
Dining with the Delawares: Kansas Delaware Homes and Hospitality 1830s-1860s

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The treaties of 1829 and 1867 give us usable, if imprecise, dates for the arrival from Missouri and Indiana, and the departure to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma), of the Kansas Delawares (Weslager 1972:370-427). The years between, then, count for about a tenth of the time the Unami-speaking people have been known to European-Americans. Although the dispersal and loss of Kansas Delaware lands and the gradual Christianizing of the tribe have been the subject of several historians' inquiries, less has been written about the ephemeral details of Delaware home life during this period. For example, the two most useful surveys of housing have hitherto been Lewis Henry Morgan's 1859 description and another list compiled about 1862. Morgan wrote:

When Mr. Pratt [a Baptist missionary] came among them 12 years ago, they were living in bark houses. Now many of them are living in frame houses two stories high, some with a veranda in front the whole length, and they have good barns and outbuildings. Some of them have herds of cattle from 25 to 100 and have 5 to 20 swine, sheep, wagons, and all kinds of implements. (Cited in Thurman 1973:200)

The circa 1862 list indicated, of 27 Delaware families, the number living in particular types of homes: log cabin 11; two cabins 5; three cabins 2; double cabin 3; small frame house 3; three houses 1; large frame house 1; two story house 1 (cited in Thurman 1973:200).

But dozens of brief notices and accounts in contemporary periodical literature allow us to sharpen our focus on Delaware domesticity from the 1830s through the 1860s. Of the extant accounts of travelers who dined with their Delaware hosts in early Kansas, one of the most representative was left by Byron, an otherwise unnamed soldier of the Ninth Kansas Cavalry. While en route from Fort Riley to Quindaro during late January, 1862,

Byron and another visitor stopped at a Delaware home to inquire after food and lodging, and left this account:

[We] inquired of the inmates (eight persons of various ages) whether they kept travellers or not. After considerable palavering, without understanding a single word, we were motioned to the barn, where we left our tired horses. As we were returning to the house, we discovered an old Indian woman "packing" a large log upon her shoulders, which she carried into the house and placed on the fire with [a] quantity of small sticks, and we were soon made very comfortable. While supper was preparing, we amused ourselves by interrogating a little half breed of a half dozen summers, who had received some education, and could digest very good English. . . . While we were there, he brought in half a dozen rabbits which he had killed with the bow and arrow. We expected poor fare, but were very agreeably disappointed to find good coffee, wild plum preserves, good biscuit, roast turkey and a fine roll of butter upon the table. (Byron 1862)

The references to wild or foraged foods such as rabbits and plums, cultivated or purchased grain for the biscuits, domesticated cattle, domestic or wild turkeys, purchased coffee, the domestic arrangements for the house and barn, the number of inhabitants per dwelling, and the varying degrees of ability or willingness to discourse in English are all echoed in contemporary accounts, affording the synoptic reader an unintended ethnographic sketch of Delaware domesticity.

Albert D. Richardson, a political reporter for the *Cincinnati Gazette* and the Quindaro, Kansas Territory, *Chindowan*, from June 1857 to early 1858 left five separate accounts of stopovers at Delaware homes. On his first such visit to a "half-way station kept by Indians" on the Delaware Reserve, dated to early June, 1857, he and his companion were dismayed by "a view of our copper-colored cook picking the corned beef from the boiler, and placing it on the table with her stout, bony fingers" (Richardson 1857a). Later that summer, however, the Delaware log or frame houses, barns, and the surrounding few acres of "cornfields and wheatfields, and fields of other grains, growing where there once was a heavy forest" reminded him of scenes common in the States (Richardson 1857b).

Just prior to Richardson's second stopover, dated to August 25, 1857, his traveling companion "for a big price got some very small, very tart, half-ripened apples, which tasted not unlike green persimmons" but could find no melons for sale. At the "well-known Indian tavern on the edge of the prairie, on the Fort Leavenworth road thirteen miles from Quindaro" where Richardson and his two companions dined that day, they "feasted on tough beef, cold potatoes, boiled corn, wild honey, bad bread and good butter" (Richardson 1857b).

Richardson's third stopover that year is dated to early December. While traveling alone in a rainstorm and 15 miles from Lawrence, en route to

Quindaro, he detected light shining through the chinks of Four Miles's log cabin. Greeted by the clamor of "half a dozen noisy dogs", Richardson asked at the cabin door for lodgings for the night. The three men dressed in coats and pantaloons sitting upon stools around the table finishing a meal, Richardson learned, were Four Miles, Fall Leaf and another unnamed man. The others in the cabin Richardson described as follows:

A stout squaw, cheery and open-faced, who wore zinc ear-rings as large as silver dollars, sat humbly waiting for the nobler sex to finish their repast. Crouching beside her was a girl of eight years also wearing the metallic ear-rings. [In a hammock swinging in a distant corner was] an Indian papoose of American descent screech[ing] so lustily that his dusky mother seized him, dandled him on her knee, and soothed him with the sweetest talk of the Delaware tongue. He looked like an infant mummy. He was on his back, bandaged so tightly to a board that he could only scream, roll his head and wink; . . . His lips were at last silenced by application to 'the maternal fount;' and then he was set up against the wall like a fire-shovel, to inspect the company.

Supper over, the little girl filled and lighted an earthen pipe with reed stem a foot long. Smoking a few whiffs she handed it to her mother. That stolid matron finished it; and we all sat staring silently into the fire. The girl, true to her sex, found courage to scrutinize my gold sleeve-buttons, watch and chain, and every other glittering article she could find about me, greeting each with some fresh ejaculation of delight. Then she kissed the papoose, and crept to her straw nest in another corner. Richardson described the cabin as being ten or twelve feet square, with "open cooking utensils" on the log fire in the great stone hearth. His bed, adjacent to a wall from which a log was missing, was "of plank, well covered with blankets." (Richardson 1867:89-92)

Two further visits are mentioned in Richardson's popular 1867 compilation of his adventures of the previous decade, *Beyond the Mississippi*. His fourth visit to a Delaware home (and his second to Four Miles's cabin) occurred in late December 1857 or early January 1858, but he left no details. His fifth visit was to a cabin six miles from Sarcoxie's house, itself four or five miles north of Lawrence. This undated visit was described as follows:

I found the good accommodations of the cabin to consist of a single room with earth floor, which could only be entered through a filthy hen-house. Upon one of the beds sat a stolid squaw in a bright red calico frock, nursing a little papoose, who greeted me with an infantile whoop. Three more tawny children were playing in the mud; four scurvy dogs lying in corners, and a dozen chickens pervading the apartment. It contained three bunks, a table, four or five chairs, a rifle, a broken looking-glass, various kitchen utensils, and an enormous fire-place in which I could stand upright . . . My supper was of fat pork, corn bread and strong coffee. My couch of straw was deluged with rain and pre-occupied with bedbugs. Early in the morning I indulged in a repetition of the evening bill of fare, disbursed the required 'six bits,' (seventy-five cents,) and bade a glad adieu. (Richardson 1867:95)

The home of Capt. Anderson Sarcocie, chief of the Turtle clan of the Delawares, no doubt because of its nearness to Lawrence received much notice. Sarah Robinson over the winter of 1855-1856 could see "the smoke from the Indian houses over in the Delaware Reserve, five miles away . . . gracefully curling and rising above the trees", recalling also that "Sicocie's dwelling, across the river, has been open to visitors from Lawrence, and an occasional party, of a winter's evening, has shared the hospitalities of his house" (Robinson 1899:197, 212; cf. also Ropes 1856:168; Cordley 1903:53; Connelley 1910:104; He-No 1855). According to a correspondent of the *Cincinnati Gazette* (possibly Henry Villard or A.D. Richardson),

[Sarcocie's] principal house is a log-cabin, about eighteen feet square, of hewed logs, and well chinked . . . His wife and daughter prepared supper for me of ten eggs, fresh pork, and warm bread, no butter and no milk. A good-natured, bare-footed, Indian girl . . . poured out my tea. She appeared about fourteen years old . . .

I slept in an out-house, which, after turning out a lot of Indian dogs, and barricading the door with an old musket, I thought I had to myself, but, after I got fairly into bed, the dogs came in by getting under the cabin, and pushing up the floor boards . . .

While eating breakfast [the next morning] I observed the girl in whom I had been interested the previous evening, sitting by the fire with a papoose in her arms.

It was a bright little one; and, though only two months old, had its ears pierced, and pewter rings in them. (Finley 1857:115-117)

Clara Gowing, who arrived in Kansas Territory during October 1859, left this description of a Delaware home, which she visited April 2, 1860:

The house [of "chief Ketchum"], of one story, with the roof coming down over the piazza, was situated in a clearing, and around the door were ponies and cattle, pigs and fowls. The door opened into a small room, in which was a bed, a cooking stove, table and chairs. On the bed was a hen, laying her egg. The next room was small also, with a large fireplace, a bed and lounge and two bureaus. On the lounge lay the chief. (Gowing 1912:183, 188)

Since, however, Chief Ketchum died July 12, 1857 (Weslager 1972:388), it is unclear whose home Gowing has here described. Another account of "head chief of the Delawares, Ketchum", dating from about December 1854, found the chief speaking English only when referring to "a particular kind of sauce, which he pointed to, and called 'good funkin'" (He-No 1855). But Phillips (1856:56) found a similar Delaware home to be "a double, hewed log house, with a covered hall or opening between, and a porch running the whole length."

Rev. Richard Cordley's visit to a Delaware home during late November, 1857, came by way of a black teamster driving him from Quindaro to

Lawrence. The teamster, who had lived among the Delawares and was well acquainted with them, brought Cordley that evening to

an Indian hut where he was evidently well known. He soon made our situation understood and we were taken in, thought the hut seemed more than full already. The old squaw busied herself setting supper for us. She cooked a chicken in a iron kettle on the open hearth. The fireplace consisted of a few stones piled around by a wall, and an opening at the roof through which most of the smoke found its way. At last we sat down to supper and I tried to eat. The chicken was just warmed through and was as raw as when first put over the fireplace. I tried hard to swallow the first mouthful I had taken but it was out of the question. I watched my opportunity to throw it under the table. It was a mud floor and dirty at that, so the morsel I threw down would never be noticed. I made my supper on a few crackers.

For about an hour that evening the cabin hosted "a company of young fellows ornamented with feathers and paint" who wrestled and scuffled with each other, but who then mounted their ponies and galloped away as wildly and loudly as they had arrived. The host and his family, Cordley noted, neither joined in nor checked them, but looked stolidly on as though it were an everyday affair. After Cordley paid his bill, he bedded down on

a shelf on the side of the cabin supported by pins driven into the logs. There were several such shelves around the walls on which the rest were to sleep. My shelf looked neater and cleaner than the others and was evidently the spare bed of the house. it was about a foot and a half wide and four feet and a half from the floor, and had some sort of a blanket on it.

The cabin was about fifteen feet square and of very simple construction. There was no chinking between the logs and I could almost roll through the openings into the yard. I could look out and see the ponies and the pigs and the cattle, and could hear the chickens. (Cordley 1903:31, 48-53)

Another Delaware who often hosted whites at his home was Tonganoxie, whose "village" in 1860 was "a few log huts by the wayside near a creek" (Williams 1912:134-135). "Viator", who stopped at Tongenoxey's half way house on September 24 or 25, 1854, and who noticed the large fenced-in cornfield surrounding the house, left this account:

Madame Tongenoxey in the absence of her spouse, readily made arrangements to accommodate us, although we could not speak her language, or she ours. Our horses regaled themselves on unthreshed oats. One of the little Tongenoxey's and a dog made chase after two tolerable-sized chickens which were soon overcome and slaughtered for our benefit. These, a little pork, some plain flour bread, with tea and coffee made our repast. It was very well cooked and though we had no milk nor butter (for they had no cows, notwithstanding the facilities for keeping stock,) the dinner was agreeable . . . We paid "four bits" each. (Viator 1854)

Another Delaware who, like Tonganoxie, kept a halfway house or inn was George Washington, who apparently charged a dollar a day for room and board, primarily for soldiers from nearby Fort Leavenworth (Gowing 1912; Mallery 1988; Washington 1937).

During the night of May 12–13, 1858, while lost in the forest between Fort Leavenworth and Lawrence, William Tomlinson accidentally stumbled into a Delaware “war dance” held for the guides soon to leave for the Rocky Mountains on a gold-seeking expedition outfitted by William Parsons. Although badly scared, Tomlinson was reassured by one of the older Delawares present that he was in no danger, and that in fact he was only six miles from Lawrence. After watching the dance for hours, Tomlinson threw himself “upon the couch of skins prepared for me in the hut of my Indian friend”, and that morning breakfasted on “coarse corn cake and smoked venison” (Tomlinson 1859:34–37; Parsons 1871).

Another account of Delawares dining on venison comes from the September 23, 1834, journal entry of Rev. John Dunbar, who on that date found an encampment of Delawares about a day’s journey north of Cantonment [i.e., Fort] Leavenworth. They had come there to kill deer and other game, the Delawares told him, and “kindly furnished [Dunbar’s party of four people] with a savory piece” of venison (Dunbar 1918:593).

Briefer accounts referring to Delaware foodstuffs tell of a large flock of turkeys tended just beyond “the porch of a little log house” on the bank of the Kansas River in May 1846 (Parkman 1943:15), and of the corn bread and bacon served to Robert H. Williams by “Johnny Cake” (either Isaac or Charles Journeycake) during February 1855 (Williams 1982:74). Rev. N.S. Harris found that “after dark, torches were lighted, spears seized, and fishing parties organized” by Delawares at the rapids of the Marais des Cygnes River, in southeast Kansas, during April 22–25, 1844 (Harris 1844:36–37), but such fishing may have been seasonal.

All these accounts supplement two agricultural and horticultural censuses taken in the mid to late 1840s, published in 1853 (Schoolcraft 1853: (1):488–497; (3):621–628). The number of bushels per crop, taken from Schoolcraft’s volumes, may perhaps reveal a typical Delaware harvest or annual yield. Totals are given in the tables below (note: n.g. = not given).

	corn	wheat	potatoes	oats	beans	peas	buck- wheat	turnips
Vol. 1	26,169	822	4,116	1,990	580	67	15	895
Vol. 3	27,620	1,043	2,776	2,215	620	n.g.	n.g.	n.g.

Other harvest totals from the two censuses are given here, from Vol. 1 and Vol. 3, respectively: pounds of cotton picked, 25 and n.g.; number of

fruit trees of all kinds, 2,679 and n.g.; number of melons of all kinds raised, 42,130 and 89,860; pounds of butter made, 7,817 and 10,470; pounds of maple syrup made, 4,815 and n.g.; and pounds of honey (wild or domestic), 11,883 and n.g. Livestock totals in the two censuses are as follows:

	beef cattle killed/sold	horses	mules	oxen	milch cows	neat cattle	sheep	hogs
Vol. 1	212	1,480	27	158	376	807	128	2,639
Vol. 3	n.g.	1,353	12	153	419	619	117	1,257

Total acreage of all land in cultivation was given as 1,582 and 1,381 acres, respectively, and the total estimated value for all agricultural and horticultural products was given as \$18,311.50 and \$10,286.00 in the two censuses. With tribal population given as 903 and 1,132, acreage per person works out to 1.75 and 1.22, respectively. Two accounts of farmstead acreages given here are perhaps representative (but cf. Thurman 1973:218-220 for size of 1862 and 1867 Kansas Delaware households). A '49er saw them as "very respectable log Houses [each with] a Field of about Eight or Ten Acres which had generally been in corn" (Forsyth 1849). And Ta-chou-wha's homestead on Stranger Creek, probably one of those enumerated on the circa 1862 list above, included ten plowed acres and sixteen fenced acres, along with "a good house and a stone chimney on it" (Fall Leaf 1863).

Finally, it should be noted that a small number of Delawares adapted to the fur-trapping life of the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains as early as 1824, when most tribal members still lived on the White River in southern Missouri (Weslager 1972:364-366; Lafleur 1831). Although Thurman (1973:181-185), Carter (1969) and Barry (1972:passim) relate the geographical range and activities of perhaps a score of Delaware mountain men, the subsistence pattern of these parties is not therein discussed. A survey of the lodging arrangements of these parties, however, suggests a rule of one family or woman per tent, and otherwise up to ten men per tent. An inventory of goods lost by a Delaware hunting party in December 1824 on "the Big B[e]nd of the Arkansas River" to Osages mentions "1 Large Tent or marquee" apparently as the sole lodging for the three whites and at least three Delawares in the party (Lafleur 1831). Similarly, a beaver-trapping party of nine Delawares and one Shawnee on the Red River, 300 miles southwest of Bent's Fort, during the late summer or early fall of 1835 all apparently lodged in a single tent (Cummins 1835), and an 1852 trading party of three Delawares — a 17-year-old young man and a married couple — occupied a single tent (Moseley 1852). But the presence of several women seems to correlate with the presence of a number of tents in traveling encampments. In 1838 Francesco Arese found a Delaware camp

of seven or eight "buffalo-skin tents supported by trees" a few leagues from St. Louis. Arese stated that "the game they kill provides their food, and the skins they sell are exchanged for brandy, gunpowder, tobacco for the men, beads of glass or chinese vermilion for the women." Arese saw saddles, guns, utensils and "women preparing deerskins or taking care of . . . babies" (Arese 1975:57-58). This encampment was possibly an entourage of tribal elders visiting the Department of Indian Affairs Superintendency Office in St. Louis (Barry 1972:271). In another account Thomas Henry Tibbles encountered "the old chief, Johnny Cake", an old acquaintance, at a camp of eight or ten tents during late October 1856 in the Solomon River drainage, north-central Kansas. A woman served Tibbles black soup made of dried and pounded buffalo meat, eaten with a horn spoon, and hominy (Tibbles 1957:55, 67-68).

Although it is hardly representative of Delaware domestic arrangements, a published sketch of Delaware scouts in an 1861 Civil War camp in central Missouri depicts knife sheaths, a two-gallon metal cooking pot, a two-quart pan, and a stone pipe with reed stem (Roetter 1861; cf. Powell 1948).

Analysis

Most of the accounts cited above indicate that the typical Delaware home was a one- or two-roomed log cabin with each room measuring from ten to eighteen feet square, with or without chinking between the logs. Chicken coops were often adjacent to the main room. This structure was usually but one of several buildings at the homesite, the others serving as barns, stables or outbuildings. Hearths were occasionally almost large enough to stand in, but stones of smaller hearths may have been unmortared. In many homes hearth smoke escaped through a hole or openings in the roof; a smaller number of homes had chimneys.

Home furnishings were sparse but usually included a table, stools or chairs, a musket or rifle, kettles, cups, plates or bowls, and the occasional cooking stove and bureau. The variety of cooking utensils is indeterminable, although knives seem to have been always available. Coffee, tea and flour were common purchases, though their method of storage is unknown; Ropes (1856:175-176) describes a Delaware family's buying trip to Lawrence and a contemporary newspaper (*Herald of Freedom* 1855) urged Lawrence merchants to deal fairly with the Delawares when they came to buy goods and provisions. Hammocks and cradleboards were present in some Delaware homes. Dress and accoutrements of the Kansas Delawares, however, are neither discussed nor exhaustively represented here.

The diagnostic feature of these houses is the bench-bed or shelf built into the cabin walls, described by Richardson (1867:92, 95) variously as a plank bed adjacent to a wall, or as a bed, or as a bunk, all of which he

distinguishes from the stools, tables and chairs in these homes. Tomlinson (1859) describes this feature as a "couch of skins", Gowing (1912) as a lounge, while Cordley (1903) offers us its precise dimensions.

Cultivated grain crops were principally corn, oats and wheat, while the livestock and poultry principally encountered were horses, cattle, hogs, chickens and turkeys. Dogs were always present. The Delaware words for hog, chicken, and other animals and items of farm produce originally of European origin, interestingly, derive from Dutch, indicating that these animals were known to, if not domesticated by, Delawares well before 1700 (Goddard 1974).

The late September date for the Delaware deer-hunting party encountered by Dunbar, and the paucity of other such accounts, may perhaps indicate that these hunters were participants in the twelve-day Big House ceremony, annually observed by the Delawares in late September and early October. Such hunters would have departed on the fourth day and returned to the Big House about the seventh day of the ceremony (Prewitt 1981). The only other occasion at which venison was available was Tomlinson's "war dance" (Tomlinson 1859).

It seems to have been the Big House ceremony that a Lawrence correspondent described in the following, entitled "Heathenish Exercises":

The Delaware Indians to the number of above 400, are now engaged in a religious performance, about 8 miles from this place on the North side of the [Kansas] river. They have been in meeting about 5 days, and will hold a week longer. — They perform chiefly at night, their exercises consist principally in dancing, whooping and singing. Some of our boys who attended one evening, report it as an interesting performance. They have their tents and all the paraphernalia of a regular camp meeting. (Anonymous 1855)

Another Lawrence correspondent reported that at a September 1857 "genuine aboriginal 'pow-wow'" held in town by a group of Delawares, rhythm was provided by a drum made of "a piece of deerskin drawn over the head of a nail keg" (Anonymous 1857).

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