

FOSSETT, W. D.

INTERVIEW

#8365

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POSETT, W.D.

LEGEND & STORY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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Field worker's name Louise S. Barnes.

This report made on (date) August 30. 1937

1. This legend was secured from (name) W.D. Possett.

Address Kingfisher Oklahoma.

This person is (male or female) White, Negro, Indian,

If Indian, give tribe _____

2. Origin and history of legend or story two Indian boys who were burned at the stake by the white people.

3. Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached _____

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Louise S. Barnes,
Interviewer.
August 30, 1937.

An Interview With W. D. Fossett,
Kingfisher, Oklahoma.

This story took place at the corners of Oklahoma and Pottawatomie County.

There was a white family living and renting land just across the line. There were two or three little children in this family. The man went away one morning and when he returned home he found his wife's body in the yard and it had been torn to pieces by hogs; at this time hogs ran at large on open range.

There were some old time men living there who were renting from the Indians and they had had a great deal of trouble in the past with these Indians.

These men immediately laid the killing on a couple of young Indian boys, whose fathers they had been renting from. They had no warrants for these boys but took them in custody to what they called the Corners, where there was a saloon, store and blacksmith shop. They sent runners out and notified all the settlers that they were going to burn these boys at stake that night and wanted them to come in

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and see the burning. They did this for their own protection as a spectator would be as guilty as the man who touched the match. Almost every man gathered in, out of curiosity, not knowing they were violating the Federal Law. The boys were chained to a stake, fuel was piled around them and set afire, burning the Indian boys alive. The men who had done the burning then told the people who had gathered there through ^{they} curiosity that/were all guilty, and the thing to do was to keep the officers out of that part of the country; so they could not get any information as to who did the burning.

When I went down in that country to seek some information as to who did the burning, so I could swear out warrants for the arrest of the guilty parties, I saw men in fields plowing with their Winchesters or shot guns on their plow handles.

I was in the United States Marshals Office at the time of the burning and notified the Attorney General at Washington of the occurrence.

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The government was very indignant and ordered me to make a thorough investigation and prosecute the guilty parties, whoever they might be. These were the words of the government officials.

We used horses for transportation at that time. My office was at Guthrie, where the capitol was located then.

I hitched up a team to a covered wagon and drove to Shawnee. From there I drove close to where this burning had taken place. It was sundown and I drove into a house and wanted to stay all night; but the man and women had gone to Tecumseh, which was at that time county seat, and there were only some small children at the house. I unhitched my team, put them in the shed stable, and made myself at home. When the man and women returned it was dark. At first they appeared to be very sore at my having stopped there during their absence. I told them I had driven very hard and my team was about given out and I would pay them any reasonable sum for what trouble I was putting them to, because I had come down on business and I had to have rest. They seemed to

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be very anxious to find out what my business was. I told them I was a cattleman from Colorado and I had a large bunch of cattle there and that I had heard that there were large pastures in that country. I told them I had come down to lease a pasture, but that since I had left home I had seen by the Denver paper that they were having a great deal of trouble with the Indians and that I didn't know whether or not it would be safe for me to bring a bunch of cattle and men in under the present conditions. I showed them the Denver paper with the story of the burning, which seemed to satisfy them. The woman had been inclined to talk all along, but the man had been trying to keep her from talking. However, after hearing my statement and looking over the paper, he became talkative also.

They told me it would not be safe to bring in cattle and men as they were looking for an outbreak from the Indians at any minute. I asked a good many questions in different ways and finally got the names of the leaders and the name of the one who touched the match to the fuel

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around the boys. The next morning I started back to Guthrie, and got out warrants for, I believe, six of the leaders, using the names I got from these people.

I took five deputies and went down to serve these warrants. I went around by Wewoka so as to come in from the East and not create any suspicion. We stayed all night in Seminole County then went on to the Corners, getting there very early, and made these arrests. One of the men we arrested was a clerk in the store at Corners.

I sized him up as a man who would make a good witness for the government, if I could weaken him enough so he would come through and tell the truth. When we got to Shawnee I put the deputies and all the prisoners except this clerk in the smoking car. I took him into the chair car and started in to try to get some information. He was very indignant to start with. He had a wife and two little girls about five and seven years old. I said, "You are the biggest fool I ever knew. You have a nice wife and family and here you are on your way to the penitentiary or maybe to be hanged". I talked to him

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along that line until he began to cry. I said, "You might as well tell the truth and if you do I'll try and protect you as much as possible". He said, "I'll tell the truth and another man in this party will tell the truth, too". When we got to Guthrie instead of putting those two in jail with the rest I took them to my house and kept them there until we fixed a bond. Speed, an attorney in Guthrie, was appointed by the governor as Special Prosecutor.

Mr. Speed and I talked it over, and as we did not want to prosecute anyone, we hitched up a team to a covered wagon and with supplies we went down to get what information we could, although we could have arrested almost anyone in that country and sent them to the penitentiary. We only wanted to get someone who had been violating the law before this occurrence and send them.

We had rifles and six shooters for fear we might have trouble with the law violators but only once did they bother us.

Mr. Speed and I were sleeping in the wagon the second night we were there. Along in the night we heard

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some fellows riding up toward the wagon. They got within about a hundred feet and I halted them. I told them if they came nearer we would shoot.

They stopped, talked for a few minutes among themselves, turned around and went away. We were not troubled anymore while investigating the case.

Across the line in Seminole County we found men who had violated the law for twenty years so that was the kind of men that were prosecuted and sent to the penitentiary. Mr. Speed was a very brave man. When I halted this bunch of night riders he was lying in the bottom of the wagon with his Winchester resting on the sideboards and turned on this bunch of men. I am satisfied if it had been necessary he would have fought to the finish.

I don't think it was ever proven that this woman that the Indian boys were accused of killing was murdered. She could have died with heart failure or many other ways.

She did not have to be murdered for her body to be found in the yard.