

PLUMMER, BERTHA BREWER. SECOND INTERVIEW 1412

Robert W. Small,
Interviewer,
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An Interview with Mrs. Bertha Plummer,
Tonkawa, Oklahoma.

History of Tonkawa Indians.

The forefathers of the Tonkawas had hunted and camped over most of Oklahoma and Texas, but the first any of the little band now located at the Oakland Agency can remember, was their being located in the Wichita Mountains. They went from there to San Antonio and Houston, Texas, where they lived in tents at that time; no houses were built at that time and white people also lived in tents. They next moved to Austin, Texas, where they picked cotton for a living; at this time they were a large and powerful tribe. It is not known how long they stayed there but high water caused the death of a large number of them and they were separated, some coming north and some going other ways.

Near the Red River they killed a great number of buffalo, the Indians' favorite meat. The meat was diseased; they ate of it and lots of them died. They were without money and nothing to eat; when an Indian has to do without meat very long he soon gets sick. The only living they had was roots,

PLUMMER, BERTHA BREWER SECOND INTERVIEW 1412

- 2 -

herbs, prairie turtles, and a few wild turkeys.

All the different tribes came together for a Council at Waco, Texas. Some men came from Washington, D. C., to counsel with them as to what they wanted to do. Four of the older men of the tribe now, were only small boys then; their names are Buck Bill, John Williams, Standing Buffalo, and Corporal Jesse. The Tonkawas had not been receiving any rations from the Government until this time; so these Government officials decided to issue them beef, sugar and coffee and told all the chiefs of the different tribes to come to Washington for a council. They started, some on foot, but later took the train. They did not just remember the name of the town. When they arrived at Washington, the council lasted for four days. Sam Houston was the head of the Indian Affairs and he told Lasalo, the chief of their tribe, to go home and he would appoint Major Davis as their Agent (whom they greatly loved) and they were to have the land in the Red River Valley.

When the Civil War broke out, the South asked the Tonkawas to help them but the chief said, "no". They were

PLUMMER, BERTHA BREWER SECOND INTERVIEW. 1412

- 3 -

friendly to all white people. After the war,^a number of the men were enlisted as United States Scouts. The Pawnees were having trouble at this time, so the Scouts were sent up there to make peace with them.

The commanding officer promised them they could have what they captured, and if that was not enough, they would be paid for their services.

While they were away, the other tribes decided they must kill off the Tonkawas, as they were too friendly with the whites, so they had a regular massacre. The Comanches, Caddoes, Wichitas, Delawares, Shawnees and Kickapooa swooped down on the Tonkawas one morning before daylight, burning the agency building. The Agent, Colonel Leeper, who made his escape, went to Wichita Falls, Texas. Over 2,000 of the tribe were killed at this time; about 700 were captured. Only one can now be found out of that number, a son of Lilly Wolf; he was captured by the Comanches and afterward married. Only 400 were left after the fight. They were in such a confusion and afraid, that a good many scattered and were captured by other tribes.

PLUMMER, BERTHA BREWER. SECOND INTERVIEW 1412

- 4 -

About fifty were enlisted at Fort Griffin in the Sixth Cavalry; eight of this number are still living and have their discharge papers, John Williams, Corporal Jesse, Standing Buffalo, Buck Bill, Jack Rush, Grant Richards, George Miles and Sherman Miles. They served as United States Scouts from one to five years, under General William Thomas, Colonel Wood, Colonel Buel and Captain Owen.

The tribe was so badly scattered that the remaining ones had a council and were given a Reservation in the Washita Valley, with Major Davis as their agent, but he was killed and the papers lost. The other tribes were so hostile to them that the Government decided to give them the old Nez Perce Reservation, known now as the Tonkawa Reservation. They came as far as the Sac & Fox Agency and stayed there one winter, (1885). Most of their ponies died and in the spring of 1886, they came afoot to this reservation, arriving here with only a few ponies in May, 1886. They were poor but a happy people. About a year after this the Government began issuing them rations. Every Saturday every family was issued, per head, 5 pounds of beef, one-half pound of coffee, 1 pound of sugar

PLUMMER, BERTHA BREWER. SECOND INTERVIEW 1412

- 5 -

and 3 pounds of flour.

Their first agent was Levi Fye; he stayed one year.

Then Mr. Weir from Tennessee came; he kept whiskey on hand and would often get them drunk, so this caused a great deal of trouble. Mr. Smith, of Arkansas City, was the next agent.

On April 1, 1889, G. C. Brewer and wife of Indiana took charge, Mrs. Brewer being the first white woman to be among them.

The Indians, with the help of the agent, plowed and sowed 160 acres of wheat, which yielded thirty bushels per acre.

The Government issued them a horsepower threshing machine. Few white people living now ever saw one of them. The Indians were good help, always willing to do their part when shown how. Up until this time they didn't know how to hitch a horse to a wagon or how a wagon ought to be carried. One incident comes to mind; one morning Jesse came to the office walking and he said "Agent, my wagon get sick; him lay down up the road;" The Agent found that a tire had run off and a wheel had broken. Another time another Indian came in with his wagon squeaking, he said; "I don't know what

45

PLUMMER, BERTHA BREWER SECOND INTERVIEW. 1412.

- 6 -

matter; my wagon too much holler". He was shown how it ought to be greased.

In the Fall of 1890 Agent Brewer was ordered to name the Indians so they could be allotted. Some had Indian names that could not be spelled out in the English language, so they were given a name and put on the roll. They were issued rations for one year but after they began to raise grain and got some cattle and were shown how to care for them, these rations were stopped.

In 1892, a Mrs. Clark, who was a Blackfoot Indian, was sent by the Government with a surveyor to allot the Tonkawas. She was over two months allotting them, with the aid of the agent. They tried to select the best land. The rest was thrown open for settlement, along with the rest of the Cherokee Strip which was opened September 16, 1893.

The Indians were allowed to lease their land through the agent to white men, receiving all the way from \$160.00 to \$400.00 per quarter section, cash.

The agent's salary was only \$60.00 per month; very little pay and lots of work. With the change of administration, Mr. Brewer was relieved in October, 1893. Mr. John Kimberly of

PLUMMER, BERTHA BREWER. SECOND INTERVIEW. 1412

- 7 -

Arkansas came and stayed one year, being relieved by his son, Walter Wimberly.

In 1898 Mr. Brewer returned to Oakland Agency, which is better known as the Tonkawa Agency.

When the Indians were allotted, the tribe numbered seventy-two. Tuberculosis and scrofula were very bad among the tribe, so they were unable to raise many of their children. The tribe has decreased until only about twenty are now living. The Agency has been discontinued and the Indians are all thrown on their own responsibility; they are very poor at present.

Copy of manuscript United States Indian Service
Oakland Agency, June 30, 1893.

~~Tonkawa Indian School was organized January 1, 1891,~~
at Oakland Agency, Oklahoma Territory.

The original enrollment comprised six (6) adults and eleven (11) children. Of the adults, four were male and two (2) were females. Of the children, eight were male and three were female. All being below the age of twelve (12) years.

The total enrollment was these seventeen (17) scholars,

PLUMMER, BERTHA BREWER. SECOND INTERVIEW 1412

- 8 -

eleven of whom had never attended any school before.

There was no schoolhouse on the reservation but there were two houses for employees; one of the houses was unoccupied, accordingly it was fitted up with some old benches formerly used by the Nez Perces who once owned and occupied this reservation. The teacher, with the aid of a few friends, dressed the children in clothing such as white children wore, borrowed a few dishes, knives, forks and spoons from the Ponca School, also, books, charts and chalk; teacher furnished slates, pencils, pens, etc.

At the time the school was opened beef, flour, coffee, sugar and beans were issued to the Tonkawas every Saturday, also salt, ~~baking powder and soap~~ once a month. The children had one meal a day (dinner) at the school.

The scheme of having a school at home greatly pleased the old Indians, for they had sent some of their children to Chilocco to school, where one had died. In some cases some were taken sick and had died before the old Indians knew of their sickness. In order to secure a school at home the Indians were glad to give a part of their rations toward the support of the school.

PLUMMER, BERTHA BREWER. SECOND INTERVIEW. 1412

- 9 -

The first six months of the school were from January 1st to June 30, 1891. On September 1, school re-opened, with an enrollment of thirteen (13) scholars; a large part of the adults having to attend to their farming and other work could not attend school.

At this time there were no rations issued to the tribe, so the teacher fed the scholars until late in September. She afterwards furnished them with potatoes, milk, etc.

A boy died October, 1891, of paralysis and dropsy; another boy died, age eleven years. He had been to school at Chilocco for three years; he came home ill and entered the day school, where he remained until his death, in February, 1892. Another boy died in March, 1892, aged nine years; at this time only one adult attended school; he withdrew on account of sickness and died in April, 1893.

Supplies for the school arrived late in September, 1892. These consisted of flour, sugar, and coffee; later a good supply of books, slate pencils, crayons, erasers, tableware and slating for blackboards were received.

PLUMMER, BERTHA BREWER SECOND INTERVIEW 1412

- 10 -

Flour, baking powder and a supply of clothing, consisting of hats, pants, flannel shirts, suspenders, some very small stockings, twenty-three yards of cotton shirting, twelve yards of mosquito bar, and five boxes of spool cotton came at the same time.

In December of the same year, 1892, a supply of soap and sixteen cords of wood. Before this time the wood was furnished by the teacher. The Beans that the Nez Perces left in the commissary and a little salt were turned over to the school. These are all the supplies the school had up to June 30, 1893. In September, 1893, school opened with ten scholars. The supplies consisted of coffee, sugar, beans, baking powder, soap and salt. One box of shoes and one bolt of gingham were received. The school was in a flourishing condition; all the scholars contented and learning fast, but in October, 1893, the school was discontinued and all children over five years old were sent to Ponca School except one, who went to Chilocco.

Mrs. Bertha Plummer wrote the manuscript above years ago when her mother, Mrs. Martha Brewer was yet alive. Mrs. Brewer helped her daughter get the history correctly stated.