

FORGOTTEN HISTORY--Phillips County Indian Scares

The Last Indian Raid Scare of 1878

By **KIRBY ROSS**

Review Staff Writer

PART ONE: The Kirwin Indian Scare of 1871.

PART TWO: The Fort Bissell Indian Scare of 1872.

PART THREE: The Fort Bissell Indian Scare of 1872 (cont.).

PART FOUR: The Last Indian Raid Scare of 1878.

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In 1906, the *Phillips County Post* reported:

"The Cheyenne Indian Massacre in Decatur County in 1878, at which time about forty settlers were killed, was the last chapter relating to Indian scares in Phillips County."

Early-day Phillips County settler Charley Hester was a cattle drover in 1878, and had trailed a herd through Decatur County shortly before the massacre. In referring to the actions of the Native Americans at that time, late in his life Hester spoke of "the viciousness when they reached the Kansas settlements" that left "a crimson trail that has no equal in history."

The prelude to the massacre is laid out in detail in the appendix to Hester's published memoir, *The True Life Wild West Memoir of a Bush-popping Cow Waddy* (edited by the writer of this article), and discusses how in 1875 two brothers from Phillips County who were buffalo hunting, Daniel and Joe Brown, were working their trade in northwest Kansas. While Joe was hauling hides to Fort Wallace, a band of Indians attacked the Brown's camp, killing Daniel.

Upon discovering the body, Joe gathered a number

of other hunters nearby and combined forces with a detachment of the 6th U.S. Cavalry patrolling the area. On April 23, 1875 they attacked a sleeping Cheyenne camp at Cheyenne Hole in Decatur County, massacring a number of Indians there, including women and children. Joe Brown was killed in the attack.

As Decatur County was filling up with white settlers over that same ground three years later, on Sept. 30-Oct. 1, 1878, Cheyennes who had broken out of their reservation in the Indian Territory and were led by Chief Dull Knife had their revenge and committed the series of retaliatory killings that came to be referred to as "The Last Indian Raid in Kansas."

INDIAN SCARE FALSE ALARM THE MONTH BEFORE

The *Phillips County Herald* reported on August 9, 1878:

"A family named Moffat, living about one mile from Kirwin and lately from New Jersey, were nearly frightened to death one night last week by four boys named Reynolds, who were encamped near the Moffat residence, and who the Jerseyites mistook for Indians. Their screams were heard a distance of three miles, and made the blood run cold through the veins of the citizens of Kirwin, who immediately organized a company of militia and started for the 'bloody battlefield.'"

"Upon arriving at the

Moffat residence the company was paralyzed at the scene--men and women who had flown from their beds in the moment of peril, without the necessary clothing to shield their forms, were congregated on the dug-out top, screaming wildly for assistance. The brave and bold commander of the militia was horror struck at the scene and immediately ordered a retreat from the field of action.

"One brave young man named John S. Anderson, and who has now gained a reputation as the hero of the West, was bravely defending one of the family--entreating her to fly with him from the jaws of death, and seek a more civilized location. After a two hour struggle the Jerseyites came off victorious, and now everything is peaceful on the 'Potomac' and in the neighborhood of the Moffat's, who now pursue their daily avocations, as before, but who will in some future day be 'granpawed' and 'granmawed' by a young Anderson!"

THE MASSACRE SCARE IN PHILLIPS CO.

On November 28, 1935, a J.M.G. published the following article in the *Kirwin Kansan*. It is uncertain who J.M.G. was, but is strongly suspected to have been John Gray, whose family was very prominent in southeast Phillips County and once owned the area known as Gray's Park west of Kirwin:

"One of the Indian scares that many old settlers remember was in the fall of

1878 and the Cheyenne Indians were the offenders. The Cheyenne tribe had been moved into the Indian Territory. Because of dissatisfaction with their new home part of the tribe under Chief Dull Knife broke away from their soldier guards and made a hasty raid across the western part of Kansas. They did not do any real damage until they reached Decatur county where they raided a ranch home and killed nineteen settlers.

“Two of the parties killed were John Irvin and Mr. Benson. Irvin was taking a load of flour and other provisions to Atwood for Mr. Benson who was going to start a grocery store there. Irvin had a homestead 4 miles west and 1 mile south of Kirwin and was quite prominent in the early history of

our county. He built the residence property in the north part of Kirwin now occupied by the John Hunziker family. He was reported to be the one that caused the separation of Mr. and Mrs. Tinker.

“There was so much anxiety and confusion in Kirwin and on up the Solomon from the scare. Many settlers started for Kirwin, driving their teams at top speed till they fell dead. Several hundred arrived here within a day or two. Our home was near the wagon trail about four miles west of Kirwin. Many stopped and pled with my father and mother to leave and go to Kirwin, relating many terrible experiences to convince that they should.

An armed guard led by Pat Waterman and Charley Don Carlos was placed west of Kirwin to warn of the

attempted attack. These fellows had a lot of fun with the settlers, giving them false reports about the Indians being near and they even went so far as to bring a supposed victim of the Indians in for people to see. This was terrifying to the women and it took some effort to get them calmed down again.

“Soon about three companies of U.S. Cavalry put in their appearance and continued on up the Solomon after the run-away Indians.”

Melissa Johnson assisted in the research of this final segment on Phillips County Indian Scares.

COMING SOON:

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- The Phillips County Earthquake
- The Phillipsburg Gold Rush