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BUCKLEY, HENRY

INTERVIEW

#12097

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ORIGIN AND USE OF EARLY MUSICAL
INSTRUMENTS

An interview of Henry Buckley, age 60,
Alabama tribal town (tulwa), Weleetka,
Oklahoma.

Billie Byrd, Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History
11-11-37

There has always been some musical instrument to accompany the songs, dances and other ceremonies of the early Indians. Many of the instruments were created from ideas furnished by the fables which served as one sort of entertainment by and for the Indians. The fables usually related to some of the wild animals and they were told by the older Indians so that the younger Indians could grasp the meaning within a fable and use it to their advantage. It was both as an instruction and reproof.

The fable telling took up the leisure time of the Indians and was purposely to establish and create an air of friendliness among all at the gatherings of which the Indians are always fond of. The fables could be told until late in the night but it was at

during Christmas night and New Year's Eve that this fable telling took up all the night. They believed that it was a great wrong for anyone to sleep at Christmas time. The stories were told in a comical way but there were stories that were sad and serious but any one listening to the teller seriously could grasp its meaning and the moral contained and use it for benefit. Perhaps a great many of the old early day Indian leaders arose to power from having heeded the morals as he listened to the elders talking.

This is a fable of how the gourd fiddle, one of the early musical instruments used by the Indians was first originated:

There were once a rabbit and a wolf that were the best of friends. They shared with one another anything that they had and anything they would kill. They had killed a deer one time and were busily engaged in cleaning and preparing it to enjoy the feast on deer meat. The deer was large so that the rabbit and wolf became exhausted and worn out from their labors so they decided to take a nap and rest. It was not long before the rabbit awoke and he proceeded to go ahead

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and enjoy his part of the best part of the deer which was the meat without so much as waking the wolf who was supposed to be his best friend. When the wolf awoke, he didn't know what had become of the meat because he couldn't suspect such a good friend as the rabbit depriving him of his share of the feast when he had helped to kill the deer and prepare it, too. The rabbit had enjoyed such a good feast that he felt very good and was in such fine spirit that he wanted to sing. He had a gourd fiddle upon which he strummed to accompany the song which he began to sing, "I ate the meat, I ate the meat, Brother wolf ate the guts, Brother wolf ate the guts!" The wolf was rather sore because he had to eat only the leavings and he was in low spirits so that he did not quite catch the words which the rabbit was singing and he gruffly asked, "Brother rabbit, just what were you singing?" The rabbit in a timid voice began to sing, "I ate the guts, I ate the guts, Brother wolf ate the meat, Brother wolf ate the meat."

It has always been believed that an idea for the

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gourd fiddle which was in considerable use by the Indians at one time originated from this fable. The large part of the gourd was hollowed out and cleaned. Cat gut strings were fastened to one under end of the gourd, the strings brought back over to the side that was to be the top over a bar piece that was placed near the hole made in the gourd when it was cleaned out, the strings were strung to the small handle part of the gourd and fastened. Another small bar was placed someplace along the handle under the strings and the fiddle was completed. As the player picked on the fiddle strings, the sounds produced seemed to sound like the cries of a cat but it was an instrument that was used to furnish music that was enjoyed by the Indians. When other instruments began to be in use, these gourd fiddles gradually began to be put out of use but were used probably up to 1379.

At the large gatherings, entertainments, festivals or the fiddle dances that were so common during the winter months, this gourd fiddle was a popular thing. The fiddle dances always drew large crowds as feasting was in progress all day long. Preparations for feasts

took up the mornings and the dances would often begin sometime during the afternoon to be in progress all night. The table would be ready for anyone who wished to eat at all those hours.

All would not be the best harmony for all at the entertainments because disagreements and arguments would arise which started fist fights and probably someone would get hurt or killed. Tribal town members would take the side of the person being harmed, if he was a member of their town, and would try to get revenge. These things led to unfriendly feelings of one town or more against one another.

The following is a fable from which, it is believed, that the idea for the ceremonial dance grounds were first had:

A council of all the large animals including the bears, wolves, elephants and deer as well as others was held in some woods. These large animals are said to have been the only ones that had fire for use in their ceremonial grounds.

A meeting of all small animals that were not in with the large animals was called to work out a way

to obtain some of the fire from the large animal fire. It was a question of who was the braver and the rabbit was the first to volunteer to try to get some of the fire. This was settled and the rabbit, being small, covered himself with some sticky stuff and set off on his mission in the direction of the large animal settlement.

When he arrived at the large animal settlement the rabbit just laid around near the dance which was in progress. Two of the large animals were going around the council circle in the search for a leader of the next dance when they spied the rabbit. They asked him if he could lead and he answered that he could although he was not feeling so well. The two large animals announced to the other large animals that a visitor was going to lead and most of the large animals gathered around to see who the visitor could be and where he would be from.

The rabbit began to lead the dance. As he sang and danced, he used all kinds of actions, leaps and bounds as he led the dance. He kept getting closer

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and closer to the fire without seeming as if he was up to anything. He made advances as if to pick up the fire but kept up until all at once he picked up the fire in his hands which immediately stuck to his fingers. He made as if to rub it off with his head but it stuck there so that he rushed under the large animals and ran away from the dance grounds with the large animals in pursuit.

The rabbit dodged in and out of the grass and thickets and setting fire to everything dry that fell in his way by the fire that was stuck to his head. He left the large animals and lost them as he zig zagged in the woods and the fire and smoke that he caused checked the pursuit from the large animals.

That was the way in which the fire was distributed to other animals and made public. The idea for dancing around the fire for the ceremonial dances is thought to have been obtained in this way. That was the many instances in which the Indians obtained their many ideas.

(Note: No change is made in diction in Billie Byrd's manuscript since his interpretation of interview is typically Indian-Ed)