

HILL, ELMER

INTERVIEW

#12096

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## BELIEF IN WITCHCRAFT

An interview of Elmer Hill, Fish  
pond or Thatho Kulka town (tulwa)  
age 62, 5 mi. south of Okemah,  
Okla.

Billie Byrd, Field Worker  
Indian-Pioneer History  
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The early Indians and some of the present day Indians were firm believers in witch craft and the results which accompanied these things. There were only a few who were capable of witching others in the form of food poisoning, with the resulting of an illness uncurable by the tribal doctor, the taking of the human foot print in the dirt which resulted in the loss of the use of the feet and legs with pitiful results--there were too many other numerous uncanny and terrible ways a witch could work on the human.

There is told a tale of a young man who died the death as a witch doctor:

There was a sick man and although all kinds of remedies had been tried, the man died. It was at the death that a real young man confessed that he had been the one to witch the man. He later denied the guilt but he had to take his punishment by the

tribal laws which were strict in dealing with all those that went against their laws. The relatives of the dead were responsible for carrying out the order of the early tribal Indian laws in cases of this kind. This particular young man who claimed to be a witch doctor was taken by the relatives of the dead and placed alive, face downwards on the dead and buried. In all this time, the young man constantly denied doing the deed but he had confessed, even if it was as a joke and the tribal laws had to be carried out.

The mourners usually spent four days at the grave of a dead and they, later, told of how the cries of that young man could be heard faintly while they were watching. No one could take pity and rescue anyone from any punishment because there was a penalty of death for anyone trying to aid guilty ones.

It has been a custom for Indians to bury articles of food and clothing as well as other articles with the dead. If the deceased was very fond of meat, as all Indians are, a hog would be butchered, some fried ribs, boiled back bone, sofkey, sour corn bread and other things would be buried with the deceased. These articles of food would, of course, be in separate con-

containers. Once there were some peanuts that were buried with a dead man. Two boys saw all the peanuts that went into the grave with the casket and they decided that they were going to have some of the peanuts. When everyone had returned to the house where services were to be held all night in memory of the deceased, even though it was late in the evening, they returned to the grave and began to dig into the grave. Nearby, there lived a crippled man who had to be carried whenever he went anywhere so that two of the men went to get him so that he could attend the services.

It was getting late in the evening when the two men were returning with the crippled man. They had to pass the cemetery before they reached the house where the services were being held. It was when they were almost to the cemetery that one of the men happened to glance in the direction of the new grave and saw what appeared to be two forms moving around it. These were the two boys who had finally obtained the buried peanuts and were busily eating them. In the late twilight, those forms looked unreal, so that the young

that first saw the two boys, although he was helping to carry the cripple, let go his hold and left on a run in the direction from which they had just come. The other man glanced in the direction of the cemetery and saw the sight and completely dropped the cripple and also left on a run. Not knowing what it was all about the cripple also began to look around and spied the forms in the cemetery and regardless of his condition, he also took on a run which was a very feeble effort.

A person afflicted by an incurable ailment or thought to be witched was closed up in a house after unsuccessful methods to cure the ailing one. After barring all windows and doors, the house and occupant were burned. There is a story about a man whom everyone tried to cure and he overheard a discussion outside the tent in which he was lying in about there being no hope of curing him and that the only way out was to burn the tent and the occupant. Before anything was ever done, he crawled out of the tent and made his escape. He is said to have regained his health and became a leader in his tribal town affairs.

There were many ways in which witched persons were

destroyed and thought to end their misery and suffering. A young woman had a small child that was always ailing and was later declared to be witched because it would not respond to all the treatments. In observing the tribal laws, the child had to be destroyed. The child was placed under some thickets and bushes---more brushes and dry twigs were heaped over it and burned. The Indians were following out their tribal laws in these methods. No one ever knew the identity of most of the witch doctors that caused all the agonies because if it was known, a witch doctor did not last long.

There are a few members of the Okfuskee tribal town of Okfuskee County, Oklahoma, that observe and carry out some part of the tribal customs handed down to them. The house in which a person has died is vacated and never lived in again. This custom is regarded, no matter how fine a house is. The house is vacated, the bed, bed clothes, clothes and other possessions of a deceased is placed outside to rot and decay. More often, the family moves into one of

the smaller out buildings. The present day Indians think they have completed their task and showed their respect to the dead when the tombstone or the small house is made over the grave of a deceased. Not so, of some of the Okfuskee town members as they observe a custom handed down to them. There was recently held a memorial celebration for a man who died in the summer. It is the custom for a widow or widower of the town to be summoned to witness the rites conducted either in the tribal ceremonies of the dance or ball game--one being the one that the deceased took great interest in and was very fond. At the close of these ceremonies, the widow or widower was then free to go his own life.

Elmer Hill is the chief of the Thatho Kulka (Fish pond) tribal town which is a subtribe of the Ochai tribe. He is the son of Abner Hill. Abner Hill was a member of Ispahecha's band into Comanche country where he died and was buried. Abner Hill was an older brother to Amos Hill, a lighthorseman captain. Amos Hill was the father of Ollie Hale, now Bunner, now

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living southwest of Bearden, Oklahoma. It isn't known where and why Abner and Amos Hill obtained that surname as it was originally known to have been Hale. They have been told they had a little of white blood by Malochee Harjo, deceased, Greenleaf town (tulwa) who was in the flight of Opothleyahola to Kansas during the Civil War. In my opinion, it is certain that these Hill s or Hales could be some descendants of Hanna Hale, a white woman, that was captured by the Fish Ponds in Georgia in 1799. There was some question about this. Hanna Hale became the wife of the Fish pond chief for whom she had children, as it was told.

(Note: No change is made in Billie Byrd's diction as he expresses his interviews in typical Indian fashion \*Ed)