

CAPROCK CHRONICLES

Quanah Parker: A Man of Two Worlds

Caprock Chronicles is edited by Jack Becker a librarian at Texas Tech University Libraries. This week's article is by frequent contributor, Chuck Lanehart, and is his final of three essays on Adobe Walls, located north of Amarillo.



Mackenzie's Raiders at the Battle of Palo Duro Canyon. Painting by Michael Gray.



**Chuck
Lanehart**

One of the greatest Native Americans was born on the Caprock, or perhaps elsewhere. In either case, Quanah Parker was a legendary presence on the Texas Plains and beyond.

Quanah's story begins with his mother, Cynthia Ann Parker, a white child who lived with her pioneer family at the East Texas settlement of Fort Parker in what is now Limestone County. In 1836, Comanches attacked, killing her father and several others and capturing 9-year-old Cynthia Ann, along with two women and two other children.



**Parker's Fort Massacre drawing published in 1912
in DeShields' Border Wars of Texas.**



**Cynthia Ann Parker
[PUBLIC DOMAIN]**



Col. Ranald Mackenzie [PUBLIC DOMAIN]

The other captives were eventually freed, but Cynthia Ann adopted Comanche ways. She married Noconi Comanche warrior Peta Nocona, and Quanah was born of their union in about 1845. A daughter, Prairie Flower, came later. Although Quanah believed Oklahoma was his birthplace, there is evidence he was born near Cedar Lake, northeast of Seminole, in Gaines County.

In 1860 at the Battle of the Pease River — in what is now Foard County — Texas Rangers reportedly killed Quanah's father and recaptured his mother and Prairie Flower. Teenaged Quanah was taken in by the Quahada Comanches of the Llano Estacado and he never saw his mother again.

Upon recapture, Cynthia Ann was welcomed by the Parker family but never fully adjusted to white ways. After Prairie Flower died in 1864, she became increasingly embittered over her lost children, eventually starving herself to death in 1870.

Meanwhile, Quanah became known among the warlike Quahadas as an accomplished horseman and a budding leader—ruthless, clever and fearless in battle. He rejected treaties with the United States which relocated Native Americans to reservations in Indian Territory, now Oklahoma.

In a campaign to find and subdue the Quahada Comanche, U.S. Army Col. Ranald Mackenzie's troops reached Blanco Canyon in Crosby County in 1871. It was the first such expedition to venture so deep into Comanche territory. Quanah's warriors attacked at midnight, stampeded some 70 of the cavalry's best horses and mules through the encampment, then disappeared.

Mackenzie — namesake of Lubbock's Mackenzie Park — soon gave up his search for the Quahadas.

One of Mackenzie's officers described Quanah in battle: "A large and powerfully built chief led the bunch, on a coal black racing pony.

Leaning forward upon his mane, his heels nervously working in the animal's side, with six-shooter poised in the air, he seemed the incarnation of savage, brutal joy."

In the spring of 1874, merchants established a buffalo hide trading post at Adobe Walls in the Texas Panhandle.

Quanah believed the settlement was a violation of the Medicine Lodge Treaty, which reserved the area as exclusive Indian hunting territory.

On June 27, 1874, Quanah led an attack on the post by combined forces of about 700 Comanche, Kiowa and Cheyenne warriors. They were turned back by 28 well-armed buffalo hunters, but other less-fortified sites across the plains soon felt the Indian's wrath.

The Red River War followed with Mackenzie's return. In the September 1874 Battle of Palo Duro Canyon, his forces destroyed Native American villages, killed some 1,500 Indian horses and wiped out their winter provisions. Only four braves died, but this last battle of the Texas Indian wars brought Comanche domination of the plains to an end.

In 1875, Quanah's people were the last Texas tribe to surrender. He led the hungry Quahada to a reservation in southwestern Indian Territory. Soon he was named chief, and Quanah oversaw the transition with remarkable ease, busying himself uniting the various Comanche bands. He worked to promote self-reliance, supported construction of schools and encouraged young people to learn the white man's ways.

Quanah endorsed agriculture and became a cattleman himself. He served as judge on the tribal court, negotiated agreements with white investors and fought attempts to revert to traditional ways.

But Quanah did not abandon all tradition, refusing to cut his long braids and maintaining a 22-room home for his seven wives and numerous children. He followed the teachings of the peyote-eating Native American Church and encouraged peyote use among his followers.

“White man goes into his churches to talk about Jesus,” Quanah said. “The Indian [goes] into his teepee to talk to Jesus.”



Quanah Parker [PUBLIC DOMAIN]

Quanah was perhaps the wealthiest Native American during his lifetime and bonded with the rich and powerful, including President Theodore Roosevelt and

iconic Panhandle rancher Charles Goodnight.

In 1901, the federal government divided the Kiowa-Comanche reservation into individual holdings and opened the area to settlement by outsiders.

Still, Quanah maintained his position as the most influential of the now-dispersed Comanches, operating his profitable ranch and continuing to seek business ties with whites.

Quanah died in 1911 and was buried in full Comanche regalia beside his mother and Prairie Flower at Post Oak Mission Cemetery near Cache, Oklahoma. Their graves were later relocated to Fort Sill.