

Indian raid took 18 lives in county

By CYNTHIA HAYNES

In the spring of 1878 Oberlin was a bustling little town but down south in Oklahoma trouble was brewing.

A group of Northern Cheyenne had been put on the reservation with the Southern Cheyenne after the battle of the Little Big Horn. The two groups did not get along and the government, which had promised to provide for the Indians, had broken its promises.

Under cover of darkness the Indians, led by chiefs Dull Knife and Little Wolf, left the reservations and started to return to their homeland in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

The cavalry followed but the Indians set a prairie fire and the soldiers were temporarily turned back.

No one knows for sure why the Indians started killing people. They needed supplies for their long trek to the Black Hills and they may have been angry about a massacre of Cheyenne women and children at Sappa Creek several years previously. In all 39 settlers were killed including 18 in Decatur County.

What had been a peaceful escape turned deadly on Sunday, Sept. 29, when they shot at two immigrant boys on the north fork of the Solomon River. The boys got away but one, John Young, was hit and died on Oct. 3. His companion, who went for a doctor, reported the Indian attack but he was not believed.

In Oberlin several men with teams of horses were gathering to go to Buffalo Park, where they expected to pick up their families. They were provisioning for the trip and when Indian scouts saw all the activity and the men the band bypassed Oberlin and turned west.

The Indians next attacked men haying. They killed John C. Hudson and wounded James G. Smith, who died 36 hours later. Smith's son Watson rode into town with the Joe Rabb family and brought the news of the killings. Watson had escaped by getting in the creek and following it down the Rabb homestead.

William Laing and his son Freeman were on their way to Kirwin with the VanCleave girls, who were on their way to school. The Indians attacked and killed both men within sight of the Anthony home and abducted the girls, who were turned loose several hours later.

Pat Lynch and Jimmy Kelly were at the Anthony home for breakfast they saw the killings and prepared to defend the homestead.

Along the road a short distance from the Anthony's Marcellus Felt and Moses Abernathy were shot off their horses. They had been on their way to Oberlin.

E.P. Humphrey and his son John were hauling hay. E.P. was killed outright and John was shot in the stomach and died a month later.

L.T., Lull and John Irwin had just come from the Kirwin land office. They had taken refuge in a dugout on the O'Toole place when they heard of the Indian raid. The men panicked and made a run for it but were both killed.

Fred Westphalen and his son Thomas were hitching up mules in their yard when the Indians rode up. The visitors seemed friendly so the men gave them food. Both were killed despite their kindness.

Mrs. Westphalen had seven children in the house but she refused to surrender even though she was wounded in the shoulder by an arrow.

George F. Walters was on his way from Park with a load of supplies when he was attacked. His body wasn't found until a prairie fire uncovered it a month later.

William Jr. and John Laing were killed on their homestead while erecting a building. The Indians burned the frame home.

Mrs. Laing pulled herself and two daughters from the fire and hid in the creek. She then walked more than three miles to the Anthony homestead, where she learned of the deaths of her husband and son earlier in the day.

John Wright was with several men, who went out to check the damage and go after the Indians. His body was found 14 days later just west of Lamb's Draw.

Ed Miskelly was looking for suitable winter pasture. He had left his wagon and gun at the Ufford place. His body was found in the North Sappa Creek near the mouth of Lamb's Draw.

The Indians continued into Nebraska.

In 1909 a move was started to build a memorial to those who died in the raid. In 1911 a marble obelisk was erected in the Oberlin Cemetery. It still stands guard over some of the graves of those who died in the last Indian raid in Kansas.



CHIEF DULL KNIFE AND CHIEF LITTLE WOLF led their people away from the reservation in Oklahoma and up through Kansas and Nebraska in hopes of returning to the Black Hills.

Attorneys at Law

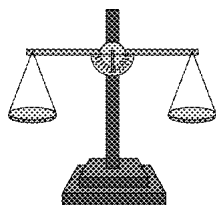
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