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## I

*The Kiowa Calendar Tradition*

Much of the history of the Native people of North America as taught in schools is based on written records—government documents and observations passed on by literate travelers, traders, missionaries, and military men who came into contact with American Indians for brief or lengthy periods of time. Native peoples' own records of their history were long carried primarily in oral form, stories about the past that were handed on from generation to generation. Among some tribes of the Great Plains, these oral traditions were supplemented with pictorial records. This book presents one of those pictorial records, a calendar kept by the Kiowa artist Silver Horn covering one hundred years of his tribe's history from the summer of 1828 to the winter of 1928–29.

**Pictorial Calendars**

The Kiowa called their calendar *sai-guat*, which can be translated as winter marks or winter pictures. The calendar was a document that recorded a series of years by means of pictures standing for events that occurred over time. The Kiowa calendar recorded two events each year, one for the summer season and one for the winter. Although both seasons were marked, the calendars were called “winter marks” as the word for year is the same as the word for winter, and years were counted by winters. Each entry in the calendar represented a half a year, and these were

named after a memorable event rather than given a sequential number as in the Western calendar system. Instead of 1861, the entry was known as the summer that they tied the spotted horse, followed by the smallpox winter (1861–62). These chronological entries were standardized and widely known, serving as a shared reference system for all of the Kiowa. It was the responsibility of an individual designated as a calendar keeper to maintain this shared reference work, remembering the stories associated with each entry, keeping the entries in proper order, and adding new ones as time passed. In order to keep all this information in proper order, calendar keepers drew pictorial charts with simple mnemonic images suggesting a key element of the seasonal designation that would serve to bring to mind the associated event. The word *guat*, which comes from the act of marking or painting, has continued in use to designate writing, and the charts must have served the calendar keepers much like written notes.

The events recorded in the calendar entries were not necessarily ones of great importance. It was more important that they be distinctive or memorable. Kiowa history was carried primarily in people's memories, transmitted through oral tradition. The calendar was used to position such memories in time. Events would be remembered as having taken place in the summer or winter of a named event. Reference to the calendar could establish the relative sequence of other events, which one came first, and how much time there was between the two. Some were the stuff of communal history, events that affected the whole tribe or band, but people commonly used the calendars to reference their personal history as well—births, deaths, first war expeditions, or buffalo hunts. Silver Horn reported that he was born in the summer that Bird Appearing was killed, which we know as 1860. His brother Hauvahte was born in the winter that the woman was frozen (1851–52), which the calendar records as occurring nine years earlier.

The Kiowa were not the only North American tribe who

kept pictorial calendars.<sup>1</sup> A few other Plains Indian tribes also kept such pictorial records, generally known as “winter counts.” Those of the Lakota, or Western Sioux, are the best known, but counts have been recorded from the Blackfoot, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Cheyenne as well as the Plains Apache, close affiliates of the Kiowa.<sup>2</sup> Other tribes may well have kept some sort of calendric records as well. Some of these records reach back much farther in time than the Kiowa calendar, some beginning in the eighteenth century, and it seems likely that the Kiowa did not originate the idea. The Kiowa calendar system is unique, however, in recording two events for each year, offering a finer grained record of the passage of time and twice as many entries for any given period.

Much of our knowledge about the origins and history of Kiowa calendars comes from the work of the Smithsonian anthropologist James Mooney. Mooney began intensive work with the Kiowa in Indian Territory in 1892, and he published his *Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians* in the 17th Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, which appeared in 1898. Kiowa people told him that the first calendar keeper in their tribe was Little Bluff, or Tohausan, who was the principal chief of the tribe from 1833 to 1866.<sup>3</sup> Some of Mooney’s information came from Little Bluff’s nephew, also called Little Bluff, who took over responsibility for maintaining the calendar after his uncle’s death, but Mooney also worked with two other calendar keepers, Settan, or Little Bear, and Ankopaingyadete, In the Middle of Many Tracks, commonly known as Anko. Throughout his wide-ranging research on Kiowa culture, Mooney found that many of the men he interviewed had a keen sense of history.<sup>4</sup> They were interested in their tribal past, and they commonly placed events in time by referring to the calendar. Following their lead, he used the calendar as the central device around which to organize all of the historical information he assembled about the Kiowa. Using it as a framework, he drew together historical narratives from many Kiowa men, which he

supplemented with information from various non-Kiowa sources, including government documents and correspondence with former Indian agents.

The calendars that Mooney acquired from Little Bear and Anko consisted of very simple pictures drawn on paper, although Mooney had some copied onto a deerskin to make a more impressive-looking specimen.<sup>5</sup> Little Bluff's calendar, which was acquired by the scholarly warrior Lt. Hugh Scott around the same time, consists of similarly simple figures drawn in pencil on a sheet of brown paper. Clearly the calendar keepers viewed these as utilitarian mnemonic devices intended to keep events in the proper sequence. Calendars were copied over when they became worn, or when more space was needed for new entries, and the old versions were discarded. Readily available materials were used, originally buffalo hides but later manufactured trade materials when they became available.<sup>6</sup>

Calendars were not the major form of pictorial art on the Plains, however, and the Kiowa had a number of highly gifted artists who lavished attention to produce beautiful and highly detailed drawings. Representational art—pictures of things one can recognize—was the exclusive domain of men, and most drawings represented men's personal accomplishments, especially their military honors. Women had their own art forms, painting geometric designs on buffalo robes or rawhide cases as well as executing them in beadwork. Early Kiowa paintings on hide have not been preserved, but a wealth of works on paper survive from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, most on the pages of blank ledger books or on the leaves of artists' sketchbooks.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the simple calendar pictures, those drawings include many details of the events they illustrate.

We see figures on horseback charging the enemy, fully illustrated with details of war gear, weaponry, and wounds given and received. Although we usually are not able to recognize the hero by name, surely a knowledgeable Kiowa viewer of the time could. And with only a little study, we can begin to

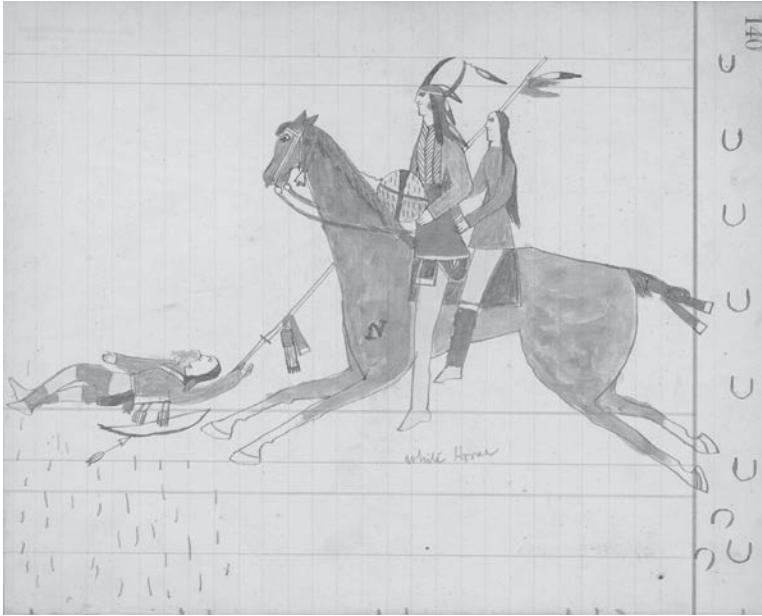


FIGURE 1-1. Kiowa drawing (detail) showing White Horse capturing a Navajo boy. By Koba or Etahleuh, 1875–78. MS 39c. Courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

reconstruct the entire encounter from the drawing alone. These pictures were intended to narrate an event, not merely to allude to it through the spare mnemonic figures of the calendars. Unlike the calendars, however, these pictures are not arranged in careful chronological order but are more random in their placement, following idiosyncratic patterns of association. Detailed as they are about “what” and “who,” Plains drawings seldom provide information about “where” and “when.” Such information was transmitted in oral rather than visual form. James Mooney found that old Kiowa warriors often dated such events by reference to the calendar.

Silver Horn, or Haungooah, was a rare individual who both kept a calendar and made other types of drawings. He was an enormously prolific and gifted artist, and his skill in drawing as well as his impulse to convey information in graphic form have resulted in a calendar that is unique in the power of its images and the amount of information that they convey. His pictures

are much more elaborate than those made by any other calendar keeper, and one often can guess what a picture represents even without an accompanying text, though some background on Kiowa history and culture is helpful.

### **The Kiowa**

The Kiowa are a Southern Plains people, many of whom still live in southwestern Oklahoma on lands that were once part of the Kiowa reservation. The reservation, shared with the Comanche and Apache, was established in the mid-nineteenth century, its boundaries defined by the 1867 Medicine Lodge Treaty with the U.S. government. The reservation was part of a much wider territory that the Kiowa previously claimed as their own. Their earliest oral traditions record that they once lived near the headwaters of the Yellowstone River, in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in what is now Montana. Sometime during the eighteenth century they moved eastward onto the open plains. No doubt they were attracted by new hunting strategies made possible by the introduction of horses, which had been brought to North America by the Spanish when they colonized Mexico and the greater Southwest. Bison, or buffaloes as they are usually called, were abundant on the Plains and provided not only meat for food but also hides to make tipi covers and warm bedding. People had been hunting bison since ancient times, but horses made it possible to travel farther to locate the moving herds, to hunt these huge animals more efficiently, and to transport quantities of preserved meat and hides.

Other tribes were also moving onto the Plains around this time, attracted by the same opportunities, and it was an era of conflict as different groups sought to stake their claims to hunting territories. The Kiowa jostled their way south, fighting for territory when they needed to, forming alliances with neighboring groups when they could. By the time that this pictorial calendar history begins in 1828, they were well established in an area that takes in lands now part of Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas,

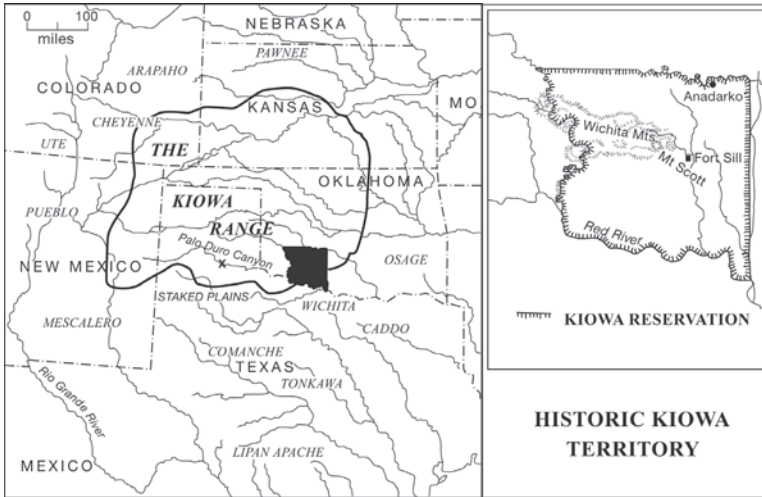


FIGURE 1-2. Nineteenth-century Kiowa territory and subsequent reservation boundaries. Map created by Marcia Bakry, Smithsonian Institution.

and Colorado. They had for decades been allied with the Comanche, another powerful people of the southern Plains, but as we shall see in the calendar, they were enemies of the Cheyenne and Arapaho, who were moving into this territory. This large region was their hunting territory and their home base, but the Kiowa looked beyond it for other resources. Mexican and American settlements to their south and west maintained huge herds of horses, and the Kiowa expanded their hunting economy to include raiding for horses that could profitably be exchanged with traders and settlers as well as with other tribes to the north and east. This pattern of long distance raiding and trading is reflected in the calendar, with entries referring to encounters far south into Mexico and north as far as the villages of the Upper Missouri River. Summer encampments, however, where tribal members gathered to celebrate the Medicine Lodge ceremony, the Kiowa form of the Sun Dance, cluster in a rough circle about three hundred miles in diameter centered on the Oklahoma panhandle.

American expansion into this region brought a new player into the struggle for territory. American traders were welcomed at first. They were a good alternative to the Comancheros, as the

itinerant Spanish traders from Santa Fe were known. They offered a different source of manufactured goods that could be obtained in exchange for buffalo robes and dried meat—or horses. Once Charles Bent's trading post was permanently established in what is now southeastern Colorado, the Kiowa were glad to travel there rather than to the trading villages of the Missouri River. The calendar records amicable encounters with a number of other traders who established posts briefly within Kiowa territory. Aside from bright lengths of cloth and durable metal kettles, firearms and associated ammunition had become indispensable to the Kiowa, as to other tribes on the Plains. Although bow and arrows (now tipped with iron) remained the preferred weapon for buffalo hunting, a tribe without firearms could not hold their hunting territory against intruders who were better armed. Traders were critical to maintaining access to now essential trade goods.

The commercial buffalo hunters who followed the traders were bitterly resented, however. They constituted direct competition for resources. Even before their numbers were sufficient to reduce the bison population significantly, commercial hunters scattered the herds and reduced the efficiency of the great summer hunt on which Native people relied for a major supply of dried meat. Among the Kiowa as in other tribes, the communal hunt was carefully policed to ensure that no one started out ahead of the others and spooked the selected herd into dispersing. Anyone who violated the rules would be punished, perhaps whipped, his weapons broken, even his horse killed. But the white buffalo hunters followed no such rules, and the Kiowa sought to check them, just as they challenged anyone who threatened their territorial resources.

Horse raiding became an increasingly essential part of the Kiowa economy. As long as the horses came from Mexican territory or from the Republic of Texas, the U.S. government had no objections to this pattern of activity. Once New Mexico and Texas were incorporated within the United States, Kiowa raiding

**1828 Pipe Dance Kado**

The calendar opens with a picture of an upright forked pole draped with offering cloths. It represents the great center pole of the Medicine Lodge in which the Kiowa held the Kado, or Sun Dance ceremony, each summer, as discussed in chapter 2. The fragmentary picture above it shows parts of a pipe with a black bowl and feathers hanging from the stem. According to the NAA calendar it indicates a Pipe Dance, an adoption ceremony in which the Wichita adopted the son of Wolf Teat (Gui-aza). Quitone said it was his grandfather Buffalo Udder (An-zah-te) who was honored on this occasion and that Buffalo Udder made rich gifts to his new “relatives” in return. Ritualized adoption of adults was a mechanism to establish formal bonds of friendship between tribes or communities. Records of Pipe Dances occur several times in the Silver Horn calendar, marking personal alliances with members of various other tribes.

**1829 Buffalo Hide Kado**

The picture shows a full buffalo hide, tanned with the hair on to make a warm robe. The NAA calendar is captioned “Ka-tode-a Pa Gado.” Mooney translates this as “creek where the buffalo robe was returned” and notes its location near Fort Elliott in the Texas Panhandle. Many summer entries in the calendar are named for the place where the Kado was held, rather than for an event that occurred that year. Conversely, many regular camping places were named for events that had once happened there. Quitone did not remember this event for certain, but he thought a man who had had trouble with his wife had demanded a robe from her relatives.

**1830 Dry Creek Kado**

Any identification for this summer that may have been along the top edge of this drawing has been lost. The NAA entry is captioned “Ton-hen Gado, possibly Tonhen

Pa, Sand Creek of Colorado.” This was a northern tributary of the Arkansas River, notable as the site of a Cheyenne camp that was massacred by Col. Chivington and a troop of Colorado volunteers in 1864.<sup>1</sup>

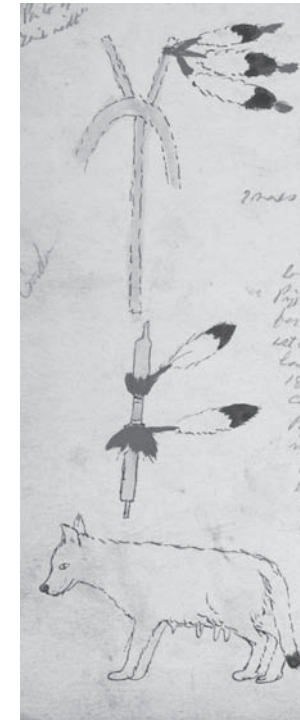


FIGURE 3-1. NAA calendar entry for 1828, by Silver Horn. MS 2531, vol. 7. Courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

