

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

NORMAN, Okla., <sup>June 30</sup>~~May 30~~--Sacajawea is famous for her association with the Lewis and Clark expedition, but an obscure Indian girl named Watkuese may once have saved the lives of Lewis and Clark without their ever having been aware of it. The little-known episode is related in a new book published today by the University of Oklahoma Press, "Indian Legends of the Northern Rockies," by Ella E. Clark.

The story was told to Miss Clark by Mrs. Elizabeth Wilson, of Kamiah, Idaho. It had become a traditional tale told by her people, the Nez Perces, about the time long ago (1805) when Lewis and Clark had come among them.

According to the story, a young girl had been captured by warriors from an enemy tribe. She was taken east and sold to some white people. Her baby was born there--a boy. But soon she left the white people and hiked all the way back to her own tribe. On the way, her little boy died of starvation. She was named Watkuese, which meant "escaped and returned to her own country."

She was sick in bed when the strangers came. She heard the commotion and asked what was happening and learned that white strangers had appeared in the valley. A Negro was with them. The Indians thought he had been smoked or was an evil spirit; others thought his dark color was war paint that indicated his bravery in battle. Watkuese asked that the head chief be brought to her

When he came, Watkuese asked him to save the white strangers: "When I was coming all that long journey, when I was hungry, white people fed me. When I was sick, white people took care of me. They will be kind to you, too. Don't be afraid of them, and don't harm them. They did no harm to me. Go up close to them and make friends with them."

The chief met with the other members of the council, and they agreed to spare the white strangers.

"Watkuese died very soon afterward--that very night, I think," said Mrs. Wilson. "If it had not been for her, all the Lewis and Clark men would have been killed."

In her book, Miss Clark adds, "After reading Bernard De Voto's abbreviated edition of the 'Journals of Lewis and Clark' the following winter, Mrs. Wilson wrote to me: 'What I told you is a true Indian story about Lewis and Clark's outfit. But none of it is mentioned in the book. I gather it was never explained to them how close they were to being killed and that this one woman saved their lives. I suppose they had no way of knowing what was going on. They mention that they were kindly treated, but it might have been otherwise.'"

Miss Clark is professor emeritus of English in Washington State University. She has spent several years collecting these tales, myths, and legends for her book.

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