

# ***KICKAPOO CORRAL AREA'S HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE***

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*Note: These two articles by Jane Sandbulte were first published in the May 26, 1990, edition of the Winfield Daily Courier and updated for this presentation.)*

A pocket of land on the outskirts of Winfield is laden with historical significance that dates back to the Indians and early settlers and possibly even Coronado.

Most Winfield residents know that Tunnel Mill Dam is located at the end of West 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue and that it's a popular fishing spot.

A much smaller number of people, however, know that the tree-bordered field north of the dam is Kickapoo Corral and that the first road into Winfield, a branch of the Old California Trail, crossed the Walnut River about 100 yards below the dam. Also, two of Winfield's earliest industries – a mill and a lime kiln – were located in the historic “pocket.”

## **Kickapoo Corral**

Kickapoo Corral, according to legend, was used by the Kickapoo Indians as a natural corral to hold their livestock as they traveled to and from settlements. The river encloses the corral on three sides, and a steep limestone bluff seals it off on the fourth side, except for an entrance just northwest of Tunnel Mill Dam. The approximately 80-acre, secluded spot could easily be guarded by one person stationed at the natural entrance.

In the early 1800s, the Osage and Kickapoo tribes roamed this area. According to one legend, the two tribes were friendly and agreed to aid the other in case of attack from unfriendly tribes.

When the Pawnees attacked the Kickapoos, the Osage tribe helped drive them off. Later the Osage were attacked by a cannibal Tonkawa tribe, but when the Osage tribe called on the Kickapoos for help, they holed up in their corral and refused to help because of their fear of the Tonkawas. After driving off the Tonkawas, the legend goes, the Osage tribe retaliated and besieged the Kickapoos for days in the corral. One stormy night the Osage attacked by climbing over the bluff and killing all the Kickapoos, except one man and one woman who escaped by swimming through the whirlpool below the dam.

This legend was related in the book “Master's Degree,” which was written by Kansas author Margaret Hill McCarter and published in 1913. However, she named the Sioux Indians as the invaders.

According to Robert Kitch, who lived from 1940 to 1985 on the farm that included Kickapoo Corral, another interesting story can be read in the book “The Kickapoos: Lords of the Middle Border,” which was written by A.M. Gibson and published in 1963. Kitch was interviewed for a Winfield Courier article in 1990.

“At the time of the Civil War, the Kickapoos were on the side of the Union, while most other tribes sided with the Confederates,” Kitch related. “With government encouragement, the Kickapoos would go down into Oklahoma and Texas and steal horses, mules and cattle and come back to villages on the Walnut and Neosho rivers in southeast Kansas. Then they would take the stolen stock over to Fort Scott and sell it to the Union Army. Kickapoo Corral was one place they would keep the livestock until they could go to Fort Scott.”

Although the corral has been planted to wheat and other crops for many years, it was most