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EDITOR’S FOREWORD

Twenty-Five Years among the Indians and Buffalo is a previously unpublished memoir written by William Daniel (Bill) Street (1851–1911), an early settler in northwestern Kansas. It appears that Street first conceived of his memoir as one that would focus on his participation in the events of September through November 1878, when armed skirmishes with Northern Cheyenne bands spilled over onto homesteaders in Rawlins and Decatur Counties, Kansas. The cover of his original manuscript portfolio carries the handwritten title “Notes for Manuscript of Book Relating largely to the Indian Raid of 1878.” The final manuscript, however, is much more extensive.

Bill Street spent his teenage and early adult years on the western plains as a teamster, cavalryman, town developer, trapper, buffalo hunter, scout, and cowboy. All of these years are recounted in this memoir, culminating, in the final chapter, with his participation as a scout for the U.S. Army in its pursuit of the Cheyenne bands in 1878.

This final chapter seems to have been prepared for separate publication. In the original manuscript, some of the events described in the preceding chapter are repeated in it, its twenty-three pages are separately numbered, and it is not given a chapter number in sequence with the main manuscript. A seven-page version of this chapter is held by the Kansas Historical Society.¹ The first fourteen pages of this chapter are also found among the holdings of the Decatur County Museum, in Oberlin, Kansas. They, with many other personal recollections of the 1878 Cheyenne encounters, are included in a recently published collection of the museum’s documents.²

The Northern Cheyenne Exodus is the subject of several books and articles informed by contemporary scholarship.³ Dull Knife and Little Wolf were chiefs of two of several Northern Cheyenne bands confined by the U.S. government on Southern Cheyenne lands in what is now central Oklahoma, despite a treaty promising a location on their traditional lands...
Notes for Manuscript of Book Relating largely to the Indian Raid of 1878.
in southeastern Montana. In early September 1878, Little Wolf and Dull Knife concluded that disease and starvation in Oklahoma amounted to a death sentence for their bands. Against the will of the U.S. government, their bands left Oklahoma for their traditional lands in Montana, with the U.S. Cavalry in pursuit. Intentions of a peaceful passage northward dissolved into a series of hostile forays.

Bill Street was drawn into these events when northwestern Kansas settlers were killed during encounters that came to be called the “last Indian raid in Kansas.” The Last Indian Raid Museum is still the everyday name of the Decatur County Museum in Oberlin, Kansas, and there is a Last Indian Raid monument and burial plot in the Oberlin Cemetery. Until recently, a historical marker on U.S. Highway 36 in Oberlin was titled “Last Indian Raid in Kansas.” The current marker reflects a more broadly objective perspective. The final chapter is Street’s account of his role in these events.

Born in Springfield Township, Muskingum County, Ohio, on January 25, 1851, William D. Street came from Ohio to Kansas with his father and stepmother in 1861. He enlisted at a young age in the Nineteenth Kansas Volunteer Cavalry in 1868. Under General Philip Sheridan, his unit was part of the 1868–1869 winter campaign against American Indian bands of the southern plains with a history of conflict with white settlers. In 1869, he homesteaded in Jewell County, Kansas, and saw service on the frontier with the Kansas State Militia. He was elected captain of the “Buffalo Militia” of Jewell, Kansas, a citizen militia formed for the protection of settlers in May 1870. He became a shopkeeper and one of the signers of the Jewell City Town Company charter on May 28, 1870. In 1871, he became the first settler in Gaylord, Kansas, and he filed a homestead claim in 1872 near the present town of Oberlin, Kansas. He ranged farther west as a trapper, buffalo hunter, and cowboy in the years leading up to the events of September 1878, the final events in this memoir.

In his later life, Street purchased the Oberlin Herald newspaper, in 1881, from its cofounder, James N. Counter, and became the paper’s editor. In 1882, he married Louisa Edna Van Cleave, who had been abducted by the Northern Cheyenne for a short time in September 1878. Over the years, they had six sons and a daughter. About 1884, Bill Street sold the Herald and established the Hoxie (Kansas) Sentinel, which he edited for two years.
Last Indian Raid memorial and gravesites, Oberlin, Kansas. Photo by Warren R. Street.
In 1887, he bought the *Oberlin Opinion*, which he owned and edited for a few months.

Street was elected to the Kansas legislature as a Republican in 1883 and 1889, and as a Populist in 1895 and 1897. He was speaker of the house in 1897 and in a special session in 1898. He sought, but did not receive, the People’s Party nomination for the U.S. House of Representatives in 1898, and his involvement in politics faded after that time.

In his later years, Street supported the Socialist Party. He served from 1893 to 1896 on the Board of Regents of the Kansas State Agricultural College, now named Kansas State University, and from 1898 to 1899 on the Kansas State Board of Charities. For many years, he gave slideshow lectures in northwestern Kansas about pioneer life. His life is recorded in Ritter and Wakelyn’s *American Legislative Leaders, 1850–1910*. After he died in Oberlin on October 15, 1911, his obituary was carried in the *New York Times* under the heading “W. D. Street, Indian Fighter, Dead,” although Street’s memoir shows that civil, even friendly, relations with American Indians were his norm.
William Daniel Street Family, January 2, 1903. Standing (left to right): William Daniel, Jr. (14), Lois Edna (16), Harvey Corbin (10), Raymond Eugene (19), Charles Van (12); Seated (left to right): William Daniel (51), John Ralph (5), Louisa Edna (Van Cleave) (40). Photo courtesy of Warren R. Street.
William D. Street, ca. 1897. Photo courtesy of Warren R. Street.
To produce this version of Bill Street’s memoirs, the original typewritten manuscript was transcribed and edited by Warren R. Street, Bill Street’s great-grandson and the author of this foreword. I received the manuscript from John Ralph Street (1897–1976), my great-uncle and the youngest son of William D. Street. The original title page shows that the manuscript was, at one point, intended for publication by the Western Bookmaking Company, of Oberlin, Kansas. Bill Street died before he finished proofreading and making handwritten corrections to the typewritten manuscript. The notation “Last of Will’s work” was written on page 149.

To make searches of the memoir more successful, I corrected most spelling and typing errors in the original manuscript. Punctuation has been edited and minor word changes have been made when needed for clarity. Handwritten additions and corrections by the author have been incorporated. I retained obsolete or invented words, some incomplete sentences, and racial and ethnic terms now considered offensive as they are found in the original. I inserted occasional words in brackets and corrected inconsistent or mistaken spellings of some names by consulting other historical sources.

The enduring value of this memoir is found in its first-person accounts of an adventurous life on the frontier. The original manuscript also contains a few reports of historic events Street did not participate in or witness, typically battles between the U.S. military and Indian bands. These were focal events of his day, important to settlers on the frontier, but because these are not first-person accounts and the events are well documented elsewhere, these passages have been removed from this version of his memoir. Each deleted section is marked by a note that refers the reader to one or more authoritative historic sources for the event.

Photos illustrate this version but were not part of the original manuscript. I added footnotes and a list of references to clarify the original manuscript, to identify some historical figures, and to provide guidance for further reading.

Many people have generously helped prepare this version of W. D. Street’s memoir. Foremost has been my wife and professional colleague, Elizabeth “Libby” Street. The weight of her editorial opinion has influenced many passages in this book; she has enjoyed side trips to Kansas during our vacation travels, and she devoted many hours to the task of
proofreading the transcribed manuscript. Libby encouraged, rather than tolerated, the seemingly endless time I devoted to this family document.

Sharleen Wurm, director of the Decatur County Museum in Oberlin, was exceptionally generous in drawing on her personal knowledge and providing access to the museum’s files, news clippings, and photos relating to the Street family and the history of Decatur County and northwestern Kansas. Gary Anderson, local historian and innkeeper of the LandMark Inn in Oberlin, was very helpful. He recalled many stories about the Street family in Oberlin and drove us to family sites in the area. He filled in details about the Street family that had been lost over the years to our own scant family lore.

Sharon Tullar, a local historian and librarian in Jewell, Kansas, guided us through the historical materials in the Jewell City Library, the site of Fort Jewell, and Jewell’s Palmer Museum. Frank Shrimplin, of the Valley Falls, Kansas, Historical Society, corresponded with me about the Grasshopper Falls days of his town. Mary Lattin, a regional historian of Hays, Kansas, passed along information about Hays, Smith County, and W. D. Street’s role in the history of Gaylord, Kansas. Brian Herder, of the State Library of Kansas, resolved conflicting information about Street’s service in the state legislature.

At the Decatur County Courthouse in Oberlin, Kari Ketterl and Judy Gaumer, of the Register of Deeds office, Janet Meitl and Rhonda Wilde-man, of the District Court Office, and Sheriff Ken Badsky interrupted their normal work for long stretches of time to help me find many official records relating to the Street family. Carolyn Plotts and Mary Lou Olson, of the Oberlin Herald, guided us through past issues of the newspaper for articles about W. D. Street and passed along published mementos about him.

In 2014, a hesitant inquiry about publishing this work met with a generously positive response at the University Press of Kansas. The professional abilities of its staff and consultants have transformed a simple transcription of the original document for family distribution into a work of enduring value that does credit to Bill Street’s reflective record of his years on the Great Plains. Kim Hogeland, an acquisition editor of the University Press of Kansas, and managing editor Kelly Chrisman Jacques skillfully shepherded the manuscript and our family through the publication process. The impressive vigilance and informed guidance of copyeditor
Penelope Cray are reflected hundreds of times throughout this book. The marketing talents of Rebecca J. Murray and Michael Kehoe connected this book with the world of readers interested in the American West.

I am very grateful for the professional skills and friendly guidance of this entire publishing team, many of whose names are not known to me. Every effort has been made to faithfully represent Bill Street’s story, but if any errors or inaccuracies found their way onto the pages of this work, I alone am responsible for them.

The guidance of several historians of the American West has shaped the final version of this work. In addition to local and regional historians already mentioned, Virgil W. Dean and John H. Monnett provided early reviews that markedly influenced the editing and the contextual writing that surrounds the manuscript in this edition. Richard W. Etulain’s extensive foreword embeds the events in Bill Street’s memoir in the greater story of the American expansion across the western plains in the last third of the nineteenth century. Our family, Bill Street’s descendants, is grateful to all of those who have helped create this enduring record of his early years on the plains.

Warren R. Street