

GRAYSON, AARON

INTERVIEW

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## CELEBRATIONS

An interview of Aaron Grayson, freedman  
of Hitchita Town (tulwa) Okemah, Okla.

Billie Byrd, Interviewer  
Indian-Pioneer History  
9-10-37

There was an annual celebration held each year from the period from 1870 on up until the early part of 1900, which was held by negroes and freedmen. The white people observed Independence day on July 4th, while the colored people observed the Emancipation day on August 4th. The observance of this Emancipation proclamation was mainly for and by negroes and freedmen yet the Indians and whites were welcome to attend the celebrations.

There were always good times because no one became drunk, quarrelsome or tried to pick a fight but only a feeling of good comradeship was felt <sup>by</sup> all who participated in the events. Of course, the Light-horsemen and the United States marshals were present to check any trouble and to keep peace and order. Many new acquaintances and lasting friendships were often made at these gatherings.

When a place was chosen where the celebrations were to be held, an American flag was set up and a cannon

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placed nearby which was fired at certain times.

When the day of the celebration drew near, the best <sup>most</sup> and highly spirited horses were taken care of by being well groomed and fed to have them in fine shape and rested up to ride that day. The saddles were all decorated with ornaments and fringes which were draped down on both sides of the horse. The rear part of the horse were mostly covered by heavy fringing and sometimes these fringes were decorated with German silver.

The Indian men who rode horses wore hat seemed to be fancy costumes but they were the clothes that were being worn in the everyday life. There was a coat which was made of fancy printed calico. These coats were not only worn during the celebration but all the time. They were highly and fancy trimmed by very bright and vari-colored material, had a large cape, <sup>and</sup> collared heavily trimmed. The sleeves just above the elbow length were further ornamented with colored ribbons which hung in streamers. The trouser legs were both gathered above the knees with ribbons and tied into a bow. If a ribbon was not used, the trouser leg was stiffly starched.

When the day of the great celebration arrived, the people did not come poking along one by one but they came in a group or by bands such as the Bruner band, Tokpafka band, etc. These people had assembled at one of the tribal towns from where they had come to the celebration as early as they could. They came on horses at a gallop, laughing, joking and yelling and were heard miles away before they finally came to the chosen place of the event.

When these groups reached the place of the celebration, the band would circle around the flag pole and the cannon<sup>was</sup> fired off which was a sign for the people to take off to one side, for the other band to march around the flag pole and the cannon fired off again.

There were always cheering words for<sup>or</sup> one another of the participants and friendly greetings from friend to friend.

A queen was often chosen for this occasion by the majority vote of the people and there were always several girls running for this title. My sister was once elected queen. The queen was crowned with a crown made of silk material. The elected queen was given

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a divided riding skirt which had been made out of calico and the best decorated horse, complete with saddle and other accessories, was donated to the chosen queen to ride that day. The queen was free to ride anywhere she wished but there were two mounted attendants always at her side whose duties were to help the queen mount or dismount on and from her horse and in any way assist the queen even when a runaway occurred.

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It was mostly the women who attended to the fixing - the barbecue while the idle ones spent their time riding to and back to a certain place and in exchanging jokes, telling tales and other loud and boisterous fun.

When the refreshment hour rolled around it was then that the Indians showed why they were present because they had come for the eats mostly. At the close of the day, everyone felt that this was a day that had been well-spent in good fellowship. At the end of the day, the different groups left for their homes with as much banter as they had gathered.

These celebrations have been held in Wetumka and Wewoka vicinity and the last event was held at

Tuskegee, a country trading store north of Okemah in 1902.

Many of the early day hunters went to the Arbuckle Mountains near Fort Arbuckle to hunt mountain goats and small game which was plentiful there. The hunters would make camp and stay for a week or longer, or until the hunting desire was filled.

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