

5414
162

INDEX CARDS

Ball games--Creek
Music--Creek
Language--Creek
Dances--Creek

Billie Byrd
Research Field Worker S-149
April 21, 1937.

163

Customs Relating to Muskogee-Creek Ceremonies
Interview with Simmer, Muskogee Tribe
18 miles southwest of Okemah, Oklahoma,
Fish Pond Town, (Tulwa).

The different Indian tribes in the United States have their own particular custom, yet there are some customs of some of the tribes that are identical. Only some of the older Indians strictly observe the customs that were handed down from one generation to the other.

There is the custom of the Muskogee-Creek Indian towns (Tulwas) of having a ball game between the towns known as a match game. Sometimes a game is not played but turns into a bloody battle. When the opposite sides are coming together for a game, the women of the sides hold bets or wagers consisting of garments, shawls, and other articles. Whichever side wins in a game becomes the owner of the articles, but sometimes the women engage in a fight among themselves and the articles are lost or demolished. Instead of a game, these contests result in a real fight. The non-players on one side often enter into fights with the opposing non-players.

This game is played between two goals which are placed about two hundred yards apart. The game is similar to

basket ball as the ball has to be started in the center of the designated ground between the goals. When the game is to commence, the players are at center and instructed by a man to avoid a fight but play a fair game. The smaller games usually played on the home grounds of the different towns (Tulwas) is played in a good manner unlike those of a larger game.

There is a man appointed to act as a score keeper. He has in his possession twenty short sticks which he sticks (one at a time) into the ground. One stick is placed or stuck into the ground when one side make a goal. It is the purpose of the opposing sides to hit the poles or throw the ball between the goals. When the sticks are stuck into the ground, the side having more sticks stuck into the ground for his side is the winner.

Then, there is the game between the men and women which is played on a certain designated Sunday. The men hunt squirrels two or three days before Sunday, while the women make other preparations for a feast, such as preparing the sofkey or blue dumplings. The squirrels are not prepared at the homes but cooked at the ceremonial grounds, sometimes in one large pot. The men and women engage in the

game while the other idle women are busy preparing the squirrels. This game is played until the squirrels are done or have finished cooking.

On the outer edge of a ceremonial ground is one tall pole, usually of medium size, firmly stuck into the ground with either a horse head, cow head or the image of a fish or other game fastened to the top end. It is the purpose of the players to hit the objects on top of the pole with the ball, but the pole may be hit and counted as a goal. Every time the object on top of the pole is hit, it is counted as five, and counted as two if the pole is hit. There is no set score to be made.

Just before the feast is begun, there is one man who is appointed to dip out on the ground four teaspoons of the squirrel soup; then this same man breaks off a piece of bread and throws it away. Everybody then partakes of the feast. The feast is held under the little arbors nearest and the ones surrounding the ceremonial fire place.

It is not known where the singing of songs during the ceremonial dances originated nor the meaning of the words or syllables contained in these songs. These words sung only by the men leaders and the men only, have no meaning

in the Muskogee-Creek language and the identical words ..
are sung and used by the Eucheas, Caddoes, Comanches,
Sac and Fox, and many other tribes in Oklahoma.

One Indian man, Willie Harjo, Hanna, Oklahoma, says
that he has heard it said that the dance originated in
the following manner: "As was the custom, some Indians
were taking the herbal medicine. These medicines are
for the purpose of internal cleansing and warding off
many of the illnesses. It was at the time when everyone
was sitting around and everyone was getting drowsy that
one of the members jumped up and suggested that all join
in a dance and make merry." Opunka hadjo was the name
that this particular man suggested and these dances are
often referred to by that name and also Stomp Dance.