

KATEMCY: THE COMANCHE PEACEMAKER

By
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Give us a country we can call our own, where we can bury our people in quiet.
~ Katemcy

Comanche chief Katemcy is one of the unrecognized champions of the Penateka (*Pen-ah-took-uh*) Comanches of Texas. Although a subchief under Santa Anna, it was Katemcy who first met with Meusebach in 1847 at the present-day site of Mason, Texas. It was Katemcy who made possible the celebrated treaty between the Fredericksburg Germans under the leadership of John O. Meusebach and the Penateka Comanches on the San Saba River.¹

The Treaty of Peace between John Meusebach and the Penateka band opened up almost four million acres for settlement. All or part of Concho, Kimble, Llano, Mason, McCulloch, Menard, San Sabá, Schleicher, Sutton and Tom Green Counties were created as a result of the treaty.²

Ten years earlier, the main movement of early Euro-American settlements was up the south-central river valleys of the Brazos, Colorado and Guadalupe rivers. The Comanches fiercely resisted their encroachments with destructive and deadly raids on the frontier. Just above the Balcones Escarpment, where the Penateka Comanches liked to camp in the Hill Country canyons, the Texans and Comanches began to do battle.³ Despite campaigns by the Texas Rangers, the lands west of the Balcones Escarpment were in the control of the Penateka Comanches. Frontiersmen to the south and east of the Edwards Plateau continued to be in constant peril.⁴

The Penateka, or “Honey-Eaters,” band of Comanches occupied the Balcones Escarpment and especially the San Saba River region. Their range extended from the Edwards Plateau to the headwaters of the central Texas rivers. Because of their site and situation, the Penatekas played the most legendary role in Texas history. “In legend and history, the Penateka were the largest and most powerful of all Comanche bands. They had swept the Apaches into Mexico and fought the Spanish to a standstill in Texas.”⁵

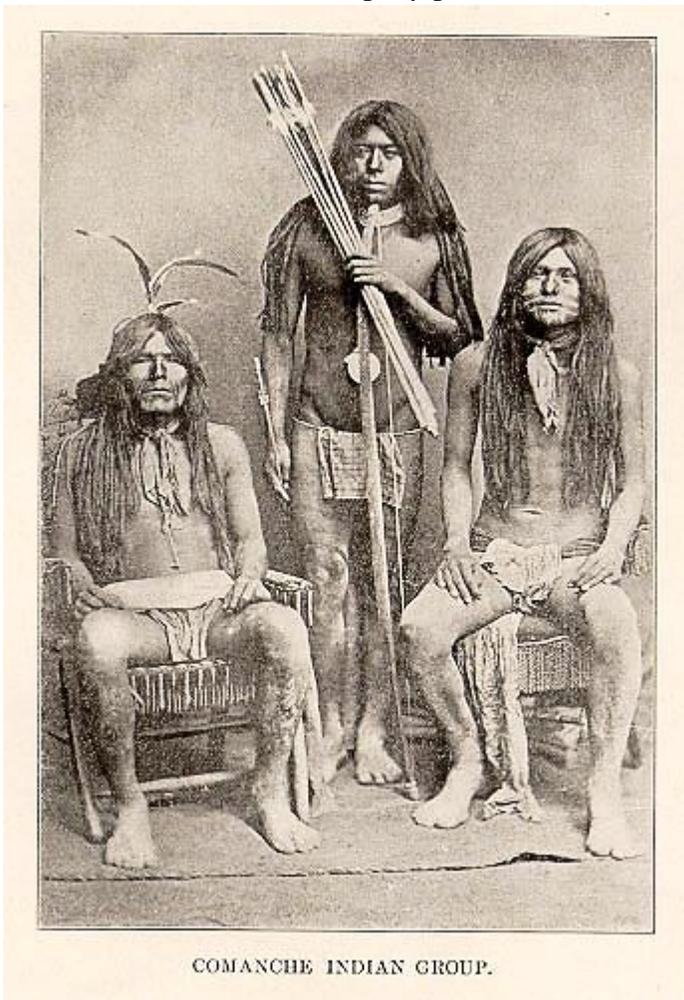
Mainzer Adelsverein

Immigration to Texas in the 1840s was made possible by the efforts of the Mainzer Adelsverein, a society formed for the purpose of promoting German colonization in the Americas. The Mainzer Adelsverein (or just Adelsverein) was an association of aristocrats, which perfectly described this organization of princes, dukes and counts.”⁶ The Adelsverein had two objectives: one, to acquire land investments that would increase in value over time, and two, to provide a safe outlet for German emigration. This society provided safe transportation from

ports of entry to colonized areas in Texas and also supported the new families until they could produce a crop and support themselves. Due to the efforts of this group, 7,380 Germans immigrated to Texas between 1844 and 1846.⁷

To settle the German immigrants, the German colonization company purchased the Fisher-Miller land grant in central Texas. The Adelsverein thus acquired 3,878,000 acres of land that covered five thousand square miles between the Llano River and Colorado River., Very little colonization resulted from the land grant, as most settlers preferred Fredericksburg and New Braunfels, which lay outside the land grant boundaries.⁸

The grant awarded by the State of Texas stipulated that the land had to be settled (at least in part) and surveyed by the fall of 1847. It became therefore necessary to enter the Comanche Territory. The land grant comprised lands between the Llano and Colorado Rivers and constituted the hunting grounds of the Penateka Comanche. Meusebach thought that regular expeditions into Indian-controlled lands should take place. Government officials, however, were unable to ensure military assistance, and surveyors refused to enter the region of the grant for fear of being attacked by the Penateka.



Meusebach's Expedition

In preparation for the first expedition into the land north of the Llano River, Meusebach engaged an eight-man military escort provided by the Adelsverein militia. These men were veterans of the Mexican-American War, well trained and combat experienced. Roemer described one trooper as "carrying two Colt pistols with revolving cylinders, each containing five shots, and a rifle manufactured on the same principle, containing eight shots."⁹

The expedition set out from Fredericksburg on January 22, 1847, headed for the Fisher-Miller grant to the west. The group consisted of three wagons and forty men. Meusebach was delayed and followed three days later. The route essentially followed Baron's Creek for a way west of Fredericksburg along what is now U.S. Highway 87 to Mason.

About ten days after the Meusebach group had left, the governor of Texas, James Pinckney Henderson, sent Indian agent Robert S. Neighbors¹⁰ to warn Meusebach of the possible consequences of entering Indian Territory. He had been given orders to the effect that if Meusebach had already departed, Neighbors was to overtake the expedition and offer to assist in the negotiations. Ferdinand von Roemer accompanied Neighbors. Roemer was a German scientist studying the geology of the country. Meusebach brought Roemer on the expedition to investigate the Spanish silver mines near the ruins of San Luis de las Amarillas Presidio (present day Menard). The Adelsverein planned to finance the German immigration with the proceeds from this mine.

Seventeen days after their departure, Meusebach and his men encountered a hunting party of Shawnees in the immediate vicinity of the Llano River (30° 39' 41" N, 99° 06' 43" W). After communicating to the Indians in broken English, they hired three Shawnees as hunters, who told Meusebach that his expedition was under constant surveillance by the Comanches, whose tracks they had detected.

Of the foolhardiness of the Dutchmen much has been said: because they went into the Comanches' own territory. Which they would not have done if they had known of the danger.

–Houston Telegraph, circa 1850

After crossing the Llano River, the German expedition advanced very cautiously. Forewarned by the Shawnees, the troop had to be vigilant, prepared to meet a sudden and unexpected attack by the Comanches. Great care was exercised in the selection and preparing of the night camps. The expedition apparently stopped at Gamel Springs in what is now Mason, Texas (30° 45' N, 99° 14' W). Moritz Tilling wrote:

When a suitable spot had been found, the eight tents of the company were pitched in a semi-circle and the openings closed by the wagons, while from six to eight fires were kept burning all night in the enclosure, four men being constantly on guard duty. In the flickering light of the campfires, the different costumes, physiognomies and actions of the Mexicans, Indians, Germans and Americans presented a rather picturesque appearance.¹¹

Germans Encounter Katemcy

Finally, the German expedition encountered a party of Comanches advancing in their direction and carrying a white flag.¹² Meusebach's men were met by Chief Katemcy at today's Camp San Saba (30° 50' 45" N, 99° 15' 42" W) on the river of that name.¹³ This was a favorite campground of the Penateka Comanches.¹⁴

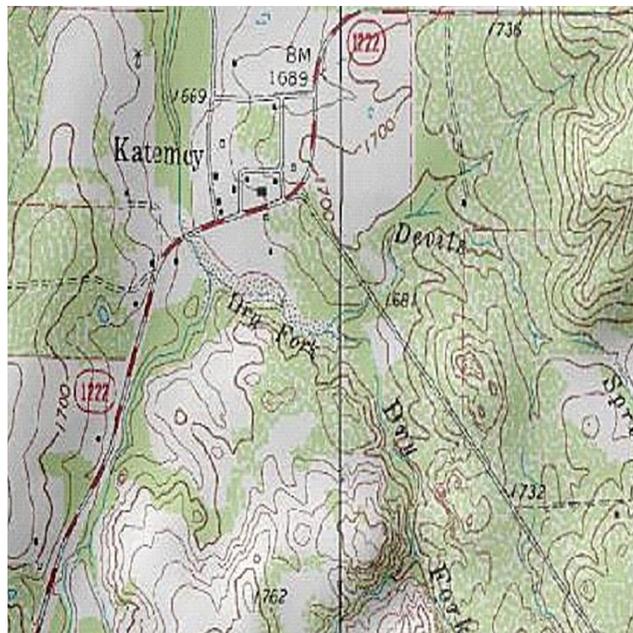
The following account is from an anonymous report taken from the files of two officers of the expedition who later returned to Germany. Entitled "Meusebach's Expedition into the

Territory of the Comanche Indians in January, 1847,” this account originally appeared in an early number of the *Magazine of Literature from Abroad*:

On February 7th we finally approached their wigwams on the San Saba River and here we were given a ceremonious reception. From the distance we saw a large number of Indians in their colorful array coming down the hill in formation. As we came nearer they entered the valley, all mounted, and formed a long front. In the center was the flag; on the right wing were the warriors, divided in sections and each section had a chief, the left wing was formed by the women and children, also mounted. The entire spectacle presented a rich and colorful picture because the garb of the Comanche on festive occasions is indeed beautiful and in good taste. The neck and ears are decorated with pearls and shells and the arms with heavy brass rings. The long hair of the men is braided into long plaits, which, when interlaced with buffalo hair, reaches from head to foot and is decorated with many silver ornaments.

As we approached the formation of the Comanche, it was requested of Mr. Meusebach that only he and few companions come nearer, and that was arranged. When our four or five men were within 100 paces, Lorenzo told us that if we fired our guns [into the air] as an indication of our confidence, that it would make a very favorable impression. This we did and the Comanche responded in a like manner. We were greeted with elaborate handshakes and then led into their village.

Writing in the *Frontier Times*, Leonard Passmore described Katemcy as “a very dignified old chief [who] was held in great admiration by all the members of his tribe.” The winter camp of this Comanche chief was near the modern Texas village of Katemcy. The chief’s name was also spelled as Ketemoczy by the Germans. Leonard Passmore also noted that “among the cliffs and deep little gorges of these granite rocks the old chief and his tribe would spend the winter, and then in the springtime move to more pleasant quarters down on the San Saba, near the present village of Camp San Saba.”¹⁵



Devil's Spring – Camp of Katemcy

Treaty between the Comanche and the German Immigration Company.

The Germans likewise promise to aid the Comanches against their enemies, should they be in danger.

—John O. Meusebach at 1847 treaty

On February 27, Meusebach was led to the “Great Council of Peace.” Negotiations commenced on March 1–2, 1847, at Sloan Springs, a tributary of the San Saba River. The location of this historic Penateka Comanche camp is on FM 2732 (Sloan Road), off U.S. 190 southwest of San Saba (31° 09' N, 98° 55' W).¹⁶

At the Great Council of Peace, about twenty chiefs participated, of which Old Owl, Santa Anna and Buffalo Hump were the most prominent. Katemcy, a subchief, was there. At the time of the midday sun, they all arrived at the prearranged meeting place, sitting down in solemn silence on buffalo skins spread out in a wide circle around the campfire.¹⁷

Ferdinand Roemer, in his account of the meeting, offered this description of the chiefs:¹⁸

The three chiefs, who were at the head of all the bands of the Comanches roaming the frontiers of the settlements in Texas looked very dignified and grave. They differed much in appearance. [Old Owl] the political chief, was a small old man who in his dirty cotton jacket looked undistinguished and only his diplomatic crafty face marked him. The war chief, Santa Anna, presented an altogether different appearance. He was a powerfully built man with a benevolent and lively countenance. The third, Buffalo Hump, was the genuine, unadulterated picture of a North American Indian.



Copied from original painting by Mrs. Ernest Marschall, daughter of John O. Meusebach.

Treaty of Peace by John O. Meusebach and Colonists with the Comanche Indians, March 2, 1847. An Epic in the Frontier History of Texas.

In the course of the treaty negotiations, Meusebach told the Penatekas, as translated by Jim Shaw, “I have come a long way to see you and to smoke the pipe of peace with you. I hope you will listen to the words of truth and sincerity, as it is the German’s custom.”¹⁹

Most treaties between the whites and Indians usually amounted to articles of surrender on the part of the latter. This was not the case with Meusebach’s treaty. The whites and Indians were given equal recognition and dignity. The agreement was as if between two allies rather than two formerly warring factions. In exchange for \$3,000 worth of presents, the Comanches agreed to allow the surveyors and settlers into the region without molestation. Also, the Indians could be allowed into German settlements and would “have no cause to fear, but shall go wherever they please.” In exchange for Comanche protection from “bad Indians,” it was agreed that “the Germans likewise promise to aid the Comanches against their enemies, should they be in danger of having their horses stolen or in any way to be injured.”²⁰

On May 9, 1847, the vested party representatives of the Penateka Comanches and German colonists met in on the Marketplatz in Fredericksburg to ratify and sign the “Treaty Between the Comanche and the German Immigration Company.” The Penatekas then demanded that a representative of the German colonists serve as an in-house intermediary and live among them. Emil Kriewitz volunteered to be the intermediary and went to live at the camp of War Chief Santa Anna. In the camp, Kriewitz began to assimilate into the culture to gain the confidence and friendship of Santa Anna, who otherwise was not totally trustful of the white settlers.²¹

Katemcy Leads an Exodus

Katemcy maintained good relations with the citizens and merchants of Fredericksburg, as well as the troops at Fort Martin Scott. In the end, it was Katemcy who led his people in the exodus from Texas.

Penateka chief Katemcy was the first to discuss the possibility of moving onto a reservation. In May 1850, Katemcy complained to the Indian agent Judge John H. Rollins that the Penatekas were starving due to lack of game. Katemcy suggested that his band of three hundred Comanches might be willing to abandon raiding and hunting and learn to farm. In 1851, Katemcy met with Indian agent John A. Rogers and stated that his people had been “driven from their homes where their parents were buried...by the white men and have no home or resting place. We want land and homes of our own.” If only the president would give his tribe a section of the country “to settle on and cultivate that we can call our own,” his band of Penatekas would gladly move there and live under the protection of the federal government. Of course, Rogers was powerless to act, as the Texas legislature refused any land for the Indians.²²

In 1852, Katemcy was found “very much in want” at his encampment on the headwaters of the San Saba River. The Penateka chief rode with thirty tribesmen to Fort Martin Scott to obtain some food. This entry into Fredericksburg was not the glorious procession of 1847.

Essentially hat in hand, Katemcy restated his band's desire to move to a reservation and raise crops. He then took his people to live among Chief Sanaco's people on the Concho River. By September 1852, both bands—some seven hundred individuals—were “suffering extreme hunger, bordering on starvation.”

The two Penateka chiefs met with Indian agent Horace Capron at Camp J.E. Johnson on the North Concho River, fifteen miles northwest of present-day San Angelo:²³

*How [could we] attempt the cultivation of the soil, or raising of cattle, so long as we have no permanent home? ...Over this vast country, where for centuries our ancestors roamed in undisputed possession, free and happy, what have we left? The game, our main dependence, is killed and driven off and we are forced into the most sterile and barren portions of it to starve...Give us a country we can call our own, where we can bury our people in quiet.*²⁴

By 1853, all four Penateka clans—those of Katemcy, Sanaco, Buffalo Hump and Saviah—were at Fort Chadbourne to receive food. They were starving. Late that same year, President Franklin Pierce, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis and the reappointed Indian agent Robert S. Neighbors pressured Governor Peter Hansbrough Bell—former commander of the Texas Rangers—to provide for the establishment of federally supervised Indian reservations in Texas. Twelve leagues [53,136 acres] of vacant land were placed under federal government jurisdiction “for the use and benefit of the several tribes of Indians residing within the limits of Texas.”²⁵

The Brazos Reserve,²⁶ just below present-day Graham, became home to Caddo, Waco, Anadarko and Tonkawa tribes. On the Clear Fork of the Brazos in Throckmorton County, Penateka Comanches lived on the 18,576-acre Comanche Reserve.²⁷ This smaller reservation contained four hundred souls—all Comanches, known as the Southern band of that tribe. Their head chief was known by the name of Ketemesie [Katemcy].²⁸ The federal Indian agent in charge of both reservations was Major Robert S. Neighbors. The U.S. Army established Camp Cooper²⁹ in 1856 to keep watch over and protect the adjacent Comanche Indian Reservation.

During the years the reservations struggled to survive, central Texas gradually was being settled by Anglo-Americans, who failed to distinguish between the reservation Comanches and the nonreservation Comanches. The latter continued to raid in Texas and Mexico, and their raids angered settlers, providing a rationalization for legislative action to encourage their removal from Texas. By 1858, the Penateka Comanches on the reservation were being harassed by nonreservation Comanches and their allies, the Kiowas, a situation that made life even more difficult for residents of the reservation.³⁰

By 1859, Neighbors and his two Indian agents had bowed to the difficulty of protecting the tribes settled on the Lower Reserve. A letter to Neighbors from Matthew Leeper, the Indian agent on the Comanche Reservation, summarized the concerns:

The more familiar I become of the wants and necessities of these people [Penateka Comanches] the more thoroughly I am convinced of the propriety and justice of your

*[Neighbors's] conclusion repeatedly and long since expressed in reference to them, that the only appropriate place for them to settle and learn the arts of civilization was upon Indian Territory near the Wichita Mountains, where they would have a country to roam over at will upon which to herd and collect their animals and other goods.*³¹

Only a small group of Comanches, elements of the Penateka band, came to the reservation, while their kinsmen continued to live freely and aggressively raid the frontier.

A number of racist and violence-prone Anglos in the region, led by the incendiary former Indian agent John Robert Baylor,³² favored either Indian extermination or removal and opposed all assimilation efforts. On May 23, 1859, Baylor and 250 men (including cattle rancher Charles Goodnight³³) attacked the Brazos Reservation, south of present-day Graham, killing five, including two elderly Indians. Residents of Belknap told Neighbors that Baylor's attacking party included some unsavory types, specifically "fifty horse thieves and well-known desperados." The Indian superintendent said that these outlaws were "stealing horses from the reserves, and from the citizens around it, waylaying roads, stopping travelers, robbing wagons, and stopping the mails."

Texas governor Hardin Richard Runnels refused to help, claiming that the matter was the jurisdiction of the U.S. Eighth Military District. Texas Ranger captain John "Rip" Ford protested in a letter to President James Buchanan's Indian commissioner that "I have never been able to detect the Reserve Indians in the commission of a single depredation...and I do think the measures instituted by the people [Baylor and his group] have been impolitic and precipitate."

Robert S. Neighbors, unable to adequately protect his charges and wanting to avoid their mass slaughter at the hands of whites, hurriedly relocated all of the reservation Indians. In August 1859, protected by three companies of federal troops under Major George Thomas, Neighbors personally led his charges to safety across the Red River into Indian Territory in what is now modern Oklahoma. Leading the Penataka Comanche was Katemcy – the peacemaker.³⁴

Ernest Wallace, west Texas teacher and historian, recorded this as a long, strange and colorful procession of Indians out of the Brazos Reservations, never to return. The sight was at once magnificent and pathetic. There were 384 Comanches and 1,112 Indians from other tribes."³⁵

Robert S. Neighbors reported, "Reflecting on the numerous violent and lawless events over the previous nine months, I have this day crossed all the Indians out of the heathen land of 'Texas' and am now out of the land of the philistines."³⁶

On September 14, 1859, at the county seat of Belknap, Major Robert S. Neighbors was assassinated—blasted with a shotgun in the back by Edward Cornett, one of Baylor's gang of vigilantes. In a letter to his father, David G. Burnet, Lieutenant William Burnet wrote, "The 'Baylor Party' have murdered Major Neighbors...the assassination...was a most foul and cowardly murder."³⁷

Today, the community of Katemcy is located on Farm to Market Road 1222, one mile east of Texas State Highway 87. The area was used for many years as pastureland by Comanche

Indians, who periodically burned off the brush to encourage the growth of the prairie grass. Today, this area is a park and a recreational area called Katemcy Rocks.³⁸

END NOTES

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