

CHAMBERLAIN, JOE

INTERVIEW

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W. T. Holland  
Interviewer  
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Interview with  
Joe Chamberlain  
709 South St. Louis  
Tulsa, Oklahoma.

I have attended many stomp dances in my time. These stomp dances were held at various stated dates, and at various stomp grounds. One of the early places was near Tulsa, and from this ground went ashes or fire to light the other grounds as they were selected and dedicated. The original fire came from the old country, and this had the ashes which were of spiritual value and meaning. Similar to the "Ark of the Covenant", to the people of the Bible lands, these ashes were kept by the town king or chief. Usually he was called the town chief, and he would deposit the ashes and start the fire. Great preparations were made for these gatherings, which were visited by hundreds and lasted for two weeks, sometimes. Then some would go to other dances of different tribes, and in this way, it was a continuous festival, and good time for them lasting several weeks. After the crowd came in the men divided into groups, and group to hunt and bring in game, another group fished, one group killed the hogs and

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cattle and attended to the barbecuing of the meat. The green corn and vegetables were prepared and cooked by the women. All the cooking was done out of doors. At some of the camps there were log houses, a permanent camp, and the Indians would come horseback and in wagons. Those in wagons always had wagon sheets, and these were used to make tents. Some, of course, slept out in the open, in fact, a majority of the men did.

I was a pretty good shot, and was usually selected to go with the hunters. I killed several deer, as well as numerous turkey, and smaller fowl, for these feasts. So, after the men were all in, the food prepared and eaten, the dancing began; just a stamping of men, marching around in a circle, and single file, and among the Five Civilized tribes they danced to songs. However, the wilder tribes used drums to beat the time for the dancing. The Delaware and Shawnee Indians introduced the Stomp Dance to the Cherokee Indian, and it was about the same as to everything but the music, which, as I said, was singing by the Five Civilized Tribes, and drums by the wild or scalping Indians. I can gladly say that

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I never saw a white man scalped. However, I can remember the Custer battle with Sitting Bull, and the terrible massacre, scalping, which I think was about the last scalping. The Indians were more or less of a roving disposition. They liked to visit each other and when a neighbor Indian was reported sick, from one to six families would load up and go to his place to doctor and help the family. These visiting Indians always took their own provisions and something for the sick family, too. If it was in planting time, or crop time, they would plant, plow or harvest his crop, as the case might be. Never any charge was thought of as they enjoyed visiting their friends and neighbors.

When we moved in here, from Illinois, we settled on the North Fork in the Sac and Fox reservation. My father, leased forty acres of land from a Creek Indian named Henry Jones. These Indians at that time lived in bark houses, and log huts. These bark houses, made from hickory and elm trees were easily made, and strong and durable. They would cut around a tree six or more feet from the ground, and peel this bark off. When off the tree, it was placed on the ground and pressed flat, and held down

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by placing log weights on it. When this was dried it was placed against the poles, erected for the house, secured these by bark strings or ropes, then a roof was made of grass and the house was complete. These had dirt floors while the log houses had puncheon floors, clapboard roofs, and sometimes a stick and clay chimney. We would also split out puncheon and make tables outdoors. We would drive down four sticks, with forks at the top, and would lay a pole across from post to post in these forks, then the puncheon would be placed in this, making a table that could be used. They would have been hard on table cloths but cloths were a thing we knew nothing of. When illness of a serious nature came into a family, we sent for the Indian doctor. He used herbs usually, and I learned about them, and now have them on hand. - lots of herbs, I of course can't practice, for profit, but use them myself and in my family. I use Spanish red root for flux; white root for bowel or stomach trouble. A dose of this is a length as long as a joint in your finger. They used snake root for snake bite. This was powdered and placed on the wound and it reduced the swelling, and took out the poison immediately. I knew a snake doctor named Lewis Ricar.

His son, Arthur, now lives south of Sapulpa at Picket Prairie. Old man Ricar had a way with snakes. He would let them bite him, copper heads, adders and other varieties. He seemed to be immune to their poison. I have seen these snakes bite him and he would carry snakes in his shirt, and on the seat of his wagon. Of course, he had remedies, and used native herbs to doctor these bites, and almost always cured his patients.

Indians, like white men, have peculiar ideas about certain subjects, signs, and their power to bring about a desired result. One was that when a storm was approaching that looked as though it might be dangerous, if they would place an axe on the ground, or stick the handle of the axe in the ground with the edge pointing toward the cloud, this caused the cloud to divide, or split, thus saving the community from the danger of it.

There is an old burial ground at Devils Elbow, about twenty-five or thirty miles south of Sapulpa, which holds the bodies of hundreds of Indians who died of smallpox. The scourge hit soon after the Civil War, and was caused or carried in in blankets given out by the Government. These were shipped to Fort Smith for distribution to the

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Indians. They had formerly been used by Union soldiers and never been sterilized, fumigated or even cleaned. The Indians thought, as their fever was high, the proper thing would be to dip the patients in the water. A lot of these were taken to the river or creek, dipped in and killed, as they almost always died immediately thereafter, from the shock. After hundreds had died, they sent to Alabama and got an Indian doctor who was an expert in the treating of smallpox and he cured every case he treated. They killed buzzards, dried the flesh, powdered it up, and gave it to the patients and they would peel off within three days. The buzzard is the only fowl free of every disease. He carries most every disease, but is free, or immune from them all himself. I heard my mother tell of the yellow fever epidemic at Memphis, Tennessee.