

SIMS, FANNIE

INTERVIEW

#8208

453

SIMS, FANNIE. INTERVIEW.

8208

Interviewer, Ruth E. Moon,
August 11, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. Fannie Sims,
1103 W. Warner Ave.
Guthrie, Oklahoma.

Born April 16, 1865

Vevay, Indiana-Switzerland County.
An old Swiss settlement-birthplace
of Edward Eggleston.

Parents George Hazeman
Emerine Protsman... German.

Several of my relatives had come to Oklahoma City in the run of '89 and I came there December 1, 1890, to live with them and do dressmaking. The town was still mighty crude. Tents, shacks and a few blocks of board walks comprised the business district. I remember only one brick building, the Lions building, but I think there was another on Grand Avenue, housing the Wheeler Bank and the Grand Avenue Hotel.

There was a town pump on Main Street where everyone went for water. All day there were teams of horses and oxen there waiting for water. The streets were so cut up by wagon wheels and horses hoofs that when the wind blew one could not see across the street for the dust.

SIMS, FANNIE. INTERVIEW.

8208

My mother and younger brother joined me in Oklahoma City just before the Iowa, Sac and Fox lands were opened in September, 1891, and Mother and I both took homesteads. She was a born pioneer and thoroughly enjoyed those years on the claim, but I had never liked camp life or even picnics. I liked civilization and settled conditions, and so the months I spent on my claim were simply endured because I felt that it was my duty to get a farm if I could.

The next year I got the position of seamstress at the Government Boarding School for the Sac and Fox Indians, and finished proving up my homestead in vacations and week-ends spent on it.

I liked life at the school much better. The Government Boarding Schools for the Indians have industrial training half a day and regular school work the other half. So my job as seamstress was to teach the girls to sew and to over-see their work. We made all their uniforms and other garments needed at the school.

At first, the Government made many mistakes because those in authority did not understand the Indians. Every man and boy wore a scalp lock, a long tuft of hair right on the crown of the head that was never cut. The rest of

SIDS, FANNIE. INTERVIEW.

8208

the head would be kept shingled. This long hair was braided tightly and a string or ribbon tied on the end. It was the Indian's badge of courage or manhood. When an enemy conquered him this scalp-lock was cut off by running the edge of a knife through the skin and cutting around the patch of hair. They were not always killed when scalped. The head would heal over, but the one who had lost his scalp lock was disgraced for life for his enemy had conquered him.

One of the Government's orders was that every boy's head must be shingled all over and that he must give up his scalp lock on entering school and it was compulsory for all Indian boys to attend school. This caused a lot of trouble for the school authorities and a lot of grief for the parents. Parents would hide their children, especially their sons, and the school would have to send out and bring them in by force. When a boy was brought in the mother would come along, wailing as though her son were dead. While the hair was being cut she would stand close by, crying bitterly. She would pick up the cherished scalp lock and carry it home with her, still mourning, for in

SIMS, FANNIE. INTERVIEW.

8208

the eyes of all her people her son was disgraced, "a sissy." It would have been so much easier for all of us if the Government had let the boys wear their hair as they wanted to until the Indians had learned the white man's ways and wanted to make the change themselves.

Another such rule was that the girls must not wear beads. Every Indian girl loved beads and had lots of them, but for a while we had to insist that they should not wear them.

Another such troublesome order was that nothing but English could be spoken at the school. These children did not know English until they learned it at school and it was natural for them to talk their own language when out of class. When told that they must not talk in their Indian tongue, some of them made up their minds that they would not speak English then and so they simply did not speak at all. They would hand in written work but would not recite at all. This order was soon changed.

Most of the Sac and Fox children liked the school life after they had learned English and had been there a while. They would come back the next year ready to go to school. They liked school and civilization much better than the Kickapoos did who lived near by.

SIMS, FANNIE. INTERVIEW.

8208

Our nearest towns in these first years were Guthrie and Oklahoma City. Both were about sixty miles away. When we had to make a trip to one of these towns we usually started in the evening and drove part of the way at night then camped and finished the trip in the cool of the following morning.

One such trip to Oklahoma City I will never forget. My brother and I were driving a spring-wagon. There were no roads only Indian trails. Our favorite trail led through the timbered hills of the Kickapoo Reservation. The woods were full of squirrels, wild turkeys, deer, and sometimes we would get a glimpse of a drove of wild ponies before they would see us and snort and dash out of sight.

We cooked our breakfast just at the edge of the trail and as we were "green" about such things, we let the fire get away from us. It crept through dry leaves to an old rail fence and ran along it. We were working hard trying to put the fire out when six or eight Kickapoos came up, talking and angry. They did not like white people anyway and here were some white people who were so dumb as to set fire to the forest. At least we guessed that was what they were saying

SIMS, FANNIE. INTERVIEW.

8208

and we didn't blame them for feeling that way but when my brother noticed that one of the men was trying to take a wheel off of our wagon we climbed in and left hastily, leaving them to finish putting out the fire.

We returned from the city by a different route but months later we went that way and a bunch of those Indians came out and pointed at us and jabbered. They remembered us and we were pretty scared. After that we always went a different way to town.

Later, I worked as seamstress at the Shawnee, Pawnee, and Ponca Boarding Schools. At the Ponca school the Reverend A. J. Sims and his wife were missionaries, supported by the Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Church. At first they held services in the old mission house which had a large chapel room. Later, Mr. Sims built a white frame church where the Ponca Indians still worship. The old mission house has been torn down and a fine, modern community hall stands there now. The work is still supported by the Methodist Church.

The first Mrs. Sims died soon after I went to Ponca and in 1907 Mr. Sims and I were married. He had come to Oklahoma in 1893 for his health. He first started a mission at Grand, near the Canadian River just across the line from

SIMS, FANNIE. INTERVIEW.

8208

Higgins, Texas. He was there six months but when Conference met at Guthrie that Fall he was sent to take charge of the Church at Watonga. The Fergusons were members of his Church there and I have often heard him say that Mrs. T. B. Ferguson, whose husband became one of the Territorial Governors, could quote more Scripture than any person he ever knew.

Mr. Sims had also held pastorates at Arapaho, Pawhuska and Newkirk before he was appointed to the mission at Ponca. While at Pawhuska and at Ponca he conducted a school for the children of the white Government employees besides his church work.

After fourteen years among the Poncas, Mr. Sims went back into regular church work and held pastorates at various places in Western Oklahoma until he retired in 1919.

He was born July 12, 1845, at St. Johns, Newfoundland. He became a naturalized citizen of the United States. His father, Charles Sims, was born in Birmingham, England, and served as Clerk of the Supreme Court of Newfoundland. I have the document appointing him to this office in 1848. It is written in beautiful script and bears the signature of Queen Victoria.

-8-

SIMS, FANNIE, INTERVIEW.

8208

We did not try to make any collection of curios while among the Indians. The few things we accumulated were kept because of some attachment to the Indian who had owned them. I have a good many beads given to me at various times by the girls who were in my classes but they are just ordinary beads.

I have a scalp lock, sixteen inches long, still tied with the same blue ribbon that was on it when the widow of "Comes from War," a Ponca Indian, took it out of her husband's coffin and presented it to Mr. Sims as a keepsake. She also took a razor out of the coffin to present to the minister. Mr. Sims used it until his death, thirty-five years later, and it is still a good razor. On a tag attached to the scalp lock, Mr. Sims wrote that it was taken from a Sioux in one of the old Indian wars. He found the patch of skin and dried human blood so repulsive that he cut it off but the long braid is still in perfect condition.

Another memento of missionary days is a watchguard made of Indian hair. A Cheyenne named "Heap of Birds" was converted under the ministry of Mr. Sims and while reading

SIMS, FANNIE. INTERVIEW.

8208

his Bible one day, he came to the passage that says that if a man has long hair it is a shame to him (I Corinthians 11:14) and without consulting anyone he went straightway and had his long hair cut and had it made into this watch guard which he presented to his pastor.

I have an album of pictures of early Oklahoma Indian schools and of old Quaker missions and pictures of the Ponca Indians in various ceremonies, such as the Council Circle, the Sun Dance and the Give-Away ceremony.