

Little Raven



Arapaho. Two images of Little Raven, a Native American (Arapaho) man. Both images are studio portraits (standing). One image depicts his profile, the other a full portrait. Little Raven holds a cane. He wears moccasins, leggings, a coat, and a vest. Between 1880-1910? Denver Public Library, Western History Collection. Call Number: X-32369.

Little Raven

When: c. 1810-1889

Where: Colorado and Oklahoma

Why Important: This progressive Southern Arapaho Chief sought peaceful relations between Native Americans and whites even amidst the Sand Creek Massacre.

His Story:

Little Raven was born around 1810 on the Plains near Nebraska. A talented mediator, he negotiated peace between the Southern Arapahoe, Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche, and Plains Apache in 1840. He was also known to befriend white Americans during the Gold Rush in Denver, where he welcomed them to his Denver tipi.

Despite Little Raven's efforts, peace was hard to maintain. White Americans drafted the Fort Wise Treaty of 1861 that forced the Arapahoe away from their homes in Colorado. Although many Arapaho chiefs did not sign the treaty, Little Raven did sign it in hopes of maintaining peace. However, he soon discovered that whites were violating the treaty. The Sand Creek Massacre furthered threatened any possible peace.

The Massacre occurred on November 29, 1864, when peaceful bands of Arapaho and Cheyenne Indians were told to camp near Fort Lyon; the US Government gave assurances that they would be regarded as friendly. This proved to be tragically untrue as Colonel Chivington ordered his troops to attack in complete disregard of the American flag and the white flag flown by the Arapaho. When the violence ended, over one hundred Native men, women, and children had been slain by the soldiers, tipis were destroyed and horses stolen. Little Raven and his band of Arapaho survived the massacre, but only because they camped far away from the other Cheyenne and Arapaho.

Chief Little Raven complained in vain: "It will be a very hard thing to leave the country that God gave us. Our friends are buried there, and we hate to leave these grounds. There at Sand Creek—White Antelope, and many other chiefs lie there; our women and children lie there. Our lodges were destroyed there, and our horses were taken from us."¹

Still Little Raven tried for peace and signed the Medicine Lodge Treaty of 1867, which moved the Southern Arapaho to a reservation in Indian Territory, now Oklahoma. Yet, just one year later, Little Raven and his followers had to flee for their lives to Fort Sill. His tribe was then moved to another reservation.

Little Raven traveled to Washington D.C. and spoke at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. President Grant even offered him a peace medal; however Little Raven said he had no peace talk to make because he had never been at war with whites.

He was a great speaker which certainly helped his efforts for peace. He worked hard for peace amongst all peoples. Little Raven finally moved to Cantonment (now Oklahoma) living at the military hospital. He died in 1889. People remember him for his peace efforts during a battle-torn era. Little Raven Street, between 15th and 20th Street in Denver, near the South Platte River, commemorates the Arapaho chief.

¹ http://www.denvergov.org/AboutDenver/history_char_raven.asp