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# CHEYENNE VOICES

By Dr. Karen McKellips

**W**hen Western Oklahoma was opened to white settlement, the voices of the Cheyenne and other Native Americans were already here. The federal government's power had years before decided this to be the place where the Cheyenne must live. Yet, here, as in so many other places and with so many other tribes with the coming of white settlement, the federal government and the dominant white culture, officially and unofficially, blatantly and subtly, undertook to replace the Cheyenne voice and the Cheyenne ways, to minimize, even eliminate, this voice in Western Oklahoma.

Major tools employed to accomplish the stilling of the Cheyenne voice were religious conversion and education, often linked together. Various religious denominations were given by the government the right and responsibility for providing the schools and teachers to convince Native Americans that they shouldn't "put on the blanket," an expression used to describe the wearing of tribal dress, the symbol of failure to adopt the white man's ways.

Attempts to still the voice of the Cheyenne and other Plains Indians tribes such as the Arapaho, Comanche, and Kiowa began in Western Oklahoma years before the opening of their lands in the two decades bracketing the turn of the twentieth century. The Washita campaigns of 1868-1869 and the Red River War of 1874-1875 resulted in the decision to try to end such conflict through conversion and education of tribal leaders and Native American children.

Most of the Southern Cheyenne came into the Agency at Darlington in March 1875, driven by hunger. From these were selected thirty-three Cheyenne who joined thirty-nine other Plains Indians—Arapaho, Kiowa, Comanche, and Caddo—who were



Illustrations by  
John Crawford

sent for punishment and to prevent further uprisings to imprisonment at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida. The group also included Lone Wolf, who was among 250 Kiowas who had surrendered at Fort Sill the month before. Some of those

chosen to go were picked at random and others because of participation in certain incidents.

Among the Cheyenne were Making Medicine (Okuhhatuh), who had participated in the battle of Adobe Walls; Medicine Water (Mihuhyeumup); White Man (Owussait); Long Back (Chaseyunnuh); Rising Bull (Otoashuhjhos); Bear's Heart (Nockkoist); Chief Killer (Nohhunahwih); Broken Leg (Cohoe); and Buffalo Calf (Mochi), who had been in the party that killed five members of the Germaine family and abducted the four daughters. Others accused of participating in raids in which whites had been killed were Bear Shield (Nockoyouh), Soaring Eagle (Ouho), Bear Killer (Nocomista), Left Hand (Nomohst), and Big Moccasin. Those who had been accused of nothing except being "ringleaders" included Heap of Birds (Moeyauhayist), Eagle's Head (Minimic), Star (Holtoich), Howling Wolf (Honanistto), Antelope (Wuhah), Wolf's Marrow (Comeuhsurah), Little Medicine (Mohaihachit), Shave Head (Ouksteuh), Roman Nose (Wouhunih), Big Nose (Paeyis), Squint Eyes (Quchkeimus), Little Chief (Koweonarre), Matches (Chisiseduh), Buffalo Meat (Oewotoh), Buzzard (Mohewihkio), Gray Beard, Lean Bear, Shaving Wolf, and Spotted Elk.

These warriors were escorted to St. Augustine by Richard Henry Pratt, later to be called the "Red Man's Moses," who stayed with them as their jailer throughout their imprisonment. He appears to have had more tolerance for people of dif-

ferent races than was typical of those in his profession at the time as he not only commanded a black regiment but also fought army authority to make imprisonment more bearable for his charges. A veteran of the Civil War, Pratt had served in the Washita campaign of 1868 and in the Red River War.

At Fort Marion, to their horror, Pratt made his prisoners cut their hair and wear army uniforms. Otherwise his treatment could almost be described as kind. He took them on outings and let them go to town without passes. They were allowed to work for townspeople to earn money, and local women organized a school and taught them to read and write. Their teachers included one of the first graduates of Mount Holyoke and another woman who before the Civil War had owned a rather exclusive private school for girls. They went sailing and fishing for sharks. They presented dances to entertain the local townspeople. Among the people who came to observe them was Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose brother was Superintendent of Schools in Florida during the Reconstruction period.

In April of 1878, three years after their arrival, thirteen of the Cheyenne Fort Marion Boys, as they had become known, were released and returned home. (One had been shot and killed trying to escape on the trip to St. Augustine.) Seventeen of the young men were sent as the first Native Americans to be enrolled at Hampton Institute, the Black school founded a few years earlier for the newly freed slaves and whose most-noted student, Booker T. Washington, had graduated three years earlier. The other two went with three from other tribes to New York to study for the ministry, four to become Episcopal deacons and one a Presbyterian minister.

At this time Pratt had received permission from the Secretary of War to open an off-reservation Indian school at the abandoned Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania, and in 1879 the school opened with 136 students.

Three of the Cheyenne Fort Marion Boys showed exceptional promise in regards embracing white man's ways. They had spoken and written frequently about how

earnestly they now believed in adopting the white culture. They were Roman Nose, Making Medicine, and Cohoe.

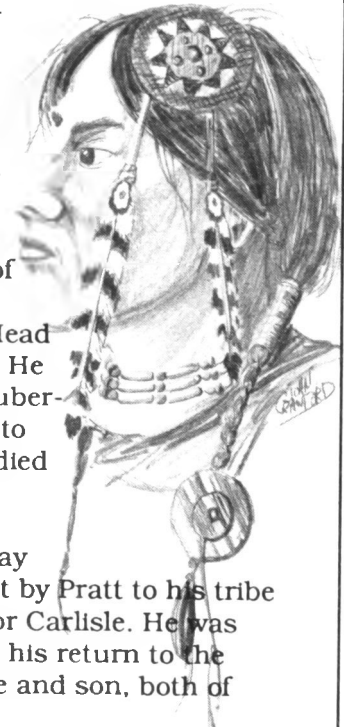
Roman Nose had asked to stay in the East and went with Dr. and Mrs. Henry Carruthers to their home in Tarrytown, New York, for a visit. From Dr. Carruthers, Roman Nose adopted the name Henry C. This taking of a Christian first name has helped Cheyenne historians keep Henry separate from the old chief Roman Nose, who died in 1868. At the opening of Carlisle, Henry asked to be enrolled and was. He stayed there three years, spending summers with the Carrutherses in New York and working for a few months on a farm in Massachusetts.

By the time Henry had finished his three years at Carlisle, all but three of the Fort Marion Boys had returned to Indian Territory. In August he returned himself to Darlington.

Cohoe was admitted to Hampton Institute where he studied tailoring and then to Carlisle; but at the age of 26, he was unhappy there and homesick to return to the reservation. In 1880, he, too, returned to Darlington.

Of the four prisoners who went to New York to study for the Episcopal ministry, two were Cheyenne—Making Medicine and Shave Head. They took English names when they were baptized. Making Medicine took the name David Pendleton in honor of Senator George Hunt Pendleton, a supporter of Carlisle, and added an English spelling of his Cheyenne name, Oakerhater. Shave Head became John Wicks. He was suffering from tuberculosis; he returned to the reservation and died within weeks.

Oakerhater in the second year of his stay in New York was sent by Pratt to his tribe to recruit students for Carlisle. He was successful and upon his return to the East brought his wife and son, both of



whom died after a short time in New York.

In June 1881 Oakerhater was ordained in Syracuse. On the same day, he, Zotom, a Kiowa Fort Marion Boy, and Rev. J. B. Wicks, an Episcopal missionary assigned to Indian Territory, set out for the reservation.

Thus, three Cheyenne leaders had become convinced to quit the blanket and spoke of returning to their people to urge them to adopt white man's ways and the white man's religion. It was hoped by those who had a hand in their conversion and education that they would be leaders among the Cheyenne in guiding their people toward the new culture. Were they faithful to this task in the years to come? Did they aid in the stilling of the Cheyenne voice?

Other Fort Marion Boys had quickly returned to the ways of their people. Most of them hadn't expressed intention to do anything else. Lone Wolf returned home after his release, put on the blanket, and died—some said of a broken heart. Zotom, the Kiowa ordained with Oakerhater, returned to the old ways, participated in the Ghost Dance movement, left the Episcopal faith.

Upon his return, Henry Roman Nose tried many different occupations. Trained as a tinsmith, he had been promised he would be hired by the Indian Agent Miles to follow that trade, but he wasn't. He worked briefly as a scout at Fort Reno. Miles again promised the tinsmith job if he would go back to Carlisle and take a refresher course. Roman Nose left his family and did so. When he returned again to the agency, Miles was gone and the new Indian Agent had appointed another Cheyenne to be tinsmith. Roman Nose took a job as an agency policeman and complained to the government. Eventually he received the tinsmith job, but the pay was so low that he couldn't move from his canvas tent into a house.

In 1890 many of the Southern Cheyenne took up the "Ghost Dance," a religious movement promising the coming of a messiah if the Native Americans returned

to the old ways. Henry Roman Nose joined them. He renounced white ways and refused to send his children to school, even when rations were withheld to force him to do so. He was tired from his tinsmith job.

In 1891 he received his land allotment and lived out his life on it, serving as a chief and as a leader in the Native American Church. Indian agents weren't pleased with his leadership. Agent A. E. Woodson accused him of setting a bad example for the younger Cheyenne. When Roman Nose and Cohoe participated in a delegation of Cheyenne who traveled to Washington, D.C., Agent Woodson wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs saying that

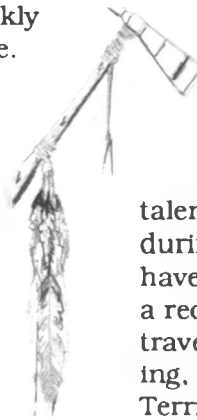
Roman Nose had engaged in evil, forbidden practices and followed non-progressive, superstitious ways. Henry Roman Nose died on William Cohoe's allotment during a peyote ceremony in 1917.

Cohoe had taken the name William during his captivity. He was a talented artist, and his drawings made during the Fort Marion imprisonment have been published and were the focus of a recent Oklahoma Museum Association traveling exhibit. He did very little painting, however, after his return to Indian Territory.

Upon returning home, Cohoe worked at the agency as a laborer, mill hand, teamster, brick molder, and baker—all in the space of two years. At Hampton, he had trained as a tailor. He later worked as a butcher and also built fences. In 1882, he quit his employment at the agency and worked for six years as a clerk at a trading post, followed by a stint as a scout at Ft. Supply. Once he received his land allotment, he worked as a farmer.

Like Henry Roman Nose, he put aside his white man's Christianity and became a member of the Native American Church. He grew his hair long and put on the blanket. He became head chief of the War Dancers Society and followed Cheyenne custom by taking two sisters as wives. He died in 1924 on his allotment in Blaine County.

David Pendleton Oakerhater was to serve the Episcopal Church in Oklahoma



longer than any other cleric. Ordained a deacon, he was never made a priest. For three years, he and Rev. Wicks worked among the Cheyenne. In 1884, Wicks' health failed and he returned home. For nine years Oakerhater was alone as representative of the Episcopal Church among the Cheyenne. During this period, many Cheyenne converts left the Christian religion, but Oakerhater worked faithfully by word and example to show the advantages of the white man's ways and religion to his people.

He was much praised by the white society of the area. The Indian Agents praised his work in official dispatches. Several favorable mentions of him and his work were made in the *CHEYENNE TRANSPORTER*, a newspaper published at the agency. He is credited with conducting the first Christian burial among the Cheyenne and with persuading sick Cheyenne to see the agency physician instead of the tribal medicine man.

His church, built in 1882, was near Darlington. Nearby was established a mission school which later moved to Fay and finally to Whirlwind Camp. Later another mission was built at Bridgeport, which he also served.

Episcopal Bishop Francis Brooke arrived in the Territory in 1893 and Rev. David Stanford in 1896. They received permission in 1897 to take over the government school at Whirlwind. The effect of this school on the Cheyenne didn't please the government authorities. They were trying to persuade Native Americans to live on and cultivate their allotments while allowing their children to be educated at boarding schools. The Cheyenne and Arapaho would leave their allotments and camp around the schools where their children were enrolled.

For this reason, Whirlwind School was closed in 1901. In 1904, Rev. Stanford persuaded the government to let the school be reopened as a school for children in bad health. However, able-bodied children continued to attend, and their parents continued to camp nearby.

When Stanford left in 1908, an Episcopal missionary, Miss Harriet Bedell, took his place as head of the school until the



government ordered it closed in 1917.

During the entire period of existence of the Whirlwind School, Oakerhater lived among the Cheyenne at the camp. He served as translator and interpreter of Native American ways to all the priests and missionaries in the area. Whirlwind Day School was more popular with Native Americans than the boarding schools and was consequently unpopular with the Indian agents and officials of nearby boarding schools. Much of the credit for this popularity was probably attributable to Oakerhater.

With the closing of the school in 1917, Oakerhater retired but continued to counsel, preach, and baptize. He died in 1934 at about the age of 84. In 1985, the Episcopal Church named David Pendleton Oakerhater to its calendar of saints, the first Native American to be so honored.

If we listen for diverse voices by listening to the Cheyenne, perhaps we find diversity not just between the white voices and the Cheyenne voices. Perhaps among the Cheyenne voices themselves there is diversity. ✨

*(DR. KAREN MCKELLIPS was born and reared in Thomas and has a B.S. from Southwestern. Her father grew up on a farm across the South Canadian River from Whirlwind Camp. She has an M.S. and Ed.D. from OSU and teaches history and philosophy of education at Cameron University.)*