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IN 1880 AT PATTEE.

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THE LAST OSAGE SCALP WAS
TAKEN IN 1880 AT PAWNEE.

This story was related by the late M.F. Stillwell, shortly before his death in 1922. Mr. Stillwell was born in Kansas, but was taken by his mother to live with his uncle, John Florer, at Pawhuska when he was only two years old. He grew up among the Osage Indians and knew their tribal history well. He probably knew as many real Indian stories as any man living in the Indian Territory.

Mr. Stillwell was one of the few white men who saw the last scalp used by the Osage Indians on a state occasion. This was in the summer of 1880, when he was about six or seven years old. The scalp was from a Pawnee Indian and was used at the regular war dance of the tribe.

One of these Osage war dances was really worth going miles to see. It was an annual affair, generally held in the spring or early summer and was made the occasion for all the Indians who had

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died during the previous year. All of the able bodied Indians of the tribe congregated at these dances. They would camp around a circle probably a mile in circumference. The war party would camp on one side and the peace party on the other.

Four days were devoted to mourning. The job of mourning for a dead Osage relative was no boy's work. It required a full grown, lusty buck to show proper appreciation of the sad affair. The mourners were not allowed to lie down during the entire four days and nights the mourning was in progress. They neither ate nor drank from sun rise to sun set and upon retiring to their tents were given a drink of water and a little bread.

The tents in which they spent the night were the regulation tepee, but were only about three feet in diameter and it was impossible for the mourners to sleep unless they napped a little sitting up.

The physical effort required to mourn for the dead led to the practice of hiring mourners. The job was so hard that no professional mourner would consent to take it for less than thirty or

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thirty-five ponies. The mourners did not dance, but walked slowly around the encampment while the peace and war parties danced. These two parties encamped on either side of the large open space and at regular intervals they would leave their tepees and start to dance around the circle toward the other party. The two parties would meet after each had danced probably a half mile. After a short pow wow they would separate and dance back to their tepees. The cooks would always have a good meal prepared after each of these efforts and the dancers would feast. Each party was equipped with several singers and musicians and the ceremony was rather impressive. This annual war dance was a religious ceremony ~~and~~ as important with an Osaqe as any religious ceremony with any of the civilized organizations.

This particular dance was held near Wooster, a big mound about five miles southwest of Pawhuska and near Nelogony. My uncle, Mr. Florer, had taken all of us and gone out to watch it. During the last day the young Indians became restless and the

agent began to fear an outbreak. He warned the whites that there probably would be trouble and that they better get back to town. Uncle John knew all of the Indians well and was not afraid. We stayed and the business so impressed itself on my memory that I can recall nearly all of the incidents yet.

For ten or fifteen years the Osages had not used a fresh scalp for their war dances. They had either hired somebody to let them cut off a little lock of hair or had forcibly taken a lock from some stranger. They had pretty rough times getting the necessary lock of hair now and then, but their religion required it and they always brought in the lock. On this particular occasion the young men of the tribe decided to enliven proceedings by reverting to the old fashion and using a real scalp. They made it up among themselves that they would adorn the scalp pole with a Pawnee scalp. The Arkansas River was the only barrier between the Osages and the Pawnees and the Osages were rather afraid of the war-like Pawnees. When an

Osage horse strayed across the river the owner counted it lost and never went over after it. So, you see bad blood was existing between the two tribes.

The young man who comprised the war party left the scene of the dance about noon on the fourth day of the mourning. They had saved their best horses and equipment for this occasion and they made a pretty sight when they rode away. They went southwest toward the Arkansas River. Each buck wore all the fancy clothes he possessed and each pony was painted and decorated with feathers in its braided mane and tail. The riders used the heavy silver mounted bridles and carried their bright shields.

The next we saw of the war party was four or five hours later, just a little while before sun down. They came galloping out of the woods about a mile southwest of camp. As the sun shone on the silver ornaments, on the bridles and the shields it made as pretty a sight as I ever saw. The whole band of about 250 rode as fast as they

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could come toward the camp and then circled it, yelling and waving the scalp. They came inside the semi-circle in which the Indians always formed while waiting for the scalp, and the leader went to the scalp pole and hung up his trophy. Then it was discovered that the customary lock of hair was not used and that the thing hanging on the pole was a real scalp which still dripped blood. Nobody ever knew the story of the scalp, but it was learned afterward that it was procured across the Arkansas river and that it came from the head of a Pawnee Indian who had been killed by the band. This was the last scalp ever taken by the Osages of which there is anything like an official record.
