

INDEX CARDS:

Kiowa-Comanche Reservation
Missionary
Mission Church
Reverend Jesse G. Forester
Fort Sill
Red Store
Helen Brewster
Kiowa Burial Custom
Comanche Prisoner
Subscription School
Pioneer Teacher
Homesteading-Day County
Wolf Creek
Gage
Woodward
Coyotes

HUFF, MARY ALICE MOUNT. INTERVIEW.

Hazel H. Haralson, Field Worker
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121

An interview with Mrs. Mary Alice Mount Huff
of 1006 So. Chautauque, Norman, Oklahoma.

I had many interesting experiences during my stay with the family of Rev. Jesse G. Forester, who was sent by the South Methodist Episcopal Church, as a missionary to the Comanche and Kiowa Indians in November, 1896.

The parsonage home was a small two-room house near the little mission church across the street from the original Red Store at what was called the Sub-Agency about two miles south of Ft. Sill, Oklahoma Territory.

Immediately after the Foresters arrived, they had a building (which had been the Mission Church) moved to the side of the little parsonage building. When I went out in December, 1896, Rev. Forester met ^{me} at the railway station at Duncan, and drove me in a small spring wagon. He also had a man named Dickerson, a carpenter and painter, whose home was in Duncan and who had agreed to go out and remain until he had joined this building to the parsonage building, painted ^{it} etc. We had a supply of paint and nails along to use on the job. It took us the greater part of the day to make the trip.

After leaving Duncan we saw no house until we reached our destination at the Fort; neither did we see

2

any person, but we did see white faced cattle by the hundreds and they were so wild we stayed close to the wagon for fear they might make a pass at us. We reached home just at sundown and I had my first glimpse of a fullblood Indian wearing a blanket. He was on a pony galloping across the prairie near the settlement.

We had not been long arrived before a couple, whose name I fail to recall, arrived in a buggy. He was a missionary, also, bound for a mission farther west. They were people of about thirty-five or forty years of age and had only been married the day before starting for his new field of labor. Neither of them had ever been among the Indians.

There was no hotel at the Sub-Agency so they came to the missionary's home to spend the night. Mrs. Forester, who was a sister of mine, wondered how we would find sleeping quarters for all of us--her husband, herself, their three children, the carpenter, the bride and groom, and myself. She solved the problem by setting up a bedstead in the building which was to be the parsonage addition and putting the mattress on it without springs (as she had none) and for covering she added a quilt, then a lot of coats and heavier clothing, next a

3

layer of newspapers and on top a heavy carriage robe from the newly-weds' buggy. Their quarters and bed were ready. The carpenter slept in the storm cave with a blanket, his overcoat, and a carriage robe to cover his bunk.

The missionary, his wife, and baby slept in their own bed in the living room and the two children and I slept on a made down bed on a mattress in the living-room, also. It was bitterly cold, but they kept fire all night in the little box heater stove and we did not suffer from cold.

After having breakfast with us, the missionaries bundled themselves up until they looked like Santa Clauses and we put hot rocks in their buggy for their feet, packed lunch enough for two meals, tucked them in their heavy robes, and they continued their journey.

The missionary was a pretty good workman and he and the carpenter, Dickerson, began work on the house. Soon they had a partition in and there were two nice large rooms. As they progressed with their carpenter work, Mrs. Forester and I painted indoors and occasionally a soldier or two from the Fort would become interested

4

and join forces with us and soon we had the house and a nice front porch completed. Then we began on a small barn and shed for the buggy, out of the material which remained from the parsonage work. We managed the walls but had no shingles or roofing of any kind nor any funds with which to buy. Rev. Forester discussed the situation with Mr. Strauss at the Red Store and Mr. Paschal at the other traders' store and they donated many empty light weight wooden barrels, which Rev. Forester and I knocked apart and then sawed each stave in the center, making two pieces. These we used for shingles and soon our barn had a roof.

Three Sundays out of each month Rev. Forester held services at the Mission church there and the teachers and employees at the Government Indian School--about two miles south of the Sub-Agency--would accompany their pupils to these services and remain for Sunday School. After Sunday School, Rev. Forester would preach and use an Indian Boy (Preston Poexicut) as his interpreter, since he spoke no Indian language and many of the Indians understood little or no English. There were many soldier boys from the Fort who attended

5

these services since many of them had become much attached to Rev. Forester and his family. The clerks from the stores (who were all white men) attended; also, the white families who lived at the Sub-Agency. A few of the lady teachers at the Indian school were musicians and one of them was usually present to play the church organ for the services, but we had some new song books and were anxious to learn the songs and since the teachers could not get to the church during the week we were minus an organist. At the Red Store, a colored man, Bill Dixon, and his wife, Dolly, worked; she as house-keeper, and he as general helper around the store and wagon yard. She was a pretty good musician and often slipped over to the church to play on the new organ when no one was about. We said, "Why not you play for us at Wednesday night choir practice, Dolly?" She was very reluctant but finally consented when someone suggest^{ed} that "we might give you a coat of white wash, Dolly, if that would help any." So each Wednesday night we had choir practice with Dolly as organist and Bill, her husband, as one of our bass singers,

6

(since he was fine); and lots of soldier boys, any Indians or white folks who wanted to come, Rev. Forester and wife, Miss Helen Brewster and myself.

Miss Brewster was a Kentucky woman sent out by the Women's Mission board of the M. E. C. S. and had been there eight years as a field missionary to the Kiowa and Comanche Indians. She had a cottage near the church and parsonage. She spoke the Comanche language well. The Kiowa language was much harder to learn and the Kiowas understood the Comanche language, so the whites always learned the Comanche language.

We, of the Missionary family, attended Sunday School in the afternoon at the Indian School auditorium and at night, preaching services at the church again. One Sunday out of each month Rev. Forester drove to a little church right at the foot of Mt. Scott and held a preaching service for the Kiowa Indians, as their camps were more in that section and they seldom came into the Sub-Agency excepting for Grass Payment and Issue day.

At this church he preached through a Kiowa interpreter, whose name was Virginia Stumblingbear. She and her husband (Luther Stumblingbear) were both

7

graduates of Carlisle.

It was amusing to see the missionary, who was a small, neat, dressy man, standing by Virginia who weighed over two hundred pounds, wore blankets, and was always seated with her baby in her lap when she interpreted his sermons. He would only speak a sentence or two and pause while she repeated it in Kiowa.

There was one white family out there who lived in a house near the church and Rev. Forester always spent Saturday night with them and drove home Sunday after the eleven o'clock preaching service. There were several children in this family and they had not sufficient clothes to attend services, they said; so Mrs. Forester and I solicited aid from the soldier boys and soon we had discarded uniforms enough to dress the entire family of children after we transformed them from U. S. Army uniforms.

The first Indian burial I attended was that of one of the Indian School boys who had died of tuberculosis. The Superintendent of the Indian School, a Mr. Cox, called Rev. Forester to hold a funeral service at the School auditorium, as the boy had died there at school. The family and many other Indians came to the service

8

and then they drove to a little government cemetery for Indians (on the hill not far from the Mission Church) burying him in a grave which the School authorities had dug. They placed a bundle of his personal belongings (as large of one of our old time feather beds) on top of the casket before the grave was filled up. His casket was a pine box covered in black cloth, made by the School workmen, as there were no caskets nearer than the railroad, thirty miles away.

The Indians were still throwing their dead in the caves in the mountains at that time.

One afternoon, Dr. Shoemaker, the Reservation Doctor, was talking to R. V. Forester at the gate when they heard Indian death wails at an Indian tepee on the hill more than a mile away. "An Indian boy has died in that camp, Forester; they let him go home from school to die not long ago; he had tuberculosis. Jump in and let's get there and persuade them, if we can, to not take him to the mountainscaves but to let us bury him."

They drove over hurriedly and the team was being hitched to a wagon and the blanket-wrapped body was already in the wagon when they arrived. Without much persuasion they consented to burial and drove the wagon

9

to the home of the missionary, where the doctor and missionary carried the boy's body into the house and prepared it for burial; then they locked the doors to the room and the doctor went to his home and the missionary went about his night services at the church. Throughout the night the mourning family came into the yard, giving their death chants. Next morning the missionary and Bill, The Red Store colored man, made the regular pine casket which we covered with black cloth, placed the body in it and bore it to the little church, where the School people, many Indians and some of the Sub-Agency people were gathered for the funeral service, after which they buried him in the little cemetery for Indians on the hill. We had no flowers, as the frost had come, so we removed some from our summer hats and placed them in the boy's hand and the mother said "chattie" which meant good.

We were making a beautiful ball dress for a Captain's daughter at the Fort and an Indian girl admired it. We said, "Amy, would you like for us to make you a dress?" She smiled and went away to the store returning soon with about three and a half yards of orange-yellow velvet and wanted it made Indian style which was merely

10

to fold the cloth in the middle of the length and cut a round hole to pull over the head, then to sew a seam on each side from the waist line down to about four inches of the bottom of the skirt. Then split a width of the goods in half long enough for a sleeve and sew one width over each shoulder for a sleeve (but it was merely a flap for it had no seam) and all of this was bound in bright green ribbon around the skirt bottom and the neck opening, around the sleeve flaps and down the side opening under the arm to the waist line. This was indeed a flashy costume and soon we had many calls to make them for many Indian women and girls. For a while we were kept busy making them for fifty cents each. Never did we make one only of the brightest colors.

During this time a great many people were going to Beaver County, Oklahoma Territory, to homestead. The road they traveled came through the Sub-Agency, passing between the Red Store and the Mission church and parsonage. Very often there would be a number of wagons in one party winding their slow way along over the hills and prairies. They would stop at the stores for supplies and stay all night at the wagon yard at

11

the Red Store. We talked with them often at their campfires. Many of them were Texas people. They endured lots of hardships to reach Beaver County. We kept one family for almost two weeks in our dugout during a bad spell of weather. Unless there was a party of them traveling together there was no one to turn to if they needed aid for there were no houses along the roads through the Reservation. There were only Indian tepees.

One night about dusk Mr. Strauss sent negro Bill over for Rev. Forester and his wife to come and attend a woman who was very ill at the wagon yard camp house. They remained there most of the night administering various remedies that seemed indicated and by morning she was improved and they were able to continue their journey in a few days.

Early in the Summer of 1897 during the week, the Indians were all encamped about the Fort and Sub-Agency for a Grass Payment, when a lady came to the missionary's home wanting help to locate her Indian parents. She identified herself as being a child who was taken prisoner by the Comanche Indians when a small child-near where Chico, Wise County,

12

Texas, now is.

Chico, Texas, was the birthplace of Mrs. Forester and myself and was the home of Rev. Forester, also; and we remembered my father's telling us of the time it occurred and we had often seen the log house from which she and her brother were stolen (along with a woman who was there at the time) and in which the children's mother was killed. We remembered visiting her grave. The woman and boy managed to escape from the Indians in a day or so but they took the little girl on and kept her until she had forgotten all of her own language. Her father finally bought her through the Government, when a Government agent finally found her. Their name was Babb. He later died and was buried by his wife. He said he had always lived cross-ways with the world and wanted to be buried cross-ways with it. So his request was granted. This daughter wanted to locate her Indian parents to get them to adopt her so that she might secure an allotment when the Kiowa-Comanche land was opened for settlement.

We searched with her and found living only an Indian uncle and a Mexican woman (Mucha-Kona) who was a captive in the ~~same~~ Indian family when the

13

Babb girl was with them; but they remembered her and promised to help her. I understood that the tribe did adopt her later and that she received the same recognition as an Indian in the land allotment.

I began teaching a subscription school in January, 1897, at the Sub-Agency Near Fort Sill.

The Sub-Agency consisted of two Indian trading stores--one run by Samuel Strauss of Tennessee and the other by Walter Paschal of Texas; a mission church of the Southern Methodist Episcopal Church; and about twenty or thirty homes.

I taught this school in the Mission Church, which was furnished free of charge by the Missionary.

The blackboards were made of wide boards painted black. We had regular crayon to use on the blackboard, which was made on the order of an old fashioned easel. The desks were two chairs turned facing each other--one for seat, the other for a desk.

We had a coal heater and I furnished the coal.

We studied readers, spellers, arithmetic and penmanship, with geography and English in the upper grades.

All our supplies came from the railway station by freight (which was a covered wagon drawn by horses)

14

This was a distance of thirty miles.

I canvassed the homes and enrolled twenty-five or thirty pupils at one dollar each per month.

My pupils were mostly beginners, but I had a few in all grades, including the eighth.

There was a school at the Fort for white children but only children of the Army families were permitted to attend. One and a half miles south of the Sub-Agency was a government school for Indians (It is still there and educates the Comanche and Kiowa Indians). It was a boarding school and the Indians were kept there nine months of each year.

There was no settlement nearer than the towns on the Rock Island Railroad, namely, Duncan, Rush Springs, and Marlow. So the children at the Sub-Agency had no school advantages until I taught this school. Some of them were ten years old and had never been in school. They were rather quick to learn and most of them made rapid progress.

The church had a bell and the Indians were not accustomed to hearing it ring so often through the week as I rang it when I began teaching. Often

15

we would have our attention attracted by the Indians gazing in at the windows but they never came in.

On one occasion a grown Indian boy kept looking in and laughed every time the first graders made mistakes during their recitation period. I remarked that if I knew the Indian word for "Come in," I would ask him in. One little girl, Frankie Maderia, whose father was a government employee, said; "Oh, let me, Miss Mount, I know what to say!" I gave her permission and she went out and motioned, saying "Kime, Kime" and he came. I seated him by the stove and again he laughed at their mistakes. I said "You, savvy white man's talk, don't you?" He said, "Ka! Ka!" which meant No.

Soon he left and went across the street to the cottage of Miss Helen Brewster (who was a missionary to the Indians for more than eight years and spoke both Comanche and Kiowa languages).

At noon I ran to her door and entered without knocking (as was my custom at her house) and was astonished to hear my Indian conversing with her in as good English as I could command. I shook my finger at him and said "You told me you didn't savvy

16

English." He laughed heartily and Miss Brewster said, "He is a graduate of Carlisle and was having fun at your expense." Afterward he always talked to me in English.

I was my own janitor, with the children's help, and each Wednesday night was choir practice. So after school we swept and set our chairs back straight to the front again. We did this on Fridays, also.

We had an organ, too, but I was no musician and had no pupils who could play but sometimes we could inveigle colored Dolly to come at odd hours and play; we enjoyed it so much and learned lots of new songs with her.

The church was a frame building with the weather-boarding nailed on the outside but it had no inside finish, and was rather cold at times. After conference, the Mission Board sent money to get ceiling for the inside and the soldier boys who attended Church and Sunday School all the time came down and helped the Missionary ceil it. That made our school room much warmer and more comfortable; however, on really cold days we still would move our chairs and desks to form a circle around the stove so that the

children could be warmer.

We had no report cards nor quizzes; but occasionally, the mothers would drop in and inquire as to the progress of their children. I do not recall any visits from the fathers.

In 1901 we (I had married after Mr. Huff had served out his term of Enlistment and come back from Spanish American War) homesteaded sixteen miles northwest of Gage, Oklahoma, in what was then Woodward County, (since then it has been made a part of Ellis County).

At the time we moved there people were coming in from the northern states mostly and taking possession of land on which they had filed. Very few of them had money to build a house so the first homes were mostly sod houses and dugouts.

When we first went out there, we lived in a sod house of one room at the Dock Fore ranch. This was three miles from our claim. It was very inconvenient to go and come so far to work in a wagon, and I was so impatient to be on the land to help with the improvements instead of sitting at the ranch all day with no employment other than to care for our baby,

that I persuaded my husband to put a floor and a window in a barn he had dug out in the bank of a canyon--near our building site--and we moved in that while the weather was still cold. We were pretty comfortably situated in this abode when we finished it. It was 14 x 16 feet; the west wall was solid dirt but the north and south walls were sloped and had to be built up with sod which was cut in strips about 8 to 12 inches long, 6 to 8 inches wide, and 4 to 6 inches thick; it was laid up similar to a brick wall and we had the entire east wall of sod. The east wall had a large window and door in it. The door was homemade with a half sash window in it. We had a cottonwood ridge pole about three and a half feet in diameter and smaller logs laid from that to the sides of the walls and covered with four layers of sod at first and later we added two more layers. There was a substance out there in places which was a white powdery looking dirt which they called gyp. I took several tubs full of this and made white wash and white washed our walls until they were very pretty and white; then I coiled our over head with heavy unbleached domestic & by tacking

it to the ridge pole and the side poles). We had our tables, stove, and water in the east end of the room and bed, trunks, and bureau in the west end. The floor was made of 1 x 12" boards.

Since we were so comfortably situated, my husband decided to do some sod breaking and fence the pasture before hauling the lumber to build our little house. All went well until the spring rains set in and after several soaking rains, which continued to come, our sod roof began to leak and then the only place that was dry was under the ridge pole.

Well, we put buckets, pans, etc., everywhere to catch all we could; and we rolled up our mattress under the ridge log and sat on it taking turns holding the baby till daylight. A man who was spending the night with us put his bedding up on some chairs and sat with his slicker covering him and his bed.

When morning came we rented a small tent and moved our bedding, etc., into it until we could get to town for lumber and then as we had a few clear days, my husband and I went to work and in a week's time had the walls and a shingle roof up and the floor laid. We moved in before we got the doors

20

and windows cased in, and worked all day Sunday putting in two windows and a door.

At first we hauled water in the wagon with a barrel from the ranch; then someone closer to us got a well and we hauled from there.

Finally two boys, Jake and Edward Feigle from New York, whose claim joined us on the north, got a shallow well in a canyon about a quarter of a mile from us and we got water there to use at the house. This enabled us to have cool fresh water to drink.

Finally the crops were planted and we hired a man named "Pete" Schrader, who had a claim near us, to dig us a well. He was certainly a fast digger and they rigged up a way to pull the dirt up with a horse and I led "Old Jim" back and forth, pulling up the dirt. My husband handled the boxes of dirt as they came up to the windlass. We went one hundred feet before we reached water. I was glad when it was finished for a number of reasons, among them: that something would go wrong and "Jim" would let the dirt fall back and kill "Pete", or that our baby would fall in, as she had to be there playing around when not asleep. Then, to have an abundance of clear, cool,

sparkling water for any purpose at all time--it means a lot.

At first we could get wood from along the creek on government land but the land was being filed on all the time and the supply of wood from that source ended. Then we burned cow chips when we could not get to town for coal.

We had no bridges and we had to cross Wolf Creek to get to Gage, where we bought, all of our supplies. Once when we were out of groceries and had started to get a supply we were just in sight of the crossing as a head rise came down. We knew there was not a chance to get across for it had the right name. We turned back and a friend of my husband's, (who was "batching" on his claim nine miles from us) went with us, as he had nothing to eat at his house and we got some sugar at the ranch and lived on milk and kaffir corn cooked like rice until the river went down so we could cross.

In the Spring of 1902, we had a rural route, called a Star Route, established. The mail carrier came out one day and circled around, getting back to Gage the next day. This gave us mail every other day. There were no telephones any where close to us.

22

During 1902 we had a man named Hull homestead about three miles north of us. He put in a small stock of groceries and got a post office which was called Chaney. It is still on the map but has never had much growth.

We had no doctor nearer than Gage and no dentist nearer than Woodward. The Woodward dentist came to Gage one day every two weeks. I tried once to wait two weeks (on the dentist) to be relieved of the toothache but after I stood it for several days I became desperate and we went to the Doctor at Gage in a wagon to get him to pull it. He had extracted one before for me and had ruptured a blood vessel so he refused to pull this one, but put something in the cavity to ease it and gave me something to keep down the aching until the dentist came. Before we reached home, however, it was jumping so that I couldn't stand it any longer and as nothing we used relieved it. My husband borrowed a buggy from a neighbor and we set out for the dentist at Woodward, a distance of thirty-eight miles. It was about midnight when we left home and by 6 P.M. the next day we had it out and were ready to start home. We had some

quilts and blankets in the buggy and I wrapped up. My husband held the baby, drove, and kept me propped up. I was soon "dead to the world," the first rest I had had in ten days. We reached home at midnight.

One of our neighbor's mother was suffering from cancer of the breast when they moved to their claim and she lingered on for quite a while. Finally they came for me about dusk one night and when I reached their place, she had died. They planned for me to sit up with her body, as was the custom then; and a sister-in-law of the deceased and I kept our lonely vigil in their big dug-out (which was made in the bank of a canyon with dirt floor, sod roof, no windows, no doors, and just an opening with a curtain for a door).

The coyotes would come howling down the canyon almost to the dug-out door and the two dogs laid right in front of the door until they would get very near; then, they would chase them off.

The family stayed at a neighbor's home that night and at midnight the neighbor brought us hot coffee (came horseback).

In the morning the neighbors came in and made a pine casket, covered with black cloth, and took her

to Gage cemetery (which was the nearest one) for burial.

There were no churches or school houses until in 1902, when we built a school house. There was no social life excepting visiting the neighbors, unless we were fond of dancing. They often had dances and would move all the household effect out side and dance all night, then go home. People went many miles to these dances.

We could only raise feed crops on the sod the first year; so, after we had harvested our feed crop we sold it and our team and moved to Gage for the winter of 1902. There my husband bought out a cafe and worked the night shift as the west-bound passenger train came in at midnight and we always had a crowd of hundry passengers to feed. This enabled us to live and make enough to keep making improvement on our claim. We had to go out there every now and then to stay over night and we hired our ploughing, etc., done when we stayed in town.

After our second baby came in June, 1903; we went back to the claim and stayed until we had it improved, etc.

In 1905, we sold it for a good price.