

PLUMMER, BERTHA BREWER

INTERVIEW

#4833

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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Field Worker's name Robert W. Small

This report made on (date) July 13, 1937

1. Name Mrs. Bertha Brewer Plummer

2. Post Office Address Tonkawa, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 6 Year 1881

5. Place of birth Near Iola, Kansas

6. Name of Father Garrett C. Brewer Place of birth _____

Other information about father Agent at the Tonkawa Agency

7. Name of Mother Martha Howard Brewer Place of birth _____

Other information about mother Teacher at the Tonkawa Agency

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 10.

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Robert W. Small,
Interviewer,
July 13, 1937.

An Interview with Mrs. Bertha Brewer Plummer,
Tonkawa, Oklahoma.

Bertha Brewer Plummer was born November 6, 1881, near Iola, Kansas. In 1885, her father, Garrett C. Brewer, and her mother, Martha Howard Brewer, moved to Oklahoma Territory, near the Pawnee Indian Agency, where Mr. Brewer was employed for one year farming for the Pawnee Indians. While engaged in this work in 1885 some five or six Tonkawa Indians coming up from Texas on their way to the abandoned Nez Perce Indian Reservation, stopped at the Pawnee Agency. These Indians were going up to look over the Nez Perce Reservation with a view to moving the Tonkawa Tribe of Indians to this reservation which the Nez Perce tribe had abandoned when they returned to their native lands in North Dakota.

In 1886, the Tonkawa Tribe which had some Laban Indians and one Iowa Indian moved to the Nez Perce Reservation which the Government had then set apart for use of the Tonkawas. Owing to a war that other tribes had made upon the

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Tonkawas previously, there were but few who moved to this new reservation -about seventy-five in all.

In 1889, Mr. Brewer came to act as agent or rather as sub-agent under the White Eagle Indian Agency for the Tonkawas. His residence and office were located on Government land which had been set apart for use as Agency headquarters, on the west side of the Chikaskia River, two miles east and one mile south of the present town of Tonkawa. This was called the Oakland Agency.

Mr. Brewer instructed the Indians in the work of farming and assisted them in every way to become a self sustaining and an independent people. The Government furnished their first horse-power threshing machine to thresh their grain. Wheat and corn were the principal crops raised.

The Tonkawa Indians were given an allotment of a hundred and sixty acres of land each. Helen Clark, an educated Blackfoot Indian lady, refined and intelligent, was sent from South Dakota to assist in the allotment of

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of lands for the Tonkawas and to Mr. and Mrs. Brewer was given the task of assigning names for many of the Tonkawas who had Indian names that could not be written in English. Their allotment showed a total of seventy-two members of the Tonkawa Tribe- a mere remnant of a tribe which a few years previous had numbered over three thousand.

Today, there are about fourteen or fifteen full blood Tonkawa Indians and only six now living of the original tribe who came to Oklahoma in 1886.

Mrs. Brewer, mother of Mrs. Plummer, was employed to teach the Indian Children at the White Eagle Agency and Mrs. Plummer, being the child of the Agent, was allowed to attend the same school.

Supplies of food and clothing were furnished to the Indians; these supplies were hauled from Arkansas City, Kansas, about every three months and issued to the Indians in proportion to their respective family needs. These supplies consisted principally of beef, flour,

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sugar, baking powder, coffee, beans, salt, and were issued twice each week. The coffee was green, not roasted and had to be "parched" or roasted by hand.

It was a custom for such tribes of Indians as were on friendly terms with the Tonkawas to make visits about once every two years at which times they would kill beef cattle to supplement their usual issue of rations and would trade ponies, hold dances and relate their experiences for a period of about one week and would then return to their own reservation. The Tonkawa tribe would in due time return the visits.

John Williams was the first Chief of the Tonkawas and Pete Dupee was the first interpreter of the Tonkawa language.

George Miles, Standing Buffalo, Sargent Johnson, John Kyse, John Williams and Jack Rush ^{been} had scouts previous to their migration from Texas and were given military discharges.

The Indians wore blankets or Indian clothing when they came here from Texas, except the Scouts to whom

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uniforms were issued by the Government.

There was some wild turkey, prairie chicken and occasionally a deer in this part of the country about 1885 to 1889 and Mr. Brewer has often caught fish from the Chikaskia River, near their home, that weighed forty and fifty pounds each.

Mr. Brewer, Agent for the Tonkawas would make a report once each week to the White Eagle Agency as to condition of the Tonkawa tribe. If occasion demanded, an Indian Policeman would be dispatched to the White Eagle Agency to convey any information of an alarming nature or any other matter of unusual importance.

A doctor was employed by the Government to render such services as might be required at his hands by the members of the Tonkawa tribe. He was stationed at the White Eagle Agency. Local "Herb" doctors or "Medicine Men" were common among the Tonkawa tribe.

Mr. Brewer, upon one occasion when suffering with a very painful "rising" in his ear was told by an Indian

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woman that she could cure him and he agreed to try her remedy. This woman went to the river bottom and searched for about three hours for the particular "weed" she was looking for and finally finding it she returned to the Agency or home of Mr. Brewer and gave him her "remedy" and to his surprise it stopped the pain and cured his affliction.

Often, when a tribesman was complaining of some ailment the Tonkawas would hold what was known as Medicine Dances which were conducted about as follows; a tepee would be erected with the door in the east; a hole about two inches deep and four or five inches in diameter would be dug in the earth in the center of the tepee and a fire built in this hole. The ailing one would enter the tepee door, turn to the left and walk around the fire; take a seat on a blanket spread on the ground; then the "Medicine Man" would go through his performance, rubbing his hands over the patient and also rubbing the medicine on patient, at the same time going through with a verbal ceremony of

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mysterious incantations: after he was through with this ceremony the patient would arise and pass out of the tepee always turning to his left when entering or leaving.

When an Indian died, the whole tribe would be heard in a lamentation of great agony and immediately the hair of the deceased would be cut off and the face painted yellow. Interment was invariably made on the day of death if possible. ✓

The graves were dug to the width of an ordinary bed mattress and were about six feet deep and all members coming to the home of the deceased would bring some gift to be buried with the dead. The manner of preparing the dead for burial was to begin wrapping the body with blankets, at the same time placing all the gifts as well as his entire earthly possessions which were not too large nor too bulky in blankets. These articles were wrapped until the roll contained all that could be placed within it or until it was about three or

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four feet in diameter. Then it was placed in the grave, and all cooking utensils, pans, buckets and other possessions that were not rolled in the blanket were placed in the grave beside the body, with the sole exception of feathers. If the deceased owned feather pillows they would be emptied and the cloth deposited in the grave. When all this had been deposited in the grave, someone, usually some old member of the tribe would advance to the west end of the grave, while all others would step back a few steps and after making a talk this person would reach down and get a handful of dirt and throw it across the grave, then go to the east end of grave and repeat the throwing of dirt across the grave, all the time talking to the dead person. This was a touching ceremony.

Three days of mourning after the burial must ensue and on the morning of the fourth day the tribe all come to the home of the deceased bringing gifts of clothing or bedding, cooking utensils, or other things to replace such things as had been buried with the dead after which the

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Chief made a talk to all members formed in a circle who were then dismissed, and they never again mentioned the name of the deceased.

The Tonkawa tribe of Indians, owing to the number of enemy tribes which they had, made no mounds to mark the graves of their dead: after burial the earth was filled in level and a bunch of weeds were broken off and used to sweep the earth free of all tracks or evidence of burial that was possible. No stone or marker was used in the early day burials of the Tonkawas to designate the places where their dead lay.

It has been said that enemy tribes of the Tonkawas would scalp their dead when they were found.

The Tonkawas all worshipped the "Great Spirit" and the younger ones took part in singing songs and were attentive listeners to bible reading and explanations of such.

Many Indians now living were taught to speak and write the English language by Mrs. Brewer, Mrs. Plummer's mother, years ago.

PLUMMER, BERTHA ANNIE 1872

At the age of nearly two, Bertha Plummer was married to Mr. A. J. Plummer, of Seneca. The wedding took place in the old country residence of her father.

Mrs. Plummer was a member of the Presbyterian Church in her girlhood days. She was united with the Baptist Church, and is a member of life time to her by the Senecas. In her youth, she collected and sent a considerable amount of money and labor work art of the Senecas.