



The Peace Circle: A Violent Failure

Lasting consequences for the
Indigenous Chiefs who trusted
Texan promises

Inspiration

It's 1843, Californians are digging for gold
and Texans go head to head with Mexico

in the Gulf for their independence¹.
Meanwhile, on a bank of the Trinity River,
a great gathering of the Delawares,
Chickasaws, Wacos, Caddos, Tahuacarros,
Keechies, Anadarkos, Ionis, Biloxis, and
Cherokees meet with Texan President
Sam Houston². This momentous assembly
of leaders will be remembered as yet
another feat of Houston's capable
presidency, one of so many that

*he seemed too impressive
to be true.*

In this case, he was;

Indigenous chiefs José Maria, Bintah,
Chowa and Ha-de-bah called for the
meeting to talk of peace³. The Caddo,
Hainai, and Anadarko people were

¹ McNamara, Robert. "Timeline of Events from 1840-1850." ThoughtCo., 03 July 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/timeline-from-1840-to-1850-1774038>.

² Webb, W. P. "The Last Treaty of the Republic of Texas." The Southwestern Historical Quarterly, vol. 25, no. 3, 1922, pp. 151–73. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30234827>. Accessed 11 Jun. 2022.

³ "Caddo Voices." Texas Beyond History, <https://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/tejas/voices/without.html>.

desperate for peace so their leaders sought help from the people who had anointed themselves as leaders of the land. Together, the old and new leaders of Texas signed the Treaty of Bird's Fort on September 29th, 1843².

Post-Circle Life

Although the leaders of the Indigenous tribes realized that peaceful relations with the settlers were necessary for survival, younger bands of Indigenous people carried on their horse-stealing practices³. Unable to control these groups, the chiefs could not fully maintain peace between their people and the Anglo settlers. However, Houston encountered



Caddo Chief Red Bear statue from the planning phase for the Peace Circle monument in Grapevine⁴

difficulties enforcing his side of the treaty as well. About 40 days after the Treaty of Bird's Fort was signed, Texas was annexed into the Union². Peace talks were taken over by official United States commissioners of Indian Affairs³ but these men only brought typical colonizing power under the guise of friendship.

"The Government has a plan, which if you will adopt and try your best to live up to, will give you more comforts and better living to you, and your families, than you have ever had before. . . The Government of the United States is the only friend and the best friend that the Indian has"

- Commissioner Chair, David Jerome

An Era of Homelessness

In their desperation for peace, the Indigenous tribe leaders chose to believe the promises made by the commissioners. After repeatedly acquiescing to pick up and move to appease local settlers, the tribes with hundreds of years of roots in what is now Texas found themselves replaced as cultivators of the land. The Texas Rangers realized this power and went as far as to kill Chief Ha-de-bah's 16-year-old nephew unprovoked. Unfortunately, they only reinforced their theory; José Maria convinced his people to move yet again to avoid bad relations with surrounding settlers.

⁴ "Peace Circle." Grapevine Texas, <https://www.grapevinetexasusa.com/grapevine-main/peace-circle/>

Modern Implications

Linda Lewis, sculptor of the Peace Circle Memorial⁵, says it concisely and palatably:

“We’re giving honor to them,’ she said. ‘They were here before us. They were removed. This peace treaty was the last time they were here on this land.’”

An acknowledgement of their disappearance, this quote does not allude to the violent and backhanded nature with which the United States government drove the land’s Indigenous residents to destitution. For decades after the Treaty of Bird’s Fort promises were made, the United States chipped away at the land ownership rights of the Indigenous tribes. By the time the US gave official legal rights to the Wichitas, Caddos, and Delawares, they were given 152,714 acres, about one-fifth of what they were promised in 1859³.

With many Indigenous people in attendance at the Peace Circle’s unveiling, the credibility of the monument seems to escape some scrutiny. Alas, the positive story written by articles about this event continue to silence much of the struggles

Indigenous people face even now that they have protected lands.



A woman’s reaction in front of the statue of Ioni Chief Towaash⁶

Modern day Indigenous populations have adapted to their US-made social environments, developed powerful voices, and maintained ancient traditions. The downside of being a minority group in the US means that this strength still cannot reach a majority of the population without the support of mainstream media, and these mediums do not uplift Indigenous voices often. More often than not, wide-reaching Indigenous stories are ones about continued government efforts to reduce Indigenous rights, e.g. the Indian Child Welfare Act being attacked by the Texas Attorney General⁶.

⁵ Yan, Renee. “Grapevine artist Linda Lewis breathing life into history, honoring notable 19th-century figures.” Community Impact, 16 Aug 2019, <https://communityimpact.com/dallas-fort-worth/grapevine-colleyville-southlake/arts-entertainment/2019/08/16/grapevine-artist-linda-lewis-breathing-life-into-history-honoring-notable-19th-century-figures/>.

⁶ Bender, Albert. “‘Peace Circle’ commemorates 1843 Treaty of Bird’s Fort at Grapevine, Texas.” People’s World, 27 September 2021, <https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/peace-circle-commemorates-1843-treaty-of-birds-fort-at-grapevine-texas/>.

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