

CUSSINS, FRANK (Mrs.)

INTERVIEW

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Field Worker Lillian Gassaway,
July 12, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. Frank Cussins,
Anadarko, Oklahoma,
202 West Kansas.

Born April 15, 1885.

Parents John Inkanish, Texas.
Half Breed Caddo and White
Tall Woman, Louisiana.

Mrs. Cussins lives in Anadarko at the present time. She is a Caddo Indian. Her father was a half breed Caddo and White. Her mother was the last surviving Caddo Indian woman who came over the Trail of Tears.

My mother was the last surviving Caddo woman that came from Louisiana. She told me everything but I never wrote it down and now I can't remember very much. The Caddo Indians were always a peace loving tribe, but when they were moved to Texas, the Texans had suffered so much from the Plains Indians who would come to Texas on their raids, that they were afraid of all Indians. So the Texans took no chances and at every excuse would kill them. The Caddos were losing so many of their members that they made an agreement with the Wichitas and became affiliated

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with them. Not all of the Caddos came to Oklahoma, some of them went west. All trace was lost of them as far as I know. Several years ago my brother was in Oregon, and one day while down on the coast he saw two Indians who had just come in from fishing. He overheard them talking, and ^{was} somewhat surprised to recognize his own language. When he came home he was telling my mother about them and she asked how they were dressed. He told her that they did not dress like the Caddos here, then described their clothes. She said that they dressed like they used to in Louisiana. He never tried to talk to them because he couldn't talk very well. He had been among the white people more than with his own people.

I don't know anything about my father's people. When the Caddos came to Texas, my grandmother married a white man. When they were moved to Oklahoma, my grandfather begged my grandmother to stay there with him. She stayed there for a few weeks but got so lonesome for her people that she put my father, who was a small baby, on her back and started out to follow her people. My grandfather, who was away when she left, followed her.

When he found her he told her that if she wanted to go with her people that it was all right, and he would let her keep the baby until it was old enough to go to school then he would take it and educate it. This she agreed to. He went back to Texas then. Sometime later he came to see the boy and told my grandmother that he would come again to get him when he was old enough to go to school. That was all right with her. He left and was never heard of again. It was never learned whether he was killed or what happened to him. I don't even know what my father's real name was. The Indians called him Inkanish, meaning "White Man." The white people called him John, so he was always known as John Inkanish. The only man who knew anything at all about my father was a man called Gaddo Jake who lived on the Canadian north of here. He could have told us my father's real name and who his people were, but as so often is the case none of us went to see him and now he is dead and no chance of learning about my father remains.

My father was killed in an encounter with the Dalton Brothers in 1894.

DRESS

The women always wore their hair in two braids down their back and tied together at the end. The young girls and women wore the earrings of half moon shape. The old women wore flat earrings.

There were three general styles of dress. The one piece dress, the two piece dress for the younger women and the two piece dress for the old women. (Mrs. Cussins had Indian dolls she had made and dressed that she showed me). The one piece dress is what we used to call a mother hubbard. A full, loose dress gathered onto a yoke across the shoulders, with long sleeves. The skirts are long, just barely missing the floor. Over these full, long skirts they wear a full long apron tied around the waist.

The two piece dress for the younger women is a full gathered skirt on a narrow band. All skirts come to the floor, with a waist apron of the same length. The waist is made opened down the front with some kind of pins with fancy ornaments to fasten it. The waist hangs a little loose. This also has long sleeves. There is a

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~~There~~ is a deep round collar and around this is a ruffle. There are fancy ornaments around the edge of this ruffle.

The two piece dress for the older women is more simple. The skirt is the same as the other but the waist fits tighter and has no fancy trimming or ornaments.

All dresses may have ribbon stitched around the hem, sometimes several rows. The young women wear lots of beads. A very long strand is roped around the neck several times, making a very heavy necklace. As they grow older they wear fewer beads until the old women wear only one strand or possibly none.

Every one wears leggings made of red flannel. The leggings for the women were made in one piece, with a flap about four inches wide down the side. These flaps were about two inches shorter than the legging, this is so the moccasin would fit over the legging at the ankle. Those worn for every day were plain, but those used for special occasions were decorated with beadwork. The leggings for the men were made just a little different. The flaps were made separate and sewed on. At the seam there were beads and the edge of the flap was fringed.

The Caddos used only buckskin for their moccasins. Other tribes sometimes used rawhide but the Caddos never did. They beaded them across the toe and up the seam at the back of the heel. The design on the toe is a formation of nine diamonds, and the design on the flap around the ankle of the moccasin is usually an oak leaf with an edging of beadwork. A simple design is on the back of the heel.

POTTERY AND DYES

The pottery was made from the different colored clays. The clay was mixed with pulverized mussel shells. There are several different colors of clay. Part of our colors come from these, others are from the different trees and roots. I don't know the names of them all, but I know some of them when I see them. Poke berry and cottonwood were used for dark dyes, then there are different roots that I don't know the names of. Most of our pottery was used for cooking and carrying water.

BASKETS

The Caddo Indians always raised corn, pumpkins, and sweet potatoes. They also made their own by-products

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of corn. In making their meal they needed a sifter, so they made baskets woven so closely that they could be used for sifters. Then they made the coarser ones for heavier work.

GAMES

The girls played very little after they got old enough to begin to learn to work. They only played shinny once in a while with the boys. But they must learn to work, and do everything about the home.

The boys played a great deal like the boys of today. They played marbles, only they had to make their marbles out of clay. Tops were made out of the little yellow brier berries. A stick is pushed through them and the point sharpened. These would spin very nicely. The boys had a game where each boy would get so many sticks, then the boy whose top would spin the longest got a stick from each of the other boys. The boy winning all the sticks won the game. There was a game very similar to the polo that is played now, only the mallets were longer. They played shinny. It was played with a ball made of buckskin and stuffed with cattails or the

cotton from the cottonwood berries. The shinny sticks were something like golf sticks, but were small branches of trees or bushes cut so that the base of the limb forms the club. The boys would choose sides and each side would try to put the ball across its goal. They had all kinds of sports: Broad jumps, foot races, horse races and so on. These were the amusements when the Indians from different localities were gathered together. At these gatherings each band would camp to itself, keeping the band intact. In these contests the loser had to give a feast for the winners.

When the boys reached early manhood they had to stop playing or taking part in the sports. He had to begin to learn how to hunt and make crops. All boys and girls are trained to make homes, so they will make desirable mates. When a boy makes his first kill, he never gets it. He must give it to the oldest man in the crowd, even if it is just a rabbit.

Houses

There are three different kinds of houses that were used by the Caddos. The log cabin, the grass house, and the bark house. All of the Caddo houses were oblong,

and all faced the east. The log cabins were very much like a white person's with doors on any side, but always one in the east and west. The grass house differs from the Wichitas' by having a door in both the east and west, while theirs have only the one in the east and their houses were round. The Caddos also had openings rather high up on the north and south for air. The bark house wasn't really made of bark but it was roofed with bark. The walls were made of split logs stood on end and plastered with clay and cattail reeds. These reeds were ground to a pulp and mixed with the clay. On the top of the house there was a frame made of slippery elm and on this the bark was fastened. The bark had to be well seasoned. It had to be kept flat while seasoning so it wouldn't warp. It usually took several months for the bark to season. These houses had doors only in the east and west. The doors to the houses were made of cedar if it could be gotten, if not they used dogwood.

The beds were stationary. Four pronged sticks were driven in the ground for the posts, then four poles of cedar, if possible, if not then dogwood were used for the sides and ends of the bed. After these were in place small poles about

one or one and a half inches in diameter were used for the bottom of the bed. These were woven together with the slippery elm inner bark. When this was finished the whole thing was covered with buffalo hides. Sometimes the hide was so heavy and thick that it was as soft as if a mattress was on it. In the winter, sometimes, they would use hides as covers, turning the hairy side down. The pillows were stuffed with cattails, cotton from the cottonwood berries, feather from wild geese, ducks, prairie chickens and other wild fowl.

Matting for floor coverings was made from cattail leaves woven together.

WEDDINGS

I don't know whether you would call the marriages religious or not. The parents usually made the marriages. The boy's parents would look for a girl who knew how to do everything about the home. She must know how to cook, make her own clothes as well as her husband's, make meal from corn and all other by-products of corn, nothing must be overlooked in her training. In turn the boy must know how to provide for his wife. The girl's parents, too, have been looking for a well trained boy for the girl. The boy's parents always ask for the girl. If the boy meets with the approval of the

girl's parents, they give their consent. When the wedding day arrives the boy's parents bring presents to the girl's parents, such as ponies and such. After the presents have been given then the Headman comes and takes the young couple off to one side a little way and performs a ceremony, uniting them as man and wife. From the time the boy's parents have asked for the girl, she isn't seen until the day of the wedding. The boy has a home ready for his bride.

CEREMONIES

The Caddos have very few ceremonies. Sometimes in the spring when the corn is planted, there will be a field that almost everyone has a part in. Before planting this field the Caddos would gather and go around the field stopping at every corner to offer a word of prayer. The corners representing the four corners of the earth. When the corn was harvested they had the Green Corn Dance. This was a dance of thanksgiving.

My mother was a kind of a doctor. When anyone was very sick she would make her medicines out of herbs and roots, and when she gave this medicine to the patient she

went through a ceremony that no one witnessed except the patient. There was a reason for everything she did and said, and the patient must understand what it all meant. If the patient wasn't very sick she gave the medicine without any ceremony. I never learned to make these medicines nor learned the names of the herbs. I only know a few when I see them but I don't know their names.

FUNERALS

The Caddos were great mourners. When a person died they mourned for six days. The procession was led to the grave by the oldest daughter carrying the fire. When my mother died my oldest sister carried the fire in a pot my mother had always made her medicines in. If there wasn't anything to carry the fire in then a torch was carried. When she got to the grave she marched around it four times, stopping at the foot of it. There she stood until the body was buried. A fire was made at the foot of the grave and it must be kept burning for six days. The belief is that the spirit hovers around for six days, then it leaves. During this time no one must leave the place. The last thing before the fire goes out my mother's things were

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brought and opened. They had been tied up in bundles until now. If anyone wanted anything that belonged to her they could have it, and the rest were burned in the dying fire. When this was over every one washed his face. The spirit was gone now, and the tears must be washed away, as we will meet again some day. The pot that my sister carried the fire in is now in the possession of Father Aloysius Hitta of the St. Patricks Mission, southwest of Anadarko about a mile. When a woman is prepared for burial a grain of corn and something else, I can't think what it is, are tied in a rag and tied around her right wrist. A bow and arrows are placed in the right hand of a man.

In olden times there were no coffins. There was a rack made like the beds, a pronged pole was placed in each corner of the grave and a bed was woven on this. The body was placed on this and covered. Over the body another bed like rack was made and this was covered with a buffalo robe. This served as a casket.

I can remember seeing my mother count her money. She used corn to count with. She would take the different colors of corn and each color would represent a certain denomination. When she finished she knew just how much she had. She never forgot how many nickles or dimes, or such as she might have, that she had.