

INDIAN FOLKLORE

From a manuscript found in the files of the late W. E. McGuire - now in possession of his sister, Mrs. W. B. Frederick, 119 N. Wheeling, Tulsa. Effie Jackson, Field worker, April 22, 1937.

THE BURIAL OF NELLIE SAUCY CHIEF.

(Fifty years ago)

The occurrence which the writer is about to relate, I think is of sufficient importance and interest that it will be worthy of printing. If it is considered not so, it may be consigned to the wastebasket and forgotten.

The occurrence relates to the death and burial of Nellie, the beloved daughter of Chief Saucy Chief and his good motherly wife. The death was on the 15th day of February, 1885, and the burial followed the next day, the 16th, making it fifty years ago last Saturday the 16th.

Nellie, together with a number of Osage boys and girls had been sent to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, to the Indian school which had been established there by Captain Pratt. This was perhaps the best organized Indian school that we have had in the United States, owing to

the great ability of Captain Pratt. There was only one objection to the school that could be offered from the Indians and people of this part of the country. The rigorous and severely damp climate there was not conducive to the good health of the Southern and Southwestern Indians. Consequently, Nellie, together with a number of other Indians from the Southwest, became afflicted with that dread and mortal disease of tuberculosis. She was sent home as quickly as possible after the discovery of her symptoms of her sickness but its ravages worked too fast and Nellie was a very sick girl when she arrived at home. She was taken to her father's home, about three miles northwest of Pawhuska, the home that had been the homestead of the family since the Indians came to this country, in '72.

Major Miles was the agent at the time and he and his good missionary inclined wife, Mrs. Miles, as was their custom in sickness, hurried out, or perhaps accompanied the person of Nellie to her home at that place and observed that she could not be well cared for there

and they asked of Saucy Chief that they be allowed to bring her to the school where the school matron, the nurses and the employees with their better equipment could administer the proper care.

There was a small hospital connected with the school but it was all occupied by patients and a place was made for Nellie in the sewing room of the main building that was well lighted with sunshine and was well ventilated but the ravages of the disease were too strong and Nellie lived only a few days and passed to the Great Spirit Land beyond.

As we all know it had been the custom for untold ages for the Indians to bury their dead on the summit of the surrounding hills and set them in an upright position and build stone walls around them that they might be protected from the ravages of wild beasts and set them upright that they might also see better, and better find their way to the Happy Hunting Grounds.

Major and Mrs. Miles being especially interested in the Saucy Chief family and Nellie, were opposed to the idea of such a burial for Nellie, so they sought

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and got permission of these two good people to give Nellie a Christian burial and deposited her body in the cemetery adjacent to the town.

Consequently Major Miles had one of the licensed traders to order a casket and Mrs. Miles, the matron and the sewing room employees at the school made a beautiful white robe for Nellie and thus she was prepared for her burial in the new way.

Men folk were scarce around the agency in those days and especially at the Government school. It became necessary that somebody open the grave. This was not an easy matter as it was a bitter cold day, the ground being frozen six or eight inches deep and about the same depth of snow on top of the frozen ground, it was necessary for us to organize what friends we had at the school in order that we might have the grave ready for interment and consequently the industrial teacher, Mr. Roberts, and the school teamster, Zack Reece, a Kaw Indian, and your humble servant, who was a teacher in the school at that time, went to dig the grave.

It was late in the afternoon because of condi-

tions of the weather before the grave was finished and the sun was ready to hide its face behind 'reservoir hill' when the procession arrived at the grave. The writer remembers how sad it was to Chief and Mrs. Saucy Chief to see the body of their beloved daughter consigned to the earth when it had been the custom to see them taken to the hills for burial.

Mrs. Saucy Chief, whose hair had turned white because of the frosts of many seasons, turned her wrinkled face with tearful eyes toward the setting sun and prayed that the Great Spirit, whom she had been taught to believe resided there, to give Nellie safe passage to the Great Spirit Land there to await the coming of her beloved parents and friends.

Thus ends the story of the death and burial of Nellie but not the mourning of her sad hearted parents who immediately went into the period of mourning in the usual way.

It was customary for the mourners to set a period of mourning to whatever period they saw fit.

Saucy Chief, as the father, thought that he should mourn until June, which he did. He donned a white sheet which is the only garment he wore except his moccasins and breech clout for the three and a half months of mourning. Thus began his fasting and prayers. As was their custom at the end of the mourning period they had their three day funeral or war dance as it was sometimes called which was to end the mourning period and with the exception of sending out their war party to take the scalp of the first individual they would meet in order to further appease the wrath of the Great Spirit.

On the morning of that last day of the funeral dance the writer missed some of his larger boys from the school room. In the afternoon I proceeded to the down town district to see if I could find out what had become of the boys who had disappeared from the school. Soon after reaching the foot of the hill, there was quite a commotion among the Indians and a few white people that were on the streets. On looking westward I discovered a wild looking bunch of

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riders coming in at full speed with the sides of their horses flecked with foaming perspiration caused from a long, hard run from some place. It developed that this was the war party which had been sent out to get the scalp which was to close the mourning period. I observed as the leader of these riders, Laban Miles, riding a beautiful black horse and to him was given the honor of carrying the scalp on the end of a pole and leading the warriors successfully into the camp, which was located where the Indian Camp still is located. I do not remember the names of the other boys of the school except Emery Gibson. but I found my boys the next day in school as usual. You no doubt will ask about the scalp. I will name the conditions, without naming the merchant who was the author of the plan. This merchant, wanting the good will of the Indians, by agreement had hid himself up Bird Creek and allowed the war party to capture his forelock, minus the skin which had formerly gone with the scalp. This was the best thing that could be done at this time because it was dangerous

to do as they had done in the past and seemed to work very satisfactorily and successfully.

When the scalp arrived at the camp the mourning period was over, their prayers had been offered, the sacrifice had been made, the scalp had been collected and everything was done to appease the wrath of the Great Spirit, that because of some offense of the family, had become aggravated and was liable to return if the full recompense had not been forthcoming.

The friends of Saucy Chief hurried to give him a bath and change his sheet that he had worn for more than three months, for good, clean, beautiful blankets, and cleanly body-wear throughout and also shaved his head in the manner to which he had been accustomed, and proceeded to furnish him with splendid food, all of which he partook of in a most greedy manner.

It was the impression of the writer that Nellie was the first fullblood to be buried in the cemetery, but Mrs. Fred Lookout informed me just recently that she thought there were two girls who had been buried previous to Nellie's interment but she could not give

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the names of the girls. One of them she said was the step-daughter of Governor Bigheart; she could not recall the name.

I want to say that along about this time Major Miles was taking some great forward steps in preparing for the education of the Indian. He had won the friendship of such men as Saucy Chief, Governor Strike Axe, Governor James Bigheart, Nom-pah-wal-la, Alvin Wood, and other chiefs of what is known as the little Osages. Most of the Big Hill Indians, sometimes called the Big Osages, led by Black Dog, were opposed to educating the young Indians. Major Miles, by his clever work, succeeded in getting the Osage Council, which was headed at that time by Governor Strike Axe, to pass a resolution for the compulsory education of the children of the tribe which were of school age.

The penalty that had the greatest effect in enforcing this order was the one authorizing the department to withhold^{payment} of any child of school age who was not attending a creditable school. It was remarkable that such a resolution could be passed at that early

date when only a few years before eight boys and girls who had been selected to go to Carlisle were recalled by the parents because of the propoganda which was circulated by those opposed to education to the effect that they would never see their children again. Later, however, Major Miles by the promise that they should have a letter from their children each week, succeeded in reclaiming these children and sending them away to school.

I have digressed to some extent from my story of Nellie in order that I might portray to those who are not informed of the great work done by Major Miles and his splendid wife while in the Indian service.