

Texas Indians: Southeastern and Gulf Cultures

The Caddoes

The Caddo were primarily villagers and farmers, and their culture had a class system as part of their social structure. They lived in grass houses around fifteen feet tall and twenty to fifty feet in diameter, framed with poles in a domed or conical shape and covered with grass thatch. Their territory included communities of isolated farms, small villages and some larger villages.

The Caddo people developed a successful agricultural economy based on growing maize, beans, watermelons, pumpkins, figs, tobacco, and squash. By about A.D. 1300 most Caddoan groups were consuming large amounts of maize, and this plant was clearly the most important food source for them time. They also supplemented their diet by hunting, and deer was their most important game animal. The Caddoes were also excellent fishermen, using trotlines, a fishing line loaded with baited hooks across streams. Being close to the plains they acquired horses sometime in the 17th century.

Interestingly, Caddos' traced their descent through the maternal line rather than the paternal. The *xinesi* inherited a position of spiritual leadership, the *caddi*, the inherited position of principal headman of a community. The *xinesi* were responsible for communication with the supreme god and meditation. While *caddi ayo* were responsible for

religious leadership and decision-making influence between villages and leading important rites, such as harvest and naming rights. The Caddoes ruled with a well organized government system.

The Caddo had early contact with Spanish Conquistadores under Hernando de Soto in 1541. The Caddo people traded fur, guns, horses, and other items to Europeans and other Indians, and developed new trade and economic networks. The economic trade between the Caddo groups and Europeans sped up the process of the Caddo people adopting the cultural traits and social patterns of the Europeans.

By the early 1840s, all Caddo groups had moved to the Brazos River area to escape colonization efforts. They remained there until they were placed on the Brazos Indian Reservation in 1855, and then in 1859 the Caddos were removed to the Washita River in Indian Territory by the superintendent of Indian affairs in Texas. During the American Civil War, the Caddo abandoned the reservation and moved to southern and eastern Kansas but return to their reservation by 1867. By 1874 the Caddo reservation's boundaries were defined and the separate Caddo tribes unified.



Caddo Chief, from a *Pictorial History of Texas*.



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The Coahuiltecan

Little is known of the Coahuiltecan, although more than two hundred autonomous bands are considered as the Coahuiltec based on similarities in their languages. They settled in the lowlands of northeastern Mexico and southern Texas.

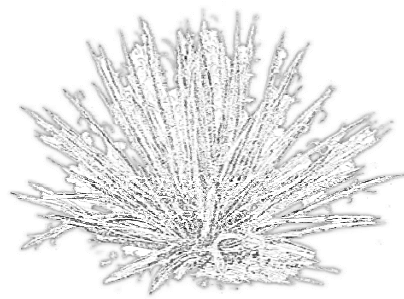
During the Spanish colonial period many of these natives were displaced from their traditional territories by Spaniards advancing from the south and Apaches retreating from the north. The Spanish simply referred to them all as a *nación*. The Coahuiltecan area was one of the poorest regions of Indian North America and the Indian groups that occupied it became extinct at an early date.

Hunting and gathering prevailed in the region, with some Indian agriculture existing in southern Tamaulipas. For large game animals, deer and buffalo were widely available. Additional game included the peccary, armadillo, rabbits, rats and mice, various birds, and numerous species of snakes, lizards, frogs, and snails. Fish were found in streams, and both fish and shellfish were harvested from the salt waters of the Gulf.

As the Spaniards advanced they displaced the various

Coahuiltecan tribes, who retreated northward, with some moving to the east and west. These groups, in turn, displaced other Indians.

The Indians also suffered from such European diseases as smallpox and measles. The Coahuiltecan retreat to the north meet the migrating Apaches, and as a result the Coahuiltecan were further disbursed, some to the 'safety' of the Spanish missions. By the 1800s most Coahuiltecan Indians had ceased to exist as a cultural unit.



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The Karankawas

It is thought that their name means “people walking in the water.” They were a coastal tribe, located along the Gulf of Mexico in present-day southern Texas. They are classified as gulf culture Indians, and they occupied arid homelands with areas extending into the swampy country of present-day Louisiana. They inhabited the Gulf Coast of Texas from Galveston Bay south-westward to Corpus Christi Bay.

The Karankawa language is virtually unknown as only about 100 words of that language have been preserved. They were nomadic hunter-gatherers, and built small villages of one or several families and traveled to acquire food. The Karankawas lived in small wood and brush dwellings which could be moved when they needed to relocate every few weeks. They supplemented their diet with Shellfish, wild fowl, turtles, and plants. The men hunted for small game and used dugout canoes to travel in coastal or interior waters. The chief weapon of the tribe for both hunting and warfare, was the long bow and arrow. Bows were made of red cedar and reached from the eye or chin level to the foot of the person using it.

Karankawas were known for their distinctive physical appearance. The men, described as tall and muscular, wore deerskin

breechcloths or nothing at all. They painted and tattooed their bodies, and also pierced the nipples of each breast and the lower lip with small pieces of cane. Women also painted and tattooed their bodies and wore skirts of Spanish moss or animal skin that reached to the knees.

The Karankawas participated in competitive games demonstrating weapons skills and physical prowess. Wrestling was very popular. Warfare was a fact of life for the Karankawas, and evidence indicates that the tribe practiced a ceremonial cannibalism that involved eating the flesh of their enemies. This was a common custom among Texas tribes, involving eating pieces of dead or dying enemies as the ultimate revenge or as a magical means of capturing the enemy's warrior spirit.

This knowledge of the Karankawas comes from Cabeza de Vaca, a survivor of the ill fated Pánfilo de Narváez expedition of 1528. He was shipwrecked and spent several years among the Karankawa. Eventually he escaped and published an account of his adventures.



Texas Indians: Great Plains Culture

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The Wichitās

The Wichitas separated from other Caddo people early in their history and migrated onto the southern plains. Their name stands for "raccoon eyed" derived from their practice of tattooing and face painting. They have also been called Black Pawnee as well as by the names of related tribes among them: the Kichai, Tawakoni, Tawehash, Waco, and Yscani. These tribes merged with the Wichita in the 19th century and sometimes are referred to as the Wichita Confederacy. The Wichita are classified as part of the Great Plains Culture. They came to occupy territory in what now is part of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.

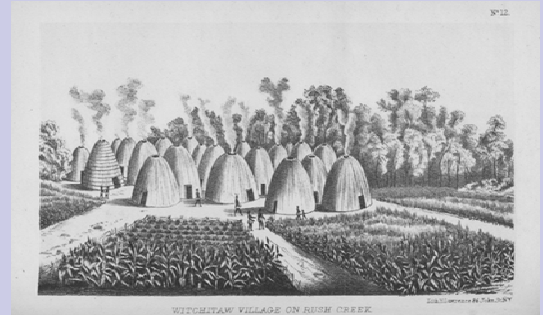
They acquired horses sometime in the 1700s, and as typical of plains Indians they used them to hunt buffalo and support their nomadic lifestyle. Like other Plains Indians they used skin Tipis on the trail. Unlike many Plains Indians the Wichita had a mixed economy of nomadic wanderings and farming. For most of the year they stayed in permanent villages constructed of conical grass houses.

The Wichita ancestral descent was matriarchal. Their villages were usually situated near rivers, with round thatched houses 15-30 feet in diameter and built upon a pole framework. Typically they had two doors, and a smoke hole in the

center. For buffalo hunts they used the traditional plains Indian skin tipis. Men hunted Buffalo twice a year after they acquired horses. They also hunted deer, elk, rabbit, antelope and bear. Women grew corn, beans, squash, and tobacco.

While not the most warlike of Indian tribes, a band of Wichitas accompanied the Comanches in the attack on the Spanish San Sabá Mission in 1758, and their Red River villages withstood a retaliatory Spanish attack. However by 1810 they were in decline and abandoned many of their villages. They were still located along the Wichita and Brazos rivers in the 1850s. The United States established a Wichita reservation in Indian Territory (Oklahoma). They left for Kansas during the Civil War but returned in 1867 and formally ceded all their non-reservation land in 1872 in exchange for a 743,000-acre reservation along the Washita River.

Wichita influence on Texas is found in the name of a river, a county, and the city of Wichita Falls.



Wichita Village, from *Exploration of the Red River*, 1852

