



Washkeenah (The Elk), a Kickapoo leader of the nineteenth century. (Courtesy of The Kansas State Historical Society) Rev. Samuel Allis, writing in 1834, said that at the end of their Sunday church services, the Kennekuk followers would march around single file, shaking hands, and saying or singing their prayers, which consisted of characters cut on a paddle. The characters represented words. Their house was marked at the top of the paddle. (See also page 26)

# Facts and Fiction

How do you know if it is going to rain? By looking at the new moon perhaps? If it is tilted over, so that the water can pour out, the month will be wet; but if it is sitting up so that it holds the water like a cup, the weather will be dry. And if the squirrels work very hard to stash away a lot of nuts, you can tell in advance that it is going to be a hard winter.

So what have these weather prediction signs got to do with Indians? Well, it happens that these (and many other) weather signs probably came to the white pioneers, and subsequently to us, from the Indians. They were great outdoorsmen and excellent observers of nature.

In a recent discussion about such things between a group of Kickapoos and non-Indians, it was suggested to the Indians present that these beliefs belonged to the white man first — and two Kickapoos jumped to the challenge. "No. That's the Indian people's!" said one with great emphasis. The other stated firmly, "White man got it from the Indian." They are no doubt right in their convictions.

Among a number of other traditions, attitudes, and customs of the Kickapoos, the group discussed some games that have been handed down for generations. The favorite outdoor game for men was stickball. Any number of players made up a team—thirty, fifty, a hundred. Each player had a long stick with a pocket at one end, made of buckskin strings. It resembled a baseball glove. The ball was tossed back and forth with this "pocket" at the end of the stick. "Just like using your arm. When you give it a good sling, it goes about three, four hundred, five hundred yards. A good strong man throws it a long ways," one man explained.

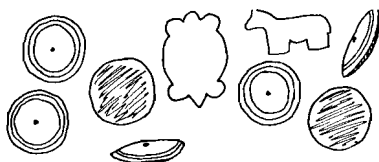
The goal posts were set about two hundred yards apart. When a player hit the post with the ball, his side got a point. Prizes such as wool blankets used to be given for the points. If the post was hit above the four foot mark, a score was made, but if it was hit below that mark, it didn't count. Stickball, they said, could

get pretty rough. (The women have a ball game, too; it is described on page 37.)

Stickball is played only occasionally nowadays. "Oh, we lost everything now. We play baseball, basketball, football. Those young fellows don't care now." (Another evidence of the progressive decline of a once strong tribe.) It should be added here that when "those young fellows" play the popular ball games of today, they are first rate.

The favorite indoor game was, and still is, squaw dice. The game requires nine "dice," which are usually carved out of bone. There are seven round pieces about an inch in diameter, one turtle-shaped piece, and one shaped like a horse or a bear. The topside of each dice is polished white; the backside is colored black. The dice are placed in a wooden bowl, and each player tosses them up so that they resettle in the bowl. Twelve points is game, and various combinations of the dice give different scores. For example, if two dice fall with the black side up, and all the rest are white-side up, the player gets two points. If there are one white and eight black, the player gets seven points. If the horse stands upright on its feet, the player wins the game. (The chances for this are pretty slim: The dice are only about an eighth of an inch thick.) Other combinations of black and white give various scores, or no score at all. Squaw dice can be played by any number of people, the more the merrier.

Squaw dice carved from bone. The seven round pieces are about 7/8" to 1" in diameter, the turtle is 1 1/4" long, and the horse is about 1" long. (Courtesy of Louis Jessepe.)

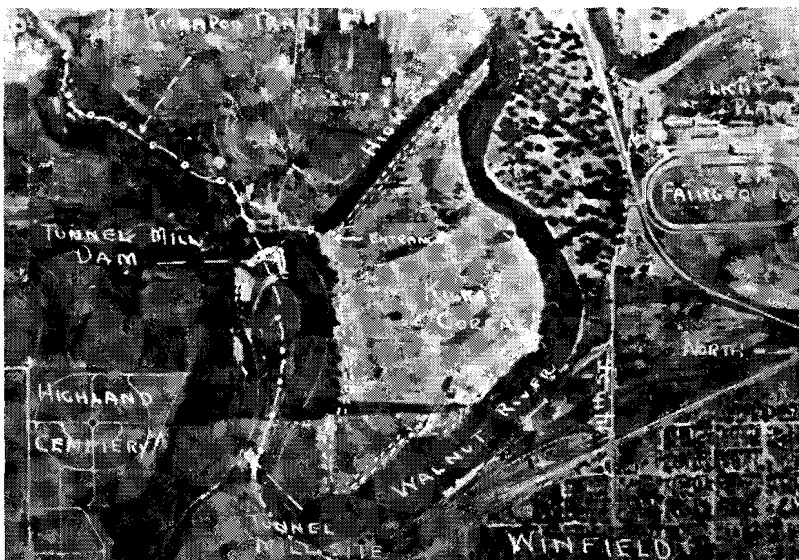


These, of course, are only samples from Kickapoo life. To tell a very big part would take a whole book. Before leaving the "Facts and Fiction" section, however, an interesting sidelight to the provable history of the Kickapoo tribe in Kansas should be brought up. It is the legend of the Kickapoo Corral near Winfield, in Cowley County.

Margaret Hill McCarter, the Kansas writer who was well known and much loved in the early part of this century, probably

started the story in her book *A Master's Degree* (1913). Perhaps the legend was going around before she wrote the book. Perhaps she just made it up. Perhaps the tale is actually true. It could be. So far, nobody has found any proof one way or the other. So if you have a spirited, imaginative soul, you may want to believe it; if you have a poo-pooing soul, you don't have to.

Anyway, here's the setting for the story: At the southwest edge of Winfield, about a half mile from town, the Walnut River loops in and out and back so that it forms kind of a peninsula. On the north, east, and south, the peninsula is surrounded by water; on the west it is protected by a steep, heavily wooded bluff. The bluff runs to the river on the north, and about a hundred yards short of the water on the south. This hundred yards forms a natural entrance to an otherwise nearly impassable area. One man could easily guard the entrance to the peninsula, which is called the Kickapoo Corral.



Aerial view of the Kickapoo Corral, located southwest of Winfield. (Courtesy of WINFIELD DAILY COURIER)

According to Charles O. Booth, editor of the *Winfield Daily Courier*, this is the story of the Kickapoo Corral:

"In the early 1800's the Osage and Kickapoo tribes roamed this region. The tribes were friendly and each agreed that it

would help the other in case of attack from an unfriendly tribe, according to legend.

"When the Pawnees attacked the Kickapoos, the Osages helped drive them off. Shortly afterward, the Osages were attacked by the hated cannibal tribe of the Tonkawas. The Osages called on the Kickapoos for help, but the Kickapoos, being afraid of the Tonkawas, holed up in Kickapoo Corral.

"After beating off the Tonkawas, the legend goes, the Osages in retaliation for the Kickapoos breaking their pledge, besieged the Kickapoos for days in the corral. Then, one stormy night, the Osages attacked by swarming down the bluff and massacred all the Kickapoos except one man and one woman, who made their escape by swimming through the whirlpool below the ford."

McCarter's version has a more romantic touch, and instead of Osages, she wrote that the enemy tribe were Sioux. Red Fox was a Sioux brave who had determined to have a beautiful Kickapoo maiden, The Fawn of the Morning Light, for his wife. However, she loved a Kickapoo warrior, Swift Elk. Red Fox attacked the Kickapoos in the Corral in order to capture The Fawn; hundreds of his Sioux tribesmen backed him up because they wanted the horses kept there. The Fawn and her beloved Swift Elk decided to escape by the river. Red Fox saw them, and shot an arrow which went clear through Swift Elk's body and into The Fawn's shoulder, thus pinning them together. The river swept the pair toward a fatal whirlpool. Red Fox jumped into the water to save the girl, and all three were sucked into the roaring vortex. Moreover, according to McCarter, a curse had been put on this same whirlpool by an old Indian chief of unknown tribe: that each year the life of a white man would be lost there in retribution for the wrongs done to him and his people. Mr. Booth says that the floods of recent years have pushed the bank back many feet at the site of the whirlpool, and the treacherous twenty-five foot hole has long been filled with silt and debris. That it ever really claimed a life a year, he seriously doubts. Anyway, those are a couple of variations to the legend of the massacre on the eighty-acre peninsula called Kickapoo Corral.

But now let's get on to some confirmed Kansas Kickapoo material.