

The Absentee Shawnees in Oklahoma

The Shawnees who eventually became known as the Absentees were thus composed of Shawnees who had been living in Texas, Arkansas, and Indian Territory during the first half of the 19th century. Meanwhile, the main body of the Shawnees were back in the United States, though probably groups and individual families drifted down to live with the southern groups from time to time. The Shawnees who had formerly stayed at Cape Girardeau, Missouri moved to a reservation in Kansas in 1825. In 1831 the Ohio Shawnees had also been moved to the Kansas reservation. Thus most of the Shawnees were living in Kansas while the groups which later became Absentees were living in Texas and Indian Territory.

In 1854 the Kansas Shawnees entered into a treaty with the United States. The signers of the treaty for the Shawnees were the principal chiefs, Joseph Parks and Black Hoof, and delegates George McDougal, Longtail, George Bluejacket, Graham Rogers, Black Bob and Henry Blue Jacket. By this treaty the Shawnees ceded their Kansas reservation to the United States. They were to be paid \$829,000 which was to be paid out over a period of years. They kept a reserve tract of 200,000 acres (their original reservation had consisted of 1,600,000 acres), which was to be allotted to individual Shawnees. Each Shawnee would get 200 acres. After these Kansas Shawnees were allotted there would still be 24,138 acres left. This land was to be allotted to the "Absent Shawnees" if they came to Kansas within five years after the treaty was ratified. At this time some of these "Absent Shawnees" were, as we have seen, living on the Brazos reservation in Texas. Others were probably living in the Creek nation. These "Absent Shawnees" were never notified of this treaty and did not receive their allotments or collect their money payments. The name, "Absentee Shawnees" comes from this treaty in which they were referred to as "the Absent Shawnees." Eventually the Kansas Shawnees came to Oklahoma, too, when the Civil War was over and white settlers clamored for the lands in Kansas. These Shawnees, known as the Black Bob Band, settled among the Cherokees near White Oak, near Vinita in northeastern Oklahoma. They are now known as the Cherokee Shawnees. Another group of Shawnees who had been living with a group of Senecas eventually settled in extreme northeastern Oklahoma near present Miami. These Shawnees are now known as the Saltery Shawnees.

The "Absent Shawnees" who had been living in Texas and Oklahoma before the Civil War moved north to Kansas and lived in the vicinity of Black Bob's Band, with the Kansas Shawnees during the war. The Shawnee chief of the group living among the Creeks was Jim Squire (Pay-low-es-tha). Most of the Shawnee young men fought for the Union, enlisting in Company H, 14th Kansas Cavalry. The Oklahoma Shawnees left to go to Kansas in 1861 because they didn't want to get involved in the Civil War directly. Confederate recruiting officers were scouting around trying to get the Indians to enlist in the Confederate army. After the war, in 1867 or 1868, the Oklahoma Shawnees moved back to where they had been before the war.

Before they left Kansas, in 1867, these Shawnees made a treaty with the United States. The Shawnee chief who signed was John White. In this treaty the Absentees were to move to Indian Territory and select for themselves any land not appointed to another tribe. When they got to Indian Territory these Shawnees selected land which the government had purchased from the Seminoles for the purpose of settling smaller tribes. However this treaty of 1867 was not ratified. Thus there were no records showing that the Shawnees had occupied these lands. Later the government gave this land to the Potawatamies when they wanted out of Kansas. The Potawatamies moved down from Kansas and found the Shawnees living there in land the government had given them. There was a lot of bitterness caused by this mistake and a lot of suffering. It was years before the confusion was resolved and the Shawnees allowed to keep their lands officially.