

Short Tempers Of Shortgrassers Inherited From Earliest Settlers

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MERTZON — When Indians began to refer to this short-stubbed rangeland as the “Land of the Threshing Lodge Brothers,” they must have been inspired by the same literary magic that fathered such modern dandies as “tiger in your tank” and “black power,” because even to this day the label is as precise as the habits of a veteran schoolmarm.

History tells us that early settlers of this area were habitually ill-tempered. According to the writings of the little-known Lipan Apache historian, old Cross Threaded Colander, the pioneers had hardly allowed the chinks to dry in their cabins until they were taking exception to every frailty and shortcoming of the Indians.

He said that even braves who weren't smart enough to send or receive smoke signals soon caught on that the white man was motivated by a hair-trigger nature. Cross Threaded Colander proved this point by relating that within six months after the pioneers had unpacked, every member of the tribe knew that if he happened to take an innocent midnight stroll past a horse corral or a chicken coop, he had best be prepared for a barrage of lead severe enough to have turned back Stonewall Jackson.

The Indian scholar goes on to say that the harder his nation worked for peace, the more cantankerous the white brother grew.

He reports one incident in which the tribal council stayed in session until the bowls of the peace pipe burned from the stems. Then, when the council's proposals for peace were submitted to the frontiersmen, the refusal was so filled with anti-Indian sentiment that it would have hurt the feelings of a cigar store dummy Indian, much less those of the live red men.

In sum, judging from the various writings of the Cross Threaded Colander, the early days of the shortgrass country can be described as an era in which the white man was dead bent on being disagreeable about every little scalping; furious over the Indians' custom of showering the school grounds with arrow points; and downright belligerent when the red men paid honor to his gods by burning a barn or cabin every few days.

The Indians, in turn, can be depicted as a simple plains people who were filled with mischief, easily misunderstood, and propelled by a sense of humor that often failed to suit the rigid anti-violence tastes of the frontier family.

After the Indians moved on, the unreasonable attitude of the whites continued in the shortgrass country. The same bloodlines who fought the redskins turned to raising cane with the railroads and literally making life impossible for hombres who were trying to get a start in business with a running iron and a long rope.

Perhaps there is a small amount of justification for their bellicosity toward the railroads, what with the latter's steam engines setting prairie fires by night and their directors raising freight rates by day. But their intolerant attitude toward ambitious cowmen is nothing more than a continuation of the nit-picking objections of their forefathers to the Indians' habit of stealing a few horses.

The modern scene in the shortgrass country, as I have reported several times, is still marked by this same testy disposition.

Oil companies are abused for tearing up a few hundred yards of fence.

Deer hunters are slandered to the high heavens for shooting a few pieces off windmills. The general picture is one of a breed of men who care nothing about living in peace.

There's no telling how far this mean disposition will reach, because shortgrassers beget more shortgrassers. The cycle goes on and on. The only consolation for the minority, blessed with perfect temperaments, is that if we can get along out here, we can live anywhere on earth.