FORM B

Personal History of Informant

WASHINGTON

R. G. Stillman

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

DECEMBER 19, 1938.

A PICTURE OF NORTHWEST INDIANS.

R. G. STILLMAN (Informant)
309 East Mercer Street, Seattle, Washington.

1. American (French, English and Scotch).

2. Lodi, Wisconsin, June 14, 1896.

3. Wife and child.

4. Wisconsin, Utah, Wyoming, Oregon, Washington, Alberta (Canada), England, France, Belgium, Washington, New York, Washington, Oregon, California, Oregon and Washington. (Note: Informant has lived in these places in this order).

5. Highschool, Normal and some University.

6. Soldier, Preacher, Salesman, Merchant, Salesman, Asst. Editor of Rural Newspaper, Contractor (Builder), Writer.

   A play produced by the Bellingham Theater Guild, 1933. Played in New Westminister and Vancouver, B. C. during that year.
   Contributor to TRAVEL MAGAZINE, 1934-35.

7. Writing, Indian lore, sociology.

8. None

9. Tall, slender, medium complexion

10. .....

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STATE: WASHINGTON

NAME OF WORKER: R. G. STILLMAN

ADDRESS: 309 East Mercer Street, Seattle, Washington.

SUBJECT: A PICTURE OF NORTHWEST INDIANS. (Folklore).

We don't know our Indians— not we modern whites. We are apt to think of them, if at all, as feathered, fringed and half-naked savages howling about some beleagured little pioneer group. We know the handsome hero will arrive in the very nick of time and, to the refrain of martial music, hard-riding bluecoats will put the painted devils to flight. Of course, this is the Indian of the screen, the radio and wildwest magazines, and our intellect may tell us that the picture is untrue. But, being what we are and living as we live, it is the impression most of us hold— if we have any impression at all.

In actuality, today's Indian is as far different from the "painted savage," as the modern Englishman is from the skin-clad Angle or Saxon. He is, in fact, our "forgotten man," bravely trying to adjust himself to conditions widely at variance with his racial heritages; quietly endeavoring to surmount barriers of racial prejudice and misunderstanding so that his children, too, may live as white men live.

Let me illustrate with a painting— a word-painting of the Nooksac tribe, one of our most northwestern red peoples. If I can brush in detail, develop the highlights and color the whole with the rich, warm, human values— if I can do this, —then you, too, will more nearly understand the Indian. And, I shall have done my part.

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The white man hangs tight to the wheel of the little red car, his eyes peering past the groaning rain-swipe and into the semi-opaque grayness of fog. The farmer had said, 'Turn to the left along the river,' and he has done this. But, although it seems miles since leaving the highway with its bordering of well-kept, prosperous farms and dairy ranches— miles of rutted, rain-puddled road where leafless limbs of

Folklore (Cont.)

immense alders and cottonwoods lean menacingly over the muddy track— there is still no sign of the thing he seeks. I must have missed it, the white man decides, and, bringing the car to a stop, he shuts off his engine and looks about him.

There are trees to his right, reaching dripping, barren skeletons into the vagueness of the fog. An old field, to his left, brush-clumped and brier-grown, stretches stump-pocked surfaces into mysterious, grey obscurity. Over and around him, the fog hangs, wet and cold— shutting away the February sun and imprisoning him in a little world of his own, a world of dripping trees and dull, drab half-lights. He listens, and above the muffled murmur of the nearby river and the steady drip of moisture, he suddenly hears voices, muffled and thickened by the foggy blanket. He turns sharply, his eyes probing the veiled distance ahead.

And, then he sees it. Surrounded by the indistinct lace of a fog-screened grove, the shadowy bulk of a small church appears against the road. Even the dull silver curtaining can not hide the dark crudity of its unpainted exterior, nor obliterate the ungainly sag of the little belfry perched on the steep, shake roof. There are no lawns or landscaping. Just a drab little church set in a grove of leafless trees. Like a dreary old man, hunched over and shivering in the damp cold.

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A few old cars stand in the wet grass, cars as dilapidated and unkempt as the building near which they are parked. There are people, too, on the wet planks of the uncovered stoop. People who silently watch the white man as he gets to the ground and starts toward them. Watch him with dark, expressionless eyes set in stolid, mask-like faces. Brown faces, like old leather.

There is a long silence. Then, an old man speaks. "You from gov'ment?"

"No," the white man answers. "I'm a writer."

"For newspapers?" This from a stocky youth who arises from his crouch against the wall of the building and advances toward the white man. "That's fine," he continues, "That's what we need. Publicity."

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Folklore (Cont.)

The white man explains he is not a reporter, but a free-lance who is interested in Indians and who is looking for material. "A farmer told me you were holding a tribal meeting of the Nooksacs," he says.

For a moment the youth appears disappointed. Then, "Oh, you write books. That's better yet. That's lots of publicity."

"Where is your chief?" the white man asks.

"Chief George? He's inside. I'm Anton George. We're cousins. Most of us Nooksacs are Georges." The young man chuckles. "We ought to change the tribe name to George. Come on, I take you to him."

The other people apparently pay no attention to the conversation. Their impassive brown faces and inscrutable eyes are turned politely into the fog.

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It is dark inside the little church, for the grey light of the world outside is further veiled by festoons of spider's webs across narrow, high windows. The walls are unpainted and unadorned and brownish-black with age. Rough pews, double-ranked along the length of the room, leave a narrow aisle that leads directly to a low platform and simple pulpit at the far end of the room. Two kerosene lamps hang from an indistinct ceiling, one over the pulpit and one centering the pews. A man, standing on a box, is preparing to light the latter lamp. "That's Chief George," young Anton announces. "Hey, Chief. Here's a writer who wants to see our meeting."

The man continues with his fumbling, strikes a match and holds it against the wick, then ~~re~~ replaces the chimney. A faint golden glow floods downward from the reflector, washing over the aisle and pews nearby, pooling the corners of the room and underneath the benches with black shadow. He gets down to the floor, and the white man sees he is tall and broad-shouldered, his fine, large head crowned with a glistening helmet of blue-black hair.

"You are welcome here," the Chief says, a faint gutteral marring a deep voice, otherwise deliberate and well modulated. "White people don't often bother about us Nooksacs." He turns to the youth. "Anton. You show this man to a good place.

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Where he can see."

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People are entering the building, scattering themselves among the benches. Twenty-five, thirty, perhaps thirty-five individuals come in. There are no youngsters.

"Where are the children," the white man wants to know. Anton George, who is sitting beside him, explains that most of the children are attending the Indian school at Taholah, sixty or seventy miles away. "Boarding school," he grins, "I went there. They feed good."

Old people sit in the front pews, immediately under the pulpit,— old women with bandanaed heads, gaudy shawls and moccasined feet,— old men, grizzled, their weathered, brown faces net-worked with wrinkles. Their eyes bleared from a lifetime of sun and winds and storms, and the smoky fumes from indoor, open fires.

Younger people settle in whispering groups over the room. Behind the white man, a plump, brown matron discusses finger waves with a slender, girlish woman whose lighter cheeks underlaid with dusky rose, betray the infusion of white blood. In the pew in front, three swarthy males argue cream-tests. "Don't make no difference what my barn test is," one is saying, "the creamery test is lower." "Why not," says another, "Ain't you a Nooksac?" All three laugh.

Chief George lights the lamp over the pulpit and sits in the armchair immediately behind it. A heavy-set man, great, drooping mustaches dividing his face with a bar of startling black, takes the chair beside him.

"That's the interpreter," Anton explains in a hoarse whisper. "Our old people don't know American, and us young people don't understand the old Nooksac. We're modern, us young people."

The slender woman leaves her plump companion, and, with minutebook and pencils, establishes herself at a bare little table set at the right of the pulpit. She flounces her blue silk skirts and pushes at her glistening, waved hair with fingers

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loaded with Woolworth jewelry. Then, she looks expectantly toward Chief George who answers her smile and gets to his feet.

"This meeting of the Nooksac Tribe will come to order," he announces. "We will now have the reading of the minutes of the last meeting."

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The morning progresses. Problems are discussed. Roads, crops, prospects for employment in logging camps, the efficiency of the government school in Taholah where their children are educated. Sometimes the interpreter translates for the old people who nod their heads in understanding. But they are silent and impassive, seldom removing their eyes from the fine figure of their young chief.

The younger people are more vocal, each piece of business being met with many varying expressions of opinion. Always, Robert's Rules of Order regulates the operation of the meeting. The numerous discussions are always orderly.

At last Chief George looks at his watch. It is nearly noon. "We always eat a banquet at these meetings," he says, looking toward the white man. "We would appreciate our visitor being our guest."

The white man, pleased, nods his assent.

The women are excused, and, with a swishing of sk rts, an explosion of sudden conversation and laughter, tramp into a side room. Chief George calls a number of men to the rostrum where they talk in low, guarded tones.

Outside, the fog has risen, and the sun, bright with victory, is flooding the world with triumphant splendor. "Let's go outdoors," Anton suggests. "Maybe we can play baseball."

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The women have finished their preparations and have called the men to the table.

Chief George, who has been talking to the white man, leads him to a chair at the table's very head. "You are our guest," he explains, "You will sit here." The old people scatter along the lower end, and the young men fill in the vacant places.

The women are busy with the serving.

The table is loaded with food. There is roast beef and pork and fried chicken in huge platters— and boiled salmon and slabs of black smoked fish. There are vegetables fresh from glass jars— and a dark, sticky mess composed of salmon eggs. There are rich, brown pies and handsome cakes— and dried, wild berries heaped in great bowls. Pitchers of creamy milk and pots of steaming, black coffee are carried from diner to diner by brown-skinned women, intent that each shall eat and drink to replstion. Young people gorge on the roast meats, the chicken, the vegetables and pies. Old people eat heavily of the fish and cram their mouths with dried berries. There is little conversation to interupt the business of eating.

At last, however, the meal is finished. Old People wipe their mouths with the back of withered, vein-ridged hands. Some one passes toothpicks among the young folks, and there is the scraping of morsels from between glistening, white teeth. There is no apparent signal, but suddenly all rise from the table. The men troop out into the sun where they smoke hand-rolled Bull Durham cigarettes and gather around Chief George and the white man. Anton is talking about a proposed baseball team from among the Nooksacs. "We could get a good team," he boasts. "Maybe we could play Bellingham." Chief George's amused eyes meet those of the white man, and he smiles at the youth's enthusiasm.

There are many introductions. The white man meets Charlie Adam, Billy and Antone Jesus, Frank Moses, Arthur Noah and several Georges. "We don't use Nooksac names anymore," Chief George explains. "Our fathers took Bible names when the priest brought us the church."

The light-skinned woman, the tribal secretary, appears on the stoop. The women have finished eating, and are ready to continue the meeting. Everyone re-enters the building.

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Anton and the white men find their places. The old people sit together under the pulpit. Younger people scatter in whispering groups of twos or threes throughout the room. Chief George rises and steps to the edge of the platform. The interpreter also gets to his feet and takes his place at the young chief's side. There is sudden silence.

"We have finished our regular business," the Chief says. "We have eaten our banquet. We have met with our friends and neighbors and relatives. Now, there is just one thing left before we go home."

"We have a writer with us who came as our friend. He has visited us to learn about us so that he can write true things about us for white people to read.

"We appreciate his coming, and we would like to have him carry with him a gift to remember us by. We haven't much, for we are poor people. Some of us got together and figured we could do this— we could take him into our tribe. As a brother. For, he is our friend. I'd like to hear from you people on this."

The interpreter translated for the old people, his words harsh and gutteral— machine-gun-like clacking and peculiar, throaty hisses. He finishes, and there is deep silence. The white man feels all eyes upon him, and he flushes with pleased embarrassment. Anton nudges him. "You make a speech after we elect you."

Suddenly a very old man totters to his feet from among the people on the front pew. He carries the burden of years upon his bowed shoulders, and his head shakes with the palsy of age. His bright plaid shawl slips from his shoulders to the floor as, with an effort, he straightens himself. He raises rheumy eyes toward the chief and a shaft of light from a narrow window bathes a face massed with tiny lines and criss-crossed with deeper wrinkles.

There is a hush— all eyes are fastened expectantly on the ancient figure, Anton whispers, "That's John Tenas. He's the oldest Nooksac. No one knows how old."

Folklore (Cont.)

The dead silence is broken by a quavering voice chanting queer gutterals and hisses— shrill and piping with age. The interpreter hangs intently on every word, translating sentence for sentence as the old man speaks. There is growing excitement as John Tenas progresses, and the white man imagines the room is filled with shades— shades of Nooksacs, long since gone. Strong, clean-limbed brown men, glorying in the freedom of great virgin forests and crystal-clear rushing torrents.

The intreprer is translating. "It is me, John Tenas speaking. Many years have passed over me since I was young. So many I cannot count. Now I am old, and my eyes are old. I see no longer except as if I were looking through muddy water.

"But inside me, it is clear, and I can see with the eyes of youth. It is like a dream, but the dream is real and does not fade away. This I see, that once the Nooksac were a great people. My father told me, and I have not forgotten. Now I see that it was true, and that a thousand warriors lived in the towns of the Nooksac. They were great hunters who knew how to hunt the deer and bear, and how to take many fish from the rivers. They were brave warriors who knew how to protect their lands and homes from enemies. Even the wild Northmen feared the Nooksacs, and, although they made slaves of the Lummis and other tribes, they left the Nooksacs alone. There was peace and plenty among the Nooksac towns.

"I see a sickness, a white man's sickness. But there was no white men. Hunters and warriors come home to find their women and children dead upon the floor of the houses. Braves go forth to hunt and fall down and die. Their wives and sons never see them again. I see that sickness made the Nooksacs weak and death lessened their numbers until not three hundred warriors and women and children are left in the tribal towns.

"But, I see they are not cowards, these three hundred people. They are brave and fear no one. They hunt deer and take salmon and trade with their neighbors. They make war on their enemies and they are feared and respected.

Folklore (Cont.)

"Now I see the first white men among the Nooksacs. They are friends, they say, and are come to trade for our furs. They are welcomed in our houses. Our wives and daughters serve them and our young men are as brothers. 'We will always be your friends,' they say, and the Nooksacs believe their words are true.

"Now more white men come— more than the stars in the sky. "We are your friends,' they say, and the Nooksacs welcome them. They cut down the trees of the forest for their villages by the salt water. They dig in the ground and the deer are frightened and run away into the hills. 'We are your brothers,' they say, and teach our young men to drink strong drink and take the most beautiful of our daughters for their own use.

"Now their chiefs come to the Nooksacs. 'We are your brothers,' they say. 'We will always be your brothers. Give us land in the lowlands, for our people wish to farm. Give us land and we will fill your bellies when you are hungry. Are we not brothers?' they say. The old men of the Nooksacs speak together, 'What is this they ask? But there are so many, what can we do. They have promised to be our brothers, let us believe them. After all, there are still many deer in the hills and the rivers are filled with fish. And they have promised to fill us if we hunger.'

"Now there are more white men— more than the grains of sand on the beaches. Now, again, white chiefs come to the Nooksacs. 'Come,' they say, you must live with the Lummis. There is a reservation there for our red brothers. Our people must have your lands.' Then the old men talk together. 'Where are the deer?' they say. 'Where are the salmon in the streams? The deer have fled from the hills for the white man takes his forest cover. The salmon have forsaken the streams because the white man soil the waters with their mills and diggings. The houses of the Nooksacs hold no food and their bellies are lean. Maybe it is best we go to the reservation of the Lummis. The white man has promised to care for our hunger."

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"Now a Nooksac steps forth in the council. 'Why should we go to live among the Lummis?' he says. 'Why should we leave the lands of our fathers? Are we not Nooksacs— mountain people? Are the Lummis not shore people? The Lummis are not our brothers. They are a puny people, timid and fearful. Why should we be as they? We are Nooksacs, and our heritage is freedom. We have listened to the promises of the white men, and they have been like the morning mists. We have believed they were our brothers, and now we are weak, there are only a few of us left. Let that few remain in the lands where our fathers have died. Let that few die, too, in the lands of the Nooksac.'

"Then the white chiefs say, "It is well. You may choose for yourselves. You may go with the Lummis and be reservation Indians, or you may each receive an allotment along the streams of your old territory, and be domain Indians. If you go to the reservations, we will take care of you, for are you not our brothers? But, if you take allotments, you must live as white men live, and abide by the laws of Washington. You will be as white men.'

"Now I see the Nooksacs have chosen. They have chosen allotments that they might be free as white men. But, where is that freedom? White men have taken our children from our houses to schools where they learn to be white men. But, can the deer of the high hills become a cow by going to school? Can the sons of free Nooksacs become farmers as are the whites? Can he learn the ways of slaves?

"Now I am old and my eyes see dimly. But, I see only a handful of people who call themselves Nooksacs. The white man has promised many things. But this is what his promises has brought to the Nooksacs— a handful of people left where once there were many. I am an old man, yet I still live. Yet, I must talk through an interpreter to the sons of Nooksacs. Is this the promise of the white man?

"Today this is a tribal meeting. We who are left of the once-great Nooksac tribe are here in this little house. So true, it is that the Nooksac dies that our young people cannot talk with the old. Maybe this is good. Maybe the day of the Nooksac is finished just as the sun goes behind the salt water. Maybe this is as it

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should be, for the old people are old and soon will be passing away and the young people live like white people and speak their language and eat their food.

"But I speak with grief to our white writing-brother. Grief in my heart for the memory of a once-great people who soon will be but the name of a river. Let this brother put in his writings how the Nooksac believed the promises of the white men. Let him write how these promises destroyed a free people. Now I am weary and am finished."

. . . . . .

The old man slumps into his place. A withered old woman replaces the bright plaid scarf about his shoulders. There is a strangled hush over the room and dark eyes are bright with some inner emotion. Anton nudges the white man. "That was John Tenas. He's our oldest Nooksac."

Chief George looks over his little group. "I am ready for a motion to elect our friend into the Nooksac tribe. Do I hear that motion?"

"I motion it," shouts young Anton, leaping to his feet.

"I second it," says the plump brown matron who discusses finger-waves.

"All those in favor, say 'aye.' Chief George is smiling at the light brown secretary.

There is a chorus of "ayes."

"Those who oppose? _____"

The white man is a Nooksac.

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