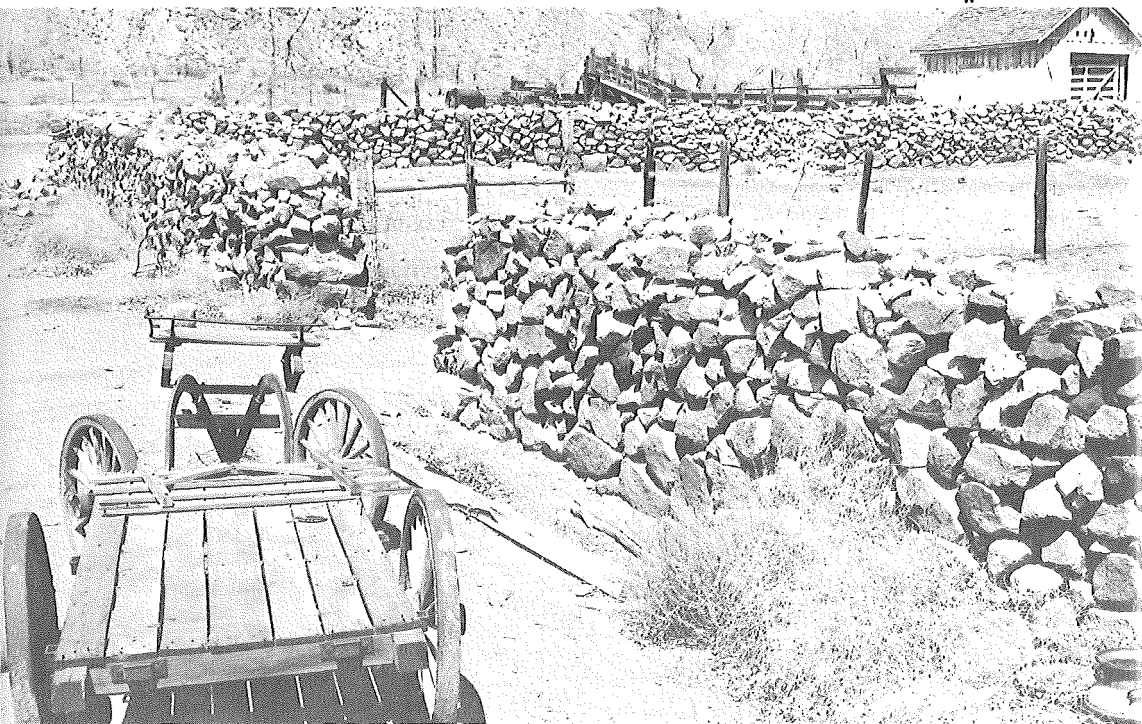




*Nevada*

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**WOVOKA**

GRACE DANGBERG

EDITOR

Mrs. Andy Welliver

COVER

Corral at one of the  
Wilson ranches, Mason  
Valley, where Wovoka  
worked in his later  
years.

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Wovoka before 1921.

*Wovoka*

GRACE DANGBERG

## WOVOKA

“He has been denounced as an imposter, ridiculed as a lunatic, laughed at as a pretended Christ, while by the Indians he is revered as a direct messenger from the Other World, and among many of the remote tribes he is believed to be omniscient, to speak all languages, and to be invisible to a white man.”

This was Wovoka as he appeared to James Mooney, investigator for the Bureau of Ethnology, Washington, D.C., in 1892. Wovoka lived for forty-two years after this appraisal by Mooney. What then is the truth concerning him as it appeared to later men?

In the latter half of the last century there appeared on the deserts of western Nevada two prophets. These men were Indians, Paiute (or Piute, Paviotso) and their homes were in territory along the banks of the East Walker River and on the shores of Walker Lake. The two have been linked, inasmuch as they appeared a generation apart, as father and son. This they were not except in the sense that the latter of the two could be considered the “spiritual” son of the earlier prophet. The earlier prophet called himself Wodziwob, the later was named Wovoka. Each had influence, and important influence, far beyond the limits of his native haunts: each prophet had honor in his own country and great honor in far away lands. This was the destiny of both men, especially that of the younger, Wovoka, who, as the collection of letters here published testifies, continued to exert influence and to be revered, twenty-five years after he was first recognized as a prophet, in places as distant as Saskatchewan and the Dakotas.

Wovoka was born about 1854;<sup>1</sup> he was the son of an assistant or follower of Wodziwob, named Tavivo or Numataivo who was a petty chief, a dreamer and who was invulnerable. Wodziwob, who was born about 1844, died in 1872, Wovoka’s father in 1912. It is thus clear that Wovoka was to a very great degree always close to the earlier prophet or one of his followers.<sup>2</sup>

As a boy Wovoka and his family lived, as was customary for Indians who were not placed on reservations, on a ranch, in this case on the Mason Valley ranch of Mr. David Wilson. Wovoka was a teenage playmate of the Wilson boys and from his and his family’s association with the Wilson family derived his other name, Jack Wilson. In consequence it has been conjectured by some, among them Paul Bailey,<sup>3</sup> that Wovoka was importantly influenced in his prophesying by his attendance at daily Bible reading and prayers conducted in his home by Mr. David Wilson, a devout Presbyterian. In this connection, it is well to note that Wovoka could neither read nor write English nor was it possible to converse with

<sup>1</sup>Mooney, p. 764.

<sup>2</sup>Another follower of Wodziwob was named Weneyuga (also called Frank Spencer), DuBois, pp. 3-4.

<sup>3</sup>See his *Wovoka*, pp. 27-33 and passim.

him about his vision or his teachings except through an interpreter.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Wovoka himself insisted, when speaking of his message, on using his native Paiute. It is probable that the attendance at the Wilson family devotions was merely perfunctory, that Wovoka and his playmates J. W. Wilson (1857–1930) and J. I. Wilson (1859–1954) were uneasy, restless listeners to the Biblical stories in archaic English and that they rushed from the readings and prayers to the outdoors where they could play pranks and where Wovoka taught the lively Wilson boys to speak Paiute. It is quite natural that anyone failing to distinguish some of the elemental concepts common to all, or most, prophecy would make an effort in this instance to link the prophet living on the Walker River and in the Walker Lake area to men or to a single divine person, who led his people two thousand years ago on the banks of the Jordan and the shores of the Sea of Gallilee.

It is indeed unfortunate that no person, so far as is known, set down from dictation in the prophet's own language what either Wodziwob or Wovoka said. For their prophecies there is nothing more authentic to turn to than the translations made on the spot from Paiute into English or the recollections, in English, of Paiutes who, when interviewed, were recalling events which took place and prophecies which were promulgated forty to sixty years earlier. The prophecies of Wodziwob may be dated to about 1869. Wodziwob, according to one informant, went into a trance during which he learned that the

“Supreme Ruler . . . was then on his way with all the spirits of the departed dead to again reside upon this earth and change it into a paradise. Life was to be eternal and no distinction was to exist between races.”<sup>5</sup>

Another Paiute recalled, in the 1920's, that Wodziwob preached that,

“Our fathers are coming, our mothers are coming, they are coming pretty soon. You had better dance. Never stop for a long time. Swim. Paint in white and black and red paint. Every morning wash and paint. Everybody be happy.”<sup>6a</sup>

In the case of Wovoka we have left to us accounts of his message which if anything are even less authentic than the words of Wodziwob which have filtered down to us. James Mooney, the investigator for the Department of the Interior who interviewed Wovoka in 1892, summarizes his teachings as follows:

“When the sun died [prophecy referring to the eclipse of January 1, 1889<sup>6</sup>] I went to heaven and saw God and all the people who had died a long time ago. God told me to come back and tell my people they must be good and love one another, and not fight, or steal, or lie. He gave me this dance to give to my people.”<sup>6a</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Mooney, pp. 771, 819.

<sup>5</sup>Mooney, pp. 702–703; DuBois, p. 5.

<sup>6a</sup>DuBois, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup>Mooney, p. 774.

<sup>6a</sup>Mooney, p. 764.

The incidence of this and other revelations is more specifically described by a Paiute informant:

“Jack Wilson took his family and went into the mountains to cut wood for Mr. Dave Wilson. One day while at work . . . he fell down dead and God came and took him to heaven.” (the portion omitted in this account refers to his hearing a great noise which Wovoka himself never mentioned).<sup>7</sup>

and by a neighboring ranchman who knew Wovoka well and sometimes employed him in the working season:

“It appears that a short time before the prophet began to preach he was stricken down by a severe fever, during which illness the ranchman frequently visited and ministered to him. While he was still sick there occurred an eclipse of the sun, a phenomenon which always excites great alarm among primitive peoples. In their system the sun is a living being, of great power and beneficence, and the temporary darkness is caused by an attack on him by some supernatural monster which endeavors to devour him, and will succeed, and thus plunge the world into eternal night unless driven off by incantations and loud noises. On this occasion the Paiute were frantic with excitement and the air was filled with the noise of shouts and wailings and the firing of guns, for the purpose of frightening off the monster that threatened the life of their god. It was now, as Wovoka stated, ‘when the sun died,’ that he went to sleep in the daytime and was taken up to heaven.”<sup>8a</sup>

Of the visit to heaven Wovoka elaborated to investigator Mooney that there, “he saw ‘God’ with all the people who had died long ago engaged in their oldtime sports and occupations, all happy and forever young. It was a pleasant land and full of game. After showing him all, God told him he must go back and tell his people that they must be good, and love one another, have no quarreling and live in peace with the whites; that they must work, and not lie or steal; that they must put away all the old practices that savored of war; that if they faithfully obeyed his instructions they would at last be reunited with their friends in this other world where there would be no more death or sickness or old age. He was then given the dance which he was commanded to bring back to his people. By performing this dance at intervals, for five successive days each time they would secure this happiness to themselves and hasten the event. Finally God gave him control over the elements so that he could make it rain or snow or be dry at will, and appointed him to be his deputy to take charge of affairs in the west, while ‘Governor Harrison’ would attend to matters in the east and he, God, would look after the world above.”<sup>8b</sup>

Despite appearances there is little in this statement that falls outside the bounds of Indian belief. However, when juxtaposed to events of the

<sup>7</sup>Mooney, p. 772.

<sup>8a</sup>Mooney, p. 773. Genevieve Wilson Chapin (daughter of J. I. Wilson) writes: “. . . when Jack was a young man he had a terrible illness, a fever, he was in a coma and near death for days, and he believed he talked with God”.

<sup>8b</sup>Mooney, pp. 771-772.





**Wovoka as Moody saw him.**



Wovoka about 1921.

time and when, in the cosmic view invoked, President Harrison is transposed to an appropriate place in a celestial hierarchy the reader may be forgiven for concluding that Wovoka's vision was designedly oriented to events of the day and that it could be construed as falling within the limits of Biblical prophesy. The claim that his visions were "messianic" cannot, however, be substantiated by anything that he himself said; this interpretation of his message must be seen as residing in the mind of the beholder rather than in the teaching of the so-called "messiah"—called this by the on-lookers both white and Indian and *not* by Wovoka himself."

It is clear from the various statements that Wovoka made subsequent to his first revelation, that at that time and at subsequent times, he went into a trance. This fact was attested by numerous observers among the good citizenry of Mason Valley. Though infrequently observed by the white people this was a common phenomenon among those of the Indians who became prophets, leaders or medicine men among their own people. It is a sort of 'oath of office' certainly among the Indians of the Great Basin. The visions seen in a trance are regarded as authentic representations of things to come. During one of these visions, the soul of the prophet, we may say, for lack of a more appropriate word which would more accurately express the belief of the Indians, may separate from the body to travel to its power. (cf. below p. 12) The fact that Wovoka's soul or spirit, on this occasion met a power which the translator calls "God" is not unusual for the more powerful and sensitive men who have this experience. It only makes more frustrating our ignorance of the Paiute word used in this instance to describe the 'power' encountered on this celestial visit.

Now in 'heaven' Wovoka found 'the happy hunting ground' peopled by all the departed—a dream of paradise, in this instance an Indian or Paiute paradise, nevertheless of a type characteristically dear to all who indulge in any form of wishful thinking. The belief in the existence of the spirit (ghost) after death is common to all Great Basin Indians. In Wodziwob's and Wovoka's visions, however, contrary to the traditional Indian view of such surviving entities, the spirits of the departed are portrayed as benevolent and happy and coming back to live on this earth. This is not Indian and may reasonably be ascribed to Christian and particularly Mormon influence.

How the various aspects of Wovoka's prophecy are related to the practice of medicine men, more properly called shamans among the Paiute may better be understood from a description of the phenomenon by Willard Z. Park, made from his field studies in 1931, at Walker and Pyramid lakes and in the towns of Reno, Fallon and Yerington. We quote the description in full in order to permit the reader to observe for himself how certain aspects of an unfamiliar practice could be seized upon, misinterpreted and emphasized by an onlooker to produce some of the accounts of Wovoka's acts and teachings and of the 'ghost dance'

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"Mooney, p. 773. On the use of the term "messiah" DuBois, (p. 135) says these ghost dance movements, "cannot be called "messianic" movements, since the appearance of no great saviour was anticipated".

which have been preserved. The phenomenon may be described as the Paiute process of acquiring 'power':

"'Power' which enables a shaman to cure the sick may come to a person of either sex. The power usually comes unsought, most commonly in dreams. But it may be inherited, or it may be sought through visionary experience in caves.

*"Unsought dreams*—When animals such as an eagle, owl, deer, antelope, bear, mountain sheep, or snake, come to a person a number of times in a dream, he knows that he is to become a shaman.

"A man dreams that a deer, eagle, or bear comes after him. The animal tells him that he is to be a doctor. The first time a man dreams this way he does not believe it. Then he dreams that way some more and he gets the things the spirit told him to get (eagle feathers, wild tobacco, stone pipe, rattle made from the ear of a deer or from the deer's dew claws). Then he learns to be a doctor. He learns his songs when the spirit comes and sings to him.

"A person who has been visited in dreams by one of these spirits must obey the instructions given him or serious illness will result. If he continues to ignore his spirit or power he will die. After he has gathered the *paraphernalia such as the tail feathers* and down from the breast of the eagle, pipe, tobacco, and rattle, he places them in a bag made of deer, badger, or coyote skin.

*"When a man or woman is visited in dreams by one of the powers, sickness results.* Often it is necessary to call in a shaman to interpret the dreams.

"A man has the same dream a number of times. Then he knows the power to be a shaman is in him. *Sometimes it makes him very sick.* He must do what the power tells him. One man here (Reno) *who is still living was sick about a year and nearly died. He went into trances and then his body was stiff as a board. He dreamed that he went to the place where the dead are. He dreamed that way all the time he was sick.* He told how spirits of dead people came and tried to steal his soul. His father was a shaman and finally cured him, *but he almost died.*

"Should a man or woman be visited by spirits in dreams and not wish to be a shaman the dreams might be disregarded for a few times, but when a shaman is called for illness resulting therefrom (from a visit of his 'power' or spirit) he will tell the dreamer to do as the power instructed him in the dream. Then if the feathers and other parts of the shaman's kit were gotten together, recovery would be assured. If the reluctant shaman failed to use his new power in doctoring people, but guarded the eagle feathers, no harm would come to him. *After a person becomes a shaman the eagle feathers, or some little object such as an odd pebble or a lead bullet with a hole in it, are regarded as the things from which the power comes.* If this object is lost the shaman at once loses his power to cure people, and he will quickly sicken and die. No other shaman can help him or save him from death.

*"A shaman has power from only one spirit.* By the aid of this spirit the shaman is able to diagnose the patient's illness, and the spirit through

the shaman, prescribes the proper remedy. *The shaman is visited by his spirit in his dreams from time to time, at which time he learns new songs or he may learn in these dreams how to cure a patient that he is about to treat.*

*“Specialists—Most shamans were credited with the power to treat any kind of disease. However, some doctors were supposed to be especially good in curing certain things. Jack Wilson was an excellent doctor for gunshot wounds. Those with power from rattlesnakes could cure people who had been bitten by snakes better than other shamans. Formerly there were Paviotso shamans to whom were ascribed strong powers for curing the wounds made by poisoned arrows.*

*“When the shaman has been commanded by his power to doctor people he tells his neighbors about his dreams and songs so ‘They will know he is ready to doctor sick people.’*

*“Not all shamans can go into a trance. Only the best and strongest doctors have this power. While in a trance the shaman goes to consult his power. There he learns how to cure the patient. A doctor who does not go into a trance is thought to call his power to help him in curing. The latter class of shamans are thought to be weaker and less likely to bring about a cure. Today, of the ten or more Paviotso shamans there is but one who goes into a trance while doctoring.” [Italics supplied]<sup>10</sup>*

In connection with the trances of Wovoka, Mr. E. A. Dyer, Sr. who observed him in such a state, describes how he appeared when, as we may assume from the foregoing description of the process of becoming a shaman, his ‘soul’ was going to consult his ‘power’ or ‘God’ as investigator Mooney describes it:

*“Jack Wilson’s trances were, at least to Indians, very impressive productions . . . He wasn’t shamming. His body was as rigid as a board. His mouth could not be pried open and he showed no reaction to pain inducing experiments. At first his friends, thinking he was dying, made repeated and futile efforts to wake him up by physical manipulation and the administration of stimulants by mouth. He revived in his own good time.”<sup>10a</sup>*

We return now to the exhortations which his power, called “God” by investigator Mooney, gave Wovoka to convey to his people. Here we have something that is a response, to a recognizable degree, to certain political and social conditions of the day as well as the possible influence on Wovoka of Christian ethical views. To those familiar with the history of the wars with the Sioux from 1876 through 1890, the exhortation “not to fight,” to follow the ways of the white man are topical. In 1892, when interviewed by Mooney, Wovoka was well aware that his visions and the dance which he had taught his people and others from the East had been blamed by many authorities, however unjustly, for the Sioux outbreak at the end of 1890 with its tragic dénouement. Be this as it may the old legends of the Great Basin Indians, Paiute, Shoshone, Washo, usually contain in their accounts of the creation of people, exhortations against

<sup>10</sup>Park, pp. 99–100, 107, 104.

<sup>10a</sup>Dyer, p. 5. Cf. the trances of Wodziwob, DuBois, p. 5.

fighting, however, *not war*, for these people knew little if anything of war, but against domestic quarreling and the quarreling of children: Hence the admonition not to fight was in the tradition of Indian practice however topical it appears to be in Wovoka's prophecy.

In the case of the exhortations to love one another and against lying and stealing, there are no Indian counterparts for these and they must, therefore, be assumed to have come into the vision of Wovoka from his contact with the Christian community of white settlers in Mason Valley.

The gift of the power to control the weather is pure Indian. Wovoka's 'power' in this respect is closely related to the power to predict eclipses. The function of such 'power', in the acceptance of the prophet's teachings, is illustrated by accounts of the Indians and of the white citizens of Mason Valley. The proof of control over the weather becomes for a shaman a sort of proving ground of credibility of his revelation for both Indians and whites. Any successful prophecy becomes a witness to his supernatural power; and any failure, is, to both communities, evidence of unreliability or trickery on the part of the prophet. It was generally conceded by residents of Mason Valley that Wovoka correctly prophesied the 'hard winter' of 1889-1890; some claimed that he accurately foretold all storms occurring between 1886 and 1891 or 1892.<sup>10b</sup>

A contemporary account by E. A. Dyer, Sr. of the exercise of 'power' in reference to natural phenomena may be quoted, not only to illustrate the belief in control over natural phenomena but also the use of *legerdemain* by a prophet, and specifically in this instance by Wovoka, to sustain his claim to 'power':

"My brother, Bob Dyer, who was also completely bilingual in Paiute and I, became aware that some activity was going to take place which somehow concerned Jack Wilson. Upon learning the time and place we unobtrusively showed up to see what was afoot. The meeting took place along the river bank on a hot July day. A hundred or more Indians were present but there was no great excitement among them. Wilson was holding a sort of informal court at the side of a blanket spread upon the ground under a large cottonwood tree. Groups of Indians came up to talk to him and moved away. Other small groups just milled around. We talked to some. They were distinctly not talkative to a white but we gathered that they expected Wilson to perform some miracle. Doo-mur-eye (accent on second syllable) they called it which means an act of wizardry. Suddenly a great outcry came from the group around Wilson. Everyone rushed over to see what had happened. There in the center of the blanket lay a big block of ice some 25 or 30 pounds in weight. Wilson had caused it to come from the sky the Indians explained to those who had their eyes turned the wrong way to see it for themselves.

"I was willing to believe it had fallen alright, but from no greater height than the top of that cottonwood tree, whose dense foliage would serve to hide the object until sufficient had melted to release

<sup>10b</sup>With reference to his power to predict the weather Park reports that one of his informants said Wovoka had power from two clouds; one was a straight high cloud which was for snow, while the other was dark and close to the ground and was for rain, see his *Shamanism in Western North America*, Northwestern University, Evanston and Chicago, 1938, p. 19.

it from whatever ingenious fastening Jack had fashioned to hold it for a time. That explained why the type of miracle was unspecified in advance. No Indian was likely to look up into the tree as he might if he were expecting ice from Heaven. It also explained the blanket. No Indian would stand on Jack's blanket and perhaps receive a premiracle icy drip, or worse, be beamed by the chunk itself. The Indians, not being of my suspicious nature accepted the miracle in full faith. A wash tub was provided from somewhere, the ice placed in the tub, the tub on the blanket and as the ice melted the ice water ceremoniously drunk."<sup>11</sup>

A 'power' of the prophet which he did not claim in the recorded accounts of his visions but which is amply attested by both Indians and whites is that of invulnerability. Of this shamanistic power Park says:

"The shamans with the strongest powers were thought to be invulnerable against bullets or arrows. As with weather control, this power was exercised to demonstrate the strength of the shaman. Frank Spencer<sup>12</sup> one of the messiahs of the 1870 Ghost Dance, who later acquired strong powers for curing sickness, was supposed to be invulnerable when fired upon with a gun."<sup>13</sup>

Mr. Dyer describes one occasion on which Wovoka demonstrated this 'power':

"Of the other alleged acts of wizardry I can only speak from hearsay but I was most solemnly assured by countless Indians that this or that was true. When out on a rabbit drive, they said, Jack was in the habit of dropping a pinch of snow or sand into the muzzle of his gun and forthwith bringing down a jack rabbit. He didn't need orthodox powder and shot. They knew this to be true as they had seen it with their own eyes. This business with the substitute ammunition led naturally to another act of which I pieced together a complete picture from descriptions of many of those who had also seen 'with their own eyes.' This feat, which brought Jack universal acceptance among the Indians and led eventually to considerable trouble for Uncle Sam, was a well-staged major production. He announced well in advance that he couldn't be killed by a gun. He simply was able to render his body impervious to lead. Moreover he could create powder and shot out of dust and sand. He then proceeded to back up his claims with a demonstration that left no doubt in the minds of a very large and interested audience . . .

<sup>11</sup>Dyer, pp 5-6. On the use of legerdemain by Wodziwob, see DuBois, p. 5. Paul Bailey in his *Wovoka* (pp. 62-66 and p. 211, note 7) makes much of a demonstration Wovoka made of his power to float ice down the river in mid-summer, using this episode to give substance to his contention that Wovoka was at all times a willful deceiver of his own people in the interest of advancing his status among them. Of this episode, Genevieve Wilson Chapin (daughter of J. I. Wilson) comments that Billy, her uncle, who assisted in this 'demonstration' "was full of fun and played jokes on people all his life and Jack (Wovoka) was smart and had a keen sense of humor and he played jokes on Billy and I firmly believe that in later life when Jack played some of the tricks on the Indians that the white people make so much of, trying to say that Jack was a fake, were done with no intent to deceive or advance his greatness as a Messiah but because he had a sense of humor and did it for fun. He loved a joke and had a great wit. You will note the story in Wovoka about the ice in the river in summertime that Jack was assisted by Bill Wilson. They did it for fun in playing a practical joke. In later years it was construed to make it look like Jack did it to further his own cause."

<sup>12</sup>See above, p. 1, note 2.

<sup>13</sup>Park, p. 109.

"The demonstration came off in grand style. Jack, wrapped in a heavy blanket robe, produced a muzzle loading shot gun for everyone's inspection. Then he reached down at his feet, got a pinch of dust which he dropped down the barrel. Powder, he explained and reached for a handful of sand. That as far as any one could tell also went down the barrel in lieu of shot. A bit of paper wadding pushed down by the ramrod completed the charge and the gun was then handed to Jack's brother who was delegated as shooter.

"Jack strode majestically to a spot previously selected, some distance from the rest of the crowd but well within gun range. He removed his blanket, placed it flat on the ground, took his stance in the center of the blanket, faced his brother standing in the midst of the crowd and ordered him to fire. The brother took careful aim at the man on the blanket and pulled the trigger. A very real and authentic shot gun blast rent the air. Jack was seen to shake himself vigorously and then heard to bid one and all to come forward to him. The Indians came up to see a man standing on a blanket, absolutely unhurt but wearing a shirt riddled with shot holes. On the blanket at his feet lay the shot. That did it. The evidence of their own senses convinced every Indian present."<sup>14</sup>

How two points of view, in this case that of the Dyer brothers on the one hand and the Paiute Indians on the other, may honestly be arrived at by observers of the same phenomenon is very aptly illustrated by investigator Mooney's account of the effect of an exhibition of Wovoka's power on the very different natures of the Cheyenne and Arapaho observers who visited Wovoka in 1890. The Arapaho, according to Mooney, were devotees and prophets, the Cheyenne more skeptical. The account of their different reactions to the identical phenomenon is worthy of quotation in full:

"In talking with Tall Bull, one of the Cheyenne delegates and then captain of the Indian police, he said that before leaving they had asked Wovoka to give them some proof of his supernatural powers. Accordingly he had ranged them in front of him, seated on the ground, he sitting facing them, with his sombrero between and his eagle feathers in his hand. Then with a quick movement he had put his hand into the empty hat and drawn out from it 'something black.' Tall Bull would not admit that anything more had happened, and did not seem to be very profoundly impressed by the occurrence, saying that he thought there were medicine-men of equal capacity among the Cheyenne. In talking soon afterward with Black Coyote, one of the Arapaho delegates and also a police officer, the same incident came up, but with a very different sequel. Black Coyote told how they had seated themselves on the ground in front of Wovoka, as described by Tall Bull, and went on to tell how the messiah had waved his feathers over his hat, and then, when he withdrew his hand, Black Coyote looked into the hat and there "saw the whole world." The explanation is simple. Tall Bull, who has since been stricken with paralysis, was a jovial, light-hearted fellow, fond

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<sup>14</sup>Dyer, pp. 7-9. Such demonstrations as this were no doubt the basis for the Sioux belief that the so-called ghost shirt conferred invulnerability to gun shot, cf. Mooney, pp. 789 and passim.



of joking and playing tricks on his associates, but withal a man of good hard sense and disposed to be doubtful in regard to all medicine-men outside of his own tribe. Black Coyote, on the contrary, is a man of contemplative disposition, much given to speculation on the unseen world. His body and arms are covered with the scars of wounds which he has inflicted on himself in obedience to commands received in dreams. When the first news of the new religion came to the southern tribes, he had made a long journey, at his own expense, to his kindred in Wyoming, to learn the doctrine and the songs, and since his return had been drilling his people day and night in both. Now, on his visit to the fountain head of inspiration, he was prepared for great things, and when the messiah performed his hypnotic passes with the eagle feather, as I have so often witnessed in the Ghost dance, Black Coyote saw the whole spirit world where Tall Bull saw only an empty hat. From my knowledge of the men, I believe both were honest in their statements."<sup>15</sup>

In these accounts, there is mention of the objects Wovoka used in the demonstration of his supernatural power; in this case his hat and his feathers are named. These were undoubtedly symbols of his 'power', in other words, objects which had been sanctified or designated in his vision as his particular paraphernalia. Each shaman, among the Great Basin tribes has these particular objects, as we have seen, associated with his 'power'. In the letters which follow it will be seen that feathers and cans of red ochre were forwarded by Jack to the Sioux who asked for them as possessing the 'power' of Wovoka himself to cure or prevent illness or bestow the blessings of health and happiness on the recipient. In this connection observers have been quick to note that the business of selling magpie feathers and abandoned tomato cans filled with red ochre, of which there were mountains near Mason Valley, to the eastern Indians, the Sioux, was a very lucrative one and afforded Wovoka the opportunity to live a life of ease. However, the writer was advised, in connection with this allegation, by Joseph W. Wilson (1891-1946), son of J. I. Wilson) that Wovoka's 'income' from the sale of these objects amounted to about \$35.00 per month in either money, Indian gloves, moccasins or other presents.

The acceptance of money for objects 'blessed' is not, however, peculiar to the Indians. It is one of their ancient beliefs that no blessing is conferred by the object or by the treatment for disease unless it is paid for. The fact that the feathers and ochre were paid for in negotiable currency is an accident of the times and a measure of the extent of influence of Wovoka which was promoted by the white man's civilization. On the payment of fees for curing, another source of income to a shaman, Park has this to say:

"Both the shaman and interpreter were paid by the sick person or his relatives. Nowadays the shaman receives about five dollars for each night and the interpreter two or three dollars. In the old days both were paid with skins, moccasins, or beads. The fee that a

<sup>15</sup>Mooney, pp. 775-776.

shaman asks is set by his power. If he asks more or less than his power instructs harm will come to him. He will sicken and no longer be able to doctor.

“About five years ago a lot of the doctors started to charge fifteen or twenty dollars to sing for people. They tried to make a lot of money. Their powers got angry. Many of them were very sick.”<sup>16</sup>

The magic hat in which Wovoka was usually photographed and which was never off his head except when he lay down to rest was a more important symbol of ‘power’ in that it was more intimately associated with his person. The importance of the hat was impressed on me when, in 1920, I attempted to interview Jack. In company with Joseph Wilson, I went to visit Jack early one sunny Sunday morning. Jack, in undershirt and trousers, was lying on a blanket in the shade on the north side of his cabin. When we approached he sat up in evident embarrassment which I attributed to the fact that he was without his top shirt but which I subsequently realized should have been attributed to the fact that he was being seen WITHOUT his wide-brimmed black sombrero. His usual poise and dignity were restored as soon as he had reached for the hat and placed it on his head still sans top shirt! (Dangberg)

We have compared and commented on the vision of Wovoka as it may be related to Paiute shamanism. It now remains to examine how this vision is related to, more explicitly, *how it appeared* to the eastern Indians, especially to the Sioux. Finally how it came to be a factor in the last Indian war on the North American continent.

We may state categorically that the message disseminated among the Sioux bears little resemblance to the vision of Wovoka as understood by Mooney from his conversations with the prophet. One of the earliest, if not the earliest of the accounts taken to the eastern Indians, that is, the Sioux, was that of Porcupine, a Cheyenne Sioux, who visited Wovoka in November of 1889; an excerpt from his account, written down in the following year as given to an officer of the United States Army follows:

“The Fish-eaters near Pyramid lake told me that Christ had appeared on earth again. They said Christ knew he was coming; that eleven of his children were also coming from a far land. It appeared that Christ had sent for me to go there, and that was why unconsciously I took my journey. It had been foreordained. Christ had summoned myself and others from all heathen tribes, from two to three or four from each of fifteen or sixteen different tribes. There were more different languages than I ever heard before and I did not understand any of them. They told me when I got there that my great father was there also, but did not know who he was. The people assembled called a council, and the chief’s son went to see the Great Father [messiah], who sent word to us to remain fourteen days in that camp and that he would come to see us. He sent me a small package of something white to eat that I did not know the name of. There were a great many people in the council, and this

<sup>16</sup>Park, p. 107.

white food was divided among them. The food was a big white nut. Then I went to the agency at Walker lake and they told us Christ would be there in two days. At the end of two days, on the third morning, hundreds of people gathered at this place. They cleared off a place near the agency in the form of a circus ring and we all gathered there. This space was perfectly cleared of grass, etc. We waited there till late in the evening anxious to see Christ. Just before sundown I saw a great many people, mostly Indians, coming dressed in white men's clothes. The Christ was with them. They all formed in this ring around it. They put up sheets all around the circle, as they had no tents. Just after dark some of the Indians told me that Christ [Father] was arrived. I looked around to find him, and finally saw him sitting on one side of the ring. They all started toward him to see him. They made a big fire to throw light on him. I never looked around, but went forward, and when I saw him I bent my head. I had always thought the Great Father was a white man, but this man looked like an Indian. He sat there a long time and nobody went up to speak to him. He sat with his head bowed all the time. After awhile he rose and said he was very glad to see his children. 'I have sent for you and am glad to see you. I am going to talk to you after awhile about your relatives who are dead and gone. My children, I want you to listen to all I have to say to you. I will teach you too, how to dance a dance, and I want you to dance it. Get ready for your dance and then, when the dance is over, I will talk to you'. He was dressed in a white coat with stripes. The rest of his dress was a white man's except that he had on a pair of moccasins. Then he commenced our dance, everybody joining in, the Christ singing while we danced. We danced till late in the night, when he told us we had danced enough."<sup>16a</sup>

This version of the vision of Wovoka came to the various divisions of the Sioux at a time when they were suffering grave afflictions due to their having been moved on to reservations where in order to feed their families these erstwhile buffalo hunters had to adapt themselves to agricultural pursuits, to tilling the land and planting seeds, to harvesting crops. It came when, due in part to bureaucratic delays, they were not receiving the quota of beef promised them in the treaty in which they gave up their hunting grounds and consented to remove to the reservations in the Dakotas, and it came to them when their probably desultory exertions to till and plant had been brought to nought by a prolonged drought and most important, when they still recalled with pride their victory over Custer at Little Big Horn in 1876.<sup>17</sup>

A dispassionate view, giving due weight to all aspects of the situation, is stated by Ex-Agent McGillicuddy under whose administration at the Pine Ridge Agency (1879-1886) there had been no trouble that could not be settled by commonsense and without guns. The letter is given in its entirety:

<sup>16a</sup>Mooney, p. 795.

<sup>17</sup>These conditions are sympathetically described from the Sioux point of view by David Humphreys Miller in his *Ghost Dance* (New York, 1959).

[*Letter of Dr. V. T. McGillicuddy, formerly agent at Pine Ridge, written in reply to inquiry from General L. W. Colby, commanding Nebraska state troops during the outbreak, and dated January 15, 1891. From article on "The Sioux Indian War of 1890-91," by General L. W. Colby, in Transactions and Reports of the Nebraska State Historical Society, III, 1892, pages 176-180.*]

SIR: In answer to your inquiry of a recent date, I would state that in my opinion to no one cause can be attributed the recent so-called outbreak on the part of the Sioux, but rather to a combination of causes gradually cumulative in their effect and dating back through many years—in fact to the inauguration of our practically demonstrated faulty Indian policy.

There can be no question but that many of the treaties, agreements, or solemn promises made by our government with these Indians have been broken. Many of them have been kept by us technically, but as far as the Indian is concerned have been misunderstood by him through a lack of proper explanation at time of signing, and hence considered by him as broken.

It must also be remembered that in all of the treaties made by the government with the Indians, a large portion of them have not agreed to or signed the same. Noticeably was this so in the agreement secured by us with them the summer before last, by which we secured one-half of the remainder of the Sioux reserve, amounting to about 16,000 square miles. This agreement barely carried with the Sioux nation as a whole, but did not carry at Pine Ridge or Rosebud, where the strong majority were against it; and it must be noted that wherever there was the strongest opposition manifested to the recent treaty, there, during the present trouble, have been found the elements opposed to the government.

The Sioux nation, which at one time, with the confederated bands of Cheyennes and Arapahos, controlled a region of country bounded on the north by the Yellowstone, on the south by the Arkansas, and reaching from the Missouri river to the Rocky mountains, has seen this large domain, under the various treaties, dwindle down to their now limited reserve of less than 16,000 square miles, and with the land has disappeared the buffalo and other game. The memory of this, chargeable by them to the white man, necessarily irritates them.

There is back of all this the natural race antagonism which our dealings with the aborigine in connection with the inevitable onward march of civilization has in no degree lessened. It has been our experience, and the experience of other nations, that defeat in war is soon, not sooner or later, forgotten by the coming generation, and as a result we have a tendency to a constant recurrence of outbreak on the part of the weaker race. It is now sixteen years since our last war with the Sioux in 1876—a time when our present Sioux warriors were mostly children, and therefore have no memory of having felt the power of the government. It is but natural that these young warriors, lacking in experience, should require but little incentive to induce them to test the bravery of the white man on the war path, where the traditions of his people teach him is the only path to glory and a chosen seat in the "happy hunting grounds." For these reasons every precaution should be adopted by the government to guard against trouble with its disastrous results. Have such precautions been adopted? Investigation of the present trouble does not so indicate.

Sitting Bull and other irreconcilable relics of the campaign of 1876 were allowed to remain among their people and foment discord. The staple article of food at Pine Ridge and some of the other agencies had been cut down below the subsisting point, noticeably the beef at Pine Ridge, which from an annual treaty allowance of 6,250,000 pounds gross was cut down to 4,000,000 pounds. The contract on that beef was violated, inasmuch as that contract called for northern ranch beef, for which was substituted through beef from Texas, with an unparalleled resulting shrinkage in winter, so that the Indians did not actually receive half ration of this food in winter—the very time the largest allowance of food is required. By the fortunes of political war, weak agents were placed in charge of some of the agencies at the very time that trouble was known to be brewing. Noticeably was this so at Pine Ridge, where a notoriously weak and unfit man was placed in charge. His flight,

abandonment of his agency, and his call for troops have, with the horrible results of the same, become facts in history.

Now, as for facts in connection with Pine Ridge, which agency has unfortunately become the theater of the present "war," was there necessity for troops? My past experience with those Indians does not so indicate. For seven long years, from 1879 to 1886, I, as agent, managed this agency without the presence of a soldier on the reservation, and none nearer than 60 miles, and in those times the Indians were naturally much wilder than they are to-day. To be sure, during the seven years we occasionally had exciting times, when the only thing lacking to cause an outbreak was the calling for troops by the agent and the presence of the same. As a matter of fact, however, no matter how much disturbed affairs were, no matter how imminent an outbreak, the progressive chiefs, with their following, came to the front enough in the majority, with the fifty Indian policemen, to at once crush out all attempts at rebellion against the authority of the agent and the government.

Why was this? Because in those times we believed in placing confidence in the Indians; in establishing, as far as possible, a home-rule government on the reservation. We established local courts, presided over by the Indians, with Indian juries; in fact, we believed in having the Indians assist in working out their own salvation. We courted and secured the friendship and support of the progressive and orderly element, as against the mob element. Whether the system thus inaugurated was practicable, was successful, comparison with recent events will decide.

When my Democratic successor took charge in 1886, he deemed it necessary to make general changes in the system at Pine Ridge, i.e., a Republican system. All white men, half-breeds, or Indians who had sustained the agent under the former administration were classed as Republicans and had to go. The progressive chiefs, such as Young Man Afraid, Little Wound, and White Bird, were ignored, and the backing of the element of order and progress was alienated from the agent and the government, and in the place of this strong backing that had maintained order for seven years was substituted Red Cloud and other nonprogressive chiefs, sustainers of the ancient tribal system.

If my successor had been other than an amateur, or had had any knowledge or experience in the inside Indian politics of an Indian tribe, he would have known that if the element he was endeavoring to relegate to the rear had not been the balance of power, I could not for seven years have held out against the mob element which he now sought to put in power. In other words, he unwittingly threw the balance of power at Pine Ridge against the government, as he later on discovered to his cost. When still later he endeavored to maintain order and suppress the ghost dance, the attempt resulted in a most dismal failure.

The Democratic agent was succeeded in October last by the recently removed Republican agent, a gentleman totally ignorant of Indians and their peculiarities; a gentleman with not a qualification in his make-up calculated to fit him for the position of agent at one of the largest and most difficult agencies in the service to manage; a man selected solely as a reward for political services. He might possibly have been an average success as an Indian agent at a small, well-regulated agency. He endeavored to strengthen up matters, but the chiefs and leaders who could have assisted him in so doing had been alienated by the former agent. They virtually said among themselves, "We, after incurring the enmity of the bad element among our people by sustaining the government, have been ignored and ill-treated by that government, hence this is not our affair." Being ignorant of the situation, he had no one to depend on. In his first clash with the mob element he discovered that the Pine Ridge police, formerly the finest in the service, were lacking in discipline and courage, and, not being well supplied with those necessary qualities himself, he took the bluff of a mob for a declaration of war, abandoned his agency, returned with troops—and you see the result.

As for the ghost dance, too much attention has been paid to it. It was only the symptom or surface indication of deep-rooted, long-existing difficulty; as well treat the eruption of smallpox as the disease and ignore the constitutional disease.

As regards disarming the Sioux, however desirable it may appear, I consider it neither advisable nor practicable. I fear that it will result as the theoretical enforcement of prohibition in Kansas, Iowa, and Dakota; you will succeed in disarming the friendly Indians, because you can, and you will not so succeed with the mob element, because you can not. If I were again to be an Indian agent and had my choice, I would take charge of 10,000 armed Sioux in preference to a like number of disarmed ones; and, furthermore, agree to handle that number, or the whole Sioux nation, without a white soldier.

Respectfully, etc,

V. T. MCGILLYCUDDY.

P.S.—I neglected to state that up to date there has been neither a Sioux outbreak nor war. No citizen in Nebraska or Dakota has been killed, molested, or can show the scratch of a pin, and no property has been destroyed off the reservation.<sup>18</sup>

It was to these bewildered and illy-led people that the NEWS of the vision of Wovoka was brought in 1889. With their background of suffering, their partial understanding of Christian teaching and their natural inclination which we all share to interpret phenomena as having specific reference to their own plight it is possible to see how they could have arrived at a version of Wovoka's vision which is expressed in a letter originally written in the Teton Dakota Dialect by George Sword, an Ogalala Sioux, and published in translation in investigator Mooney's account of the Ghost Dance.<sup>19</sup>

The copy of the original Sioux manuscript is in the archives of the Bureau of Ethnology:

In the story of ghost dancing, the Ogalala heard that the Son of God was truly on earth in the west from their country. This was in the year 1889. The first people knew about the messiah to be on earth were the Shoshoni and Arapaho. So in 1889 Good Thunder with four or five others visited the place where Son of God said to be. These people went there without permission. They said the messiah was there at the place, but he was there to help the Indians and not the whites; so this made the Indians happy to find out this. Good Thunder, Cloud Horse, Yellow Knife, and Short Bull visited the place again in 1890 and saw the messiah. Their story of visit to the messiah is as follows:

"From the country where the Arapaho and Shoshoni we start in the direction of northwest *in train for five nights* and arrived at the foot of the Rocky mountains. Here we saw him and also several tribes of Indians. The people said that the messiah will come at a place in the woods where the place was prepare for him. When we went to the place a smoke descended from heaven to the place where he was to come. When the smoke disappeared, there was a man of about forty, which was the Son of God. The man said:

"My grandchildren! I am glad you have come far away to see your relatives. This are your people who have come back from your country.' When he said he want us to go with him, we looked and we saw a land created across the ocean on which all the nations of Indians were coming home, but, as the messiah looked at

<sup>18</sup>Mooney, pp. 831-833.

<sup>19</sup>On the re-interpretation of Wovoka's vision by the Sioux, DuBois (p. 7) says: "in strict accuracy, I feel that it is misleading to speak of Paviotso Ghost Dances with the connotation attached to them due to the Californian (1870) and Plains (1890) manifestations. The behavior patterns which became attached to these cults, outside of western Nevada, were not necessary correlates of an adventist doctrine among the Paviotso [Paiute]. Foreign tribes in accepting the prophecies, not only placed them in a new context, but also attached to them Paviotso traits which were merely in solution among the originators. In the process of doctrinal borrowing they made these common Paviotso traits necessary concomitants of the cult. In fact, they may almost be said to have created the cult as a dynamic and specific movement."

the land which was created and reached across the ocean, again disappeared, saying that it was not time for that to take place. The messiah then gave to Good Thunder some paints—Indian paint and a white paint—a green grass [sagebrush twigs?]; and said, 'My grandchildren, when you get home, go to farming and send all your children to school. And on way home if you kill any buffalo cut the head, the tail, and the four feet and leave them, and that buffalo will come to live again. When the soldiers of the white people chief want to arrest me, I shall stretch out my arms, which will knock them to nothingness, or, if not that, the earth will open and swallow them in. My father commanded me to visit the Indians on a purpose. I have come to the white people first, but they not good. They killed me, and you can see the marks of my wounds on my feet, my hands, and on my back. My father has given you life—your old life—and you have come to see your friends, but you will not take me home with you at this time. I want you to tell when you get home your people to follow my examples. Any one Indian does not obey me and tries to be on white's side will be covered over by a new land that is to come over this old one. You will, all the people, use the paints and grass I give you. In the spring when the green grass comes, your people who have gone before you will come back, and you shall see your friends then, for you have come to my call.'

The people from every tipi send for us to visit them. They are people who died many years ago. Chasing Hawk, who died not long ago, was there, and we went to his tipi. He was living with his wife, who was killed in war long ago. They live in a buffalo skin tipi—a very large one—and he wanted all his friends to go there to live. A son of Good Thunder who died in war long ago was one who also took us to his tipi so his father saw him. When coming we come to a herd of buffaloes. We killed one and took everything except the four feet, head, and tail, and when we came a little ways from it there was the buffaloes come to life again and went off. This was one of the messiah's word came to truth. The messiah said, "I will short your journey when you feel tired of the long ways, if you call upon me." This we did when we were tired. The night came upon us, we stopped at a place, and we called upon the messiah to help us, because we were tired of long journey. We went to sleep and in the morning we found ourselves at a great distance from where we stopped.

The people came back here and they got the people loyal to the government, and those not favor of the whites held a council. The agent's soldiers were sent after them and brought Good Thunder and two others to the agency and they were confined to the prison. They were asked by the agent and Captain Sword whether they saw the Son of God and whether they hold councils over their return from visit, but Good Thunder refused to say "yes." They were confined in the prison for two days, and upon their promising not to hold councils about their visit they were released. They went back to the people and told them about their trouble with the agent. Then they disperse without a council.

In the following spring the people at Pine Ridge agency began to gather at the White Clay creek for councils. Just at this time Kicking Bear, from Cheyenne River agency, went on a visit to the Arapaho and said that the Arapaho there have ghost dancing. He said that people partaking in dance would get crazy and die, then the messiah is seen and all the ghosts. When they die they see strange things, they see their relatives who died long before. They saw these things when they died in ghost dance and came to life again. The person dancing becomes dizzy and finally drop dead, and the first thing they saw is an eagle comes to them and carried them to where the messiah is with his ghosts. The man said this:

The persons in the ghost dancing are all joined hands. A man stands and then a woman, so in that way forming a very large circle. They dance around in the circle in a continuous time until some of them become so tired and overtired that they became crazy and finally drop as though dead, with foams in mouth all wet by perspiration. All the men and women made holy shirts and dresses they wear in dance. The persons dropped in dance would all lie in great dust the dancing make. They paint the white *muslins they made holy shirts and dresses* out of with blue across the back, and alongside of this is a line of yellow paint. They also paint in

the front part of the shirts and dresses. A picture of an eagle is made on the back of all the shirts and dresses. On the shoulders and on the sleeves they tied eagle feathers. *They said that the bullets will not go through these shirts and dresses, so they all have these dresses for war. Their enemies weapon will not go through these dresses. The ghost dancers all have to wear eagle feather on head. With this feather any man would be made crazy if fan with this feather. In the ghost dance no person is allow to wear anything made of any metal, except the guns made of metal is carry by some of the dancers. When they come from ghosts or after recovery from craziness, they brought meat from the ghosts or from the supposed messiah. They also brought water, fire, and wind with which to kill all the whites or Indians who will help the chief of the whites. They made sweat house and made holes in the middle of the sweat house where they say the water will come out of these holes. Before they begin to dance they all raise their hands toward the northwest and cry in supplication to the messiah and then begin the dance with the song.* [Italics supplied]

The mention of travel by train in this letter directs attention to a neglected aspect of the ghost dance "craze" or movement which played a very important part in the rapid dissemination of the vision over a vast area of the continent of North America and its assimilation to itself of a body of Christian belief and 'myth' that was foreign to the prophet Wovoka's vision.

In order to gain some perspective on the influence of train travel on the spread of doctrine it is interesting to note that the spread of the prophecy of Wodziwob coincided with, or followed immediately upon, the completion of the line of the Central Pacific Railroad in May of 1869. Wodziwob himself was aware of the importance of this event: he is reported to have said to a group of Paiutes who came to learn about his prophecy of the return of the dead: "There are a lot of people telling this news but they are not telling it right. What I said was that a train was coming from the east. My real dream was about the train, but people made it out different."<sup>20a</sup>

Now the spread of the prophecy of Wovoka occurred at the time of the Sioux outbreak and could not but have been facilitated by the completion of the Carson and Colorado line several years earlier in 1881.<sup>21</sup> Hence, two Paiute shamans had visions, each at a time when contemporary or recent construction of railroads facilitated access to the area where the prophets lived.

Following the suggestion that events were of signal importance in the spread of the visions of Wodziwob and Wovoka, it is even more important to observe that the far-reaching acceptance of the doctrines occurred at times when there was widespread discontent among the Modoc about 1870 and among the Sioux about 1890, leading in each instance to war. Before the spread of the vision of Wodziwob, the Modoc were restless and belligerent; in 1872 their dissatisfaction erupted in war. For a number of years before the tragedy of Wounded Knee on December 15, 1890,

<sup>20</sup>Mooney, pp. 797-798. In this connection the full account of Porcupine who visited Wovoka in November, 1889, should be read, see *ibid* pp. 702, 793-796.

<sup>20a</sup>DuBois, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup>See David F. Myrick, "Railroads of Nevada and Eastern California." (Berkeley, 1962) Vol. I, p. 171.



the Sioux had been in a highly disturbed state. It is thus evident that the spread of the visions of Wodziwob and Wovoka occurred in correspondence or correlation with significant events involving the Modoc and the Sioux. It is interesting to speculate, as DuBois does concerning the diffusion of the vision of Wodziwob, as to HOW it could have spread, naming among other things the reservation system, intermarriage, the transporting by rail of agricultural labor as aids in this presumed process.<sup>22</sup> It is nevertheless obvious that none of these 'mechanics' of diffusion brought about the spread of prophecy, many shamans having from time to time told of their dreams in their own home circles where they died with the authors though all the same means of diffusion existed. The spread of the visions of Wodziwob and of Wovoka and the acceptance of them was triggered by events leading to highly emotional states of the distant peoples who heard them and believed.

The Sioux apparently hoped against hope that they could escape their lack-lustre fate, confined to a reservation where they were doomed forever to do the work of women, through Wovoka's dream. Their belief in his dream and the tragic occurrences that ensued upon its interpretation by them brought Wovoka into a bewildering world of conflict in both the use of guns and ideas. Miller has written a sensitive interpretation, based on intimate personal contact with the Sioux, of the tragedy for them—the failure of the vision as they interpreted it to materialize. He is overwhelmed with pity for the disillusioned Sioux, with sympathetic understanding of the tragedy for them of their disappointed hopes. He has only scorn for the dreamer, Wovoka, who becomes for him the perpetrator of their tragedy and particularly that of Kicking Bear, his hero. Miller does not see the tragedy of Wovoka's life. The fate of the two men Wovoka and Kicking Bear, both idealistic and kindly disposed men, was to be misunderstood and disappointed in their beliefs and dreams. Both died alone and almost forgotten, Kicking Bear in 1904 at the age of fifty-eight; Wovoka thirty years later at the age of seventy-eight.

This account should not be closed without tribute to men of the calibre of ex-agent McGillycuddy who were doomed to stand by helpless while others of lesser stature destroyed not only a people but also, in McGillycuddy's case, his work. The triple tragedy of the lives of these three men, Wovoka, Kicking Bear and McGillycuddy, awaits the poetic interpretation of one who will discover in the interrelated events of their lives the matrix of an American epic.

In the foregoing account of Wovoka's vision and prophecy and their spread and adoption no attempt has been made to interpret the data. It is thought that interested persons should be afforded the opportunity to study the life of the 'prophet' and his teachings from the surviving records. Thus far conclusions from these accounts, that is, the fragmentary records preserved by Mooney of his teachings, the interpretations of his message by other tribesmen, the recollections of both by E. A.

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<sup>22</sup>DuBois, pp. 135–138.

Dyer, Sr., and others have afforded romancers such as Paul Bailey and David Humphrey Miller, relying on Bailey, an opportunity to write entertaining accounts of Wovoka in which they claim to represent his thoughts and his motives. While these writers are entirely within their rights, for the basic data they use from which to draw their conclusions is entirely in the public domain, it is nevertheless deplorable that no straightforward account of this 'prophet' has been written by a person whose aim is not the marketplace but the service of truth. For this reason extended accounts of Paiute shamanistic belief and practices have been here incorporated in the hope that the synthetic Indian that emerges from the pages of Bailey and Miller according to the former, rejected by the white man three-quarters of a century before discrimination became socially and politically topical, and by the latter as a charlatan using ledgerdemain to deceive his own people when he was using it instead in obedience to age-old practices of the Great Basin Indians, may be enabled to stand out in posthumous pride as a true son of his own people and a respected citizen of Nevada.

We will conclude with a personal impression of Jack, that of E. A. Dyer, Sr. who says, "Jack Wilson was a tall, well-proportioned man with piercing eyes, regular features, a deep voice and a calm and dignified mien. He stood straight as ramrod, spoke slowly and by sheer projection of personality commanded the attention of any listener. He visibly stood out among his fellow Indians like a thoroughbred among a bunch of mustangs." (Dyer, p. 4) In conclusion, Mr. Dyer states that Jack may have inadvertently caused the government of the United States considerable trouble. This has been atoned for and in Mr. Dyer's words "paid in full" for his grandson gave his life for his country. He continues:

"He was shot down in action while serving with Chennault's Flying Tigers in the China-Burma theatre during World War II. After the war his body was recovered, returned to his homeland and buried with full military honors." (Dyer, p. 17)

In order that the student or the seeker after truth be aided in his use of these data, we will append a chronology of the events of Wovoka's life, insofar as they are known, and also references to related events in Nevada and in the western United States.

#### CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF WOVOKA

1856: Wovoka was born about 1856. On the date of his birth, see above, p. 5. He was the son of Tavivo or Numitaivo who was a shaman and a leader of his people in the southern portion of Mason Valley. According to the white settlers, Tavivo was surly and treacherous; he could run a deer down; he was also called Buckskin. Wovoka's mother was a gentle, kindly woman; Wovoka resembled her.

- 1860: The so-called Paiute War was fought on the shores of Pyramid Lake between the Paiutes and the white settlers. (See any Nevada history.)
- 1863: David Wilson and his wife settled in the southern end of Mason Valley; their home was subsequently called Missouri Flat. The family of Wovoka, soon to be named Jack Wilson, lived in a wikiup on the Wilson ranch.
- 1864: In this year, when he was eight years old, Wovoka began playing with the Wilson boys, J. W. "Billy" (1857–1930) and J. I. "Joe" (1859–1954). According to Genevieve Wilson Chapin (daughter of J. I. Wilson):

"Some of Jack's (Wovoka's) people worked for him (David Wilson) and they always brought all the children to be fed as food was scarce. Jack began playing with Billy and Joe . . . There were no other playmates . . . their play consisted in climbing trees, hunting bird's nests, fishing and swimming in the river. And when they were a little older the playing of pranks of which Billy was a past master."

- 1869: The Central Pacific Railroad lines were completed. About this time the Indians acquired the 'right' to travel free on the trains in circumstances as follows:

". . . it was 'Chief' Huntington's personal pow-wow with an old Paiute Chief that set up harmonious relations. The great white chief told his Indian brother that they must take care of the railway and the railway would take care of them. In like manner, Crocker arranged a treaty with the Shoshones. Passes were given to the Indian chiefs to allow them to ride in the coaches, while the rest of the tribes were given to understand they could ride on freight trains without question. This became a favorite pastime and, when the custom was carried over to other railroads, men such as Gest of the Nevada-California-Oregon Railroad never could fathom the basis of what appeared to be a God-given right. The Indians were friendly to the C P and more than once warned of washouts." (David F. Myrick, I, pp. 18–19.)

In this year of 1870, Wodziwob prophesied the return of the dead to this earth; they were to come from the east as the train did! Tavivo, father of Wovoka (Jack) was a follower of the prophet.

Jack, Joe and Billy Wilson took on the chores of chopping wood for the fires, milking cows, and general ranch chores (Genevieve Wilson Chapin). When Jack or his family worked for Mr. Wilson, they all came for breakfast. Mr. Wilson was a devout Christian and every morning after breakfast he would

read a few chapters from the Bible aloud before they started to work.

- 1872: Wodziwob died. His work was carried on by Frank Spencer, also called Weneyuga. After about five years no one listened to him any more. (DuBois, p. 4)
- 1874: Jack began to take the lead among his own people; the older people, however did not listen to him. J. I. Wilson stated that Jack often asked about the belief in a life after death. He also stated that he and his brother never mentioned the "Mes-siah" to Jack.
- 1876: Jack married a woman named Mary. They had, over the years, several children. The boys died in infancy or childhood; 1 daughter survived to adulthood. (Mooney, p. 771 and Wilson family recollections)
- 1876-1877: The Sioux, under their leader, Sitting Bull, waged war against the forces of the United States. The forces under General Custer were massacred at Little Big Horn on June 25, 1876.
- 1879: About this time, Jack became ill with a severe fever; he was in a coma and near death for several days. Several persons report having seen him in a trance about this time, among them E. A. Dyer, Sr. (see above, p. 12, see also pp. 7 and 10)
- 1880s: Sometime during the 1880s the body of an Indian girl who had died was burned near Hawthorne. It is reported that 200 Indians saw Jack, as he had promised, raise the girl from the flames to "God's house".
- 1881: The Carson and Colorado railroad was completed to run from the Mound House to Walker Lake. (see above p. 23)
- 1886-1891 or 1892: Jack accurately prophesied all storms and the appearance of the sun dogs. (Mrs. Webster) Probably during these years Jack worked at times for the family of Dan Simpson. The Simpson family record these anecdotes concerning him:

Dan Simpson believed in Jack. One year during a drought (1887, 1888 and 1889 were years of drought) Jack went to Mr. Simpson and promised to make it rain if Mr. Simpson would give him three beeves. Mr. Simpson refused but later, when his cattle began to die, he promised Jack one beef if he would make it rain. The storm came; ever after this Mr. Simpson kept Jack in beef.

One day when Jack was stacking hay, the derrick fork swung around and hit him on the chest, throwing him from the stack and knocking him unconscious. This could



have inflicted an ugly wound but was prevented from so doing by a brass button Jack wore on his shirt. When Jack was coming to, he said, "Oh, me alright Frank, me bullet proof!" (Frank was the son of Dan Simpson)

Once when Mr. Simpson was peddling beef at an Indian dance, someone stole a piece of meat. Mr. Simpson told Jack whereupon he went out in the crowd where he made a peculiar call. The thief came forward like a "whipped dog", had the stolen meat weighed and paid for it.

- 1886: About this time Jack announced his revelation and gave his dance to his people. (Mooney, pp. 765, 771)
- 1888: About this time Jack received his *great* revelation. He was apparently cutting wood in the mountains for Mr. David Wilson. (Mooney, p. 772)
- 1888–1889: In the winter the first news of the revelation came to the Sioux. (Mooney, p. 819)
- 1889, January 1: There occurred a total eclipse of the sun. In November, Porcupine, a Cheyenne (Sioux) visited Jack. His account of his visit was written down some months later as given to a military officer. (Mooney, pp. 793–796, 817)
- 1890: In the summer a delegation of about twelve Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians visited Jack and took part in the dance with his people.  
 In December the scout, Arthur Chapman, under instructions from the War Department, visited Jack. (Mooney, p. 766)  
 December 15: There occurred the tragic massacre of men, women and children at Wounded Knee, Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota. (Mooney, pp. 843 ff.)  
 December 27: The White Pine News reported that Bannocks had travelled to Mason Valley for a gathering to perform the Ghost Dance. At the same time, according to the same authority, Johnson Sides was going about explaining to the Indians the advantages of cooperation with the white men, rather than going to war. (according to Mooney, Sides was an enemy of Jack, see p. 765)
- 1891: In January of this year, and following the massacre of the Sioux at Wounded Knee and the ensuing anxiety, the news reporters and editors in eastern Nevada took note of the custom of allowing Indians to ride free on the trains and expressed alarm that such easy access to Nevada and the prophet Wovoka was afforded by the railroads. Strange Indians in colorful regalia were congregating in Star Valley when the *Elko Independent* (January 10, 1891) commented:

“The Railroad Company, in our judgment, is wrong in permitting Indians to ride on the trains at this time, as without that means of conveyance they could not possibly assemble in such multitudes on so short notice, and especially at this time, owing to the severe weather, there would be little danger of any assembly large enough to do any damage, even if they feel disposed to make trouble.”

Mooney (p. 807) describes the widespread use of trains by the eastern Indians at this time.

A few days earlier (January 8, 1891) the *Independent* quoted the *Reno Journal* and made some comments of their own, indicating the alarm of some of the white citizenry and the climate of opinion in which the “vision” of Wovoka now existed in Nevada:

#### Visiting Indians

A delegation of Indians representing the Kiowas, Arapahoes, Bannocks and Sioux has arrived in Nevada to see the Messiah. The chiefs were entertained regally by Agent Warner at the Pyramid Agency and furnished with a conveyance to Walker Lake, the home of the Prophet, who is an inferior Indian and known to the whites by the unpretentious name of ‘Jack Wilson’. When the chiefs interview Jack they will not have such an exalted opinion of the Prophet—[*Reno Journal*.]

Instead of giving these mischiefmakers ‘regal entertainment’ they should have been driven out of the State. There would be no danger whatever from the Piutes and Shoshones in Nevada were it not for these renegade ‘visiting statesmen’ who are here for no other purpose than to put devilment in the heads of our peaceable and friendly Indians.”

Accompanying these observations were almost daily reports in *The Independent* on the activities of the troops under General Miles at the Pine Ridge Reservation in the Dakotas.

Fortunately for all concerned in Nevada the *Elko Independent* commented editorially on January 20, 1891, as follows:

#### The Indian Scare

‘American,’ in a communication to the *Virginia Enterprise*, dated Elko, Jan. 17, scouts the idea of any danger from the Indians in Eastern Nevada, and as he is as well posted on Indian affairs as any man in the county we would be pleased, did space permit, to give the article entire, but on account of its length we give only the closing paragraph, which is as follows:

‘The total number of Indian men, women and children upon the three reservations (comprising two agencies) in this State is from actual count last September 1,340. It is

estimated that the total number of Indians off of the reservations is about 5,500, making a total within the State of 6,840. In the course of two or three weeks the Indians contemplate holding another dance some three miles south of Medicine Springs, in Elko county. This gathering will chiefly comprise the Shoshones from Ruby Valley, Cherry Creek, Deep Creek, Austin, Eureka and other neighboring localities; there will be perhaps some Go-shootes and Utes, the total number will possibly not be over 125 to 150. I hope the citizens in that locality will not become unnecessarily frightened as the Indians inform me it is only for business purposes and they don't wish to frighten their white friends as they have no hostile intentions.'"

- 1891: The spring of this year was universally recognized as the time when Jack's prophecy would be fulfilled and the dancers would meet their dead. (Mooney, p. 820). Another promise placed this event in the fall of 1891 (Mooney, p. 807).
- 1892, January 1: Special investigator for the Bureau of Ethnology, James Mooney, visited Jack and obtained from him information incorporated in his "The Ghost Dance Religion". (Mooney, p. 768).
- 1892, November: Jack was directing a ghost dance at Pine Grove in Mason Valley. The Yerington paper reported that a delegation of Cheyenne Indians from Oklahoma had come to interview Jack and that one of them was a school teacher and well informed. The same paper stated, on November 12, that a ghost dance was in progress at Pine Grove.
- 1893: J. I. Wilson proposed to Jack that he would take him to the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago. Permission for this venture was obtained from the Government; it was expected that it would be a profitable venture for all concerned. One month before the two men were to depart, Jack went into hiding in the hills where he remained for eight weeks, or until all plans for the journey had been given up. (Dangberg, p. 284)
- Before 1900: During the last decade of the Nineteenth Century E. A. Dyer, Sr. states:
- "At this point I became a sort of confidant of his [Jack's] and functioned as his secretary. I shared these roles at times with the late J. I. Wilson of Yerington with whom I later held many talks on the enigma that was Jack Wilson. At that time I was operating a store and Jack dropped in often to get me to answer letters which he got in considerable numbers from Indians, particularly in Oklahoma. They were almost invariably post-marked Darlington, Oklahoma and written by one, Grant Left-Hand who appeared to



function as a scribe for most of the Indian Nation. Most letters asked for something of Jack's in the way of a 'gift'; magpie feathers, red ochre for paint, clothing that he had worn. In time a great many requests were for hats, specifically for those which he had personally worn. I was very often called upon to send them his hat which he would remove forthwith from his head on hearing the nature of the request in a letter. He expected, and got, \$20 for such a 'gift.' " (Dyer, p. 11)

1894: The *Elko Independent*, after three years of quiet again took up the cry of danger from the Indians and blamed Wovoka for it:

#### End of the World

The Piute Indian prophet of Walker Lake, who caused a furor among his people several years ago by announcing the coming of the Indian Messiah and originating the ghost dance, is at his old business again with new tricks. He announces the end of the world to take place soon by a mighty rush of water that will tear down the mountains and make a plain of the earth. Every living thing will be destroyed, and a white grass will be left growing when the waters subside to basins created for them. Countless antelope, deer, buffalo and other game which delight the Red Man, will grow fat and fast upon the white grass, and then only the Indians will return to enjoy the hunting grounds and monopolize the earth.

Captains Dave, Numana, Sam, Johnson Sides and other wise men call the prophet a liar and say his tongue is forked, and powwows will be held at prominent points in the State to speak the true words to the guileless buck and keep him in the narrow path—Wadsworth Dispatch.

Following this alarm, there appeared in the white community a purported peace-maker whose own words tell eloquently of the tragedy of misinterpretation and misunderstanding that was overtaking the Paiute shaman, Wovoka, in the course of which he was blamed for the very things against which he had raised his voice by men who claimed as their own the portions of his vision which were sure to please and re-assure the powerful and dominant white community. *The Elko Independent* on August 22, 1894, printed:

#### Wee-Voo-Kah in Disgrace

Johnson Sides, the great Indian peace maker, says that on the 15th instant a Pawnee Indian in the service of the Indian Bureau, arrived here on his way to Walker lake to see Jack Wilson, the Messiah, whose Indian name is Wee-Voo-Kah, though sometimes called Co-Hee-Jow. Johnson Sides accompanied the Pawnee to Mason valley where they

met Wee-Voo-Kah. Johnson said to Wee-Voo-Kah: 'This Indian come heap long way to see you. He like to shake hands with you.' Wee-Voo-Kah would not speak, neither would he shake hands with nor look at the stranger. The Pawnee put five silver dollars on Wee-Voo-Kah's hand, still he would not speak; Then he put five more silver dollars in his hand, but Wee-Voo-Kah kept silent. The Pawnee put the money on the ground, took out his peace pipe and passed it around. All smoked except Wee-Voo-Kah, who said 'you Indians come from far away to kill me by witchcraft.' He then mounted his pony and galloped away toward Pine Grove. The other Indians took the money and gave it back to the Pawnee, who said Wee-Voo-Kah was no good and not worth noticing, though it made him feel bad to be treated so by him. Johnson then told the Indians that they were not to blame for what Wee-Voo-Kah did and that they must treat their Pawnee friend with consideration. He advised them to pay no attention to Wee-Voo-Kah who had been tormenting them for eight years, as he gives them no protection and they should not bother with him more.

The Pawnee told the whites that the Indians east of the Rocky Mountains had heard much of Wee-Voo-Kah. They thought he was a great man endowed with the spirit of prophecy, and at the request of the Indians the Government had commissioned him to visit Wee-Voo-Kah. He was now satisfied that he was a false prophet and did not amount to anything, and he so would tell his people when he returned home.—Reno Journal. (On Sides cf. above p. 30)

1900–1920: Genevieve Wilson Chapin states that Jack lived on the Wilson ranch during this period.

1902: A Sioux named Kicking Bear together with a certain Short Bull visited Jack and received instructions in the dance, according to James L. Long of the Indian Field Service, Oswego, Montana. Kicking Bear is the hero of Miller's *Ghost Dance*.

1906: After this date and again, probably in 1911 or 1912, Jack made two journeys to Oklahoma:

"On each of these he was accompanied by a boy 18 to 20 years of age who, he said, was his nephew. This boy had attended Stewart Institute near Carson City, Nev., and was thus equipped to manage the details of rail travel. Once Jack planned to take Mary his wife, with him; in preparation for this event he painstakingly instructed her in the art of eating with a knife and fork. Mary, however, soon grew weary of this unaccustomed exertion and decided to remain at home. When Jack was preparing for one of the journeys, Mr. Wilson asked him if he could go along; Jack's reply was, 'No, Joe, you talk too much.' On all of

the journeys he was treated with great deference and entertained lavishly: he slept in feather beds in carpeted rooms and was served the choicest of food. Mr. Joseph W. Wilson (1891–1946), in a letter written in 1938, says: 'I happened to be present at the time Jack returned from his first eastern trip. Jack was very much elated and my memory of Jack telling of his meetings with the Indians was that there were immense crowds; he said, "Me stand up from sun up until sun down, me shakum hands all day. Me pretty tired. Five big Indian chiefs layum \$20.00 (gold) in my hand. Me likum that way shakin' hands. Me think that a pretty good way shakin' hands.'" (Dangberg, pp. 284–285)

E. A. Dyer, Sr. says of Jack's attitude to these visits:

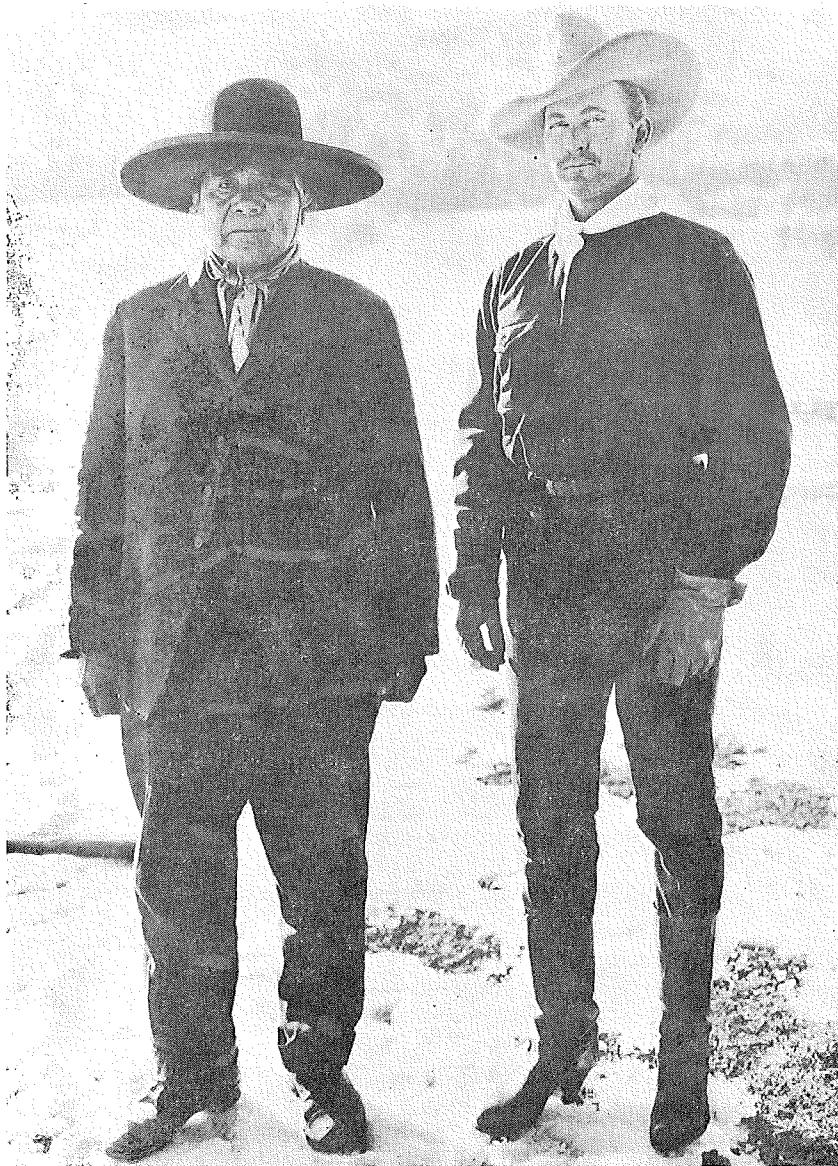
"No Indian blamed him for the debacle at Wounded Knee, a point on which he had at first some misgivings. I continued to act occasionally as corresponding secretary. His correspondents in Indian Territory began to write importuning him to visit them. At the outset he was somewhat leery, half suspecting a trick to get him where hands could be laid upon him in revenge for letting them down with those ineffectual ghosts shirts. But eventually he was persuaded, partly by my assurances that law and order prevailed in Oklahoma and he made a trip back there. He was lionized and on his return was loaded with presents of money but mainly of items such as moccasins, vests, belts, gloves, buckskin breeches and other articles of finery dear to the Indian heart. The loot would have made a collector of Indian hand work green with envy. Everything was of the finest quality, adorned with beads, porcupine quills, animal teeth and claws. Twenty years later he still wore some of those vests and moccasins." (Dyer, pp. 15–16)

1908–1911: Between this period the letters which are here reproduced were written to Jack.

1913: Jack was deeply grieved when Zenas Wilson (son of J. I. Wilson) died; he came to comfort the family.

1919: When Mr. Plummer died Jack came to call on his widow. He stayed a long time and said that Mr. Plummer was a good man.

1920: Jack's sight and hearing were failing slightly. In the spring of 1920, the writer, at the invitation of Mrs. J. I. (Carrie Willis) Wilson, went to Yerington for the purpose of recovering the letters here reproduced, to interview citizens of the community who had recollections of Jack and his revelation and to interview Jack. An appointment was made to interview Jack one evening at sunset at the ranch where he and his family were picking potatoes. This is what happened:



*Credit Smithsonian Institution.*

**Wovoka with T. J. McCoy in the Walker Lake area, 1926.**

"I remained in the dooryard until dusk. At long last Jack appeared, coming around the corner of the barn; he walked across the yard with long purposeful steps; his head held high. When he was about 10 feet from me, he stopped suddenly and drew himself up to his full height, which was some 6 feet or more, and with the look in his eye of the man who could at will go to heaven by way of the Great Dipper and the Milky Way, he said, 'No!'" (Dangberg, p. 287)

1926: Colonel Tim McCoy paid a visit to Jack and reported that he found Jack both friendly and willing to talk and that he seemed unusually vigorous for nearly seventy years of age. McCoy continues, as quoted by Bailey (p. 207),

"He seemed robust and at least twenty years younger. He talked readily of the ghost dance religion, and of the great visits he once had with the tribal leaders from the east. He still talked of the coming millennium, in which the Indian would be given a new earth to dwell upon. He still emphatically declared that he visited God, and had talked to Him. And he appeared to have the impression that he would never die."

McCoy, as Bailey states in his note to this quotation (see p. 215, note 60) was an authority on the Plains Indians. It is suggested that his use of the name of the Diety in his account of this conversation reflects this association with leaders of the eastern tribes (cf. above pp. 17-18; 21-22)

1931: Genevieve Wilson Chapin writes that all of the Wilsons were proud of Jack and were his friends through life, and that when she was in Yerington, 1931, she went to the Indian village to see him and found that he needed more food so took him eggs and bread a number of times. She says, "He was so happy to see me!"

1932: Jack died on Sept. 20. Joseph McDonald wrote a three column obituary which appeared in the Reno Evening Gazette for October, 4, 1932, portions of which are reproduced as follows:

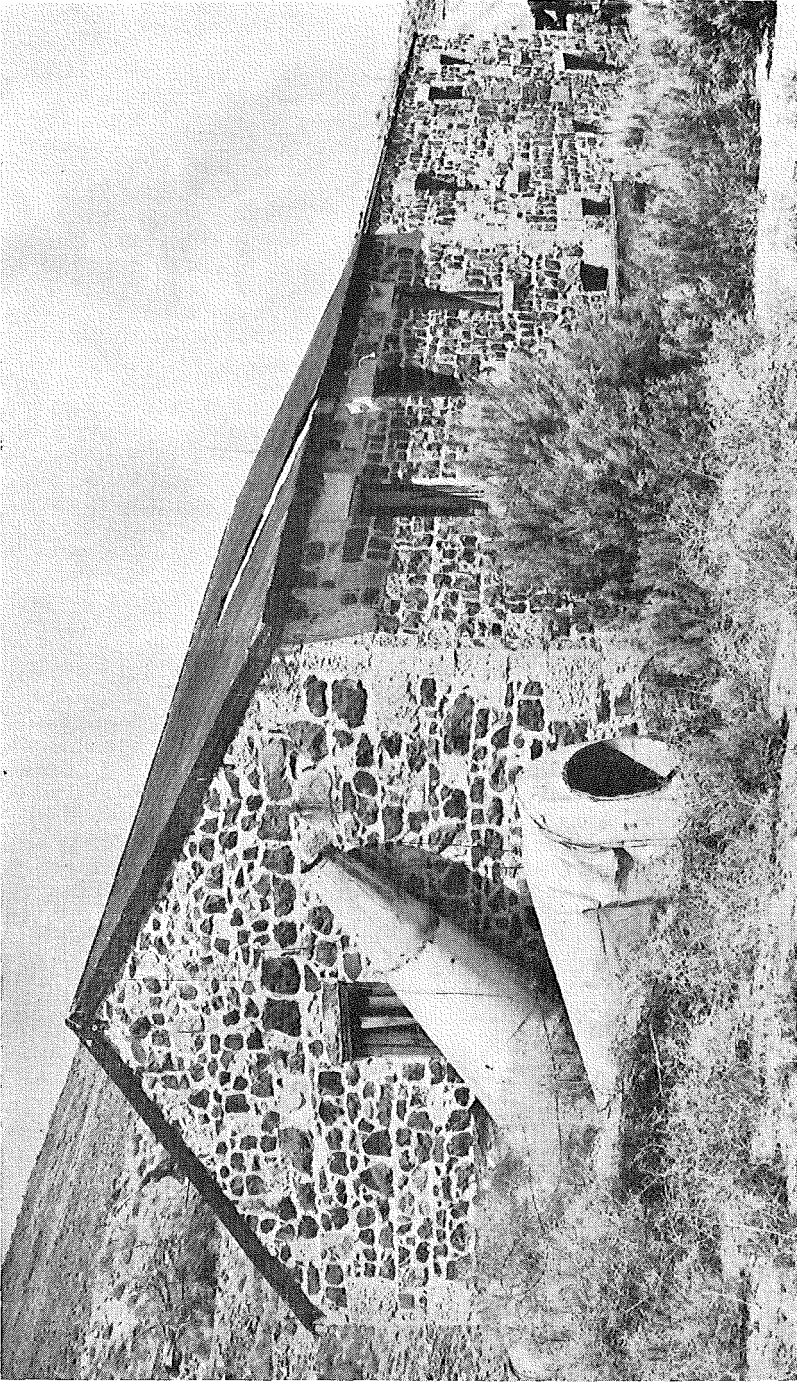
The Indian prophet, Jack Wilson Wovoka, whose fanatic doctrines symbolized by the ghost dance spread like wildfire among Western Indians in the late 80's, died unnoticed in his hut near Yerington this week and was buried in a sandy grave at Schurz near the shores of Walker Lake.

That the Indians believed in him completely is evidenced in the widespread adherence to his doctrine. Although the ghost dance custom lived for only a decade in Nevada, he continued to exert great influence over Indians in other sections, and for many years continued to receive gifts of moccasins, beads, shawls, and money. In return he sent from Mount Grant red paint for them to decorate their bodies and eagle feathers which carried his blessing.

The department of archaeology, anthropology and ethnology at the University of California has displayed great interest in the ghost dance and other tribal



Rootcellar where the letters were found.



Nordyke Flour Mill.

customs peculiar to Nevada Indians and made several calls on Wovoka to travel to Berkeley to explain his powers. He heeded none of the calls, and many of the secrets invaluable to research workers, were buried with him.

In the true mein of a tribal daughter, Mrs. Alice Vidovich of Sparks, Wovoka's daughter and only surviving relatives, would give no information as to the declining years of her father's life. With her husband, Jerry Vidovich, Southern Pacific employe in Sparks, she is the owner of a well-kept modern cottage, and on the surface she is truly Americanized. But she retained the old Indian belief that whatever secrets Wovoka possessed should remain with him, and said today she did not wish to discuss her father's life or his powers.

The funeral services held at Schurz were simple and in no way indicated the great place that the man once held in the council of the Indians. Following his death his body was taken from the Indian camp at Yerington to a home in Schurz where it was kept during the night, while the Indian men and women kept up the customary "wailing". The following day the body in the coffin was taken to the Indian burying ground and lowered into the freshly dug grave, while scores of Indians stood around with bowed heads.

Rev. E. H. Emig, Indian missionary at Schurz, recited a short prayer, and the Indians then departed for their homes.

Whether a special marker will be placed over the grave has not been decided. It is in the family plot in the Indian burying ground, but Indians at Schurz and vicinity have indicated that it will represent no special shrine of worship for them, although they all admit, even the young ones, that Wovoka once was the most powerful Piute of the tribe. Of late years he has acted as a medicine man, but failing health caused him to become very inactive recently.

## LETTERS TO JACK WILSON

The 21 letters and fragments of letters in this collection range over a period of 4 years, from August 1908 to December 1911; they were sent by 12 different men and 1 woman. Letters from each of the correspondents have been grouped together in chronological order; each group is preceded by a short biographical comment on the writer and any persons named in his letters; occasionally explanatory comments have been inserted in the letters in square brackets. The few facts which are known concerning the writers of the letters have been courteously supplied by the superintendents and officials of the various agencies under whose jurisdiction the individuals lived or were still living in 1938.

One of the men who wrote frequently to Jack, but none of whose letters were found in this collection, was James P. Roberts of the Fort Peck Reservation. This man, according to James L. Long, was in 1938 about 68 years old and read and wrote English fluently. In 1902 he and Fred Robinson, the writer of the first of this series of letters, were instructed in the 'ghost dance' religion by a Sioux named Kicking Bear from the Pine Ridge Reservation (cf. above, p. 34) Later James Roberts received a bundle of medicine wrapped in a flour sack; on the sack was printed "J. W. Wilson & Bros. Flour Milling Co., Nordyke, Nevada." Mr. Long wrote: "He [Roberts] said that he lost all interest in the religion from then on, because he thought that some white people were just sending these things to get money out of the Assiniboinés." (see illustration p. 38)

No attempt to restore words obliterated by action of dust and dampness on ink and pencil has been made.



In many respects the most interesting series of letters are the seven which follow. Fred Robinson, the writer of the first letter was one of the group of prominent young Assiniboin men who received instructions in conducting the "ghost dance" in the autumn of 1902 from Kicking Bear, a Sioux who had visited Wovoka earlier in that year (see above, pp. 34 and 40). Later, Fred Robinson went to Canada where he married; he still lived there in 1938.

According to James L. Long, Rufus W. Medicine, who wrote the remaining six letters in this series, died many years before 1938, apparently at Brockton, Mont. Nothing further is known of him.\*

Moose Woods Reserve  
Dundurn [Saskatchewan] Jan 17/09

Jack Wilson

I thought I would write you a short letter today I will tell you who I am Oct 27th 1905 you send me paint 3 can full and some medicine too Jan 29th 1906 you wrote to me and send me (1 tomatoes can) full of paint. I tell you this so you can remember who I am I am staying with the news you tell me all the time till now I have been as far north to a place called Prince Albert and I am telling them about the news and till now I am staying here for winter I came to this place and I am telling every day what they ought to do father will you help me with the heart of the people where the prayers come from I want you to help to make the people straight thought. Help me too How can it be done to grow one church or prayer Help me father than I want them to know forwards the road of life Help me that I want the people on earth to think and go into the road of life The people think they would have their own way and have good time, I am always talking about the everlasting life

Another thing is pulling the people and you know that I am telling them about the good road and good life and I am telling them too on one side the Bad road and the evil spirit The last one I mention is a man have gone on that side you must hear that There were not many people but this man he divides them into two and he spoil the whole thing You know some people have good time. So he want it like that. He gave me some bad words and he send some to you, his name is Rufus Medicine. As it is hard to get the people in shape and I want you to quit them. The people here have raised \$37.00 and send them to you as you have it already now All the people that have paint have raised money for you as what they say, and this fellow is going back to (poplar Mont) I am going to Prince Albert as they want me over there to tell them of the News. I will be back in few days again you seems to forget me so long so I write to you You know me well so If you get this letter try and answer me

I am yours faithful worker

I shake hands with you with my Best thought

Fred Robinson

---

Dundurn, Sask,  
3/17/1909,  
Moose Wood, Reserve,

Jack Wilson, Dear father, I will now write to you again, I am now Came back from Poplar, Montana I went down there on Feb. 7, on March 12, I came back, Well father you ask of me 25.00 dollars, but I send you \$37.00 on Dec. 7' Now

\*Adapted from Dangberg, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin No. 164, pp. 286-296.

if you received I like to know it if you are kindley, write me, the money order was to be Cash at Smith Nevada, \$37.00, I try to do right thing with you, I residing the money order at Dundurn Post office, I send you address money order \$37.00 Derect yerington, Lyon Co, Nevada, Care Call Box 83, I send the money there, so now please kindley let me know if you get that money which I send to you, I waiting for your kindley Reply,

I shake hands with you father, I am yours son,

R. W. Medicine,

---

Dundurn,  
Sask,  
Box 122, 4/8/09

Jack Wilson, Dear father We have a praying meetting last night, And pray to you I stand here to day again praying to you to help this indians I give magepie feathers and medicine out last night, hear me father and look upon me as then own son, help, me, father, send on me good things that I may lived upon this earthes to do Gods Good Will And you, pray for me that I may know the Good ways towards Gods our father, I am going home on April, I like very much to hear from you before I lived this Reserve, Indians are all well, I must come close, by shakings hands with you, wish to hear from you

I am yours son,

R. W. Medicine.

---

Dundurn,  
Sask,  
Box, 22,  
April, 6, 1909.

J. Wilson, Dear father I get three Packages, to day, I will go home again this month, and I dont think I will stay here at Moose, Wood, Reserve so I dont know, what to do, about that \$10.00 I have ask you to send soft red paint, and white earthe, last time, the peoples here are know that I ask for soft red paint so they are watching all time, all peoples here are all well, no snow now, I shakes hands with you

I am yours son,

R. W. Medicine

Awaiting for an earlyer Reply,

---

Dundurn, .....  
Moose, Wood, .....

4/10/....

Jack Wilson of Nordyke, Nevada

Dear father I must drop ..... llnes to you again, and let ..... know that all this indians ..... well, I pray that this indians ..... well and be good peoples ..... to you father and .....ags that ..... in right ..... am going home now ....., I let you know that ..... going to stay here no more,

I am come to close .....hanking hands with you,

I am yours son,

R. W. Medicine

all my hearts, I am trying hard to remember you ever day, I pray to you father as I am, remember me And answer my pary, I ask of you to gett you soft red paint, & feathers again, hear me father I stand befor you to day, I will send you \$2.50 a pices I am humble & pary to you that you will have a pity on me, I shake hands with you, please kindly answer me, yours truly,

Rufus Medicine,  
Dundurn, Sask,  
Canada, Moose Wood, Reserve,

---

[The handwriting is that of Rufus Medicine.]

....ple n.... ..ray to da.... afternoon, I live [leave?] moose [wood] am way to my home no..... in this Reserve for two years and ..... now I am going home, I lived ..... Brockton, Valley Co, Montana ..... address, Well father I do best ..... in this Reserve, for this indians they ..... your medicine, & magepie feathers ..... they were very glad to have it, they ..... praying meeting every Saturday & Sunday ..... hear them praying & help them father ..... this I ask of you, many times, father ..... wish to see you, many times I t..... to see you, father remember me ..... praying, hear my voice in praying .....

page two

which give you \$5.00.

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Bear Comes Out (1858–1938) lived for many years before his death at the Bull Head Station on the Standing Rock (Sioux) Reservation in South Dakota. According to W. O. Roberts, superintendent of the Pine Ridge Agency, he was not an outstanding person but was respected by his tribe. At the suggestion of Mr. Roberts a letter was addressed to Andrew Knife of Pine Ridge, S. Dak., a nephew of Bear Comes Out and his only close living relative, inquiring for letters written him by Jack Wilson or for further biographical details; the letter was not answered.

Porcupine Tail Creek,  
August 10 1908

Dear Father Jack Wilson,

Today I was doing and was very sorry and I was going to send you \$6 dollars and was going to ..s use to sorry for that I wont to know that some medicine good for you peoples I like to see those medicine, soon as you could and I wont your to send those I send 4 beets belt working I like you to send me those medicine for myself how much it cost those medicine makes those pillis them it and send it to me when I was there and you give me some medicine give me some of those for the belt.it that is all wont to say for you I am glad to shake hand with you that is me your son

Bear Comes Out.

Porcupine S. D. Jan 31 1910

Jack Wilson, of  
 Nordyke Nevada

Dear Sir or father—

I think about make through your children Moccasins you ask for me moccasin measure & send to me but another I received letter and I found in three moccasins you wanted Therefore Ill wait you long time and what you mean Also I didnt not [under] stand an English [when] my folks your [let]ter Read for .....  
 ....lich way h..... and for I think Best Way for answer for you I think you wants some money but I have not money therefore let you borowed for you now when you have this moccasins What you want give for me if you can sent to me now we have all my things we afraid of this year for therefore what you can tell us let me knowed. & one of this thing yours country above. The star\* we afraid what he doing Let me knowed now That is all I shake hand with you this time

Bear Come Out that is me

[\*Halley's Comet]

Fast Horse (1860–1919), a Yankton Sioux who lived in the Riverside district near Brockton, Mont., was, according to John G. Hunter, superintendent of the Fort Peck Agency, a medicine man and a “preacher.”

Brockton, Montana

Jan. 1st, 1909.

Jack N. Wilson:

Father I am [staying] with all my son's [children] we all still well. am writing letter to you on this [very] [Ha]ppy New Year's day, [w]ell father I heard that ..... your things were burned [tell me] thats true. Write to [me] soon. Than with my boys [we all go] an Collect as much money [as possibly] can and I'll give it ..... you. Well that's all I want to say,

I am Your Son,

Mr. Fast Horse.

Brockton,

Montana,

Feb. 12th, 1909.

Mr. Jack Wilson.

Dear father:—

Father these money are yours. I hope you be glad to get them. When you get the money Please let me know soon. I put the money in two envelopes.

Your Son,

Fast Horse.

P.S.

There is \$32.00 in altogether.





3 Menard Street  
 Chicago, Ill  
 Mr. J. T. Wilson  
 Morristown  
 Tenn  
 Dear Father  
 I recd your 50c dollar from  
 Allen & I thank you for same but  
 the 50c is not the 50c I want  
 when I wrote to you. I want the  
 50c that you sent me in the  
 S. D. at first. I don't want a  
 50c dollar in Cash either. I never  
 heard of any of it. I will  
 the full details of Feb. 1855  
 to you or all about it.

and told me all about it  
 the money and that we are  
 people. I am a star at home  
 the little book but now it all  
 read by this spring and I  
 know what kind of medicine  
 these are. I will send you  
 some and I will send you  
 from it, our god, I will take  
 with me all about these  
 things.  
 your brother  
 John, Short Ball  
 Ammen, so as possible.

Brockton, Montana,  
Valley County,  
Mar. 7, 1909

Mr. Jack Wilson,

Dear father:

Father I was very glad to get what you send it to me. So I wrote these few lines to let you know that I got all of them. I got them safe and give them out equally. This is all I want to say,

I am Your Son,

Fast Horse.

Cloud Horse (1851–1923) was one of a delegation of Sioux that visited the prophet in 1890. These men had set down for them in the Teton Dakota dialect an account of the visit which is given in full by Mooney (*ibid.*, pp. 796–798, 819 and above, pp. 21–23). A letter from William Gay, (1868– —), husband of Cloud Horse's daughter, is given in its proper chronological sequence with the letters of the older man. According to W. O. Roberts, superintendent of the Pine Ridge Agency, William Gay was half Indian and half white; he and his wife were still living at Kyle in 1938.

Kyle, S. Dak,  
Oct. 9 10.

dear father Jack wilson

I am going to say a few words to you this morning and I wish you let me Know if you get that moccison and one dollar, which I send it to you last month of may and I want medicine for it so please let me Know I want medicine if you get them

now this is all from

Your truly son

William Gay  
Kyle, S. Dak.

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Kyle Post Office  
March 17, 1911.

Dear Father:—

Just a few lines to you this morning to let you know something I wrote to you here lately and told you that I did not get something that you send me Well I made a mistake I did not open the package ever since you send it to me untill this moning that is on the 17 of March and when I open it and looked through the medican you send I found in it the pain that you send so I am very sorry I told you the wrong thing I said I did not get it but I hope you will excuse me for it I made a mistake so that is what I want to let you know that I got all you send me. I got a little scared for a while when I found the paint so I am going to send you money because I have foold you so bad and this morning I am sitting in a Mexican man's house and there is a young girl there she is my miece she is very sick so I want you to pray to the Lord to get here well again for me and when she gets well again I want to let every bod know it so that is why I want you to helpe me and you aske me to come over to see you so I think Im going to come over whith Red Star and he told me that he send you money and asked you



something but you did not answer him so if you want me to come with him I want you to let me know soon so this will be all for this time so I shake hand with you and hope to stand solid by you

I am your son

Cloud Horse,

P. S. I would like to find out if you have any kind of rules for your medicans that you send me if so let me know too ..... the feathers let me know please.

---

Pine Ridge, So. Dak.,  
April 29, 1911.

Jack Wilson,

Nordyke, Nev.

Dear Father: Why do you not write to me. I sit with you and I write to you this letter. I hope I will come to see you. I send you a dollar bill. Why dont you answer me?

When you get this letter answer soon, Father This man writing a letter for me but he lives far and this man write for me this letter.

This man a good man write for me this letter. I sit with Cloud horse and we write this letter.

Your loving son, I shake hands with you, Answer quick when you get this letter.

Cloud Horse

Address answer to Red Star  
Pine Ridge, So. Dak.

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Kyle Post Office  
Dec 13, 1911

Dear Father:—

Your letter has been received and I was very glad indeed to hear from you dear father

Now I am going to send you a pair of mocissions but if they are not long enough for you when you write again please send me you foot measure from this day on—I will try to get the money to send to you. I wish I had it just at present I would send it wright away

I think I might get the money soon enough to send it so that is why I say that so. I will get it just as soon as possible and be sure to send it so if you get a letter from me I may have the money in that letter so dear Father this will be all. I can answer you so for your sake all the Indians out here make fun of me but I allways think dear Father that around me you would give me strength. so if you get the money I want that medican and some good feathers & that paint so that is what I want you to send me.

So this is all for this time I give a good & hard shaking of the hands to you I hope you have pity on me

I remain your son

Cloud Man Horse

Nothing is known of the John Short Bull who wrote the letter which follows. It is possible that he was a relative of Short Bull, the Sioux chief; this man was one of the delegates who visited the prophet in 1889-90 and later, in 1890, led one of the bands opposing the repressive measures which the Government directed against the "ghost dance" (Mooney, pp. 817, 843, 849-851). This John Short Bull may be the Short Bull who with Kicking Bear instructed the Assiniboin in the "ghost dance" in 1902 (see pp. 286, 288).

Allen, So. Dak.

April 27th 1911.

Mr. Jack Wilson,  
Nurdyke, Nevada.

Dear father

I send you five dollars from Allen P. O. for P. O. money order that time I think you were at Colorado State but the money order returned to me at Allen S. Dak. and I sent you another five dollars Cash and I never heard from you if you receive the five dollars or not so I want to know all about it, and tell me all about it the news and that we are people all sick, sick all time little fooks but now it all over by this spring and do you know what kind medicine best these sickness Cough and lungs sick and Melease and How we pray it, our god may mistake and tell me all about it these things.

Yours. poor son

John. Short Bull.

Answer soon as possible.

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The fragment of a letter which follows was apparently written by an Arapaho Indian. According to Superintendent Forrest R. Stone, of the Wind River Agency at Fort Washakee, Wyo., the Sherman Sage, named in this letter was still living in 1938 and said that he had letters from Jack Wilson after he returned from a visit to the reservation in 1911 or 1912. A James Brown and John Yellow Plume also had letters from the prophet at this time; these, however, have all been lost.

Lodge Pole, Mont.

March 31 - 1910.

My Dear Father,

I am so capable to answer your welcome letter I was very glad to hear from you again. My Post Office from my plow is about a quarter of a mile, I received the medicines you send me some time ago. When I got I make a pray meeting with a good-men who have repect of you, and also we have a fest over it. I give the medicines and paints to the fellows crew of 13 and also give some to those who have ask me after I got the paint. I always have my own son to write letters for me but he has been out working about Two weeks he has just come home and he write this letter for me again Samon [Salmon?] Frist Shoot is also a good young man he some times writes for me my wife is The G[ir]l

I cannot Trust no other man so this is reason I always ..... write for me. The older Indians are still praying for? what you know send I am so anxious to

know how to used the medicines and would like to have advice in regards to the medicine The Arapahoe Indians some here about two years ago Their names are Shuman [Sherman] Sage and The Gun These two men claim to see you at your place when they come here they told me lot of news about what you have said I stayed with the two about seven (7) days They made me one hand game stick. Both of the men are my best friends they like me very well I like to know if you will send the medicine rest of the medicines what we ordered in our letter It was hard to get the money this winter that was reason I ..... send you.

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American Horse and F. W. Antelope, who wrote the letter which follows, were Arapaho Indians; the superintendent of the Wind River Agency reports that both died before 1938. This is not the American Horse, a Sioux chief who was one of the council of men who, in 1889, appointed a delegation to visit the prophet (see Mooney, *ibid.*, p. 820).

Arapahoe, Wyoming,  
Fremont Co. April 30-11

Dear Father in christ, Jack Wilson.

today I am thinking of you and I would like to Write you a few lines to you this morning and to let you know that I am well with my folks and also my wife was very Sickness for along time. But she go round now days and and she go down River to take a cold Bath in water and she Said she fells much Better after she take Bath. And rest of Indians are well. Some of Indians are Farming for oats and wheat and some out working for Shearing time. now I want to ask you some thing, my Brother came from Oklahoma and he want me to go with him to your country to visit you, he would like to see you very much. So I wish you Please tell us if is alright to visit you. my Brother he is waiting for his money from Oklahoma. But we would like to hear from you. before we start off. to your Place-and I wish you Please send us little Painted if you got to spare and tell us some news that is if any news from this spring, or anything go on - let us hear from you by return mail.

I am yours truly,

F. W. Antelope  
and American Horse.

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Nothing is known of the man who wrote the following fragment.

for ears, has been trouble ..... his sore ears in side for two years then he wants medicine for that.

William James Rope

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A typewritten letter from a neighbor of Jack's completes the series.

Masonic, Calif., April 7, 1911.

Mr. Jack Wilson,  
Yerington, Nevada.

Dear Jack:

How are all the indians getting along down there? Please write and tell me. I heard lots of indians died down to Yerington lately. Is this so? We are all well here. There is about four feet of snow in Bridgeport. At Uncle Tom's place there is about seven feet of snow, and the indians are hungry there as they can't get out. Tom's folks are all well only they can't get much to eat. Old man John Craig has been down to Mono Lake and there has been so much snow that he did not come back yet.

We all send our kindest regards and hope you will write soon again.

Daisy Bell.

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SPO, CARSON CITY, NEVADA, 1968



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