

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE CONFEDERATED PEORIA TRIBE

In Union There is Strength

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The Confederated Peoria were originally a group of independent related tribes from the Illinois region. Most supported the French during the French and Indian War and suffered for it. These tribes split during the American Revolution with some supporting Britain and some the colonies. Between the wars and disease the Peoria, Piankishaw, Wea and Kaskaskia all suffered heavy population loss. The anthropologist Mooney suggested a combined population of around 5,000 at its peak. By 1804 it was estimated in a Spanish report that there were only 50 Peoria men left. By 1818 the surviving Peoria united with the remaining Kaskaskia. The same year the Piankishaw and Wea survivors united together. By then the two "united bands" had been removed to Southwest Missouri. A new treaty was signed removing them further west into the area of the Permanent Indian Frontier and the groups started moving on their own before it was even ratified by Congress.

The Permanent Indian Frontier was supposed to be the boundary for western white settlement when it went into effect around 1828. It contained a series of forts from Ft Snelling in Minnesota to Ft Jesup, Louisiana to serve as buffers between the United States and the various tribes that were being resettled. These forts were also designed to serve as buffers between the resettled local tribes and the Immigrant Eastern tribes. In this area "Permanent" lasted just 26 years.

In 1828 the groups were beginning to move west although stragglers would continue coming in over the next several years. Within two years they were having problems with the Kansa. According to a letter sent to Superintendent William Clark they "were being infested by the Kansa, what they do not beg from us they steal....We are putting in our corn fields and cannot lay down a hoe or axe but that they take them and they strip our horses of their bells". Things did settle down some as the new communities began to develop. Later that year a band of Wea from Indiana came in and settled in what would become eastern Miami County and a group of 19 Kaskaskia settled with the remainder of their tribes in Franklin County along the Marais des Cygnes.

By 1832 the government licensed traders to establish posts near the village sites and the missionaries were right behind. One of the reasons the missionaries often received government assistance was their role in "civilizing" the "Native". By converting the "Native" economy from hunting and gathering to more intensive cultivation it was believed it would be easier to keep them within their designated landholdings. By teaching farming and manual labor skills to the boys and sewing, cooking and the "domestic arts" to the girls the foundation was being laid to make the students forget their tribal roots and culture. Eventually it was believed these students would intermarry with the whites and the "Native problem" would cease to exist. Instead this ethnic group would go on to become "functioning members" of white society and eventually good, taxpaying

citizens. The Peoria Methodist Mission was established under Reverend Slavens near the present town of Peoria. The school attached to it had 24 students the next year. In 1840 it reported a church membership of 40 and was closed later in the year. The Presbyterians established a mission and school for the Wea near present Paola. That one lasted about 5 years.

In 1834 a sub agency for the Shawnee, Ottawa, Wea-Piankishaw and Peoria-Kaskaskia was established. An Office of Indian Affairs Report in 1834 gave population figures of between 128 and 140 for the combined Peoria and Kaskaskia and between 394 and 405 for the combined Piankishaw and Wea tribe. The Shawnee Sub Agency was replaced in 1837 with the Osage River Sub Agency located at the old Presbyterian Mission just outside present Paola. In 1844 there was heavy flooding along the Marais des Cygnes, Kansas and Missouri Rivers. The next year the government purchased and distributed 4000 bushels of corn to feed the Potawatomi, Peoria, Wea and the most recent arrivals, the Miami, who were settled just south of the Piankishaw-Wea.

In 1847 the Potawatomi were removed to their "New" reservation where some remain as the Prairie Band today. One account stated they received \$60,000 with hundreds of whites, blacks, Wea, Piankishaw, Peoria, Kaskaskia, Miami, Shawnee, Sac, Fox Chippewa and Ottawa selling horses, beef, pork, vegetables, breads and goods and between 16 and 17 stores going. (Jotham Meekers Diary cited in Barry). 1848 saw more Miami arrivals and a Catholic Mission and Manual Labor School established at Miami Village. The school lasted less than a year.

1851 saw the establishment of the Osage River Agency overseeing the Miami, Wea, Piankishaw and Peoria-Kaskaskia. By 1854 there were only 250 Miami and 259 of the Confederated Piankishaw-Wea, Peoria-Kaskaskia left after a severe cholera outbreak. This was also the year the Kansas-Nebraska Act opened the territory for white settlement and more lands were ceded to the government as a result. At this time the two bands officially joined into what became known as the Confederated Peoria Tribe. With the flood gates open and less land available to the tribe, the handwriting was clearly on the wall. The Permanent Indian Frontier wasn't permanent after all. At this point the Confederated Peoria had to make a choice. The first option which had failed so often in the past was simply to wait stoically for the next phase of removal to begin. The second option was being adopted by other tribes and the jury was still out on whether it would be successful. In an effort to prove they could be good neighbors who did not have to be removed to the wilderness members of the tribe formed a partnership with trusted whites in the form of a town company.

In 1855 the Paola Town Company was formed with a partnership between Confederated Peoria tribal members and new white settlers. The President of the Town Company was Baptiste Peoria the head of the Confederated Peoria. He had previously settled in the vicinity of what would become Paola and agreed to sell adjoining lands but with some stipulations. The area which is today Paola's town square was never to have a commercial structure on it or the land would revert to the company and, it was implied, to the tribe. The town company consisted of both white settlers and tribal members, both those who were born into the tribe and those adopted or married into the tribe. The hope appears to have been to make money and establish that the tribe could be a good neighbor if allowed to stay, rather than being forced to relocate later.

Between Bleeding Kansas and the Civil War all the tribes found themselves in a difficult spot. Everyone (white) seemed to feel that resources and private property belonging to tribal members was free for the taking and the further you were from the troubles the better off you were. Few members of the Consolidated

Peoria took part in the conflict because it was increasingly clear that no matter who won the tribes were still going to be the losers. A number of treaties were signed in 1854 opening the tribal lands for sale to the new white settlers. Remaining tribal lands were often allocated to individuals and families. A central theme of understanding was that lands allocated to tribal members in severalty (individual ownership) would not be taxed until five years after statehood. Since Kansas did not become a state until 1861 the lands should have been exempt from property tax until 1866. In 1862 the State of Kansas began a series of tax sales for Indian owned lands and made it very plain they wanted NO tribes left in the state when it was finished. A number of tribes sued and the case went before the United States Supreme Court which upheld the tribal position. Kansas ignored the Supreme Court ruling and continued selling land, pleading that since the state was at war it needed the additional revenues. After the War final negotiations were carried out leaving only two options- renounce your tribe and apply for citizenship or remove to the southern Indian lands that would become Indian Territory and later Oklahoma. The Confederated Peoria, like many other tribes split over the issue. Even Baptiste Peoria's own family split with wife Mary Ann vowing to remain where she was unless forced out at bayonet point. To the people of Paola she became known as "Mother Batees" while her husband Baptiste held to his role and his people and removed to the new Indian Territory in present Oklahoma where the tribe remains today as **the Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma**.

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