

SMEDLEY, WILLIAM.

SECOND INTERVIEW.

12883

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LEGEND & STORY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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SMEDLEY, WILLIAM. - SECOND INTERVIEW

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Field worker's name Gomer Gowen

This report made on (date) February 3, 1938

This legend was secured from (name) William Smedley

Address Poteau, Oklahoma.

This person is (male or female) White, Negro, Indian,
If Indian, give tribe

Origin and history of legend or story Attendance of mixed race
group on circus at Fort Smith, Arkansas, in which one of the
party, an Indian, met with death.

Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached Three.

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Gower, Gomer- Investigator;
Indian Pioneer History-S-149
February 3, 1938.

Interview with William Smedley
Poteau, Oklahoma

During the Fall of 1877, a circus, after extensive advertising, stopped at Fort Smith, Arkansas, to exhibit its wonderful attractions. Then, as now, a traveling show had irresistible allurements. The blaring of the band instruments; the prancing of the horses upon the backs of which rode spangled ladies; the troop of elephants marching in the parade, each, except the leader, having his trunk entwined about the tail of the one just in front; the gayly painted chariots with their occupants, - lions, tigers, monkeys and various other animals from darkest Africa and Asia, followed by a herd of ill-tempered camels from the banks of the far off Nile. This array of pomp and splendor was flanked by clowns who, under any and all circumstances, drew the attention of the children as no other part of the spectacular parade could.

Too, then as now, the young swain, living within riding distance of the place at which a show was billed to stop, deemed it a tragedy should he for any reason be prevented

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from attending at least one of the performances.

On the occasion of the show performance at Fort Smith, my brother, George Smedley, Dual Morris, Bill Harper and an Indian, Israel Morris, left their homes on Nail Prairie, in Sugar Loaf County, at sunrise, dressed in their best, and riding their best ponies, and set forth in gay spirits for Fort Smith, to be a part of the crowd which they knew would gather there to witness the parades and performances.

Arriving at Fort Smith, they put up their ponies in a convenient wagon yard and proceeded to mingle with the vast throngs of people who, like themselves, were on pleasure bent. Numberless saloons were open and did a thriving business. Many of those residing in the Indian Territory, as did the party of four heretofore named, where the sale of liquor was forbidden, quite humanly, partook too freely of that which was forbidden them in their home surroundings.

Late that evening, having spent all their money seeing the side-shows as well as the main features of the show and in the purchase of several rounds of drinks, they departed for their homes, traveling by way of the old Fort Towson-Fort Smith Road. They rode in two pairs, and upon reaching a distance of about four miles from Fort Smith on that road,

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and site near the old McCarty home, the horse which was ridden by my brother George, always more or less ill-tempered, grasped the jaw of the horse ridden by the Indian, Israel Morris, in his mouth and caused the Indian's mount to fall upon its side, throwing the Indian violently to the ground. The horse quickly arose to his feet but the prostrate Indian could not be aroused beyond emitting a series of grunts or snores. The remaining part of the group, after many efforts to arouse the Indian from what they considered a drunken stupor, decided that his condition was the result of his over-indulgence in strong drink during the day and that to let him lie where he was in order that he might sleep it off, was all they could do. They tied his pony to a nearby tree and resumed their homeward journey, hoping that on the following morning the supposedly sleeping Indian would wake from his drunken stupor, mount his pony and come on home.

The McCarty family, upon arising on the following morning, being fully unaware of the occurrence, saw the Indian's pony tied to the tree and a prostrate form lying near it. Their curiosity prompted an investigation of the uncommon sight which met their gaze, whereupon they found

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the Indian still in death. The matter was promptly reported to the authorities at Fort Smith who, after due examination, found that his neck was broken, presumably when his horse fell with him.

A full investigation of the entire matter was made by the Federal authorities, who then had jurisdiction in all matters where whites living in the Indian Territory were concerned, and the result was found to be, as related, the death of the Indian was attributable to the fall of his horse, and each of his companions on that occasion was exonerated from blame in the matter.