

STRAND, HARRY

INTERVIEW

#9375

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

Field Worker's name Ophelia D. Vestal.

This report made on (date) December 2, 1937.

1. Name Mr. Harry Strand.

2. Post Office Address Oklahoma City.

3. Residence address (or location) \_\_\_\_\_

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month \_\_\_\_\_ Day \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_

5. Place of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Name of Father \_\_\_\_\_ Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Other information about father \_\_\_\_\_

7. Name of Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Other information about mother \_\_\_\_\_

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 12.

Mr. Harry Strand, who gave this interview wrote this article when he was Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce at Lawton. His original manuscript is in the Public Library at that place.

Ophelia D. Vestal,  
Investigator,  
Dec. 2, 1937.

An Interview With Harry Strand,  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

I-See-0, a Kiowa Scout.

I-See-0 was a religious old man. He did not worship in the common and accepted ways of the white man, but he too, had his communion with his Creator. He was always a leading figure in the Peyote rituals. I-See-0 thought in some ways that the white man was intolerant when it came to religion. For many years the Indians held their Peyote rituals without interference, then some one brought a bill before Congress which would have put the taboo on this ceremonial. The Peyote rituals derives its name from the peyote plant which the Indians dry and eat at their ceremonials.

Peyote, sometimes called Mescal buttons, is the dried flowering top of the peyote cactus, a small low growing plant which grows abundantly in the Rio Grande Valley and Mexico.

The Peyote buttons are from one inch to an inch and a half in diameter, about one fourth or three eights in thickness, with a convex undersurface. The button is hard when dry, and becomes soft when moistened. It is of a bitterish taste, and sometimes the root is used but preferably the top just about the root.

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The commercial name in English for this drug is pe-yo-te, which is an adapted form of the Spanish spelling, pe-llo-te, which according to the Mexican variation in pronouncing is called pe-yo-te although written in Spanish "pellote". The name "mescal" is given to "peyote" the term "mescal" is also applied and more correctly to a distilled intoxicating liquor derived from an entirely different plant.

The use of peyote was learned from the Mexicans. It is used as a medicine and the afterward experiences of chewing this cactus is of a soothing effect to the nerves and acts like a drug if used too much. I-See-O said it had a harmful effect, but the Indians only used it at their formal ceremonials and never too much at these times. The Indians felt it was their duty to use the peyote as well as the white man used wine in his church.

The peyote rituals were to I-See-O as a communion with his Creator, but he considered it a cure for all human ailments.

I-See-O's daughter became paralyzed. Many of his friends advised him to take her to a hospital but she gradually grew worse. Then I-See-O called a Peyote

meeting. All night was spent in prayer and using of the peyote in the traditional manner.

Ever since the white man first came to America, it has been his desire to get the Indians to become more civilized. The younger Indians are losing the folk lore and customs of their people. They are learning the education of the whites and losing the tradition of their forefathers. Only the old men and women know the weird practices, ceremonies, and rituals of their own Pagan religion. The Indians were worshippers of nature and their religion had much beauty and poetry in it.

The Peyote ritual is probably one of their oldest and most familiar; hardly known, however, to the white man. People who did not understand these meetings have tried very hard to break such meetings up. Prohibitionists have tried to classify it with liquor and drugs.

The Indians have been very anxious to convince the white man that there wasn't any harm in these meetings. The Kiowas have frequent meetings and prominent white men and their families have been invited to witness the celebrations.

At one time such meetings were held at Fort Sill by the Kiowas, where army officers and their wives were invited.

For days and days the Kiowas planned the meeting. From morning until night they busied themselves in the construction of their tepees. Not until late in the afternoon of the set day would the performance start.

The sun was slowly setting in the west when the visitors first noticed the glimpse of the tabernacle. The Indian women were still working on the tepee. The Indian women have all the work to do.

Some clay was carefully moulded into the shape of a crescent with its ends facing the east, marking the altar of worship.

The Indians face the east when they prayed. When the mound was completed, they arranged the interior of the tepee.

By this time it was dusk. The Indians were watching toward the Heavens for the fire chief to appear to perform his duty of keeping the fires burning all night at the altar. When the fire had been started, from the midst of the group arose the preacher, who had been chosen

the leader of the services. He was dressed in buckskin costume beautifully decorated with beads and feathers. He blew a whistle which had been made of a bone of an eagle's wing, announcing the beginning of the celebration.

The chief of the tribe took his seat and others such as second chief, walking always to the left of their chief, talking and laughing for fifteen minutes. Then the chief placed the bag of peyote beside him on the altar.

The conversation stopped. Dressed in the familiar drab of the American soldier, came I-See-O, the old Indian scout, the last of the faithful Red Men who had joined the legion under General Scott. Behind him appeared his son-in-law, White Fox, carrying his wife, Toh-mahdl, I-See-O's daughter. The treatments that had been given her, did her no good so they had turned to God for help. The limp body was placed on the ground near their chief and leaders.

The preacher stood, speaking kindly to the people, both Indians and the visiting white people. "Friends, we have come to pay homage to our Creator. He made Heaven and earth, the sun and the moon, and all there is; He who during the great war brought our sons back, safely and victorious".

Then the preacher took the tobacco in the beaded bag, made a cigarette, passed it on to his fellowmen. Then he passed the fire stick. Four puffs were taken together, representing the four winds.

Then the chief and all present took some wild sage from the inner edge of the circle--the wild sage, the emblem of purity--rubbed it on their faces and arms--this in perfection of the Peyote sacrament.

Then they started singing and beating the tom-tom.

"Friends, we have come to worship our God. May he implant tolerance in the hearts and minds of our white neighbors. May the peace of God always rule over us.

May Toh-Hahdi, the beloved daughter of I-Saa-O, regard her health and may the Peyote, now and in the future bring miraculous cures to the afflicted, and the diseased, and may we all live happily together."

Two dried peyotes were passed to each Indian by the chief. While each held the button in his mouth, the chief made the sign of the four winds and sprinkled dust on the fire. The fire chief fanned the embers until the large tepee was filled with smoke.



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The dust had been gathered in the shadow of the cedar, the evergreen which lives into eternity and as the smoke of the fire rose in a dense cloud above them, they each gathered some smoke in their fists and each blessed himself. As they inhaled the smoke of the cedar, their souls would become immortal and their lives would remain ever active and fresh as the branches of the cedar are ever virile and green.

Then came the hymns.

The first song by the chief.

In his left hand he held a beaded staff, in his right hand a gourd filled with pebbles. The gourd was covered with beads, a rosary on one side and a crucifix on the other.

While the assistant chief beat the tom-tom which was an iron kettle covered with buckskin, the chief shook the gourd keeping time with it. The rest of the group swayed back and forth keeping time with the beat of the drum. Four hymns were sung, then the chief passed his staff and gourd on to the left to his assistant. On and on to the person on the left of each drummer, each

one taking his turn and singing four hymns until the hours rolled by at last.

I-See-0 rose in his place, approached the fire facing the chief; raised his hands to the heavens and prayed while the others bowed.

"Because I worship you, believe in you, knowing you will help me, I call you Father, I ask of you to help my daughter to recover. I know you have helped others and pray help me in this hour of need. I am sure of your power to restore her health. I am old and please let me spend the rest of my days with my children. Bless the white people here and help them to understand us. The white man's religion is stranger than ours but they know there is a God above all. Help my daughter to recover and to stay with me".

It was now midnight, the tom-toms were growing weaker. The heads were lowered and eyes closed. The payote was having its effect; from outward appearance it showed no alcoholic effects, just repose, comfort and peace; peace with the neighbors, with nature and with God. The embers were dying, the last trace of consciousness was gone.

Suddenly came the shrill sounds of a whistle. The chief has given the signal, time for water. Up came the fire chief with a bucket of water. Stopping before the altar, he knelt, throw some cedar on the fire, blessed the water and called to the Peyote.

"It is you, Oh Peyote, whom I worship and paying homage to you means much to us. Help Toh-Hahdl. Help the white people and watch over us all".

The chief then approached the fire and knelt and prayed. "Oh, God Jesus, Oh, God Jesus, I thank you for enabling us to worship here in this way".

They prayed and smoked in the usual way they had done all night. It was becoming light and the persons who were thirsty could come get them a drink.

Then the chief blew his whistle, facing the east and offered prayer to the four directions and they started singing. A squaw carried water to the people.

The gourd, the feathers, the beads and the drum were placed in turn before the altar. The assistant chief then untied the buckskin from the drum kettle while the chief sang the last hymn. The kettle still having water in it, was passed to the Indians, they dipped the drum stick in it and each blessed himself.

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Several women now appeared at the tepee with the breakfast which consisted of water, squaw corn, fruit and a bowl of pounded cooked beef. They did not enter the tepee but passed the food to the fire chief. The chief blessed the food tasting of it from each dish.

When each in turn had tasted the food the chief took the bowls away.

This ended the ceremony of the Peyote. All of the Indians seemed to be in the best of spirits after the all night ritual. Gwen Toh-Hahdi, I-See-O's daughter, boasted that she was recovering from her ailment.

In the desire to get the facts recorded, I was careful not to try any of the Peyote myself.

During the month of January 1927, I-See-O became very sick with pneumonia and, though every possible assistance was given him by civilian and army doctors, and medicine men, his spirit joined the hosts of his comrades in the Happy Hunting Grounds at 1:00 A. M. on Friday, March 11, 1927.

Red men and pale faces joined in paying a last respect to I-See-O, at the little Indian mission near

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Fort Sill. Silence was prolonged through the services with only the voice of the missionary and a Comanche and Kiowa interpreter, and raising voices of the audiences in hymns, but as the body was taken from the church, wails and lamentations arose, with the Indians covering their faces with blankets.

Long after the services the Kiowas mourned the loss of their wise man and leader; the Comanches wailed over the loss of one of their good friends, and the whites quietly mourned the loss of one of the outstanding servants of the white race. Soldiers and civilians mingled with the Indians who mourned and their ~~eyes~~ eyes.

The Reverend Mr. J. I. Reid, a missionary, conducted the services with a nephew of I-Soo-O's, George Hunt, as interpreter for the Kiowas and White Parker, son of Quannah Parker, as interpreter for the Comanches. The Kiowas occupied the right side of the church, the Comanches were on the left side. Others at the rear of the church. Following the traditions of his tribe, the Reverend Mr. Hunt praised I-Soo-O very much. "He is like a shock of corn gathered in old age", he said.

Military funeral services for the Kiowa Indian were held the next day at the old Post Chapel at Fort Sill. The chapel was filled, a large number being Kiowa and Comanche Indians. At the conclusion of the services the Kiowa Indians sang in their own language a song composed by one of the tribesmen.

As an indication of the respect and esteem in which the old scout was held throughout the army, it is interesting to note that in addition to the presence of Brigadier General Irwin, commandant of the Field-Artillery School, two other Brigadier Generals were present-General Frank McCoy and General Alston Hamilton.

Taps for I-See-O sounded in the military cemetery at Fort Sill in the presence of several hundred army officers, soldiers, civilians and Indians. Bugle strains that announced the body of I-See-O was asleep forever although his soul might be scouting the realms of another life, were preceded by volleys discharged over his grave by a firing squad and "Nearer My God, To Thee" by the band.

After the closing prayer by Chaplin Diebert, the white friends left but the Indians, in accordance with their custom, remained to lament the death of one of their tribe.