




## Quanah Parker Comanche Chief and Rancher

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*Quanah Parker (1852–1911) was a leader of the Comanche people during the difficult change from free-ranging life on the southern plains to the settled ways of reservation life.*

**Q**uanah (Fragrant) Parker was born in Texas to Peta Nocona, a Comanche war leader, and Cynthia Ann Parker, an Anglo woman who had been captured by the Comanches and raised as one of them.

**The Move to Indian Territory** In 1867 the Treaty of Medicine Lodge Creek ordered that the Comanche, Cheyenne, Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache, and Arapaho groups move onto reservations in Indian Territory (later the state of Oklahoma). The Comanches refused to obey the treaty. Seven years of fighting followed.

**A Chief Emerges** The Comanches surrendered to reservation settlement in 1875, and in 1878 Parker became their principal chief and then a member of the Comanche Council.

In the 1880s, Parker was hired by cattlemen to ride with Anglo “cattle police” to keep an eye on property lines during the cattle drive through Comanche lands to Dodge City and Abilene, Kansas. The job provided him with money, surplus cattle, and influence among the cattle barons.

With cattle he had received as gifts from the cattlemen, Parker eventually started his own herd. He set up his own ranch, where he would eventually build his famous residence, the Star House. More a mansion than a house, it had two stories and a double porch. Its metal roof was decorated with prominent white stars, and the interior was as luxurious as the homes of wealthy Anglo businessmen of the day.

**Progressive in Two Worlds** In 1884 Parker made his first of 20 trips to Washington, D.C. He went to discuss allotment (the process of dividing tribally held land into individually owned plots) and the changes it would bring to the lease arrangements the Comanches had worked out with the cattle ranchers. He was unable to stop the process of allotment, but he did get his people a better deal.

Starting in 1886, Parker had been a judge on the Court of Indian Offenses, but he lost this position as

the group made the final move toward allotment. The breakup of communally held lands and the resulting breakdown of age-old tribal traditions angered many of the Comanches, and some saw Parker as the source of their problems.

Parker, meanwhile, wanted to be seen as a progressive Native American and became a national celebrity. Visitors to the Star House included Theodore Roosevelt and British ambassador Lord Bryce. Parker was one of the four Native American chiefs to ride in President Theodore Roosevelt’s inaugural parade.

**The Circle Is Completed** In the early 1900s, Parker began to lose his influence over tribal politics. Allotment had reduced his land base and therefore his personal fortune, and he eventually resorted to taking a paid position with the Indian Service.

Early in 1911, Parker became very ill. In February, after a long and tiring train ride, he went to his bed for the last time. Quanah Parker died on February 25, 1911, at the Star House. After a Christian service in a local church, Parker was buried in Cache County, Oklahoma. The procession to his resting place was said to have been more than a mile long.

### Review Questions

1. What was allotment?
2. What effect did allotment have on Parker’s personal fortune?

### Critical Thinking

3. **Making Inferences** How might being half Anglo have worked both for and against Parker?
4. **Recognizing Details** What details show that Parker was a celebrity?