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Origin of the Name Wichita

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Here then is the origin of the Indian legend about the buffalo. Each year thousands of these animals had gathered in this ideal winter refuge. No one saw them enter the canyon for the Indians had already gone to their chosen winter camps. But in the spring when the bands went out hunting, they at first found the whole country bare, not a buffalo to be seen. But when the waxing season put the urge of migration into the great herds, they came suddenly "out of the ground," climbing single file up the narrow pathways, a steady stream all day long, then spreading out over the plains until the country was black with them.

Here was the miracle. The Indians saw it with their own eyes. They told their people how the buffalo came up out of the earth. This happened somewhere in the high plains of the Llano Estacado but it is not easy to find the exact spot. No Indian was ever too curious about any "medicine place." They believed that if the buffalo came up out of the earth, they must have originated there. Thus the vast herds were created underground and sent forth to bless the Red Men.

ZOE A. TILGHMAN

OKLAHOMA CITY

ORIGIN OF THE NAME *WICHITA*

No positive origin has been learned for the name of the Wichita Indians, from whom the city in Kansas and the Wichita Mountains in Oklahoma take their name. These people are a peaceful tribe of Caddoan linguistic stock and were first known to white men as one of a group of tribes living to the west, between the Red and Washita rivers. The Leavenworth-Dodge Expedition found them living in a village near the mountains in the southwestern part of present Oklahoma. They built large dome-shaped houses of grass on frames of poles and raised corn and pumpkins. Later they were crowded into Texas by more warlike tribes and finally placed on a reservation there in 1855. In 1859 the U. S. Government removed them to a district leased from the Chickasaw for them, but which was really their old home.

Attempt has been made to explain the name as derived from an old word of their own, *weets*, meaning men and *eta* north (Men of the North), but neither their pre-history nor tribal legends indicate such residence. They fled to Kansas during the Civil War and remained there as refugees until its close, thus "coming from the north." But the name was in use long before this. They lived during this exile at the site of Wichita, Kansas, thus giving that place its name.

Since the historical evidence is not plain and the etymology is based on the supposed obsolete word *weets*, this origin of the name is of doubtful authenticity.

I believe the true origin is the Creek or Muskogee word *we-chate*, or *we-chata*. *We* is the word for water, always pre-positioned as in *We-wo-ka*, "barking water"; *We-leetka*, and *We-tumka*. *Cha-te* is "red" and *We-chate*, "red water."

Benjamin Hawkins,¹ a Government agent who wrote a careful survey of the Creek country in Georgia and Alabama about 1795-97, mentions a stream there,

¹ Georgia Historical Collections, Vol. 3, p. 25.

We-chate hatchee, "Red Water River." The Creek Indians were moved west, the first large group emigrating in 1827. While they located along the Arkansas and Canadian they ranged as far as Red River in hunting.

The tribes who lived along it, to the west, and from time to time made marauding expeditions against the settled Indians and whites in the eastern part of the present State of Oklahoma, were generally known by the whites as *Pawnees*, this name being adopted from the earlier French traders, who called them *Pani* or *Pani Pique* "Painted Pawnee." The term was applied loosely to the several tribes of that region, comprising the Tawakony, Toweash, Caddo, and the Comanche and Kiowa. The tribe to which the name *Pawnee* finally attached lived then in the Nebraska area.

In 1834 the Government sent the Dragoon Expedition under command of Gen. Henry Leavenworth and Col. Henry Dodge to explore the western region and make contact with these tribes. Undertaken in the heat of summer and with heavy and unsuitable equipment, many of the command fell sick, including Gen. Leavenworth who died at a way camp, leaving Col. Dodge to carry on the expedition.

The next year, however, these western tribes were persuaded to come to a council with the whites and the eastern Indians which was held just west of the "Cross Timbers." A military camp called Fort Holmes was established for this purpose near the present site of Lexington, Oklahoma.

A commission of three headed by Special Commissioner Montford Stokes was appointed to treat with the Indians. They held meetings at Fort Gibson beginning in May, 1835. The journal of their proceedings is an important historical link in the name origin. Since they had no secretary, one of the commissioners kept minutes of their proceedings, and there are frequent references to the *Tow-e-ash*² and the Comanche, whom they expected to meet.

It was more than three months later, however, in August, that they proceeded to Fort Holmes for the council. They were accompanied by a military escort and representatives from the tribes living in the eastern part, the Osage, Cherokee, Creek and Choctaw. The last three were classed as civilized, having adopted the white man's houses and modes of living to a great extent. Roley McIntosh, head chief of the Creeks, headed his delegation and delivered an address to the assembled council on August 25. In the military escort was Lieutenant W. Seawell, who acted as secretary when the councils met.

On August 19, in the minutes, Seawell first uses the word *Witchetaw*, in reference to the *Tow-e-ash* Indians. This term thenceforth disappears. It can hardly be doubted that he adopted the name *Witchetaw* from the Creeks who were with him, since they would naturally refer to the tribes living along Red River as the *We-chate* people. The name being written in official records, was at once established.

Historical and linguistic data harmonize, and I present this as the origin of the tribal name *Wichita*.

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² *Journal of the Commissioners* (Chronicles of Oklahoma, vol. 14), p. 398.