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Effie S. Jackson.
Field Worker
March 4, 1937

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INDIAN DANCES "WO-HAW" SAW.

W. J. Nicholson, 501 N. Santa Fe, Tulsa Oklahoma, known as "Wo-haw" chief (Beef Chief) by the western Indians for whom he was beef dispenser from 1885 to 1892, describes two Indian dances it was his privilege to witness. These dances, the Sun Dance especially, were held very secretly, and only accidentally was it possible for him to see them.

The Sun Dance, a religious ceremonial offered to the Great Spirit in exchange for the safe conduct of the dead to the happy hunting ground was a custom of the four wild tribes of Indians located in the western part of Oklahoma- the Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Kiowas and Comanches.

A long pole was set up in the middle of a clearing. Deer thongs about an inch wide were attached to the top and hung loose in the manner of Maypole ribbons. Indians whose relatives had passed on participated. They danced from sunrise to sunset. Slits were cut around the waist of each dancer and the thongs ran through and tied. The Indians must dance until the thongs tore the flesh away. Should he be overcome before this happened, he must try again the following day.

The dances were held in great secrecy-- but Mr. Nicholson saw part of one before being discovered and routed from his vantage point by some excited Indians. He and a friend had ridden on the Indians unawares and watched them for a hour before being discovered. He believes he is one of the few white men to have ever seen one.

Because of its cruelty and torture the U. S. government sent troops to disperse the Indians and it was permanently forbidden about 1892.

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"At Ft. Rena". Mr. Nicholson goes on to say, "at one time six tribes of Indians had come together for an encampment. There were about 4000 of them and they had a dance every night. The cowboys had a camp in the government pasture eight or ten miles away. Two of us started out and happened to ride through the camp. There were tepees up and down the river as far as you could see. We were riding along and not paying any attention, we were used to the Indians, when before we realized it we were in a clearing about the size of an acre with no tepees on it, we were completely surrounded.

"Some of the Indians were sitting, others standing, and all were very quiet. There seemed no convenient way of getting out, so we rested quietly on our horses to see what happened next. I don't know what kind of a dance or ceremony it was and have never talked to anyone who did.

In the center of the clearing was an ages old tepee. In front was a fire and on it a kettle steaming and something cooking. Someone was beating a tom-tom in the tepee. Soon an Indian came out naked, his body painted and spotted. He had a whistle in his mouth and when he blew it, a scaw came out, also naked, then two children, one about seven, and the other ten.

"They all danced around the kettle and spat in it. The first Indian went into the tepee followed by the other and came out with a bunch of green weeds which they dipped into the kettle and sprinkled themselves with the hot water, that is, all except the little Indians who sprinkled it on the grass. When the kettle seemed to be dry, they each grabbed a hunk, tossing it from one hand to another, then ran and threw it down at various points in the circle. The Indians picked them up and rubbed them all over the heads of the paposes. This closed the ceremony."

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"WO-HAW CHIEF".

W. J. Nicholson, 501 N. Santa Fe Avenue, Tulsa, Oklahoma was called "we-haw Chief" by the Indians. This meant "beef chief" to the Arapahoes, Cheyennes, Kiowas and Comanches of the western part of the Oklahoma Territory that is what he was from 1885 to 1892.

Born in Springville, Iowa, near Cedar Rapids in 1865, Mr. Nicholson came to Oklahoma in 1885. (He drove cattle from the Rio Grande country to Oklahoma for the U. S. Government and later held a contract to supply Indian Reservations with beef.) Back in the days when the Indians were still numerous on the reservations in Oklahoma, the U. S. Government in an effort to civilize them realized they must feed them. Since the Indians depended on meat mainly for feed, the result was that thousands of head of wild cattle were driven into Oklahoma from the Rio Grande country each year. (Issuing of this beef was under government contract.)

(Four tribes, Arapahoes, Cheyennes, Kiowas, and Comanches occupied the western area with agencies for the first two at Darlington, for the others at Ardmore. (Every two weeks beefes were issued by the Indian department and "Issue Day" presented a scene characteristic of the time. For several days before, the Indians gathered in anticipation of the event. Excitement ran high and chattering and yelling prevailed. The cattle were turned into a corral, weighed and inspected. With the help of the Indian they were branded I D (Indian Department) and then turned loose to be killed by the Indians in their own fashion.) Painted and feathered

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for the occasion, the hunters displayed their skill, some using bows and arrows and others using guns.

Each Indian family averaged about fifteen members, a beef was allowed to each family. Other rations given out at the agencies consisted of flour, coffee, beans, clothing and firearms.) Giving them food only made them more shiftless, according to Mr. Nicholson, Before the use of coffee they had depended on a drink made from the mescal bean, but found they liked coffee better as it did not make them drunk. The squaws made the flour into a sort of pone - flour and water mixed into a stiff dough, formed into cakes about two inches thick, baked on hot rocks. This was more like hardtack but suited their purpose as it lasted for sometime, and could be easily carried from place to place. The government often gave them dried fruit and salt pork but this was quite promptly thrown away, they were too primitive for foods as artificial as that. They wanted food in the raw stage, as witness their method of eating their meat. In killing the beef the idea was to save the blood, which they promptly drank, then the "piece de resistance" was the liver and entrails eaten raw. Then all the meat was stripped from the bones and dried in strips to be eaten, that way or cooked.

The government tried to encourage farming - issued seeds for spring planting but did not seem to get farm implements to them in time to prepare the soil, so the process was slow.

The Indian men wore shirts, leggings and moccasins with their blankets draped around them and fastened with a belt, they resented wearing pants - another primitive holdover. The squaws wore a sock-like dress under their blankets. The clothing was furnished by the government, the only articles made by the Indians were their moccasins. They were very

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particular about their hair - kept shiny and smooth. A favorite practice was to braid strips of hide of the otter or other small animal into the hair, possibly to keep it oiled.

They made their own bows and arrows until they found the government would give them firearms (for hunting); it was safe to do this for in return for food and clothing the Indians were peaceful in behaviour. Their commodity of exchange was ponies. As of old and Indian's wealth (and bride) depended on the number of ponies he owned. Raising ponies and hunting was the chief pastime. The only handicraft of the savages was beadwork - decorating moccasins, headbands, and belts.

(While holding the contract for beef supply, Mr. Nicholson furnished between 12,000 and 15,000 longhorns a year to the reservations.) Some amusing incidents took place.

Friends of a tailor, who had died at the agency, sought to defray funeral expenses by selling his effects. Nicholson bought a grey cut-away suit with two pairs of trousers, never meaning to wear the coat, but as winter came on, he was forced to wear it for the sake of warmth, presenting a mixed ensemble of wild-west and Fifty Avenue.

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Bobtail Wolf, a sullen Indian, who knew he was thoroughly disliked by Nicholson who dispensed the beef, went to the agent, D. R. Fant, for his requisition. Fant wrote a note which Bobtail Wolf delivered to Nicholson, who, to tease the Indian said he couldn't read. The Indian went back to the agent in great disgust. Fant, carrying the joke farther, drew a picture of a cow and put the caption under it "this is a beef", then a picture of an Indian "this is an Indian"; down the page "Give the beef to the Indian". The Indian took the order back and got the beef, telling

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everybody that "Wo-haw" had to read picture writing.

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"One of the funniest things I recall" said Mr. Nicholson, "was about the Arapahoes and Cheyennes. They had sent five of their chiefs to Washington as a delegation of some sort. They were fat old boys and had been 'dressed up' while there in full evening clothes. Then they came back, they had thrown away the pants but were wearing the high silk hats, coats and vests with their - blankets. As they shuffled along, somebody asked them how they liked Washington. "We no like 'um - tee such soon.

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"One day when the Cheyennes came into the agency (at Darlington) Jim Riley, who worked for the government store, fell in love with one of the Cheyenne girls and married her. She had been at school in the east and was one of the prettiest Indian girls I had ever seen. Jim built a home and furnished it. She was a fine housekeeper and an excellent cook. The following fall when the Indians came for their winter supplies Jim came home one night and found his wife was gone. Not only his wife but all the furniture. He found her in Indian clothes down where the Indians were camped; took a look at her and the tepee filled with the furniture, went back home and got a blacksnake whip. This he used vigorously.

"You couldn't threaten a Indian or shoot at him, it only angered him, and made him more stubborn. A whipping always seemed to engender respect. Jim told her if he ever found her dressed like an Indian and living like one again, that the whipping she had received was not a circumstance to the one she would receive next time. He set fire to the tepee - went back to the store and loaded up the wagon with more furniture. So far as I know this ended his marital troubles."

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Indian Medicine and art as told
by "We-haw". (W. J. Nicholson-Tulsa, Okla)

"Every tribe had its medicine man," said Mr. Nicholson ("We-haw" to the Indians) "but ordinary ills were treated by the squaws. Herbs and roots were treated by them and used as medicine. I remember once when I had chills and fever and old squaw gathered what looked to me like some weeds with blossoms. She boiled them and gave me the juice (or tea) to drink. It was vile stuff but it seemed to drive the chills and fever away.

"In extreme cases rocks were piled up, heated, water poured over them, then the patient placed on them and covered-- a case of kill or cure.

"I remember once at Anadarko an epidemic of small-pox broke out among the Indians. They built a big fire, put on a kettle and put a small tallowin over it and steamed the patient. He would then run to the river and dive in, dozens of them died, of course. The doctors sent out by the agency had a pretty tough time of it.

"As I said before, every tribe had a medicine man. His chief equipment seemed to be to make himself as hideous as possible, then alternately chanting and blowing a whistle, he would stamp round and round the tepee where the sick man lay."

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The Indians, especially the men painted themselves quite profusely. Their bows and arrows, also feathers were gaudily colored. The tapes of the chief bore decorations in keeping with his exploits. Where the Indians get the material to make the paint was always more or less a secret. Possibly from some kind of rock or soil-herb or root.

"What interested me most was my contact with an Indian artist. Once

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on a long ride in the Commanche country, I came at nightfall to the place of an old Navajo Indian whom I know well. He had a house and a tepee, but I thought he always used the tepee. Nobody was at home, so I used the house. Along in the night he and his squaw came in. He was a peaceable, quiet old Indian whose name translated into English, meant "White man".

He was quite an artist and had painted on a buck skin, a picture of a battle which had taken place many years before between the Navajos in the west and the other tribes.

"The very next morning before I got ready to leave, a man from the Smithsonian Institute and another man came to see the Indian about the painting. He wouldn't talk and wouldn't show it to them. I knew he would talk to me, so I stayed all that day and night. He finally got out the picture and unrolled it. It was on fifteen or twenty deer skins and covered the space of two large rooms. The Smithsonian representative was amazed: every little tree, creek, tepee and settlement was depicted. He said he had been trying to get a picture of that battle for years and offered \$750.00 for it. "White Man" shook his head, he was suspicious. Said he'd raised a big family but they were all dead, "As long as we had buffalo meat we get along fine, but the white man's food has killed us" thus reasoned the old man.

"Finally the old Indian asked me what to do and I advised him to sell it. The following day we set off for the agency and "White Man" sold the picture for one thousand dollars."