

TCU and May 24, 1841 (1-16-2020)

TCU is trying hard to develop healthy relationships with Native American peoples and communities. Part of that is dealing with history. While TCU was not directly involved in the killing of Native Americans and the taking of their lands, it benefits from these actions, which is why we ask, “What responsibilities do these benefits bring upon TCU? What does it mean for TCU to reside respectfully on Native American lands?” Answering these questions is not easy, but it begins with understanding the events and attitudes that made this residence possible.

On May 24, 1841, a group of 69 Texas militia led by General Edward H. Tarrant surprised and attacked three Native American settlements on Village Creek, a tributary of the West Fork of the Trinity River (located where the Fort Worth and Arlington city limits meet, but now mostly submerged in Lake Arlington). Cherokees, Muscogees/Creeks, Seminoles, Kickapoos, Shawnees, various Caddo groups (Caddos, Anadarkos, and Ionies/Hainais), various Wichita groups (Wacos and Kichais/Keechies), and perhaps others lived in these settlements.

The Texans plundered and destroyed the villages and took prisoners, who indicated that there were close to 1,000 warriors living there, although half of them were gone hunting buffalo. The Texans counted 225 occupied lodges, but could also see glimpses of the main village’s lodges, which they did not attack. They also noticed about 300 acres of corn and found many guns, ammunition, powder, and “a sort of Black Smith Shop,” along with farming implements and feather beds and bedsteads. The Texans stole horses, cattle, guns, lead, powder, saddles, buffalo robes, and other items. Acting Brigade Inspector William N. Porter later surmised that these villages constituted “the *Depot* for the stolen horses from our frontier.”

Several Native Americans were killed, as was Denton County’s namesake, Captain John B. Denton, a Methodist minister who was the only Texan casualty. Porter reported that “the Indians had twelve killed, that we counted; and a great many more must have been killed and wounded, from the quantity of blood we saw on their trails and in the thickets where they ran.”

Another account indicates that the Texans’ advance scouts initially came upon two Native American women and a baby. When the women saw the Texans, they attempted to escape. The Texans, however, killed one woman and captured the other and the baby. The captured woman later escaped, but General Tarrant kept the child until he returned it two years later. (Brown, *Indian Wars and Pioneers of Texas* (1880), pgs. 85-88) (For the earliest accounts of the raid, see “Report of Brig. Gen. Tarrant’s Expedition against the Indians on the Trinity and Brasos (sic)” by Wm. N. Porter, Acting Brigade Inspector, June 5, 1841, [Journals of the Sixth Congress of the Republic of Texas, 1841-1842](#), vol. 3, pgs. 416-19, and the newspaper account in the *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Houston), June 23, 1841)

A much larger force of Texans from the Red River area returned to the area in mid-July, while another group from Nacogdoches moved in from the south. The *Telegraph and Texas Register* reported on July 7, 1841 regarding the preparations for this expedition, “They anticipate much

pleasure from the excursion. It is amusing to notice that the officers in their communications relative to the expedition, speak of it rather as an excursion for frolic and fun, than as an undertaking accompanied by privation or danger.”

Native Americans living in the area had fled as the invading Texans approached. The *Telegraph and Texas Register* surmised on September 1, 1841: “This campaign has been productive of immense advantage, as it has proved the Indian forces east of the Cross Timbers (i.e., a narrow band of timber running through the DFW region) is entirely dispersed, and not an Indian village remains in this section. A vast region of fertile territory has thus been redeemed from the savage domination: abounding in the most beautiful scenery. This section has long been regarded as the garden spot of Eastern Texas; its fertile soil and healthy climate offer many attractions to settlers, and we may expect in a few months to hear that settlements have extended far above Fort Kingsboro” (i.e., future site of Kaufman, TX, about 35 miles southeast of Dallas). In the words of one historian writing nearly one hundred years later, “Thus the Indians of the Trinity area were dispossessed of their homes, and forced to seek places of abode elsewhere.” (Strickland, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 34.1 (July 1930): 46)

The May and July 1841 expeditions were not isolated incidents, but part of a larger campaign undertaken by the Republic of Texas to exterminate and remove Native Americans, take possession of their lands, and populate them with white settlers. It is important to understand these expeditions within this broader context, which is described in the accompanying document.

Although TCU did not come into existence until 1873, the 1841 raids and the broader efforts by early Texans established the conditions that made it possible for TCU to eventually reside at 2800 South University Drive in Fort Worth. Texans took these lands from Native Americans, turning them into commodities—land grants and headrights and the like—that were bought, sold, and developed, until at last the city of Fort Worth in 1910 provided fifty acres to entice the university to re-locate. TCU’s pageant in 1923 commemorating its fiftieth anniversary reflected how this system benefitted TCU when a fictionalized mayor of Fort Worth said to the school, “Long ages ago it (i.e., the site of TCU’s campus) belonged to a Red Skin of wisdom and vision . . . These acres we wish to give to you.” (“These Fifty Years,” TCU’s Fiftieth Anniversary Pageant, Golden Jubilee Celebration, June 5, 1923, episode III, pgs. 23-24)

What, then, does it mean for TCU to reside respectfully on Native American lands?