

GOVERNMENT POLICY AND INDIAN FARMING ON THE CHEYENNE AND ARAPAHO RESERVATION: 1869-1880

By *William D. Pennington**

In 1877, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, E. A. Hayt, prepared a list of preliminaries for civilizing Indians. Part of the list included "the endowment of the Indians with lands, divided into farms of convenient size, the title to which shall be vested in every feasible way the knowledge of agriculture and a taste for agricultural pursuits among them."¹ Obviously, the Commissioner linked agriculture to progress toward civilization for the Indian. This view was characteristic of the Bureau of Indian Affairs' attitude toward the Indian problem. By making Indians tillers of the soil, they would be subject to the same institutions upon which Western Civilization was based. The implementation of this policy among the Plains tribes unfamiliar with the agrarian way of life was a most formative task. The difficulty is illustrated when one looks at the attempt of the government to make the Cheyennes and Arapahoes farmers during the early years of their reservation.

The foundation of the government's farming policy with the Cheyennes and Arapahoes is found in three treaties prior to their being placed on a reservation in 1869. The Fort Laramie, Fort Wise, and Medicine Lodge treaties all emphasized the government's effort to promote farming. Article seven of the Treaty of Fort Laramie, signed in 1851, called for the Cheyennes, Arapahoes and five other tribes to receive \$50,000 annually for 10 years to purchase "provisions, merchandise, domestic animals, and agricultural implements."² Additional farming promotion was mentioned in the Treaty of Fort Wise ten years later. Each member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes was to be assigned a tract of forty acres of land and be established comfortably on it. The government agreed to build them houses and to furnish agricultural implements, livestock and other necessary aid and facilities to assist them in beginning agricultural pursuits. Dwelling-houses for an interpreter, miller, engineer, farmers, and mechanics were likewise provided. Throughout the treaty, the emphasis was put on helping the Indians "sustain themselves successfully in agricultural or other industrial pursuits."³

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¹ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1877* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1877), p. 1.

² Charles J. Kappler (comp. and ed.), *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, (4 vols., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904-1941) Vol. II, 595.

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 1075.

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

A definite statement of the Indian farming policy was made by the government in the third treaty, signed in 1867. The Treaty of Medicine Lodge made clear the Indian was to be a farmer and substantial inducements were offered to encourage him. Any individual member of the Cheyenne or Arapaho tribe, who was the head of a family, was promised a tract of land of his choosing within the reservation, not to exceed 320 acres. All he had to do was show a desire to begin farming. To help the Indian who had chosen his land, the government promised to provide "seeds and agricultural implements for the first year, not exceeding in value one hundred dollars." For each following year, which the Indian farmed up to three years, he would receive seeds and implements of up to \$25.00 in value. The treaty further stipulated that instructions would be given by a farmer hired by the agency to assist these Indians who had commenced to farm. Finally, \$500 was to be given to the 10 Indians who, according to the agent, grew "the most valuable crops for the respective year."⁴

Progressively the three treaties reveal that the government became committed to the idea of civilizing the Indian through farming. They agreed to give the Indian every possible opportunity to follow the white road of civilization by allotting him land, by providing him with agricultural implements, and by extending other incentives.

The land on which the Cheyenne and Arapaho were expected to follow this policy was critical to the success of the tribes' agricultural efforts. The Department of Interior instructed Agent Brinton Darlington in August, 1869, to select an agency site which possessed good soil and an ample supply of timber and water.⁵ In compliance with these instructions he chose a site on the North Fork of the Canadian River which he described by saying that "almost the whole of the bottom and most of the upland is suitable for cultivation."⁶ Darlington also stated that there was sufficient area to provide an eighty acre farm for every male person over eighteen years of age, in the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes.⁷

Darlington's report applied only to the eastern portion of the reservation which he deemed fertile enough for farming. The western portion, and in

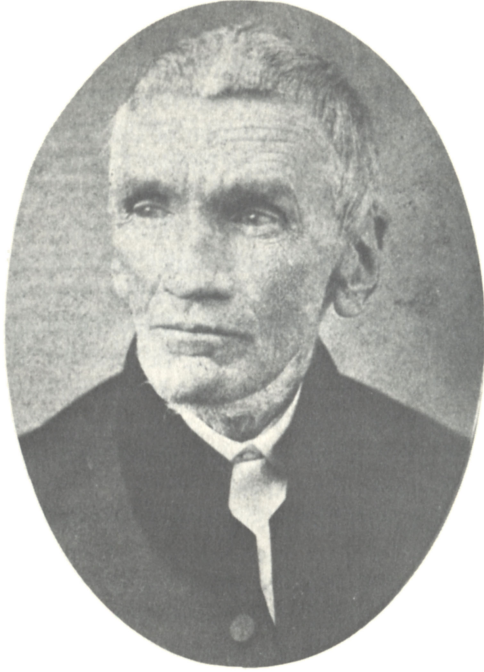
⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 807-811.

⁵ Brinton Darlington to Enoch Hoag, November 7, 1870, Upper Arkansas Agency, Letters Received, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁶ Darlington to Hoag, August 17, 1869, Central Superintendency, Letters Received, National Archives.

⁷ Captain Seth Bonney to Brevet Major W. A. Elderhin, September 18, 1869, p. 58, Camp Supply, Indian Territory Letterbook, Indian Archives, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, quoted in Martha Buntin, "Difficulties Encountered in Issuing Cheyenne and Arapaho Subsistence: 1861-1870," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XIII, No. 2 (March, 1935), pp. 41-42.

INDIAN FARMING ON RESERVATION



Brighton Darlington, who led the early effort by the federal government to organize a system of farming among the Cheyenne and Arapaho.

years of drought or dry spells even the eastern portion, proved to be otherwise. Agents of the reservation from Darlington on, would explain annually how the lack of water at critical times in the growing season hurt the farming efforts. Agent G. D. Williams best characterized the reservation land when he concluded that "the long spell of dry weather intervening between the spring and autumn rains makes it questionable whether this will ever become a successful agricultural region without the aid of irrigation."⁸

With the land questionable for farming, the task of the government to transform these Plains tribes into farmers in the early years was a most difficult one. The two reservation agents sent to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Reserve were Darlington, who served from 1869 to 1872, and John D. Miles from 1872 to 1880. Both men attempted to carry out federal policy set forth in the treaties by teaching their Indians to farm.

⁸ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commission of Indian Affairs for the Year 1887* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887), p. 75.

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

Darlington, while serving only three of the twelve years, encountered more difficulties than his successor. Before the Indians adopted agriculture, Darlington first had to gain the confidence and friendship of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes. This feat was accomplished by Darlington and much of what was achieved later in the civilization of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians was based upon the foundation laid by Darlington.⁹

Darlington came to Indian Territory in 1869 as part of the "peace policy" promoted by President Ulysses S. Grant. This policy placed Indians in western Indian Territory and Kansas under the care of the Society of Friends. The agents on these various reservations were supervised by the government designated Central Superintendency. Darlington's agency was first established near Camp Supply in 1869. Because the Indians believed it was too near the soldiers, the agency was moved the following year to a site on the North Fork of the Canadian River in the eastern portion of the reservation.¹⁰ Partly as a result of the changing of the agency site, little farming was done by these tribesmen the first year.¹¹

In December, 1869, Enoch Hoag, Superintendent of the Central Superintendency, wrote to E. S. Parker, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, requesting the Interior Department to "furnish funds for the breaking, fencing, and planting of some two hundred, or more, acres at the new Cheyenne Agency, the coming spring."¹² The Department provided \$500 for the cultivation of 100 acres and encouraged Darlington to promote the breaking of as much land as possible.¹³ J. A. Covington, head farmer on the reservation, remarked in May of 1870, "Our corn[,] most of [it] is up but looks very sickly on account of the scarcity of rain. The Garden is also almost dried up."¹⁴ Darlington stated that "about 220 acres of prairie broken, and so much as was done in time for seeding was planted in corn, beans, and pumpkins, and some turnip seed was sown; but as it was not possible, with the means at my command, to have the ground fenced in time, only a portion of the crops could be saved."¹⁵ This meager success in the summer of 1870 was a beginning for the agency, but little was done for Indians with regard to

⁹ John H. Seger, *Early Days Among the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians*, Walter S. Campbell, ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1924), p. 17.

¹⁰ Kappler, comp. and ed., *Laws and Treaties*, Vol. I, 841.

¹¹ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1869* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1870), pp. 382-383.

¹² Hoag to E. S. Parker, December 30, 1869, Upper Arkansas Agency, Letters Received, National Archives.

¹³ Hoag to Darlington, April 16, 1870, *ibid.*

¹⁴ J. A. Covington to Hoag, May 26, 1870, Central Superintendency, Letters Received, National Archives.

¹⁵ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1870* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1870), pp. 265-266.

INDIAN FARMING ON RESERVATION

farming. This condition caused Lieutenant Colonel A. D. Nelson to say, after escorting a train of Indian supplies to their reservation, "No serious effort has been made so far as I can learn to open farms for these Indians [Cheyennes and Arapahoes] or to build them houses or has anything else been worthy of notice in the direction of civilization."¹⁶

In 1871, Darlington tried to persuade the Indians to farm, even if on a small scale. After the buffalo hunt, he had met them in council and told of the benefits which would be derived from farming and stock raising. He also explained the government's policy and his objective. Before adjourning the council, he called for volunteers to take the lead in farming and many promised to do so.¹⁷ In February, Darlington wrote Hoag saying, "I believe, that the great body of the Indians of this agency desire to remain in peace, and many of them contemplate entering into agricultural pursuits, as soon as they can be assisted therein."¹⁸ Preceding the farming season, he again wrote Hoag saying, "Present appearances lead me to believe that a large number, most of them Arapahoes, will, to some extent, test their capability for farming this Spring—if the necessary assistance to do so should be extended to them."¹⁹

The results were much better than the previous year. The employees, under the direction of the agency farmer, were able to plant 160 acres of corn which yielded about 4,000 bushels.²⁰ As for the Indians, by urging, encouraging, and assisting, Darlington succeeded in getting the Arapahoes to plant and cultivate sixty acres, with a "fair prospect for an average harvest, and a renewed faith in ultimate success of farming."²¹ The best example of those who tried to farm was Big Mouth, an Arapaho chief, who openly vowed his determination to follow the white man's road. He selected a farm of eighty acres; Darlington had it broken and fenced; and Big Mouth, with probably the help of his wife, planted corn, pumpkins, melons, etc. Besides starting to farm, Big Mouth used his influence to try and persuade his fellow Indians to follow his example.²² As for the Chey-

¹⁶ A. D. Nelson to Brigadier General John Pope, September 2, 1870, Upper Arkansas Agency. Letters Received, National Archives.

¹⁷ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1871* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), p. 470.

¹⁸ Darlington to Hoag, February 15, 1871, Upper Arkansas Agency, Letters Received, National Archives.

¹⁹ Darlington to Hoag, March 1, 1871, *ibid.*

²⁰ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1871*, p. 473.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 470

²² Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency William Nicholson, July 17, 1871, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency Papers, Indian Archives, Oklahoma Historical Society.



Big Mouth, an Arapaho chief, who openly vowed his determination to “follow the white man’s road.”

INDIAN FARMING ON RESERVATION

ennes, they were less inclined to settle down near the agency and were unwilling to begin farming.²³

The Indians' success at farming in 1871 was not as great as Darlington had hoped but he was encouraged with their partial success. "I am of the opinion," Darlington wrote, "that the Indians of this agency, who but a few years since were the 'terror of the plains,' have shown themselves, under proper treatment, not only worthy, but capable of being advanced in all the avenues of civilization."²⁴

In the spring of 1872, Darlington died from an attack of "brain fever." His work had caused a mental and physical effort too great for his strength.²⁵ Darlington's success cannot be measured by the number of acres broken or bushels of corn planted, but his significance lay in the fact that he was able to get the job started. The importance he placed upon agriculture for these nomadic tribesmen is reflected in a letter to Hoag in 1869. "The interest of our Government and the welfare of the Indians are deeply involved in the decision of the question whether agriculture is to be introduced among them in good earnest or not."²⁶

Darlington's place was taken by John D. Miles, who previously served as agent for the Kickapoos in Kansas. He was at the peak of life, very business minded and added great enthusiasm and energy to the job of civilizing the Indians.²⁷ His outlook with regard to this job was similar to that of Darlington's. Miles summarized his views in a letter to Superintendent Hoag, "Although the Indians regard the 'Rations' and 'Annuity goods' as being our principle [sic] work, yet I regard that as being but a small matter when compared with our higher duty—that of evincing to them the advantages of a higher life."²⁸

Miles' plan for Indian farming was an attempt to enlist more fully the Indians' "heart in their work." At the head of each band, he intended to place a farmer who would oversee and assist them in their work. The members of each band were to receive all they raised or produced. Doing this, Miles hoped "to more fully, enlist, not only individual efforts among the Indians, but also a spirit of emulation among those who are placed with them in striving to excel in results." By letting them control their own

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1871*, p. 473.

²⁵ n.a., *Darlington: The Indian's Friend* (El Reno, Oklahoma: *El Reno American*, n.d.), n.p.

²⁶ Darlington to Hoag, December 8, 1869, Upper Arkansas Agency, Letters Received, National Archives.

²⁷ Seger, *Early Days*, p. 19.

²⁸ John D. Miles to Hoag, June 4, 1872, Upper Arkansas Agency, Letters Received, National Archives.

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

affairs, it was hoped the thieving in gardens and cornfields would be lessened.²⁹ Miles was very critical of the work done the previous summer because only employees raised corn on the reservation. This, in Miles' opinion, was not accomplishing the aim of the Department of Interior, "that of instructing the Indian in the arts of civilized life. . . ." "I have no doubt," Miles continued, "but that we shall fail to accomplish what we desire in many instances, and yet I believe it is the legitimate way to enlist Indian farmers."³⁰ Even so there were twice as many acres planted in corn during the summer of 1872 as there were in the summer of 1871.³¹ This was accomplished primarily by the agent employees.

Except for two or three Cheyennes, only the Arapahoes engaged in farming their lands. The Cheyennes did practically nothing in the way of farming, saying, "We are not yet ready for the corn but will wait a year or two to see how the Arapahoes succeed."³²

In the summer of 1873, Miles tried to induce the Arapahoes to choose farm sites, but enjoyed little success. Therefore, he had the large agency field plowed up and divided into small sections, giving each band a small lot on which to grow corn and melons. This met with "indifferent success." Only ten of these small patches, consisting of sixty acres in all, were planted and tilled by Arapahoes. The results were naturally lessened by drought and grasshoppers. This attempt, though small, was at least encouraging to Miles. Also, thirty acres of oats were sown in early spring, but because of the dry, cold weather the seeds rotted and Miles was forced to replot the ground and plant corn.³³

Indian farming for the 1874 season amounted to almost nothing. Arapahoes, who took an interest in farming the previous year, were too busy making a "Medicine Lodge" during the time they should have planted corn. The same section was plowed for them as before, but not much was done because Miles believed that "to plant without a reasonable hope for success, and fail, would only destroy our prospects for next spring." The 20 to 30 acres of corn and melons, which the Indians did plant, plus 250 acres of corn planted by the employees failed to mature. No rain fell

²⁹ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1872* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), p. 250.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ J. A. Covington to Hoag, June 1, 1872, Upper Arkansas Agency, Letters Received, National Archives.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1873* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1874), pp. 221-222.

INDIAN FARMING ON RESERVATION

from June until September 7 and grasshoppers visited the fields during the middle of August.³⁴ An example of the progress which Miles wished to have throughout the reservation was that made by a brave called "Curley." He selected a farm site about two miles from the agency and Miles had it plowed and fenced. Little progress, however, was made due to the hostility of most of the tribesmen on the reservation.³⁵

The results of farming for the year 1875 were also not very good. A cold, wet spring caused many of the Indians to replant their crops, resulting in additional labor. This greatly disheartened many from going any further in the experiment of farming. The results amounted to about fifty acres of corn, melons, squashes, pumpkins, and a variety of garden vegetables.³⁶

Elements hindering the progress of Indian farming were a late spring and an act of Congress which reduced the employment force.³⁷ In addition the illness of Miles in June, and the outbreak of hostility by many of the tribesmen retarded the farming efforts.³⁸ The agency farmer, Nathan Davis, reported, for the month of September, that there were 22 male farm laborers out of 374 adult males in the Arapaho tribe and three Indian farms.³⁹ In a closing note for the year 1875, Miles reported a number of leading Arapahoes had selected farms and intended to begin "agricultural existence" the following spring.⁴⁰

In 1876, Miles proposed to have ground broken in five to fifteen acre lots for the families desiring to settle down and farm. He estimated that he could find "willing and anxious persons among the Cheyennes and Arapahoes to occupy more than 500 acres in lots as above proposed."⁴¹ These Indians began to realize that the chase, hunting buffalo, would no longer provide a means of support. Both Arapahoes and Cheyennes appealed to Miles for farm implements and other forms of assistance. Miles estimated

³⁴ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1874* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1874), p. 235.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

³⁶ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1875* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1875), p. 270.

³⁷ Miles to Hoag, November 2, 1875, Central Superintendency, Letters Received, National Archives.

³⁸ J. P. C. Shanks, to Edward P. Smith, June 15, 1875, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, Letters Received, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³⁹ Monthly Report by Nathan Davis, September, 1875, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency Papers, Indian Archives.

⁴⁰ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1875*, p. 270.

⁴¹ Miles to Smith, February 15, 1876, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, Letters Received, National Archives.

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

that “ $\frac{3}{4}$ of all the Indians of this agency would have made a laudable effort at farming this season, if the Government could only furnish plows, harnesses, hoes, etc., etc.”⁴²

The results of this Indian desire, regardless of a lack of agricultural implements, were very good. The Cheyennes, for example, manifested a greater interest in agriculture than ever before.⁴³ Seventy-five acres were assigned the Cheyennes from the agency fields, and were subdivided into small lots of one to five acres for each family. They planted corn, potatoes, melons, and various kinds of garden produce. Miles, enthused over their showing, said, “A more earnest effort I never witnessed put forth by any people than was by the Cheyennes so far as their means and knowledge extended, and as a result they have been quite successful and have already received, and are now receiving, a fair reward for their industry.” He went on to state that, “I have seen some of the Cheyennes who could not secure the use of a plow or hoe, use their axes, sticks of wood and their hands in preparing the ground, planting, and cultivating their garden spots, so anxious were they to make a beginning.” The Arapahoes were given the same acreage from one of the Agency fields and it was subdivided as before. These farms were operated about the same as the Cheyennes’ and had similar results. In addition he declared:⁴⁴

quite a number of Arapahoes have located themselves on spots of ground along the North Fork with the view of permanency and broken little patches of prairie aggregating about one hundred and ten acres, on which they have planted corn, pumpkins, melons, potatoes, and other garden vegetables and as the season has been very favorable for a ‘sod’ growth, the highest anticipation are now being realized in the way of ‘roasting’ ears, melons, etc.

In 1877, under the direction of J. A. Covington, head farmer, the Indians were encouraged to abandon their pattern of extended family habitations to a greater extent than ever before. Success was particularly evident among the Arapahoes, with individual efforts being made. Miles noted that they developed greater appreciation for individual property. This was reflected in a speech made by an Arapaho Chief, Left Hand, in which he stated, “I have worked hard all summer breaking ground, building fence, planting, and cultivating corn, melons, etc., and now lazy Indians hang around my camp and eat me poor.” In response, Miles said, “As in proportion as they labor

⁴² Miles to Nicholson, April 12, 1876, *ibid.*

⁴³ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1876* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876), p. 47.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; Annual Report sent to Nicholson, August 31, 1876, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency Papers, Indian Archives.

INDIAN FARMING ON RESERVATION



A typical Cheyenne village of the nineteenth century.

themselves they will learn the cost and appreciate the value of what they may have and the necessity of individualizing their efforts.”⁴⁵

Miles was ordered by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1877 to assist these Indians in breaking their small lots. But Miles stated he would only break land for “such as would agree to break a like parcel for themselves.” The heavy rains in May and June were followed by dry weather, thus hampering the breaking of land.⁴⁶ The yield was normal but significantly the Cheyennes raised a good crop under difficult circumstances—lack of tools, wagons, and ponies.⁴⁷

The Cheyennes and Arapahoes were still hampered in 1878 by the lack of agricultural implements and animals. Agricultural implements, which were purchased in April, did not arrive at the agency until around the first of June.⁴⁸ Before this time, no plows were available to be issued for the

⁴⁵ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1877*, p. 83.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Seger, *Early Days*, p. 47.

⁴⁸ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1878* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1878), p. 55.

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

general use of the Indians who desired to work. The only plows owned at the Agency were a few issued at the farm connected with the Agency School.⁴⁹ The head farmer on the reservation, Covington, noted that because of the "scarcity of seeds, facilities for breaking prairie, and farming implements generally, we have been able to assist only about one-half of the aspiring young farmers of these two tribes, who are rapidly realizing the benefits to be derived from agricultural pursuits."⁵⁰

Six hundred acres of land were cultivated by the Indians in 1878 under the direction of Covington.⁵¹ Besides corn, a considerable amount of garden produce were raised, such as radishes, turnips, tomatoes, peas, cucumbers, squashes, and cabbages. But this was restricted by the late arrival of garden seeds and Indians eating the vegetables before they were mature.⁵² Major J. K. Mizner, Commanding Officer of Fort Reno, remarked in July of 1878 on the farming success, "There appears to be a growing disposition to work among the Indians. . . ."⁵³

Farming was less successful in 1879. The season started with sufficient rain to permit the Indians to plow their old ground and plant it in good condition. Early vegetables produced well, but when it came time to break new land, the dry weather came and continued the rest of the season. This made it impossible to break prairie land as well as seriously hurting the crops which were already planted.⁵⁴

In addition to tracing the amount of farming done on this reservation, factors both contributing and hindering farming are a necessity in evaluating these Plains Tribes' efforts. A long list could be compiled of each, but the more significant ones serve to illustrate the point.

The first of five reasons which brought these nomadic tribes closer to agricultural pursuits was the disappearance of the buffalo in the late 1870s. It compelled the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, as well as other Plains Indians, to turn to other activities for survival. The Bureau of Indian Affairs allowed and encouraged these Indians, after being put on the reservation, to make annual hunts. By doing this the government did not have to supply them

⁴⁹ J. K. Mizner to the Commander of the Department of the Missouri, July 17, 1878, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, Letters Received, National Archives.

⁵⁰ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1878*, p. 56.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁵³ Mizner to Department of Missouri, July 17, 1878, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, Letters Received, National Archives.

⁵⁴ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1879* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1879), p. 59.

INDIAN FARMING ON RESERVATION

with as many annuities. But as early as 1876, these Indians, after returning from their annual hunt, realized that the buffalo were fast disappearing.⁵⁵ The end came by 1879. Miles exclaimed, "There can be no longer any provision made for subsisting these Indians a portion of the year through their own efforts in the chase. Hereafter the whole supply must be furnished by the Government or raised by tilling the ground. . . ."⁵⁶ As long as the Indian had the buffalo to provide his major needs, there was no real cause to farm. But once they were gone, the Indians was compelled to look to the government and the earth for survival.

The second element in helping the Indians to farm was the gradual reduction of annuities by the government. At the same time, the government contributed agricultural implements and aids in hopes of making the Indian self-supporting. The government expected the Indians to do this in a few years. The Indians, however, thought the government should provide them subsistence forever.⁵⁷ This policy of reduction of Indian supplies was fair but the government rushed the reduction too quickly. As early as 1876 the government was reducing appropriations and requiring labor from the Indians in return for their supplies and annuities.⁵⁸ These reduced rations by the Department of Interior, besides forcing these Indians to farm, caused many, prior to 1875, to go on the warpath for the want of food.⁵⁹

A third factor contributing to farming was the reservation school. As early as 1873, Miles reported that thirty-six children were enrolled in school. The boys, under the direction of Superintendent of the School, J. K. Trueblood, helped prepare and plant a garden and truck patch. The importance of the school was reflected in the statement by Miles, "In the school is where we hope to inculcate principles and 'sow the seed' that will bear better fruits than 'the raids.'"⁶⁰ The person taking the lead in education was John H. Seger, school superintendent on the reservation for the second half of the 1870s. Seger taught the boys how to plow, plant, and cultivate corn, potatoes, melons, beans, and many varieties of vegetables. His objective was to estab-

⁵⁵ Annual Report to Nicholson, August 31, 1876, Cheyenne and Arapaho Papers, Indian Archives.

⁵⁶ Miles to E. A. Hayt, February 8, 1879, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, Letters Received, National Archives; United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1879*, p. 58.

⁵⁷ Jessie Fremont Bender, "The Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians: 1861-1892" (M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1930), p. 97.

⁵⁸ Miles to Nicholson, September 20, 1876, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, Letters Received, National Archives.

⁵⁹ Miles to Nicholson, June 28, 1876, *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Miles to Hoag, April 25, 1873, Central Superintendency, Letters Received, National Archives.



John H. Seger, who hoped that his school among the Cheyenne and Arapaho would become self-supporting because of the agricultural pursuits of his students.

lish the school on a self-supporting basis in addition to furnishing education to the Indians.⁶¹

As the employee force at the agency began to be reduced, around 1876, the Cheyenne and Arapaho school boys began to take up the slack by planting the corn for the agency. In return, they were given one-half of the proceeds from the crops, which they invested in cattle and clothes.⁶² In spite of the poor land and dry weather, Seger was able to make great progress in teaching these boys to farm. In 1880, Miles reported that, "The subject of education of children is fast becoming the most important factor in the civilization of the Indian. . . ."⁶³ This education included the art of farming.

Two additional activities which helped these Indians farm were the hauling of freight to the reservation by the Indians, themselves, and the leadership given by the prisoners returned from Florida. The hauling of freight from the railways at Wichita and Caldwell, Kansas, to the agency by the

⁶¹ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1876*, p. 48.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1880* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880), p. 69.

INDIAN FARMING ON RESERVATION

Indians was started by Miles in 1877. Besides giving these Indians work, this project also provided the benefit of harnesses and wagons which were used on Indian farms.⁶⁴ Covington expressed the contribution that the prisoners made after they returned to the reservation in April, 1878 when he remarked that "the return of these people has had a good effect and has stimulated afresh the desire these Indians have manifested to engage in the pursuits of civilized life."⁶⁵ These Indians had been trained in white man's ways and when returned were spread out among the different bands. Their influence on the other Indians was strongly felt.⁶⁶

In addition to these positive influences, there were also some significant hindrances to these Indians becoming farmers. First of all, traditionally these Plains Indians practiced little, if any agriculture. Little Chief, a Northern Cheyenne Chief on the reservation, illustrated this handicap of culture when he said, "The Spirit above did not intend for our children to learn to read and write—he gave the white people the desire to read[,] write[,] farm and to live as white people live—he gave the Cheyenne a land with plenty of buffaloes[,] antelops [sic] and deer. We were happy when we had nothing but plenty of meat to eat and made our own clothes from skins. . . ."⁶⁷

The Cheyennes and Arapahoes were nomadic tribesmen living under communal laws. Their pattern of life and work was in direct contrast to the government's plan of civilizing them by making individual farmers out of these tribes.⁶⁸ These Plains Indians thought it was a disgrace to be found at work and few had the "moral courage to do so in the face of the decision of their companions." Besides, they believed women should do the work, classifying them as beasts of burden instead of equal companions.⁶⁹ Brevet Major General John Pope realized this problem in 1870. "It will yet be many years," he declared, "before these Indians can be induced to abandon their nomadic habits and to find subsistence in the cultivation of their soil."⁷⁰

The lack of tools was another factor which obstructed farming among the Indians. The Indian Department inferred to Darlington in 1871, that it was willing to use "every exertion to induce the Indians to enter into agricultural pursuits by offering to assist them," but they did not fulfill this intention very

⁶⁴ Miles to Nicholson, August 1, 1876, Cheyenne and Arapaho Papers, Indian Archives.

⁶⁵ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1878*, p. 55.

⁶⁶ Charles E. Campbell to Mizner, July 16, 1878, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, Letters Received, National Archives.

⁶⁷ Little Chief to Mizner, December 10, 1878, *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Robert Gelston Armstrong, "The Acculturation of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians" (M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1942), pp. 39-40.

⁶⁹ J. R. Townsend to Miles, July 31, 1872, Central Superintendency, National Archives.

⁷⁰ Pope to George L. Hartsuff, June 8, 1870, *ibid.*

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

well.⁷¹ Four years later, Miles reported the number of employees was not sufficient to meet the need “to do justice to Indian civilization.”⁷² The following year Miles asserted that there were earnest appeals made to him for farm implements by both the Cheyennes and Arapahoes to enable them to begin farming. He believed that if he could have furnished these tribes with plows, hoes, and such implements that three-fourths of them would have begun to work. As the season was good, they probably would have met with success, thereby, starting them on the road to becoming farmers.⁷³

Some farming materials were supplied the next year, 1877, but Miles again recognized the problem when he said, “We have been unable to furnish anything like all who are willing and anxious to plow with an outfit. . . .”⁷⁴ Once the agricultural implements were furnished they usually arrived too late in the season for farming causing them to be unused for a year.⁷⁵

Little Raven in 1870, offered some insight on what might have been accomplished if the government had furnished enough agricultural supplies. He declared:⁷⁶

Their advice [Generals Philip H. Sheridan and William B. Hazen at a Council with these Indians] was to us to cease our war against the whites and to settle down on the Reservation; that there we should be furnished with everything to enable us to go to farming . . . We were promised seed and all manner of agricultural implements, wherewith to cultivate the soil, and white men to instruct us. I am sure if we were provided with all those things, my people would as a matter of course learn to till the land, and perhaps . . . after a while to live altogether by such means, but without instructions, seeds and implements, my people can do nothing in that line, never having depended for a living in that manner.

Farming was further handicapped by the dry season. Crop failures due to the lack of rain in the growing season were constantly mentioned throughout the 1870s. Darlington remarked in 1871, that, “a severe drought

⁷¹ Darlington to Hoag, February 9, 1871, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency Papers, Indian Archives.

⁷² United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1875*, p. 270.

⁷³ Miles to Nicholson, August 31, 1876, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency Papers, Indian Archives; United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1876*, p. 47.

⁷⁴ Monthly report by Miles, May 14, 1877, Central Superintendency, Letters Received, National Archives.

⁷⁵ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1878*, p. 55.

⁷⁶ Little Raven to Commanding Officer of the United States Army, August 23, 1870, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, Letters Received, National Archives.

INDIAN FARMING ON RESERVATION



Leaders of the Cheyenne and Arapaho—many of whom believed “The Spirit above did not intend for our children . . . to live as white people live.”

prevailing about the time of earing caused the yield to be largely diminished.”⁷⁷ Miles, two years later, spoke of drought and grasshoppers as lessening the production of farm growth. The following year he reported the destruction of the entire corn crop due to extremely dry weather.⁷⁸

In 1876, the Agent concluded that “the frequency of dry summers in this region renders farming an uncertain business.”⁷⁹ This detriment to the Indians’ success in farming was mentioned again in 1877 and 1879.⁸⁰ E. N. Marble, Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, summed the situation up by declaring that “self-support by farming cannot reasonably be expected of this generation of Indians in a country so liable to drought as that now occupied by the Kiowas, Comanches, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes. The actual

⁷⁷ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1871*, p. 473.

⁷⁸ Miles to Smith, August 25, 1874, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, Letters Received, National Archives.

⁷⁹ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1876*, p. 72.

⁸⁰ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1877*, p. 83; United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1879*, p. 59.

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

loss of the crop once in three or four years will seriously affect the progress of a people who are both improvident and easily discouraged. . . .⁸¹

Though the reservation was very unproductive for farming, another agricultural enterprise was adaptable—raising cattle. If it had been offered as a medium between the nomadic life of hunting the buffalo and the tilling of the soil, the Indian would perhaps have adapted much easier to farming. The first year Miles was at the agency he saw the need for Indians investing in cattle.⁸² A report also that year let the government know of the possibilities of involving the Indian in this enterprise. Captain Henry E. Alvord, Special Indian Commissioner, after visiting the reservation, recommended “to drop the corn talk (since not successful), notify the Indians that, aside from little garden patches, planting will not be urged upon them at present, and that every effort be then made to induce these tribes to turn their attention to cattle-raising, exchanging for good beef-stock as fast as possible their many surplus horses.” He went on to declare that, “While the prolonged attempt to make farmers of these people has proved an entire failure, there is every reason to believe that, properly managed, they can be rapidly brought to stock-raising upon a large scale.”⁸³

This same opinion was voiced in 1877 by Brevet Major General John Pope who advised that the money now used for buying agricultural implements, opening and working farms, etc., should be expended in stock cattle mainly for the Indians. Herding stock is certainly far more suited to these Nomadic tribes than cultivating farms and doing the daily hard drudgery of farm laborers.⁸⁴ Brevet Major General A. H. Terry expressed it best when he said that “the first step in the progress of civilization should be to the pastoral state. . . . It is the step which is most easily made because it involves a comparatively slight change of habits.”⁸⁵

There were other detriments to making the Indian into a dirt farmer. The success of the Cheyenne raids and depredations in the early 1870s had a distinct demoralizing effect upon those who stayed on the reservation.⁸⁶ Also, the Indians looked upon the government as obligated to provide them with a living and believed they did not have to work. For example, Little Raven, an

⁸¹ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1880*, p. xxv.

⁸² United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1872*, p. 250.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁸⁴ Pope to Colonel R. C. Drum, June 8, 1877, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, Letters Received, National Archives.

⁸⁵ Alfred H. Terry to William B. Allison, January 26, 1877, *ibid.*

⁸⁶ Darlington to Hoag, February 15, 1871, *ibid.*

INDIAN FARMING ON RESERVATION

Arapaho chief, told his fellow Indians not to work, that their "great Father in Washington" had sent white men to make farms and build houses for them.⁸⁷

The wild Northern Cheyennes also retarded agricultural development. They refused to work leaving a negative effect on the remaining Indians.⁸⁸ In addition, the long cattle drives across the reservation in the last part of this period destroyed many corn fields prepared by the Indians.⁸⁹

The Cheyennes and Arapahoes therefore during this period from 1869 to 1880 had begun minimal attempts at agriculture. Their success, however, never approached the federal government's expectations. Perhaps the Bureau of Indian Affairs erred in the policy of forcing these nomadic tribes to follow the plow. It is surprising that the agents had any success at all given the many hindrances such as aridity of the soil and the vast differences between white and Indian culture. Government policy should have offered cattle raising as an intermediate step for the Indians. In 1877, Brevet Major General John Pope wrote that he did not believe that it was possible "to make the Indian tribes in this Department self supporting through agricultural pursuits. It is too violent a change from all the habits and prejudices of their lives. But the herding and care of cattle is now in this direction, if not completely so of their previous customs of life and would be infinitely more willingly adopted by them."⁹⁰

In 1879, John Miles reported 5,300 Indians on his reservation. All of them required daily rations the following year, pointing up the failure of the farm program. The federal government encouraged the Indians to take up farming as a means of self support, but it must be concluded that the policy was unsuccessful. What little progress made under such adverse conditions was indeed miraculous.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency to Nicholson, July 17, 1871, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency Papers, Indian Archives.

⁸⁸ Mizner to Assistant Adjutant General of the Department of the Missouri, March 12, 1879, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, Letters Received, National Archives.

⁸⁹ Captain C. Wheaton to Assistant Adjutant General of the Department of the Missouri, July 1, 1880, *ibid.*

⁹⁰ Pope to Drum, June 8, 1877, *ibid.*

⁹¹ Miles to Hayt, January 25, 1879, *ibid.*