

LEGEND AND STORY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma.

Field Workers name Nannie Lee Burns

This report made on (date) May 3, 1937

1. This legend was
secured from (name) Mary Virginia Spicer Whitecrow
address, Gen. Del., Miami, Okla.

This person is female Seneca Indian.

If Indian, give tribe Half Seneca.

2. Origin and history of legend or story memory

3. Write out legend or story as completely as possible.

Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form.

Number of sheets attached 12.

THE WHITECROWS.

Interview with Mary Virginia Spicer Shitecrow, Seneca.
By Nannie Lee Burns, Field Worker,
Indian-Pioneer History Project S-149
May 3, 1937.

My father, Joseph Spicer, a fullblood Seneca,
came many years ago with our people from Sandusky,
Ohio.

My mother was a white woman, Bettie Ivers
Spicer, whose father had a saloon in Baxter Springs,
Kansas, for a while before he returned to Sandusky,
Ohio.

My husband, Alfred Whitecrow, a fullblood
Wyandotte-Seneca, was born about three miles east
of Turkeyford, Okla., February 6, 1869. From 1809 to
1912 he was the Seneca Chief. His father was Jacob
Whitecrow of Sandusky, Ohio. His grandfather was
Jacob Whitecrow, His great grandfather, when a small
child, was taken by the Ohio Senecas and when shut up
made so much noise that they called him a white crow,
so he was given that name, though his real name was
Nicely, and his sons served in the Revolution under
the name of Nicely. They were half breeds.

My mother and father were married in Baxter Springs, Kansas, and settled near the Spicers, east of Turkey Ford.

I have an older sister, Malinda, who married John Dick and a brother, Micheal, who was chief of the Senecas for several years before my husband.

I was born April 5, 1872, east of Turkeyford.

Girlhood Days.

I liked school and went to the Wyandotte Mission school and from there, I was sent when sixteen to Wabash Indians, to a Quaker School where I stayed for three years afraid to come home for fear that they would not send me back if I came home. In the summer when school was out, I worked and one summer I made \$30.00 and that winter, I bought me pretty dresses and things I wanted. I had lots of money to spend.

My husband and I were sweethearts before I went. We had been raised in the same neighborhood and went to dances horseback together. After I returned, I worked in the home of Uncle Jerry Hubbard, the Friend's Missionary, and was married to Alfred at his home in Wyandotte.

(Uncle Jerry's comment on this marriage in "Forty Years Among the Indians" is "One Sabbath in 1892, I married Alfred Whitecrow and Mary Spicer, both Seneca Indians. She used to live with us and was a very good girl, always pleasant and jovial." We were married on March 20, 1892.

Early Life.

We went to live on our farm east of Turkeyford, where at first we had a small house but soon we built a six-room frame house with two front rooms upstairs, a large barn and other buildings. We raised corn and wheat, hogs, cattle and horses, chickens, etc., we had two good teams and a good wagon.

We traded at Seneca, Mo. I only went twice a year, each spring and fall, and we would spend a \$100. 00 and bring home a wagon load of food and clothing or rather most of it was goods to make things for the family. Here our children were born. They are: Mayo, served in the World War, first at Camp Travis and later in Wisconsin as Bayonet Instructor; he was in army 9 years. Walter, who was on boat out 3 days from New York when the Armistice was signed so was turned around and sent home.

The other children are, Gertie, Dona, Jake, Elsie, Perry and Howard, my baby, now 23 years old.

Seneca Indian Ceremonies.

My father died when I was nineteen. They had a Ghost Supper for him. At the funeral after a talk by Leader (Watson Whitewing), they cut big notch near head of casket to let the spirit out and put little bag of tobacco in his hand and at the funeral the leader gives out the date and place of the Ghost Supper to be held nine days after that date.

Before funeral, my father's sister come to our house and washed my mother's hair and combed it and tied a black ribbon around it at back of neck and let the hair hang down her back and dressed her in a black dress. She must wear this till the day of the supper and must not even comb her hair or go anywhere. On the day of the Supper, Aunt Clara Whitecrow Smith came and washed mother's hair again and this time she took off the black ribbon and combed it and fixed it like mother always wore it, and this time she put a colored dress on her to attend the supper. You cook lots of things and your kinfolks and neighbors come in and you have feast but you set table and put on it part of the things cooked.

This is covered up and left that night so that the spirit of the departed may have it to eat if he returns.

Here Mrs. Whitcrow laughed and said when baby of Sarah and Tom Armstrong died, they had Supper and the baby's part was left on the table. Some, who had been out opossum hunting that night, on their return not knowing of the feast, ate the food and the next morning the children said, "He did come back and he was hungry."

(SPRING THANKSGIVING)

Speaking of Feasts - we still have some of ours. Tomorrow on Sycamore, south and east of Wyandotte, at the stomp ground, we have our spring Thanksgiving Feast and Dance which is a prayer for rain for the growing crops followed by a War Dance by the men. The women, except the Pot Hangers or helpers, take no part in this. (The six Pot Hangers or helpers, who are women, meet and superintend the preparation and cooking for each feast. These women are chosen for life by the tribe and superintend the preparation of the food for all occasions and can be distinguished by their dress. Their hair tied by a ribbon, usually black at back of their neck and left hanging down. All have long hair, and when they

take part in the dances, they wear shawls around their shoulders, wear full long skirts and waists. Their aprons and skirts trimmed with many colored rows of narrow ribbon about 8 inches from the bottom of the dress. Noticeable is a vivid small red spot of color near point of cheek bone. Paint is supplied them and used only on tribal occasions). The Pot Hangers and some men will meet in the morning and cook the hominy and beef in a big iron kettle. About two o'clock, Watson Whitewing will talk and then pray. You want copy of prayer. Here it is in English, though he will talk in Indian:

SENECA THANKSGIVING PRAYER (SPRING)

"Now is the season of growing things.
Now we give thanks to our Creator.
Now we sprinkle tobacco on fire.
How smoke arises, it lifts our words to him.
Now we speak to Hahwenniyu, the great ruler,
The great life, one great Spirit.
Now he listens to the words of the people here assembled.

We thank him for the return of planting season.
We thank him that he has again permitted him to see it.
We thank him that we again take part in ceremony.
We thank him that he has given us the earth,
Our mother, from whose breast all things grow.

We thank him that he has given us seed to give back.
To our mother.

We thank him for rivers and waters that flow.
For herbs and plants, and all fruit bearing trees
and bushes that grow.
We thank him that our supporters of life-
Corn, beans and squash - fail us not.
That famine is not permitted to enter our lodge doors.

Continue to listen, Nah wenniyu; Again we speak.

We thank him that our old men and our old women,
Our young men and our young women and children are here.
We thank him that the eyes of the people are turned
To Hahwenniyu.

We thank him that the minds of the people remember
The great wisdom, the one Great Creator
Who makes all things to grow.
Now smoke arises, he has seen it.
Now we have spoken, he has heard it.

It is done, "Naiewhyie."

After the prayer, the hominy and beef are divided, each has a bucket or something to get his share. Then the dance, only the men take part, their bodies are bare to the waist and they usually paint the bare part different colors. They dance round fire. Some sing. They give men who dance tobacco. They buy tobacco, usually plug so big, also anything else that the people want to give the dancers. This dance, war Dance. I omitted in writing that at the beginning of the prayer that fine tobacco is sprinkled on the fire which is referred to in the prayer.

STRAWBERRY DANCE

Our strawberry feast and dance in May when the strawberries are ripe. Take two crates strawberries and make drink with water. After the address and prayer of Thanksgiving and sharing of the strawberry drink both men and women take part in the dance that follows.

BLACKBERRY DANCE.

In June, we have the blackberry dance when blackberries are ripe. Just like the Strawberry Dance, only use blackberries followed by dance.

GREEN CORN DANCE AND FEAST.

You remember Green Corn Feast last year. (It was the writer's privilege to be Mrs. Whitecrow's guest one day last year at the Green Corn Feast; I am going to have tent this year. You go and stay with me. You learn lots of things. This is their main ceremony of the year and is held each year in August at Bassets Grove (tribal property) two and a half miles southeast of Turkeyford. Here they have erected permanent buildings the main building is about 30 x 60 feet, the uprights are heavy timbers, with a row of supporting posts through the center longways and an opening in the roof for the escape of the smoke. Two rows of seats are around the edge, the inside row is under the roof and faces the center and only those belonging to the tribe are allowed to sit here but back of them is another row that they have provided for their friends and visitors. There is also another large building possibly 15 x 40 feet that is a bunk house which is screened and furnished with beds for sleeping purposes, but most of the families bring their own tents and stay on the grounds the entire time.

There are two clans, the turtle and the deer, commonly called thenorth and the south. I am turtle and belong to the north side. Alfred, he belonged to the south side and he took the boys with him. The girls went to the north side with me. Each family must put his tent either on the north side or the south according to the clan to which he belongs. This distinction is also observed in their seating in their assembly room where the ceremonies are held, and is very important in the Peach Seed Game as one side opposes the other. They have drilled a well only a short distance from the grounds is the beautiful Cowskin river where they go for a swim each morning, women and men separate.

On the Sunday preceding, most of the families gather and pitch their tents as this Sunday is called Lamp Day. Monday morning men go through the camp to each tent collecting fruits and vegetables that they have raised. These consist of beans, onions, apples, peaches, melons and various fruits and vegetables. These are piled in a heap near one end of the long room, thus showing the giver's thanks for the crops and fruits.

Meanwhile one or more beaves have been killed, the men supervising the killing. The Pot Hangers superintend the cooking of this which is put in small chunks and placed in the great iron kettles together with green corn that had been cut from the cob water added and cooked by a fire underneath the kettle. Usually by two o'clock the corn and beef are done and the fruit and vegetables are collected. They gather in the long room on the seat around the open space, facing the pole of fruits and vegetables and the center of the space. Then the tribal spokesman (Watson Whitewing) addresses the crowd in the Indian tongue. This is followed by the prayer of Thanksgiving during which a fire is built and at certain intervals he sprinkles tobacco on the fire, which fire is to carry their prayer to the Great Spirit. After this the announcements are made by him which includes the players for the Peach Seed Game.

This is followed by the "Naming of the babies" This includes any children who have been born since last year and the older ones who have not received an Indian name. Two men take part in this. The tribal spokesman and the singer.

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The child is usually given the singer by one of the Pot Hangers and, if it is a boy and small, carried in the arms of the singer to the Spokesman to whom one of the women have told the name desired and after he names the child, if small, it is carried in the arms of the singer around the spokesman while the singer sings.

If the boy is larger, he is led, not carried. If the child is a girl, it is the same except she is not carried round the spokesman but is returned after the naming to her parents. At the conclusion of this ceremony, some men, assisted by the Pot Hangers, divide and pass out to the members assembled the fruits, vegetables the corn and beef together with the broth for which each has provided himself with a bucket, pan, etc. Some of this may be eaten there but most of it is carried to their tents and is a part of their evening meal.

That night they dance around the fire. The north and south sides dance separately on their side till 12 o'clock after which they unite.

Early on Tuesday two of the officials, one from each side of the peach seed players, make the rounds of the tents collecting bets for the game. These consist of

any article, even clothing that the person may wish to bet on the game. After the bets are matched from the opposing side the game begins. There is a teller for each side and three players, which make eight in all. Four are chosen each year. The player who won the game last year opens the game this year. Beans are used as counters. Each side has 100 beans and each player when he starts is staked with five beans and must quit when he loses these. The seeds used are peach seeds, burned black on one side and left the natural color on the opposite side. These are filed smooth and the ones that Mrs. Whitecrow showed me had worn off the rough and looked as though they had been polished. These seeds are placed in a large wooden bowl and shaken. If five black faces are up the player scores a point, if all six he gets five points. This is continued each day, allowing time for the players to eat, till 4 o'clock. At night, each clan continue to dance separately for awhile after which join in a general stomp dance till about 2 AM. The game is usually won by Thursday though it has been known to last for a week. At the conclusion the bets are paid.

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Here Mrs. Whitecrow said, " Last year I won dress, Kimona, pair silk hose, long string of beads." Our side, the North, has won for the last five years. I play each year." That night in the dance, the clans are not separated. The day after the game ends is the War Dance which in its nature is really a Sun Dance. That morning, the dancers start from the east side of the grounds coming west and make a circle of the Stomp Ground, entering the Stomp Grounds from the east just as the Sun rises. The dance continues through the day and just as the sun is going down, the dancers leave the grounds going west out of sight and the dance for that day is over. The food stuff that has been given the dancers through the day is then divided among the dancers and they take their share to their tent.

The next and last day is a game of Indian football in which the women play against the men. That night they dance all night and the next day they break camp and go home and it is over for this year, thankful that they have food for the coming winter.

ADOPTION DANCE

Ever hear of the Adoption Dance? We don't have it any more. It used to be when you lost a father, mother, brother or sister, that you could select some one to take their place as Father, etc., known as your adopted father, etc. You had big supper prepared, invited your folks and friends and seat the adopted one at the table, and they had to eat something each time that people came to the table to eat. The adopted one takes no part in the dance, as it is given for him or her. "Were you ever adopted: "No, but I always wanted to be."

The Senecas still take a great interest in their native dances and the attendance is always good. Our rolls have never been closed and today we have over seven hundred members nearly five hundred more than when we came here. We moved to Miami in 1909 but my husband still continued as chief and was the county jailer at the Courthouse here for a long time.

LATER DAYS

He passed on three years ago. We had Ghost supper for him at his brothers. After the supper the wife is not allowed to go anywhere or take any part in any gathering for a year. "My, but you want to go places."

Mrs. Whitecrow was sixty-five last month and lives alone in a small two room house at 202 L St. NW in this city, Miami, but is visited daily by some of her children and the morning the writer visited her she was baking a peach pie for her son that she was expecting that night. She has had two light strokes and does not walk very well and complains that her memory is failing that she cannot remember as she used to and occasionally to some question would say, "I just can't remember."

With her passing will go one of the loved and respected of the older members of the tribe.