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## Changing Times - Indian Fairs

Elmer M. Mills

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# Changing Times —

I don't know how long ago it was that the Indian fairs of Weatherford, Oklahoma first started. We moved to Weatherford while I was around five years of age, and I recall them as far back as I can remember.

Seven thousand Indians, Arapaho and Cheyenne, and Whites once a year would gather for their festival at our town of 1500 Whites and Blacks. What a time that would be — the Whites and Reds celebrating in a friendly atmosphere, but with still lingering thoughts of the yesteryears smoldering just beneath the skin.

The two main things I remember the most were the long parades of the cowboys and the Indians as they marched down Main Street. The big chief was always at the beginning of the long procession with his war bonnet of eagle feathers. "Cowboys and Indians" was the everpopular game of our childhood. As he plowed through us kids, brushing us aside like the hull of a ship parting the waves,

the big chief and his steed pawed their way forward. I can still see that the chief's stern and stately face, erect and sober, centered among those beautiful feathers, with war paint that glowed like sunshine on a cloudy day. With head held erect, he glanced down at me, in particular, which I considered an honor. He looked so stately and proud, as if he had just won a great battle.

But the battle had not been fought yet. The sham battle-to-be was after the parade and was held on the fairgrounds at the south edge of town. Talk about a sight! **There** was a sight to be seen! All of the Indians and cowboys in the parade put on one of the most realistic and spectacular sham battles ever held.

In those days, there were no motion picture cameramen around, but the mock battle would have been ideal film clips for Hollywood. But there weren't any, I'm sure, for if I didn't see any, being a "see-all, hear-all," there weren't any.

The battle was on a place as big

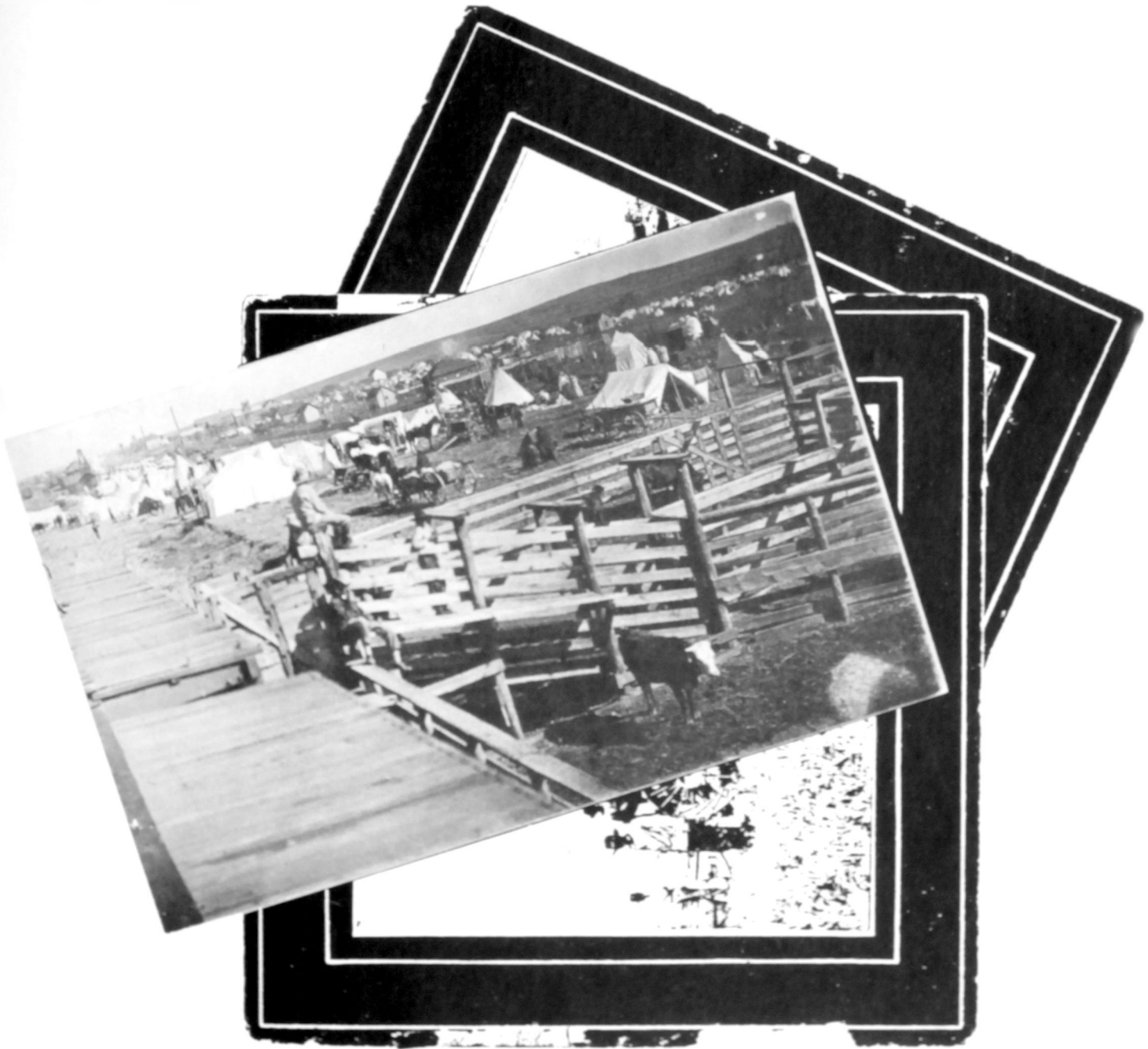
as a football field. There they lined up and charged, firing away at one another, of course with blanks, even using bows and arrows. Each side used the most surprising and skillful tactics at its command — shooting over the backs of the horses while crouching on the other side. Actually, they were falling from their horses, lying as if dead all over the battleground. There couldn't have been any better battle fought that would depict the true realism of those tragic eras. Undoubtedly, this drama must have been directed by "old salties" of past battles.

The Indian fairs lasted only five or six years longer, putting me about nine years of age in 1915. Changing times were in style even back in those days. But anyhow, I'm thankful for the memories. ■

*ELMER M. MILLS, now of Seneca, Missouri, has sent many of his memories for WESTVIEW readers through his granddaughter-agent Lori LeBahn. His memory of the Indian fairs is his second.*

# Indian Fairs

By Elmer M. Mills



*Pictures courtesy of Claris Robinson*