

METHVIN, J. J.

INTERVIEW

9541

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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Field Worker's name Lillian Cassaway.

This report made on (date) December 31, 1937

1. Name J.J. Methvin.

2. Post Office Address Anadarko, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 709 West Alabama.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 17 Year 1846

5. Place of birth Jeffersonville, Georgia.

6. Name of Father John Methvin. Place of birth Georgia.

7. Name of Mother Mourning Glover Methvin of birth Georgia

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 5.

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Lillian Gassaway.
Journalist,
December 31, 1937.

An Interview with J.J. Methvin.
Anadarko, Oklahoma.

The Kiowas were polytheists and animists. They defied all the powers of Nature and prayed to them in turn according to occasion. The old Indians did not believe in Heaven or Hell, but believed in transmigration. All night birds were animated by souls of the dead. Dreams were revelations that must be obeyed implicitly. They thought then and do yet that a person can be bewitched by making medicine.

The Sun is the greatest god of the Kiowas. They made sacrifices to him and each year a Sun dance was held. The buffalo, too, was held in reverence as was the peyote. The buffalo as an animal symbol of strength and the peyote as a representative of the sun in its shape and because of the button in the center.

Inside the medicine lodge the medicine was exposed during the whole time of the dance, which was four days, though the preparation for the dance took several days. The hunt for the buffalo, the women securing the center pole of the medicine lodge. Then the four days dance in which they neither ate, drank, nor slept.

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The center pole must be cut down by a captive woman, usually a Mexican, and the "tiame" was held ⁱⁿ so much dread and had so many taboos attached to it, that a Mexican, captured when a boy, was given to it for the special purpose of unwrapping it and setting it in place; then if anything went wrong the punishment would fall on the captive instead of the tribe.

T.C. Battey, who was with the Kiowas in 1873 and was a witness to the Sun dance at that time, describes the medicine lodge as follows; " The medicine lodge is situated nearly in the center of the encampment; is circular in form, and about sixty feet in diameter, having its entrance towards the east. It is built by support; around this and at nearly equal distance, are seventeen other forked posts, forming the circumference of the building. These are from twelve to fifteen feet in height and all of cottonwood. Small cottonwood trees are tied on the outside of these in a horizontal position, with ropes of rawhide, having limbs and leaves on them.

Outside of these, small cottonwood trees are placed in an upright position, thus forming a wall of green trees and leaves several feet in thickness in the midst of which many hundred spectators afterward find a cool retreat, where they

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can observe what is going on without making themselves conspicuous. Long cottonwood poles extend from each of the posts in the circumference to the central pole, and then limbs of the same are laid across these forming a shady roof one-third of the way to the center.

The central pole is ornamented near the ground with robes of buffalo calves, their heads up as if in the act of climbing it. Each of the branches above the fork is ornamented in a similar manner with the additions of shawls, calico, scarfs, etc., and covered at the tip with black muslin. Attached to the fork is a bundle of cottonwood and willow limbs firmly bound together and covered with a buffalo robe with head and horns so as to form a rude image of a buffalo. To this were hung strips of new calico, muslin, shrouding, both blue and scarlet, feathers, shawls, etc., of various lengths and qualities. The longer and more showy articles were placed near the ends. This image was so placed as to face the east. The lodge of the encampment are arranged in circles around the medicine house, having their entrance toward it and the nearest circle being some ten rods distant.

The ground inside the inclosure had been carefully cleared

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of grass sticks and roots, and covered several inches deep with clean white sand. A screen had been constructed on the side opposite the entrance by sticking small cottonwoods and cedars deep into the ground, so as to preserve them fresh as long as possible. A space was left two or three feet wide between it and the inclosing wall, in which the dancers prepared themselves for the dance, and in front of which was the medicine. This consisted of an Image lying on the ground, but so concealed from view in the screen as to render its form indistinguishable. Above it was a large fan made of eagle quills, with the quill part lengthened out nearly a foot by inserting a stick into it and securing it there. These were held in a spread form by means of a willow rod or wire bent in a circular form; above this was a mass of feathers concealing an image on each side of which were several shields highly decorated with feathers and paint. Various other paraphernalia of heathen worship were suspended in the screen among these shields or over them, impossible for me to describe so as to be comprehended. A mound had also been thrown up around the central post of the building two feet high and perhaps five feet in diameter. If at any time during the dance there was any blood

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shed, even accidentally, it was considered an evil omen and the dance was discontinued.

In 1890 the Kiowas made great preparations for the old Sun dance, but the Government had forbidden it because it was so barbarous, and was a prelude to the warpath. The agent had given his consent for the dance to go on if they would omit the objectionable part of the performance, but Washington officials ordered the dance stopped. Big Tree, the chief, declared that they had gone too far with the preparations to stop but was told that he would either stop it or fight. He said that he would fight and that night troops were ordered to Anadarko, and the next morning the Agency was full of soldiers. The dance was called off and no attempt has ever been made to have another.