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Mr. Grant Foreman
Director S-149

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Interview with Mrs. W.H. Custer 81 Forest St.
Pawnee, Oklahoma.
Field Worker, Goldie Turner,
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Mrs. Custer was born in Iowa and came to Kansas when a child. She came to Oklahoma in 1889. Mrs. Custer says:

We first came to Old Oklahoma in 1889 and took up a claim there. The people certainly had a hard time, many having to live entirely on parched corn. We fared quite a little better because I brought canned fruit and vegetables from Kansas. Of course there was very little raised the first year for sod crops never make much. There were lots of water melons and some wheat and corn. We stayed in Old Oklahoma till 1893 then came to Pawnee.

We leased three eighty acre places from John Cox an Indian. Our lease papers were the first lease papers made out in the Pawnee Reservation. I kept them awhile but finally destroyed them.

I went back to Kansas and stayed until my third baby was born and Mr. Custer went out to the lease. He built a dug-out for our home. There were trees all around and no people living close. The next year he built a log cabin and then a one room frame house. We used the dug-out for a kitchen even after the house was built. I was always afraid of snakes and centipedes, which were thick. We killed a lot of long centipedes in our log cabin and had a number of narrow escapes from snake bites. We killed several diamond back rattlers.

When my baby was four weeks old my father brought me down to Pawnee to our home. We came in a light covered spring wagon in cold weather. We got lost in the Osage country and were nearly frozen. The baby kept warm because he was wrapped up good but the two little girls got cold and

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cried because their feet hurt. My father could walk beside the team and keep warm so I finally got in the back of the buggy where I had a pile of bedding, put a little girl on each side of me and sat on their feet. When we finally got to Fairfax where we were to stay all night with friends, I couldn't walk when I got out of the buggy. My feet were frozen and I was unable to wear my shoes the rest of the winter. I had to wear overshoes.

Our lease was about eight miles north of Pawnee on Cool Creek. We brought 26 head of cattle with us, as well as chickens and feed. We didn't have any hogs so I traded butter to one of my neighbors at 5¢ a pound for two shoats which furnished our meat for the next winter.

There had been an Indian camp located on one of the places we leased which was moved just across the line on the next place after we moved there but could be seen from our bus-out. We made many friends with the Pawnees and attended many of their dances. John Fox, a Pawnee, proved a very loyal friend as did a number of the others. The Pawnees were the most friendly tribe and the ones most trusted of all the Indians who came to camp.

The Indians have only two different dances, or at least I could see no difference in any except the two. The Death dance and the Ghost dance. Soon after we came here, a drunk Indian, driving to camp, lost control of his team which ran away and killed a little Indian child. The body was brought to camp and at daybreak the dance began. The weeping and wailing was so prolonged that I took my little children and went out and sat on the ground away where we couldn't hear it. The mourning continued all that day.

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In the Ghost Dance an Indian man wearing a white blanket (which looked like muslin to me) and covered with pictures of the animals and symbols which they worshipped, printed on it, would dance around in the circle with the other Indians but wouldn't join hands with them. He would seem to single a certain person out of the group and as he danced around would touch this person on the head. Gradually this person came under the Ghost Man's power. Then he would be sent out to the top of a big hill on our place. There he stay fasting, dancing and talking in unknown language to the Great Spirit and the spirits of the departed for three days, then he would come back to the rest of the tribe and tell the things that were told him by the Great Spirit. The Indians always used the tom-tom for all their dances. It could be heard for miles and miles. Their religious ceremonies were based mostly on superstition and mesmerism. I have seen several of them just fall and lay unconscious for hours and sometimes all day before recovering consciousness.

At one time when they had the smoke dance and smoked the peace pipe, there were eighty wagons of Osages besides the Pawnees, Otoes, and Poncas. The Indians often came over to our house, especially the women. They would bring calico to trade to me, but I didn't have anything but chickens to trade them. I traded them a lot of chickens though. They never bothered anything except our well. Mr. Custer dug a well soon after we came, which had to furnish our water for the stock as well as to drink, but couldn't furnish enough for our use and the Indians too.

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We told them to stay away and even fastened the top of the well down with a chain but they pulled it up anyway one day when we were gone. The squaws would climb down the wall and dip up water using their blankets tied together to haul up water and help them out. One day I was alone with the children when I caught them getting water. I went out and told them to go away that we wouldn't have enough water, but they were mostly toes that time, who were meaner than the Pawnees, and said that they would get the water anyway. I finally told them that if they didn't go away I would report them to the agent. This frightened them for they were afraid of the agent and they scattered. I was never afraid of the Indians for we had lived by Indians in Kansas.

One evening Stella Knife Chief was visiting me and on leaving told me to watch the camp early the next morning and I would see something. I asked her what it was but she wouldn't tell me. The next morning I watched and soon saw a great sight. All the Indian men, all decked out in war paint and "on the warpath", dashed out of camp on their ponies, rode a short distance away, then wheeled their ponies and went back to camp. That was the only time I ever saw them put on this display.

John Box often came to see us and ate with us often. He said his first wife liked the white people (she was dead when we got acquainted with him) and they often went to Arkansas City to visit white friends. After she died, according to Indian custom, he had to marry her nearest relative in line. This was a Mrs. Ashington who didn't like white people and of whom John Box often said "me no like". One day he came almost at dinner-time so I asked him to stay and eat with us. He did

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asked him why and he told us his wife was in the wagon which quite a distance from the house. We discovered she was lying in the bottom of the wagon covered with several blankets.

The second year we were here, in August, Mr. Custer took typhoid-malaria fever and was not able to be out until November. He was delirious part of the time and I was alone part of the time although both the white and Indian neighbors were very good to help me when they could. When he needed a doctor, I would have to get in the wagon, drive to the nearest neighbor and either get them to stay with Mr. Custer or come on to town for the doctor and groceries. I would have to hitch up the team and go out to the corn field and shuck corn for the stock. When Mr. Custer grew so bad, no one thought he would ever live, the Indians came to camp but when they heard he was so bad they broke camp and went quietly away. One day I was sitting outside the door on a bench when on looking around I saw an Indian woman sitting beside me. I never knew where she came from nor had I ever seen her before. She had some sweet smelling herbs in her hand. She tried to comfort and sympathize with me. That night John Box came and sat by his bed all night. I tried to get him to lie down but he wouldn't. He was certainly a good friend. We often sold the Indians beef and had to wait for our pay till they got their annuity payments. Mr.

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ox said never to sell to any Indians that he wasn't with
and we would always get our money. We did that and never lost a
penny.

In time the Indians took my little boy to the camp and
painted him all up like an Indian then brought him for me to
see. I hadn't even known that they had gotten him. It tickled
them to see me surprised.

Jim Marie, a well educated Pawnee, came to our house one
night and asked if we had a bible. I told him we did and he then
asked if he might borrow it. He said he wanted to preach to the
Indians straight from the Bible. He took it and we could hear
him talking although we didn't know what he said.

There were three bands of the Pawnee Indians. The first
band went east from Kansas and came to Oklahoma from Arkansas
and the Cherokee Nation. Another band came straight south from
Kansas to Oklahoma. They passed by our home. I was a little
girl then and had been sent by my mother on an errand down the
road. I looked up and saw a string of wagons containing Indians
as far as I could see. I wasn't afraid though for I saw soldiers
with them. It took all day for all the Indians to pass by.

We lived on the Indian lease five years then moved from

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one place to another all over Oklahoma. Mr. Custer built a square log cabin on a place about eight miles east of Pawnee 37 years ago which is still standing. He bought a hotel in Perkins and ran it a few years. He lived at Orlando and at Skedee. While at Skedee Mr. Custer thought he could make money by going to Iowa to shuck corn so he rented a house in town for me and he went away. I didn't have but little money to live on so I picked strawberries which I sold in Ralston to buy our clothes, and also I made dresses for the women in Skedee.

The dresses then were usually made of brilliantine which is very wiry and hard to sew. The skirts were made in from twelve to sixteen gores with a pleat over each gore. I would get three dollars for making a woman's dress.

We lived in the Cherokee Nation about a year before we came to Pawnee. We didn't like it there and lost nearly all our cattle. The water there wasn't good. The cattle had to drink water which collected in what was called strip mines.