

shifted from containment to forced assimilation, and officials increasingly tried to turn the Osage into churchgoing, English-speaking, fully clothed tillers of the soil. The government owed the tribe annuity payments for the sale of its Kansas land but refused to distribute them until able-bodied men like Ne-kah-e-se-y took up farming. And even then the government insisted on making the payments in the form of clothing and food rations. An Osage chief complained, “We are not dogs that we should be fed like dogs.”

Unaccustomed to the white man’s agricultural methods and deprived of buffalo, the Osage began to go hungry; their bones soon looked as if they might break through their skin. Many members of the tribe died. An Osage delegation, including the chief Wah-Ti-An-Kah, was urgently dispatched to Washington, D.C., to petition the commissioner of Indian Affairs to abolish the ration system. According to an account by John Joseph Mathews, members of the delegation wore their best blankets and leggings, while Wah-Ti-An-Kah wrapped himself in a red blanket so entirely that you could see little more than his eyes, dark wells that burned with an entire history.

The delegation went to the commissioner’s office and waited for him. When the commissioner arrived, he informed an interpreter, “Tell these gentlemen that I am sorry that I have another appointment at this time—I am sorry I had forgotten about it until just now.”



.... *The Osage chief Wah-Ti-An-Kah* Credit 12

As the commissioner tried to leave, Wah-Ti-An-Kah blocked his path to the door and let go of his blanket. To the shock of even his fellow Osage, he was naked, except for his breechcloth and his moccasins, and his face was painted as if he were leading a war party. “He stood there towering like some primitive god of the dark forests,” Mathews wrote.

Wah-Ti-An-Kah told the interpreter, “Tell this man to sit down.” When the commissioner complied, Wah-Ti-An-Kah said, “We have come [a] long way to talk about this.”

The commissioner said, “Surely this man who doesn’t know how to act—who comes to my office almost naked, with war paint on his face, is not civilized enough to know how to use money.”

Wah-Ti-An-Kah said that he was not ashamed of his body, and after he and the delegation pressed their case, the commissioner

agreed to end the ration policy. Wah-Ti-An-Kah picked up his blanket and said, “Tell this man it is all right now—he can go.”

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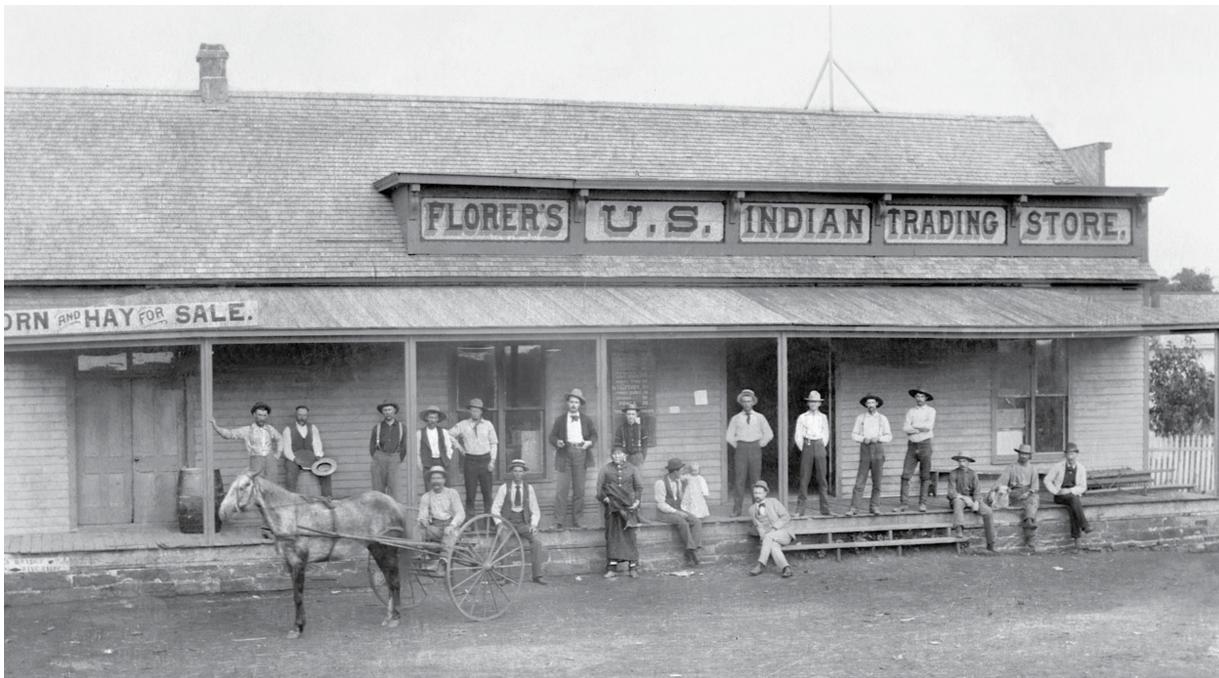
Like many others in the tribe, Mollie’s parents tried to hold on to their customs. Bestowing a name was one of the most important Osage rituals; only then was someone considered a person by the tribe. Mollie, who was born on December 1, 1886, was given the Osage name Wah-kon-tah-he-um-pah. Her sisters were also known by Osage names: Anna was Wah-hrah-lum-pah; Minnie, Wah-sha-she; and Rita, Me-se-moie.

But the process of acculturation was accelerating as settlers began to move onto the reservation. They didn’t look like the Osage, or even like the Cheyenne or the Pawnee. They seemed unwashed and desperate, like William Hale, who would eventually appear on his horse, in his ragged clothes—this man from nowhere. Even settlers like Hale who formed close ties to the Osage argued that the white man’s road was inevitable and that the only way for the Osage to survive was to follow it. Hale was determined to transform not only himself but the wilderness from which he came—to cross-fence the open prairie and to create a network of trading posts and towns.

In the 1880s, John Florer, a Kansas frontiersman who referred to Osage territory as “God’s country,” established the first trading post in Gray Horse. Mollie’s father, Ne-kah-e-se-y, liked to linger outside it, in the shade, and sell animal pelts, and Mollie got to know the son of a trader, who was one of the first white people she’d ever seen; his skin was as pale as the belly of a fish.

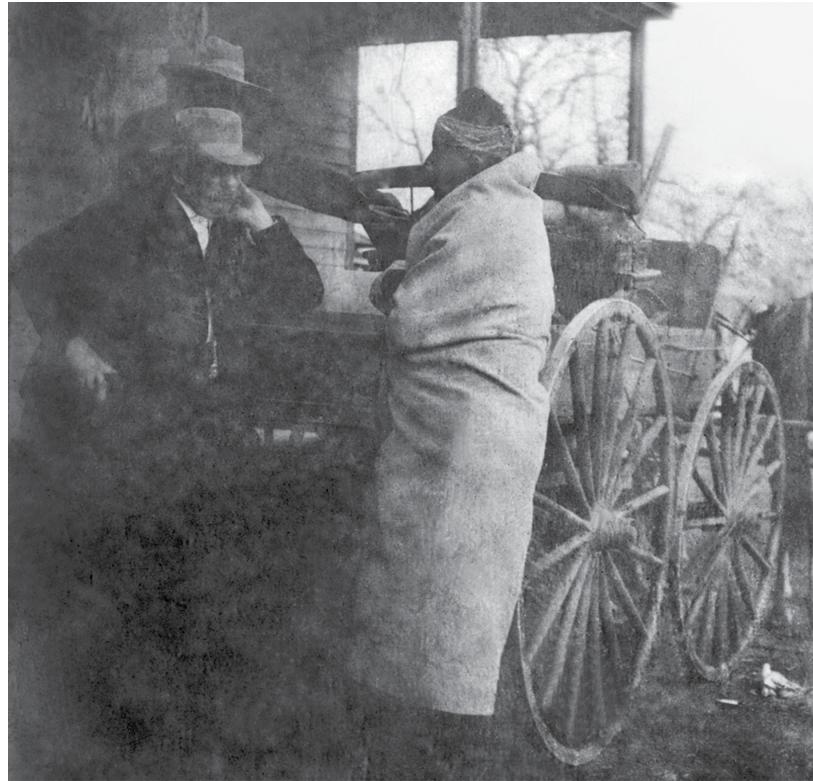
The trader’s son kept a journal, and in it he noted a profound existential change experienced by Mollie and her family, though he remarked upon it only in passing, as if it were no more than a new item on a ledger. One day, he said, a trader began to refer to Ne-kah-e-se-y as Jimmy. Soon other traders began to call Mollie’s father Jimmy, and before long it had supplanted his Osage name. “Likewise his daughters who often visited the store, received their names there

of,” the trader’s son wrote. And that’s how Wah-kon-tah-he-um-pah became Mollie.



.... *John Florer's trading store in Gray Horse* Credit 13

Mollie—who, like her mother, then wore leggings, moccasins, a skirt, a blouse, and a blanket—slept on the floor in a corner of her family’s lodge and had to do many grueling chores. But there was a relative peacefulness and happiness to that time: Mollie could enjoy the ceremonial dances and the feasts and playing water tag in the creek and watching the men race their ponies in the emerald fields. As the trader’s son wrote, “There lingers memories like a half forgotten dream, of an enchanting world dawning on a child’s consciousness in its wonder and mystery.”



.... *Mollie's father (right) in front of Florer's trading store* Credit 14

In 1894, when Mollie was seven, her parents were informed that they had to enroll her in the St. Louis School, a Catholic boarding institution for girls that had been opened in Pawhuska, which was two days' journey by wagon to the northeast. An Indian Affairs commissioner had said, "The Indian must conform to the white man's ways, peacefully if they will, forcibly if they must."

Mollie's parents were warned that if they didn't comply, the government would withhold its annuity payments, leaving the family starving. And so, one morning in March, Mollie was taken from her family and bundled into a horse-drawn wagon. As she and a driver set out toward Pawhuska, in the center of the reservation, Mollie could see Gray Horse, the seeming limit of her universe, gradually disappear until all that was visible was the smoke rising from the tops of the lodges and fading into the sky. In front of her, the prairie stretched to the horizon like an ancient seabed. There were no settlements, no souls. It was as if she'd slipped over the edge of the

world and fallen, to borrow Willa Cather's phrase, "outside man's jurisdiction."

Hour after hour, mile after mile, lurching back and forth in the wagon, Mollie crossed the wild, empty landscape, not yet carved into a country. Eventually, the light began to fail, and the driver and Mollie had to stop and set up camp. When the sun sank below the prairie floor, the sky would turn blood red and then black, the density of the darkness diluted only by the moon and the stars, from where the Osage believed that many of their clans descended. Mollie had become a traveler in the mist. She was surrounded by the forces of night, heard but not seen: the gibbering of coyotes and the howling of wolves and the screaming of owls, which were said to carry an evil spirit.

The next day, the monochrome prairies gave way to timber-covered hills, and Mollie and her driver rode up and down the slopes, past shadowy blackjack and sunless caves—perfect places, as an Indian Affairs agent once fretted, "for ambush." (He added, "Let me tell you there are...ignorant criminals who would do anything.") They rode until they came upon a sign of human habitation: a single-story, dilapidated, red-painted wooden structure. It was an Osage trading store, and nearby was a grubby rooming house and a blacksmith shop with an immense pile of horseshoes. The muddy trail turned into a wider, even muddier trail, with a scattering of trading stores on either side. These businesses had sagging duckboards out front to help customers avoid the treacherous mud and hitching posts for horses and weather-beaten façades that looked as if they might tumble over in the breeze, some of them with trompe l'oeil second stories to create an illusion of grandeur.

Mollie had reached Pawhuska. Although the reservation's capital then seemed a small, squalid place—a "muddy little trading post," as one visitor described it—it was likely the biggest settlement Mollie had ever seen. She was taken about a mile away, to a forbidding stone building that stood four stories high: the St. Louis Catholic missionary school, where she was left in the care of women in black-and-white habits. Mollie went through the front door—Mathews once

described the entrance to another Osage boarding school as a “big, black mouth, bigger and darker than a wildcat’s”—and down a labyrinth of drafty corridors; coal lanterns glowed in the darkness.

Mollie had to remove the Indian blanket from her shoulders and put on a plain dress. She wasn’t allowed to speak Osage—she had to catch the white man’s tongue—and was given a Bible that began with a distinct notion of the universe: “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.”

Each hour of the day was regimented and students were lined up and marched from point to point. They were taught piano, penmanship, geography, and arithmetic, the world distilled into strange new symbols. The instruction was intended to assimilate Mollie into white society and transform her into what the authorities conceived of as the ideal woman. So while Osage boys at other institutions learned farming and carpentry, Mollie was trained in the “domestic arts”: sewing, baking, laundering, and housekeeping. “It is impossible to overestimate the importance of careful training for Indian girls,” a U.S. government official had stated, adding, “Of what avail is it that the man be hard-working and industrious, providing by his labor food and clothing for his household, if the wife, unskilled in cookery, unused to the needle, with no habits of order or neatness, makes what might be a cheerful, happy home only a wretched abode of filth and squalor?...It is the women who cling most tenaciously to heathen rites and superstitions, and perpetuate them by their instructions to the children.”

Many Osage students at Mollie’s school tried to flee, but lawmen chased after them on horseback and bound them with ropes, hauling them back. Mollie attended class eight months each year, and when she did return to Gray Horse, she noticed that more and more girls had stopped wearing their blankets and moccasins and that the young men had exchanged their breechcloths for trousers and their scalp locks for broad-brimmed hats. Many students began to feel embarrassed by their parents, who didn’t understand English and

still lived by the old ways. An Osage mother said of her son, “His ears are closed to our talk.”



~~~~ **Mollie was forced to attend the St. Louis School.** Credit 15

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Mollie’s family was straddling not only two centuries but two civilizations. Her family’s distress increased in the late 1890s as the U.S. government intensified its push for the culmination of its assimilation campaign: allotment. Under the policy, the Osage reservation would be divvied up into 160-acre parcels, into *real estate*, with each tribal member receiving one allotment, while the rest of the territory would be opened to settlers. The allotment system, which had already been imposed on many tribes, was designed to end the old communal way of life and turn American Indians into private-property owners—a situation that would, not incidentally, make it easier to procure their land.

The Osage had seen what had happened to the Cherokee Outlet, a vast prairie that was part of the Cherokees' territory and was near the western border of the Osage reservation. After the U.S. government purchased the land from the Cherokee, it had announced that at noon on September 16, 1893, a settler would be able to claim one of the forty-two thousand parcels of land—if he or she got to the spot first! For days before the starting date, tens of thousands of men, women, and children had come, from as far away as California and New York, and gathered along the boundary; the ragged, dirty, desperate mass of humanity stretched across the horizon, like an army pitted against itself.

Finally, after several “sooners” who’d tried to sneak across the line early had been shot, the starting gun sounded—*A RACE FOR LAND SUCH AS WAS NEVER BEFORE WITNESSED ON EARTH*, as one newspaper put it. A reporter wrote, “Men knocked each other down as they rushed onward. Women shrieked and fell, fainting, only to be trampled and perhaps killed.” The reporter continued, “Men, women and horses were laying all over the prairie. Here and there men were fighting to the death over claims which each maintained he was first to reach. Knives and guns were drawn—it was a terrible and exciting scene; no pen can do it justice....It was a struggle where the game was empathically every man for himself and devil take the hindmost.” By nightfall, the Cherokee Outlet had been carved into pieces.



~~~ *The land run of 1893* Credit 16

Because the Osage had purchased their land, it was harder for the government to impose its policy of allotment. The tribe, led by one of its greatest chiefs, James Bigheart—who spoke seven languages, among them Sioux, French, English, and Latin, and who had taken to wearing a suit—was able to forestall the process. But pressure was mounting. Theodore Roosevelt had already warned what would befall an Indian who refused his allotment: “Let him, like these whites, who will not work, perish from the face of the earth which he cumbers.”

By the early twentieth century, Bigheart and other Osage knew that they could no longer avoid what a government official called the “great storm” gathering. The U.S. government planned to break up Indian Territory and make it a part of what would be a new state called Oklahoma. (In the Choctaw language, “Oklahoma” means “red people.”) Bigheart had succeeded in delaying the process for several years—the Osage were the last tribe in Indian Territory to be allotted—and this had given the Osage more leverage as government officials were eager to avoid any final impediments to statehood. In 1904,

Bigheart sent a zealous young lawyer named John Palmer across the country “to keep his finger on the Washington pulse.” The orphaned son of a white trader and a Sioux woman, Palmer had been adopted as a child by an Osage family and had since married an Osage woman. A U.S. senator from Oklahoma called Palmer “the most eloquent Indian alive.”

For months, Bigheart and Palmer and other members of the tribe negotiated with government officials over the terms of allotment. The Osage prevailed upon the government to divide the land solely among members of the tribe, thereby increasing each individual’s allotment from 160 acres to 657 acres. This strategy would avoid a mad dash on their territory, though whites could then attempt to buy allotments from tribe members. The Osage also managed to slip into the agreement what seemed, at the time, like a curious provision: “That the oil, gas, coal, or other minerals covered by the lands...are hereby reserved to the Osage Tribe.”

The tribe knew that there were some oil deposits under the reservation. More than a decade earlier, an Osage Indian had shown John Florer, the owner of the trading post in Gray Horse, a rainbow sheen floating on the surface of a creek in the eastern part of the reservation. The Osage Indian dabbed his blanket at the spot and squeezed the liquid into a container. Florer thought that the liquid smelled like the axle grease sold in his store, and he rushed back and showed the sample to others, who confirmed his suspicions: it was oil. With the tribe’s approval, Florer and a wealthy banking partner obtained a lease to begin drilling on the reservation. Few imagined that the tribe was sitting on a fortune, but by the time of the allotment negotiations several small wells had begun operating, and the Osage shrewdly managed to hold on to this last realm of their land—a realm that they could not even see. After the terms of the Allotment Act were agreed upon, in 1906, Palmer boasted to Congress, “I wrote that Osage agreement out in longhand.”

Like others on the Osage tribal roll, Mollie and her family members each received a headright—essentially, a share in the tribe’s mineral trust. When, the following year, Oklahoma entered the

Union as the forty-sixth state, members of the tribe were able to sell their surface land in what was now Osage County. But to keep the mineral trust under tribal control, no one could buy or sell headrights. These could only be inherited. Mollie and her family had become part of the first underground reservation.

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The tribe soon began leasing areas to more and more white prospectors for exploration. Mollie saw workers—tool dressers, rope chokers, mule peelers, gang pushers—toiling furiously. After lowering a torpedo filled with nitroglycerin into the belly of the earth, the muddied workers would detonate it, occasionally turning up a fragment of an ancient American Indian spear or an arrowhead. They'd stare at it in bewilderment. These men built wooden structures that ascended into the sky, like temples, and they chanted their own private language: “Bounce, you cats, bounce. Load up on them hooks, you snappers. That’s high. Ring her off, collar-pecker. Up on the mops. Out, growler-board.” Many wildcatters dug dry wells, or “dusters,” and scurried away in despair. An Osage remarked that such white men “ack like tomorrow they ain’t gonna be no more worl’.”

In the early twentieth century, George Getty, an attorney from Minneapolis, began his family's quest for oil in the eastern part of Osage territory, on a parcel of land, Lot 50, that he'd leased for \$500. When his son, Jean Paul Getty, was a boy, he visited the area with him. “It was pioneer days,” Jean Paul, who founded the Getty Oil Company, later recalled. “No motorcars, very few telephones, not many electric lights. Even though it was the beginning of the twentieth century, you still very much felt the influence of the nineteenth century.” He went on, “It seemed a great adventure. My parents never saw the charm of it all that I did. We used to go often to Lot 50, about nine miles into the Osage, in a horse-drawn wagon. It took a couple of hours and we had to cross a river to get there.”



~~~ **Workers strike oil in Osage territory.** Credit 17

Before encountering the Indians, Jean Paul had asked his father, “Are they dangerous? Will we have to fight them off?”

His father laughed. “No,” he said. “They’re rather quiet and peaceful.”

One damp spring day in 1917, Frank Phillips—a wildcatter who’d previously sold a tonic to prevent baldness—was out with his workers on Lot 185, less than half a mile from Lot 50. They were on a platform drilling when the derrick began to tremble, as if a locomotive were rushing by. From the hole in the ground came a rumbling, gurgling sound, and the workers began to run, their screams smothered by what had become a roar. A driller grabbed Phillips and pulled him off the platform just as the earth burst open and a black column of oil spewed into the air.

Each new find seemed more breathtaking than the last. In 1920, E. W. Marland, who was once so poor that he couldn’t afford train fare, discovered Burbank, one of the highest-producing oil fields in the

United States: a new well generated 680 barrels in its first twenty-four hours.

Many of the Osage would rush to see a gusher when it erupted, scrambling for the best view, making sure not to cause a spark, their eyes following the oil as it shot fifty, sixty, sometimes a hundred feet in the air. With its great black wings of spray, arcing above the rigging, it rose before them like an angel of death. The spray coated the fields and the flowers and smeared the faces of the workers and the spectators. Still, people hugged and tossed their hats in celebration. Bigheart, who had died not long after the imposition of allotment, was hailed as the “Osage Moses.” And the dark, slimy, smelly mineral substance seemed like the most beautiful thing in the world.

## 5    THE DEVIL'S DISCIPLES

Money was the one means at Mollie's disposal that might induce the indifferent white authorities to pursue a killer of Indians. After Lizzie died in July 1921, Mollie's brother-in-law, Bill Smith, had presented his suspicions to authorities that she'd been slowly poisoned, but by August they had still not looked into the case. Nor had any progress been made in the then-three-month-old probe of Anna's murder. To prod investigators, Mollie's family issued a statement saying that because of "the foulness of the crime" and "the dangers that exist to other people," they were offering a \$2,000 cash reward for any information leading to the apprehension of those responsible. The Whitehorn family also offered a \$2,500 reward to catch Charles's slayers. And William Hale, who campaigned for stamping out the criminal element from Osage County, promised his own reward to anyone who caught the killers, dead or alive. "We've got to stop this bloody business," he said.

But the situation with law enforcement continued to deteriorate. The Oklahoma attorney general soon charged Sheriff Freas with willfully "failing to enforce the law" by permitting bootlegging and gambling. Freas denied the allegations, and while the case awaited trial, these two powerful lawmen were pitted against each other. Given this turmoil, Hale announced that it was time to hire a private eye.

During much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, private detective agencies had filled the vacuum left by decentralized, underfunded, incompetent, and corrupt sheriff and police departments. In literature and in the popular imagination, the all-seeing private eye—the gumshoe, the cinder dick, the sleuthhound,

the shadow—displaced the crusading sheriff as the archetype of rough justice. He moved across the dangerous new frontiers of deep alleyways and roiling slums. His signature was not the smoking six-shooter; instead, like Sherlock Holmes, he relied upon the startling powers of reason and deduction, the ability to *observe* what the Watsons of the world merely saw. He found order in a scramble of clues and, as one author put it, “turned brutal crimes—the vestiges of the beast in man—into intellectual puzzles.”

Yet from the outset the fascination with private detectives was mixed with aversion. They were untrained and unregulated and often had criminal records themselves. Beholden to paying clients, they were widely seen as surreptitious figures who burglarized people’s secrets. (The term “to detect” derived from the Latin verb “to unroof,” and because the devil, according to legend, allowed his henchmen to peer voyeuristically into houses by removing their roofs, detectives were known as “the devil’s disciples.”) In 1850, Allan Pinkerton founded the first American private detective agency; in advertisements, the company’s motto, “We Never Sleep,” was inscribed under a large, unblinking, Masonic-like eye, which gave rise to the term “private eye.” In a manual of general principles and rules that served as a blueprint for the industry, Pinkerton admitted that the detective must at times “depart from the strict line of truth” and “resort to deception.” Yet even many people who despised the profession deemed it a necessary evil. As one private eye put it, he might be a “miserable snake,” but he was also “the silent, secret, and effective Avenger of the outraged Majesty of the Law when everything else fails.”

Hale recruited a brooding private detective from Kansas City, who went by the name of Pike. To preserve his cover, Pike, who smoked a corn pipe and had a smudge of a mustache, met Hale at a concealed spot near Whizbang. (Civic leaders like Hale considered the name Whizbang undignified and instead called the town Denoya, after a prominent Osage family.) As smoke from the oil fields melted into the sky, Hale conferred with Pike. Then Pike slipped away to pursue his investigation.

At the direction of Mollie and her family, Anna's estate also hired private detectives. The estate was being administered by Scott Mathis, the Big Hill Trading Company owner, who had long managed the financial affairs of Anna and Lizzie as a guardian. The U.S. government, contending that many Osage were unable to handle their money, had required the Office of Indian Affairs to determine which members of the tribe it considered capable of managing their trust funds. Over the tribe's vehement objections, many Osage, including Lizzie and Anna, were deemed "incompetent," and were forced to have a local white guardian overseeing and authorizing all of their spending, down to the toothpaste they purchased at the corner store. One Osage who had served in World War I complained, "I fought in France for this country, and yet I am not allowed even to sign my own checks." The guardians were usually drawn from the ranks of the most prominent white citizens in Osage County.

Mathis put together a team of private eyes, as did the estate for Whitehorn. The private detectives investigating the Osage deaths had often worked for the William J. Burns International Detective Agency before venturing out on their own. Burns, a former Secret Service agent, had succeeded Pinkerton as the world's most celebrated private eye. A short, stout man, with a luxuriant mustache and a shock of red hair, Burns had once aspired to be an actor, and he cultivated a mystique, in part by writing pulp detective stories about his cases. In one such book, he declared, "My name is William J. Burns, and my address is New York, London, Paris, Montreal, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, New Orleans, Boston, Philadelphia, Cleveland, and wherever else a law-abiding citizen may find need of men who know how to go quietly about throwing out of ambush a hidden assassin or drawing from cover criminals who prey upon those who walk straight." Though dubbed a "front-page detective" for his incessant self-promotion, he had an impressive track record, including catching those responsible for the 1910 bombing of the headquarters of the *Los Angeles Times*, which killed twenty people. The *New York Times* called Burns "perhaps the only really great detective, the only detective of genius, whom this country

has produced," and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle gave him the moniker he longed for: "America's Sherlock Holmes."



.... ***The Big Hill Trading Company was run by Scott Mathis, who was a guardian of Anna and Lizzie.*** Credit 18

Unlike Sherlock Holmes, though, Burns had rigged juries, and allegedly kidnapped a suspect, and he routinely used the sordid techniques of imperial spies. After being caught breaking in to a New York law office in an attempt to steal evidence, he said that such methods were sometimes needed to prove a conspiracy and that such lines had been crossed "a thousand times" by private investigators. Burns perfectly embodied the new profession.



.... *The private detective William J. Burns* Credit 19

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That summer, the team of operatives hired by Mathis began to infiltrate Osage County. Each agent identified himself, in his daily reports, only by a coded number. At the outset, operative No. 10 asked Mathis, who'd been a juror on the inquest, to show him the crime scene. "Mathis and myself drove out to the place where the body was found," No. 10 wrote.

One of the investigators spoke to Anna's main servant. She revealed that after the body was found, she'd obtained a set of Anna's keys and had gone, with Anna's sister Rita Smith, to Anna's house. Incredibly, no one from the sheriff's office had searched the place yet. The women eased open the door and stepped through the silence. They could see Anna's jewelry and blankets and pictures, the accumulated treasures of her life, now resembling the ruins of a lost city. The servant, who had helped dress Anna the day she

disappeared, recalled, “Everything was just as we left it”—except for one thing. Anna’s alligator purse, which she had taken to Mollie’s luncheon, was now lying on the floor, the servant said, with “everything torn out of it.”

Nothing else in the house appeared to have been stolen, and the presence of the bag indicated that Anna had likely returned to her house at some point after the luncheon. Mollie’s brother-in-law Bryan seemed to be telling the truth about having brought her home. But had he taken her back out? Or had she gone away with someone else?

No. 10 turned to another potentially rich vein of clues: the records of Anna’s incoming and outgoing telephone calls. In those days, phone calls were manually patched through by an operator at a switchboard, with long-distance calls often relayed through multiple switchboards. These operators frequently kept a written record of the calls. According to the log of a Fairfax operator, at about 8:30, on the night Anna disappeared, someone had rung her house from a phone belonging to a business in Ralston, a town six miles southwest of Gray Horse. The records showed that someone, presumably Anna, had picked up. That meant that Anna was likely still in her house at 8:30—further evidence that Bryan had been truthful about taking her home.

The private detective, sensing that he was on the verge of a breakthrough, hurried to the Ralston business where the call originated. The proprietor insisted that he hadn’t called Anna’s house and that nobody else would have been allowed to make a long-distance call from his phone. Bolstering his claims, no Ralston operator had a record of the call being patched through to the Fairfax operator. “This call seems a mystery,” No. 10 wrote. He suspected that the Ralston number was really a “blind”—that an operator had been paid to destroy the original log ticket, which revealed the true source of the call. Someone, it seemed, was covering his or her tracks.

No. 10 wanted to look closely at Oda Brown. “General suspicion points towards the divorced husband,” he wrote. But it was getting

late and he finished his report, saying, "Discontinued on case 11 P.M."

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A week later, another operative from the team—No. 46—was sent to locate Brown in Ponca City, twenty-five miles northwest of Gray Horse. A savage storm blew across the prairie and turned the streets into rivers of mud, so the private detective didn't arrive in Ponca City until dark, only to discover that Brown wasn't there. He was said to be visiting Perry, Oklahoma, where his father lived. The next day, No. 46 took a train south to Perry, but Brown wasn't there, either; he was now said to be in Pawnee County. "Consequently I left Perry on the first train," No. 46 wrote in his report. This was what Sherlock Holmes stories left out—the tedium of real detective work, the false leads and the dead ends.

Back and forth No. 46 went until, in Pawnee County, he spied a slender, cigarette-smoking, shifty-looking man with rust-colored hair and flat gray eyes: Oda Brown. He was with a Pawnee woman whom he'd reportedly married after Anna's death. No. 46 stayed close, shadowing them. One day, No. 46 approached Brown, trying to befriend him. The Pinkerton manual advised, "The watchful Detective will seize the Criminal in his weakest moments and force from him, by his sympathy and the confidence which the Criminal has in him, the secret which devours him." No. 46 wormed his way deeper into Brown's confidence. When Brown mentioned that his ex-wife had been murdered, No. 46 tried to elicit from him where he'd been at the time of her death. Brown, perhaps suspecting his new friend was a professional snoop, said that he'd been away with another woman, though he wouldn't disclose the location. No. 46 studied Brown intently. According to the manual, a criminal's secret becomes an "enemy" within him and "weakens the whole fortress of his strength." But Brown didn't appear at all nervous.

While No. 46 was working on Brown, another operative, No. 28, learned a seemingly vital secret from a young Kaw Indian woman who lived near the western border of Osage County. In a signed

statement, the woman claimed that Rose Osage, an Indian in Fairfax, had admitted to her that she'd killed Anna after Anna had tried to seduce her boyfriend, Joe Allen. Rose said that while the three were riding in a car she'd "shot her in the top of the head," then, with Joe's help, dumped the body by Three Mile Creek. Rose's clothes got splattered with Anna's blood, the story went, so she took them off and discarded them in the creek.

It was a grim tale, but operative No. 28 was buoyed by the discovery. In his daily report, he said that he'd spent hours with Mathis and Sheriff Freas, whose trial was still pending, pursuing this "clue that seems to be a lead on the case."

The private detectives, though, struggled to corroborate the informant's story. No one had spotted Anna with Rose or Joe. Nor were any clothes found in the stream by the body. Was it possible that the informant was simply lying to get the reward?

Sheriff Freas, his flesh unfolding from his voluminous neck and chest, urged the private detectives to discount Rose and her boyfriend as suspects. Then he offered a counter-rumor: two hard-boiled characters from the oil camps had purportedly been seen with Anna shortly before her death, and had afterward skipped town. The private detectives agreed to look into the sheriff's story. But concerning the allegations against Rose, No. 28 vowed, "We are going to follow out this theory."

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The private detectives shared what they knew with Bill Smith, Mollie's brother-in-law, who was still conducting his own investigation. The twenty-nine-year-old Smith had been a horse thief before attaching himself to an Osage fortune: first by marrying Mollie's sister Minnie, and then—only months after Minnie's death from the mysterious "wasting illness" in 1918—by wedding Mollie's sister Rita. On more than one occasion when Bill drank, he'd raised his hand to Rita. A servant later recalled that after one row between Bill and Rita, "she came out kind of bruised up." Bill told the servant,

“That was the only way to get along with them squaws.” Rita often threatened to leave him, but she never did.

Rita had a keen mind, yet those close to her thought that her judgment was impaired by what one person described as “a love that was truly blind.” Mollie had her doubts about Bill: Had he, in some way, been responsible for Minnie’s death? Hale made it clear that he didn’t trust Bill, either, and at least one local attorney speculated that Bill was “prostituting the sacred bond of marriage for sordid gain.”



~~~~ **Mollie's sister Rita** Credit 20

But since Anna’s murder Bill had, by all appearances, vigorously sought to discover who the culprit was. When Bill learned that a tailor in town might have information, he went with a private detective to ask him questions, only to find that he was spreading the now-familiar rumor: that Rose Osage had killed Anna in a fury of jealousy.

Desperate for a break, the private detectives decided to install a listening device to eavesdrop on Rose and her boyfriend. At the time, statutes governing electronic surveillance were nebulous, and Burns was an avid user of a Dictograph—a primitive listening device that could be concealed in anything from a clock to a chandelier. “Burns was the first American to see the immense possibilities of the instrument in detective work,” the *Literary Digest* reported in 1912. “He is so enamored with it that he always carries one in his pocket.” Just as Allan Pinkerton, in the nineteenth century, was known as “the eye,” Burns, in the twentieth century, had become “the ear.”

The detectives, hiding in another room, began listening to the staticky voices of Rose and her boyfriend through earphones. But, as is so often the case with surveillance, the rush of excitement gave way to the tediousness of other people’s inner lives, and the private detectives eventually stopped bothering to jot down the innocuous details that they overheard.

Using more conventional means, however, the private detectives made a startling discovery. The cabdriver who’d taken Anna to Mollie’s house on the day she vanished told them that Anna had asked him to stop first at the cemetery in Gray Horse. She had climbed out and stumbled through the stones until she paused by her father’s tomb. For a moment, she stood near the spot where she, too, would soon be buried, as if offering a mourning prayer to herself. Then she returned to the car and asked the driver to send someone to bring flowers to her father’s tomb. She wanted his grave to always be pretty.

While they continued to Mollie’s house, Anna leaned toward the driver. He could smell her liquored breath as she divulged a secret: she was going to have “a little baby.”

“My goodness, no,” he replied.

“I am,” she said.

“Is that so?”

“Yes.”

Detectives later confirmed the story with two people close to Anna. She had also confided to them the news of her pregnancy. Yet no one knew who the father was.

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One day that summer, a stranger with a Chaplinesque mustache showed up in Gray Horse to offer his assistance to the private eyes. The man, who was armed with a .44-caliber, snub-nosed English Bulldog, was named A. W. Comstock, and he was a local attorney and the guardian of several Osage Indians. Some locals thought that Comstock, with his aquiline nose and tan complexion, might be part American Indian—an impression that he did little to discourage as he built up his legal practice. “The fact he represented himself to be an Indian would make him get along pretty well with the Indians, wouldn’t it?” another lawyer skeptically remarked. William Burns had once investigated Comstock for allegedly assisting an oil company in a scheme to bribe the Osage Tribal Council for a favorable lease, but the charge was never proven.

Given Comstock’s numerous contacts among the Osage, the private eyes now took him up on his offer to help. While the detectives were trying to establish a connection between the slayings of Charles Whitehorn and Anna Brown, Comstock passed on tidbits that he collected from his network of informants. There was chatter that Whitehorn’s widow, Hattie, had coveted her husband’s money, chatter that she’d been jealous of his relationship with another woman. Was it possible that this woman was Anna Brown? Such a hypothesis led to the next logical question: Was Whitehorn the father of her baby?

The detectives began to follow Hattie Whitehorn around the clock, relishing being able to see without being seen: “Operative shadowed Mrs. Whitehorn to Okla. City from Pawhuska....Left Okla. City with Mrs. Whitehorn for Guthrie....Trailed Mrs. Whitehorn, Tulsa to Pawhuska.” But there were no developments.

By February 1922, nine months after the murders of Whitehorn and Anna Brown, the investigations into the cases seemed to have reached a permanent impasse. Pike, the detective Hale had enlisted, had moved on. Sheriff Freas was also no longer leading the investigation; that February, he was expelled from office after a jury had found him guilty of failing to enforce the law.

Then, on a frigid night that month, William Stepson, a twenty-nine-year-old Osage champion steer roper, received a call that prompted him to leave his house in Fairfax. He returned home to his wife and two children several hours later, visibly ill. Stepson had always been in remarkable shape, but within hours he was dead. Authorities, upon examining the body, believed that someone he met during his excursion had slipped him a dose of poison, possibly strychnine—a bitter white alkaloid that, according to a nineteenth-century medical treatise, was “endowed with more destructive energy” than virtually any other poison. The treatise described how a lab animal injected with strychnine becomes “agitated and trembles, and is then seized with stiffness and starting of the limbs,” adding, “These symptoms increase till at length it is attacked with a fit of violent general spasm, in which the head is bent back, the spine stiffened, the limbs extended and rigid, and the respiration checked by the fixing of the chest.” Stepson’s final hours would have been a hideous torment: his muscles convulsing, as if he were being jolted with electricity; his neck craning and his jaw tightening; his lungs constricting as he tried to breathe, until at last he suffocated.



.... **William Stepson** Credit 21

By the time of Stepson's death, scientists had devised numerous tools to detect poison in a corpse. A sample of tissue could be extracted from the body and tested for the presence of an array of toxic substances—from strychnine to arsenic. Yet in much of the country these forensic methods were applied even less consistently than fingerprint and ballistic techniques. In 1928, a survey by the National Research Council concluded that the coroner in most counties of the United States was an “untrained and unskilled individual” and had “a small staff of mediocre ability, and with inadequate equipment.” In places like Osage County, where there was no coroner trained in forensics and no crime laboratory, poisoning was a perfect way to commit murder. Poisons were abundantly available in products found on the shelves of apothecaries and grocery stores, and unlike a gunshot they could be administered without a sound. And the symptoms of many toxic substances mimicked natural ailments—the nausea and diarrhea of

cholera, or the seizure of a heart attack. During Prohibition, there were so many accidental deaths caused from wood alcohol and other toxic brews of bootleg whiskey that a killer could also spike a person's glass of moonshine without ever arousing suspicions.

On March 26, 1922, less than a month after Stepson's death, an Osage woman died of a suspected poisoning. Once again, no thorough toxicology exam was performed. Then, on July 28, Joe Bates, an Osage man in his thirties, obtained from a stranger some whiskey, and after taking a sip, he began frothing at the mouth, before collapsing. He, too, had died of what authorities described as some strange poison. He left behind a wife and six children.

That August, as the number of suspicious deaths continued to climb, many Osage prevailed upon Barney McBride, a wealthy fifty-five-year-old white oilman, to go to Washington, D.C., and ask federal authorities to investigate. McBride had been married to a Creek Indian, now deceased, and was raising his stepdaughter. He had taken a strong interest in Indian affairs in Oklahoma, and he was trusted by the Osage; a reporter described him as a "kind-hearted, white-haired man." Given that he also knew many officials in Washington, he was considered an ideal messenger.

When McBride checked in to a rooming house in the capital, he found a telegram from an associate waiting for him. "Be careful," it said. McBride carried with him a Bible and a .45-caliber revolver. In the evening, he stopped at the Elks Club to play billiards. When he headed outside, someone seized him and tied a burlap sack tightly over his head. The next morning, McBride's body was found in a culvert in Maryland. He had been stabbed more than twenty times, his skull had been beaten in, and he had been stripped naked, except for his socks and shoes, in one of which had been left a card with his name. The forensic evidence suggested that there had been more than one assailant, and authorities suspected that his killers had shadowed him from Oklahoma.

News of the murder quickly reached Mollie and her family. The killing—which the *Washington Post* called "the most brutal in crime annals in the District"—appeared to be more than simply a murder.

It had the hallmarks of a message, a warning. In a headline, the *Post* noted what seemed to be increasingly clear: CONSPIRACY BELIEVED TO KILL RICH INDIANS.

## **6** ~~~ MILLION DOLLAR ELM

Even with the murders, they kept on coming, the greatest oil barons in the world. Every three months, at ten in the morning, these oilmen—including E. W. Marland and Bill Skelly and Harry Sinclair and Frank Phillips and his brothers—pulled in to the train station in Pawhuska, in their own luxurious railcars. The press would herald their approach with bulletins: “MILLIONAIRES’ SPECIAL” DUE TO ARRIVE; PAWHUSKA GIVES CITY OVER TO OIL MEN TODAY; MEN OF MILLIONS AWAIT PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT.

The barons came for the auction of Osage leases, an event that was held about four times a year and that was overseen by the Department of the Interior. One historian dubbed it the “Osage Monte Carlo.” Since the auctions had begun, in 1912, only a portion of Osage County’s vast underground reservation had been opened to drilling, while the bidding for a single lease, which typically covered a 160-acre tract, had skyrocketed. In 1923, the *Daily Oklahoman* said, “Brewster, the hero of the story, ‘Brewster’s Millions,’ was driven almost to nervous prostration in trying to spend \$1,000,000 in one year. Had Brewster been in Oklahoma...he could have spent \$1,000,000 with just one little nod of his head.”

In good weather, the auctions were held outdoors, on a hilltop in Pawhuska, in the shade of a large tree known as the Million Dollar Elm. Spectators would come from miles away. Ernest sometimes attended the events, and so did Mollie and other members of the tribe. “There is a touch of color in the audiences, too, for the Osage Indians...often are stoical but interested spectators,” the Associated Press reported, deploying the usual stereotypes. Others in the community—including prominent settlers like Hale and Mathis, the

Big Hill Trading Company owner—took a keen interest in the auctions. The money flowing into the community from the oil boom had helped to build their businesses and to realize their once seemingly fantastical dreams of turning the raw prairie into a beacon of commerce.



.... ***Frank Phillips (on bottom step) and other oilmen arrive in Osage territory in 1919.*** Credit 22

The auctioneer—a tall white man with thinning hair and a booming voice—would eventually step under the tree. He typically wore a gaudy striped shirt and a celluloid collar and a long flowing tie; a metal chain, connected to a timepiece, dangled from his pocket. He presided over all the Osage sales, and his moniker, Colonel, made him sound like a veteran of World War I. In fact, it was part of his christened name: Colonel Ellsworth E. Walters. A master showman, he urged bidders on with folksy sayings like “Come on boys, this old wildcat is liable to have a mess of kittens.”



.... ***Colonel Walters conducting an auction under the Million Dollar Elm*** Credit 23

Because the least valued oil leases were offered first, the barons usually lingered in the back, leaving the initial bidding to upstarts. Jean Paul Getty, who attended several Osage auctions, recalled how one oil lease could change a man's fate: "It was not unusual for a penniless wildcatter, down to his last bit and without cash or credit with which to buy more, to...bring in a well that made him a rich man." At the same time, a wrong bid could lead to ruin: "Fortunes were being made—and lost—daily."

The oilmen anxiously pored over geological maps and tried to glean intelligence about leases from men they employed as "rock hounds" and spies. After a break for lunch, the auction proceeded to the more valuable leases, and the crowd's gaze inevitably turned toward the oil magnates, whose power rivaled, if not surpassed, that of the railroad and steel barons of the nineteenth century. Some of them had begun to use their clout to bend the course of history. In

1920, Sinclair, Marland, and other oilmen helped finance the successful presidential bid of Warren Harding. One oilman from Oklahoma told a friend that Harding's nomination had cost him and his interests \$1 million. But with Harding in the White House, a historian noted, "the oil men licked their chops." Sinclair funneled, through the cover of a bogus company, more than \$200,000 to the new secretary of the interior, Albert B. Fall; another oilman had his son deliver to the secretary \$100,000 in a black bag.

In exchange, the secretary allowed the barons to tap the navy's invaluable strategic oil reserves. Sinclair received an exclusive lease to a reserve in Wyoming, which, because of the shape of a sandstone rock near it, was known as Teapot Dome. The head of Standard Oil warned a former Harding campaign aide, "I understand the Interior Department is just about to close a contract to lease Teapot Dome, and all through the industry it smells....I do feel that you should tell the President that it *smells*."

The illicit payoffs were as yet unknown to the public, and as the barons moved toward the front of the Million Dollar Elm, they were treated as princes of capitalism, the crowd parting before them. During the bidding, tensions among the magnates sometimes boiled over. Once, Frank Phillips and Bill Skelly began to fight, rolling on the ground like rabid raccoons, while Sinclair nodded at Colonel and walked off triumphantly with the lease. A reporter said, "Veterans of the New York Stock Exchange have witnessed no more thrilling scramble of humanity than the struggling group of oil men of state and national repute throw themselves into the fray to get at the choice tracts."

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On January 18, 1923, five months after the murder of McBride, many of the big oilmen gathered for another auction. Because it was winter, they met in the Constantine Theater, in Pawhuska. Billed as "the finest building of its kind in Oklahoma," the theater had Greek columns and murals and a necklace of lights around the stage. As usual, Colonel started with the less valued leases. "What am I bid?"

he called out. “Remember, no tracts sold for less than five hundred dollars.”

A voice came out of the crowd: “Five hundred.”

“I’m bid five hundred,” Colonel boomed. “Who’ll make it six hundred? Five going to six. Five-six, five-six—thank you—six, now seven, six-now-sev’n...” Colonel paused, then yelled, “Sold to this gentleman for six hundred dollars.”

Throughout the day, bids for new tracts steadily grew in value: ten thousand...fifty thousand...a hundred thousand...

Colonel quipped, “Wall Street is waking up.”

Tract 13 sold for more than \$600,000, to Sinclair.

Colonel took a deep breath. “Tract 14,” he said, which was in the middle of the rich Burbank field.

The crowd hushed. Then an unassuming voice rose from the middle of the room: “Half a million.” It was a representative from Gypsy Oil Company, an affiliate of Gulf Oil, who was sitting with a map spread on his knees, not looking up as he spoke.

“Who’ll make it six hundred thousand?” Colonel asked.

Colonel was known for his ability to detect even the slightest nod or gesture from bidders. At auctions, Frank Phillips and one of his brothers used almost imperceptible signals—a raised eyebrow or a flick of a cigar. Frank joked that his brother had once cost them \$100,000 by swatting a fly.

Colonel knew his audience and pointed at a gray-haired man with an unlit cigar clamped between his teeth. He was representing a consortium of interests that included Frank Phillips and Skelly—the old adversaries now allies. The gray-haired man made an almost invisible nod.

“Seven hundred,” cried Colonel, quickly pointing to the first bidder. Another nod.

“Eight hundred,” Colonel said.



~~~ **Downtown Pawhuska in 1906, before the oil boom** Credit 24



~~~ **Pawhuska was transformed during the oil rush.** Credit 25

He returned to the first bidder, the man with the map, who said, "Nine hundred."

Another nod from the gray-haired man with the unlit cigar. Colonel belted out the words: "One million dollars."

Still, the bids kept climbing. "Eleven hundred thousand now twelve," Colonel said. "Eleven—now twelve—now twelve."

Finally, no one spoke. Colonel stared at the gray-haired man, who was still chewing on his unlit cigar. A reporter in the room remarked, "One wishes for more air."

Colonel said, "This is Burbank, men. Don't overlook your hands."

No one moved or uttered a word.

"Sold!" Colonel shouted. "For one million one hundred thousand dollars."

Each new auction seemed to surpass the previous one for the record of the highest single bid and the total of millions collected. One lease sold for nearly \$2 million, while the highest total collected at an auction climbed to nearly \$14 million. A reporter from *Harper's Monthly Magazine* wrote, "Where will it end? Every time a new well is drilled the Indians are that much richer." The reporter added, "The Osage Indians are becoming so rich that something will have to be done about it."

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A growing number of white Americans expressed alarm over the Osage's wealth—outrage that was stoked by the press. Journalists told stories, often wildly embroidered, of Osage who discarded grand pianos on their lawns or replaced old cars with new ones after getting a flat tire. *Travel* magazine wrote, "The Osage Indian is today the prince of spendthrifts. Judged by his improvidence, the Prodigal Son was simply a frugal person with an inherent fondness for husks." A letter to the editor in the *Independent*, a weekly magazine, echoed the sentiment, referring to the typical Osage as a good-for-nothing who had attained wealth "merely because the Government unfortunately located him upon oil land which we white folks have

developed for him.” John Joseph Mathews bitterly recalled reporters “enjoying the bizarre impact of wealth on the Neolithic men, with the usual smugness and wisdom of the unlearned.”

The accounts rarely, if ever, mentioned that numerous Osage had skillfully invested their money or that some of the spending by the Osage might have reflected ancestral customs that linked grand displays of generosity with tribal stature. Certainly during the Roaring Twenties, a time marked by what F. Scott Fitzgerald called “the greatest, gaudiest spree in history,” the Osage were not alone in their profligacy. Marland, the oil baron who found the Burbank field, had built a twenty-two-room mansion in Ponca City, then abandoned it for an even bigger one. With an interior modeled after the fourteenth-century Palazzo Davanzati in Florence, the house had fifty-five rooms (including a ballroom with a gold-leaf ceiling and Waterford crystal chandeliers), twelve bathrooms, seven fireplaces, three kitchens, and an elevator lined with buffalo skin. The grounds contained a swimming pool and polo fields and a golf course and five lakes with islands. When questioned about this excess, Marland was unapologetic: “To me, the purpose of money was to buy, and to build. And that’s what I’ve done. And if that’s what they mean, then I’m guilty.” Yet in only a few years, he would be so broke that he couldn’t afford his lighting bill and had to vacate his mansion. After a stint in politics, he tried to discover another gusher but failed. His architect recalled, “The last time I saw him, I think he was just sitting on a nail keg of some kind out there northeast of town. It was raining and he had on a raincoat and rain hat but he was just sitting there kind of dejected. Two or three men were working his portable drilling rig and hoping they might find oil. So I just walked off with a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes.” Another famed oilman in Oklahoma quickly burned through \$50 million and ended up destitute.



---- *The press claimed that whereas one out of every eleven Americans owned a car, virtually every Osage had eleven of them.* Credit 26

Many Osage, unlike other wealthy Americans, could not spend their money as they pleased because of the federally imposed system of financial guardians. (One guardian claimed that an Osage adult was “like a child six or eight years old, and when he sees a new toy he wants to buy it.”) The law mandated that guardians be assigned to any American Indians whom the Department of the Interior deemed “incompetent.” In practice, the decision to appoint a guardian—to render an American Indian, in effect, a half citizen—was nearly always based on the quantum of Indian blood in the property holder, or what a state supreme court justice referred to as “racial weakness.” A full-blooded American Indian was invariably appointed a guardian, whereas a mixed-blood person rarely was. John Palmer, the part-Sioux orphan who had been adopted by an Osage family and who played such an instrumental role in preserving the tribe’s mineral rights, pleaded to members of Congress, “Let not that quantum of white blood or Indian determine the amount that you take over from the members of this tribe. It matters not about the

quantum of Indian blood. You gentlemen do not deal with things of that kind.”

Such pleas, inevitably, were ignored, and members of Congress would gather in wood-paneled committee rooms and spend hours examining in minute detail the Osage’s expenditures, as if the country’s security were at stake. At a House subcommittee hearing in 1920, lawmakers combed through a report from a government inspector who had been sent to investigate the tribe’s spending habits, including those of Mollie’s family. The investigator cited with displeasure “Exhibit Q”: a bill for \$319.05 that Mollie’s mother, Lizzie, had racked up at a butcher shop before her death.

The investigator insisted that the devil had been in control of the government when it negotiated the oil-rights agreement with the tribe. Full of fire and brimstone, he declared, “I have visited and worked in and about most of the cities of our country, and am more or less familiar with their filthy sores and iniquitous cesspools. Yet I never wholly appreciated the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, whose sins and vices proved their undoing and their downfall, until I visited this Indian nation.”

He implored Congress to take greater action. “Every white man in Osage County will tell you that the Indians are now running wild,” he said, adding, “The day has come when we must begin our restriction of these moneys or dismiss from our hearts and conscience any hope we have of building the Osage Indian into a true citizen.”

A few congressmen and witnesses tried to mitigate the scapegoating of the Osage. At a subsequent hearing, even a judge who served as a guardian acknowledged that rich Indians spent their wealth no differently than white people with money did. “There is a great deal of humanity about these Osages,” he said. Hale also argued that the government should not be dictating the Osage’s financial decisions.

But in 1921, just as the government had once adopted a ration system to pay the Osage for seized land—just as it always seemed to turn its gospel of enlightenment into a hammer of coercion—Congress implemented even more draconian legislation controlling

how the Osage could spend their money. Guardians would not only continue to oversee their wards' finances; under the new law, these Osage Indians with guardians were also "restricted," which meant that each of them could withdraw no more than a few thousand dollars annually from his or her trust fund. It didn't matter if these Osage needed their money to pay for education or a sick child's hospital bills. "We have many little children," the last hereditary chief of the tribe, who was in his eighties, explained in a statement issued to the press. "We want to raise them and educate them. We want them to be comfortable, and we do not want our money held up from us by somebody who cares nothing for us." He went on, "We want our money now. We have it. It is ours, and we don't want some autocratic man to hold it up so we can't use it....It is an injustice to us all. We do not want to be treated like a lot of little children. We are men and able to take care of ourselves." As a full-blooded Osage, Mollie was among those whose funds were restricted, though at least her husband, Ernest, was her guardian.

It wasn't only the federal government that was meddling in the tribe's financial affairs. The Osage found themselves surrounded by predators—"a flock of buzzards," as one member of the tribe complained at a council meeting. Venal local officials sought to devour the Osage's fortunes. Stickup men were out to rob their bank accounts. Merchants demanded that the Osage pay "special"—that is, inflated—prices. Unscrupulous accountants and lawyers tried to exploit full-blooded Osage's ill-defined legal status. There was even a thirty-year-old white woman in Oregon who sent a letter to the tribe, seeking a wealthy Osage to marry: "Will you please tell the richest Indian you know of, and he will find me as good and true as any human being can be."

At one congressional hearing, another Osage chief named Bacon Rind testified that the whites had "bunched us down here in the backwoods, the roughest part of the United States, thinking 'we will drive these Indians down to where there is a big pile of rocks and put them there in that corner.'" Now that the pile of rocks had turned

out to be worth millions of dollars, he said, “everybody wants to get in here and get some of this money.”