

Illusive Cities of Gold

Coronado's Search for Quivira

Golden cities in Kansas? That's what Francisco Vasquez de Coronado sought in 1541, eighty years before the Pilgrims ventured to the New World. Spurred on by stories of North America's Seven Golden Cities of Cibola, where they would find "trees hung with golden bells and people whose pots and pans were beaten gold," Coronado led an expedition from New Spain (Mexico). Coming up empty-handed in Texas and New Mexico, he continued north, where he hoped to find the mythic golden city of Quivira.

Here in central Kansas, he reached his destination, though not his heart's desire. He found no gold, only fertile land and the thatched villages of the nomadic Wichita tribe, which he named "Quivira." Coronado stayed among the Wichita people for 25 days, then returned south, disillusioned and bankrupt.



"The province of Quivira is 950 leagues from Mexico. ...The country itself is the best I have ever seen for producing all the products of Spain, for besides the land itself being ...well watered by the rivulets and springs and rivers, I found prunes like those of Spain, and nuts, and very good sweet grapes and mulberries. ..." ~Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, in a letter to the King of Spain, 1541

"Coronado Sets Out to the North"

Frederic Remington



Straw-roofed Round House/Kansas State Historical Society

Myth Meets Reality

Expecting a city filled with gold, Coronado found only scattered iron pyrites and copper in central Kansas. Looking for Quivira's fabled multi-storied stone houses, he found the Wichita Indians' one-story, straw-roofed round houses. Though he disparaged the Wichita people as "savage," he also praised them as "the best of hunters."



Kansas Cowboys c.1880s/Kansas State Historical Society



Longhorn/Ted Lee Eubanks

Motion and Change

Coronado brought the first cattle to Texas. Some escaped to the wilds, and over generations, these cattle developed into the longhorn, the only breed to evolve without human management. After the Civil War, cowboys drove millions of longhorns from Texas to Kansas rail yards, including Great Bend, for shipment east.