TCU's Developing Relationships with Native Americans

Texas Christian University has had three locations during its history—Thorp Spring (1873-95), Waco (1895-1910), and Fort Worth (1910-present). These places, however, had previously been the homelands of many Native American peoples, including the groups that eventually became known collectively as the Wichita or *Kirikir'i-s* (the Wichita, Waco, Tawakoni, Kichai, Iscani, Taovaya, and others). They have lived for centuries in what is now Kansas to central Texas. The expansion of Texas and the U.S., though, made TCU's residence in these places possible.

After the Republic of Texas was established in 1836, it sought to drive out the Wichita and other Native American peoples so it could open these lands to white settlement. On May 24, 1841, a group of Texas militia led by General Edward H. Tarrant attacked a series of Indian villages on Village Creek, a tributary of the West Fork of the Trinity River, destroying a Waco settlement (believed to have been located where the Fort Worth and Arlington city limits meet, but now mostly submerged in Lake Arlington). Several Native peoples were killed, as well as Denton County's namesake, Captain John B. Denton. The battle caused many of the Native peoples to move permanently from the area and in 1849 Fort Worth and Tarrant County were established.

Pleasant Thorp, a veteran of the Army of the Republic of Texas, began acquiring land in 1850 in what became Hood County, settling on it around 1853 and founding Thorp Spring.[1] He later sought to establish a college there, leading to TCU's (i.e., Add-Ran College) initial location.

The United States established the Brazos River Reservation in Young County, near Graham, in March 1855 and moved a group of Wacos and Tawakonis, as well as other tribes, onto it. A Comanche Indian Reservation was also established in Throckmorton County. Texans, however, continued hostilities, leading to both reservations' closure in 1859 and these tribes' removal from the state. All the places on which TCU would reside were now effectively under the control of the state and the mechanisms for TCU to eventually gain possession of them were in place.

TCU, like most of American society, saw itself as the rightful successor of Native Americans. At its fiftieth anniversary in 1923, the faculty and students of the English department wrote a pageant, "These Fifty Years," depicting the university's founding and progress. It began with "a lone Texas Indian, who tells a legend about the present site of the University." The legend acknowledged that the prairies and the hill above the river on which the university was located had previously been "the domain of the Tehas," and under the protection of a chief whose dying will was, "Let my plains be free and fruitful." The pageant asserted its fulfillment because the "look-out on the hill top" was now "T.C.U., thine Alma Mater, Guardian of the Tehas youth!"[2]

In 1928, about 4,000 people saw TCU's football stadium transformed into a "weird Indian reservation," with wigwams, Indian costumes, Indian dances, and "haunting Indian melodies." Approximately 350 girls from the physical education department presented the "Indian Spring Festival," a pageant about the Indians' spring corn dances. TCU's president, as the chief of the tribe, wore feathers and a blanket.[3]

These types of portrayals were common. TCU put on an even bigger production in 1931 when it performed Charles Wakefield Cadman's operatic cantata, "The Sunset Trail." An audience of 16,000 saw 700 performers, including 300 students from TCU's physical training department along with Fort Worth's Civic Chorus and Symphony Orchestra, depict the story of Indians struggling against the white people's advance. Six tepees, whose sides were decorated "with weird Indian symbols," were scattered across the football field, with a campfire and totem pole in its center. According to reports, one of the most effective scenes was when the "tribesmen," carrying their torches, went into the hills to communicate with "the Great Spirit." With the lights turned out, the "Indians" moved to the top of the stadium's south end and their torches disappeared into the "hills," leaving their village in the dark.[4] Five years later, the annual pageant portrayed "The History of Tarrant County," dividing it into five episodes: the Indians leaving, the melting pot of French, Spanish, and Mexicans, Tarrant County giving her sons to the Confederacy, the cowboys, and the county's march of progress.[5]

Rarely did TCU engage directly with Native Americans, although in 1933 Monroe Tsatoke and James Auchiah, two members of the Kiowa Five (Six), famous for paintings done in a traditional Kiowa style, addressed the Art department and the 'Southwestern Literature" class.[6] This, however, began to change in the 1970s. In 1972, the White Roots of Peace, ambassadors for the Mohawk Nation, addressed students regarding their desire to bring understanding and mutual respect between "the white and red races."[7] N. Scott Momaday, a Kiowa who won the 1969 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for his novel, *House Made of Dawn*, spoke the next year at TCU's Honors Day Convocation. He also spoke in 1983 during Creative Writing Week and as part of the opening of the Mary Couts Burnett library extension.[8] From 1983 to 1986, the campus conducted a clothing and food drive for the Kickapoo tribe, located in Eagle Pass, Texas,[9] and in 1987 Cherokee Indian Principal Chief, Wilma Mankiller, spoke on the future of the Cherokee Indian Nation.[10]

In 1993, TCU Assistant Professor of History, Nancy Shoemaker, remarked, "This is the only place where I've taught where I've never had an Indian student in my class."[11] TCU has never had a large Native American presence among its students, faculty, or administration. In 1992, however, a small group of students formed the Native American Student Association. It flourished for a few years, raising awareness and providing support, but it eventually disbanded.[12]

TCU is now seeking healthy, respectful, and mutually beneficial relationships with Native Americans. Coming to terms with our past is an essential step in developing these relationships. So is engaging with and learning from Native American peoples. Since 2016 TCU has held several public conversations with Native Americans on topics ranging from Columbus Day to stereotypes to the Dakota Access Pipeline and more. In 2017 the Chancellor designated the first Monday in October as an annual Native American and Indigenous Peoples Day observance. The Native and Indigenous Student Association also formed that year, and in 2018 TCU erected a plaque acknowledging all Native American peoples, and particularly the Wichita and Affiliated

Tribes, who have inhabited the land on which the university is located. TCU continues to understand, grow, and develop in its relationships with Native American peoples.

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[1] Thorp's land grants have been digitized and can be viewed at the Texas General Land Office (http://www.glo.texas.gov/history/archives/land-grants/index.cfm) (enter Thorp, Pleasant in Patentee or Grantee field). See also http://www.granburydepot.org/z/biog2/ThorpSpringHistory.htm.

[2] *Skiff* 21.34 (June 3, 1923); *The Horned Frog 1923*, pdf pg. 13; https://repository.tcu.edu/handle/116099117/11049). See also "These Fifty Years" program, pg. 7 (https://repository.tcu.edu/handle/116099117/11726).

[3] *Junior Journal* 26.28 (May 9, 1928); *Texas Christian University Interpreter* (April-May 1928) 2.6-7, pg. 8, (https://repository.tcu.edu/handle/116099117/21309); *The Horned Frog 1928*, pg. 191; https://repository.tcu.edu/handle/116099117/11054).

[4] *Skiff* 29.23 (March 13, 1931); *Skiff* 29.24 (March 20, 1931); *Skiff* 29.25 (March 27, 1931); *Skiff* 29.31 (May 15, 1931).

[5] *Skiff* 34.29 (April 24, 1936); *Skiff* 34.31 (May 8, 1936); *Skiff* 34.33 (May 22, 1936).

[6] *Skiff* 32.7 (Nov. 3, 1933).

[7] *Daily Skiff* 70.77 (Feb. 24, 1972).

[8] *Daily Skiff* 71.94 (Mar. 30, 1973); *Daily Skiff* 81.81 (Mar. 29, 1983); *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (Mar. 30, 1983).

[9] *Daily Skiff* 81.75 (Feb. 23, 1983); Larry J. Crocker, *The plight of the Kickapoo Indians: an appeal for assistance* (Mary Couts Burnett Library Special Collections, Call No: E99.K4 C7 1983); *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (Sept. 27, 1983); *Daily Skiff* 83.85 (Mar. 15, 1984); *Daily Skiff* 83.88 (Mar. 28, 1984); *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (Jan. 13, 1985); *Daily Skiff* 85.51 (May 2, 1985); *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (May 14, 1986).

[10] *Daily Skiff* 84.99 (Apr. 16, 1987); *Daily Skiff* 84.101 (Apr. 23, 1987).

[11] *Daily Skiff* 91.43 (Nov. 10, 1993).

[12] *Daily Skiff* 89.39 (Nov. 5, 1991); *Daily Skiff* 89.67 (Feb. 6, 1992); *Daily Skiff* 93.48 (Nov. 16, 1995).