



KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

Osage Indians

The Osage Indians were primarily based near the Osage River in western Missouri and the Arkansas River in Kansas. A semi-nomadic people, they often traveled to Arkansas in a seasonal pattern. The tribe concentrated on hunting, gardening and foraging, moving from traditional homes in the woodlands to the vast plains where buffalo roamed. Because of these characteristics, the tribe does not fit into the general descriptions of either a Woodlands tribe or a Great Plains tribe.



Europeans first documented the Osage in 1673. Many early explorers noted that the Osage were the largest Natives in America, with the men often averaging over six feet tall. A spiritual people, the Osage called themselves *Ni-U-Kon-Ska*, and the Europeans called them *Wazhazhe*, both meaning Children of the Middle Waters. The tribe was divided into the Earth People and the Sky People, derived from one creation legend that these two groups merged to form the Children of the Middle Waters.

The Osage embarked on three hunts each year. Prior to the summer hunt, the men hunted bison, deer and elk while the women planted gardens of corn, beans, squash and pumpkins. Upon returning to the village, the women harvested the crops before leaving for the fall hunt. Although only men were allowed to hunt, women skinned the animals and tanned the hides.



As experienced warriors, the Osage allied with the French in the early 1700s against the Illiniwek (Illinois). René Auguste Chouteau became the primary representative of the Osage for trade with Europeans. In 1802, Lewis and Clark wrote of more than 5,500 members of the Osage comprised of three groups: the Great Osage, the Little Osage and the Arkansas band. Jean Pierre Chouteau founded the St. Louis Fur Company after becoming the United States agent for the tribe in 1804.

In 1808, the tribe began signing treaties to cede land from its Missouri, Oklahoma and Arkansas territories. In 1825, the Osage moved onto a reservation in southeast Kansas, upon which the town of Independence, Kan., was later founded. The Osage finished signing treaties in 1810. The group later moved onto the Osage Indian Reservation in Osage County, Okla., located between Tulsa and Ponca City.



The Osage, unlike many other tribes, prospered on the reservation. In the early 1900s, oil reserves were discovered, which led many Osage to die unnatural deaths. The United States government finally stepped in to end the Osage Indian Murders. Today, the Osage Nation claims more than 10,000 members.

The Osage Indians are closely related to the Kaw, or Kansa, tribe, from which the toponym Kansas was derived. Kaw translates roughly to "People of the South Wind." The Kaw also lived along the Missouri River and made alliances with the Osage and the Missouri in the 1700s. The tribe moved onto a reservation near Neosho, Kan., in 1846 and later to a new reservation in Okalahoma where more than 1,600 Kaw live today.

