

MILLER, SEBRON

CIVIL WAR INCIDENTS.

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Jefferson Berryhill,
Field Worker,
June 30, 1937.

Interview with Hattie Gibson and Sebron Miller,
Okmulgee, Oklahoma.

Incidents During The Civil War

Many unforgettable things happened among the Creek Indians during the Civil War. This story is from Mrs. Hattie Gibson, and was told to her by her parents who participated in that war.

Mrs. Gibson told of the time during the war when the Indians had to retreat. They had all the women and children together, she said. The battle was being fought near the camp. It was taking its toll of lives, and a retreat was called. While some of the warriors were fighting the rest had slipped away and taken the families away to protect them. When they were some distance away the others who had been fighting caught up with them but the foe had found out the moving of the tribe, and they came after them. The retreat was slow and the enemy was approaching fast and the fugitives became panic stricken.

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The women started throwing things away, anything of weight was disposed of, to run faster as they were afoot. Mrs. Gibson said they were crossing a muddy creek that made the progress slow, and the enemy was just a little distance behind. The women had disposed of everything but the babies they clutched in their arms. But on account of the babies they were lagging behind. Knowing that to expect mercy from the enemy was useless, they threw the babies away and stamped them in the mud.

During that war food was scarce. She said that the game was plenty but it was dangerous to fire a gun as it would direct the enemy to the camp, so many went hungry. Horses or ponies were the main factor. Once after they had been on the march all day and no food had been taken, the horses had been fed with corn, and were tied up in a bunch. After the camp had been made the women went to where the ponies were kept and took the corn from the horse manure, washed it many times, and made bread out of it.

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The following stories of the Civil War were told by Sebron Miller. One time the Indians had fought against the white men and in the battle they had seen the big guns or cannons used by the whites. Some of these Indians got the idea of making a cannon. The Chief told them it would not work, as it would shatter not being of iron, but heedless of the warning, five of the Indians left secretly and proceeded to try. They selected a green elm tree that was twisted so badly it would have been impossible to split it even with an axe. After many days of hard labor they managed to burn the middle of the tree clear through, and they felt that cannon was made, but before showing it to the others, the five held a council and finally decided to try out the new invention; so they loaded the gun with the lead and plenty of powder, and touched it off. The explosion was terrific. When the smoke cleared the gun was not to be found as it had all shattered and killed all five of the inventors.

Mr. Miller told of a story which was told to him by

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his grandfather. He said in the wars of earlier years, the Indians fought against white men who wore armor. During this war one Indian had killed one of the white soldiers and stripped him of his armor. After that he always wore it under his shirt. During one of the battles he boasted to others that he could not be harmed or injured by a gun shot, and he was considered as a man with a charmed life. He would come out of the trench and shoot at the enemy and jump back. He repeated the action many times. He had been shot, but a glancing shot didn't do any harm. Finally he came up from the trench as he had done before, and took aim at his enemy. He was shot in the chest, and the force of the shots threw him back into the trench. He lay there for a few minutes gasping for breath, then finally he struggled to his feet, looked around and saw that his people were looking at him astonished as they had thought him killed. He let out an ear-splitting war whoop. He had fooled his comrades with his suit of armor.

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The Indians had a terrible means of taking revenge. Mr. Miller was told of how they used to kill their prisoners. They burned them at the stake as we know, but long before that, a different method was employed. When a prisoner was taken in the war he had no hope of receiving mercy, unless he escaped, which sometimes happened. He was sometimes used as a target for bow and arrows.

Once in the battle with the whites a man and his wife were spared for further torture. The other prisoners had been killed instantly, shot by poison arrows. After they returned to camp with the two prisoners, they had a rattlesnake tied to a stick, stuck in the ground. A sharp pointed stick was used to poke at the writhing snake to make him angry. Then the woman was tied to the ground a few inches away and the snake was turned loose, while the man was brought to see the torture. The snake bit till the prisoner died then the man was treated in the same way. I heard two old Indians in conversation over that torture. One was saying they came upon a couple of men that had died by the snake bite. That was when I was a small child.