



12-15-1986

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Recommended Citation

Turpin, Robert F. (1986) "A Charge to Keep," *Westview*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 2 , Article 15.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol6/iss2/15>

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A Charge To Keep

By Robert F. Turpin

For fifty years, John Stink was an outcast to both the Indians and whites, living alone with only his dogs to keep him company. His Osage name was Ha-tah-moie, Rolling Thunder.

Even among the Osage, there were several different stories of Ha-tah-moie's banishment from his tribe. One of the most often repeated ones was that he became very drunk when he was a young man and fell into a snow-drift. Believed to be dead, he was picked up by his friends and buried under a pile of rocks. Sometime later, Ha-tah-moie sobered up, rolled the stones away, and crawled from his grave.

When asked about the story, Ha-tah-moie answered, "I e'xuba, it's a lie."

Another story supposedly took place during a smallpox epidemic in which many of the Osages were afflicted. Ha-tah-moie supposedly died from the disease, and his body was rolled up in a blanket and then entombed in a cave. Later a group of hunters found him sitting near his gravesite. When asked about this story, Ha-tah-moie again said that it was a lie but that he did remember having smallpox.

Ha-tah-moie recovered slowly and had the after-effect of the disease of large sores on his body. The sores gave off an offensive odor—thus, the name John Stink for Ha-tah-moie.

He was shunned and avoided by his own people as well as the whites. His only company during these unhappy years was several large dogs that were always around him.

As a result of his feelings of alienation, he took his dogs and moved deep into the woods. He lived there several years undisturbed. His refuge was on a small island; therefore, he had access to water. He took daily baths and

lay in the sun for hours at a time. Finally, his sores were healed, and he regained his physical health.

Although his life was dogged by despair and loneliness, he eventually became very wealthy. His money came from oil rights on the many wells that had sprung up on Osage land in the Pawhuska area, where he settled.

During a very severe winter, Ha-tah-moie almost froze to death, but for the first time in his life when he screamed for help, he received it. He was befriended by Indian Agent J. George Wright and the Whirlwind Soldiers.

So a new life thus began for Ha-tah-moie. He considered the house that was built for him a palace because it was so much better than anything he had ever lived in before.

After Whirlwind Soldier died and his widow moved back to the Dakotas to be with her family, Mrs. Eunice W. Stabler was assigned by the government to take care of Ha-tah-moie.

Mrs. Stabler's job was a difficult one at first because the old Osage was moody and difficult to get along with.

Because of his attendant's constant attention, Ha-tah-moie finally was softened, and he began to open conversations with her. It was her interest in him that finally motivated him to become a better person.

Rolling Thunder was without a doubt an outstanding person whose morals weren't contaminated by the world. He came out a conqueror. He gained self-respect, and in the end many of his people called him a friend and were happy to do so.

But to many of his own people, he was an object of ridicule and fear. His belief in the good of all men ran deep and true; despite his ordeals, he bore no ill feelings toward others. He was an outstanding person and a true Osage in all respects. ●

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