

★ NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

**Mennonite Missionary S. S. Haury's
Account of the Running Buffalo
Shooting, 1884**

Translated by Levi Wilkins

*Edited by John Truden**

Southern Cheyenne Indian Running Buffalo's 1884 death reveals much about the relationships Indigenous people, the US military, cowboys, and missionaries developed on the Cheyenne and Arapaho Reservation before the 1892 Land Run. Cattle driver E. M. Horton killed Running Buffalo after the latter man stampeded Horton's horse herd when the former refused to give Running Buffalo two horses. Running Buffalo's expectations were normal. Many cowboys gave Southern Cheyennes animals to purchase temporary grazing rights. Scholars have only recently realized that these encounters were frequent, peaceful, and reshaped the region in the years after the 1874–75 Red River War.¹ Horton and his men fled to Cantonment, a government outpost-turned-Mennonite mission on the North Canadian River. Despite Running Buffalo's violent demise, his family quickly resolved the conflict by acquiring half of Horton's horse herd. Mennonite missionary S. S. Haury recorded all of this and sent his observations to his superior. Though second-hand oral histories and government documents recorded these events from the vantage point of government bureaucrats and cowboys, this June 1, 1884, edition of the German-language Mennonite newspaper the *Christlicher Bundes-Bote* (*Christian Dispatch*) translated by Levi Wilkins contains a first-hand account from Mennonite

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

missionary S. S. Haury, a person who not only intimately knew the Indigenous individuals involved but also described how these events played out at Cantonment. What follows is his description.²

On Sunday morning of [May] 4th [1884] someone by the name of [E. M.] Horton demanded passage through [Running Buffalo's domain] in order to bring [his horses] to Kansas.³ Some 5 miles east of [Cantonment] [Running] Buffalo, a [Southern] Cheyenne, demanded two ponies as payment from anyone who desired passage through.⁴ When Horton declined they fell into strife that ended when Horton and Knight, one of his people, shot Buffalo and fled here.

During our service the Indian trader Thure came to our school-house as I spoke of the leader who came to Jesus and asked for help for his sick boy.⁵ The trader brought the news that a "cowboy" had shot an Indian and that war between the Indians and Whites was to be feared. I ended my speech, spoke a quick prayer and requested that Br. Hirschler finish the service, and went to the telegram office. The telegraphist had just prepared a telegram in which the Agent requested that military help be quickly sent.⁶ I asked him not to send that, rather to simply report the simple facts until we looked more into the thing.⁷ I then went to the store. Here I met Horton with his people, who were ready to fight. Soon a Cheyenne Indian came in and requested the murderer. We sought to calm him and I then rode in all haste to Buffalo's Camp in order to investigate the thing and to prevent a bloody conflict where possible. In the Camp I found Buffalo in his bed, shot through with two bullets. Buffalo is said to have first fired some shots in the herd in order to spook them after Horton declined to give him what was requested, and he is said to have then pointed his pistol at Horton, threatening to kill him. (It should be noted here that not quite a year ago, when I saw Buffalo for the first time, that he threatened to kill me after strife with a horse dealer in a similar situation. I behaved in a friendly manner towards him and invited him the following day to eat together, and he has been friendly towards us since then. On just the day before his death he and his wife ate lunch with us.)⁸ As Buffalo went after Horton with drawn pistol, Horton is said to have jumped from his horse and shot at Buffalo. Buffalo fell with his horse, as the bullet appeared to have gone through his head and then the neck. Buffalo stood again [and was] then shot down by Knight, one of Horton's people. Horton then fled here.⁹

After I had listened to Horton's people with sympathy and explained that we had nothing against Horton's evil deed, I desired to return to the Station as quickly as the horse could run. The telegraph office which



Cheyenne and Arapaho delegation, November 1891. Little Chief is pictured third from the right on the front row (9471, Joseph O. Hickox Collection, OHS).

Horton and his people had meanwhile taken refuge and was watched by some 12 Cheyenne soldiers.¹⁰ “Little Chief” and “White Horse” and three other Indians were to deal with him in my presence.¹¹ I insisted that all these Indians lay down their weapons. When I told Horton what the Indians wanted, he declared that he would shoot down any Indian who dared to set foot in the office and aimed his weapon at them. Two of them then aimed their weapons at him. I saw that Horton was so excited that he could fire at any moment and attempted to move back the Indians because Horton, in such an excited state, would fire on the Indians.

I attempted to calm Horton and offered my room to him overnight, as he didn’t feel safe in the telegraph office. He couldn’t decide. In the meantime more Indians were arriving: some spoke of lighting the house on fire. I reminded them that the house was property of the United States, upon which they gave up such intentions.¹² Horton now wished for the Indians to allow him to spend the night in the protection of the stone built bakery. The Indians were ready for that if he would lay down his weapons. He would have nothing to do with that. After a long back and forth the Indians gave up and retreated a half mile. There were around thirty of them, and Horton and his people moved to the stone bakery. On the way there they began to run and some Indians, who were of the opinion that they would run off, aimed their weapons

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



Cheyenne camp on the North Canadian River near Darlington Agency, c. 1890 (10068, Nadine Pendleton Collection, OHS).

at them. One had his weapon aimed on Br. Stauffer and had almost fired when “Little Chief” rode by and told him to desist because Br. Stauffer is one of ours.¹³ I grabbed another by his arm and attempted to calm him. Horton came to the bakery without incident. However, the Indians declared that he should have nothing to eat or drink. During the night the Indians watched the bakery; things went quietly. Horton’s wagon and saddle were taken possession of by Buffalo’s relatives. I had promised dinner to all the Indians, which we gladly had. On Monday morning they also came to eat and even for lunch.

On Monday the Cheyenne soldiers each desired a pony from Horton, whose herd was given into my protection and were brought into our corral. I beseeched them to wait until the military arrived, whose agent had promised each one a horse. It was difficult to hold on to the horses until protection arrived. Around evening lieutenant [A. J.] Gibbon from Reno with 25 men finally arrived. Also, the Agent had sent 9 Indian police to bring the ponies to Darlington.¹⁴ Lieutenant Gibbon immediately took Horton and his men (in all 4 men) into his protection and spent the upcoming night in house No. 7. We gave them food and drink, because they’d had nothing since Sunday morning. The Indians went home and it was quiet for the night.

On Tuesday morning, however, came no fewer than 75 armed Indians and desired something from Horton. They placed their request upon half the herd (that numbered about 400 horses), which he finally

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

had to accept. In the afternoon the military, with Horton and his people and the Indian police and half of the ponies, left.¹⁵

God has truly looked after us and turned away a bloody battle; because on the same evening the military arrived 75–100 “cowboys” wanted to arrive to retrieve Horton from the Indians. That would have been the sign for a general Indian battle. Thank God for his merciful leadership!¹⁶

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

Endnotes

* Levi Wilkins is a firefighter in Norman, Oklahoma. He speaks fluent German and has a bachelor's degree in modern languages and literature from Texas Christian University. John Truden is a graduate student at the University of Oklahoma. Among other projects, he studies the lives and choices of Indigenous interracial families in early Oklahoma.

¹ John Truden, "Where Cowboys and Indians Meet: Resources and Relationships in an Environmental Borderland" (paper presentation, American Society for Ethnohistory Sixty-Third Annual Conference, Winnipeg, Manitoba, October 14, 2017); also see James E. Sherow, "Water, Sun and Cattle: The Chisholm Trail as an Ephemeral Ecosystem" in Char Miller, ed., *Fluid Arguments: Five Centuries of Western Water Conflict* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001), 149–50.

² Portions of this document have been edited for clarity and length. The author focused on editing S. S. Haury's main summary of events instead of the entire article and deposited the full transcript with the Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, as well as the Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS), Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, under the John Truden Collection. The newspaper is available at this link: bethelcollege.advantage-preservation.com/Viewer/?pt=29184&by=1884&bm=6&bd=1&pbd=06/01/1884-06/01/1884&fn=christlicher_bundesbote_usa_kansas_north_newton_18840601_foreign%2520language_7&df=1&dt=8&tc=8&cnt=United%20States%20of%20America&sn=Kansas&cn=North%20Newton&pn=Christlicher%20Bundesbote.

³ Between 1866 and 1887, thousands of cowboys gathered cattle on the Texas border and drove millions of them on several trails through Indian Territory to sell the animals for a higher price in Kansas. Horton's horse herd was just one of several hundred drives that passed through the reservation that summer.

⁴ Haury refers to Running Buffalo as Buffalo, which may have been an abbreviation or a nickname.

⁵ It is unclear who this man was. This area is poorly documented and many individuals moved fluidly through Fort Supply, Cantonment, and Fort Reno during the reservation era.

⁶ Agent D. B. Dyer arrived at Darlington Agency and nearby Fort Reno about fifty miles down the North Canadian River in April 1884. He was not familiar with the region and proved to be incompetent.

⁷ S. S. Haury's role as a negotiator and peacemaker is far more apparent here than in any other account.

⁸ Haury's relationship with Running Buffalo reveals much about the relational way that Cheyenne people understood the world. Running Buffalo expected others to initiate friendships with gifts; Haury befriended Running Buffalo and clearly knew him well, while Horton refused to give a gift to Running Buffalo and ignited a conflict.

⁹ Whether Running Buffalo attacked Horton or simply stampeded his herd is disputed. Unfortunately, Haury was not present for this event.

¹⁰ It is unclear whether these were Indian scouts, dog soldiers, or simply men avenging their relative.

¹¹ Running Buffalo was the son of Stone Calf, the most prominent Southern Cheyenne on the western side of the reservation. Consequently, Running Buffalo was well known and had many relatives at Cantonment and Fort Supply.

¹² US soldiers built Cantonment in 1879 and abandoned it in 1882. Running Buffalo and his brother-in-law Amos Chapman scouted for US soldiers at Cantonment, which the Southern Cheyennes called "Where the woods meet." Running Buffalo was intimately familiar with the area. The Mennonites later leased the compound as a combination church and boarding school; quoted in Rodolphe Charles Petter, *English-Cheyenne Dictionary* (Kettle Falls, WA: privately printed, 1915), 209; Return, Cantonment on the

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

North Fork of the Canadian River, March 22, 1879, roll 870, Microfilm 617, *Returns from U.S. Military Posts, 1800–1916*, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC, hereafter cited as NARA; Peter T. Lieneman, November 30, 1937, 77–80, volume 54, Indian Pioneer Papers, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK; J. J. Beretov, Special Orders No. 7, February 3, 1881, folder 75-2, box 194, Cheyenne and Arapaho Nation Agency Records, Research Library, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, OK.

¹³ Little Chief acted to protect a friend who provided services and goods to Cheyenne men, women, and children in the past. Although they may not have understood the implications of their actions in Southern Cheyenne society, the Mennonites were generous and gained friends for it.

¹⁴ Gibbon's men were part of the US Ninth Cavalry, an African American unit. Amos Chapman also was present by the second day, although Haury does not note his presence; A. J. Gibbon to post adjutant, Fort Reno, May 9, 1884, 194–95, roll 275, microfilm 689, *Letters Received by the Officer of the Adjutant General 1881–1889*, hereafter LR81-89, NARA; J. Darlington, 146, roll 4, microfilm 1070, *Reports of Inspection of the Field Jurisdiction of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1873–1900*, NARA.

¹⁵ Running Buffalo's relatives understood the world through the same lens that caused Running Buffalo to stampede Horton's herd and Little Chief to protect Stauffer. Horton paid for the Southern Cheyenne's life with his horses. Afterward, the soldiers returned to Fort Reno and sent E. M. Horton and his partner to Kansas.

¹⁶ Unlike Horton and other cowboys passing by along the trail, most of the men Haury is referring to were cattlemen who obtained leases on the reservation in January 1883 or their workers. The cattlemen were slowly driving Running Buffalo's relatives out of their camps and destroying their homes, a conflict that ended with President Grover Cleveland expelling them on July 23, 1885. For the time being, these men antagonized local Indians who refused to sign the leases and demanded the agent remove the cattlemen; Phillip Sheridan to Grover Cleveland, July 24, 1885, 120-37, roll 363, LR81-89, NARA; Grover Cleveland, "Proclamation," July 23, 1885, 142-43, roll 363, LR81-89, NARA; Stone Calf to George Vest, December 23, 1884, 235-37, roll 275, LR81-89, NARA.