

Notice of Copyright

Published and unpublished materials may be protected by Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S. Code). Any copies of published and unpublished materials provided by the Western History Collections are for research, scholarship, and study purposes only.

Use of certain published materials and manuscripts is restricted by law, by reason of their origin, or by donor agreement. For the protection of its holdings, the Western History Collections also reserves the right to restrict the use of unprocessed materials, or books and documents of exceptional value and fragility. Use of any material is subject to the approval of the Curator.

Citing Resources from the Western History Collections

For citations in published or unpublished papers, this repository should be listed as the Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

An example of a proper citation:

Oklahoma Federation of Labor Collection, M452, Box 5, Folder 2. Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

CAPPS, SARAH.

INTERVIEW

12175

351

BIOGRAPHY FORM

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

352

CAPPS, SARAH. INTERVIEW

12175

Field Worker's name Grace Kelley

This report made on (date) November 26, 1937 1937

1. Name Mrs. Sarah Capps (Mrs. Robert Capps)

2. Post Office Address Dewar, Okla.

3. Residence address (or location) On top of mountain northeast of Dewar.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year 1980

5. Place of birth Illinois

6. Name of Father Louis Kellogg Place of birth Illinois

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Jane Beach Place of birth Illinois

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 _____.

Investigator, Grace Kelley,
November 13, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. Sarah Capps (Mrs. Robert Capps)
Dewar, Oklahoma.

When I was a girl, or young lady, I lived with my father because my mother was dead. We had a little house on Andy Frazier's place. Andy Frazier was a Choctaw police who had a Cherokee wife and daughter. The daughter and I were together almost all of the time. We couldn't talk each other's language but we had a kind of sign language that was easy to understand. We both learned nouns from the other but never did get to talking fluently. Frazier was away from home almost all the time and arrested Indians, negroes and white people. The whites were usually arrested for selling furs and stealing cattle.

He had separate grounds for every kind of entertainment, and each was quite a way from the other. There was a stomp ground a half mile from the house in a good grove. These dances weren't named at that time so they were just called "Stomp Dances."

-2-

There was the ball ground where the men played on a glade or prairie. I didn't like those games for there was always somebody getting crippled or nearly killed. It was like cattle fighting over feed. They made a score like basketball but used ball-sticks instead of just the hands.

Then they had a place where they had old fashioned camp meetings. Traveling preachers would come and they had interpreters. They were very strict during these meetings. Everyone had their own camps where they cooked and ate but the best friends or more important persons stayed at Frazier's house.

The Indians used more cowhides, deer hides and robes of skins than quilts to make their pallets with, some had real large shawls. The men wore breech clouts and some had shawls, also. Nearly every Indian woman wore a shawl and if she had a baby it was tied or strapped on her back with it. They surely looked cute with their little heads bobbing and their black eyes shining. It's queer that everyone was so particular about having sufficient clothing on but we never thought anything

-3-

about these Indians being nearly nude. It was just as natural as looking at a statue or an animal.

Every Saturday they had a social and we surely worked to get ready for it. We made lots of Tom Fuller. We put some corn in the Tom Fuller blocks, added a little water to keep it from scattering when we hit it with the pestle. We beat corn until our arms felt like they would break. Then it had to be shaken just right to make the grits jump over the edge of a riddle or basket. The corn was cooked until it was about half or three quarters done. While we girls were getting the corn ready the boys killed a shoat or big hog which was added to the corn and cooked until tender. This was cooked the same day that the social was that night.

Another dish we had was made by cooking corn just like hominy but don't use salt. We poured buttermilk over the hominy and let it set two or three days.

If the tables were in the house there were three or four of them. If it was warm weather they were out doors and if put end to end making one table it would be two hundred feet long, and they were covered with

white table cloths. They had china dishes and real spoons but they were only used on special occasions. They had wooden dishes that had been hollowed out of a block of wood and horn spoons. Cow horns were sawed in two, lengthwise, making two spoons. They were boiled a long time until soft. Then they were scraped until clean and white. While they were hot they were cupped and shaped, then when they were cold they held their shape. They had over a hundred of these. The most important persons were given these wooden dishes and horn spoons until they ran out, then the children and people of less importance were given the "store dishes."

Dances.

The men would walk up on one side in a line and the women walked up in the same way from the other side. The ones at the head of the line walked out facing each other. They do not touch each other but dance until tired out. Then they went to the foot of the line to sit down and talk. The next ones in line walk out and dance-- and so on. They didn't do the waltz as white people did.

Sick Dance.

Everyone went to the sick person's home like there

-5-

was to be a "social." A fire was built about fifteen feet in front of the front door. The sick person's bed was pulled to the door in such a way that the sick person could see the fire. Stakes were driven into the ground from the fire to the door and strings tied to these stakes making a lane. The Indians danced around the house and fire, but did not cross the stakes, all night. The sick person was better by morning or was given up-- and usually died. The medicine man was a very busy person all during the night. He gave orders to the other Indians, keeping the line right. He burned some herbs in the fire and walked down the lane from the fire to the patient. Never was I allowed in the room but I believe he put something on her like anointing with olive oil. He used herbs from the woods, wore terapin shells that rattled when he moved, and sang some song.

The first time somebody started to cross the lane he was warned not to cross it as that would kill the curing power of the medicine. If he crossed it he would be shot but everyone knew their rules and I never

-6-

knew of anyone having to be shot, but I don't doubt for one minute that they would shoot the person who broke the rule.

War Dance.

There was a fire built like a brush heap. They painted up and put feathers in their braided hair and danced around the fire all night long. One cause for this dance was when the Government took their land away from them.

Stomp Dances.

Whenever the people were run down and sick, they had their dances. Now they call them the Green Corn Dance, then they called it stomp dance. The medicine man would fix up some medicine from herbs like black tar and everyone took it. I wouldn't take it though but I don't believe it would have hurt me: except I don't like to take medicine.

Arrows for the Bows.

They pulled the gristle from an opossum's tail and used it like thread to wrap some feathers on a stick to make the arrow go straight. The spikes were made from flint rock. They had a chisel and hammer at that time to make them with. They had some poisoned arrows put away

-7-

and were very particular that no one got them by mistake as just a scratch from one would kill a person.

Hitching Ground.

They were very particular about odors so had a regular hitching place a good way back from the house and the horses were always put there, no matter what kind of meeting was taking place.

How Some Learned English.

I was told that the Indians who could talk English had learned from their colored slaves. Some of these slaves stayed with them after the Civil war. The ones who were bought from white people could talk English, learned the Choctaw language and made good interpreters besides teaching their masters.

Smoke House and Butchering.

The smoke-house was a log house. They had benches in there that were made of split logs. Two or three trees were cut open and fastened together making a flat top about four feet wide. All the splinters had been smoothed off and the bark removed. The top was smooth and white from scouring. They bored holes slanting in the

-8-

under part and made legs to go in these holes to hold the table up. They had benches to sit on that were made the same way. Shelves were made of the split logs and fastened when they were building the house. Split logs went the full length of the house about the fifth log and were put in just like the wall logs except they protruded inside the house for a shelf instead of being even with the other logs.

The men and boys drove the hogs up out of the woods and butchered what they wanted and then turned the others out again. They brought the meat in and some of it was stacked on the table and salted. Later, it was smoked. We had to strip the entrails and wash and dry them to put in the soft soap.

The boys did the rough and heavy work but we had to take care of the cows--about like white farmers now.

Ferryboat of South Canadian.

Old man Merian Yates ran the ferryboat on the South Canadian River where the Frisco Bridge is now. Once we wanted to go across the river to Francis to get some groceries but the river was up four feet. The ferry

-9-

was boxed in so that there was no danger of the wagons rolling off and there was a hitching place to fasten the horses so the men decided they could make it across. The cable broke. There is a bend in the river that causes a whirl in the water or current and the boat was washed down stream and toward the same bank we got on from. The men had a hard time getting the boat where they could unload, and just as everything was safe another big rise came and brought trees and things down the river. It would have been terrible if we hadn't gotten out just when we did. They never did get all of the cable out. We went home and ate cornbread until the river went down.

Working on the Railroad.

This was our home when my husband worked on that railroad. Of course, it was just a camp for they kept moving on as the road advanced. We had a log house that had one door but didn't need a window for there was no chinking between the logs. There were some things against the wall where the bed was to keep the rain off of it but even then it wasn't very agreeable when it rained. Our stove was a camp-fire in the middle

CAPPS, SARAH

INTERVIEW

12175

- 10 -

of the floor and the smoke went out wherever it wanted to, between the logs. Babies were born in homes like these.

There were saloons just across the line in old Oklahoma. The men called that the Corner Saloon as it was right in the corner of Oklahoma across the South Canadian River from us. The men would go over to get Rock and Rye whiskey for medicinal purpose, get a drink before they started home and before they got home they were mocking the Indian Stomp Dances and the whiskey didn't do the wives any good as medicine for they didn't even see the bottles.