

UPTON, JAMES THOMAS. TORRISBY.

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UPTON, JAMES THOMAS. BIOGRAPHY.

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James Thomas Upton, a
biographical sketch, from
a personal interview with
the subject.

Mr. Upton lives seven miles northeast of Muskogee, Oklahoma, and states he was born near Aurora, Arkansas, in 1872, coming by covered wagon to Webbers Falls, Indian Territory in 1877; that his parents farmed there one year. With Ox teams and covered wagons, they left Webbers Falls and settled near Elgin, Kansas, where they remained two years. In 1880, they moved with horse teams and covered wagons back to the Indian Territory and settled in the Creek Nation some four miles north of Muskogee, near the Leachers Ferry, which crossed the Arkansas River on what is now known as the Jim Seward farm.

Mr. Upton knows a great deal of old pioneer days pertaining to old roads and trails, ferries, fords and ranches, and the life and customs of the whites and Indians of the Five Civilized Tribes, in early days.

He is also familiar with early day financing in Muskogee, I. T., and many other things which this interviewer has given in previous stories by others interviewed, and his would be only repetition. But he also at various times had dealings with the Osage and Blackfeet Indians

~~and he has told me of them.~~

OSAGE INDIANS

The Osages were Plains Indians and lived in wigwams. Like most all Indians they had their Chiefs. They had no permanent location and roamed the plains, hunting and fishing mainly, and pilfered for their other foodstuffs. They simply would not work. They had some of the finest horses in the territory, due to stealing them from people in Kansas.

The Osages were under an Indian Agent located at Pawhuska, I. T. This agent tried to look after them. He tried to get ~~them~~ to farm and settle down and quit stealing, go to work and leave the other Indians who were farming, particularly the Creeks and Cherokees, alone.

This agent did his best for them because he tried to get them to go to school and did much to get them farming tools, etc. The Government gave them at one time, big fine mule teams, new wagons and harness, corn and seed to plant and each family a milch cow or two. They did not know how to care for the mules and they ran off, tore up the wagons and harness. Pieces of wagons and harness were scattered all over the prairies. The

mules went wild and the cows were eaten by these Osage Indians. They simply would not work.

They would move about from place to place by taking poles and fastening them to their horses on which they would place their tents and personal effects, and drag them along on the ground. They traveled in single file, like ducks, one right behind the other until they pitched camp.

The Osages were savage, lazy and shiftless. They simply refused to do anything and were very slow, indeed, to take up the ways of civilization. In fact, the old Osages who live today are far from being civilized like the Five Tribes but, of course, the younger generations have gone to school and have become useful citizens.

What particularly interested Mr. Upton about the Osages was their method of burial and he explained if an Osage died, they would set him up beside a stump or tree and in his lap they would place a bowl of soup and place around him his gun, bow and arrow, and all his earthly belongings and then pile rock all over him. If he owned horses, dogs, etc., they would torture the animals for as many days as the owner was sick and then kill them. They believed he needed all his belongings when he reached his

new Happy Hunting Ground.

The Osages wore blankets and the women folks adorned themselves with all kinds of jewelry and beads.

Many of the men wore head gears of feathers and wore a breach cloth together with his blanket. The men folks painted their faces with powdered clay and different fruits and berries.

Mr. Upton states that if one should visit at Cushing, Oklahoma, he would soon contact some of these Osages even today, attired in the same manner as they were fifty years or more ago.

BLACK FEET INDIANS

The Black Feet Indians were known to Mr. Upton and his parents in Kansas. The Black Feet were as wild and as savage as the Osages, if not more so. The Chiefs wore feather head gears, moccasins, buck skin leggings, adorned with feathers and beads. They dressed more warmly with hides and furs than most Indians due to the severe winters. Their weapons were bow and arrow, and in some instances old rifles taken from immigrants and in raids on pioneers in small villages. They lived in wigwams like the Osages and moved and roamed around from place to place. They were

always in skirmishes with immigrants and other tribes, particularly the Cheyennes and the Arapahoes..

Like the Osages they expected a livelihood from hunting and fishing and what they could pilfer and steal. They secured their horses from raids on small village settlers. The people at all times were scared and in fear of the Black Feet, even more so than any other Indians.

Many times the inhabitants would have a pre-admonition the Black Feet were going to raid their village and would summon U. S. soldiers who would be close on the Indians' heels and prevent their raids; other times the Indians never showed up.

In short, their activities were those of barbarians. They took great pride in scalping their victims, men, women and children. They had great dances after the raids and exhibited these scalps. They were very superstitious and when a white headed or red headed person was scalped, they were a bit backward to make merry for fear of evil spirits.

The boy children were taught to be warriors. At a certain age these boys would have to encounter some wild animal and kill him with his bow and arrow and when he

had made certain accomplishments along these lines he was permitted to engage in raids and war against other tribes.

Mr. Upton says he does not know if the Black Feet ever moved into Indian Territory or not, but is of the opinion the white men and other Indians about killed them all out.

The Black Feet buried their dead by constructing platforms of poles high in the forks of a tree. In a bear or deer skin they would wrap the dead and put with him his earthly possessions. He states he has seen lots of these Indians buried in this manner. He also states that sometimes the immigrants and settlers would climb the trees and remove the bodies and belongings. It might be a year before the Black Feet would come back that way and they could always locate the trees in which they had placed their dead and when they found them gone, it created a great hatred in their hearts toward the white man and revenge was sweet to them, and they would start more desperately than ever raiding the whites and spreading fear into all the settlements, far and near.

COMMENT

As before stated Mr. Upton could and did tell many

things besides those relative to the Osages and the Black Feet. He is a real pioneer and has suffered many adversities but is a true, loyal Oklahoman. He had reared a large family and some of his children have been well educated and at different times have held reasonably high places in our affairs of state. Mr. Upton himself is uneducated having only attended a three-month subscription school which cost his parents \$1.50 for the three months.