

INDEX CARDS:

Pawnee Reservation
Blackburn
Osage Customs
Osage Superstitions
Pawnee Dances
Osage Medicines
Photography
Traditions

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Interviewer
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Interview with A. B. Cooper
Blackburn, Oklahoma.

Mr. Ansen Cooper was born in Illinois in 1868.
He came to Pawnee county in 1901.

Blackburn was a government town site and was laid out at the time the government survey was made. The government later sold it to the Blackburn Town-site Trustee Company. The town, however, was known among the Indians as "Skinner's Town", because John Skinner established the first store there. This was a general merchandise store. Mr. Skinner also built and operated a toll bridge across the Arkansas river there. In the early days Blackburn was a thriving little town. It got a large Indian trade because the Indians liked Mr. Skinner so well.

The town was surveyed twice for a railroad but none was ever built there. The first survey was made by a promoter whose name I do not remember and the second was made by the Missouri, Kansas and Texas railroad company. The right of ways and sidings were all staked out and it seemed certain that the route would be through Blackburn instead of Cleveland but through the efforts of people of

-2-

Cleveland, it was run through there instead of through Blackburn. The bridge across the river, built by Mr. Skinner, was used for several years and then it was washed out by high water. He never rebuilt it and for quite a number of years there was no bridge there and what once was a thriving little town became only a country village.

At one time the town was incorporated. There was a saw mill there, a grist mill, an elevator, a saloon, a blacksmith shop and several stores. The mail and passengers were brought over from Pawnee on a Star route. All the supplies for the stores were freighted over from Pawnee and Perry. The first school was held in a little red frame building built and donated by Mr. Skinner. I later bought the same building for a barn after a permanent school house was built.

I ran a photograph gallery in Pawnee for several years in the early days and in this capacity met with the Indians quite a bit. While in this business I learned something of the Osage language and customs. I never learned to speak any Pawnee. At first the Indians would not let me take their pictures and would ignore me when I would go to their camp. Finally I met an Osage man who was more friendly than

-3-

the others. I asked him how I could get to take pictures of the Osages. He taught me the Osage words meaning "May I put your face on paper?" After learning this I didn't have any difficulty. Sometimes they wouldn't pay for their pictures, especially the enlargements. I finally asked an Osage friend what I could do about it. He said: "Tell them that if they won't pay you will bury their pictures face down." I told them that and it worked for they were very superstitious.

The Osages could never be induced to sleep in an upstairs room. One time when Mr. Hunter and I had a studio in Pawnee, several Osages came and asked if they could sleep on the floor of the studio; they said there were no rooms to be had in town except in upstairs rooms. We told them they might sleep there and then we decided to play a sort of prank on them. We decided to take a flash light picture of them when they were settled for the night. We got everything in readiness before they came and when they were nearly asleep we took the picture. Of course there was a big noise and these Osages were very startled and scared. We thought for a little while that we would have trouble with them but finally got them quieted down, then told them that we were only doing some work that had to be finished by the next

-4-

morning. We never did tell them that we had taken their pictures.

One time in early days the town of Blackburn told the Osages that they would give them two beeves if they would kill, dress and barbecue them on the street as an attraction at a two-day celebration on July fourth and fifth. They agreed to this. I wanted some pictures of them very badly but they told me that I couldn't take any. Finally with the help of some friends I decided to take some pictures anyway. I got my kodak all in readiness and since there was a big crowd of people around watching I was able to work my way to the inner circle. When I got ready to snap the picture my friends stepped aside enough for me to get a clear view. I snapped the picture just as one of the Indians who had a huge knife in his hand, rose up facing me, but my friends quickly stepped in front of me again as soon as I had snapped the picture and he did not see the kodak. So I got another good picture of these Indians without their knowledge.

Another time the Pawnees were having a big dance and pow wow north of Pawnee. There were several tribes there besides the Pawnees and I wanted some pictures of these

-5-

tribes in camp. At first I didn't know how to go about it for they never allowed any one to take pictures of their camp. I went to^d bank where a very intelligent young Pawnee Indian worked, whose acquaintance I had made. His name was Bayhulle. I asked him if there was any way that I could take pictures of the camp during the pow wow. He told me that he thought he could arrange it with High Eagle, the Pawnee Chief, if I would be willing to pay the chief five dollars. I told him that I would gladly pay five dollars and Mr. Bayhulle made the arrangement for me. I was allowed to come and go and take as many pictures of the camp as I wanted at any time during the pow wow but no other photographer was allowed in camp.

One of the medicines used by the Osages was a Mexican bean which was called "Beano". It had about the same effect on the user as the Marihuana weed does. The sick Indian would join in a dance with other Indians in a large tent for awhile, then take one of these beans and chew it, then crawl into a small pit previously dug, about eighteen inches deep and which was just large enough for him to lie in. It was covered with canvas. He would lie in this until the effects of the drug wore away or until he died.

-6-

The Indians have some beautiful symbols. One is that at their tribal dances they have a little gourd with pebbles in it which they shake as they dance. The pebbles represent the leaves and the noise, the wind. The shaking of it symbolizes the blowing of the wind among the leaves.

Their traditions are handed down from father to son and not all of them are taught. One time, I was talking to Colonel Moore, a Pawnee. He was setting up a tepee. In the center of the space where the tepee was to be placed was a little mound of dust. I asked him why this mound was there and he said it symbolizes the end of life or the body after the soul had gone to the Great Spirit. He also said that he knew very few of the symbols and traditions of the Pawnee tribe for he wasn't one of the ones who had been taught these symbols and traditions.

(Mrs. Cooper related this incident.)

One time when I was taking care of the baby of Mrs. Echo Hawk, I noticed a large black cloth lying on one of the tables. It had something tied in the middle of it. The cloth was a little larger than a large bandanna handkerchief. Mrs. Echo Hawk saw me looking at it

-2-

and told me that it was one of the tribal secrets and that only a very few ever were allowed to see what was tied up in the cloth. Those who were allowed to see its contents had to complete certain rituals and advance certain stages somewhat like a lodge before being eligible to see what was in the cloth. Mr. Echo Hawk was one of the tribal councilmen but Mrs. Hawk did not tell me whether he knew this secret or not.