

## Spirit of the Prairie: The History of the Making of the Medicine Lodge Peace Treaty Pageant

by Marcia Lawrence



October 1867. Smoke hangs over the valley like shreds of silver silk. The autumn dawn is perfectly still; no breeze stirs the chattering cottonwoods. The scent of coffee is strong on the air, and grunts of waking men punctuate the rising birdsong. In the cool shady grove, shards of angled morning sun dance on the currents of the Medicine Lodge River and Elm Creek where they join as one.

The one-note cluck of a wild hen turkey is answered by a syncopated serenade from the toms fanning and strutting in the glade beyond the grove. In a whoosh of feathers and blur of movement, the spell is broken. Shots are fired; voices raised. The day begins.

Just as the natural confluence of the two streams brought opposing forces together, such was the human intent that quiet morning. Fifteen thousand Indians and five hundred U.S. troops,<sup>1</sup> together with eastern reporters and eager politicians, were encamped along that river running through the red cedar hills of southern Kansas. Day after day, negotiations continued between the proud chiefs and the implacable soldiers and legislators representing the interests of the U.S. government. The eyes of a nation were fastened on this place, this sacred spot of the Plains Indians, and its collective hope was pinned on the treaty that would be signed that October day. The men who came together at the banks of Medicine Lodge Creek believed that a lasting peace could be crafted, quelling the savage violence stampeding across the Great Plains. Peace for the pioneers, venturing ever further west in their quest for land and a fresh start; peace for the Indians, tirelessly trailing the buffalo in the

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Marcia Lawrence was born and raised on a farm just east of Medicine Lodge, Kansas and has participated in every presentation of the Medicine Lodge Indian Peace Treaty Pageant during her lifetime. Her upcoming book, "Spirit of the Prairie: The History of the Making of the Great Medicine Lodge Indian Peace Treaty Pageant" will be released in September 2015, at the 25th performance of the Pageant.

<sup>1</sup> *Kansas, A Guide to the Sunflower State*. Federal Writers' Project, 1938. 256. *Google Books*. Web. 25 Oct. 2013.



Illustration from Harpers Weekly, October 1867, by Jack Howland: "Council at Medicine Lodge Creek".  
Medicine Lodge Indian Peace Treaty Association Archives, Medicine Lodge, Kansas.

nomadic tradition of their Old Ones. Three treaties were eventually signed in the shade of the cottonwood grove. But contrary to popular belief, the Medicine Lodge treaties would not bring lasting peace to the frontier.

A primitive shelter blended with the elms and the cottonwoods at the confluence of the two streams. It was the venerated medicine lodge of the Kiowas, who, for generations, had come here to bathe in the healing waters of the river. Hence, the moniker Medicine Lodge River had come into common use, and eventually became a natural place-name for the town that would be established nearby in 1873. Aside from the roving Plains people, the striking Gyp Hill territory played host to but a few buffalo hunters. Coronado, Lewis and Clark, and Zebulon Pike had come and gone, and white people who stayed were still a rarity.

The little frontier town grew from the bare bones of a rude outpost offering scant shelter and obnoxious whiskey to a bustling county seat of a thousand souls by the turn of the century. Industry arrived to supplement the agrarian economy, notably a prosperous gypsum mining and milling enterprise, established in the late 1890s by Englishman William Carter Best.<sup>2</sup> Best's son John would become the driving force behind the first attempt to commemorate the historic 1867 peace council of Medicine Lodge.

By 1916, local residents were eager to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the peace treaty signing. Research was conducted, legislators were prevailed upon, and plans were coming together when,

<sup>2</sup> *Chosen Land: A History of Barber County, Kansas*. Medicine Lodge, KS: Barber County Historical Committee, 1980. 104. Print.

in April 1917, the United States entered World War I. The far-reaching war effort and its devastating after-effects disrupted events across the country, including the Medicine Lodge peace treaty celebration.

Agriculture slumped after the war, spiraling dangerously down into what would become the Great Depression of the 1930s. Hardship was no stranger to those who lived in and around Medicine Lodge, but the town was riding a wave of technology. Automobiles, electricity, telephones, and radio had all found their way into the fabric of daily life. Due in no small measure to the weak economy, though, interest was less than lukewarm for mounting a sixtieth anniversary celebration. And by then, there were no old settlers left in the town who remembered the famous peace council.

Three people played key roles in the renewed momentum: Mrs. Inez Hibbard, who was often described as 'crazy about those Indians'; Mr. John Best, the original researcher, promoter, and patron; and Sergeant I-See-O, a Kiowa Indian scout who was present at the 1867 proceedings. Before a celebration could be mounted, members of the newly-formed Medicine Lodge Indian Peace Treaty Association needed to find the location where the historic treaty signing took place. Thanks to Mr. Best and Mrs. Hibbard, Sergeant I-See-O was brought from his home at Fort Sill, Oklahoma to Medicine Lodge in 1926 to aid them in their search.

Also known as Plenty Fires, I-See-O was a teenager when he left the Rio Grande raids in New Mexico for the food and gifts promised at the peace council convening near his people's medicine lodge in Kansas. It was, perhaps, this close interaction with American military men that led the young Kiowa to join the U.S. Army as an Indian Scout at Fort Sill in 1889.<sup>3</sup> According to his good friend and commanding officer Hugh Scott, I-See-O convinced Indians across a wide swath of the Southwest to forgo the siren song of the Ghost Dance in the early 1890s, single-handedly averting the violence that erupted in other parts of the country. Years later, Scott wrote in a letter to I-See-O, "You did good work at that time (the Ghost Dance excitement)... You brought things about so that no one was killed... the Indian people of Oklahoma owe you a great deal of thanks... If it had not been for you in those days there would have been great bloodshed... the white people owe as much to you as do your own people."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Swett, Morris. "I-See-O, Kiowa Indian Scout." *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 13.3 (Sept. 1935):347. Print.

<sup>4</sup> Nunley, Donald. *Oklahoma vacation*. 2013. *Youtube*. Web. 6 Aug. 2014.



Kiowa Chief and U.S. Indian Scout I-See-O at the confluence of the Medicine River and Elm Creek, April 1927. Medicine Lodge Indian Peace Treaty Association Archives, Medicine Lodge, Kansas.

I-See-O served at Fort Sill until regulations forced him to retire at age 64. But he was a man of the old ways, unable to function in the modern world of airplanes and electricity. Scott intervened when he discovered the life of poverty to which his trusted scout had descended. Thanks to his old friend, I-See-O was awarded a distinctive position with the U.S. Army. An act of Congress established that, as long as he lived, I-See-O would remain on active duty status with all the pay and allowances of a non-commissioned officer of his rank. Additionally, he could not be reduced in rank, a privilege shared—to this day—by no other soldier.<sup>5</sup>

On a raw and rainy April day in 1926, the old chief walked the river bank for miles, rejecting one location after another. After hours of exploring, I-See-O announced to the tired group of townspeople that, finally, they were standing at the place of the sacred medicine lodge

<sup>5</sup> Swett 349.

he remembered from so long ago. Affixing his mark to a hastily drawn up formal declaration, U.S. Army Indian Scout Sergeant I-See-O swore that this spot, less than a half mile south of town, was truly the site upon which the historic Peace Council was held.

Local newspaper publisher Mr. J.C. Hinshaw prominently featured photographs of a regal I-See-O dramatically gesturing toward the site he identified in the *Barber County Index* during the weeks following the discovery.<sup>6</sup> Ripples of excitement at this development stirred the townspeople again into action. Both the U.S. Congress and the Kansas Legislature were again approached to make appropriations to fund the proposed sixtieth anniversary celebration, and communication with old contacts was resumed once more.

By summer, however, the Association had its answers: the same responses given a decade before. A definite no, from both bodies, and the defeat made particularly bitter by the knowledge that the federal government had appropriated \$50,000 for the Custer semi-centennial taking place in June in Montana. Citizens of Medicine Lodge were stunned at the news. Why, that hothead Custer was prevented from even attending the famous Medicine Lodge Peace Council, sniffed the townspeople. He was otherwise occupied with the unpleasant proceedings of his own court-martial<sup>7</sup> at the time, they added slyly.

Clearly, the sixtieth anniversary commemoration would have to be a homegrown affair, not at all what was originally envisioned. Medicine Lodge in 1926 had a population of roughly 1,200<sup>8</sup>—not a large town, and not a particularly wealthy one, much as it is today. But, also much like today, the citizens were a stubborn, stiff-necked bunch who, once they decided they wanted something, didn't give up until they got it. The big question was... what did they want? Mr. Best had entreated legislators a decade before, from Kansas Senator Charles Curtis (who would later be elected Vice President of the United States) to Representative Chester Long—a Medicine Lodge boy—about erecting a monument for a semi-centennial commemoration,<sup>9</sup> to no avail. A monument to mark both the

<sup>6</sup> *Barber County Index* [Medicine Lodge] 15 Apr. 1926. Print.

<sup>7</sup> Wert, Jeffrey D. *Custer: The Controversial Life of George Armstrong Custer*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. 288-91. Print.

<sup>8</sup> *Barber County Index* 20 May 1926.

<sup>9</sup> Best, John. *Letter from Senator Charles Curtis*. 4 Apr. 1917. MS. Rachel Nixon Papers, Peace Treaty Association Archives, Medicine Lodge, Kansas. and Best, John. *Letter from Rep. Chester Long*. 21 Mar. 1916. MS. Rachel Nixon Papers, Peace Treaty Association Archives, Medicine Lodge, Kansas.



Professor Franklin L. Gilson, Emporia State University, wrote and directed the Medicine Lodge Indian Peace Treaty Pageant. Gilson Scrapbook, Lyon County Historical Association, Emporia, Kansas.

place and the peace treaties figured prominently in the Association's plans this time around, too.

The Barber County Index noted:<sup>10</sup> "The plan now being considered for the celebration of this historic event is to place a suitable monument either at the place or here in the city, so that future generations may always remember the event. The Congress and Senate will be asked to appropriate funds with which a granite monument may be bought. The state government will be asked to provide funds to assist in securing the shaft and the holding of proper ceremonies, such as the bringing of several troops of soldiers and a large number of Indians here to take part in the celebration."

The Association was again awash in excitement. A monument. And soldiers. And Indians! The plans gained momentum, if not grandeur. Foremost in every mind was the nagging question of cost. 1926 was shaping up as a banner year for cattle, crops, and the fledgling oil and gas wildcatters. The Barber County Index reported record harvest yields for wheat, kafir corn, barley, and oats.<sup>11</sup> New wheat was bringing \$1.15 a bushel the last week of June, and some fields yielded as high as 40 bushels per acre.<sup>12</sup> Still, there wasn't much money for even a small celebration. Dreams of a lavish extravaganza wilted like tender blades of new grass under a hot Kansas sun.

As if heaping insult atop injury, the War Department responded to the Association's request for two troops of cavalry and a regimental band with a crisp reply--accompanied by a price tag of \$15,000!<sup>13</sup> It seemed that the efforts of the little town were stymied at every turn. June burned into July, and reports of the extravagant Custer celebration trickled into town like sweat down a hatband. Fifty thousand people, they said, gathered at Last Stand Hill<sup>14</sup> to celebrate the semi-centennial of Custer's crushing defeat at Little Big Horn. Surely, the Medicine Lodge celebration, commemorating peace with the Indian nations, was at least as worthy as the Custer massacres.

The resourceful organizers shrugged off the heat of the Kansas summer, doggedly corresponding with notables and colleagues and

<sup>10</sup> *Barber County Index* 10 Jun 1926. 2.

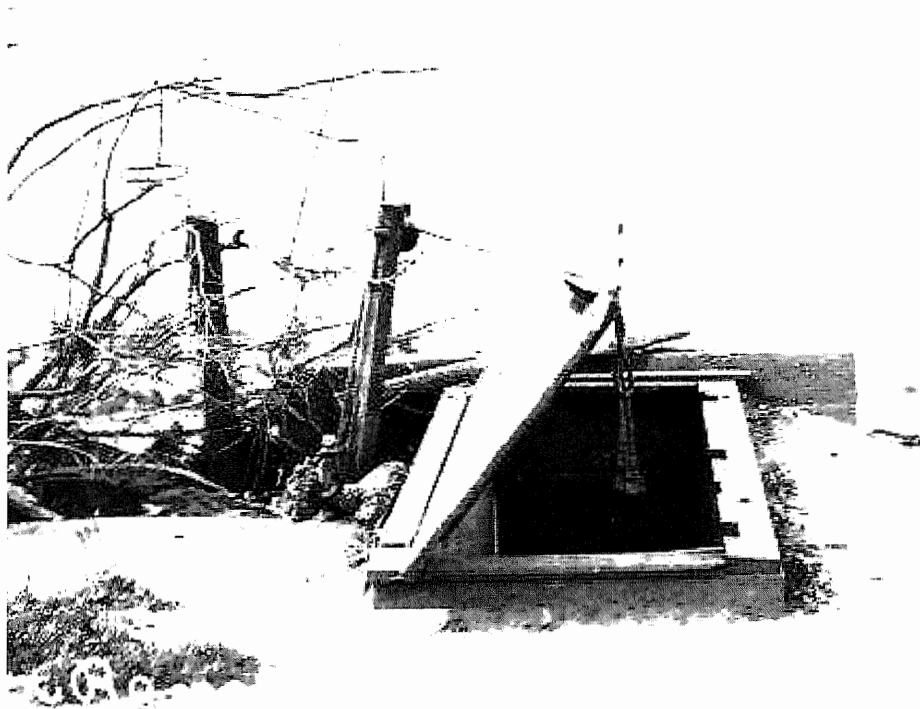
<sup>11</sup> *Barber County Index* 17 June 1926. 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Barber County Index* 24 June 1926. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Thoburn, Joseph. *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 5.4 (Dec. 1927). Print.

<sup>14</sup> Perottet, Tony. "Little Bighorn Reborn." *Smithsonian Magazine* Apr. 2005. Web. 10 Apr. 2014.





Storm cellar on the Platt Ranch west of Sun City Kansas, after the May 1927 tornado. Mike Platt, Medicine Lodge, Kansas.

friends of friends across the country. One resounding “Yes!” came from an unlikely corner. Major Gordon William Lillie<sup>15</sup> enthusiastically supported the Association’s efforts, and promised to attend the celebration. The news spread through town like wildfire, and understandably so. Major Lillie, head of the Boomer Movement and leader of the Oklahoma Land Run, was better known as Pawnee Bill, one-time partner of Buffalo Bill Cody.

Maybe it was Pawnee Bill’s show business influence, but the idea of a presentation, a play, a pageant gained traction with key members

<sup>15</sup> Brown, Erin Glanville. “Pawnee Bill.” *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*. Oklahoma Historical Society. Print.

of the Association. Suggestions ranged from adopting the plan used by Sacramento the previous year when that city held their “Forty-Niners” jubilee, at which participants dressed in costumes like the old-timers would have worn to utilizing the concept that made Fiesta in Santa Fe so popular.

“If it could be done here, they said, people could dress like the Indians did at that time, or like the cow-boys, or the gamblers who were numerous,”<sup>16</sup> read a report from the *Barber County Index*. One ardent advocate of a theatrical production was Miss Rachel Nixon, the advertising manager at Best Bros. Keene Cement Company and colleague of fellow Association members John Best and J. Fuller Groom. Miss Nixon had rubbed shoulders with an emerging giant in the pageant field when she attended Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas.<sup>17</sup>



Bumper stickers appeared on nearly every automobile in Barber County. Medicine Lodge Indian Peace Treaty Association Archives, Medicine Lodge, Kansas.

<sup>16</sup> *Barber County Index* 10 June 1926. 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Chosen Land: A History of Barber County, Kansas*. 347.

Franklin Leonard Gilson was certainly known to many in Medicine Lodge by 1926. Director of the School of Oratory at Southwestern from 1908 to 1913,<sup>18</sup> he was deeply involved in not only oratory and theatre, but music as well. Now head of the Speech and Theatre Department at Kansas State Teachers College in Emporia, Professor Gilson's reputation was on the rise throughout the Midwest. The "professor of pageantry" had made quite a name for himself, both for his unique Pageantry courses at the teachers college and for the pageants he wrote and sometimes produced for many Midwestern towns. Several Medicine Lodge families had made the long trip to Dodge City in 1919 to see Professor Gilson's pageant, "Story of the Southwest."<sup>19</sup> His Gilson Players theatrical troupe had been touring Kansas towns for a decade, and a trio of one-act plays opened to a packed Medicine Lodge Opera House back in 1922.<sup>20</sup>

The historical pageantry movement had evolved in response to rapid social, economic, and technological changes taking place at the dawn of the twentieth century. Historical pageants came to prominence at a time in America's history when lynching plagued the South, women agitated for the right to vote, and labor unions organized to demand better working conditions.<sup>21</sup> Pageants became popular as a way of coping with the swiftly shifting times by glorifying the past. Modern pageantry had its beginnings in England as an outgrowth of the Arts and Crafts Movement, a reaction against industrialization and immigration. In the United States, the plays were crafted to transmit traditional American values and ideals. Pageants created a sort of community cohesion by educating an increasingly diverse local population about the history of their town.<sup>22</sup> Townspeople acted out scenes from their area's past, often under the direction of a theatre professional. Frank Gilson was always on the cutting edge of all things theatre, trendy in both his attire and his attitude. This new national preoccupation with play-acting the past on a very grand scale was right up his alley.

18 McDonald, Betty. *F.L. Gilson--first Chairman of the Speech Department at the Kansas State Teachers College, 1913-1946*. Thesis. Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, 1972. Print.

19 "Pageant by High School Students Feature at Fair." Sept. 1922. Print. Rpt. in *Gilson Family Scrapbook*. Emporia: William Allen White Library. Print.

20 "To Play in Nine Towns." Apr. 1922. Print. Rpt. in *Gilson Family Scrapbook*. Emporia: William Allen White Library. Print.

21 Coleman Hewett, Rebecca. Diss. U of Texas, 2010. Print.

22 Marcus, Kenneth. "Documentary Pageantry: An Analysis of Three Historical Dramas in Modern America." Faculty Lecture Series. University of La Verne, La Verne. 9 Nov. 2012. *Campus Times Marcus Reviews Historical Pageants*. Web. 25 Oct. 2013.

Slowly the concept crystallized. More than a monument, much more than a parade—a pageant would commemorate not only the famous peace treaties but dramatize the area's entire history. And this would not be just any knock-off, hand-me-down affair. The great Medicine Lodge Indian Peace Treaty pageant would be a professionally written and produced grand march through the colorful history of the beautiful red gypsum hills. It would become Professor Gilson's best-known pageant, and the second longest continuously performed pageant in the United States.<sup>23</sup>

The town rallied behind the idea, and the Association sent off their request to Professor Gilson. Response was considerably delayed, though, as the Gilson Players troupe was on the Chautauqua circuit that summer, touring the western and northwestern states. This professional tour took the players 12,000 miles in 12 weeks, and they performed to over 160 audiences.<sup>24</sup>



Indian Village in the City Park, October 1927. Medicine Lodge Indian Peace Treaty Association Archives, Medicine Lodge, Kansas.

23 Marcus, Kenneth.

24 McDonald, Betty.

While anxious Association members awaited word from Professor Gilson, other letters began going out to all those who once had lived in the area. Dr. L.L. Osborn, who headed up the Membership Committee, began a letter-writing campaign that stretched for the better part of a year. Scarcely a person who'd ever set foot in Barber County escaped this early mass mail marketing campaign.<sup>25</sup>

The spring of 1927 brought far more drama to Medicine Lodge than just preparing for the big production that would take place in the fall. The worst tornado disaster ever experienced in the area knocked the



The inaugural dance of the Prairie Flowers, led by Spirit of the Prairie Mimi Gilson, daughter of director F.L. Gilson. Medicine Lodge Indian Peace Treaty Association Archives, Medicine Lodge, Kansas.

county to its knees on May 7. The devastation was horrific. Over half a million dollars damage was done in less than three hours, and three people died as a result of the raging storm.<sup>26</sup> Residences were wrecked, barns and granaries and outbuildings were scattered in pieces over fields and pastures, livestock was crippled and killed, even great chunks of prairie grassland were ripped from the earth by the might of the wind.

25 Osborn, L. L. *Membership Solicitation Letter*. Nov. 1926. MS. Peace Treaty Association Archives, Medicine Lodge, Kansas.

26 Grazulis, T. P. *Significant Tornadoes, 1880-1989*. St. Johnsbury, VT: Environmental Films, 1990. Print.



Coronado Scene. Medicine Lodge Indian Peace Treaty Association Archives, Medicine Lodge, Kansas.

As if this wasn't enough, less than a week later a fearsome hail storm hammered the unfortunate town. Hailstones seven inches in diameter<sup>27</sup> beat animals to death and smashed structures that had somehow escaped the wrath of the killer tornado. From this landscape of destruction, the hardy souls of the Medicine Valley rallied to the monumental task of creating a pageant to honor the history of their place. Professor Gilson traveled to Medicine Lodge three times in 1927 to work with his cast, which included nearly every man, woman, and child in the town—not to mention hundreds of horses, cattle, oxen, and mules.

The citizens of Medicine Lodge went on a fundraising binge, and brought in over \$10,000 for the celebration. Advertised endlessly in the Barber County Index and hawked by Association members and their families, subscriptions and memberships were sold as the primary source of funding. A front page article proclaimed, "Saturday, November 13, 1926 is the day set for enrolling memberships in the Indian Peace Treaty

27 *Chosen Land: A History of Barber County, Kansas*. 9.



Lewis & Clark Scene. Medicine Lodge Indian Peace Treaty Association Archives, Medicine Lodge, Kansas.

Association, which is now incorporated. The goal is one thousand members at \$1.00 each and one hundred subscribing members at \$10.00 each. All members will receive a membership button. Beginning next week, members' names will be published in the Index. Everyone in Medicine Lodge should wear a membership button."<sup>28</sup>

The advertising committee printed a hundred thousand stickers, sold at cost to local businesses, to be sent out with their daily mail. The committee also had car banners produced, and not a car left the city without a Peace Treaty Pageant bumper sticker or window sticker proudly advertising the upcoming event.

Association board member and newspaper publisher Mr. Hinshaw ran frequent news stories as plans developed for the pageant and attendant festivities. As the date drew nearer, he began printing old eye-witness accounts of the Peace Council by authors as varied and famous as former Tennessee Governor Alfred A. Taylor and New York Tribune news correspondent Henry Stanley (of "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" fame). And—practically unheard of in that time—when Hinshaw produced the first-ever "Peace Treaty Special Edition," the

<sup>28</sup> *Barber County Index* 20 November 1926.



The Lloyd Weidner family in the 1927 Wagon Train Scene. Courtesy, Linda Regier.

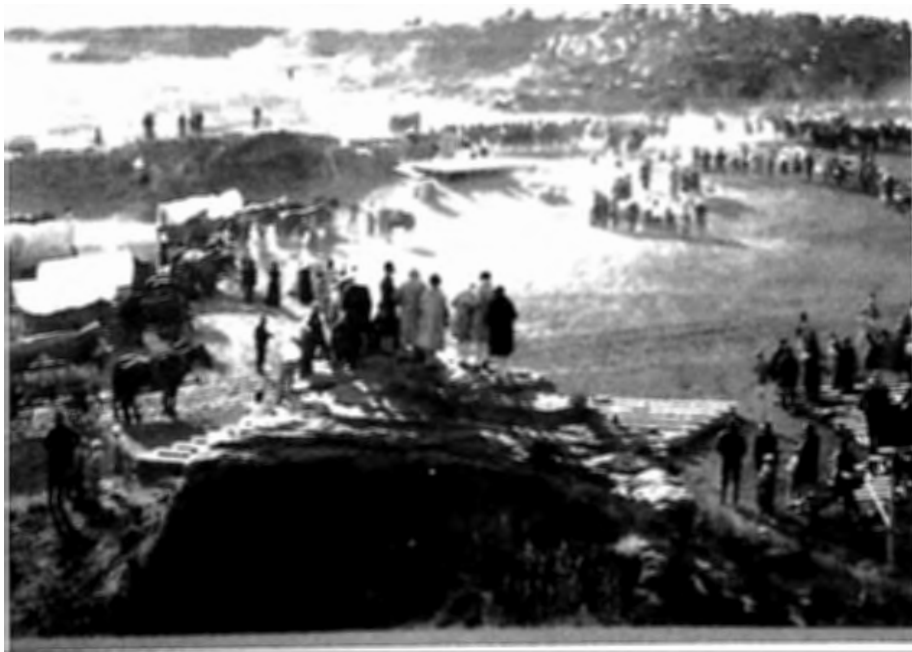
Barber County Index contained 32 pages chock-full of news, historical accounts, photographs, and advertisements.<sup>29</sup>

High on the Association's agenda was selecting a suitable venue for the pageant performance. Mr. Elbert S. Rule donated the land upon which the performances still take place. Founder and principal owner of the Golden Rule Refining Company,<sup>30</sup> Mr. Rule made his fortune several

<sup>29</sup> *Barber County Index* 29 September 1927.

<sup>30</sup> *Chosen Land: A History of Barber County, Kansas*. 9.





1927 Peace Treaty Pageant Finale. Medicine Lodge Indian Peace Treaty Association Archives, Medicine Lodge, Kansas.

times over in Barber County and beyond. Nestled in the rugged red hills and overlooking the vast prairies of the area, the pageant plays out in a natural amphitheatre, and the audience is seated along and below the bluffs framing the area. In one of the most picturesque episodes, covered wagons wind through sandy hills and across the prairie as they approach the buffalo grass stage, teasing the audience with glimpses of the wagon train long before its scene occurs.

The Peace Treaty Association operates much the same today as it did in the 1920s. Committees for advertising, finance, pageant, legislative, housing, membership, Indian village, concessions and entertainment, costumes, music, pageant grounds, and traffic were formed, and

directors for each episode and scene of the pageant were recruited. Committee members and scene directors worked tirelessly through the summer of 1927, securing costumes and props and negotiating with the Oklahoma State Historical Society regarding the Indians' participation, travel arrangements, and housing.

Finally the three-day extravaganza opened. Crowds were estimated to be five thousand the first day (Wednesday, 12 Oct. 1927) and about twelve thousand the following day. On the day of the final performance, the *Barber County Index*<sup>31</sup> estimated ten thousand persons in attendance. The prelude to the pageant included a full day's worth of activities. The program featured selections by the 13<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry band, speeches by Indian chiefs, and troop maneuvers by the 13<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. The main address was given by Governor Johnson of Oklahoma on Wednesday, by Governor Paulen of Kansas on Thursday, and by Medicine Lodge's former Congressman J.N. Tinchler on Friday. The Indian Village, located in the southwest part of town near the Carry A. Nation Home, was open all day and offered tribal dances and music. Boxing matches were held Thursday night and a football game—Medicine Lodge vs. Protection—was played Friday night. And, exactly as it's done today, patrons were exhorted to be sure and visit the Carry A. Nation Home.<sup>32</sup>

The culmination of years of tireless work came to fruition as Mr. Riley MacGregor, pageant narrator for over a half century, opened the first performance with the Prologue,<sup>33</sup> written by Miss Rachel Nixon. The same passage opens the pageant today:

The curtains of the past are drawn;  
 Before our eyes unrolls the scroll of years!  
 Adown the long dim aisles of time we see  
 Envisaged here the days of yore,  
 The days of Kansas History

Behold! the Virgin prairie spreads afar,  
 Flings forth her grassy carpet free,  
 Star flecked with countless blossoms fair  
 She waits alone,  
 For man—for mastery.

31 *Barber County Index* 13 October 1927.

32 *Souvenir Programme, Medicine Lodge Indian Peace Treaty*. Oct. 1927. 1927 Program Brochure for Peace Treaty Pageant. Peace Treaty Association Archives, Medicine Lodge, KS.

33 *Souvenir Programme, Medicine Lodge Indian Peace Treaty*.

As the evocative words died away, carried on the ever-present prairie wind, the lovely Spirit of the Prairie began her dance, translucent white gown billowing and flowing across the buffalo grass and red dirt of the prairie stage. She floated among the tiny prairie flowers—grade school children dressed, in 1927, in colorful crepe paper costumes mimicking the bright flowers that dot the endless Kansas plains.

One youngster, however, mutinied. Dub Rickard recalled his reaction when his mother announced that he was to be one of the prairie flowers. “Oh, Ma! Don’t make me do it, please? Girls is prairie flowers, boys ain’t! Boys is cowboys!”

The argument worked, and six-year-old Dub rode with his family in a covered wagon, while his buddy Jack Trice wore the crepe paper and danced as a prairie flower.<sup>34</sup>

As the prairie flowers scampered across the grassland, led by their lovely Spirit of the Prairie, the action picked up with Episode I: The Period of Discovery. Francisco Vasquez de Coronado (Mr. Rule) and his followers, including Father Padilla (played by Mr. Jan Skinner, whose sister-in-law, Mrs. Lulu Skinner, was the Pageant committee chair), were seen trekking across the unknown plain, in search of Quivera, the Land of Gold.

The first scene of Episode II: The Period of Exploration opened with President Thomas Jefferson (rancher Mr. Jefferson Long) presenting a commission to the explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, authorizing them to explore the territory of the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase. Scene Two portrayed Zebulon Pike and his companions exploring and surveying the great Southwest territory. The intrepid explorers were played by well-known local landowners Mr. E.E. Lake, Mr. Roy Hoovler, and Mr. G.E. Alexander, respectively, and the scenes were directed by Mr. Lake.

Episode III: The Period of Settlement was introduced with more of Miss Nixon’s verse, spoken by Mr. MacGregor, as the audience watched the wagon train snake its way over the hill, around the bend, and through the trees, lurching and bumping slowly into the grassy amphitheatre. The action depicted in this episode has varied hardly at all from the original presentation. The first scene opens with a wagon train finding a place to stop for the night. The participants portray the usual activities of an evening camp, including a pair of young lovers who steal away

<sup>34</sup> “Laurel “Dub” Rickard.” Personal interview. 29 Nov. 2013.

from the safety of the circled wagons for a romantic interlude. There’s a bit of gambling, a bit of dancing, a prayer meeting, and a terse warning from the wagon master to stay close—Indians are rumored to be in the area. In action worthy of a Hollywood movie, a band of wild Indians attacks the wagon train, swooping in with bloodcurdling cries and guns afire. Although the settlers bravely defend their little camp, it looks as though all might be lost. Then, in the distance, clouds of dust and brassy bugle calls signal the arrival of the cavalry—just in the nick of time!

The wagon train scene has evolved as the centerpiece of the pageant. Full of action, and reminiscent of memories all spectators can relate to, it is also the most expansive and difficult to time and stage. It seems that at least once during every production there is a team of runaway horses or an Indian who gets dragged by his horse, or a cavalry soldier thrown from his mount. Just more live action excitement for the audience, the seasoned players reason.

The final Episode IV: The Signing of the Peace Treaty of Medicine Lodge included a huge cast: U.S. government dignitaries, state officials, representatives of the many newspapers and magazines who sent correspondents, and, of course, the Indians. Hundreds of Indians, all descendants of the five tribes who attended the Peace Council: Kiowa, Comanche, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Plains Apache. The peace pipe used in the scene was a gift from Sergeant I-See-O to the Peace Treaty Association, and has the distinction of actually having been used by the Kiowas.

Audiences through the years have been held in the thrall of kaleidoscopic scenes following one another in quick succession. When the solemn treaty signing is completed, all the actors from all the scenes flood the amphitheatre in the lovely late afternoon light for the grand finale. The flag is raised on the pageant field, and—just as in 1927—audience and actors join in singing “America, The Beautiful.”