

Effie S. Jackson
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FOLKWAY AND FOLKLORE OF THE OSAGES

(From manuscripts found in the file
of the late W. E. McGuire-Pawhuska.
Now in possession of his sister,
Mrs. W. B. Frederick--119 N. Wheeling-
Tulsa).

"Out west from the present location of the city of Pawhuska, formerly the capital of the Osage nation, and now the county seat of Osage county, is a series of hills, covered with heavy timber and long grass.

After passing up the eastern slope of one of the highest of these hills and coming to the peak, it suddenly ends in a high bluff. There is a deep canyon, and a similar bluff rises from the other side, topped with a ledge of rock projecting out many feet from the earth beneath, denoting the work of the ages.

Between these two bluffs there is a small stream of clear water and a stretch of comparatively level land several hundred feet wide, up and down the stream.

Here was the old camping ground of the Osage Indians, composed of many clans.

The Osage Indians are divided into two groups.

One of these groups was composed of the warriors and the other group was known as the peace makers and governed by the principle of love. The peace-makers were the guardians of the womanhood of the tribe.

It has been more than fifty years ago that Soldier-chief, head of the warrior group of the Osages, called all of the clans together for a general council.

This memorable council was held on the ground above described and the story of the meeting never has been told before. It was told to the writer by a white woman who has worked among the Osage Indians for many years, doing research work, who was finally adopted by an Indian family, and thus learned most of the early history of the tribe, as well as many of the secrets.

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When the smoke of the early morning fires was curling into the blue canopy above and break of day could be gleaned over the eastern horizon, Soldierchief walked slowly from the camp and onto the bluff on the west side of the stream.

The tribal members were awakened by the death chant heard from the ledge of rock projecting from the top of the cliff.

Those who have heard it, say there is nothing more plaintive, more thrilling, more terrible than the death chant of the Indian.

There was a rustle in the camp below for the chant that was being heard meant trouble and that something very important was about to happen. Soldierchief stood there with his face turned to the skies and his long, black hair fluttering in the early morning breezes, hands outstretched, and the mournful, pathetic, plaintive, pleading chant coming from his lips.

He wore the Dragon Robe. This was a robe made of deer skin and the images of snakes worked into it by plaited strips of deer skin and painted yellow and red.

Suddenly the chanting stopped. The warriors were waiting, in silence near their tepees.

"Gather here, ye warriors of my tribe, for I have much to tell you," the old Indian warrior shouted from the hilltop.

The tribesmen all gathered about in the valley below. Faces were upturned and ears were strained to hear what was about to be spoken.

The old Indian stooped and was seen to raise a bundle above his head. It was the sacred bundle.

The sacred bundle is described as being about the size of an ordinary handbag. The outside was made of twisted and braided horse hair. This was wrapped over deer skin. Inside of this was a human hand and a bird.

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He began to speak and this is, in substance, what he said, according to the story told by one of the old Indian women who was present.

"Last night I had a vision. From across yonder hill I could hear the sound of hammers and the buzz of saws.

"Almost all we have has been taken from us. But still we have the grapes that grow along the streams, the black haws, the wild berries and a land to ourselves.

"But I saw the form of the white man coming into our land. I saw great buildings, made of mudstones and rock. Over yonder, and he is said to have pointed to the present location of Pawhuska, I saw the grim spectre of another race intruding upon our lands."

"Across yonder hills I could see women whose hair dropped from their heads, whose teeth dropped from their mouths, whose eyes were sore and some were blind.

"Hear me, O ye tribesmen, this vision is prophetic of what may come to you, if we do not adhere to the customs and the laws of our tribe. Some of you are drifting away from them.

"Also, I could see the form of a man, stoop and burdened with sorrow and fear. He carried a pack over his shoulder and dogs gathered about him. That may be your plight, the dog representing the association with the lowest element of the white race.

"A stench and a stink will rise to the dome of the great tepee unless we adhere to and observe our laws. The mother bird is calling to you. Clasp hands and remain in tribal fellowship," he is said to have concluded.

There was consternation in the camp and all took up the death chant.

SOLDIERCHIEF has never been seen again to this day and his passing remains a mystery. This was the first mysterious death among the Osage Indians, more than fifty years ago, and climaxed by the recent "reign of terror," in which more than a score of Indians were killed and murdered.

The words of Soldierchief are considered as a prophecy by the Osage Indians today. For at the present time there is an Indian now living in a tepee near Pawhuska who is said to be the character depicted by Soldierchief.

Remember that Soldierchief used the word stink in his speech. Remember also that he told of dogs following them, and the man with the pack on the end of a stick thrown across his shoulder.

For anyone can go to Pawhuska today and see John Stink, thought once to have been dead, walk along the highway with the pack over his shoulder, surrounded by his dogs and sneered at by all. Each night he steps outside his tepee and the echoes of the death chant that have sung through the Osage hills again breaks across the hills and valleys to warn the Indians of the prophecy of a half century ago.

and the Osage Indians believe that when John Stink passes on, that it will be the end of the Osage tribe.

The prophecy has come true. The hair is falling from the heads of Indian women. Their teeth fall out and many have become blind by disease transmitted to them through the influence and association of the white man.