

## WINDS OF THE VALLEY

by

Barbara Booth

The tall grass of Kansas bends and waves as the ever changing winds brush across the land in an unending love song. Theirs is an eternal courtship. The dust in the summer and the snow in the winter drift in swirls and lines, forever writing and erasing the story of the Flint Hills.

The winds whispered their wordless tales long before Big Chief John of the Kaw Indian Tribe led a group of surveyors up the Santa Fe Trail near the White Man's town of Council Grove and on to the west. Only a few miles farther they found a part of Kansas which lay in a quiet valley between gentle hills with sparkling springs at the head of a creek. The surveyors found the waters there so clear they named them Diamond Springs.

The winds were filled with memories before Jason and Chloe Ann Loomis homesteaded in the Diamond Valley at the close of the Civil War.

On the western hillside stood an old log cabin when Jason brought his family to Kansas. Who had built it, or who had lived there, Jason never knew. No doubt the Indians did, especially the Kaws who lived on Big John Creek near Diamond Valley.

The cabin with its sturdy walls and solid roof was a welcome shelter for Jason and his pioneer family as they planted their first crops and began to build their own home of native limestone at the table rock crossing of Diamond Creek in the valley.

There was a cautious peace between the farmer and the Indian during those early days. Guardedly they shared their valley land. The occasional stories told in the community were reminders to Jason and his neighbors that there was a continuing need for caution.

One of the families remembered well the year a group of young braves went into their home, took a featherbed mattress out into the yard, slit it open and rode off, dragging the fast emptying ticking in their whooping wake. The mattress had been brought all the way from England; and Jason and his friends figured when the Kansas winds got through with those feathers, they'd probably be back in England once again!

Usually the confrontations ended in a bristling stand-off, with a young brave caught by the housewife in the act of stealing eggs or begging unsuccessfully at her front door. The little group of braves and precious gifts for the dead that Jason had found near the log cabin showed only a quiet respect, not conflict . . . still the group of Kansans learned to sleep with one eye open like the wild cats which roamed the nearby hills.

A skirmish between the peaceful Kaws and a band of warring Cheyennes left seven of the Kaws dead and brought a temporary halt to the peaceful security of the little valley below the Diamond Springs.

Jason and his neighbors stayed in the safety of their stone farm house while the warring Little Robe and his tribe encamped in their Diamond Valley. When they had moved on, life settled once again into its comfortable pattern for the farming community and its Kaw neighbors.

In time the Diamond Valley homesteaders built a store, a post office, a school and a church with its cemetery nearby. For several decades Diamond Valley was an important station on the Santa Fe Trail, a crossroads for the cattle drives as well as the annual campsite for the Kaws.

Each spring the Indians left their homes on Big John Creek and headed out on their buffalo hunt. They always stopped at the cabin on the hill by Diamond Springs. Jason watched as the buffalo hunters settled into their hillside camp for the night. Did they love that cabin as much as they did the Diamond Spring with its crystal clear water? Certainly they didn't show that much respect for the frame homes of Jason and his neighbors in the valley community. He was sure they were basically peaceful with their clusters of women and children showing their strong family ties. Still he stayed close by his new stone house as the Indians set their tents encircling the little log cabin which had so recently served as his own first Kansas home.

Sentinel fires on the surrounding hilltops glowed through the night as reminders that the braves were standing their silent watch also.

And so the pioneer stood by to protect his land and his home.

That was why he saw the young squaw as she was thrown from her skittish pony. He had started towards the hill to offer help but her back was broken, and she was dead. Jason stood silently at a respectful distance as the grief-stricken young brave buried his bride beneath a tree by the old log cabin. Tenderly he placed her tea kettle and other possessions on the fresh mound of dirt. Jason stood watching as the saddened Indians staked out the pony to kill it.

In the morning it was a sadly quiet tribe of Indians who rode off on their buffalo hunt and a silent farmer who turned back to his own family in his Diamond Valley home. Only the Kansas winds encircled the little cabin where the ring of tents had been. They stirred the foot prints and blurred the tracks and whispered a memory through the valley.

All day long the winds gusted around the little log cabin blowing bits of dust from the grave and dropping them like silent tears into the sparkling water of Diamond Creek.

In the evening, as the sun was setting beyond the hills of Diamond Valley, the settlers heard a half-human sound rise

mournfully above the winds. Long and deep and agonizing it tore across the valley to echo back in hollow emptiness for the lonely Indian brave who stood on the hillside crying out one last farewell to his bride.

The tall grass of Kansas bends and waves as the ever changing winds reveal the heartbeat of the land. The dust in the summer and the snow in the winter drift in swirls and lines, forever writing and erasing its story.



*The log cabin at Diamond Springs, Kansas, built prior to the Civil War and used as the first home of Jason and Chloe Ann Loomis in the Diamond Valley. Only the foundation stones remain today.*