

# Same Traditions, New Reasons: Experiences of American Indian Women in Pawnee Bill's Wild West Shows



*By Alyce Vigil*

Imagine waking up in the early morning hours. The cold seeps around the doorway, causing you to dress quickly. You cook eggs for breakfast and wake your children and husband. After the meal, your husband and children go out while you tidy the house and prepare for your day, finally stepping outside into the midst of a chaotic landscape full of American cowboys in leather chinks; Mexican vaqueros with large, jangling, silver spurs; horses and bulls of every color; and wagons, stagecoaches, and train cars creaking, rumbling, and whistling. Your husband and son ride around the side of the tipi, the former riding bareback in feathers and war paint, the latter wearing chaps and a cowboy hat. To the left and right, Cheyenne and Pawnee neighbors are doing the same. You join the other wives in their work of beading, tanning hides, cooking meals; skills passed down through generations of women. Later in the day white visitors walk among the

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tipis, watching you. That evening you join the other cast members in a crowded arena, performing in Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West.

Wild West shows such as this one organized by Gordon William "Pawnee Bill" Lillie (1860–1942) were the unofficial national pastime of America, and endeavored to teach white Americans about life on the western frontier. American Indians were very important to this life, and naturally featured prominently in the shows. Native women in particular held very important roles in the Pawnee Bill Wild West show, although they worked mainly behind-the-scenes performing time-honored roles as they had for generations. They maintained a traditional home in the encampments and participated in battle reenactments in the show itself. They traveled with their husbands and preserved a traditional view of family life events, such as births and deaths, and formed friendships with people from other ethnic groups while on the road. Most importantly, by participating in the Wild West shows native women had the opportunity to preserve their traditional way of life and, by virtue of the shows, make being Indian slightly more acceptable to the white audience.

When investigating the topic of American Indian women in Wild West shows, the researcher finds that authors have largely neglected the roles of native people. One of the most informative and comprehensive secondary sources is L. G. Moses's book *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883–1933* (1999).<sup>1</sup> This source covers a wide range of topics, but even this reference is incomplete. Moses concentrates solely on the American Indian men in the show; the book rarely even mentions women. The larger literature of today gives the same emphasis; the white men on the show have first priority, American Indian men come in a distant second, and native women a nonexistent third. The notable exceptions to this rule, however, are those few native female performers who style themselves as "princesses." Lillian Smith (1871–1930), more popularly known by her stage name Princess Wenona, was one such woman. Michael Wallis's book, *The Real Wild West: The 101 Ranch and the Creation of the American West* (2000), devotes much discussion to her biography. A sharpshooter whose skill and popularity made even the famous Annie Oakley jealous, she was on the Wild West show circuit for many years before retiring. This paper will discuss her story in more detail later, but it is interesting to a historiographical discussion to note the fame she won merely by presenting herself as an "Indian princess." By calling herself a princess, Smith separated herself from the other native women in the show, whom the white audience saw as "squaws": dirty, subservient women who condoned horrifying acts of violence. The white audience

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*G. W. "Pawnee Bill" Lillie, 1908  
(3878, Virginia Sutton Collection,  
OHS Research Division).*



condemned squaws but celebrated those noble women who embraced Anglo culture as princesses. Smith was one woman who saw the advantages of being a princess, so she styled herself as one. Hence, audiences loved her. Fascinated by her native heritage, the public nonetheless felt that she was far enough removed from it that she was not a threat. Because of this, historians study her life, and there is a wealth of literature about her <sup>2</sup>

To discover why American Indians, and native women in particular, traveled with the Wild West shows, it is first necessary to discuss what was happening within the tribes themselves at the time. Perhaps the most obvious people to be involved in Pawnee Bill's show were members of the Pawnee tribe. The Pawnee tribe is composed of four clans: the Skidi, Chau, Kitkehahki, and the Pitahawirata.<sup>3</sup> The Pawnees' traditional land was in Nebraska, but in 1874 Agent William Burgess went south to find new land for them. He settled on a stretch of land immediately west of the Arkansas River and north of the Cimarron in present-day northeastern Oklahoma. The Pawnees began the long journey, but by February 1875 had only made it as far as Wichita, Kansas, since many storms held them in camp.<sup>4</sup> It was along this journey that young Gordon Lillie met the tribe. A lad of fifteen, he was living in Wellington, Kansas, at the time, and spent all his free time at the Pawnees' camp. He befriended several, most notably a medicine man named Blue Hawk, and eventually followed them to Indian Territory, where he worked at the Indian agency <sup>5</sup>

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*Pawnee Bill stagecoach, photograph by Merryman of Pawnee, printed c. 1926 (23358.3, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS Research Division).*

Meanwhile, the Pawnees did not reach their new land until the end of June—much too late to plant crops. It was a bad beginning, but the Pawnee women were especially eager to work and make improvements. They wished to build homes similar to the earth lodges they had in Nebraska. The US Congress, however, would not let them build such structures; one reason for moving Indians to reservations was to halt such “barbaric” practices. Congress demanded that the Pawnees only build log cabins; however, neither the Pawnees nor their agent knew how, and they had no money for materials. Congress did not allow the Pawnees to help themselves, and forced them to survive the winter in unhealthy conditions, with cold canvas tipis and only the little food the government gave them.<sup>6</sup> The Pawnees became so desperate and bored that when Major Frank North (1840–85) came to get scouts to fight the Sioux, he had no difficulty in finding one hundred men.<sup>7</sup> Federal reach even extended to the youngest of the Pawnees. The government built a boarding school and thoroughly established a “prison system” within it by 1883. In 1887, an epidemic of measles broke out, and the agent ordered the faculty not to care for those who became ill, but to “kick the children out.”<sup>8</sup> Out of eighty-five children affected, at least forty died from lack of care. The government sent some children away from the reservation to Chilocco Indian Agricultural School in far north-central Oklahoma or as far away as Carlisle School in Pennsylvania.<sup>9</sup> This



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horrific treatment continued for several years, causing the population of the Pawnees to decline drastically. In their ancestral home of Nebraska in the year 1872, the Pawnees numbered 2,447. By 1876, only a year after their removal, they had decreased slightly to 2,026, and by 1890, their numbers had fallen dramatically to only 804.<sup>10</sup>

Pawnee women enjoyed an elevated status within the tribe. Pawnee religion held the feminine as centrally important. For example, the Pawnees called the constellation known as the Pleiades “the Women.” At midnight on the full moon of September, they are directly overhead, and only then could the harvest ceremony festival begin. Further, the Pawnees held that God had set these stars there to travel from east to west to form a guide to the Pawnees so they would not get lost. Therefore, women in Pawnee mythology were associated with very important things such as crops, food, travel, and direction. As a matrilineal people, Pawnee women were important in daily life as well. Some even fought alongside their husbands in battle.<sup>11</sup>

The Cheyenne people were another tribe whose members featured prominently in Pawnee Bill’s Wild West. The Cheyennes were originally from present-day Minnesota and the Dakotas.<sup>12</sup> While the Pawnees traditionally lived in earth lodges, the Cheyennes lived in tipis.<sup>13</sup> Prior to reservation life, Cheyenne women enjoyed complementary roles with the men. They farmed, harvested, cooked the food, and dressed and prepared buffalo robes for trade. They exclusively managed their households, and organized food and gifts for powwows and all major ceremonies.<sup>14</sup> The women also made clothes for all members of their family from buffalo, deer, and elk hides, and they sometimes traded these goods.<sup>15</sup>

The Cheyennes had two subcategories: northern and southern. On October 28, 1867, a treaty between the US and the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes provided for a reservation in present-day Oklahoma for the Southern Cheyenne and Southern Arapaho tribes. In 1869 Congress established a temporary agency at Camp Supply, with Brinton Darlington as agent. A presidential executive order of August 10, 1869, moved the reservation to a site five miles northwest of present-day El Reno, Oklahoma, calling it Darlington, after the agent.<sup>16</sup> Life on the Cheyenne reservation was monotonous, and the people were poor.<sup>17</sup> Because of this several enlisted as US Army scouts or joined the Wild West shows, in order to work for pay to try to make a better life for themselves and their families.

Wild West shows offered American Indians an opportunity to escape the boredom, impoverishment, and horrors of the reservations. One of the most important opportunities the shows offered was the prospect

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*The Pawnee, Oklahoma, Indian Agency, Pawnee Bill in the crowd, photograph by Wagon Photo Company (21412.PR.1, Barney Hillerman Collection, OHS Research Division).*

of working for pay Pawnee Bill's Wild West paid each man for each member of his household who worked in the show, and any horses he had. The wages were as follows: men, \$25; children, \$15; women, \$10; and horses \$25.<sup>18</sup> If these numbers are compared to the wages in the late 1880s, it is evident that inflation has not made much impact. In fact, these numbers are lower, although it may be because Wild West shows were not nearly as profitable as they had been in previous years, and because these individuals were not employed for the same length of time. Another, perhaps more likely reason, is that the supply outweighed the demand. As previously stated, many native people wished to travel with the shows, and therefore show organizers did not have to pay as much to procure actors.<sup>19</sup>

According to this information, the researcher can infer something about the mentality behind the show's organizers. Women were not worth as much as men or even boys. By paying extra for a horse, probably to help alleviate the cost of hay, the show's director encouraged men to bring their own horse if they had one. This helped the show immensely, as the public liked to see Indians on horseback running full tilt across the arena. Horses appeared to be more important than, or at the very least of equal importance as women. However, there are some rare records of females without a male escort being in the show; this suggests that while women usually joined the show to accompany their husbands and families, it was not unheard of for a single woman to join of her own accord. Mrs. A. Kelly took her two young boys on the show circuit, for example, as head of household in her own right. From her title, researchers can assume she was a widow, which may be why it was acceptable for her to emerge as the leader of her family in a world run by men. Miss Martha Rice, however, does not fit that mold. She was probably an unmarried girl who signed up for the show for the same reason others did—in hope of a chance to work for pay at a job that valued her traditional skills.<sup>20</sup>

Another incentive for American Indian women to join Pawnee Bill's Wild West show was to be with other Indian people in a traditional

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*Butchering bison at Pawnee Bill's ranch, c. 1890-1916 (4234, Frederick S. Barde Collection, OHS Research Division).*

*Left to right, standing: Pa-So-Top-A, unidentified, infant, Mary Lookout, Jean Standing Bear unidentified, Julia Lookout, unidentified. Left to right, seated: Colonel Zack Miller G. W Lillie, Frank Phillips, Standing Bear's baby, Fred Lookout, and Francis Revard, photograph by Griggs of Bartlesville (19160.157 Blanche Garrison Collection, OHS Research Division).*



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setting. Apparently joining a Wild West show was a common goal for many Indians, as Pawnee Bill had several agents write him letters offering, and sometimes almost begging him, to hire Indians for his show. For example, a July 1916 letter from M. H. Bartin, an agent in Gordon, Nebraska, presents a man named Holy Eagle, his wife, and nine-year-old boy, and a man named Shoutat, his wife, and two girls aged two and four years.<sup>21</sup> It is likely that, for an agent to write such a letter to a showman, he was under considerable pressure from Holy Eagle and Shoutat, who wished for gainful employment. Pawnee Bill also put some individuals in charge of procuring cast members. A Pawnee man named Thomas Morgan, for example, had a contract with Pawnee Bill to provide Pawnee Indians (twenty-five men, ten women, and fifteen children) and thirty horses on August 3, 1921, to go to Sedalia, Missouri. In this contract Pawnee Bill agreed to feed and transport people and stock at his own expense, and pay all cast members flat rates for the trip. Men earned \$20, women \$10, children and horses \$6.<sup>22</sup>

Cast lists detailed in show programs and route books, the detailed publications of the shows' travels and the casts' daily lives on the road intended as souvenirs for show audiences, offer an interesting glimpse into the uncertain status of native women in Pawnee Bill's Wild West show. The 1894 program lists women under the heading "Squaws," and the program lists their relationship to other cast members, possibly as justification for being included in the show at all. For example, listed is "Female Horse, wife of Good Boy, Chief of the Mohaves." In the 1898 program there were no native women or children listed at all, although men were enumerated. The 1899 program, however, listed both native women and children, under the titles of "squaws" and "papooses," of course. The program from 1900 did not list American Indian cast members at all, although the 1901 program listed all of them. Only the men were listed in 1908. The 1910 program saw an interesting compromise, as all Indian performers were listed under not their own names, but those of the head of household. For example, there were Kills Enemy under the heading "Indians," Mrs. Kills Enemy under "Squaws," and Kills Enemy again under "Papooses."<sup>23</sup> By tracking the way the programs listed women, we can perhaps glean information about how much show organizers valued their presence and contributions. In 1894, during the show's heyday, a woman was important enough to be named, but program writers thought the public would also be interested in her husband's status. The emphasis seems to be on family and cultural leaders, such as "chiefs" and "braves." By 1900 program writers demoted all American Indians to mere bystanders—something



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that may not have gone over well with the audience, as they completely reversed it by the next year. By 1910, however, only a few years before the demise of Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Pawnee Bill's Great Far East Show, program writers gave native women and children only a passing mention, in favor of the Anglo tradition of male dominance.

The final and most important reason Americans Indians wanted to join the Pawnee Bill Wild West show was to give them the opportunity to maintain a traditional way of life. On the show circuit being Indian was not discouraged as it was on the reservation or in boarding schools. Indianness was an essential part of show life. This idea manifested itself in many ways, from the daily lives of cast members to special occasions to participation in the show itself. For example, Pawnee Bill purchased typically Anglo foodstuffs for his cast such as beef, soup, milk, and various vegetables. However, he did supplement it with ethnic foods, such as spaghetti, rice, and corn.<sup>24</sup> The American Indians with the show further supplemented these. When two buffalo died of the heat in September 1895, the Indians quickly butchered them.<sup>25</sup> Upon returning from an impromptu fishing trip they made turtle soup.<sup>26</sup> Given that that Pawnee and Cheyenne women were instrumental in procuring and cooking food, it is likely that the women handled the bulk of this work. The American Indians also liked to travel with the show. While the show was in Paris, for example, several Indians ascended the Eiffel Tower. In his book, Moses quotes an awed native man, Red Shirt, as saying, "If people look so little to us up here, how very much smaller they must seem to One who is up higher."<sup>27</sup> Significantly, Moses mentions no women on this trip.

The traditional special occasions of American Indian life continued on the circuit of the Pawnee Bill Wild West show. Mothers gave birth and doted on their children, much as they always had, and the writers of the route books seized upon the happy occasion, too. In DeSoto, Missouri, on September 2, 1895, for example, Charging Thunder and his wife Taken Prisoner had a baby boy, whom they named Pawnee Bill after the show's director. It is interesting to note that they were Mohave, not Pawnee.<sup>28</sup> Not to be outdone, Good Boy and his wife named their little girl, born in Houma, Louisiana, on October 13, 1895 May Lillie after Pawnee Bill's wife, who was a skilled sharpshooter in the show.<sup>29</sup> Other media were not exempt from the fascination with native children born on the show route. A November 1903 article in the *St. Louis Republic*, for example, details Pony Little Star, born in Portland, Oregon on October 18, 1903, to father Little Chief and mother Shining Light. The paper even went so far as to take a photograph of the family. The flashbulb caused surprise for the adults, but the father

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*Roaming Chief (Pawnee) and Pawnee Bill shaking hands, photograph by Burke and Atwell of Chicago, 1904 (2164, Frederick S. Barde Collection, OHS Research Division).*

asked that the newspaper send a copy of the picture to him at the Rosebud Agency in South Dakota.<sup>30</sup>

Happy occasions, however, were not all that contemporary writers heeded. In Pennsylvania on June 8, 1895, a two-year-old Sioux boy named Charles White Horse died of congestion of the lungs. Captain Shaw, who wrote the route book that year, states that he “had two doctors out during the day,” but to no avail.<sup>31</sup> The necessary time and the expense this surely incurred leads the researcher to believe that Shaw and his superiors surely cared much for the young boy and his family. His parents held the boy’s funeral the next day, attended by the entire show cast and some five thousand citizens.<sup>32</sup> Doubtless the Pennsylvanians came merely to see a traditional Indian burial, but the presence of the cast again speaks to the camaraderie felt among the performers.

American Indian women in the show also engaged in severe bickering. In 1895 a woman named Black Buffalo set her tent close to Shaw’s and it caused an argument between her and Shaw’s wife.<sup>33</sup> Later in the season Black Buffalo and another native woman named Mrs. White Horse got into a “scrap, [and] both came out with cut heads and bad hearts.” Apparently Pawnee Bill saw this as the last straw, as he fired Black Buffalo and made her buy a train ticket to return to her home in Rushville, Nebraska.<sup>34</sup>

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*May Lillie, wife of Pawnee Bill, photograph by Burke and Atwell of Chicago, c. 1890-1916 (2158, Frederick S. Barde Collection, OHS Research Division).*



Fights between the native women and white showmen were not the norm, however. Cast members formed friendships on the road, where perhaps the inherent temporary lifestyle and loneliness made common ground easier to find. A few white cast members learned the Sioux language, for example, and when it was cold, the cast fell into the habit of congregating around the Indians' fires to stay warm.<sup>35</sup> While the show was in Racine, Wisconsin, May Lillie went to a large blanket factory and bought \$500 worth of Indian blankets that the American Indians stayed up all night admiring and trading.<sup>36</sup> When the *St. Louis Republic* interviewed members of the show in 1903, they learned that a cast member, John Hollow Horn, was a graduate of the Indian boarding school Carlisle. Hollow Horn could speak English very well, but it was difficult to get him to do so. Only when the newspapermen mentioned football did he "throw aside his reserve and talk freely."<sup>37</sup> Mutual love of the sport of football provided an avenue of common ground. Show organizers such as L. F. Nicodemus took the Indians to see a play once, which they enjoyed immensely.<sup>38</sup> While the show was in East Saginaw, Michigan, on August 18, 1895, all the American cowboys, the entire Mexican band, and every one of the American Indians took streetcars to an amusement park, where they rode the Ocean Wave Swing, making one or two seasick to the amusement of the others. In fact, these particular groups that historically had been the bitterest of enemies often took side-trips together and enjoyed each other's company.<sup>39</sup> Even several years after the show ended, cast members remained in contact. A Cheyenne man, Ernie Black of Longdale,



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*May Lillie feeding livestock at Pawnee Bill's Blue Hawk Peak Ranch, 1890-1916 (2159.C, Frederick S. Barde Collection, OHS Research Division).*

Oklahoma, who was in the Miller Brothers' 101 Ranch Wild West show and who once helped get Cheyenne Indians to be in Pawnee Bill's show sent Pawnee Bill a pair of beaded moccasins made by his wife in March 1940.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps because of these friendships, the Americans Indians showed immense loyalty to Pawnee Bill's Wild West show. For example, on July 2, 1895, while the show was in Tamaqua, Pennsylvania, there was opposition by another "faker" show—an operation that the people with Pawnee Bill's show deemed to be unauthentic. This show tried to open on the grounds Pawnee Bill was using. The Indians chased them down the street and they fled, terrified.<sup>41</sup> Shortly thereafter, on July 4, 1895, while the show was in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, the Indians policed the area heavily. When the show vacated it was the only show to date during which no one slipped into the show under the sidewalls of the main tent without a ticket.<sup>42</sup> While some could paint this sort of behavior as loyalty to the show, it is true that one could also read this behavior as a form of self-interest, even self-preservation. If the show did poorly, they would be forced to go back to the reservation.

While often the feelings between cast members were friendly, the



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feelings of the public toward American Indians were not always as convivial. In a newspaper article from the *St. Louis Republic*, eight police officers at the Union Train Station kept fifty-five Sioux prisoners for two full days while they waited for their train. The Sioux had been with the show for twenty-six weeks and were returning to the Rosebud and Valentine Agencies in South Dakota and Nebraska, respectively. They had just arrived from Pana, Illinois. After the last show of the season, some of the younger men of the party had celebrated with whiskey bought for them by coalminers. Before they left, they “terrorized” the citizens and became “unmanageable.”<sup>43</sup> The Pana police telegraphed those in Saint Louis to warn them of impending danger. By the time they reached Saint Louis, the Indians were sober and no fights occurred. Although the newspaper article did paint the American Indians as drunks who tried to “escape to the bar” at one point (although possibly, having been held there for two days, they were merely hungry), the article goes on to praise them as “typical Sioux.” Their tall stature and almost haughty manner awed the journalist and those Missourians who saw them.<sup>44</sup> This dichotomy is interesting. Praise comes immediately after condemnation. On the one hand, white people saw these men and women as noble savages, proud and awe-inspiring and worthy of the highest praise. Their treatment by the police, however, begs the rhetorical question. Does the perception of being a “typical Sioux” include being a drunk?

To play to the idea of American Indians as noble savages, Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show emphasized the participation of the American Indians. This, after all, was what the white audiences were most interested in seeing—a portrayal of “real life” on the western plains. American Indian women, whether the audiences realized it at the time or not, played a key role in that story. Advertisements for the show included posters that portrayed images of a day at an Indian village and a village on the move, for example.<sup>45</sup> One of the newspaper advertisements for the show called it “Pawnee Bill's Indian Show” there was no mention of “Historical Wild West.”<sup>46</sup> Another newspaper devoted almost an entire article to the Indians in the show, dwelling on “a tribe of Pawnee Indians [who spoke] the Pawnee language.” This article called the show “Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show and Indian Village and Museum.”<sup>47</sup> We can see by the emphasis placed on the American Indians even in the naming of the show itself that they were of the utmost importance to the show in its early years. Pawnee Bill knew the public wanted to see Indian villages and hear their language. In fact, on May 19, 1895, in New Castle, Pennsylvania, people crowded the Indians so closely that one “got out of patience, took his horse and

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ran them out.” When the show landed at Antwerp, Belgium, on April 19, 1894, a huge crowd awaited them at the docks, mainly to see the Indians.<sup>48</sup>

The native women’s most significant contribution to the show was, therefore, in the encampment they set up near the show tent in each city the show visited. They erected tipis and maintained a traditional household, just as tribal women had for generations.<sup>49</sup> This served to preserve the “Indianness” of the cast, and proved interesting and educational to the white visitors.

American Indian women also participated in the show itself. They took part in the Grand Review, wherein the entire cast was in the arena at the same time as a preview for what the audience was about to see, and in the Final Salute, wherein the entire cast again packed the arena as a friendly goodbye to the audience. The American Indian women also participated in some of the acts within the show, albeit in a very limited, stereotypical way. The women’s most notable act in 1910, for example, was the portrayal of the Battle of Summit Springs. Historically, in this battle the 5<sup>th</sup> United States Cavalry, commanded by



*Annie Oakley, c. 1889, photograph by R. K. Fox. (Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-24362).*

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General E. A. Carr, and Pawnee Scouts under the command of Buffalo Bill Cody, fought renegade Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahos, under their leader Tall Bull. Tall Bull and his followers had raided a white town, murdering several people and taking some women captive. The US Army and Pawnee Scouts followed their trail to the Indians' camp. Here is where the show picks up. The audience saw a war dance and the "cruel treatment of the women captives" by the native women. In a surprise dawn attack, the army and scouts raided the village, killed the warriors, captured the Indian women and children, rescued the white women, and Buffalo Bill shot and killed Tall Bull.<sup>50</sup> And those who deserve it live happily ever after, according to the Anglo view

Some native women, however, did enjoy a larger part in the show. Most notable of these is Lillian Smith, more popularly known by her stage name Princess Wenona. Because she styled herself as an "Indian Princess," a wealth of knowledge exists about her, unlike the majority of native women in the shows whom white audiences gave the derogatory name "squaws." Smith was born February 3, 1871, in Coleville, California. The 1880 census displays an "I" for Indian, not a "W" for white, although her particular tribe is unknown.<sup>51</sup> Wild West show organizers billed her as a Sioux princess, the daughter of chief Crazy Snake. According to publicity accounts from the mid-1880s, she was seven years old when she received her first .22 rifle. She most likely signed up with Buffalo Bill's Wild West when he discovered her in 1885 while at a shooting gallery in Los Angeles. Maybe because of this encounter, or her home state, or a combination of the two, she took the stage name the "California Girl." She proved herself skilled with shotguns, revolvers, and rifles, especially while on horseback. For example, she could break ten glass balls on strings swinging from a pole, and then shoot the strings without a miss.

Annie Oakley, the famous petite, white sharpshooter with Buffalo Bill, became jealous of the attention the press gave Smith, especially when the show toured England in 1887 as part of Queen Victoria's Jubilee celebrating the first fifty years of her reign. At a command performance for the queen, both "American girls," as Queen Victoria called them, were presented to her; but when the *Illustrated London News* published a sketch of the event, they portrayed Smith and ignored the presence of Oakley. Indeed, when fifteen-year-old Smith first joined the show, Oakley began to lie about her age, saying she had been born in 1866 instead of 1860. Overnight she became a young girl of twenty again. Oakley had always been petite (which may explain how she got away with the age-defying game), and Smith had a tendency to gain weight. When she noticed this, Oakley began to

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ridicule her “ample figure” often.<sup>52</sup> Oakley’s derision finally got so bad that it led Smith to leave Buffalo Bill’s show in 1889 and tour with other shows under the new stage name “Princess Wenona” so that the press and the public would not recognize her as easily.<sup>53</sup> She had four husbands and was involved with several more men, but her favorite husband was her last, Frank C. Smith, an expert rifle and pistol shot, with whom she continued to tour until their divorce.<sup>54</sup> During the 1905 season, the couple joined Pawnee Bill’s Historic Wild West with an act called “Wenona and Frank—the World’s Champion Rifle Shots,” wherein Smith shot ashes off Frank’s cigar and a dime out of his hand.<sup>55</sup> In 1907 she enlisted with the 101 Ranch Wild West Show and permanently moved to Oklahoma. By the mid-1920s, several 101 Ranch performers had moved into the film industry, but Hollywood left others behind. The Miller brothers let many of these, including Smith, live on the property in exchange for light ranch work.<sup>56</sup> Smith stayed there, penniless and almost friendless, until her death in 1930.<sup>57</sup>

Wild West shows such as the one organized by Pawnee Bill Lillie were the unofficial national pastimes of America, and they endeavored to teach white Americans about life on the western frontier. American Indians, both male and female, were very important to this life, and so naturally featured prominently in the shows. These women traveled with their husbands, preserved a time-honored view of family life, and maintained a traditional home in the encampments. Native women had done these things for generations, but now they were doing them for different reasons. Because Congress put many tribes on reservations and took many children to boarding schools, the Wild West shows provided an opportunity to work for pay, and most importantly to preserve tribal culture. Because of white Americans’ fascination with all things Indian, native women in the Wild West shows were able to cater to the prevalent society of the day and make being Indian more acceptable.

### Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> L. G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Wallis, *The Real Wild West: The 101 Ranch and the Creation of the American West* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 309.

<sup>3</sup> George Hyde, *The Pawnee Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 346.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 329, 331.



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<sup>5</sup> Erin Brown, unpublished Pawnee Bill's historic house tour packet, Oklahoma Historical Society; Marcia Shottenkirk, "The Century Club: Gordon Lillie," *The Journal Record*, August 2007

<sup>6</sup> Hyde, *The Pawnee Indians*, 331.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 335-36.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 343-44.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 340, 344.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 18-20.

<sup>12</sup> John H. Moore, *The Cheyenne* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1996), 155-56.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Gaines, *Cheyenne*, (Edina, MN: ABCO Publishing Company, 2000), 6.

<sup>14</sup> Moore, *The Cheyenne*, 156.

<sup>15</sup> Gaines, *Cheyenne*, 12, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Introduction to microfilm roll, CAA 58, Cheyenne and Arapaho Agencies, Indian Archives microfilm collection, Research Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, OK.

<sup>17</sup> George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1915).

<sup>18</sup> Folder 4, box "Wild West Shows and Two Bills Shows, 1 of 2," Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum archives, Pawnee, OK (hereafter cited as Pawnee Bill archives).

<sup>19</sup> Linda Scarangella McNenly, *Native Performers in Wild West Shows: From Buffalo Bill to EuroDisney* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 54.

<sup>20</sup> Cast list, folder 4, box "Wild West Shows and Two Bills Shows, 1 of 2," Pawnee Bill archives.

<sup>21</sup> Letter, folder 22, box "Wild West Shows and Two Bills Shows, 1 of 2," Pawnee Bill archives.

<sup>22</sup> Note, folder 7 box "Two Bills/Post Two Bills Show 2 of 2," Pawnee Bill archives. Please note that because of the dates (1916 and 1921), the show in question was not either Pawnee Bill's Historical Wild West (in operation from 1888 to 1908) nor Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Pawnee Bill's Great Far East, also known as the Two Bills Show (in operation from 1908 to 1913). After 1913 Pawnee Bill continued to stage smaller traveling shows at state fairs, amusement parks, and the like. It is likely that these are the types of shows that employed Holy Eagle, Shoutat, and Thomas Morgan.

<sup>23</sup> Folder "Cast Members of WW Shows," vertical files, Pawnee Bill archives.

<sup>24</sup> Folder 12, box "Wild West Shows and Two Bills Shows, 1 of 2," Pawnee Bill archives.

<sup>25</sup> A. G. Shaw *Official Route Book of Pawnee Bill's Historical Wild West and Mexican Hippodrome* (Harrisburg, PA: Barrington & Co. Printers, 1895) in folder "1894-1895 Route Book," vertical files, Pawnee Bill archives.

<sup>26</sup> L. F. Nicodemus and H. G. Wilson, *Season 1901 Official Route Book of the Pawnee Bill Wild West Show*, 1901 in folder "1901 Route Book," vertical files, Pawnee Bill archives.

<sup>27</sup> Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 82.

<sup>28</sup> Shaw, *Official Route Book*, 82.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>30</sup> "Fire Water" at the Union Station," *St. Louis (MO) Republic*, November 2, 1903.

<sup>31</sup> Shaw *Official Route Book*, 41.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 35, 102.

<sup>36</sup> Nicodemus, *Season 1901*, 34.

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- <sup>37</sup> “‘Fire Water’ at the Union Station,” *St. Louis Republic*, November 2, 1903.
- <sup>38</sup> Shaw, *Official Route Book*, 58.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 70, 71, 74, 83, 84, 93.
- <sup>40</sup> Ernie Black to Gordon W “Pawnee Bill” Lillie, March 28, 1940, folder 24, box “Two Bills/Post Two Bills Show, 2 of 2,” Pawnee Bill archives.
- <sup>41</sup> Shaw, *Official Route Book*, 53.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-54.
- <sup>43</sup> “‘Fire Water’ at the Union Station,” *St. Louis Republic*, November 2, 1903.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> Allen L. Farnum, *Pawnee Bill’s Historic Wild West: A Photo Documentary of the 1900-1905 Show Tours* (West Chester, PA. Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1992), 10-11.
- <sup>46</sup> “Pawnee Bill’s Indian Show,” *Shenandoah (VA) Herald*, September 19, 1890.
- <sup>47</sup> “The Peabody Fair,” *Wichita (KS) Eagle*, August 23, 1887
- <sup>48</sup> Shaw, *Official Route Book*, 34.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.
- <sup>50</sup> *1910 Program: Buffalo Bill Bids You Good Bye: The Wild West and Far East* (New York and Cincinnati: I.M. Southern & Co. Publishers, 1910) in folder “1910 Program,” vertical files, Pawnee Bill archives.
- <sup>51</sup> Michael Wallis, *The Real Wild West*, 309.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 312-13.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.