

[Pioneer Life of Tabitha Brown]

W13868

LIST AND CUSTOMS - FOLK TYPES

[?] no.

[?] 13868

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WPA L. C. PROJECT Writers' UNIT

Form [md]3 Folklore Collection (or Type)

Title Pioneer Life of Tabitha Brown

Place of origin Portland, Oreg. Date 2/6/39

Project worker Sara B. Wrenn

Project editor

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Remarks CC Pioneer Life

Form A

Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date February 6, 1939.

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon

Subject Pioneer Life of Tabitha Brown

Name and address of informant Mrs. H. A. Lewis #8 N. E. 97th Ave., Portland, Oregon.

Date and time of interview February 3, 1939 1:30 to 3:30 P. M.

Place of interview Above address, home of informant.

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant —

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you —

Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Large, comfortably but plainly furnished living room, of the ordinary colorless type. House, two-story, six-room, of the early nineties architecture; in fair condition. A garden of the usual variety, enclosed by a fence, surrounds the house, which is situated on a corner. A nursery of considerable acreage adjoins — the business and property of Mr. Lewis.

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The place is more than eleven blocks from the end of the carline on East Glisan, with sidewalks, terminating after two blocks. The cross street, 97th Ave., is unimproved, being a succession of big chuckholes, now full of muddy water and resembling portions of the old immigrant trail across the Cascade Mountains. To avoid these holes, the worker made her zigzagging way until she finally staggered through the gate.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date February 6, 1939.

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon

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Name and address of informant Mrs. H. A. Lewis, 8 N. E. 97th Ave., Portland, Oregon.

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

1. Ancestry
2. Place and date of birth
3. Family
4. Places lived in, with dates

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5. Education, with dates

6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates

7. Special skills and interests

8. Community and religious activities

9. Description of informant

10. Other points gained in interview

1. English.

2. Forest Grove, Oregon, July 18, 1863.

3. Alvin Clark Brown, father; Sarah Ann Ross, mother; two sons, Clayton and Dee.

4. Forest Grove, 1863-1889; Portland, Oregon, 1889 to date.

5. Public schools; Pacific University, Forest Grove, Ore.

6. Teacher, public schools; bookkeeper; housewife. No special accomplishments.

7. No special skills. Interested in Oregon history, flowers and nature.

8. No church affiliation as to denomination. Has always taken part in community Sunday school and social and welfare work. Member of Parent Teachers' Association, Daughters American Revolution, Sons and Daughters of Oregon Pioneers, XPU (Ex-students Pacific University), Oregon Grange.

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9. Intelligent appearing woman. Medium sized, with gray hair, hazel eyes and ordinary style of dress — just one of a thousand women of American lineage. Her ancestors came to America in the 17th century.

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

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Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon.

Subject Pioneer Life of Tabitha Brown

Name and address of informant Mrs. H. A. Lewis, 8 N. E. 97th Ave., Portland, Oregon.

Text:

My grandmother, as you already know, was Tabitha Brown, who, with her little orphan school, started what is now the Pacific University at Forest Grove. I don't believe I know of any incidents that have not already been told and written many times concerning her crossing the plains with her fatherless children and her heroic efforts after reaching here. Her journal is preserved among the treasures of the Pacific University, where it has been available to many students of Oregon history. Being a descendent of thrifty New Englanders, when she found the obstruction in her riding glove finger was a picayune, or 6 1/4 cent piece, you may imagine how happy she was at the discovery, on one of the dark

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days shortly after arrival. With the picayune clutched tightly in her hand she went at once to the trading post, where she exchanged it for three needles. Then she traded some old clothes — and they must have been mighty old, threadbare and ragged clothes for her to have parted with them at all — to the Indians for buckskin, after which she made gloves - and made gloves - and made gloves. She used to say afterward that she had “made gloves for all the ladies and gentlemen of Oregon.”

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When grandmother started her little school at Forest Grove, it was first for orphan children, and in addition to teaching them the alphabet and the three Rs — reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic — she taught them how to keep house and sew. Wait a minute — see, here is the old iron with which she taught them how to iron their clothes. (The iron was of the old-fashioned sadiron type, with an iron handle and all in one piece, the iron now corroded and pitted with small holes). Once, when the strawberries were ripe — the strawberries were so big in those days, much larger than now; my husband thinks it was because of the land having been burned over so often and the rich soil resulting from the ashes. Well anyway, grandmother was sending her little brood out to pick strawberries for dinner. By this time, however, she had other pupils than orphans. Others were sending their children, paying for their education and board with vegetables and grain and such provender, when they hadn't the money. One little girl, whose parents were paying real money in her behalf, decided on this day that she didn't have to pick strawberries. She was heard to say, “My pa pays for me, I'm not going to pick her old berries”, and didn't. But that night at the supper table one place was lacking a saucer of luscious, red wild strawberries. One little girl sat with nothing to eat, while all the rest of the little boys and girls gobbled down strawberries and cream — for they had cream by this time — whether they were rich or poor. There was no more trouble of that kind. Grandmother knew how to deal with class distinction.

Mother, who came to Oregon in 1847, and whose people settled in Portland, was one of grandmother's early pupils, because there was no school in Portland at the time. Her

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romance with my father must have begun rather early. This little song book, called "The School Singer, or Young Choir's Companion," was one of the books she took out to Forest Grove with her. They all took just such books as they might have. Another textbook she had was Webster's speller. My mother was a 3 Congregationalist. But we used to go to other churches and meetings. I remember they used to hold camp meetings regularly at what was known as Ames Chapel, near Crescent Grove cemetery, near what is now Tigard. I can still hear the sonorous voice of one revivalist, who solemnly intoned over and over again: "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." They used to hold these camp meetings for days at a time, sometimes for two or three weeks. They had one big building or shelter, where they slept; the men at one end and the women at the other. Who slept in the middle, between them? Well, as I recall, it was the leader of the meetings and his wife, a Mr. and Mrs. William Kelly. Mr. Kelly slept next to the men and Mrs. Kelly next to the women.

To go back to Grandma Tabitha Brown, it may interest you to know that for a short period, while she and grandfather, who was a clergyman, were waiting for the completion of their parsonage, they lived in the home of George Washington at Mount Vernon. That was in the year 1815, and I remember hearing her tell about it, and the little "cat-door" with hinges, that was in the door leading to Martha Washington's room. I suppose it was her bedroom. It always interested me so as a child, picturing the cat going in and out through its little hinged door.

Of all the lovely things that have been said and written of Grandmother Brown, the loveliest to me, is the tribute written by Mrs. Elizabeth Wilson, one of the early teachers sent out to Oregon by the New England Board of Education, and whose first work here was with grandmother, wherein she says: "Her heart was as tender and kind as her spirit was energetic."

In the wagon train in which my mother came to Oregon a woman joker caused trouble that might have ended in a tragedy. One day an Indian brave of the Nez Perce tribe

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visited them when in camp. It was up in the Nez Perce country, and, fortunately, as matters turned out, he came alone. This woman, who could talk a 4 little jargon, just a few words, gathered some of the girls about her and told the Indian they were all hers, and wouldn't he like to have one. He indicated he would, and picked out my mother. Then the woman, either because she thought the joke would be funnier, or possibly becoming a little frightened, said; "Oh that one is specially fine; she is very white. I want a hundred spotted ponies for her." The Indian grunted and rode off, and it was hoped that ended the incident, for when the men of the party learned of the matter they were greatly concerned. And they had need to be, for next morning, bright and early, here came the Indian, driving in sixty spotted ponies, all that he could collect, and for which he demanded his young white squaw. They said my step-grandfather, Isreal Mitchell, was white as a sheet, when he, with several of the men, finally placated the Indian; and until they got out of that section of the country, the camp guards were kept double what they had before been. They fully expected him to return with reinforcements to demand his bride.

My step-grandfather was a very peaceable man. He didn't come to the Oregon country so much to better his condition, but rather with the idea of helping Dr. Whitman in his missionary efforts. When they reached the Walla Walla country they encamped at the Whitman Mission, and grandmother took advantage of the opportunity to do some laundry. Among the things she washed were a pair of stockings. Meantime an Indian, with his blanket wrapped around him, had stalked, unannounced, into her little domain. Suddenly grandmother missed her stockings. She looked all about, but they were not to be found. Then she turned on her unwelcome visitor, demanding to know if he had them. He was a Mission Indian and could talk some English. He grunted no, he didn't have them, and shook his blankets, but without revealing his hands, to prove his denial. But grandmother was not convinced, and that night she announced to grandfather that 5 "We are not going to stay here among these thieving Indians. We are going on to the Willamette Valley." And on to the Willamette Valley they went. It was only a short time later that the Whitman massacre occurred. Grandmother always felt she owed a good deal to a pair of stockings.

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Another story of the Indians my mother's family told, was about the stealing of their horse, Prince. That was in the Walla Walla country too. The Indians stole Prince, and the next day they brought him back, the chief demanding one shirt. The one shirt was given him. The next day or night Prince was stolen again, and again brought back, and another shirt demanded. This was repeated until grandmother was compelled to make a shirt out of an old dress skirt. This time two shirts were demanded, one big one and one little one, for the chief's son. By that time the wagon train was getting out of the tribe's territory, I suppose, for they left Prince to go on his way unmolested further.

Form D

Extra Comment

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

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Comment:

It was hoped that this interview would result in considerable personal detail concerning Mrs. Lewis's grandmother, Tabitha Brown, but apparently all she had is that which the records of Pacific University reveal.

EXCERPTS FROM THE EARLY OREGON REMINISCENCES OF MRS. E. M. WILSON

In 1851, the year of our first residence in Oregon, the Indians were roaming at will. I was very much interested in them and never afraid. Had I been as observant then as I afterward became, I would never have been so fearless in giving food or clothing. I would insist that the men should carry the burden. The squaw would not comprehend, but I would refuse to hand over the gift until I had some sort of an acquiescence to my plan. But I had no reason to think it was lasting, and suppose the customary burden-bearer took up her load as soon as my back was turned.

Once, some ten or fifteen fine-looking fellows (Indians) gadded into my father's study. Seating themselves on the floor, they stared about in their dignified way, till my father dropped his plate of teeth into his hand, to remove a blackberry seed that annoyed him. One frightened look and then a scramble for the door. Never waiting to rise to their feet, they shot out as if impelled by the Evil One, as they verily believed. No inducement would bring them back. The power to drop one's teeth into the hand and put them back again where they belonged was too "big medicine" for them. I do not doubt my father's life would have been safe with this power, had he otherwise been in danger.

One cold, rainy night, in December, in Albany, the first winter of our Oregon life, I was struck with the terrible misery of two Indians — houseless, 3 soaked with rain — their moccasins fairly water-logged. It was nine o'clock at night. One of them was shaking with ague, or the chill of pneumonia. His lungs were so congested, the rain so severe, he could only catch his breath in gasps, 'wake siah memaloose'. — I thought he was about to die. The other had a violent toothache. I took them into the little house where I taught school, built up a red-hot fire in the stove, and brot blankets from home, food too, though both were too sick to eat. Then I took the laudanum bottle to father and asked him to show

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me an average adult dose. But in giving it, remembering father's homeopathic proclivities, I thot it better to double the dose. I wanted to insure one night of complete forgetfulness. But with my own bedtime came compunctions and fear. What if they, unused to white man's concoctions, should be unusually pensitive. Now I was sure I did not want to commit murder. What if I should find two dead Indians in my schoolroom in the morning. With fear and trembling I went over in the early morning — but a still earlier hour had sent them on their way. The following year two fine looking Indians accosted me. I did not remember them, but they identified themselves as my hospital patients of the year before, and repeatedly declared, 'skookum medicine'.

In Sept., 1851, I was riding horseback through the unsettled counties of Polk and Yamhill, on my way from Albany to Forest Grove, where I was teaching. Somewhere in the northern part of Yamhill County, we saw the cabin of a new settler. A fence, newly built, enclosed a small piece, broken up for a garden. A man was ploughing at a little distance in the open. The sun was gone; the world lay in twilight; only this little cabin, the result of a few days' work, to make the scene look otherwise than it had looked for a thousand years. It might be many miles to the next house, so, uninviting as the prospect 4 was, we thot better to beg shelter for the night and supper, to risking the possibility of not finding any at all. My escort rode to the man who was still with his plow, and I dismounted at the cabin, where two little children, perhaps two and four years of age, were looking at me thru the rude fence. 'Please tell your mother to come out'. They did not speak, only looked at me. I tried again. 'Tell mammy to come.' I then went in, and taking the oldest by the hand, I said, 'Take me where mammy is,' and the little thing led me around the corner of the house to the other side of the enclosure, and stopped by a new-made grave.

In February, 1855, I was going on the steamer Canemah to Oregon City. I was married then but a short time, and very able to enter sympathetically into the emotions of a young married couple — married that morning — that came on board, the bride not much over sixteen. They were going to the Cascades, he to work in a sawmill, she to cook for the men. She was dressed as she thot proper for a bride, but not at all suitably for a boat ride

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on a cold, rainy day. I got into talk with her. She said it was her first time on a steamboat. I advised her to go behind a portier and change into something warmer... I became much interested in the young couple, and it was with a sense of personal bereavement that I heard the following fall of the young husband's being killed by the Indians, in the sawmill; having first witnessed the butchering of his wife.

In the fall of 1855 my mother and brother (?) took up a claim, two and one-fourth sections on the south edge of the French Prairie. To make the necessary proofs they had to go to Oregon City. My husband was very unwilling to leave us alone at night, but no time could be lost. Mr. Wilson wrote to my brother, who was assessing Marion County, asking him to come if possible. He also took me into the yard and gave me a lesson in self-defense. So, when the Salem stage wagon came along, they started, going over the Champoeg road — mother and Joseph, my husband, leaving myself and my two younger sisters alone. The whole eastern part of the State was then in a state of outbreak.

The long summer day came to a close. My younger sister and I retired, leaving Mary reading. Presently I was awakened by her gasping voice, 'The house is surrounded by drunken Indians!' It seemed true, but I recalled that a log cabin, with but one well-barred door, no window that could be entered; a wide, low chimney, to be sure, but that could be easily defended by fire. Their voices were drunken, but a great comfort came to us when we recognized Frenchmen. Yet still there was no quieting our fears till they moved on. Shortly after what seemed to be a round of parting drinks, we heard the delightful sound of their moving away. We were so weakened by fright that we had not left our post of lookout, when Mary, in a voice of utter despair said, 'One of them is jumping his horse over the fence!' At that instant he began to sing. No song or anthem will ever carry up from my heart a fuller burden of devout gratitude than the words we heard: 'Oh, I almost wish That I were a fish, To be caught by My sweet Kitty Clyde.'

My brother, Frank, had found the note in Salem and rode out to the ranch, keeping well behind the other party, whom he had seen were unusually merry and boisterous.

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Once in awhile, at White Salmon, we all went up the mountainside, to where, on a small plateau, were a number of tepees, the occupants of which were going thru the ceremonial of the Snohollo excitement or belief. I understood it imperfectly. As far as I did it seemed very similar to the Messiah craze, in the Dakotas, a few years ago. I soon wearied of what, to me, seemed utterly meaningless, and went into a tepee, where sat an old, smoke-dried crone. She was glad to see me. Seemed to have some burden on her heart that I must hear. After much repetition on her part, and much bewilderment on mine, I gathered that, in spite of appearances, she was not like them — the crowd outside, that she was like me, 'my sister.' I did not know at what she was aiming till I heard the name 'Jason Lee' repeated over and over again. Then she asked me to listen, and with her teeth tightly closed, she sent thru them some vocal sounds which at last I caught to be two or three lines of Greenville. I began to sing, 'Come ye sinners, poor and needy.' She accompanied me with what sounded like singing on a comb. She enjoyed it and so did I. Her story I translate to be this. At one time she had been to the Salem school, or under the teaching of Jason Lee; that she had glimpses of a higher life than savagery had given her; that in the following years she had held on to the little she had, stoutly refusing to countenance by her presence the Snohollo incantations going on outside. The wigwam smoke and the wild life had wellnigh obliterated the little she knew, but to the name of 'Jason Lee' she held as to a watchward. Most truly she seemed to be one feeling for God's hand in the darkness. I believe she was then lifted up and strengthened. This was the only time I ever chanced, knowingly, to meet anyone who had been brot under that early missionary influence.

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One spring, my husband being gone on his first circuit to hold court, I was taken ill, and to make it more convenient for those who cared for me, my bed was brot down into the living room. I was alone there, quite ill, when the door was opened, and a big Indian walked in and said that he would bring his ictas to me, that I must take care of them while he was away on some journey. Another Siwash had stolen his klutchman (cloochiman - his

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woman) and he was going after them to recover either wife or ponies. But he could not leave his possessions in his wigwam or they would be stolen. I was quite helpless; only children in the house. There were many things I would rather have than the belongings of an Indian. I asked him how long he would leave them; 'three suns.' 'Very well,' I told him, 'but not one minute longer than three suns.' Could I have had my choice they would not have shared my room three minutes, but he was faithful to his word and kept his appointment to the minute.

In 1885, one June afternoon, I heard peculiar noises on the sidewalk, in the shade of my house, and found them to be the result of an extraordinary sewing club that was squatted there, working hard. They explained that the boat that day was to bring the students of their reservation, who had been away at the Forest Grove Indian School. They had come to meet them, but had not had time to completely finish all the preparations they were making. As needles and thimbles were put to work, sleeves finished and set in, buttons put on and buttonholes worked, the change from old to new clothes was made under our high sidewalk, and when the boat whistled a neatly dressed score of more of relatives went down to meet the students.

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Among the remarkable Indians of early days was one called 'Lawyer.' His son, (?) also called Lawyer, took charge of the horses of Lewis and Clark on their expedition to the Pacific in 1804-6. Here is an individual - a special development, leading an advance guard; small perhaps, but easily distinguished from the rank and file... his generations following may be ready to carry onward a few steps farther, the banner of progress — this was the case with the famous Indian, Lawyer, a Nez Perce.

All who claim Oregon as a home are indebted to this truly noble red man for the powers he possessed and exercised toward promoting unity. In June, 1877, in the old Congregational Church on Third Street, I saw Archie Lawyer, his son, en route to Portland to receive ordination as a Presbyterian minister. He was accompanied by two others, and a more

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dignified, gentlemanly, intelligent class of students, it was never my privilege to see. This was the year of the death of his father at about the age of eighty. Lawyer was one of the first pupils of H. G. (?) Spaulding in 1837, who came to the West with Dr. Whitman. He learned to read well, and to the end of his life showed the bearing of an intelligent and cultivated gentleman.

Another example of industry was found in the person of an Indian woman, known as Jennie Mitchell. She was once the wife of the last chief of the Nehalems. In 1860, the chief being dead, she came to her own land, the Clatsop country, and there married Michael Martineau, with whom she lived until his death. Indian women age rapidly in appearance. Her age, is, of course, unknown. She remembers, as a child, hearing the bombardment of the Indian village at the mouth of the Columbia, by Dr. McLaughlin, in 1829. What with smoke and disorder she seemed 9 extremely old. She did not talk English. I was made to observe what I had seen before, the peculiar devotion of the Indian woman who marries a white man. He may not be a very noble specimen of his race, but, such as he is, the native woman submits to — returns for everything the utmost devotion. From the first light of dawn to the last glimmer, she wrought constantly over her baskets and rush mats. The last of her race — all of her kindred dead — childless. How good it was that she could weave mats!

In the year 1869 we spent some time at the Indian Agency of Fort Simcoe. Agent Wilbur was a wonderfully gifted man, fitted as few are for his work. From camping with the Indians in the forest, showing them how to fell the trees, to make and load the skids, which supplied the sawmill, and the lumber to construct the various buildings on the Reserve; to acting on police force; he was infinitely resourceful, lightning quick in thought and action. I asked him once where he learned how so quickly to plant that giant fist of his just where it was most needed. He said he was once a deputy sheriff in N. Y. I cannot compare Mr. Wilbur to distinguished leaders of men I have read of in history. He was a man of affairs, often called from his remote sphere of action to confer with those at the head of Indian affairs at Washington, where his counsel was regarded with rare reverence. The first time

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we visited the Reservation was after a terrible bereavement, the loss by drowning of my son, Alfred. The Indians all knew of it and I am reminded of that touch of nature that makes kinship of copper color and white, in remembering that one of them went to a house that was near and brot thence a rocking chair, which he placed for me. I am sure it indicated sympathy, tho no doubt they were proud of the unusual possession of so elegant an article of furniture, and not unwilling it should be used by the strange visitors... We visited a farm house with Mr. Wilbur — the pride of his heart.

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He said the amount of work done by that family was surprising, and it was — a decent farm house, floored, with glass windows, some chairs, table, etc. The pride of the house, however, was the quantity of crochet work. Everything to which a crochet edge could be fastened, had it. It was not quite so smoked and grimy as it would have been had they been living on the ground floor of the original tepee. The beds were veritable constructions, with quilts, pillows, pillow cases, trimmed deep with their own work, and a great improvement over the huddle of skins and horse blankets that make their usual bed. But I hope by this time they spend a little less time on washing the floor, and a little more on the bed linen.