

FIFE, SANDY

SECOND INTERVIEW.

#12381

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Investigator, Grace Kelley,
December 13, 1937.

Interview with Sandy Fife,
Dustin. 3 miles south and
3 east of #32 School.

Born About 75 years ago.
On Wolf Creek.

Parents Artussee Harjo, Mouth of
Deep Fork.
Nancy, Indian Territory.

Story of Punishment of Converted Indians.

It was against the Tribal Law for any of the Indians to go to meetings held by the Reverend Mr. Buckner, a traveling Baptist Missionary. I do not know the years when this took place but it was before the Civil War and I can only remember having known one of the persons punished. She was Sallie, the mother of Sam Logan. She and Sam are both dead now.

Several were whipped at the same time that she was whipped and for a long time others were whipped. Sallie was kneeling down, praying, while she was being whipped with some elm or hickory sprouts about the size of my finger.

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The committee of the Council met after this had been going on for quite a while and decided that their punishment was doing no good and that this new religion seemed to be doing no harm. These men had not been converted themselves though. They passed a rule to establish a religious meeting place and anyone who wanted to could meet, be converted, and carry on the work. They saw that these Indians were trying to do right and that it was a good thing. That was when The Big Arbor was established.

Religion of the Stomp Indian.

There is an old legend that all the old Indians believed. There have always been prophets and there still are prophets among the Indians. The word Stomp Ground means "Big House." God gave them the Big House and the medicine and told them how to use it.

They obey the Old Testament much more closely than the more modern ones who have been converted but lots of persons would not understand nor sympathize with them. They believed in Heaven and believed that they would go there after death.

The reason that they did not want their women to go to the new church was that they thought it was a Church for the

white people and not for the Indian. They wished not to lose these things as they considered them good and sacred as they had been handed down through their prophets.

Their dances were to get care for the coming season or undertaking. They believed that if they were not careful to observe the rules there would be an epidemic in the tribe.

A person who had helped to dig a grave was not allowed to come near the bed of a sick person for fear that a grave would have to be dug for that person.

They were very careful that their women should stay "clean."

They were very careful not to eat roasting ears before they had taken medicine, nor to let a person who had eaten of it to touch their dishes, spoons or dipper as that person was "unclean."

Rating of Towns.

Tuckabatchee Town is spoken of as 'The Mother of the Muskogee Nation and is first.

Arbeca is second, Cussetah is third and Coweta is fourth.

Their number shows their importance in the tribe. Each gathers at his own town but no two towns meet on the same date so they can all visit the other towns. They do not take medicine when visiting unless they want to and then it is taken by permission.

Tuckabatchee Sacred Plates.

When the Muskogee Indians came from Alabama they brought everything that was important and these things were very important as they concerned the medicine and the medicine was the most important of anything to them.

These plates are earthen or of baked clay and they are kept at Tuckabatchee Town all the time. There is a little log house about four feet long that was built especially for them.

There are two sizes. The ones that are about eighteen inches in diameter are called Micco Harnega, and Red Root is the medicine used in them. The Indian that has been careful not to eat the Green Corn is allowed to eat from these.

The others are about six inches in diameter. The Barsa is a lily-like plant that grows by the roadside. It is baked

or boiled and makes a very bitter medicine. The ones who have dug a grave or eaten green corn wait until the others have taken their medicine and are through then they take their medicine and use these plates.

A certain man takes care of these plates and also takes care of the fire.

Indian Stomp Meetings.

These Green Corn Dances are held either in July or August. For four days the Indians fast and take medicine. The next four days they eat "white food" which is just flour and water with no salt nor other seasoning. Some of them take a lighter medicine and wash their faces in it but they do not take as much as before. They have their dances and later have a ball game, then break camp.

Indian Ball Games

There are two different kinds of Indian ball-games. The one that they play here at the town is played by both women and men. The other is the matched game, played by picked men.

They have a pole with a horse head or some kind of skull, or a fish that has been cut out of a board on the top of the pole. The men use sticks but there is no medicine on

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them. The women catch and throw the ball with their hands instead of with the sticks. The ball has to be thrown and has to hit the skull for a score. There is no set score for this game. They just play until they get tired and quit with the ones having the highest score winning. The women try to tear the clothes off the men to hinder them from throwing straight. It is a very rough game but not a dangerous game. If a person gets hurt playing, it is an accident.

Matched Game.

This game is the next thing to a war. When the Town King wants to have a match game with another town he calls the citizens to come to the town for a dance at a certain time. The King has already decided to have the game and when they get there he announces that he would like a ball game with a certain town. They set a date and yell and dance all night. Some men are appointed to go to the King of the other town with the challenge.

If the King of the other town accepts and agrees on the date to play, all the towns have spokesmen who agree where to camp and where to play ball. They don't play ball at

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their towns nor camp there just preceding the game. The date is named by the number of suns not by days.

Then they come back and choose men to play--they always pick the best men and the number is agreed upon by both towns and different games might have a different number of players but both towns of a certain game have the same number.

When one town wants to tell the other something they have runners to take the message as none of one camp are allowed to go to the other camp except these runners.

The morning of the game they come back to their own camp and make their report. The goal posts are taken to the place where the game is to be and set up by the town it belongs to. Then they dance around it and yell. Next is the ceremony in the middle of the field.

These goal posts are similar to the football goals but the game is more like basketball except they use sticks instead of their hands and the ball is much smaller.

The teams draw up facing each other in the middle of the field and lay their ball stick down. A spokesman has been appointed to give them their last instructions as

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to the rules. He sends them to their positions: guards and forwards for the goal posts and centers--they are to stay in their places when playing. The same man throws up the ball and the game is started. The side that throws the ball through the goal posts twenty times makes the score of twenty and wins the game.

Several men have been appointed on both sides to referee the game and it is their duty to stop any fights that may start if possible. Sometimes they wrestle instead of fighting.

The medicine that they have taken before the game seems to keep them from getting hurt as much as they would have been hurt without it but even then they are pretty well beaten up and cut up before the game is over. I have never known of anyone being killed but plenty of arms and ribs have been broken and there have been scalp wounds four or five inches long. One man was hit between the eyes with the end of the ball sticks.

Square Name Clan

When a young man takes his first medicine as a man at a Green Corn Dance, he is given a nickname.

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There are three arbors for officers of the town. One of them is the King's arbor.

If the Henneha Clan on the South side have a boy that they want named, they pick the name they want. Sometimes the name is that of a bird or animal or sometimes a boy is named by his actions while he is taking the medicine. Harjo is my father's name and means that he acted drunk, crazy or funny while he took the first medicine.

They go to the arbor on the east- Tusknagee- and hold a conference. A certain man calls the boy out by the new name. This man is the "Caller" and the name is long drawn out. The name I remember is Ho-dunul-ga Ya hoo laaaaa (Hodulga Yahola). He goes to that arbor and to those clansmen. Then he is recognized by that name by the King who gives him a gift of tobacco and after that he is always known by that name.

Airplane Foretold.

Talla Masseur Chisee (means Rat in Creek) was an old Indian who died at the age of a hundred and twenty-eight years. He has been dead for four years. He has told us many times of a legend that he couldn't understand at first.

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When he was a child he heard the old people telling that a prophet had told that some day there would be queer things in the air like ships but not exactly like them. This was foretold before the whites came here.

He understood what was meant when he saw the first airplane.