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WICHITA INDIANS
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THE WICHITA INDIANS and allied tribes
WACO, TOWAKONI, AND KICHAJ

THE WICHITA CONFEDERACY is made up of four tribes belonging to the Caddoan linguistic stock. Wichita, Waco, Towakoni or Tawakoni, and Kichai. The life of these tribes was a combination of the semi-sedentary, agricultural existence of the south central tribes and of the wandering, hunting life of the Plains peoples. Today the four groups are living on allotted land in Caddo County, in western Oklahoma, to the north of Anadarko. The 1935 population of the combined groups is 350*. All but a few dozen are Wichita. This tribe has been increasing steadily in recent years. The Wichita were over 90 per cent full blood in 1910.

While these four tribes were once distinct, they have lived together so long that they have one culture. No information is available as to small tribal differences in customs, etc. The Wichita, Towakoni and Waco speak dialects of the Caddoan type which are mutually intelligible. Kichai is a related language but is not understood by the others.

HISTORY. The Wichita were found by Coronado in 1541 in central Kansas. Osage and Chickasaw raids forced them southwest to the upper reaches of the Red and Brazos rivers in northeast Texas. Until 1837 they roamed the country around the Wichita mountains in southwest Oklahoma. From then on they were placed on a series of reservations in the general neighborhood. In 1867 their present home was settled.

The Towakoni and Waco were found in the early 18th century on the middle of the Brazos and Trinity rivers in eastern Texas in the general neighborhood of the present city of Waco. They remained in this region under Spanish, French, Texan and American rule until 1855, when they were placed on a reservation on the Brazos, from which they were driven by the Texans in 1859. They then joined the Wichita.

The Kichai formerly lived between the Red and Trinity rivers in eastern Texas. The principal village of 1772 was near the present Palestine, Texas. In 1855 they joined the Waco at the Brazos reservation and fled with them to the Wichita.

HABITAT. High, rolling, broken prairie, with sandy soil and a few well timbered watercourses. Rainfall was slight, but the country was fairly well watered in places.

PHYSIQUE. The people are short and stocky, with a noticeably dark skin.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION. The tribes were divided into village units, each under the leadership of a chief. The chieftainship did not pass from father to son unless the son displayed ability, bravery and generosity equal to that of his father. Generosity and kindness were the most important of these qualities. The chief was elected by the leading warriors, and was at all times responsible to them. Yet his power seems to have been greater than among most Plains tribes. Under him was a sub-chief who had entire charge of the moving of villages and of the choosing and laying out of new sites. The elaborate ceremonies were in charge of medicine men and priests, helped by one or more servants chosen from the people. These might later become medicine men. Rank in the village was determined by ability in war and by the possession of wealth. There were no clans or other exogamous groups.

SOCIETIES. There were religious societies for men and women. They were semi-secret and could be entered by any one at will. A slight payment was made to the narrator of the traditions of the society. There were no hereditary memberships.

RELIGION. The Wichita gods are called "dreams." There are heavenly gods and those on earth. The heavenly gods are headed by the Creator. Next in power is the Sun, after whom comes a long procession

of star gods headed by the Morning-star. These star gods far outnumbered all other dieties. Finally there is the Moon, the special diety of women. Of the gods below the Water goddess and Mother-earth are the leaders. Offerings and prayers are also made to animals, especially those with magic power who are guardians of the medicine men. The religious system of the Wichita may be called a star cult, much like that of the Pawnee but less elaborate.

There were ceremonies performed by the various societies. The Deer dance was the most important. Other dances were held to bring good crops and hunting, to obtain magic power and good luck in war. There were four dances for women in connection with the return of successful war parties. Besides these ceremonies there were prayers and offerings made to the various gods by individuals in connection with every activity. The Ghost Dance of the nineties took strong hold on the Wichita. Today the peyote cult has considerable following.

DWELLINGS AND VILLAGES. There were two types of houses. During the buffalo hunt the ordinary hide tipi of the Plains tribes was used, the three-pole foundation being favored. (See leaflet 19.) The other type was the bee-hive shaped grass lodge, occupied by several families, which was peculiar to these people and to the related Caddo confederacy. Eight to sixteen posts 12 to 15 feet high were set in a circle 15 to 30 feet across. Their tops were connected with cross pieces. Around this frame and several feet outside it was set a circle of long slender poles. The tops were tied together and the individual poles were tied to the cross pieces of the frame. Horizontal rows of long willow rods were tied around the poles. To this frame was tied a thatch of bundles of long coarse grass. Additional horizontal poles were tied on top of the thatch to hold it in place. A smoke hole was left open east of the peak. On top of the house was a peak of grass surrounded by the tips of four wall poles pointing in the four directions. The houses were about 25 feet high. Long ago there were four doors, those at the north and south being for ceremonial use. In more recent times there are only east and west openings, which are closed by movable, unattached panels of rods and grass.

Inside there was a central fire pit. Platforms for sleeping and storage ran around the walls. On them were reed mats and buffalo robes. Each bed had hide curtains.

As many as 70 to 80 of these houses might be in a village. Besides the houses there were summer shelters and drying frames. Fluctuations in war and the food supply often caused the moving of the villages. The old houses were abandoned and new ones made as needed. Around the villages were many acres of fields and gardens.

FOOD. Meat was obtained from the buffalo and other animals. It was eaten fresh or dried for storage. From their fields the people obtained corn, squash, melons, beans, peas and perhaps other vegetables. No doubt they also gathered wild crops of fruits, nuts, berries and seeds. Corn was ground in a log mortar with a long heavy wood pestle or on stone metates. Pumpkins and similar vegetables were cut into long strips for drying. Tobacco was cultivated.

CLOTHING. Before white influence made itself felt clothing was very scanty. The men wore a breech cloth and moccasins and the women a knee-length hide skirt and moccasin leggings covering the calf. The men wore leggings on occasion. The skin shirt was not made. For warmth the buffalo robe was used by both sexes. This costume vanished long ago. Today the clothing of the whites is generally used. The men wore many metal pendants hanging from four holes pierced through the lobe of the ear.

TATTOOING was very extensively practised by the tribe. In the sign language the gesture for Wichita is based on their fondness for tattooing. The men were marked about the eyes and mouth, on the backs of the hands, along the arms and

across the chest. The women's designs were on the nose, mouth and jaw, around the neck, down the arms and on and around the breasts. The men's designs were star symbols and the whole design on the women was taken from the buffalo. The women were tattooed to distinguish them from their slaves and from the women of other tribes.

WAR. While small in number and generally peaceful the Wichita were courageous and successful fighters. War parties set out to win glory by counting coups or taking scalps, or to steal women for slaves. The Apache, Osage and Tonkawa, in the order named, were their worst enemies. There is no record of distinctive weapons or tactics. Bows and arrows, knives, clubs, shields, etc., must have been used. Horses and mules were obtained very early and made the long raids against the Apache possible.

ARTS AND CRAFTS. Pottery was once extensively made, but no information is available as to its appearance. Basketry is mentioned but again data is lacking. Bowls and other utensils were made of wood, and horns were shaped into spoons. The culture of the prehistoric Caddo tribes described in reference 10 is possibly something like that of the early Wichita. Hide dressing was of the ordinary Plains type. Beading was done, small, isolated designs with white edging being used.

GAMES. Archery, double-ball, hoop-and-pole, shinny and racing games were active sports. Dice and guessing games were played. Stilts and swings were used. All games were played in a ceremonial manner.

CHARACTER. The morality of the Wichita is very high. Their life was well regulated and they fought but little with other tribes. Towards the whites they have been uniformly friendly. No other tribe is said to have surpassed them in this respect.

CUSTOMS. Children were born in the lodge. The husband stayed away for four days. The child was at once washed in the river. Its cradle was made by a woman of exceptionally good health. A name was often chosen for the child before its birth. If this was not done the child was not named until it had done something to suggest a name. If it was sickly the name might often be changed. Marriages were arranged by relatives. The girls were married at about 16, the boys when able to provide for a family. A girl's parents could break up a marriage if the husband was not to their liking. The dead were dressed and painted and kept at home until a grave had been dug on a nearby hill. The body and all war equipment but the shield were placed in the grave by someone chosen to carry out the rite. This person was customarily adopted by the family of the deceased after the funeral. The body was laid at full length, with the head to the east. The soul was believed to go to Spirit-land, where the old life was lived in all its perfection. Mourning on the part of the entire village lasted but four days. It ended with a ceremony in the mourners lodge.

MYTHOLOGY. The myths of the Wichita tell of the creation of the world and its peoples, their growing wickedness and destruction by a flood, the re-peopling by two survivors, and finally of the end of the world, which will be followed by a new creation.

Compiled from the following sources by F. H. Douglas.

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Pictures 2, 3, 5, 11; history, 2; houses, 2, 3; tribal customs, 1; food, clothing, crafts, 2; myths, religion, 1, 10.

*Reduction from 1931 figure due to reclassification, not decrease.