

NORRIS, EMILY. INTERVIEW

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Pete W. Cole,
Field Worker.

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An Interview With Mrs. Emily
Billy-now Norris, of Daisy,
Oklahoma. Age sixty-eight.

I am an Oklahoman, native born, reared in what is now the State of Oklahoma. I have all of my allotment, but am living on the allotment of my deceased husband. There are heirs who have an interest in the property, but all of us are common holders of the property together. I am living not far from where I was born.

From year to year, as a habit, when garden vegetables that I planted mature according to Indian customs and practice to putaway for winter use, through process, I cure and put away sun-dried green corn on cobs, or shelled, pumpkins, apples, and peaches. Roast green corn on cob or shelled when dry is put away in flour sacks or some convenient way of keeping in a dry place until ready for use. It was through this method that we stored away our Spring garden vegetables for winter use and of course knowing the different ways of cooking and how served was no question to the women. And there were several ways of cooking which was enjoyed by all.

In those days we had no D. D., Ph. D. or any other kind of learned doctors but there were some Indian Herb doctors that were just as smart, fees reasonable, and there use to be doctors who would not accept pay or charge for

their services but were willing to accept what the family was willing to give; and on several occasions I have seen them give a pony, milch cow, fat hog, or some groceries, in return for his services rendered. But before he can be classed as an herb doctor, he was required to stand the test and pass examination unknown to any of the family as Old Folks used to tell about any applicant who is studying to be a doctor. He must go through the ceremony led by his senior doctor through some magic form but first of all he must pledge to surrender himself to the people that regardless of time of day or night, or weather or distance, when called on for service he must go. Upon his arrival and upon a thorough examination, he was required to relate to the family the trouble and whether or not he can help the patient. If he is to wait on the patient, he prepares himself the required herbs that is known only to himself, waits on the patient day and night for so many days, by giving him treatments or steaming, and if improvement is shown, he notifies the family as to what to do or give medicines at required times and returns home. Now and then he returns until the patient is well again. Or if no change is seen in the required time he usually notifies the family that it is no use to try treating any more as the patient is going to die and

Usually he told the truth as it worked out as he predicted. It is known that the medicine man will predict that the patient will live so many days and at certain time of day, would call for some one, tell some secret, or other things he would care to tell and very often this would come true before his death. The Choctaw Indians have been told, and some have seen/it is true, and have always considered that though uneducated in books, they had some way of knowing, how it was possessed through some unknown method that few and only few ever possessed this form of knowledge as to qualifications that was required of the work they seek, and that not/any one can be an herb doctor.

It is believed that a witch has to go through some performance similar to one who is learning the trade, but usually through some evil method. As already stated that not/anyone can be an herb doctor, or he must be able to distinguish the different kind of herbs and how to use in different cases of sickness, and now there are only a few if any who may know all of the names and different kind as this is almost a lost art among the Choctaw people today.

One of the most common home use remedies or first aid is for severe headache, break off a colored bottle and chip off a piece or pieces until a sharp piece

found; then place tourniquet under shoulder until the blood vein is visible then lightly cut the vein and let the blood run until about one pint or better has run. Loosen the bandage and the blood will stop running. This is a sure cure for a severe headache.

I have seen women use to balance pan, water bucket or wash tub by placing on top of their head and carrying one bucket in each hand in carrying water.

Men enjoy hunting and fishing for a living. As there was plenty in those days, one would not have to go far to kill. Neither did we plant large crops nor put up feed for stock for the winter. The grass grew tall and remained green throughout the year. Winters were not severe although the snow would be from two to three feet high, but the stock would range in the bottom of creeks and rivers and remain at through the winter.

We knew nothing about canning fruits in our young days but stored away our own of curing garden vegetables, that the new late models invention of canning is nothing new to me as we had our garden vegetables stored away for winter use that late inventions of cooking or to preserve is only to save time.

We had dippers made out of gourds, or for social entertainment we use to have a gourd or cigar box whittled

out for violin or guitar which tuned up furnished wonderful music.

We did not know what it was to buy a casket for the dead or where lumber could be bought to make coffins for the dead that when one died, men would get together and hew out logs, cut ends to fit and place it in the ground where the deceased was to be buried. Place hewn out logs for bottom or floor, a quilt or feather bed was placed where the corpse was to lay. Cover over with logs as described and covered with dirt. This was one of the ways that the dead were buried. The memorial or the Big Indian Cry was held about six months to one year after the death of member of the family.

When a man lost his wife he would go bareheaded or wrap his head with a handkerchief and would not wear his hat until after the cry and afterward he was free to marry again. Likewise of the woman. After her husband was dead, she would remain in the house to herself, all through the day. Meals were brought to her as she would not eat with the family at the table. She would go to the grave once and twice a day to cry, wore black dress, and her head uncombed, always mourning until after the cry, she would change dress, friends comb her hair, give her a good word of

encouragement and afterward she is one of the members of the family again, and is free to marry if she so desires. Thus ends the remembrances of the deceased love mate of wife, husband or children.

When a young man is out looking for a wife, he use to make a visit to the man who had daughters, usually takes dinner with the family. The purpose was to investigate to find all he can about the girl that he intends to ask her hand for a wife, by her way of cooking meals. If he is satisfied that she is a good cook he makes about two or three more trips, and asks her father about the hand of one of the girls. It was customary that the oldest girl must marry first then the next oldest and so on so there was no use in asking for the younger girl when the oldest girl is still unmarried. The father delivers the message to the mother of the girl, and the mother breaks the news to the girl. After the girl decides and gives her consent to the proposal, it must go through the same channel from whence the first news came and finally reaches the ear of the applicant. It took some time before the acceptance or rejection to the hands of matrimony was made known to the hands of the fiancée. When the news breaks out, a big dinner is planned, date set for the marriage, men go out hunting, women began to get ready for the big dinner

and when the day set for the feast time was had and everybody friends, acquaintance, relatives and enemies were given warm welcome to attend the day of marriage. As a matter of good manners, where there were men gathered, carrying on conversation boys under twenty-five years of age were not permitted or allowed to be around under no consideration. They would get together to themselves and practice playing Indian ball game, swimming, hunting or enjoy some social game together but it was strictly against the rule to try to be with the grown persons.

The older folks in their gathering would talk about the present, past, and future times that are to come. They were not educated, could not write their own name, could not talk the languages of other races of people but the gift and power they possessed, they predicted as to how the country will be after being open up to the white settlers and from what I have heard and was told it is true by the prophecy of the old timers.

To show their friends toward each other, one would pull out a tomahawk pipe, fill with tobacco, light it, smoke a few puffs and hand it to his next man and so on until the pipe reaches around each man that is present, or if the tobacco plays out before making the round the

it and continues as before. That was the way they use to do. While over at some other place some older man would get the young men together and they would have their entertainment by relating some ghost stories, old fables, or other stories that he may know.

Editor's Note-

This article was only slightly edited in order not to lose the flavor of Mr. Cole's Indian manner of writing.