

Field Worker: Lenna L. Rushing
March 24, 1937

BIOGRAPHY OF Mr. John McClellan
Full Blood Sac and Fox Indian
Indian name (Ga-bye-d)
Residence 3 miles east, 3 miles north, 1/2 mile west of
Cushing, Oklahoma (Route 3)

BCRI: Oklahoma
Early fall of 1870

When the first band of the Kansas Saus came to Oklahoma, my parents were among the band. They joined the Sac and Foxes who had earlier come here under the leadership of Keokuk. It was just after they arrived that I was born. It was the early fall. All of my boyhood I spent in this country. I was too young to participate in the buffalo hunts, but I saw the second to the last party go out. In fact we went part of the way with them. Their objective was the country in the northwest part of Oklahoma, and southwest portion of Kansas. My family accompanied them as far as the great salt plains around Buffalo and Woodward, and then returned. The salt plains were a regular feeding ground of the buffalo, since they came there for the salt. I remember it because it like an endless stretch of whiteness and desert and loneliness.

All through the fall and winter and early spring the hunters stayed on their trip. This was the customary thing in our village. Then in the early spring they sent word ahead of them four or five days that they were returning. Every one who had remained at home became very busy making preparations for the return of the hunters.

All the delicacies they had raised were prepared and cooked. Their food pits, which I shall describe later, were raided and out came the pumpkins, corn, squash, and so on just as fresh as the day they were put away.

When the hunters arrived, they did nothing for themselves all day long. They did not even unhitch their horses or unpack any of their belongings. The whole village was thrown open to them, and they made themselves at home anywhere they chose. The beast was for their own especial benefit, and all day they feasted with everyone in the village waiting on them hand and foot.

The next day it was different. The hunters became hosts and the ones at home becoming the guests. The feast this day consisted of all the choicest buffalo meat brought home and prepared by the hunters.

After the feasting was over and the excitement had died down, we always moved to another site to establish the village. However, this gradually came to be a thing of the past, as more and more white men were coming into the territory and were encroaching on our freedom.

There were several methods of storing away the meat. Some was cut in very thin slices about the size of a side of bacon, hung over poles, and dried by the sun. This was then folded and stacked away. Some of it was barbecued Indian fashion to be preserved this way. The way the Indian women barbecued, it was practically impossible for the meat to spoil. The other pieces of meat were put in melted tallow and allowed to set. All kind of

meat was preserved in this way. Usually the fowls were eaten when killed, but sometimes a choice fowl, such as a swan, was stored away.

The Indians in those days were prosperous, and they were excellent farmers. Among the things they raised were squaw corn, squash, pumpkins, pole beans, bush beans, and an Indian red bean shaped very much like a butter bean. They planted plentifully and their crops were luxuriant. They had every thing they wanted to eat, and also had enough to store away to last all winter.

The corn was dried in this fashion: While it yet tender, the corn was gathered, husked, and silked. Then it was boiled on the cob for about five minutes in large brass kettles. After the corn had been removed from the water and cooled, they took mussel shells and scraped the corn off by the root. It was then spread out in thin layers on canvases and dried. This usually took from two to three days, to dry, and several families always come in to help. Then when they started to dry their corn their courtesy was returned and they were helped also.

There were two ways to prepare pumpkin for drying. With the first method, the pumpkin was cut in half across the stem, and then cut into new moon shapes like a cantelope is cut. Each of these pieces were puled, split up the middle about three fourths of the way to form a fork, and put over long sticks. These were hung in a high place to dry.

The other method was a little more common. The pumpkin was cut in half, and then cut into rings which look like a water melon rind, after the inside had been eaten. These were peeled and

cleaned, and strung on poles. After they had dried, the women pushed them up together and made a chain with them. They were strung together in an oval fashion and looked very much like a rag run when it was finished. These mats were stacked, and I have seen as many as thirty and forty all in one stack.

The squash was dried very much like the pumpkin was.

To keep the beans, they were gathered and piled in heaps in some dry place to dry out. Afterwards they shelled them and put them away in bags, buffalo bags. These buffalo bags were made out of the cured and tanned hide of buffalo, and were similar in appearance to any of our traveling bags. They were fastened together with buffalo thongs, and the lid, which was in one piece with the bag, was tied down securely with thongs also.

Some of the vegetables they stored away as fresh as it came from the harvest. It is wonderful how they preserved these. A huge hole about six or eight feet in diameter and seven to nine feet deep was dug, and well cleaned out. A flooring of poles placed very closely together and cut to fit the holes was placed in first. Next came a covering of hay or leaves. The pumpkin, corn, squash, and whatever else they wished to keep were deposited. On top of the food clean grass was placed, then a layer of elm bark. Last they piled in the dirt, packed it, and marked the spot of their "cache" This was all done during the harvest, and kept it perfectly even until the next spring when the Buffalo hunters returned.

When I was quite young, around twenty, I was coaxed by my elders to join the Medicine Lodge, I am still a member.

This country in here before the opening of the land was free from any barbed wire fencing. It was an open cattle range. There were several ranches leased from the Sac and Fox Council before then. They were run by cattlemen, and their cattle were prospering on this rich pasture land.

I knew Mr. Patrick, the agent to the Sac and Foxes, but I can not remember the one who was there before him.

I remember an incident which happened in the early days, which brought shame to the Sac and Foxes. A government man bringing supplies from Guthrie to the Sac and Fox Agency was killed by a Sac and Fox boy. Stones were tied about his head, and he was thrown into the river to drown. The boy unhitched the oxen team and with the help of some others raided the provisions box. He went free for a while, but finally his sister betrayed him. He was brought by Talbert White, the Indian officer in those days, to the jail at the Sac and Fox Agency. There he was kept until troops came and took him to Fort Leavenworth in Kansas. He was kept there a year or two, and finally word was sent to his relatives when he was to be hung. All the village was told, and several families started up there. It took them about a month, being in wagons, and their food on the way up was wild game that they killed plus a few provisions brought from home.

Upon their arrival at Fort Leavenworth, they were given permission to see the boy. The day he was to go to the gallows, these families were present. When asked if he had a last word to say, he said, "I am sorry for what I have done, because it has brought a bad name to my tribe. I would like to warn all young

men not to do anything like I have done because it will only bring them grief." They then pulled the string, and he hung there until he died. His relatives were asked if they wanted the body shipped back home, but since it was so long and the railroad journey was so roundabout, they buried him there.

I am pretty old now, but I am still trying to carry on my old ways. I just received a shipment of Indian corn from Iowa, and intend to raise it for seed purposes. I do not like to see the Indian things die.
