

# Go South and be FREE

**John W. Williamson's Account  
of the Pawnee Removal**

Introduction and edited by  
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The removal of Native Americans to the Indian Territory is a tragic episode in our nation's history. Suffering and inhumanity of forced relocation comes quickly to mind as one recalls the "trail of tears" followed by the Cherokees and others. However, one group, the Pawnee tribe, eagerly accepted the concept of relocation. In the winter of 1874-75, most members of the tribe moved willingly from their ancestral homeland in Nebraska to a new reservation in the future state of Oklahoma. The following saga of

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their journey and the establishment of their new agency was later recorded by John William Williamson, the trail agent during the move.

The ancestors of the historic Pawnee tribe entered the region some 900 to 1,000 years ago. Later migrations of Caddoan-speaking bands from the southern plains merged and reinforced the earlier arrivals.<sup>1</sup> By 1800 the tribe existed as a loose confederation of four bands, the Skidi, Chawi, Pitahawirata, and Kitkahahki. They were a semi-sedentary people whose earthlodge villages were located along the principal water courses of present-day central Nebraska. They were agrarian, yet spent considerable time and effort hunting buffalo along the Platte and Republican rivers in the western part of the Great Plains.

After several centuries of living in this region, the Pawnee suffered massive setbacks. In the early 1800s, contacts with whites brought diseases that decimated the population. In addition, intertribal warfare took a terrible toll. The years after 1830 saw more attacks and raids by powerful Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Sioux war parties. The result was a dramatic decrease in the Pawnee population from an estimated 12,500 people in the 1840s to 2,447 in 1872.<sup>2</sup>

Another factor that adversely affected the Pawnee way of life was the continued infringement by white settlement. The Pawnee domain was first restricted by reservation boundaries in 1833. By 1857 the reservation was reduced to a 15-by-30 mile tract along the Loup River in central Nebraska, with an agency located at Genoa. Many Pawnees feared that continued exposure to the white culture would erode tribal structure and destroy their traditional ways of life.<sup>3</sup>

Crushing events in 1873–74 contributed to a general desire on the part of the tribe to leave their Nebraska homeland. In the summer of 1873, the Pawnees, then under the influence of “civilizing” Quaker agents, were allowed to go on a buffalo hunt to the Republican Valley. On August 5 the hunting party of 400 Pawnees was attacked by an overwhelming band of Brule and Oglala Sioux. In what became known as the Battle of Massacre Canyon, the Pawnees were put to flight with a loss of nearly 100 men, women, and children. This incident greatly demoralized the tribe.<sup>4</sup> In addition, drouth and grasshoppers destroyed their crops, leaving the Pawnee destitute. Many tribal leaders, convinced they could no longer survive in Nebraska, believed the only solution to their dilemma was to relocate the tribe. The favored location was with the Wichita tribe, whose lands lay far to the south in the Indian Territory

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A long tradition of friendship had existed between the Pawnee and Wichita. For hundreds of years the Pawnee had maintained strong ties with this southern tribe through visitation and trade.<sup>5</sup> The Wichita formally invited the entire Pawnee tribe in 1874 to come south and share their reservation, but Quaker agency administrators were opposed to the move. In a June council, Ter-re-wak-wah, chief of the Pitahawirata band, summed up the general feeling of the tribe: "We are surrounded by pale faces, and cannot go out and kill game, and we want to go south and be free."<sup>6</sup>

By the early fall of 1874, ten representatives from each of the four bands were allowed to go and select a new reservation site near the Wichita. Agent William Burgess ordered John W Williamson, a trusted agency employee, to supervise the group on their 500-mile journey south.<sup>7</sup> As it turned out, the permission to send band representatives prompted a mass exodus as three-fourths of all the Pawnee decided it was time to leave.

John William Williamson was born on June 28, 1850, at Delavan, Walworth County, Wisconsin.<sup>8</sup> In 1871 he traveled to Nebraska with two neighbor men to take up homesteads. After filing on land in Boone County, some 20 miles northwest of the Pawnee Agency, he came to Genoa to work for the agency farmer. Several months later, in a dejected mood, he decided to return to Wisconsin, "never to come








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*When Zebulon Pike met with them in 1806 (facing page), the Pawnee were a dominant, warlike tribe ranging much of the northern plains. By the time John W. Williamson (right) moved among them, the Pawnee were suffering from military defeat, confinement, and white encroachment (Courtesy Kansas Historical Society and Nebraska State Historical Society).*

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back to this country ” After spending two months at Delavan, he changed his mind and returned to Nebraska. Upon arriving in Genoa in late February, 1872, he was hired as assistant agency farmer

Williamson soon learned the Pawnee language and apparently became quite popular with members of the tribe. Because of his wavy shoulder-length hair, they called him “Bukskariwi” (Curly Head) and at times “Chaikstaka Laket” (Whitemen Leader). In 1873 Agent Burgess appointed him trail agent in charge of the ill-fated hunting party that went to the Republican country. Williamson narrowly escaped with his life at the Massacre Canyon disaster. One year later, Williamson was placed in charge of moving the Pawnee south to the Indian Territory. It is interesting that although he was only 23 years of age, he was given the responsibility of this difficult and potentially dangerous task.

After the Pawnees safely arrived at the Wichita Agency, Williamson again returned to Genoa. In March, 1875, he returned south with a party of Boone County men to help build the new Pawnee Agency at its permanent site. However, illness soon forced him to leave the southern climate. Williamson, with his wife and young son, made

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their way back to Nebraska in May, 1876. For the rest of his life, Williamson remained in the Genoa area, farming and raising a family. For several years he worked as the school farmer for the government Indian school established at Genoa in 1882. In his later years Williamson became something of a frontier celebrity because of his knowledge of the Pawnee and his direct involvement in their history.

Shortly after the turn of the century, Williamson's role in the Pawnee removal came to the public's attention. In 1902 Elmer E. Blackman, the first archeologist for the Nebraska State Historical Society, went to Nance County to investigate an early Pawnee site. Besides prehistoric research, Blackman also was interested in more recent Indian history. He interviewed Williamson and took notes on his role at Massacre Canyon and the later Pawnee removal. Blackman then prepared a lengthy manuscript based on this.<sup>9</sup> In 1903 an article by Blackman on the Pawnee removal appeared in the *Lincoln State Journal*. It seems that Blackman wanted to prepare material on Williamson's exploits for another publication, but he left the Society in 1909 before proceeding very far.<sup>10</sup>

Blackman returned to the Society in 1917, continuing his work as state archeologist and museum curator. In 1921 Blackman and Addison E. Sheldon, then Superintendent of the Society, traveled to the Massacre Canyon site accompanied by Williamson and noted frontiersman Luther North. It is quite possible that at that time it was suggested to Williamson that he write down his reminiscences of the early days, including the Pawnee removal. In 1922 a booklet about his story of Massacre Canyon was published.<sup>11</sup> In addition he began to record in manuscript form other information on Pawnee Indians, the town of Genoa, and Nance County history. Fortunately, this was largely completed before his death on March 13, 1927.

The narrative presented here is a section of Williamson's handwritten autobiography, which he titled "The Moving of the Pawnees." Based on references within the text, his manuscript was prepared sometime between 1924 and 1926. Slight discrepancies occur in the dates of some events, but this is understandable with the passing of some 50 years. A few details, which were recorded by Blackman but absent in Williamson's account, are added in the notes. A microfilm copy of the original manuscript is housed in the Nebraska State Historical Society Archives. The originals were loaned for microfilming in 1965 by John Peterson, a grandson of Williamson. The following is the only known written account of the Pawnee removal, a noted episode in their tribal history.



## “THE MOVING OF THE PAWNEES”

*By John W Williamson*

According to the best of authority of white men, also of old Indians, the Pawnees before locating at Genoa belonged to a very large tribe all of the same language composed of the Whitchitas, Ar-rick-a-rees, but they separated, the Wh[ichitas] going south to Oklahoma on the Washatau [Washita] River where they are still living, the Ar-rick-a-rees going north near where Fort Bertha [Berthold] now is in North Dakota, where they still live.<sup>12</sup> In 1872 a young man about 25 yrs. by the name of Spooner came among the Pawnees. He was a quarter breed Sac and Fox from Wisconsin and a very intelligent and educated young man. Up to this time the Pawnees had no accurate knowledge of where the Whitchatas were located, but undoubtedly they must of learned their whereabouts through this young man. Mr Spooner lived constantly with them and chose their way of living. He even at first was a waiter on one of the chiefs taking caring [care] of his ponies and doing other errands and in less than two years time could talk their language fluently He soon become a popular advisor of the Pawnees.<sup>13</sup> From that time on the Pawnees for some cause became very dissatisfied and were always wanting to go South and join the Whitch-a-tas, claiming for their reason that the



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*In 1872 the Pawnee Agency at Genoa, Nebraska, included the Indian school (above) and the agent's house (facing page on the right). Williamson can be seen in the foreground above (Courtesy Nebraska State Historical Society).*

surrounding country was being settled so fast by white people that they would have no hunting grounds.

In June, 1873, a young Chouie chief (I think that was the band he came from) called Spotted Horse, in a more suitable name Roving Chief. He was a very bright Indian and fine specimen of man hood. He dared anything and was exceedingly well liked among the Pawnees. He was chosen by the chief[s] of the four bands to be the leader of a company of able bodied young men to go south and find the Whitchitas. He immediately departed with this company of young men unbeknown to the agent. In a few days the Agent [Burgess] learned that he had gone but did not for what purpose as it was his habit to roam a great deal and always return allright. The agent did not take any alarm of his departure. He invariably returned from his expeditions with a good many ponies taken by him in some manner <sup>14</sup>

He returned in the autumn of the same year and reported to the Pawnees that he found the Whitchitas. He had been in council with them. They would be glad to have the Pawnees join them and further promised them ponies as they had lots of land on which to hunt. This report caused great rejoicing among the Pawnees which was carried on very quietly and secretly undoubtedly by the advise of Spooner

The agent did not learn of these facts until about in June, 1874. The

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first thing he noticed was that they had started to tear down some of their lodges and selling to the settlers the poles and crotches at the trading post outside of the reservation.<sup>15</sup> These homesteaders would [find] this very valuable in building sheds. He at once investigated and called a council to find out what it all meant.<sup>16</sup>

In this council they informed him they were getting ready to go south and join their brother Whitchitas—and also told him of the promises they had made them. He instructed them that this they could not do. He at once wrote the Indian Office at Washington and told them of the Pawnee dissatisfaction in Nebr and that they had already started to tear up the villages here and he had stopped them



for the time being. They made reply to the agent that they could not go south as no provision was made there for them. If they did not obey on this, soldiers would be sent to enforce obedience.

Another council was called, and this report from Washington told to them. The agent was also instructed to use all means possible to keep them here without calling military assistance. So he detailed me to go over amongst them and talk with them (as I know their language) and try to advise them to stay where they were.<sup>17</sup>

I spent much time and had a great many arguments with some of the chiefs. They had many excuses. One was that white men were stealing their wood, which was some truth. Another was that the medicine men had talked with the Great Spirit. He did not want them to dwell among the White People. Also the Great Spirit had sent winds and the grasshoppers. That proved He did not want them to stay here. My friend Captain Chief in his joking way told me that the



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reason we did not want them to move was that we would lose our jobs.<sup>18</sup> This was undoubtedly some more of Spooner's advises to them. But all arguments proved to no avail to quelsh these [word missing] that had risen among them.

In the meanwhile a great deal of correspondence took place between the agent and the Indian Office at Wash. Finally the Indian Office concluded to buy them a strip of land. In October the Indian Commissioner, I think his name was Ed. P Smith, under Grant's administration, came to Genoa and immediately called a council, this being the last big council held in the council house which still stands on the north side of Main Street.<sup>19</sup>

In this council he advised them that if they would take 40 well equipped young men in charge of a white man, whom they could choose with his approval, and go at once south to the Whitchitas where arrangements would be made with their agent to care for them until he could get there.<sup>20</sup> Then he would show them a piece of land 30 by 60 mi. on Bear Creek. The government would purchase from the Cherokees if the land proved satisfactory to the Pawnee delegation. The price I believe to be paid was 30¢ an A.

They then held a short council amongst themselves outside the council house and selected me for the white man to put in charge, sent one of the chiefs for me to come up to the council, and then asked if I would be willing to go with them if it proved satisfactory to the commissioner. The commissioner said I would be all right and asked me if I would go. I told him I would but that it wasn't wise for one white man to go alone and he thinking it over said he did not think it advisable either and I could choose a white man to accompany me. I chose a man from Boone Co., Al Alexander, a man a few years my senior. I considered him a valuable companion as he was a man of fine integrity and was well liked among the Indians having been employed here at the agency a great deal.<sup>21</sup>

Mr. A. and I at once made preparations for this trip, going to Columbus and purchasing a tent and complete camping outfit. We took a light covered wagon, a team of mules, and a pair of good saddle horses. Arrangements were also made for the 40 Indians to proceed to Grand Island. We would meet them there.

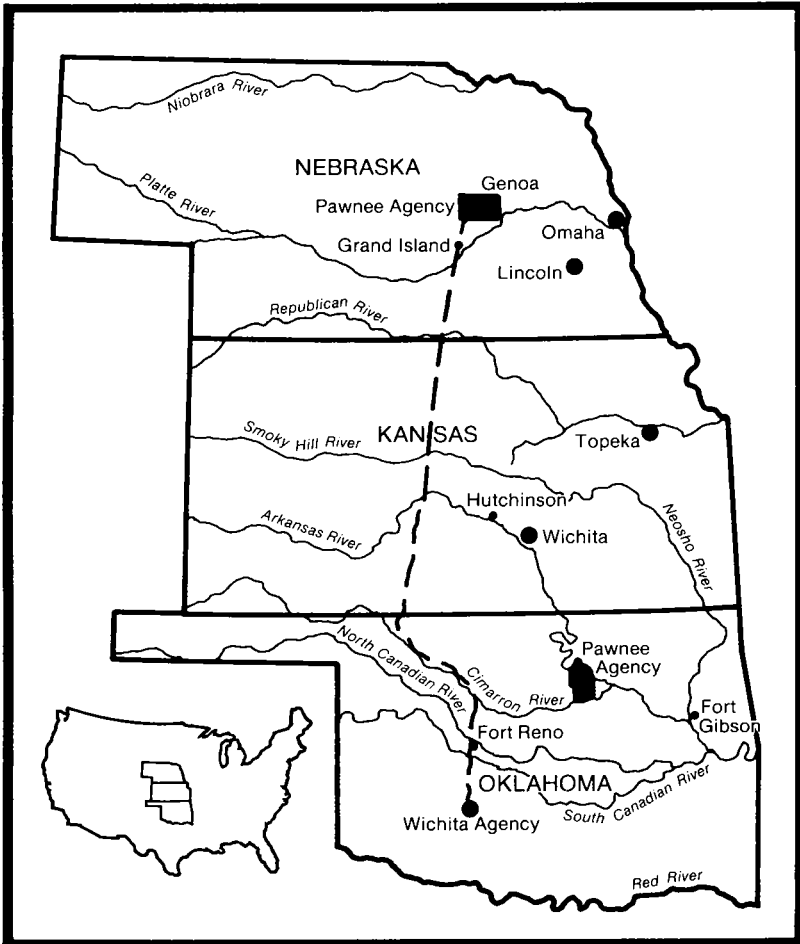
On the 2nd day of Nov we started on our trip. On the 4th of Nov we reached Grand Island and proceeded to the Platte River where the many bridges crossed the Platte as there was where we had instructed the Indians to camp.

On reaching the camp what was my surprise to find out instead of

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40 Indians I had 1400 men, women, and children. I called a council. The head chief said [sentence not completed].<sup>22</sup> That night we had a prairie fire caused from their camp fires. We and the Indians fought fire but succeeded and putting it out. The only damage done was the destroy of one stack of hay which was settled for satisfactory

I sent a telegram to the George Clothier of Columbus, as he always sent telegrams to the agency when necessary, telling Mr Burgess, the agent, to come at once.<sup>23</sup> He arrived on the following day and at



*Led by Williamson, the Pawnee travelled in a south-southwesterly route to the Cimarron River, then skirted the Cheyenne-Arapaho Reservation to get to the Wichita Agency.*

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once called a council in which he tried to persuade them to come back to Genoa and let the 40 go on and investigate the land the government was going to give them. But all his pleadings and threats proved to no avail, the council ending without any definite result being reached. The same night the agent and I discussed it in our tent. He concluded rather than call military aid and have trouble he would let them go on being they were so determined. The lateness of the season, the scarcity of food had to be considered, but we tho't by traveling southward all the time some of the severe storms and cold weather might be avoided. We also believed in western Kansas buffalo might be found. Mr Burgess asked me if I was perfectly willing to undertake the task. I said I was.

The next morning a council was called. They were informed that they could go on. My instructions to accompany them, keep them together, and see that they did not molest any settlers. Also to call on military aid when necessary and make the trip as quick as possible. I was instructed to report to the agent at the Cheyenne and Arapahoe agencies.<sup>24</sup> He would have instructions prior to this to take care of us while there.

About the 7th of Nov we broke camp and started on our journey Myself or the Indians little realizing what hardships we were to suffer as it proved to be a very severe winter and game was very scarce owing to the country having become quite thickly settled. We traveled in a south west direction. Many squaws walked and carried a pack on her back. This made it impossible to make over 12 to 14 miles a day

A few miles from Red Cloud we came across a sod house. A horse was lariated out close by At the sight of so many Indians he became frightened, broke his rope, and ran away Thinking nothing of this we went on, crossed the Republican river, and there camped. In the evening Mr Alexander and I went into Red Cloud and went into one of the stores to make some purchases. While seated there an officer came in and asked me if I was the man that had charge of those Indians.<sup>25</sup> When I told him I was, he placed me under arrest. Upon my inquiry, asking the nature of the offense, he said that the Indians has stolen a horse. If I was responsible for them, I would have to make it good. I then asked him if that meant we were all under arrest. He said yes. I then told him that it was customary to feed prisoners. This caused a little merriment among the bystanders. We all enjoyed a good laugh together I then told him I remembered a horse breaking his rope and running away If he wanted to come over to our camp the



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next morning and look through the ponies and if he found the horse there, I would see that the horse was given over to him. Sunday morning the office and the owner of the horse came into camp but were unable to find the property. We camped there, that day being Sunday, and I learned that the man found his horse.

The same afternoon another claimant made his appearance, saying that the Indians had stolen wheat that he had in a little sod house up the river away. I investigated and made inquiries at Red Cloud and was told that the man never had any wheat. He took this method of trying to get money under false pretenses, but in order to get rid of the man I gave him the agent's address and told him to write him about his so claimed loss which seemed to satisfy him. My instructions were in case the Indians really did do anyone any damage they would make out a complete estimate of their loss, I would sign it, and it could be sent into the agent at Genoa. He would make settlement.<sup>26</sup>

The next day we again took up our journey

*[The brief account which follows is an untitled reminiscence authored by Williamson that is also found in his manuscript collection. It is inserted in the narrative where the events would have taken place.]*

My next experience was on the Solaman [Solomon] river about 8 miles west of Corker [Cawker] City. We came to this river on a Friday night late in November, 1874, and had a council with the Chiefs and made a request for them to camp in the same place for 3 days, as I wished to go down the river about 30 miles to visit some friends that had taken a homestead there. They agreed to my request. So on Saturday morning I struck out for the place, found my friends, stayed all night Saturday night and Sunday night. Monday morning after having a nice visit and started out expecting to be back to camp Monday night—which I did, but to my great surprise found no Indians, nor my assistant A. L. Alexander whom I had left in charge of them. I could see by the camp ground that they had been gone for 2 days at least. So what could I do but to follow the trail the best I could for it was late, sun almost down, and the country was not settled at that time.

I forded the river and went in a south westerly direction over some rough hilly country thinking perhaps I might find some track of them or come to some habitation but nothing could be found. I began to feel pretty gloomy. My horse was tired and hungry and so was I. Besides it was quite cold and it was certain that I would have to lay out that night sure. The horse could eat dead grass; for me there was nothing. I finally came to a path between two hills. This led me to believe that

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*On the trail south the Pawnee were protected from the bitter winter weather only by their traditional tipis (Courtesy OHS).*

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there must be some body living not far off so I followed in an eastern direction and finally came to a dug out.

I got off from my horse and went to the door and knocked. A woman came to the door She was a rather dark looking person about 20 or 25 years old. I asked her if she had seen any Indians go by her place. She said that she had not. I told her the perdicement I was in and asked her if I could get some thing to eat. At first she said no, but after I told her that I was hungry and offered to pay her she finely gave me some thing to eat. After finishing supper I offered to pay her but she would not take pay It was getting dark by that time and when I went out and noticed a hay stack standing by the carol [corral] I asked her if she had any objection if I stayed by the hay stack for the night. She hasitated for a moment and then told I could but I must not go to sleep. And if I heard any one coming to get on my horse and get away Now that did not sound very good to me. It set me to thinking what I had better do. At first I concluded to go on a little farther and lay down for the night in some canyon, but changed my mind—whent to the south side of the hay stack out of the north cold wind. Of course, I did not dare to go to sleep after what the woman had told me. But it made me feel good to see my horse enjoying himself eating hay But for me it was different. I wanted to sleep so bad but dared not. But I must have

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gone into a drouse, for I was startled by my horse whinering. It went through me like a shot. When fully awakened I listened for a little while, heard men's voices coming up the valley. By the noise they made they were driving horses. I soon heard them letting down the bars to the coral. I got on my horse and rode away and finished the night in a canyon, and in the morning started to hunt for my Indians.

I rode all that day in a south westerly direction knowing that would be their course. When near night I rode on the top of a high hill to look around. On reaching the top of the hill I saw a valley below. Looking down the valley I could see smoke rising up. I was quite sure it was the Pawnees. I rode down to the camp and when near saw that it was the Pawnees. I soon located our tent and was not in very good humor, but on reaching the tent Al was getting supper. The smell of the supper took away my angry feeling for I had nothing to eat since the night before. Al explained the reason for them not living up to their agreement. He tried to keep them from going, but they told him that they knew that I was not coming back for I was mad at them when I went away. While it was true that we had had some trouble while camped on the Republican near Red Cloud—they wanted to stay there for a few days, the weather was fine, and I wanted to keep them moving which did not please them for they wanted to hang around and beg from the White People or swap trinkets for food. I asked the chiefs why they did not live up to their agreement. Their answer was they did not think I was coming back. I told them that I would never lie to them. We never had anymore trouble of that kind.

Some years after I ran across a man who had lived in that part of the country and when I related my experience to him said the place was a head quarters for a gang of horse thieves and had been drove out of the Country [*End of insert*]

While in camp one evening on Wolf Creek our next trouble occurred which looked at the beginning that it might prove to be very serious.<sup>27</sup> About sundown the Indians saw a bunch of armed men coming towards us. At first the Pawnees were frightened, thinking they might be Sioux, but as they came closer proved to be 45 white men. I walked out to meet them.

Their spokesman asked me if I had charge of those Indians. I replied that I did. He at once proceeded to tell me in very forcible language that he wanted us to get out of this country as fast as possible. I asked him why. He said a school teacher and some school children had been killed by the Indians. These were the ones that had done the crime. I told him I did not see how that could be, as they were



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a very peaceable band of Indians and I was moving them to their new quarters. He then said he did not believe this and that I was as bad as the Indians. I then showed him my papers. He being very unreasonable would not believe me then, but said I had forged them. He also swore if we did not go at once that they were going to fire on us. I tried to show him the foolishness of 45 men firing on a bunch of 1400 Indians, among them at least 300 well armed warriors. I then told him we also carried a U.S. flag. He surely did not want to fire on it and that we were in adv[antageous] position behind the timber, but if he insisted on trouble, I would go tell my Indians to be ready, as we were not going to break camp until ready to start again.<sup>28</sup>

In the meantime some of the Indians came up on the scene, including Spotted Horse and interpreter Harry Coons.<sup>29</sup> He told the chief the nature of the trouble. He said the report was not true, and they would not break camp. Then another white man by the name of Dr Spillman, a more rational man, spoke up and said, "I believe this young man and what he says to be true." Spotted Horse invited these men to camp and eat supper. As they were beginning to look at it in a different light, they accepted the invitation and not only had supper but remained in the camp all night, as they had walked quite a distance from some settlement. Dr Spillman staid in my tent. We had a very enjoyable evening together. I remember him among one of the very pleasant and agreeable men I have met in my life. They went away in the morning thinking of the Pawnees in all together a different way then they did the night before.

Many funny incidents would happen along the way. When a rabbit showed himself, the Indian and dog would surround and so bewilder him that an escape was impossible. It was amusing to watch them catch a rabbit. They had several 100 dogs. They being mixed with wolves were small. I have stopped and laughed when I watched them cross a stream of water. We always forded a stream, and as the dogs attempted to cross and the current was swift they could not cross straight. They would be in a angular line. They would set up such a yelping and barking that the squaws would scold them and call them by name saying, "Pa heet, Pa-roots," meaning for them to stop their noise.

The ponies often became sore on his back, as they were packed pretty heavy and squaw on top. When the pony tho't he had had enough of it, he would stop and buck to get rid of his load. The first thing he would dispose of would be the squaw. When she was throwed off, she generally started to cry and scold the pony. This caused great

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amusement among the young boys. All the time the pony would keep going through the same tactics until he freed himself of his burdens. Some other squaw would generally help the unfortunate squaw to repack and mount her pony again.<sup>30</sup>

No deaths occurred until near Bunker Hill, Kansas, where occurred the death of Spotted Horse from what I was led to believe was pneumonia. About midday Spotted Horse came to me and looking down in the valley asked if we could not camp there that night as some years before his brother had been killed in here by the Sioux in



*Food on the trail was in short supply due to slow movement in the severe winter weather and the scarcity of game (Courtesy OHS).*

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battle. He wanted to sit on his grave that night and mourn. He said, "I may never come this way again." I told him that it being such bad, cold weather that he had not ought to do a thing like that as he was liable to catch cold and get sick. He said he didn't care if he did. He seemed to be in very depressed spirits. I finally granted his request, and we camped there for the night.

That night he carried out his plans and mourned all night on his brother's grave. The next morning when he passed my tent in speaking to me I noticed he was very hoarse. We did not travel that day. That afternoon I was called to his tent and found him laying on the buffalo robes. The medicine men were dancing around him, howling

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hideously, shaking their gourds, and burning him on his chest with hot irons. This was their method of treating some patients. He was sick 3 or 4 days, so we did not travel. I visited his tent every day

A few people came over from Bunker Hill to visit the camp, among them a minister, his wife, and daughter. When he learned of Spotted Horse's sickness, he went to his tent to see him. Through the interpreter, Harry Coon, he talked and prayed with him.

Sometime after midnight I was summoned to his tent, he sending word that he wanted to see me. Upon reaching tent I found him in a most critical condition and unable to talk only thro a wisper. He reached out his hand. I took it in mine. He said these last and dying words in Indian language, "Now, Brother, in a little while I will be dead and gone. I want to be buried in a white man's cemetery and have a coffin and have the man who prayed with me to preach my funeral sermon. I want you to get the Big Father at Wash. (meaning the head of the govenment) to put up a stone where I am buried. I want my name written on this stone and also the words that I am a friend of the White Man." As I promised him his dying requests, he peaceably passed away<sup>31</sup>

Spotted Horse was 35 yrs. old at the time of his death. He was a fine looking Indian of a very gentle and mild disposition. Always courteous and pleasant to whom ever he met. Thus passed away one of the finest specimens of Indian manhood. I believe, when the great day comes, Spotted Horse will be with some of his white brethren.

I regret to say, though almost fifty years have passed, I have been unable to carry out all of his request, that is, of having the stone or marker put up. I have had repeated promises, and I expect in the near future to see a marker placed on his grave. The other wishes were carried out. As it was impossible to buy a coffin, I had a carpenter at Bunker Hill make him a very suitable coffin. This same minister very willingly preached the funeral sermon, and he was buried in the Bunker Hill cemetery

About a year ago [1922 or 1923] I wrote to the Methodist minister at Bunker Hill and asked him if he would inquire and find out if any one lived there now that remembered those circumstances and if Spotted Horse's grave could yet be found. To my surprise I received an answer from the lady who was the daughter at the time of the minister who preached S. H. funeral sermon. She is a woman between 50 and 60 years old, has married, and lives at Bunker Hill. In this letter she said her father and mother were both dead, but that she remembered the occasion and even one of the songs that sung at the services. She also



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wrote that she had kept the grave in good condition, so that it can easily be found. She also requested that I take up the matter of placing a marker with one of our Nebr senators. The people of Bunker Hill being very much interested had said they would take up the matter with a Senator [Charles] Curtis of Kansas who is a  $\frac{1}{4}$  blood Indian. I wrote Senator [George W.] Norris making my request, explaining to him what they would write to the Kansas senator I rec'd a reply stating that he would cooperate with Senator Curtis and try to get a sufficient appropriation and which I hope will be successful.<sup>32</sup>

This sickness and death delayed us bout a week or ten days. By this time we were in getting short of food. I realized that in a short time they would be in dire need of food. Having no funds to purchase anything I wrote to Barkly White of Omaha, Sup't of all the north western Indians, explained their condition, and asked him to answer me at Great Bend, Kansas, and advise me what I should do.<sup>33</sup> In about a week we reached Great Bend. I went in to inquire for my mail, the P.O. being in the back end of a very large store. There I rec'd a letter from Mr White in which there was no money but authority and a voucher for \$1800 to purchase the following articles: flour, soda, sugar and coffee.

I introduced myself to the proprietor of the store and stated that I had authority to buy \$1800 worth of food. I showed him the voucher and when with my signiture could be given to him in exchange for merchandise. He could then send the voucher to Wash., and he could receive his money He then read the letter, examined the voucher, and asked me the question if I knew anyone there that would identify me. While he was showing this reluctance in letting me have the goods and I was trying to assure him of getting his money, I glanced up and saw a man standing by the door who beckoned for me. I went over to him and pointing accross the street said, "I have a store, and I am willing to take that voucher for goods as I have listened to your conversation and I am satisfied every thing is all right and the way you say " He told me that on the track he had a carload of flour that wasn't just up to the mark and he was going to return but that he would sell me very cheap. I purchased this and also the sugar, coffee, and soda.

I sent word to the camp on the Arkansas river and told them to come to the city and get the flour In a short time the streets were filled with Indians and good curious white people. They lost very little time in getting the flour to camp. I had previously put this in charge of the

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chiefs. They had equally divided it amongst the bands. It was quite a sight to see the long string of squaws reaching from town to camp with a sack of flour on their back, very happy at the tho't of getting something to eat. That night they had a little celebration over the occurrence. To show their appreciation to me in getting them this food they asked me to it to drink coffee and eat pawnee bread with them.<sup>34</sup>

The next day we were on our way again and taking a south westerly course through a country entirely unhabited. Southwest of Great Bend while in camp one foggy night some white men had sneaked into camp and had run off 100 or more of the Indians' ponies. The next morning the Indians discovered their loss. We at once set out to hunt for them. It was a very sandy country, and their trail was easily followed. After riding some distance we came down from on top of some ridges, as we could look down into a valley where ran a stream of water. There we could see some men trying with difficulty to get a bunch of ponies across this muddy and mery stream. The men seeing us dashing toward them left the ponies and rode away, so we succeeded in getting our ponies back with little trouble.

Our next trouble was that we came across a stretch of land where there had been a prarie fire. As our ponies had been living entirely on dry prarie grass, this caused us great concern. It was necessary then to fall trees along the streams. The ponies ate the dry bark. When the ponies would completely bark a tree, so when they got through there would be nothing left but a white skeleton. Some of the trees were enormous cotton woods. These squaws hacked down in such shape so the ponies could at them to eat. It taking the ponies some time to get filled up on this diet, we were compelled to camp for some time at each stop. This wasn't very good feed. They became so poor and weak that traveling became very slow.

The next settlement we reached was a small railroad town called Sun City on the Medicine River. This town was supported by cattle men who run up thousands of head of Texas cattle for winter grazing, as there was a grass called winter rye which grew very heavy and high in the summer, ripening and dying, but coming up very dense and thick in the early fall. This provide excellent winter pasture. This afforded a treat for a poor ponies.

It was a beautiful day in the late evening and was real nice and warm when we reached the Medicine River. The Indians crossed and camped on the south side in the timber, but we remained on the north side. Owing to the lateness of the evening and the night not very cold we decided not to pitch a tent but to sleep in the wagon. While

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preparing our supper we noticed that a little ways, possibly a mile, we could desern a village and half way between a log house. We ate our supper and retired. Sometime a wind arose and lifted off the cover one wagon and big process was in places. It was impossible to sleep there then, so we each took a buffalo robe. Wrapping them about us, we set out for the log house we had seen that evening, but the storm was so bad we lost our bering. We walked around about 2½ hours.

The first thing we struck was a log fence that encircled this log cabin. We easily then found the house but found it securely locked with a hasp and padlock. The only way we could get in was to take a rail off the fence and ram against the door until it give way The house was not chinked or plastered. The snow and cold blew in between the logs, but in every way it was better than sleeping out in the opening. We started a fire on the dirt floor from some fire wood we found in the house. Then we carried in cedar rails and piled in. We were fixed pretty comfortably This house must have been occupied by a hunter He had buried his cartridges in the dirt floor for pretty soon they began to explode in such fashion that we forced to go out of doors. The



*Several times on their journey south, the Pawnee were forced into extended encampments by winter storms, poor range, and in one case, death (Courtesy OHS).*

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celebration lasted for about a half a hour or more. We stood out on the south side until they ceased. We then went in and sat down and considered ourselves pretty fortunate in not being frozen or shot to death.

About noon the storm abated a little and the sun to shine thru. Looking out thru the storm I could see the outline of this little village. We decided to put on our buffalo robes, face the storm, and try to get to the village. It soon darkened again. We had quite a hard trip in facing the storm to get to the village. We run up against a building. Feeling our way around to the door we went in and found a bunch of men busy sawing wood and some women preparing dinner which sure looked good to Alexander and me having not eaten since the night before. This building, as well as all the others in the village, was constructed from native sawed lumber and not plastered, so consequently were not very warm. The storm did not stop, so we stayed there that night. We were not worried [about] the Indians, as they had camped on the south side of the timber and had showed more wisdom than we had. When in their snug tents with a good fire they were comfortably fixed. During the night sometime the storm stopped, but the morning was bitter and cold and good deal of snow had fallen. We learned later a good many freighters who were freighting from some railroad point to this town lost their lives in the storm.

Upon going to the camp that day we found the Indians all right in every way, but one of our mules we used on the wagon had frozen to death. She was very old. It was claimed she had made two trips to Calif. and back in her day and could she have talked could probably told of many exciting and interesting things as she carried a mark on her hip due to a bullet from an Indian's gun.

I learned from some one in the village that there was a man run a booze joint where he sold whisky to cowboys and cattlemen. I went there and asked him if he kept whisky He said he did. I warned him not to sell any to the Indians. If he did, I would arrest him and he did sell them he was endangering the whole town. All Indians were crazy for whisky, but I believe the Pawnees were worse. While docile when sober they became unmanagable when drunk. I have know them when drunk to kill one another This talk to him done a great deal of good for all the while we were camped there I never knew him to sell any to them.

The food supply was just about exhausted again. The chiefs were constantly coming to me and telling me about their condition and asking me if there wasn't some way to get some thing for them to eat



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as were camped here unavoidably on account of snow The food supply was less all the time. The medicine men begin to wonder if in some way they had not made the Great Spirit angry at them. They began to have religious gathering. After holding these meetings for sometime one of the religious advisers claimed to have a dream. He dreamed, he stated, that the sacred bundle had not been carefully looked after Consequently the ear of burnt corn was broken in two. One of the chiefs came to me and said that one of their religious advisers had a dream and related to me. He said that the bundle was going to be opened. He wanted me to come and witness it, as I doubted some of their views on these things. The ear of corn was found to be broken. Whether the broken ear was known to them before or not, I do not know They at once began to repent by this manner They would take blankets and calico all though they never to spare and tore in strips and hung in the trees to whip in the wind. When I asked why they did this, they said they were sacrifices to the Great Spirit. They were trying to make amends for the negligence in not caring better for the sacred bundle.<sup>35</sup>

A short time after, while hunting up the Medicine [Lodge] River, I met a man.<sup>36</sup> We engaged in conversation. I told him of the starving and pitiful condition of the Indians of whom I had charge. I also stated my inability to give them any aid. He at once replied that he had a large drove of cattle up the valley He would sell me all I needed. I told him I had no authority to buy, and it would take to long a time to get word from the department. He said that I could buy all the cattle I needed. All I needed to do was to sign a statement of the actual need of the Indians, how many head of cattle I bought, and at what price per head. He also declared his faith of getting the money from the government, as he had sold cattle previously to starving Indians. The government had always sent to him his pay His offer was most gladly received. I did not know how I could voice my appreciation to him for myself and also for the Indians as I knew this would sure make them very happy I made a bargain for 100 head and returned to camp.

I told the Indians that I wanted some of the chiefs and men to go with me the next morning up the valley, as I had purchased 100 head of cattle from a man and we would slaughter them in his corrals. The chief could then divide the meat amongst the rest. This was announced through the camp by the criers and caused great rejoicing.

The following morning these plans were carried out. I, with the Indians, went to this man, looked over the cattle, and bo't them at a price of \$14 per head. They were long horned native Texas cattle and

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while not very large were in fine condition. A bill and the statement he asked for was made out and sign by me. The cattle were butchered and the meat accordingly divided. The meat was delivered in camp. Great feasts were held and offerings made to the Great Spirit. The receiving of this meat by the Indians was sure proof to the Indians that they had grieved the Great Spirit and He had forgiven them and sent them this food.



*Editor:* At this point the Pawnees had marched from central Nebraska to just north of the Kansas-Oklahoma border, a distance of 300 miles. The Wichita Agency was about 150 miles yet further south, through country roamed by hostile Cheyenne bands. Though arduous, the journey had claimed only one life.

The trip, however, was only part of the migration story. After reaching Indian Territory, a new reservation and agency for the Pawnee tribe had to be established. John Williamson's account of the early days of the Pawnee Agency continues in the next issue of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*.

### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> "Towards Plains Caddoan Origins: A Symposium," *Nebraska History*, 60 (Summer 1979), pp. 131–293.

<sup>2</sup> A segment of this decline is detailed in Benjamin J. Kracht, "The Effects of Disease and Warfare on Pawnee Social Organization, 1830–1859: An Ethnohistorical Approach," Unpublished M.A. thesis, 1982, Department of Anthropology, University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

<sup>3</sup> Clyde A. Milner, II, *With Good Intentions: Quaker Work Among the Pawnees, Otos and Omahas* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), pp. 61–86, traces the events leading to the removal; David J. Wishart, "The Dispossession of the Pawnee," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 69 (September 1979), pp. 382–401.

<sup>4</sup> The best analysis of this encounter is Paul D. Riley "The Battle of Massacre Canyon," *Nebraska History*, 54, (Summer 1973), pp. 220–249.

<sup>5</sup> The Wichita, like the Pawnee, were Caddoan speakers. They were closely related both culturally and linguistically. These relationships are illuminated by Martha Royce Blaine, "The Pawnee-Wichita Visitation Cycle: Historic Manifestations of an Ancient Friendship," Don G. Wyckoff and Jack L. Hofman, editors, *Pathways to Plains Prehistory: Anthropological Perspectives of Plains Natives and Their Pasts* (Duncan, Oklahoma: The Cross Timbers Press, 1982), pp. 113–134.

<sup>6</sup> Milner, *With Good Intentions*, p. 75.

<sup>7</sup> William Burgess was appointed Pawnee agent in 1873 after serving as headmaster of a school in Millville, Pennsylvania. He was relieved of his duties as agent in May, 1877 after a controversy arose concerning beef purchases at the new Indian Territory

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agency. He returned to Columbus, Nebraska, and entered the newspaper business. Milner *With Good Intentions*, pp. 51–52, 99; J Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *Illustrated History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: Jacob North & Co., 1907), pp. 257–258.

<sup>8</sup> Biographical information on Williamson comes from his obituary in the *Genoa Leader-Times*, March 18, 1927 and from his autobiography and reminiscences contained in the John William Williamson Manuscript Collection, MS2710, Nebraska State Historical Society Archives, Lincoln.

<sup>9</sup> E. E. Blackman, "Report of Department of Archeology," Robert W Furnas, editor *Annual Report, Nebraska State Board of Agriculture for the Year 1902* (Lincoln: State Journal Company, 1903), p. 299. Although submitted as part of his annual report, Blackman's manuscript of the Williamson interview was not published. A handwritten copy entitled "Removal of Pawnees to Oklahoma, 1874," can be found in the Elmer E. Blackman Manuscript Collection, MS25, Nebraska State Historical Society Archives, Lincoln.

<sup>10</sup> The Lincoln (Nebraska) *State Journal* article, "The Moving of the Pawnees," appeared September 27 1903. Yet another Blackman account of these events can be found in his manuscript collection at the Nebraska State Historical Society Typed, undated, and entitled "The Story of the Pawnee's Removal South by John Williamson," it is an edited version of Williamson's written account.

<sup>11</sup> J W Williamson, *The Battle of Massacre Canyon. The Unfortunate Ending of the Last Buffalo Hunt of the Pawnees* (Trenton, Nebraska: Republican Leader 1922).

<sup>12</sup> In 1871 the Wichita Agency was moved from Fort Sill to the north bank of the Washita River just across from present-day Anadarko. Robert M. Utley editor *Soldier and Brave: Historic Places Associated with Indian Affairs and the Indian Wars in the Trans-Mississippi West* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971), p. 251. Fort Berthold, located in west central North Dakota, was originally established as a Missouri River fur trading post in the 1850s. In 1868 it became agency headquarters for the Arikara, Gros Ventre, and Mandan Indians. The site is now inundated by Garrison Reservoir. G. Hubert Smith, "Like-a-Fishhook Village and Fort Berthold, Garrison Reservoir North Dakota," Vol. 2, *National Park Service Anthropological Papers* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1972).

<sup>13</sup> B. T. Spooner had served as an interpreter for the Ojibways in Michigan. He apparently had some influence on the Pawnees, encouraging them to move south. Burgess had ordered him off the reservation in February, 1874. Milner *With Good Intentions*, pp. 78–79.

<sup>14</sup> This was Big Spotted Horse, a Kitkahahki who became very proficient in the art of horse stealing from the southern tribes. He appears to have made earlier visits to the Wichitas. In October 1873, Big Spotted Horse left for the Wichita Agency with about 250 fellow tribesmen. He was killed a few years later while stealing horses from whites in Texas. George E. Hyde, *The Pawnee Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), pp. 297–301, 335; Milner, *With Good Intentions*, p. 70.

<sup>15</sup> Lester W Platt and D. A. Willard owned stores just east of the reservation boundary. They had lived among the Pawnee for some time and were popular with them. Willard later bought the land where the agency stood and organized the town of Genoa. A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska* (Chicago: The Western Historical Company, 1882), pp. 1125, 1126; Obituary of Lester W Platt, *Columbus Journal*, September 29, 1875; Obituary of D. A. Willard, *Columbus Telegram*, August 30, 1923.

<sup>16</sup> This was the council of September 8, 1874, as reported by Burgess the following day Milner *With Good Intentions*, pp. 79–80.

<sup>17</sup> Williamson had learned their language and customs, "always trying to be their

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friend and always having their confidence." He frequently attended councils. Williamson manuscript autobiography p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> Captain Chief (La-kit-a-wer-la-shar) was of the Skidi band and was about 40 years old at this time. He was described as being short and stout and having a very jovial nature. Williamson manuscript autobiography pp. 26–27

<sup>19</sup> Edward P. Smith, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, did not attend the council but delegated authority to arrange the removal to Benjamin Rush Roberts. Roberts, a Quaker member of the Hicksite Central Committee, also served on the Board of Indian Commissioners. This board provided independent management of Indian affairs. Milner *With Good Intentions*, p. 80.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Richards, a Quaker, was the Wichita agent at this time. *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1875* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1875), pp. 288–289.

<sup>21</sup> Alvin L. Alexander, a farmer, homesteaded in Beaver Precinct, Boone County, northwest of the Pawnee Agency. He was a native of Pennsylvania and was 32 years old at the time. United States Bureau of the Census *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Population*.

<sup>22</sup> Williamson possibly means Sun Chief, nephew of the Pawnee leader Pitalesharo, who had died that fall. Pitalesharo was commonly recognized by the whites as the head Pawnee chief. Although the title of chief was primarily hereditary, the Pawnees did not recognize a single chief as the whites thought. Gene Weltfish, *The Lost Universe* (New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1971), p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> George W. Clother was in partnership with his father in running the "Clother House," a hotel north of the Columbus depot. He was a trader and had extensive dealings with the Pawnee. Andreas, *History*, pp. 1271, 1276.

<sup>24</sup> William Burgess's letter of October 31, 1874, to John W. Williamson provides his written instructions. "Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Pawnee Agency, 1874–1875," *National Archives Microfilm Publications No. 234* (Washington: National Archives, 1956), Roll 663. John D. Miles was the agent for the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes. *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1874* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1874), p. 236.

<sup>25</sup> H. G. Bill was sheriff of Webster County, Nebraska, at this time. Andreas, *History*, p. 1480.

<sup>26</sup> The Red Cloud Chief for November 25, 1874, reported that Frank Mattison had 25 bushels of wheat stolen when the Pawnees passed through.

<sup>27</sup> This camp was near present-day Luray in northern Russell County, Kansas. Blackman, "The Story of the Pawnee's Removal South," p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Williamson related to Blackman how some Pawnees took delight in frightening settlers, who were understandably apprehensive with the nearby presence of such a large body of Indians. Near Spillman's Valley, which is apparently in northwest Lincoln County, Kansas, several Pawnees came upon a schoolhouse and frightened the children by looking in the windows and yelling. Some of the children fled home stating that Indians had killed their teacher. This was pure fabrication. Blackman, "Removal of Pawnees to Oklahoma, 1874," pp. 17–18.

<sup>29</sup> This is Little Spotted Horse (Ah-sah-wa-kov), not to be confused with Big Spotted Horse, the talented horse thief. Harry Coons' name often appears as "Kuhns" in agency documents.

<sup>30</sup> Further details on the materials packed by the Pawnees can be found in R. Eli Paul, "Pawnee Camp Equipage, A Letter by John W. Williamson," *The Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly*, 21 (Summer 1985), pp. 1–3.

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<sup>31</sup>"A letter was received from John Williamson dated 11th inst. giving an account of the death of Spotted Horse, 1st Skeedee soldier after an illness of a week. His loss is to be regretted as he was one of the most reliable of our Indians." Letter of George F Howell, Acting Agent, Pawnee Indian Agency to Barclay White, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Omaha, Nebraska, December 16, 1874, "Letters Received," *National Archives Microfilm*, Roll 663.

The minister was probably Rev James J. A. T Dixon of the Congregational Church. His daughter was Mrs. William (Lillie) Harbaugh. Letter of Alma Lange, historian at the Bunker Hill, Kansas, Museum, to Thomas R. Buecker January 28, 1985; A. T Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A.T Andreas, 1883), p. 1288.

<sup>32</sup> When Williamson was interviewed by Blackman, he related the following remarkable incident regarding the failure to secure a grave marker for Little Spotted Horse:

"There is a gentleman in Genoa who is quite an enthusiast in occult science. This gentleman and the Williamson family were visiting at the same house one evening when, as they said, for pure entertainment, their host produced a board arranged with the alphabet on it in such a way that a block of wood resting on the board could move freely to any letter and thus spell out words [a ouija board]. Mrs. Williamson and some one else found the board would answer simple questions by simply placing their fingers lightly on the board. After some time they asked who was wanted and the board spelled 'Buck Scan. This was Mr. Williamson's Indian name and he was soon all attention. Of course his wife knew this was his name, but not one in the room understood Pawnee except Mr Williamson. Mr Williamson asked who was talking and the answer came in Pawnee as did now the following converse. The board spelled out Spotted Horse and reminded Mr Williamson of not only the date of the Chief's death and the place but repeated his last words and reminded him of the stone which he had promised to have placed at the grave. Mr Williamson said he had enough of ogie board 'for fun' as it was quite a serious thing to him. The rest of the company could understand part of it as some was in English but Mr Williamson will not allow them to use the board when he is around now. Mr Williamson is quite sure that no deception (so common in such cases) could have been practiced in this case, as no one in the room at the time could understand Pawnee but himself. The matter has worried him not a little, as he frankly admits." Blackman, "Removal of Pawnees to Oklahoma, 1874," pp. 13-15.

<sup>33</sup> Barclay White, a Philadelphia Quaker was appointed head of the Northern Superintendency in 1871 and, as such, was Burgess' immediate superior White was considered a diligent and thorough administrator who served until his position was abolished in 1876. Milner *With Good Intentions*, pp. 45, 189.

<sup>34</sup> Pawnee bread was made by mixing flour salt, soda, and water to a stiff dough. This was patted down to about ½-inch thick, dipped in animal fat, and fried until it turned brown. Williamson manuscript autobiography, p. 18; Weltfish, *The Lost Universe*, p. 80.

<sup>35</sup> To the Pawnee the sacred bundle directly linked their gods and themselves. Each bundle contained articles of great religious significance. Using the bundle, priests conducted appropriate rituals, which, in turn, expressed the special heavenly order under which the Pawnee lived. Hyde, *The Pawnee Indians*, p. 356; Milner, *With Good Intentions*, pp. 29-30; Weltfish, *The Lost Universe*, pp. 26, 99-105.

<sup>36</sup> This man is identified as John T Rankin, a cattleman near Sun City, Kansas. Blackman, "The Story of the Pawnee's Removal South," p. 26.