Center Currents

The Indian nation for whom the state of Kansas is named is not one of the storied tribes of the Great Plains, such as the Sioux, Cheyenne, or Comanche. In fact, A.B. Guthrie, in *The Way West*, stereotypes the Kaw as ragged, begging, and degraded, contrasting them with the noble Pawnee and fierce Sioux. That novel, set in the later 1840s, coincides with the removal of the Kanza (or Kansa or Konza or one of the other myriad spellings of the name) from their first reservation, some 6,000,000 acres in size that was 30 miles in width and extended from near present-day Topeka west well into present-day Colorado.

Unlike Guthrie’s depiction, the actual Kaw were formidable warriors and hunters, although greatly outnumbered by the tribes with whom they competed for game in the bison country of central and western Kansas. In one battle with attacking Cheyenne while in a hunting camp on Plum Creek, for instance, the Kaw killed fourteen enemy while losing only one. And Zebulon Pike’s Osage scouts are said to have skirted far to the west of Kanza territory while guiding the explorer to the Pawnee village in southern Nebraska.

My thoughts are on the Kanza because I have just finished reading an excellent book, *The Darkest Period: The Kanza Indians and their Last Homeland 1846-1873*, written by Ron Parks, former director of the Kaw Mission State Historic Site in Council Grove and the author of a pageant about the Kaw, *Voices of the Wind People*. This study focuses on the period when the tribe was removed to a reservation of roughly a quarter million acres crossed by the Santa Fe Trail at Council Grove, then later forced onto a diminished reserve before their final removal to Indian Territory.

Among its many insights, one of the more significant is the account of the tribe’s death walk in the winter of 1867-68, following their battle with the Cheyenne on Plum Creek. As Parks notes, the tragic/heroic treks of the Cherokee, Nez Perce, and Northern Cheyenne are well known, but that of the Kanza is not, although over 10 percent of their total population perished before the tribe made it back to their villages.

*The Darkest Period* is thoroughly researched and documented, well illustrated with maps and photographs, and thoroughly indexed, which is good for the scholar and student, but more important, it is well and engagingly written, making it accessible for the general reader. If your bookstore doesn’t have it in stock, contact Oklahoma University Press and order a copy.
Mention George Armstrong Custer at any gathering of western scholars and you’ll likely find you’ve tugged at a painful scab on the collective American subconscious. Our feelings about Custer are deep and contradictory and mixed with guilt over our treatment of native tribes, and it’s difficult to reconcile Custer’s ultimate sacrifice with accounts that portray him as a fool or a madman. We like our hero stories to be tidy, and the Custer story is a mess.

It’s exactly this complexity that keeps us fascinated, and makes Custer a perennially viable topic for university and commercial publishers alike. From the gems (think Evan S. Connell and Nathaniel Philbrick) to the duds (Larry McMurtry), there are enough books to keep Custer buffs reading for a lifetime. The challenge is to find work that will offer some new understanding of one of the defining moments of the American psyche.

In his new book, Shooting Arrows and Slinging Mud, James E. Mueller does just this. He examines the role that journalists had in shaping the public perception of Custer in the immediate aftermath of the 1876 battle in which Custer and 267 under his command were killed in an overwhelming victory for the Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapahoe near the Little Bighorn River in Montana.

Mueller, a professor of journalism at the University of North Texas, at Denton, is a veteran reporter and the author of two previous books, both examining the relationship between the press and recent presidents. In Shooting Arrows, Mueller combs contemporary accounts in the days and weeks after the battle to present a mosaic that outlines that thinking of America while the news was still fresh and bloody in our minds. The conversation turned on questions that resonate to this day, from our policy toward the Indians to who really was to blame for one the greatest military blunders of all time.

Mueller is a careful and restrained writer, and Shooting Arrows can be slow going at times, but the journey is worth it. Consider his wealth of detail about Mark Kellogg, the only reporter to accompany the Seventh Cavalry to the Little Bighorn. Kellogg was 43, a widower with two young daughters, trying to start a new career as a reporter for the Bismarck Tribune. “The reporter trotted after Custer,” Mueller writes, “riding on a mule carrying two saddlebags bulging with paper and pencil and enough bacon, sugar, and coffee to last fifteen days.”

Mueller dispels the myth that journalists of the time were hacks and hucksters that capitalized on the sensational to sell newspapers—and who beat the drum for revenge against the Indians. Instead, Mueller’s account shows that, despite their cultural biases, journalists provided credible accounts of the battle and wrote thoughtful editorials. In addition, at least one journalist made the ultimate sacrifice in reporting first-hand from the Indian campaigns, a story that was largely ignored until the shock of the Little Big Horn.

Mark Kellogg, the Bismarck Tribune reporter, died with Custer.

Our Reviewer

Max McCoy, an assistant professor of journalism at Emporia State University, is an award-winning novelist and investigative reporter.
Announcements and News

Heritage of the Great Plains

Call for Manuscripts

Heritage of the Great Plains is a refereed semiannual journal published by the Center for Great Plains Studies and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Emporia State University. It strives to be a repository for scholarship of the life and culture of the Great Plains region, and the variety of topics with which its articles deal reflect the breadth of that culture. Submissions of academic and non-academic written material about the Plains region are welcome. For additional guidelines please visit www.emporia.edu/cgps and follow the publication links.

Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences

Call for Manuscripts

Great Plains Research is a biannual, multidisciplinary, international journal that publishes peer-reviewed research on the natural and social sciences of the Great Plains. The editor is soliciting current manuscripts on important research results and synthetic reviews of critical scientific issues for the Great Plains. For more information visit www.unl.edu/plains.

Sundays at the Site

Red Rocks State Historic Site

Sunday, June 15, 22 and 29

2:00 p.m. – Free, donations are always appreciated – 927 Exchange St.- Emporia, KS

June 15 –

Biography on the Porch: US Vice President Charles Curtis of Kansas, America’s first bi-racial elected executive - Presented by Ken McClintock

June 22 –

Murders on the Porch: reporting the Sandy Bird and Martin Anderson murder investigation and trials for the Emporia Gazette - Presented by Nancy Horst and Bobbi Mylnar

June 29 –

Music & Sing-Along on the Porch: a nod to Mr. White’s lifelong love of music – Presented by LUNADAZ featuring Shiuaun Mason and Michael Debacker

For additional information about Red Rocks and directions to the site please visit

Preserving the Past Through Performance

Summer Camp at Pioneer Bluffs, July 21 – 25

Is there a fascinating story you’d like to share – a story passed down in your family or one you’ve heard about a local historical figure? You have the opportunity to help preserve the past by performing the stories that shaped our community.

Those stories will be brought to life in a week-long camp, Preserving the Past through Performance, to be held July 21 to 25 at Pioneer Bluffs. Participants become historians with two goals: accuracy and entertainment.

The camp will be held from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. daily. Participants/historians will spend the week learning about the person they have chosen to portray, developing their script, and weaving it all into a first-person narrative.

There is no cost for attending this program. Participants/historians share what they learn at a future community performance, perhaps at the Chase County Chautauqua on August 15-17 or at the Pioneer Bluffs Fall Festival on October 4.

For additional information and registration please visit pioneerbluffs.org
Great Plains Quarterly & Great Plains Research

*University of Nebraska Lincoln, Center for Great Plains Studies*

Both *GPR* and *GPQ* are long-established, peer-reviewed journals that are highly-regarded and have significant readership. They offer access to a wider multidisciplinary audience that may not be available in more narrowly disciplinary journals, expanding your research's impact. The editors – Chuck Braithwaite of *Great Plains Quarterly* and Gary Wilson of *Great Plains Research* – welcome your submissions and are ready to work with you. For additional information please visit [www.unl.edu/plains/publications](http://www.unl.edu/plains/publications)

Art & Literary Talk at Pioneer Bluffs

**August 2**

An art and literary magazine presents a Prairie Talk on Kansas City Voices, to be held at Pioneer Bluffs. At 1:30 p.m. on Saturday, August 2, this community dialog will feature published authors who will read selections of their work from Kansas City Voices and discuss their writing.

Kansas City Voices is a periodical of art and writing, published annually by Whispering Prairie Press. The magazine is an eclectic mix of fiction, essays, interviews, articles, poetry, and art by writers and artists from every region of the U.S. and beyond. Exceptional written and visual creations from established and emerging voices are showcased in the publication, and at talks like this throughout the Midwest. For more information please visit [pioneerbluffs.org](http://pioneerbluffs.org)

Root, Root, Root for your Home Team

*Kansas Humanities Council – Smithsonian Traveling Exhibit*

The Kansas Humanities Council invites museums, public libraries, art centers, and other nonprofit cultural institutions to apply to host Hometown Teams, a Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibition touring six Kansas communities in 2015. For additional information please visit [www.kansashumanities.org](http://www.kansashumanities.org)
New Books

**Anthropology, Sociology, Cultural Studies, & Politics**


*The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City* by Eric Avila. Published by University Press of Minnesota, May 2014. ISBN: 9780816680733


**Art, Photography, & Essay**

*What Happens Next?* by Douglas Bauer. Published by University of Iowa Press, September 2013. ISBN: 9781609381837


*Lens on the Texas Frontier* by Lawrence T. Jones, III. Published by Texas A&M University Press, June 2014. ISBN: 9781306407069


**Fiction, Poetry, & Literature**

*Moon of Madness* by Don Coldsmith. Published by Goldminds Publishing LLC, November 2013. ISBN: 9781930584495

**History**


*Prairie Forge: The Extraordinary Story of the Nebraska Scrap Metal Drive of WWII* by James J. Kimble. Published by University of Nebraska Press, May 2014. ISBN: 9780803248786


**Ecology, Biology & Environment**


*Kansas Fishes* by Kansas Fishes Committee. Published by University Press of Kansas, June 2014. ISBN: 9780700619610


**Biography & Memoir**

*Leaving the Pink House: A Memoir* by Ladette Randolph. Published by University of Iowa Press, September 2014. ISBN: 9781609382742