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Fruitland: The Stanley Quaker Mission to the Kaw

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THOMAS STANLEY FAMILY HOME
Lyon County Historical Society

Fruitland: The Stanley Quaker Mission to the Kaw

In 1833, as a boy of fifteen in the Quaker settlement of Salem, Ohio, Thomas Stanley was inspired to take up the missionary life based on discussions he overheard about a widely circulated letter, originally published in the March 1833 edition of the *Christian Advocate and Journal*.



The discussions had to do with correspondence written by William Walker, an educated Christian Wyandot half-breed who visited the West in 1832. He was a member of a tribal delegation exploring the area after learning that the U.S. government planned to move all Native American tribes east of the Mississippi River to lands in present-day Kansas and Nebraska.

The Walker/Disoway letter related an account told to him by William Clark, of Lewis & Clark Expedition

fame, about how four chiefs from the Flathead and Nez Perce tribes in the far northwest walked to St. Louis to find the “right way” to worship the Great Spirit. Clark was at the time Superintendent of Indian Affairs.

According to historian Bernard DeVoto, what the chiefs really wanted was the secret to the white man’s power. “When they decided to ask for instruction in religion, they wanted to increase their power. They wanted, that is, to increase their magical control of nature in order

to acquire objects which the white man possessed or knew how to make: guns and powder and other weapons most of all, tools, needles, beads, blankets, cloth, garments, alcohol, mirrors, and all the other goods of civilization.”

Walker’s letter also called upon the church “to awaken from her slumbers and go forth in her strength to the salvation of those wandering sons of our native forests. What,” he asked, “could be more worthy?”

After the Walker letter had been read throughout the country, Christians representing several denominations, including the Society of Friends or Quakers, planned missions to Native American tribes in the West. Thomas, a grandson of John Woolman (1720-1772), the famous Quaker known for his humanitarian concerns, was moved to act on the calling he had felt four years earlier when he heard at age nineteen about a Quaker mission to the Shawnee in what is now Merriam, Kansas.

Thomas and his wife Mary (Wilson)

traveled by boat to that mission and a year later were appointed its superintendents. While not very successful at converting the Shawnee, the Stanleys were able to gain enough trust that a number of Shawnee parents enrolled their children in the mission’s school. One Shawnee woman would, at a memorial to the couple after their death, recall Thomas and Mary’s efforts: “I was quite young and pretty wild,” she said, “and our dear friends had quite a hard and laborious work to go through when they took charge of us ‘wild hides’ in that school. But they were always so good and just like father and mother, subdued us with love and kindness, always doing something to better our condition in life.” Charles Bluejacket, an important Shawnee Chief, and other notable tribal members were educated at the school.

According to the Stanley’s granddaughter, Pearl Dixon, in addition to reading and writing, the Shawnee were taught to be industrious and honest.

“Nothing was given to them free of



KANSA MEN AND BOYS IN FRONT OF
THE QUAKER MISSION AT BIG JOHN CREEK.

Photographed by J.B. Reiff, Council Grove

Courtesy Scott Brockelman

charge unless they were in dire need and not able to earn it,” she wrote. “They were taught how to sow and to reap; how to grow fruit trees and the use of farm implements.”

In 1845 the couple returned to Ohio and then moved to Iowa. In 1852, Thomas again felt the call and left his family to visit the Kansa or Kaw tribe at Council Grove in what was then Indian Territory. Shortly after, he made a trip to Washington, D.C., to seek funds for a Quaker mission from

President Franklin Pierce. However, the funds had already been allocated to the Methodist Episcopal South. It was the first of six trips Thomas made to lobby three different presidents on behalf of Native Americans.

After a second trip to Washington in 1857, Thomas Stanley moved his family to settle among the Kaw. Only a flag marked the place when they arrived at Emporia by wagon. Traveling on to their destination, Americus, nine miles northwest, they found only a few



THOMAS H. AND MARY W. STANLEY,
"60 Years Among The Indians"
 by Pearl Dixon

houses. As granddaughter Pearl tells the story:

All this country was then occupied by the Kaw Indians, who were camped around. Not long after the arrival of the new white party, two of Thomas Stanley's yoked oxen wandered away from the herd. When found in a swamp one was lying dead, having been drowned, while his yoke-fellow stood by patiently. Liberal Thomas, not willing that the good meat be wasted when it might furnish a treat for his Indians,

set out on foot for the nearest Indian camp, which was four miles distant. Upon arriving there, he shook hands with all as a token of his good will and said as best he could, 'Come, get the meat.' Because of this incident, which showed the love and good will of the missionary, the Indians gave him the name of Toppoosca, which means father. They also named Mary, his wife, Ewa, which is mother in their language.

In the spring of 1858 the family had settled on a claim about 3.5 miles west of

Americus and a mile south of the Neosho River. It would be their home for the rest of their lives.

"Quaker families, many familiar with the land because of their previous association with the Shawnee Quaker Mission, began to enter the territory when it was first opened to settlement in 1854. They settled in colonies, the largest being Springdale (near Leavenworth), Spring Grove (near Osawatomie), and Cottonwood (near Emporia). By the end of the year 1857, about 240 people had come to these settlements." The Stanleys were members of the Cottonwood meeting.

In March and April 1858, these isolated groups were visited by two itinerant English ministers, Robert and Sarah Lindsey, who were typical of the traveling ministers among Quakers of the nineteenth century. From Sarah Lindsey's diary of the trip:

4th 4 mo. First day. At Thomas Stanley's 8 miles from Emporia. This individual along with his wife & children are living in a temporary one-roomed

house the walls of which are of rough boards driven into the ground. T. S. has interested himself a good deal about the Kaw Indians, and is now awaiting the decision, respecting the settlement of land to which this tribe of Indians are supposed to have a claim, but which is disputed by some of the white settlers. This tribe moves about & lives in tents, being but partly civilized, but they wish T. Stanley to open a mission for them.

In 1862 Thomas planted a seven-acre orchard of fruit trees that fed a great many as it matured. That same year a fall prairie fire destroyed the Stanley's barns, fencing, hay and stored grain.

Accounts show Mary was no less a missionary in spirit than her husband. She managed the household, leaving Thomas free to follow his callings. "Every garment from the baby's little socks to the father's heavy overcoat," according to granddaughter Pearl, "was the work of her nimble fingers." She also canned the orchard and garden produce.

By now the Kaw trusted the family,

and their home became a refuge for the tribe. The Stanleys gave freely of their fruit, vegetables and milk to those in need, never locked the door, and Thomas never carried a weapon. When a Kaw wished to go on a buffalo hunt he often brought family members to camp near the Stanley cabin, knowing that they would be safe there.

In 1864 the Stanleys built a large stone house on their land. From it they could see for miles in every direction. It was called “the traveler’s home, the Indian’s home; the home of any and all who passed that way.”

In 1866 at the request of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the Stanleys took charge of the Quaker Kaw Mission that had been established in 1863 near the mouth of Big John Creek. They moved back to their home when the school was closed later that year.

Inspired by the Stanley’s orchard and those of others, the neighborhood west of Americus by this time had become known as Fruitland. Thomas helped build

the Fruitland schoolhouse, which was also used for religious services. Emporia State University’s Ross Natural History Reservation now occupies the site.

When President Ulysses S. Grant was inaugurated in 1869, he initiated a “Peace Policy,” an attempt to take politics out of the management of Native American affairs by appointing different religious denominations as agents to the

“His tall, square-built figure clad in a big overcoat,” relates one account, “might often be seen traversing the wide prairies alone.”

tribes. Thomas Stanley again traveled to Washington as part of a Quaker committee. Tribes that came under the care of the Quakers included the Kickapoo, Shawnee, Potawatomi, Kansa, Osage, Quapaw, Sac and Fox, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Wichita, Kiowa, Comanche and Apache.

As white settlers continued to encroach on the Kaw Reservation, stealing its resources and squatting on its land, the government began to consider moving the tribe to Oklahoma. Thomas visited the territory in 1870 to find a suitable location for the tribe.

Adding another betrayal to the long list of broken treaties, the Kaw were forced to move to Oklahoma Indian Territory in 1873. Thomas was appointed agriculturalist, or farmer for the Kaw after their move. In this work he taught fruit growing and farming, and supplied the Kaw with hundreds of trees from his own nursery. He made the 240-mile trip to the new Kaw territory on horseback and on foot. “His tall, square-built figure clad in a big overcoat,” relates one account, “might often be seen traversing the wide prairies alone.” He always carried with him a letter of introduction from the President of the United States, and a letter of endorsement from the church.

In 1890 Thomas and Mary celebrated

their 50th wedding anniversary with friends and family at the large stone house on the hill. Thomas passed away in 1902 and Mary in 1909. They are both buried in the Fruitland Cemetery. The house was torn down in the 1930s and today all that remains of the orchard are a few pear trees. The stone wall that surrounded the seven-acre orchard was dismantled and moved to the ESU campus where it is now a low wall encircling Welch Stadium.

During their tenure as Native American agents, the Quakers are credited with the establishment of a school system, development of agricultural instruction, training of Native American women in domestic arts, and teaching the principles of Christianity by precept and example.

Michael Stubbs is a historian of Kansas and the Flint Hills. He is the founder of the Mt. Mitchell Prairie Guards and an activist concerned with community affairs. One of his projects was naming all the roads in Wabaunsee County. He lives near Eskridge.