope Creek, January 22, 1879. As such earlier historians have often anointed Morning Star as the overall leader of the Northern Cheyennes throughout the entire northern odyssey. In fact, it was the younger Little Wolf, who, as Sweet Medicine Chief, led the people north from Indian Territory. If it were not for his leadership and determination, the Northern Cheyennes likely would never have realized their dream of being able to remain in their beloved Montana lands after 1879.

Little Wolf was about fifty-eight at the time of the exodus north. He had a long record of fighting the Vehoe (spiders), the Cheyenne name for their white enemies, and he rose to become a headman or "little chief" of the Elk Horn

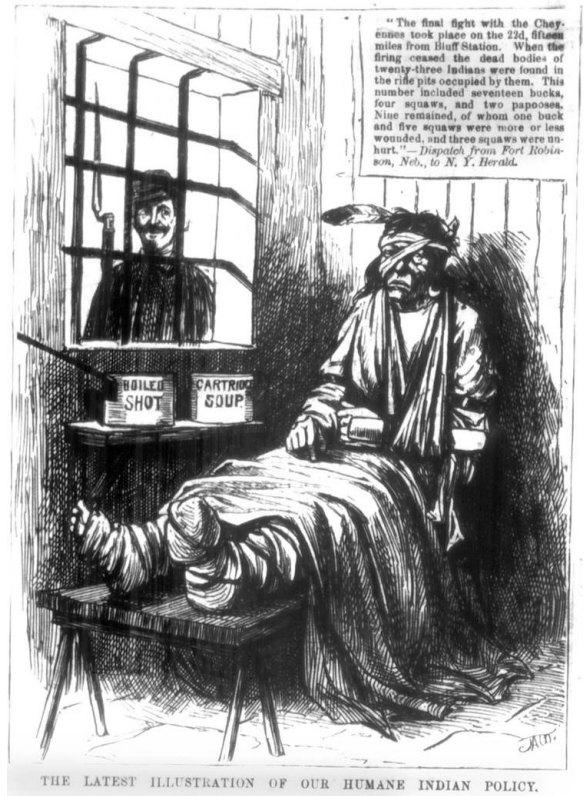
1. The standard scholarly works on the Cheyenne journey home of 1878–1879 are John H. Monnett, *"Tell Them We are Going Home": The Odyssey of the Northern Cheyenne* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001); James N. Leiker and Ramon Powers, *The Northern Cheyenne Exodus in History and Memory* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011). See also Monnett, "A Portrait in Leadership: Little Wolf and the Northern Cheyenne Odyssey, 1878–1879," *The Denver Westerners Roundup* 57 (September-October 2001): 3–15.

Scraper military society. After the northern bands established themselves in the comparative isolation of the Powder and Tongue River country at the time of Red Cloud's War of 1866–1868, Little Wolf's people were strongly allied with the Lakotas in the struggle to resist white encroachment of their homelands east of the Bozeman Trail. Little Wolf led Cheyennes in Red Cloud's war. He witnessed the Fetterman fight in 1866, losing his brother, Big Nose in the engagement. Little Wolf and his warriors eventually burned Fort Phil Kearny following government abandonment of the post in 1868. During this time Little Wolf was chosen one of the four "Old Man" chiefs, a high honor, within the Council of Forty-four.²

Because of his ability as an organizer and military tactician the council, at the same time, elected him Sweet Medicine Chief of all Cheyennes, bearer of the Chiefs' Bundle, which contained the holy presence, the very incarnation of Sweet Medicine, the great prophet of the Cheyennes. As such Little Wolf was expected to be above anger, think only of his people and not of himself, as Sweet Medicine had taught the Cheyennes from the instructions of Maheo, the All Being. At that time, Little Wolf sat at the head of the Council of Forty-four in their deliberations, the seat of highest honor and esteem among all Cheyennes. "Only danger that threatens my people can anger me now," Little Wolf pledged as he took the oath. "If a dog lifts its leg to my lodge I will not see it."³

By late summer 1878, following his people's exile to Indian Territory in 1877 after the Great Sioux War, Little Wolf decided to escape the disease and hunger of Darlington Agency. His words on September 9, 1878, to agent John D. Miles are the most widely quoted. "Listen now to what I say to you," he told Miles. "I am going to leave here; I am going north to my own country." During the late hours of September 9, 1878, 353 followers of Little Wolf and Morning Star left Darlington Agency for home. There were 92 men, 120 women, 69 boys, and 72 girls. By the spring of 1879 one half of them had perished.

Burdened by the elderly and the young, Little Wolf's people miraculously made their way through two-thirds of western Kansas in less than three weeks after their departure from Darlington Agency. During this time pursuing troops never took their camps by surprise. The Cheyennes fought four pitched battles with the U.S. Army and armed civilians, engaging them from tactically advantageous fortified positions and repelling mostly dismounted troops skirmishing in textbook formations.⁴ At the Battle of Turkey Springs in Indian Territory, fought on September 13, Little Wolf soundly whipped a larger command of the Fourth Cavalry under Captain Joseph Rendlebrock from Fort Reno. Realizing Rendlebrock's presence, Little Wolf doubled back on his line of flight to secure familiar defensible ground of his own



This satirical sketch of "our humane Indian policy" was published in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper on February 8, 1879, after the army killed dozens of Northern Cheyennes during the "breakout" at Fort Robinson, Nebraska. Courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society.

2. For more on Little Wolf and Dull Knife, see George B. Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyenne* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), 383–398.

3. Gary L. Roberts, "The Shame of Little Wolf," *Montana, The Magazine of Western History* 28 (Summer 1978): 39.

4. "The Select Committee on the Removal of the Northern Cheyennes," *Senate Report 708*, 46th Cong., 2d sess. (Serial, 1899); see also Monnett, "Tell Them We are Going Home," 43.



This photograph of Northern Cheyenne prisoners, men, women, and children, was taken in Lawrence, Kansas, a year after they had begun their trek north from Indian Territory back to their homeland in Montana.

choosing upon which to fight. Outnumbered, Little Wolf still controlled the field. He commanded the high ground and the water, cutting the soldiers off from that vital resource. He outmaneuvered and outfought a battalion of the Fourth Cavalry forcing them to abandon their position due to lack of water. He then got in their rear and harassed their line of retreat and inflicted an embarrassing defeat upon them in a running fight. The government's condemnation of Rendlebrock at this engagement became another example like the scrutiny following Little Big Horn that assumed white commanders must have failed in their duties for no group of Indians could achieve decisive victory over the U.S. Army on their own merits. At Turkey Springs the U.S. Army lost because the Cheyennes won, not by superior numbers, but by virtue of better tactical leadership demonstrated by Little Wolf. The army court-martialed Rendlebrock for his embarrassing defeat and dismissed him from the service.⁵

As the people moved north, the soldiers kept up the pursuit. At Punished Woman's Fork on September 27, Little Wolf drew a larger force of cavalry under Colonel William H. Lewis into a small box canyon and finally defeated them in a fierce fight that resulted in Lewis' death. While directing his men from their defensive positions on the heights above the stream, the Dog soldier Tangle Hair recalled years later: "Little Wolf did not seem like a human being; he seemed like an animal—a bear. He seemed without fear." Punished Woman's Fork was indeed Little Wolf's finest hour! But the Battle of Punished Woman's Fork proved also to be an Achilles heel for the Northern

5. "The Select Committee on the Removal of the Northern Cheyennes"; Monnett, *Tell Them We are Going Home*, 44–60.

Cheyennes. During the battle army scouts discovered a hidden ramada of Indian ponies concealed in a side canyon. The soldiers destroyed eighty-five of them along with most of the Cheyennes' food and provisions.⁶

After Punished Woman's Fork, the Northern Cheyennes were desperate for food for their women and children, and for horses. A series of foraging raids in the populated regions of northwest Kansas that led to the death of more than a few white settlers temporarily turned white media attention against them. Although the eastern press eventually restored sympathy for the Cheyenne cause following the outbreak of Morning Star's contingent from Fort Robinson in January 1879, these raids may have originally influenced Little Wolf and Morning Star to divide their people into two groups while in Nebraska so that if one contingent befell disaster the other might continue the quest for the north country. Although Morning Star's followers surrendered on Chadron Creek and later suffered the consequences at Fort Robinson, Little Wolf's quest during the winter months of 1878–1879 is less known.

During the fall and winter of 1878–1879, Little Wolf and about one hundred followers backtracked into the rugged Sand Hills where they remained until mid-February subsisting off wild game and stolen cattle. In late February, with a break in the weather, Little Wolf's people headed northwest toward the Black Hills and Nohavose, the Sacred Mountain. When they left Nebraska they entered the Military Department of Dakota. Despite unsubstantiated newspaper reports that Little Wolf, like Chief Joseph the year previous, was headed for the international border, Little Wolf probably never entertained serious thoughts of joining Sitting Bull and his Lakotas in Canada. Given his line of march the Northern Cheyennes were by the end of winter 1879 headed toward the old Tongue River Cantonment located on the Yellowstone River just west of Miles City, Montana. Little Wolf's band surrendered to Lieutenant Philo Clark who had known and respected him.⁷ "You are the only one who has offered to talk before fighting," he told Clark, "and it looks as though the wind, which has made our hearts flutter for so long, would now go down. I am glad we did not fight, and that none of my people or yours has been killed. My young men are brave, and would be glad to go with you to fight the [Sitting Bull] Sioux." Of the 353 Northern Cheyennes who had started out from Darlington Agency, 114 surrendered with Little Wolf. Only fifty-eight remained of Morning Star's band.

In the weeks following the surrender, Little Wolf's greatest ally became his captor, Lieutenant W. P. Clark. Clark maintained the right of the Ohmeseheso to have their home in the north. "They are weary with constant fighting and watching," Clark asserted. "They want peace, rest, and a home somewhere in this country where they were born and reared."⁸ The federal government heard Clark's arguments only because he made them at an opportune time. By the spring of 1879, after eight months of pursuing the Indians twelve hundred miles through three military departments, the army was embarrassed and weary of the Cheyenne war. The departmental commander, General Alfred

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6. Tangle Hair's quote was given to Grinnell; see his *The Fighting Cheyennes*, 394. The destruction of the Cheyenne pony herd is covered in *Senate Report 708*: 150.

7. Report of William P. Clark in Clark's ACP File, RG 94, 9w4/7/9/D/box 4, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

8. *Ibid.*

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H. Terry, endorsed Clark's report and that of Clark's commanding officer Major George Gibson. Shortly thereafter Little Wolf enlisted as a sergeant in Lieutenant Clark's Indian scouts. They became good friends and Little Wolf became an informant to Clark for his research on a book about Indian sign language.

Little Wolf's people were allowed to stay at Fort Keogh until 1882 when Congress approved a small reservation along Rosebud Creek and the Tongue River. From there the tribe endeavored to expand its lands and win approval for all Northern Cheyennes who wished to do so to settle in the north. Soon the survivors of the Fort Robinson outbreak, who did not wish to remain with Lakotas at Pine Ridge, joined them. By 1900 the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation expanded and many more northerners, who had not made the trek in 1878, gained permission to relocate there from Indian Territory.⁹

Little Wolf died in relative obscurity in 1904, ironically the same year as did Hin-mah-tooyah-lat-kekt, Young Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce. White historians never accorded Little Wolf as much adoration as Chief Joseph for the other great odyssey of Indian peoples in the 1870s. But Joseph died at Colville, Washington, not in his homeland of Oregon's Wallowa Valley. Little Wolf died in his beloved Tongue River country. Unlike Joseph, Little Wolf had led his people directly in both council and in battle against the whites during his long trek, and he had brought his people home.¹⁰

Undoubtedly much of the credit for keeping Little Wolf's memory alive in the outside world in the early twentieth century must be given to the naturalist George B. Grinnell. Little Wolf and Grinnell, met often, smoked together, and told stories. Grinnell selected Little Wolf as one of his important sources for his work on the Cheyennes, and Grinnell more than any contemporary, made Americans aware that Little Wolf, not Morning Star, was the principal leader of the Northern Cheyennes on the trek north. In a letter to a friend in 1925, Grinnell paid Little Wolf an ultimate tribute. "I knew old Little Wolf almost intimately," he wrote. "Toward the end of his life...I disregarded tribal feeling about him and used to pass him my pipe to smoke. I consider him, the greatest Indian I have ever known."¹¹

More recently, Cheyenne historian Leo Killsback related from a conversation he had with Eugene Little Coyote, a direct descendant of Little Wolf, and president of the Northern Cheyenne tribe from 2004–2007, that Little Wolf's deeds and style of leadership "should be used as an example of decolonization in today's struggles. Through the Medicine Way of achieving inner peace through remembering and taking command of their history the Cheyennes can still be inspired by Little Wolf in the seemingly never ending quest for sovereignty in their homelands, secured at such a precious cost in lives and endurance in 1878–1879. The results" of this, said Eugene Little Coyote, "would be truly amazing."¹²

9. For the story of the creation of the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation see, Orlan J. Svingen, *The Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1993).

10. Monnett, "Tell Them We are Going Home," 171–172.

11. Grinnell to R. S. Ellison, October 1, 1925, in folder 29, Robert S. Ellison Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

12. Leo Killsback, "The Legacy of Little Wolf: Rewriting and Rerighting Our Leaders Back into History," *Wicazo Sa Review* 26 (Spring 2011): 85–111.

John H. Monnett, *a native Kansan and graduate of the University of Kansas, is an award winning author of works on western history and emeritus professor of history at Metropolitan State University of Denver, Colorado.*

THE NORTHERN CHEYENNE VOICE: 135 YEARS AFTER
THE LONG JOURNEY HOME:

Jennie Parker, L. Jace Killsback, Rubie Sooktis

transcribed and edited by Leo Killsback

“We are still here”

by Jennie Parker

I want to tell you about the Northern Cheyennes and how we live today. When the Northern Cheyennes reached their homeland, and they refused to go back to the south, the United States government finally realized that they could not force them to go back. So they, in 1884, established our reservation. On March 19, 1900, by executive order they once again changed the reservation, expanding it and giving us more acreage; we were given a total of 444,497 acres, which we presently live on today. It is called the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. We have an enrollment of 10,865 Northern Cheyennes. According to the Southern Cheyenne enrollment office, there are 12,887 Southern Cheyennes. So today we Cheyennes are 23,042 strong! We are still here today.

Today we live like all of western society; we have adopted many of the ways, but we are also losing some of our traditions. The one thing that we still have is our beliefs and the strong spiritual energy that comes from our Sacred Hat and the Sacred Arrows that are still with us today. Our people survived because of those sacred bundles. We still have our ceremonies.

There was a time when the United States government did not allow the Cheyennes to acknowledge their beliefs and ceremonies, and the ceremonies had to be performed secretly. And finally the ceremonies were started again. I don't know if the government just forgot about us or if they had too many other things to do, but the Northern Cheyenne people started doing our religion again and having our ceremonies in public. Congress passed another law, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act that helped to give legal sanction for our beliefs. What we believe is not so different from what is written in the Bible. The act tells about singing, dancing, and fasting, and we have done that for many, many years.

We still have our chiefs, our societies; they play a strong role during our ceremonies and in making decisions that support our traditional ways. We have problems just like people on the outside. Today the Northern Cheyenne people rely on programs that include education and some people get food stamps, and our health care is funded through federal funds. We have problems that cause the breakdown of families, such as alcoholism, drug abuse, unemployment; but we have many good things. We have a college

We teach our young people about how our ancestors survived and that they were a strong people, and that we are still a strong people.



"Tell Him If He Tries To Send Us Back We Will Butcher Each Other With Our Own Knives," a drawing by Maynard Dixon, appeared in Edgar Beecher Bronson's article, "A Finish Fight for a Birthright, Little Wolf's Escape and Dull Knife's Capture," Pearson's Magazine (February 1909). It was reproduced as "The Defiance of Dull Knife," in Bronson's Reminiscences of a Ranchman, 1910 edition.

on our reservation, and it is close to home where many of our students can attend, and we have a successful rate of graduation on our reservation. We also have others that go away to college off of the reservation, and they are successful.

We were fortunate back in the 1970s when a generous man, T.R. Hughes, from Nebraska, brought buffalo up to our reservation and gave them to the Northern Cheyenne tribe. And we have buffalo today. We also have a gas station that is tribal and a fast food store. We have a bank with a Cheyenne member in charge. We have a casino that employs Cheyenne members.

We no longer have the ten bands that we had years ago. Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, and in 1935 we became citizens of this United States, but we were here before that law. With this law came changes for the people. We had chiefs that were in charge and different societies that played a role in different things within our tribe. With the 1934 Act, we had to start a new form of government. We had to elect a president of the tribe, a vice-president, and a tribal council.

We live today and continue to survive despite all of the different afflictions. We teach our young people about how our ancestors survived and that they were a strong people, and that we are still a strong people. We continue to survive despite all of the problems. We are still Cheyennes. It is ironic that the Punished Woman's Fork battle site will be known for the Cheyennes who only wanted to go home to the north. I will quote President Theodore Roosevelt who said, "I feel very

strongly that if any people are oppressed anywhere, the wrong inevitably reacts in the end on those who oppress them, for it is an immutable law in the spiritual world that no one can wrong others and yet in the end himself escape unhurt."

Jennie Parker, a descendent of Chief Little Wolf, is a Northern Cheyenne historian and elder.

Being Native to This Land

by L. Jace Killsback

Pevavoona'e! Voxaa'enestoo'e naheshevehe. Good morning! My Northern Cheyenne name is Screaming Eagle. However, I go by the name Jace Killsback, and I am the Busby District Representative on the Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council. I want to put into context that period of time when the Punished Woman's Fork battle took place and what the Northern Cheyennes were trying to do as indigenous people belonging to this land and what our purpose was. We were just trying to be human beings. We were trying to get home. Too often in history, scholars and authors will portray conflicts that occurred as battles. One side had an army; the other side had families, women and children. So those odds were not equal. I want to put

that into context because this battle was one of many as the U.S. Army chased Chief Dull Knife and Little Wolf and the Northern Cheyennes who followed them. It is one of the popular accounts in our history because of Chief Little Wolf's attempt to set a trap in which the majority of our disciplined warriors planned an ambush. But one warrior shot early and the whole event was in a sense, messed up. But we have to remember that back then young Northern Cheyennes at the age of thirteen were considered warriors. So our people evaded this capture. But again in the case for our people we were refugees coming from Indian Territory, trying to make it home. Jennie Parker reminded me of the real translation of what this battle meant for our people. It was "the Battle Where We Received Life to Return Back Home." Our translation here is going to be "the Battle of Punished Woman's Fork," but I think Cheyennes have another perception of what this battle meant to us and its significance.

My family is one of few that can trace direct lineage to Chief Dull Knife and his Cheyenne wife. Their daughter's daughter, my grandmother, was Bee Woman or Queen Bee Woman, Hattie Killsback, from whom we get our last name. Her daughter was Joann Limpy, Evanahane'e, Killsback woman, and her daughter is mother, Jackie Tang. Dull Knife had another wife, a Pawnee. Today a lot of our family members come from that lineage. Our family resides and is from the Busby District, the White River Band of Northern Cheyennes.

The last Indian raid, or the Dull Knife raid, has been falsely memorialized beginning with the first newspapers that printed that the Northern Cheyennes were on a warpath of revenge—a vengeful rage. Even today our people are still being labeled as aggressors as if they were attacking the peaceful whites and their settlements. Today we would call these white settlers illegal immigrants, and since our people were merely travelling through their familiar lands that they had known for thousands of years, we should memorialize our Cheyenne ancestors as the original peoples of this land—indigenous peoples, meaning "native, originating or naturally being in a particular place."

What does being native to this land, indigenous, mean? Native means originating, original. Native means a person is in a specified place by birth and residence, typically associated with a country, region, or nation. We are native to this land. But we are also native to a nation—the Northern Cheyenne Nation. We continue to struggle with this identity. Over 135 years of violence, forced assimilation, and acculturation has caused the deterioration of the foundations of our Native identity. Chief Dull Knife, my grandfather, was a leader of a Nation. He, along with Little Wolf and Wild Hog, understood the threats against our native identity. They fought and were willing to die for this identity. They were native. They should be remembered for what and who they fought for. They did not fight for the conventional things that we so carelessly desire today—status, ego, attention, validation, money, short-term gratification. They fought for a native identity that existed a thousand years before them and that will exist a thousand years after them.

The Punished Woman's Fork battle site is a particular place where the Northern Cheyenne people commemorate the battle. In relation to the time that Indian people have been around, this battle occurred in a mere fragment of time. This relationship of place to time is in response to a vast amount of land that Indian people held as theirs. The battle occurred in a small place. All of this land is ours. At one point there was no question about who we

We are native
to this land.
But we are
also native
to a nation—
the Northern
Cheyenne
Nation.

We have crossed
the human
bridge of unity to
commemorate . . .
the Battle of
Punished
Woman's Fork.
The gathering at
Scott City was a
rare moment
for all of us.

were. And this battle represents numerous conflicts between colonial forces and indigenous peoples that occurred over the land. Some lands were traded, some were sold, some were secured by the government through treaty or agreement. Other lands were taken violently through war and through battle between the colonizer and the colonized. This relationship of dominance allows for newcomers to treat indigenous people as aliens and sometimes subjugate them to unfair and unjust laws and policies. Today we can no longer accept this relationship of dominance. This is our land even though we all share in the occupation of this land now. We are indigenous. Our roots are deeper than others. Our ancestors wanted to secure this place for us and our later generations.

We are Natural Beings because, of course, we are human beings. What does this mean? What does it mean to be natural? A hundred and thirty five years ago nobody questioned what it meant to be an Indian; there wasn't a question about it. Nobody had to be enrolled, fill out paper work, and be part of an enrollment with a number. Today this enrollment process is one of the most challenging concepts to define. How difficult it must have been for our old tribal leaders, Dull Knife and Little Wolf, to try to convince the United States government to just leave us alone and let us be? How difficult was it for our grandparents and parents who survived the horrors of assimilation, racist policies, and boarding schools just because we wanted "to be?" How difficult is it for our youth today to just "be?" So like the Dog Soldier who stakes himself to the ground and fights to protect his honor and more importantly his people, so too shall we stand as the Northern Cheyennes, as modern warriors, to fight and protect our identity. We are native. We are a nation. Let us all together just be.

L. Jace Killsback, a member of the Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council, is a descendant of Chief Dull Knife

Surviving the Odds, People of Dull Knife and Little Wolf

by Rubie Sooktis

I'm a descendant of Chief Dull Knife. The Dull Knife descendants come from a plural marriage. My line descends from his Pawnee wife, Little Woman. There is a human part of Dull Knife, and we are part of that human part—the Dull Knife descendants. Between June 26, 1876, and June 9, 1878, Dull Knife lost five children and five others survived, and they lived to begin their lives on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. This is how the Dull Knife descendants began their life on the reservation. This human part I call "Surviving the Odds, People of Dull Knife and Little Wolf."

The morning star rises each day to bless us with its light of the coming new dawn. The morning star with its first light, to awaken all life, to yet begin another day, to do what we must fulfill to better the lives of one's family and people. Many Cheyenne names were taken from nature itself as was our grandfather's name, Morningstar. In many pages of Cheyenne

history our grandfather is better known as Dull Knife. While his given name at birth was Morningstar, the name “Dull Knife” was a nickname that stuck with our grandfather all his life. He was called Morningstar. In 1965 the symbol of the morning star in the tribe’s flag was officially adopted by the Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council during the administration of tribal chairman John Wooden Legs.

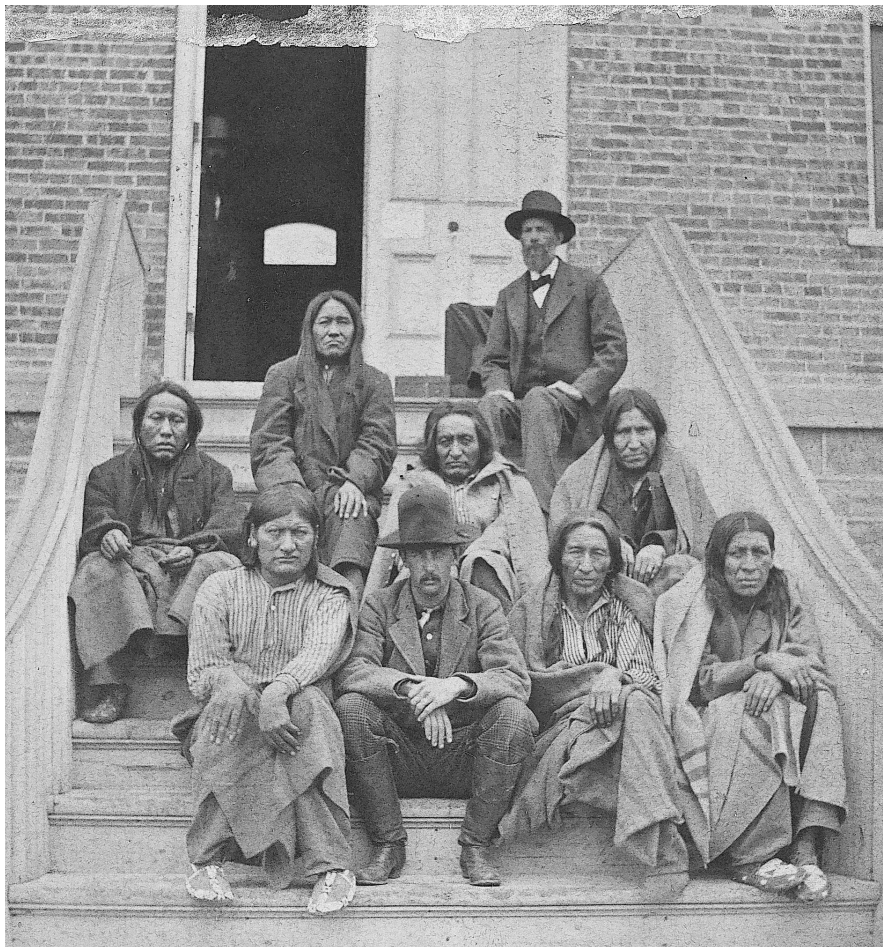
We have crossed the human bridge of unity to commemorate and celebrate the Battle of Punished Woman’s Fork. The gathering at Scott City was rare; a rare moment for all of us as never before has such a gathering happened with an invitation of a large number of the Northern Cheyenne people. Perhaps we can regard it in which our gathering will be remembered as a time of friendship, however brief or however lasting. Yet in visiting the battle site of the Punished Woman’s Fork, it was a reminder of another time, another war; personally it is extremely difficult for me to visit battle sites. It’s especially painful when a chapter of the Cheyenne history was made with bloodshed, but it’s unbecoming for a member of a Cheyenne chief’s family to express such

a difficult emotion—to weep. But our visit and gathering was not about us, it was about Chiefs Dull Knife and Little Wolf and their followers who made the journey home to the great northern plains against impossible odds.

The story of Dull Knife and Little Wolf leading the Northern Cheyennes home is maintained in both written form and oral tradition. The descendants of Little Wolf have their own stories like those of our stories as descendants of Morningstar. The oral history is alive today. It is a living history. The Northern Cheyenne people who travelled to Scott City make it the living history. It is a good day and a good time for the non-Northern Cheyennes to hear these stories; the many different things, the many different teachings, and family stories and teachings.

One day I would like to see the oral history and written history as equal parts; to learn and to accept that oral history has a value. I probably won’t see it in my lifetime.

The Battle at Punished Woman’s Fork was only one of the battles that the Northern Cheyenne people fought during the long walk home. The story of the walk north actually began on September 9, 1878, when they escaped from the Oklahoma Indian Territory and began their return home under gunfire. The people’s escape caused one of the greatest manhunts of the



Pictured here in Dodge City, Kansas, on April 30, 1879, where they were held for the murder of western Kansas settlers, this group of seven Northern Cheyennes included Wild Hog (front row, left) and Old Man (front row, second from right). Also pictured is Franklin G. Adams of the Kansas State Historical Society (upper right).

The great
northern plains
was our way of
life. We knew
the country,
we knew the
rivers, we knew
exactly where
to go to get
home.

nineteenth century with 10,000 U.S. soldiers and 5,000 civilian volunteers chasing them across Kansas, chasing them across Nebraska. They managed to elude the soldiers at the Battle of Turkey Springs near Freedom, Oklahoma, on September 13, 1878, and the Battles of Sand Creek [Little Sand Creek in southwest Kansas] on September 17, 21, 22, and finally on September 27 at the battle of Punished Woman's Fork. I learned about these sites on an oral basis. I knew them by their Northern Cheyenne names.

My mother talked about these places where the U.S. soldiers caught up with the Cheyennes. I heard about Turkey Springs, I heard about Sand Creek, I heard about the Punished Woman's Fork site. It was from that site that they ran for seven days, only stopping to rest. They ran until they reached the Crescent Lake Wildlife Refuge where they finally were able to rest and eat. I was told that they ran through places where animals didn't and couldn't go. So the Battle of Punished Woman's Fork was really the defining moment of the Northern Cheyenne people's survival.

On October 23, 1878, Dull Knife and his followers were captured near Fort Robinson, Nebraska, during a major snowstorm. They were prisoners, prisoners of war. They were at Fort Robinson until January 9, 1879, when they broke out. Little Wolf was further east, and I really believe to this day that the Northern Cheyenne people had a strategy. I really believe that the reason why Dull Knife and Little Wolf separated was because of the very fact that one of them would survive. I'm happy that they both survived.

The outbreak on January 9 was a tragic outbreak, but it was also for survival. As we read and as we heard from our elders, five days before the outbreak their water, food, and fuel were cut off in sub-zero temperatures. During the escape one of Dull Knife's daughters, Broken Foot Woman, asked her sister, "Why are they doing this to us, when all we did was come home?" That's a question that was later answered.

In our oral tradition, we also heard about the bloody footprints in the snow that led away from Fort Robinson. Those bloody footprints become our footprints of survival, when the Northern Cheyenne Reservation was established in November 18, 1884. Dull Knife didn't get to see the establishment of the reservation, but his children did, his grandchildren did, and we all did. People ask me, "Why did they go home?" Well, the great northern plains was our way of life. We knew the country, we knew the rivers, we knew exactly where to go to get home. Dull Knife and his people and Little Wolf and his followers walked here under gunfire in 1878. In 1994 two descendants, my brother Andrews Sooktis and Sam Spotted Elk Jr. and a professor from Connecticut walked the trail of Dull Knife and Little Wolf. They confirmed the Cheyenne names of these places where Dull Knife and Little Wolf's people were discovered. It was only then did I learn the name "Punish Woman's Fork."

Rubie Sooktis is a Northern Cheyenne tribal historian and a descendant of Chief Dull Knife.

Morning Star, Violence, and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

by *Leo Killsback*

Today we as Cheyennes struggle with our identities. We are supposed to know our families and where we come from at least four generations back. That is what I was told. Nowadays it is becoming more of a challenge because we have people who do not necessarily know their family background. I am a sixth generation descendant of Dull Knife and I wouldn't have known that if I didn't talk to my elders and family members. One of my elders is Rose Killsontop. She told me that Dull Knife's daughter's Cheyenne name was Esevoova'e. She is the one from whom my family descends. Her daughter was Hahnoma'he'e, Hattie Killsback, where our family gets its name. Her daughter, my grandmother, was Joann Limpy, and her daughter, my mother, is Jackie Limpy-Tang. Part of our tradition is to pass these Cheyenne names down to our family members. My name in Cheyenne is Heshe'eveesehe, which means Dirty Nose, but I would say it wrong as a child. I would say "dirty diaper" instead. Being the youngest of four boys, I didn't mind because the name probably fit me. I didn't realize that I was saying it wrong until later.

Recently there has been a lot of talk about terrorism, gun violence, chemical warfare, and biological warfare. If we put this talk into today's context, I think our people know what it is all about because we survived it. It's touching at times to hear our elders speak. They talked about some of the violence and we heard some amazing stories about our warriors who survived being shot maybe five or seven times, and they did not die. They weren't going to die because they have their children right next to them, their wives, and family members. When I think of these things today, these modern threats, it's really easy to make that connection about how terrible gun violence is and how terrible chemical warfare is to those victims.

Our people survived the worst of gun-violence at places like Sand Creek, Washita, and at Fort Robinson. Over the course of thirty to forty years Cheyennes, from both the Southern and Northern bands, were targeted by the U.S. military force more than any other Indian Nation on the plains. We know what gun violence is and what it can do to families, communities, and entire nations. Our people did what they could to survive.

The violence and resistance did not stop there. Losing land was a major blow to our people and culture, but I think what happened afterwards was much more destructive. Young Northern Cheyenne children were taken from their families and parents, forced to go to boarding schools and forced to learn a foreign language. I try to work on learning the language all of the time and encourage our young people to talk Cheyenne.

The assimilation process created a lot of problems and issues that our people are still suffering from. Assimilation, boarding schools, and the oppression of spiritual practices were unfair and unjust. After generations of suffering at the hands of assimilation-based policies, our people have long been free of the oppression, but we continue to contribute to our own destruction. This is evident in the statistics. Today our people still suffer from the long ravages of

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history, which are manifest as drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse, domestic violence, depression, and despair. I was born in the Cheyenne homeland and raised on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation in Busby, Montana. I always return to our homeland and devote more than one-third of the year to residing in the place where I grew up. I, as part of the Cheyenne Nation, also endure the challenges, but I also take on the burden of responsibility of assisting my people. This is the Cheyenne way.

I appreciate events in which both the Indian and non-Indian communities are brought together to have a dialogue. The town of Scott City and the Kansas Historical Society should be proud of their efforts to improve things by revisiting history that a lot of times is not something to be proud of from either perspective. I teach students who are from white families and have a white cultural background and may not have been taught the complete story in history. You have to teach it in a respectful manner.

One of the best examples in teaching about America's shameful history as it relates to native peoples is the truth and reconciliation efforts after the Nazi regime was overthrown. The United Nations held a convention and drew up a number of rules and passed them as laws outlining human rights that all people should enjoy. This would prevent anything like the Holocaust from ever happening again. Afterwards it became illegal to deny that it occurred. Indian people have been fighting for a similar type of movement because today many young people do not learn about the atrocities that were committed at Sand Creek and Washita, and in the aftermath of the boarding school era our children's spirits were broken.

Our people need healing, our people need justice. We need truth and reconciliation no different than the Holocaust survivors. Only now has the struggle of Indian and indigenous people reached the forefront. In the past our people were afforded neither the privilege nor the resources that we have now to promote healing. We need lawyers, doctors, and intellectuals—people who can reaffirm our existence and bring us out of this cycle of destruction.

In 2007 the Northern Cheyenne tribe passed a resolution that adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was under the leadership of various individuals who consisted of Cheyenne language speakers and those who cared about sacred sites and our culture and language. At that time the declaration was not yet endorsed by the United Nations. Two months later, the United Nations passed it, with the exception of three countries: New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. Recently President Barack Obama endorsed and supported the declaration. The remaining countries followed suit. It is a non-legal binding document that simply outlines the rights of indigenous peoples. I think if Indian peoples did not go through the violence and the struggles that they did, there would be no need for a declaration of rights for indigenous people. But because our people suffered so much, we have to take a stand to ensure that such violence never happens again. Article 7, clause 2, of the declaration states: "Indigenous peoples have the collective right to live in freedom, peace and security as distinct peoples and shall not be subjected to any act of genocide or any other act of violence, including forcibly removing children of the group to another group."

We Northern Cheyennes know what it is like to have our children taken from us and be forced to be educated in accordance with foreign ideals. We

are here, we've been here, and we will always be here. This is the truth. All that we ask is to be treated with respect, especially our children. Article 10 of the declaration states: "Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return." Our people were removed from their traditional homelands, which were secured by treaty, located in the northern plains. They were removed to Indian Territory. The leaders proclaimed that they wanted to return home. And they did.

Article 25 of the declaration states: "Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard." This clause is significant because we Northern Cheyennes know what it is like to be forcibly removed. Today we are here in our indigenous homeland. We Northern Cheyennes remember that this is our land through the oral tradition and because our leaders of the past secured it through treaty agreement. Some of our people believe that we have never given up claim to these lands, and one day the descendants of the first white settlers will find it necessary to return some of these lands in an effort to achieve a practical and realistic sense of justice, thus bringing much needed closure for both sides. This is what justice looks like.

As I flew in from Arizona I looked down and thought that Kansas was suffering from a drought, but at least the environment looked a lot better than the desert in the southwest. There is something familiar about these lands even though I have never been here. I imagined the landscape being all green and covered with buffalo. Our elders used to say that the land was covered with buffalo and in one story from our prophet Moste'eove, he said that one day they would be all gone. I remember one elder saying that they just could not believe that this could happen. It was an impossible thought that all of those buffalo would be gone. So when I flew over Kansas I had a nostalgic feeling, and when I landed I saw how flat the land was and imagined it full of buffalo.

Our goal is to live in peace and coexist. Today we can do this by holding on to our traditional ways, but we also have to take on the ways of our neighbors. We also hope that our neighbors take on our ways as well. And, they do, especially when they become ecologically conscious—conscious of what we are doing to our environment. Those are traditional Indian ways of thinking. To coexist means to share knowledge and sometimes our people do not know how to do this, especially since they were taught for so long to abandon their Indian ways. They were told that the only options of survival were to forget the old ways, learn English only, and take on the white man's values and religion. This is not living together, and it is not coexisting. We must collectively protect humanity, and what we all believe to be good values: peace and justice and the American ideologies of freedom and liberty. Indian people shouldn't have to give up their loyalty to their nation or their traditions just to be part of their own country and live in their own homeland.

Some of the most significant teachings that I learned about the trek north from Indian Territory of our people came from the stories of Vooheheve, my

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Leo Killsback, a Northern Cheyenne and assistant professor of American Indian Studies at Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, spoke at the Scott City Symposium on September 28, 2013. Courtesy of Leo Killsback.

grandfather Dull Knife. I almost quit school to do something else. It was at this time, when I wanted to give up, that I started studying more about our people and our people's trek home. I think it was about this time that I learned about Dull Knife's leadership and his persona. We had different types of chiefs and Little Wolf, he was a war chief, and we needed that kind of leader at the time because we were being attacked and we needed someone who could stand up and fight for us. That's what we needed at the time, and I think if we weren't being attacked, I don't think Little Wolf would have become a chief at such a young age, maybe not until his later years when he was older. But because we needed him, that's why our people chose him.

In our nation there were already chiefs who were in positions of leadership and who earned their place over the course of several years. The highest were the "Old Man Chiefs." Dull Knife was in this position. He wasn't necessarily a war chief, but an elder type of a leader—spiritual, humble, peaceful, and very patient. You are all familiar with the famous picture of him and Chief Little Wolf taken in 1873 at Washington, D.C. That photo was taken before the Black Hills were stolen. He and a Northern Cheyenne delegation went to Washington to try and win our land back or at least ask for protection from encroachment. He lived through a lot. In 1876, after the Little Bighorn Battle, at the Dull Knife Battle, he witnessed the death of his son who was shot in front of his eyes. In Indian Territory he had to make a decision, whether to let half of his people die slowly to disease and starvation or let half of his warriors die fighting as they returned home. In 1879 his two daughters did not survive the Fort Robinson Breakout; they were gunned down but he survived.

One of my favorite quotes from Chief Dull Knife is: "All that we ask is that we be allowed to live, and to live in peace." I believe this to be true today. Today I think if he saw us, he would be proud of us, but he would also give us some important advice. I don't know what he would say or what that advice would be, but I think it is important for us all to think about what he did for our people in the flight from Indian Territory in 1878. This may help us be better people even if we aren't leaders.

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The Northern Cheyenne Exodus in History and Memory: An Overview

by James N. Leiker and Ramon Powers

On the 135th anniversary of the Battle of Punished Woman's Fork, the organizers of the symposium described that battle as "a triumph of will and human spirit against all odds." It was, in truth, one event in the larger story of the Northern Cheyenne Exodus – the removal of nearly 1,000 members of the tribe to Indian Territory in 1877; their suffering in that foreign environment; the escape and flight north of 353 under Dull Knife and Little Wolf, as they crossed the plains and found refuge in the Sand Hills of Nebraska; and the subsequent incarceration of Dull Knife's band at Fort Robinson and their breakout and slaughter in January of 1879.¹ In addition to the more than sixty Northern Cheyennes who died at the hands of the military outside of Fort Robinson, approximately forty Kansas herders and settlers were killed in the flight north.

The story has been told many times, but a part of that story remained untold; the memory of the events of the Northern Cheyenne Exodus. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche believed that all living things suffer, but only human beings cannot abide suffering without meaning. The suffering created by these required all parties to seek meaning in that suffering.² Consequently, both Northern Cheyennes and Kansas settlers told stories that addressed the suffering they experienced as they recalled the tragic events. We hope the dedication of the Punished Woman's Fork site that took place during the symposium will be one of the ways the two divergent memories will find resolution.

For much of the last century, the story of the Northern Cheyenne flight was framed by whites in western Kansas after the settlements were attacked. A granite monument was erected in Oberlin, Kansas, in 1911 that commemorated the deaths along the Sappa Creek in 1878. In recalling the past, most western Kansans were affirming the progress they had achieved and the sacrifices endured to overcome their frontier past. To western Kansans it was all a matter of "survival of the fittest" in which the Anglo-Saxon was destined to

We hope the dedication of the Punished Woman's Fork site . . . will be one of the ways the two divergent memories of the exodus will find resolution.

1. Our use of the term "exodus" is not without controversy. Previous scholars have described it variously as an "odyssey" or "last Indian raid," or as with many Northern Cheyennes themselves, simply "the return home." It is important to recall that the majority of Northern Cheyennes remained in Indian Territory during the winter of 1878–1879, most either returning north years later or accepting the Southern Plains as their new home. At the risk of imposing on Native American history a concept borrowed from Judeo-Christian tradition, the term "exodus" implies the movement of oppressed peoples who seek a return to places with divine significance. For histories of the Northern Cheyenne Exodus, see: James N. Leiker and Ramon Powers, *The Northern Cheyenne Exodus in History and Memory* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011); John H. Monnett, *Tell Them We Are Going Home: The Odyssey of the Northern Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001); Stan Hoig, *Perilous Pursuit: The U.S. Cavalry and the Northern Cheyennes* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2002); Alan Boye, *Holding Stone Hands: On the Trail of the Cheyenne Exodus* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); Vernon R. and Albert G. Maddux, *In Dull Knife's Wake* (Norman, Okla.: Horse Creek Publications, 2003); Mari Sandoz, *Cheyenne Autumn* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992 [McGraw-Hill, 1953]).

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996 [1887]).



In September 1911 the state of Kansas and Decatur County constructed a memorial monument in the Oberlin Cemetery to honor the memory of nineteen settlers killed on September 30, 1878. Courtesy of Decatur County Last Indian Raid Museum, Oberlin, Kansas.

prevail. As the author of an early history of Kansas stated, "Right or wrong, nature takes its course and proves the contention of the scientists that the fittest will survive." Native peoples were regarded as part of nature that had to be subdued.³

Although whites seemed to have contempt for native peoples and their remains that lay beneath the hooves of grazing cattle (as stated by one source), some seemed more sympathetic. One victim of the events in northwest Kansas was a young Northern Cheyenne boy who—wounded and cut off from his fleeing tribesmen—was killed by cowboys. Charles Elliott Perkins, president of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, who enjoyed regular hunting trips to the area around Ludell, Kansas, in the 1890s, paid to erect a small monument with the following inscription: "An Indian boy about 19 years old was wounded and left behind on what has since been known as

Hundred Head draw, near where this stone stands he was killed on this spot Nov. 16, 1878, by Abbot and Harney, who were herding cattle there. The body was never recovered except by the coyotes."⁴ The stone Perkins built for the unnamed Cheyenne youth remains encircled by fencing wire in a pasture four miles east of Ludell.

Oberlin continued its commemoration of the 1878 events by creation of a permanent museum in the 1950s. They named it the "Last Indian Raid Museum." Its advent during Hollywood's "Golden Age of Westerns" aided its popularity. There was a proliferation of western movies and television shows like *Gunsmoke*, set in a highly fictionalized Dodge City, sparking national curiosity about cow towns and other Kansas sites that claimed connections to the mythic frontier. Other towns integrated the exodus into their histories but none have matched Oberlin's consistency. Scott City professes the designation "Last Indian Battle in Kansas" commemorating the clash between Northern Cheyennes and the U.S. Army at Punished Woman's Fork. Through much of the twentieth century the Battle Canyon site lay on privately owned ground. Though used for pasturage, generations of youngsters and historical enthusiasts explored the spot's remaining rifle pits, played in the notoriously named "Squaw's Den" where Cheyenne women and children huddled during the fight, and scoured the area for shell casings and arrowheads. In 1958 the landowner deeded the thirty-acre site to Scott County, which in turn leased it to the local historical society. In the early 1960s, community leaders organized a series of pageants reenacting the battle. Hundreds of people gathered each year at the site to recreate "in exact detail" the costumes of the cavalry and Indian warriors who clashed there. A promotional booklet recorded the story: "one of the epics of the

3. Adolph Roenigk, ed., *Pioneer History of Kansas* (Lincoln, Kans.: A. Roenigk, 1933)

4. Edith Perkins Cunningham, ed., *Family Letters and Reminiscences, 1865-1907* [of] *Charles Elliott Perkins and Edith Forbes Perkins* (Portland, Maine: Anthoensen Press, 1949), 239.

country's history, ranking high in the annals of heroism and bravery—not of the white man—but of the American Indian, whose determination and valor in the cause of freedom will ever serve as an example to oppressed people." Souvenir stands sold miniature tipis, beaded earrings, war bonnets, and other paraphernalia.⁵

How to explain this mid-century phenomena of Euro-Americans imagining a frontier past through the eyes of Northern Cheyennes? One possibility is that "playing Indian" and "playing pioneer" do not oppose each other and in fact are part of the same discourse. Both use nostalgia to attract people from struggling rural communities, beset by distant forces, back to a time of self-reliance and accordance with nature. Inhabitants of Oberlin and Scott City were not immune to larger attitudinal changes toward Indians in national culture. But unlike other Americans who could criticize Manifest Destiny from positions of detachment, plains residents have built lives and identities on real land bloodied by nineteenth-century conquest. Similar to a suburbanite who enjoys playing Confederates at Civil War reenactments, playing "Indian-pioneer" allows reconnection with simpler times, affirmation of natural, physical power, identification with underdogs, and perhaps even reconciliation with their lands' previous tenants who fought bravely for their homes and lost.

The tendency appears strongest in locales that claim some past violent episode, like a massacre or military battle. No similar remembering occurs in the Nebraska Sand Hills, where the Cheyennes evaded the army. In the 1970s a preservation society in northern Oklahoma called the Cherokee Strip Volunteer League began exploring the possibility of a historical marker identifying the Battle of Turkey Springs, where the first clash with U.S. troops occurred. Though Little Wolf deserves more credit for winning that engagement, local memory favors Dull Knife as the real hero. A miniature statue of Dull Knife and his followers, which is to be used as a model to raise funds for a life-size version on the actual Turkey Springs site, is located in the library at Northwest Oklahoma State in Alva.⁶

This shift in local memory had an earlier precedent in the first half of the twentieth century, when a Romantic view of Indians began to emerge among writers skeptical of the new, modern bureaucratic state. Many such romantic depictions took their cue from Earl Alonzo Brininstool, a freelance writer from Los Angeles who over the course of his career contributed dozens of books and articles involving western themes. In *Dull Knife, a Cheyenne Napoleon*, Brininstool showed a penchant for hyperbole and carelessness with facts, but readers forgave his inaccuracies in the rush to defend his master point: "Dull Knife was a born fighter . . . , a red Napoleon of the Plains, with a brain that would have done credit to a Washington or the great French general he

Unlike other Americans who could criticize Manifest Destiny from positions of detachment, plains residents have built lives and identities on real land bloodied by nineteenth-century conquest.

5. Leslie Linville, *Visiting Historic Sites on the Central Hi-Plains* (Osborne, Kans: Osborne County Farmer, 1979), 88–92; a serial pioneer history ran in the *Scott County News Chronicle* from July 9, 1959, to January 5, 1961. Additional background on the Battle Canyon site was provided in correspondence from Jerry Snyder to Ramon Powers, March 29, 2009. Quote is from a locally printed brochure titled "Squaw Den's Pageant," Scott County, 1960, no author given.

6. Brochure, "Battle of Turkey Springs, September 30, 1878," Cherokee Strip Volunteer League, Alva, Oklahoma, 1978; *Freedom Call* (Woods County, Oklahoma), October 12, 1978; and *Alva (Oklahoma) Review Courier*, September 29, 1978, and July 17, 2005.

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so closely resembled in his leadership." Brininstool crossed an interpretive threshold:

The primary cause of every Indian war in the United States was the greed of the white man for the lands occupied by the red man. In other words . . . the white man wanted it! . . . When the real history of our Indian wars shall be written as it should be written, and the wrongs and injustices of the red man truthfully told, the grievances of the Cheyennes will be told by a better pen than mine; but no more gallant spirit ever was exhibited on any battlefield in all the world's history than that shown by these devoted Cheyennes of brave old Dull Knife's band, in their last desperate fight for their rights.⁷

Self-published in 1935, *Dull Knife, a Cheyenne Napoleon* found a receptive audience among "Wild West" fans. By the Great Depression, pioneer tales singing the praises of civilization's triumph had lost cachet. In an era that idolized gangsters as folk heroes, Indians, gunfighters, and other social rebels from the frontier past now found a measure of admiration.

It would fall to Mari Sandoz—a native of the Nebraska Sand Hills who spent her adult life among New York's literary elite—to reconcile the distinct strands of local and national memory. She was born in 1896 along Nebraska's Niobrara River, the same land through which the Cheyennes led the army on a hellish chase only two decades before. Sandoz eschewed the sentimentality of pioneer narratives, offering readers gritty portrayals of flawed men and women who reflected the harshness of the land around them. She once explained that the pioneer was ever a misfit in his own community. That held true for her as well; having escaped western Nebraska to pursue a writing career, first in Lincoln then on the east coast, she returned often as though no community could ever satisfy her completely or for very long. Sandoz began researching the Northern Cheyennes' story in the late 1920s. Her mother's illness in 1937 caused a ten-year postponement. The delay actually proved beneficial since it gave Sandoz time to acquire practical experience on the Northern Cheyenne reservation. Sandoz became a ubiquitous spokesperson for government aid and highway-building, lobbying the tribe's cause on radio and television and making frequent trips to Washington to testify before Congress.⁸

From a strict empirical standpoint, the research behind *Cheyenne Autumn* fell short, even though Sandoz did employ some innovative methods. Among these certainly was a reliance on oral history, collected through her childhood discussions and subsequent interviews with Northern Cheyennes. Still, as professional historians and literary critics point out, Sandoz took considerable liberties in blurring fiction with non-fiction. Though she stuck to her facts loyally and precisely, she embellished characters and

7. E.A. Brininstool, *Dull Knife (A Cheyenne Napoleon): The Story of a Wronged and Outraged Indian Tribe, and the Most Masterful and Stubborn Resistance in the History of the American Indian* (Hollywood, Calif.: E.A. Brininstool, 1935), 6, 10; Brininstool, clippings from *Northwest Nebraska News*, January 10, 1935, in RG 965, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

8. See, Helen Winter Stauffer, *Mari Sandoz: Story Catcher of the Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982).

fictionalized dialogue to heighten her stories' dramatic effect. Sandoz upheld the primacy of sensation over knowledge when it came to place, believing that authors must physically and emotionally experience a landscape before writing about it. Since sensations are experienced subjectively, complete rational objectivity is impossible. Sandoz vehemently defended her works both as history, which uses facts, and literature, which conveys believable worlds through imagination. The Great Plains comprised that imagined world toward which she continually invited readers' attention. In that raw environment, natural men—be they pioneers or Indians—grapple with industrial civilization and monopolistic power. *Cheyenne Autumn's* strongest contribution lay not in its scholarly achievement but in its remarkable synthesis of the various strands of mythic history that had accumulated over the better part of seventy years.

Cheyenne Autumn went through several rejections before seeing print in 1953. Much of her narrative centers on the Cheyenne community, rich with descriptions of ceremonies, spirituality and family life. Sandoz explains the northwest Kansas attacks as the inability of elders to control young warriors, while the split between Dull Knife and Little Wolf arises from a dispute over their final destination. Reception of *Cheyenne Autumn* ran a wide gamut. At one end stood people like Father Peter Powell, whose own lifetime of research and storytelling about the Northern Cheyennes drew inspiration from Sandoz. Aware of the book's academic shortcomings, he long defended it as capturing "the heartbreaking mood and beauty" of the topic like no other writer, her voice "a love song to the Plains."

In 1964 the story met the world through a medium that writers and historians could only glimpse with jealousy. The director John Ford, who bragged that in his films he had "killed more Indians than Chivington, Beecher, and Custer put together," adapted Sandoz's book to film for Warner Bros. Studios. *Cheyenne Autumn* happened for Ford during the waning years of an illustrious career spanning fifty years and 136 films. Filming in picturesque Monument Valley, he became a famous visual director, but on set he could be a dictator; even John Wayne jumped when Ford barked orders. His popularity had peaked by the early 1960s, by which time a Ford western no longer meant automatic success. Although friends noticed personal changes in him: heavy drinking, less interest in work, he remained a player, producing movies that seem to indicate a contemplative turn in his life. In *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, Ford acknowledged that many "frontier values" rest on myth but to expose those myths would endanger the traditions built upon them; hence "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." With *Cheyenne Autumn*, the aging director—by then a legend in his own right—prepared to tackle the myths that he personally had created.⁹



In the 1950s Oberlin continued its commemoration of the 1878 events with the creation of a permanent museum identified as the "Last Indian Raid Museum." Its advent during Hollywood's "Golden Age of Westerns" aided in its popularity. Photograph courtesy of the authors.

9. Ronald L. Davis, *John Ford: Hollywood's Old Master* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).



Mari Sandoz, author of Cheyenne Autumn, was born in 1896 along Niobrara River in the Nebraska Sand Hills. From a strict empirical standpoint, the research behind Cheyenne Autumn fell short, even though Sandoz did employ some innovative methods such as her reliance on oral history. She took considerable liberties in blurring fiction with non-fiction, and although she stuck to her facts loyally and precisely, she embellished characters and fictionalized dialogue to heighten her stories' dramatic effect. Courtesy of Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center, Chadron, Nebraska.

Cheyenne Autumn became the seventh and final film that Ford shot in Monument Valley. Ford originally wanted Navajos to play Cheyennes but the studio squelched the idea, pushing him to hire “names.” Thus two of the film’s most ludicrous aspects were established from the outset: a story emanating from the grassy plains set in a southwestern desert; and Mexicans and Italians cast as Indians—Ricardo Montalban as Little Wolf, Gilbert Roland as Dull Knife, with Playboy-model turned actress Carroll Baker included for good measure. Spencer Tracy participated in early footage before wisely backing out, soon replaced by veteran actor Edward G. Robinson as a stately Carl Schurz. At age seventy, Ford’s energy level, as well as his hearing and sight, diminished considerably during filming, causing him to take shortcuts. By the time production wrapped up, he was exhausted, having completed a \$6

million film in three months.

Though historians are accustomed to groaning at the movies, *Cheyenne Autumn* took the bar to a new low. The movie opens in the “vast, barren land called Indian Territory in the American Southwest” where tipis—a plains habitation—dot the rocky landscape. All the genre’s familiar tropes appear in the first ten minutes: cavalry music, chanting Indians, stylized and simplistic dialogue, male protectiveness toward females, whinnying horses, and the white male protagonist’s John Wayne-like drawl, in this case spoken by Richard Widmark. Visually, Ford delivered on what he did best, providing beautiful, colorful scenes of Indians traveling on foot or horseback through painted, sagebrush-filled deserts. But as in so many of his films, visual splendor overrides geographic specificity. Indian Territory, Yellowstone, and Dodge City all appear as abstract places within a vague fictionalized West, detached from local contexts.

To its credit, *Cheyenne Autumn* tried to maintain focus on the injustice done the Cheyenne people, but where and from whom that injustice originates the story never says. Racist cowboys, apathetic bureaucrats, opportunistic journalists—all appear but none are held to blame. Despite a tough exterior, John Ford seemed personally hurt by the scathing reviews of *Cheyenne Autumn*, his last western. Critics sprinkled their columns with words like “rambling” and “disbelief.” Poor ticket sales indicate that audiences agreed. Mari Sandoz even made her disappointment public, stating in an interview, “They made it slow and dreadful, and this was a story of great pursuit. I don’t see how you can make a slow story about one of the great chases of history and make it dull.”¹⁰

It is tempting to join the many criticisms by describing *Cheyenne Autumn* as a setback in the memory of the exodus. But it may be more useful to analyze why a tragic story, filled with drama and meaning, should have failed in its

10. Sandoz to James R. Webb, July 25, 1964, and to Richard B. Williams, Sturgis, South Dakota, December 1, 1964, in Helen Winter Stauffer, ed., *Letters of Mari Sandoz* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 433–35; 442–43.

first—and to date, only—encounter with film. Certainly commercial demands for profit over authenticity, which led to compromises in location, casting and script, played the dominant role. Skilled in the art of visual narrative, Ford’s style did not lend itself well to a story where murderers, victims, and injustices flow from all sides. The same might be said of film in general and for that matter, of audiences’ own weak experience in accepting stories with moral complications. It was not for lack of trying. A generous appraisal of *Cheyenne Autumn* would label it a primitive first attempt at restoring historical balance to the western genre, a precursor to “revisionist” westerns like *Soldier Blue*, *Little Big Man*, and *Dances with Wolves*.

Kenneth Foote, author of *Shadowed Ground: America’s Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*, stated: “Conflict arises because it is nearly impossible to celebrate one side of the dispute without denigrating the other. . . . To celebrate the heroism of Native Americans resisting the destruction of other cultures flies in the face of an entrenched frontier mythology that celebrates the perseverance of white settlers in driving those cultures to extinction.”¹¹ Maybe, but the examples we have provided suggest the opposite: that for many residents of the rural Great Plains, frontier mythology has shown a remarkable capacity both to celebrate the perseverance of white pioneers and the perseverance of Indians defending their homes.

As such, their mythology may continue to draw them toward the land’s previous inhabitants, either for lessons on how to resist those forces, or should they fail how to accept the loss of their homes and communities with dignity. In 2008 the *McCook Daily Gazette* reported on Northern Cheyenne Dr. Richard Littlebear’s lecture in Oberlin with a haunting tribute titled “Listen to Both Sides”:

Echoing over the quiet hills southwest of Oberlin . . . through the deep-cut canyons . . . caught in the sharp limestone outcroppings . . . are the anguished cries of prairie settler families: Husbands, fathers, brothers killed as they worked the hay. Their horses stolen . . . lives shattered.

Listen again—closer. There are other cries—cries of hungry babies . . . mothers who haven’t enough to feed their children, to protect them from the cold. Husbands and fathers frustrated and angry because they can’t provide for their families. Their home is still so far away.¹²

If descendants of survivors of the last Indian raid can indeed “hear both sides” and sympathize with Northern Cheyennes trying to return home—albeit 135 years later—then we have reason for optimism. Cultural memory seldom seeks to understand the past for its own sake, and thus historians’ constant frustration when their empirical knowledge is disregarded for irrational myths and stories. But those stories provide deep insights if we look, for it is through remembering that cultures define themselves and their relations with others in the process. [KH]

11. Kenneth Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America’s Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 322.

12. Address by Richard Littlebear, Last Indian Raid Museum, Oberlin, Kansas, September 28, 2008; and *McCook Daily Gazette*, October 8, 2008, 1–2. Dr. Littlebear is president of Dull Knife College on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in Lama Deer, Montana.

For many residents of the rural Great Plains, frontier mythology has shown a remarkable capacity both to celebrate the perseverance of white pioneers and the perseverance of Indians defending their homes.