**TONKAWA INDIANS**. The Tonkawa Indians were actually a group of independent bands, the Tonkawas proper, the Mayeyes, and a number of smaller groups that may have included the Cava, Cantona, Emet, Sana, Toho, and Tohaha Indians. The remnants of these tribes united in the early eighteenth century in the region of Central Texas. The Yojaune Indians, who were actually a Wichita tribe, were absorbed by the Tonkawas in the second half of the eighteenth century. The name Tonkawa is a Waco term meaning "they all stay together." Traditionally, the Tonkawas have been regarded as an old Texas tribe, but new evidence suggests that the Tonkawas migrated from the high plains as late as the seventeenth century. In addition, the Tonkawas proper might have been only a small element of the fragmented tribes that migrated to Texas. Although this might explain the apparent lack of connection between the Tonkawa language and any of the surrounding tribes, it also raises the question of classifying components traditionally regarded as Tonkawan. Little is known of the social or political organization of the Tonkawas prior to their consolidation. Each band apparently elected a chief to lead them, and it is probable that during wars additional war leaders were chosen. After consolidation, the Tonkawas chose a tribal head chief. Maternal clans were the basic unit in Tonkawa society. Children became members of their mothers' clans, and men lived with their spouses' clans. Because each clan saw itself as a family unit, marriage within the clan was discouraged. Anthropologists term the Tonkawa kinship arrangement as a Crow system of nomenclature, which stemmed from the brotherhood within each clan. As in many other Indian tribes, the Tonkawas practiced levirate, whereby a brother would marry his deceased brother's wife. If the deceased had no brother, another male from his clan, usually the son of a sister, would perform the duty. As a result, any such male was designated a "brother," regardless of the generational difference. The children in that situation would logically call both their biological father and his "brothers" "father." The same kinship relation carried over to the female side of the family where sororate, the practice in which a sister married her dead sister's husband, was practiced. Following this same pattern, when a man died his property was distributed among his siblings' children, rather than to his own in order that the property might stay within his clan. Orphans became wards of the mother's clan. The system was designed to insure that widows and orphans would be cared for.

Little is known of the Tonkawa life cycle. Shortly after birth, a piece of wood was tied to the baby's head to flatten it. The children learned the trades of their respective sexes as they grew. The sparse knowledge of Tonkawa marriage customs seems to indicate a lack of emphasis on the ceremony. Death rites apparently received the greatest attention, at least in existing written records. When a person neared death, his or her friends would gather and form concentric rings around the dying, chanting and swaying until the individual passed away. The deceased was then buried, along with many of his or her prized possessions. Like other plains Indians, a horse was sometimes shot over the grave of a prestigious warrior. The band mourned for three days, relatives more deeply than others, and then carried out a four-day smoking ceremony that was meant to purify those contaminated by death. This ceremony also allowed the society to realign and reintegrate itself following the loss of a member.

The Tonkawas were initially enemies with the Apaches, probably because the latter pushed them from the [buffalo](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/tcb02) plains. When the Comanches and Wichitas migrated southward and began to pressure the Apaches, the Tonkawas allied themselves with the new arrivals. A number of Tonkawas apparently joined the northern tribes in their raids on the San Sabá Mission in 1758. Early in the nineteenth century, the Tonkawas apparently changed their alliances, becoming enemies with the Comanches and allies with the Apaches. The Tonkawas had a plains Indian culture, subsisting on the buffalo and small game. When the Apaches began to push them from their hunting grounds, they became a destitute culture, living off what little food they could scavenge. Unlike other plains tribes, the Tonkawas ate fish and oysters. They even attempted to farm, without apparent success, in the late eighteenth century. As the buffalo dwindled, the Tonkawas supplemented their food supply with dogs, horses, and practically every other available mammal except wolves and coyotes, the latter apparently exempted for religious reasons. They also gathered and ate a number of herbs, roots, fruit, seeds, acorns, and pecans. When Anglo settlers moved into their region, pecans became an item of barter.

The Tonkawas wore little clothing. Children often went entirely nude. Adult males wore a long breechclout, supplemented with buckskin or bison-hide moccasins, leggings, and robes as the weather demanded. Women wore short skin skirts, with additional accoutrement as weather dictated. Males wore earrings, necklaces, and other ornaments of shell, bone, and feathers, and both sexes tattooed their bodies. Women often painted black stripes on their mouths, noses, and backs, and they painted concentric circles around their breasts, from nipple to base. In aboriginal days the Tonkawas lived in short, squat tepees covered with buffalo hides. As the buffalo became scarce, brush arbors, resembling the tepee in structure but covered with brush branches and grass, replaced the buffalo-skin tepee. Still later, these structures were replaced with simple flat-topped huts covered with brush.

[Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fca06) may have been the first European to encounter the Tonkawas during his trek through Texas, but it was the French at [Fort St. Louis](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/qbf45) that gave the first definite information concerning the tribe when they mentioned the Mayeye Indians in 1687. [Alonso De León](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fde06)'s expedition in 1690 began the period of regular Spanish contact with the Tonkawan groups. Between 1746 and 1749 the Spanish established three missions for the Tonkawas on the San Xavier (San Gabriel) River, closer to their homelands. The Tonkawas suffered several devastating epidemics and Apache raids during the life of the missions. By 1756 the Spanish abandoned the San Xavier missions in favor of the ill-fated Santa Cruz de San Sabá Mission for the Lipan Apaches.

Following Tonkawa participation in the destruction of San Sabá, the Spanish regarded them as enemies. Not until 1770 did the Spanish attempt to reestablish cordial relations with the Tonkawas. During this time, an Apache captive named [El Mocho](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fel23) rose to prominence within the Tonkawa tribe. The Spanish disliked El Mocho's influence among the Tonkawas, for he had played a conspicuous role in the attack on San Sabá. As a result, the Spanish bribed several other Tonkawa leaders who agreed to assassinate the undesirable El Mocho. Unfortunately for the Spanish, an epidemic killed El Mocho's rivals, and the Spanish reluctantly agreed to deal with him, recognizing him as the "*capitán general*" of his tribe. In 1782 El Mocho met with the Apaches in an attempt to form an alliance with the tribe. The alliance apparently failed, primarily because of El Mocho's ambition to become the leader of the combined tribes. His continued harassment of the Spaniards caused them to revive their plans of assassination, and in 1784 they murdered El Mocho during his visit to [La Bahía](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/uql01). After the murder of El Mocho, the Tonkawas and Spanish settled into a period of uneasy peace, occasionally disrupted by transgressions on both sides. Relations with the Mexicans apparently followed a similar pattern. The arrival of Anglo-Americans, [Stephen F. Austin](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fau14)'s colonists in particular, apparently ushered in a period of cordial relations. The Tonkawas often aided their new Anglo allies against the Comanches. At some point in the early nineteenth century, Tonkawa relations with the Comanches had soured, and the Tonkawas had become allies with their former enemies, the Apaches. The Tonkawas remained staunch allies of the English-speaking settlers in Texas. They continued to help the Texans and later the United States during their wars with other Indian tribes. In the 1850s the Texans set up a reservation for the Tonkawas and other tribes on the Brazos River in Young County. Some Texans, however, who were distraught over recent Indian raids attacked the reservations and killed many of the residents. In 1859 the Tonkawas were removed to a reservation in Indian Territory. When the [Civil War](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/qdc02) began, the United States troops withdrew, and a group of Delaware, Shawnee, Wichita, Caddo, and other tribes attacked the Tonkawas, killing approximately half of the 300 natives. The survivors straggled back into Texas where, after the war, Governor [J. W. Throckmorton](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fth36) asked the legislature to donate a league of land to them, as well as supplies. Eventually, most of the Tonkawas settled in the vicinity of Fort Griffin, where they continued to serve as scouts for the United States Army until the end of the Indian wars. Fort Griffin was abandoned in 1881, and in 1884 the surviving Tonkawas and a few associated Lipan Apaches moved to a reservation in Indian Territory. In that year there were ninety-two Tonkawas, including a few Lipans. By 1937 this number had dwindled to fifty-one. In 1951 the Tonkawas had intermarried with Lipans and other Indians or whites to the extent that they were no longer distinguishable as a separate tribe.