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THE PIEGAN VIEW OF THE NATURAL WORLD, 1880-1920

By

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Dissertation

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

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in History

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Title: The Piegan View of the Natural World, 1880-1920

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Abstract: This dissertation is a new interpretation of the stories told by the Piegan people (now known as the Blackfeet) from 1880-1920, about their relationship with the natural world. It is a history of the transition to reservation life, the economy of the reservation, individual Piegan who told the stories, the ethnographers who recorded the stories and what those stories tell us about Piegan views of the natural world. It is a blend of different methodologies within history: archival research, ethnohistory, oral history and first-person narrative. This new interpretation argues that although the transition to reservation life was difficult, the Piegan worked with ethnographers to share their stories and their view of the natural world which had provided them stability and continuity since ancient times.

# The Piegan View of the Nature World, 1880-1920

By Rosalyn R. LaPier

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## Preface

### SOMETHING VITAL WAS MISSING

People often ask me how I became interested in plants. I sometimes jokingly reply that, "I'm not sure if I am that interested in plants." I am asked this question because I sometimes give public talks throughout the Rocky Mountain west regarding the topic of historic Piegan plant use, also called ethnobotany or traditional environmental knowledge. I came to this knowledge in the old fashioned way. I apprenticed with two old women.

Over two decades ago my oldest aunt Theresa Still Smoking told me, in a matter of fact way, that I needed to learn about plants. My aunt was not asking me if I was interested in learning about plants. She gently implied that it was my responsibility to learn. At the time I was living in Chicago and only returned home to Montana a few times a year so I was not sure how this was going to progress.

I come from a family of women who know about plants. My grandmother Annie Mad Plume Wall was well-known for her medicinal plant knowledge. She was still going out to collect plants well into her nineties. She finally stopped going out into the field when an old ankle injury that she sustained as

a teenager came back to haunt her and made it too painful for her to walk around. She relied instead on those of us who knew what she harvested. She learned about plants from her grandmother Not Real Beaver Woman and her great-grandmother Big Mountain Lion Woman, and they probably learned from their grandmothers as well. I had been collecting plants all my life, as all the children were expected to participate in plant collecting expeditions. However, as children, we were not expected to learn what we were collecting. We were just free labor.

My aunt Theresa started telling me about plants that summer. I took her on long drives across the prairies and foothills of the Blackfeet reservation, up into the mountains of Glacier National Park, up into southern Alberta and around ancestral Piegan territory. During these excursions I would get drive-by lessons on plant use, some that I knew very well, others that I had collected but did not know their uses, and yet others that were brand new to me. The expectation was that I would just listen and not ask too many questions. At the time I remember thinking to myself I am never going to remember all this stuff. I started scribbling down notes after each trip. Being a bookworm, I decided if I was going to learn anything about these plants that I had better start looking for some books to read.

I was in luck. On a family visit to the Head-Smashed-In

Buffalo Jump Interpretive Centre in southern Alberta I purchased Alexander Johnston's monograph, *Plants and the Blackfoot*, published in 1987.<sup>1</sup> This was perfect, I thought, I would not have to memorize all these plants after all; I could just read about them. However, even though Johnston included almost 200 plants in his monograph, many of his descriptions did not provide sufficient detail of their uses. He did not discuss when certain plants were collected or how they were processed. He also did not even include some of the plants that we collect on a regular basis, like "blue root" (*Comandra umbellata*). We collect bags and bags of this stuff every summer. I wondered how he could not list that one. I asked myself, isn't this a book about plants and the Blackfoot? Well, so much for the easy way out. I concluded that I was going to have to rethink my approach. As I continued apprenticing with my aunt and my grandmother, I also continued looking for everything written about Piegan environmental knowledge.

I also consulted Walter McClintock, an early chronicler of Piegan life, who wrote the first study of Piegan ethnobotany or environmental knowledge when he published "Materia Medica of the Blackfeet" in 1909 with the Berlin

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<sup>1</sup>Alex Johnston. *Plants and the Blackfoot*. Occasional Paper No. 15. Lethbridge: Lethbridge Historical Society, 1987.



Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and History, based on research he conducted in the 1890s. He reprinted it in the appendix of his book *The Old North Trail or Life, Legends and Religion of the Blackfeet Indians* in 1910. In his book he relied on the knowledge of his female relatives from his adoptive Piegan father *Siyeh*, Mad Wolf. McClintock called these women "botanists" who had learned "the knowledge of herbs and wild plants" from an early age. McClintock sent the dried plant specimens he collected in the 1890s to the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh and Mr. O.E. Jennings, the Assistant Curator of Botany, identified them. Although his study only listed 66 plants it was considered the most thorough review of Piegan plant use for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> The work of McClintock and other early recorders of Piegan life encouraged me, and I began to consider their relationship to the plant knowledge I was gaining from my family and the stories I had heard growing up.

My grandmother loved to sit and visit with people. One day my grandmother told me a story about Spotted Bear, her maternal great-grandfather. It was a story that I had heard many, many times before. I stress this point to show that I can be a slow learner. Spotted Bear was a great warrior, "one

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<sup>2</sup>Walter McClintock. *The Old North Trail: Life, Legends and Religion of the Blackfeet Indians*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1999.

of the greatest," as she emphasized. Her favorite stories of Spotted Bear were his adventures raiding the Crow. He always seemed to get into a predicament and then of course he was able to get out of it. In this particular story my grandmother mentioned, almost as an afterthought, that Spotted Bear used his personal "medicine power" and changed the direction of the wind. Whoa, wait one minute, I thought, he changed the direction of the wind! How did he do that? At that moment I realized that Spotted Bear's understanding and relationship to the natural world was dramatically different from the one that the chroniclers of Piegan life often wrote about in their books. Spotted Bear's knowledge and use of nature was not the same utilitarian story found in those academic monographs.

I had heard stories all my life of how the Piegan altered nature, from stopping the wind from blowing, to controlling animal behavior, to creating a snow storm so powerful it could freeze a person in mid-step. However, the narratives in the scholarly literature told of how the Piegan "adapted" to their environment and used (or abused) what was available, such as in Shepard Krech's *The Ecological Indian*.<sup>3</sup> It was a story of how the environment shaped their behavior and not vice versa. However, in my grandmother's version, the

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<sup>3</sup>"Buffalo," in Shepard Krech. *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*. W.W. Norton and Company, 1999, 123-150.

Piegans changed the environment to force nature to "adapt" to their needs. It occurred to me then that what had been missing from the books and articles that I read on Piegan environmental knowledge was this story of a dynamic relationship between humans, the natural world and the supernatural realm. The Piegan believed that they did not always have to face the challenges of their daily lives - they could change their world.

The Piegan are one of the most studied tribal groups in the U.S. and Canada. This is probably because they appear to represent an iconic Plains Indian. Historian Hugh Dempsey even published a bibliography of Blackfoot sources with thousands of entries.<sup>4</sup> I started re-reading the same old sources but with new lens in place. This dissertation reflects a part of my effort to re-interpret Piegan history. My guiding questions became: How did the Piegan understand nature and their environment? What did they believe? The stories that my grandmother and my aunt told seemed to connect humans to a larger relationship and history of the natural and supernatural. What did these scholars fail to interpret? Something vital was missing.

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<sup>4</sup>Hugh A. Dempsey and Lindsay Moir. *Bibliography of the Blackfoot*. Native American Bibliography Series, No. 13. Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 1989.

## Introduction

### METHODOLOGY AND "RE-RIGHTING HISTORY"

This work of Indigenous history is a profound departure from standard historical texts, and this departure is significant precisely because it marks a turning away from colonized interpretations of our past toward a decolonized tribal history. W. Angela Wilson, *Remember This!*

This dissertation is a re-interpretation of stories left behind by the Piegan people. It is a history of the people who told the stories, the people who recorded the stories and what those stories tell us about their views of the world. It is a blend of different methodologies within history: ethnohistory, oral history and first-person narrative. It is primarily ethnohistoric. Ethnohistory merges the social sciences and humanities, especially anthropology and history, and studies the cultures and histories of a community. It evolved out of the interdisciplinary research of the Indian Claims Commission

in the mid-1900s.<sup>1</sup> In my dissertation I use the method of ethnohistory to study both the history of the Piegan and their cultural customs.

In part this dissertation recounts the oral history of my family, stories narrated to me by my late maternal grandmother Annie Mad Plume Wall and others. Some of these stories were recorded on an old tape recorder. Most were not. In the latter case, I rely on my own memory to reconstruct those stories based on the many times I heard them. The role of oral history in Native American communities is well documented within both historical and anthropological literature. Oral history often plays a complex cultural role within Native societies.

Anthropologist Keith Basso, in *Wisdom Sits in Places* relates the interconnecting role that stories, language, and physical landscape play within Native societies.<sup>2</sup> Basso concludes that oral stories are complex multilayered cultural icons that through their continuous repetition serve as the basis for maintaining individual social normative

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<sup>1</sup>Anthropologist Michael Harkin wrote of this history in "Ethnohistory's Ethnohistory: Creating a Discipline from the Ground Up," *Social Science History*, Summer 2010 34(2): 113-128.

<sup>2</sup>Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*. Tucson: University of Arizona, 1996.

behavior and even achieving intelligence or wisdom. In my dissertation I use these family stories to situate the larger oftentimes impersonal history of the Piegan tribe within more personal stories of community life.

Some parts of this dissertation are written in first-person narrative, a method that is sometimes frowned upon in the historical profession and at other times embraced. Historian William Cronon wrote in his seminal article, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History and Narrative," that "narrative remains essential to our understanding of history and the human place in nature." His reflection on this methodology is entirely written in the first person, expressing his own thoughts and feelings about the role of the historian in relating the history of an event. He rhetorically questions why it is that historians use the same sources, place and time and relate very different stories of the same event. He argues that, "our narratives take changes in the land and situate them in stories whose endings become the lessons we wish to draw from those changes."<sup>3</sup> Historians he claims often engender events, especially environmental events, with moral lessons for humans to learn from.

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<sup>3</sup>William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History and Narrative," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 78, No. 4, (Mar. 1992): 1347-1376.

If finding "morals" to stories is one way American historians construct history, what are Native American historians trying to do? Many contemporary Native American historians would argue that they are trying to uncover or reconstruct "Native voice." The underlying methodological struggle I had in this process was how to both express Native voice, my own and those found in the records, while at the same time telling a historical story based on the archival record and secondary literature.

For me this seemed an easy task. However for some of my (early) readers this approach has seemed at times too disjointed, with too many voices. (The authorial voice is apparently not strong enough.) Other Native historians and scholars have struggled with this same issue of methodology. Historical narrative that will work within a Native community is often seen as peripheral or even lacking academic credibility to the Academy. And what will work within the Academy will sometimes be seen as imperialistic or colonial within Native communities, privileging only Euro-American voices. The often conflicting agendas of both the Academy and Native community are the foundation of numerous contemporary historical writings by Indigenous historians.

Choctaw historian Devon Mihesuah's edited volume

*Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing About American Indians* addresses new methodologies that Native communities can begin to use to control representations of their community histories. Her intended audience though is non-Native academic scholars. She hopes to bring about a change in their methods when researching Native communities. Similar to Mihesuah, Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith examined the role of research as an imperialistic process in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. She argues that indigenous communities world-wide should recognize academic research as inherently unequal, and she encourages indigenous communities to control some aspects of the role and purpose of research within their communities. Ho-Chunk historian Amy Lonetree explored how some Native communities are creating new public history representations of themselves in *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. She posits that communities can use museum exhibits and their corresponding text to address the impact of colonialism and trauma within tribal communities. The most provocative contemporary Native historian is Dakota historian W. Angela Wilson. Wilson has forcefully argued that Native scholars should abandon western methodologies altogether and return to Indigenous methods, most notably, oral history, in her book *Remember*



*This! : Dakota Decolonization and the Eli Taylor Narratives.*<sup>4</sup>  
She concludes that recording and documenting oral history is the only authentic indigenous methodology and it should therefore be privileged. All these Native/indigenous historians come to a similar conclusion - that Native/indigenous communities should attempt to control the stories told about them. And that at the very least these communities should instruct non-Native scholars to utilize historical methods agreeable to the community.

I too struggle with which methodologies will work and be acceptable. In Chapter One of my dissertation I address several issues that are important within Native American communities that will be of no consequence to non-Native or academic communities. I included this discourse because the ultimate audience for this work is the Blackfoot community-at-large. They will ask of any scholar: Who are you? Who is your family? What is your experience? What gives you the right to write about "us"? Again, for the typical historian

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<sup>4</sup>Devon Mihesuah, *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing About American Indians*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books, 2nd ed., 2012. Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2012. W. Angela Wilson, *Remember This! : Dakota Decolonization and the Eli Taylor Narratives*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005.

these questions will seem both out of place and perhaps out of line. But for a Native historian researching and writing Native history, these questions and others must be answered as proper protocol before proceeding. This is why I titled Chapter One, "A Beginning of Sorts"; it is not the typical beginning found in most dissertations.

Unlike Dakota historian W. Angela Wilson, however, I do not assert that my dissertation methodology is "profound" or "significant." I do acknowledge Wilson's hypothesis that the field of history has a "colonial" past, especially in its efforts to write and interpret the history of Native peoples, and that most of this history privileges Euro-American voices and methods. Cheyenne historian Leo Killback, in his essay "Indigenous Perceptions of Time," argues a more strident position. He states that, "Indian historians are burdened to learn these totalizing foundations and later reject them," to find methods that work within their own cultural communities.<sup>5</sup> Efforts to "decolonize" Native history reflect what Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith called the "re-righting" of history. However, I do not plan on completely rejecting western methodology. I

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<sup>5</sup>Leo Killback, "Indigenous Perceptions of Time: Decolonizing Theory, World History and the Fates of Human Societies," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 4, 2013.

hope that by using ethnohistory, oral history and first-person narrative my dissertation will draw on both traditions and thereby be relevant to and accepted both within the Academy and by Native peoples.

This dissertation is divided into eight chapters.

Chapter One "A Beginning of Sorts" attempts to address the variety of questions that are often asked within both the Academy and Native communities regarding the history of family, community and places. These questions are often quite different from each other. However, they are necessary to address before delving into the thesis of this dissertation.

Chapter Two "The Piegan Reservation in 1910" explores life on the reservation in 1910 as a tumultuous snapshot in time when "buffalo Indians" were transitioning to reservation society. This is necessary in order to understand the context of the stories they told to the collectors who arrived just as they were learning to adapt to their new circumstances. It was also the time when both of my grandparents were born and raised, and when their parents were adjusting to their new reality.

Chapter Three "Storytakers, Ethnologists Visit the Piegan" explores the role of outside scholars who came from 1880 to 1910. The story of ethnographers coming to a

reservation is almost always told as a one sided story, as the scholars being "takers" of local knowledge. To a certain extent this story is different with the Piegan. The Piegan wanted their history told and they actively worked with ethnographers and sold them their stories.

Chapter Four "'Invisible Reality'- The Piegan Universe" explores the belief system of the Piegan. The Piegan believed that there existed three separate yet interconnected realms which they called the above world, the below world and the water world. Within these three worlds were both visible and invisible elements or the natural and supernatural. In addition to their practical knowledge came a deeper understanding of the way the universe worked. It is from within this system that the Piegan developed a unique view of nature.

Chapter Five "Visible Reality, The *Saokio-tapi*" explores the pragmatic knowledge that the Piegan held of their landscape. At one point in their history they called themselves the *Saokiotapi* or the prairie people because they lived their lives on the northern Great Plains. The Piegans' understanding of the world was drawn from this practical familiarity with the prairie. Their pragmatic knowledge of this vast territory informed their belief systems and their belief systems determined how they interacted with their

landscape.

Chapter Six "*Stō-yē*, The 'Closed' Season" explores the Piegan perception of nature during the fall and winter. The Piegan divided the year into two seasons - *Nā-pōs* or the "open" season and *Stō-yē* or the "closed" season. This phraseology coincided with their belief system. In the fall the Piegan "closed" their major religious objects for the winter. The most important belief that the Piegan recorded was that they had an ancient relationship with nature, that nature gave them various gifts to live their lives, and that they could influence nature to accommodate to their wants and desires.

Chapter Seven "*Na-pos*, The 'Open' Season" explores the Piegan perception of nature during the spring and summer. In the spring the sound of the first thunder signaled the time to "open" the religious season. The Piegan believed that the thunder controlled the rain and in turn the relative abundance of plant life. Many of the religious activities of the Piegan centered on reestablishing and strengthening their relationship to nature.

Chapter Eight "'I have great power'" reexamines Piegan life at the turn of the twentieth century and Piegan belief systems of the past. Although transition to a new economy and sedentary life was difficult for the old Piegan, their

belief systems remained unaffected by reservation life. As the old time Piegan lives became increasingly controlled by the outside world their work with the outside ethnographers provided them an element of control over the information that they recorded. But this was nothing new. The Piegan believed that they always had control. It was fundamental to their basic belief system. When ethnologists first came to the reservation to document and record the Piegan world, the Piegan told them stories of their belief in a different reality. It was a reality in which they had control over nature and their world.

## Chapter One

### A BEGINNING OF SORTS

When I was growing up my family used to go out to my great-great-aunt Agnes's house. Agnes and her husband Albert lived in the foothills of the Rocky Mountain front just south of Badger Creek in a place on the reservation that butts up against the Badger-Two Medicine wilderness area.<sup>1</sup> My grandfather called this area "God's Country." In the winter they lived in a small house with minimal amenities in a thicket of aspen trees. Inside their house they had a wood stove, a small table with chairs and a metal framed bed that served as both their couch and bed. Agnes seemed to always have fresh bannock bread and tea. In the summer they lived mostly in the outdoors and we sat outside under the shade of the aspens. My first memories of her she was in her 60s. She seemed ancient, but she was physically strong and agile. Whenever we visited Agnes told us old stories of the *Amskapi Pikuni*, the South Piegan. When she told us these stories the

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<sup>1</sup>Agnes (No Runner) Wells (born 1905) and her husband Albert Wells (born 1902) were respected cultural leaders of their day. They were interviewed by scholars including Howard Harrod about Piegan religious beliefs for his dissertation and the ultimate book, *Mission Among the Blackfeet*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971.

places we knew so well came alive. I remember how I could see the stories as she told them. I remember believing that animals could talk, the stars were living beings and supernatural characters *lived* right here where I lived. My first experience learning South Piegan history was through her vividly told stories.

Later in life I read George Bird Grinnell's *Blackfeet Lodge Tales: The Story of a Prairie People*. This was the first book I ever read about the Piegan. Although it was originally published in 1892 (based on articles published in the 1880s) it is still considered one of the most authoritative books on South Piegan life. I remember how flat these stories seemed, how one dimensional, how unalive. Some of the stories were the same stories that Agnes told and that I had heard many times before. This was my first experience with reading something about the Piegan that did not *feel* quite right. Something seemed to be missing from those stories - and it was not the "facts." Grinnell's stories were the same stories I had heard before. However for the Piegan the purpose of stories is not to retell an event of the past but to make the event come alive in the present, so that it becomes our own present day experience. However beyond this complexity, something more was missing.

Historian William Farr has posited that, "The Blackfeet



world possessed an extra dimension, for amid the visible world, was an invisible one, another magnitude, a spiritual one that is more powerful, more meaningful, more lasting. It was a universe alive."<sup>2</sup> It seemed to me that what Grinnell described was to a certain extent only the visible world and not the added dimension - one which I grew up hearing about and which my grandparents understood intimately. Stories were not recreations of the past but creations in the present.

Until that moment it had not occurred to me that what I had learned and heard about the Piegan was any different than what had been written about the Piegan. These different versions of the same story intrigued me and to a certain extent my interest in Blackfoot history sprung from those experiences. Environmental historian William Cronon explored how two different stories can come from the same information in his article "A Place for Stories: Nature, History and Narrative." He commented that, "As often happens in history, [different interpretations] make us wonder how two competent authors looking at identical materials drawn from the same past can reach such divergent conclusions. But it is not merely their *conclusions* that differ. Although both narrate

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<sup>2</sup>William E. Farr, "Troubled Bundles, Troubled Blackfeet: The Travail of Cultural and Religious Renewal," *Montana the Magazine of Western History*. (Autumn 1993):8.

the same broad series of events with an essentially similar cast of characters, they tell two entirely different stories."<sup>3</sup>

It is similar with Piegan history, most scholars develop their different interpretations using the same sources. This dissertation will do the same. However, whenever I can I will add stories from my family to provide a more nuanced context. I was fortunate to have spent time with people like my aunt Agnes, my grandmother Annie and others. But I am equally fortunate to have spent many years learning about the Piegan from museum collections, archives, unpublished manuscripts and published primary sources. I believe that combining these two types of sources, oral and written, is necessary to get a more complete understanding of Piegan history.

In this dissertation I will explore the Piegan's unique relationship with the world around them, much like that told to me by my aunt Agnes. I will also briefly explore reservation life in the early 1900s, when people like aunt Agnes were growing up. Within this new reservation society the Piegan were increasingly losing control over their day-to-day lives. This is not a new story and many historians

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<sup>3</sup>William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History and Narrative," *The Journal of American History*. (March, 1992): 1348. [His emphasis.]

have told it before. However, the Piegan would interpret things differently and attach different meanings to their experiences. They were not weak reactors of historical forces but powerful actors in their own story, a different story, found manifest within their relationship with the supernatural. What historians have failed to share is that the Piegan believed they had power and influence over one thing - nature. And in the end, that is all that really mattered.

### ***A Beginning of Sorts***

The beginning of a dissertation is usually the place to provide basic information about the researcher, the researcher's methodology, what sources she will use, how she will interpret the sources, and how she will construct her interpretation. However, scholarship focusing on a Native American-American Indian-First Nations-Aboriginal-Indigenous peoples brings several unique concerns. This chapter will address these issues as they relate to Native American history first. In this work I will be using the terms "Native American" or "Native" to define the peoples of the Northern Great Plains who were here before the arrival of Europeans and others. I am not choosing these terms for political purposes but just because I am used to using them.

In the present, scholarship related to Native peoples is always suspect. Scholars such as Vine Deloria, Jr., Devon Mihesuah, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and Edward Said, question the validity of scholarship about Native people if it is not from a Native perspective.<sup>4</sup> This is especially true if the sources used for the scholarship are not from a Native perspective. Because of this many questions regarding validity and authenticity need to be sorted out. The first question that I need to answer is, am I really "authentic"? Am I someone who can speak for my ancestors? Next what data will I be using? Where did it come from? Outsiders!?! If so, are the data valid? Since I will be studying my own community, to what extent will I be "using" my family for information? Will I be exploiting Grandma? And revealing her sacred knowledge?

I will also address other questions that arise in more typical dissertations including questions related to time, place, people and interpretation. What historical time

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<sup>4</sup>These scholars have all addressed various issues related to scholarship about Native peoples, including but not exclusively, Vine Deloria, Jr. *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact*, Boulder: Fulcrum Press, 1997; Devon Mihesuah, *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Zed Books, 1999; and Edward Said *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage, 1994.

period will I cover with this study? What place, area or region will I study? What group will I study? This is a lot to address in a chapter. It is necessary to deal with these questions (because they will arise with some readers, in particular Native readers) in order to be transparent about my intentions and my research. However, academic readers are interested in my interpretive conclusions, which will also be addressed.

### ***Authenticity***

The Browning Mercantile was not far from my grandparents' house when I was growing up. My grandfather instituted an ingenious way to get us kids to learn our Piegan history - he paid us money. For a few pennies he would ask us to either sing a song, dance a dance or recite our family tree. I was not so keen on the singing and dancing part, so I recited the family genealogy. With our new found wealth we headed off to the Browning Merc to purchase what seemed like loads of penny candy. From this inauspicious beginning I learned the family tree. As an adult I used the book *Blackfeet Heritage* which is a census of the Blackfeet reservation done during allotment times.<sup>5</sup> I

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<sup>5</sup>Roxanne DeMarce, ed., *Blackfeet Heritage, 1907-1908*. Browning, MT: Blackfeet Heritage Program, 1980.

filled in this information by questioning my grandmother about who was *really* related to whom. I can therefore unequivocally say that I know who I am. Why does this matter? Most scholars will ask. All I can say is that it does! Most Native scholars (and even some non-Native scholars) today want to know. They want to know if you are "authentic," if your experience is authentic and if your voice is authentic. That is the way of the world today, no getting around it.

Authenticity within a Native community, of course, means more than just knowing your family tree. It also implies knowledge of cultural heritage and even participation in cultural activities. From community to community this can have different parameters and these parameters can change over time and place. During my childhood, at least from my grandfather's perspective, encouraging his grandchildren to know Piegan songs and dances and to recite our genealogy were basic yet essential components of Piegan knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

My maternal grandparents are the late Francis Wall and

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<sup>6</sup>Pan-Indian powwow culture on the Blackfeet reservation was a new activity during my childhood. And it was not until my adulthood that many Blackfeet began to view Pan-Indian powwows as part of "authentic" Blackfeet cultural activity. Since the new powwow culture was foreign to her understanding of the Piegan experience, my grandmother referred to powwows as something "those hippie Indians" did.

Annie Mad Plume. For the most part neither of them went by either of those names. My grandfather went by the Piegan name Iòkimau, which is a shortened form of the word Ixtáiòkimau, or "To Make Pemmican." He was adopted as a young boy by Aimsback and Aimsback's second wife Hollering in the Air. My grandfather's given name was Thomas Francis Wall, a nice Irish name, which in reality was what he was - Irish - with a bit of Piegan.<sup>7</sup> (Why an old time Indian would adopt a blond-headed Irish boy is a whole other story.) My grandmother went by the name Annie Rattler. Earlier on in her life her uncle Rattler took care of her siblings. However, she was raised by her grandmother Mary Spotted Bear and great-grandmother Big Tiger Woman. (There really are not any tigers in Montana, just bad translators. The real translation should be something like Big Mountain Lion Woman.) On all of their official documents my grandparents' names were Francis Aimsback and Annie Mad Plume-Aimsback. I always thought it was rather progressive for the folks back in the day to give my grandmother a hyphenated name. But at some point my grandfather started using his birth name of Wall and he gave his children that surname. On most of their documents my grandparents are listed as full-blood Piegan.

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<sup>7</sup>It is possible that he was named after the Irish nationalist who became the acting Governor of Montana territory, Thomas Francis Meagher.

In reality neither of them was. My grandfather was mostly Irish and my grandmother was mostly Piegan. Despite that mixed-up history somehow there is enough family blood for me to be enrolled as a Blackfeet tribal member.<sup>8</sup>

The whole blood issue gets a bit more complicated on the Métis side of the family. My paternal grandparents are the late Arthur Baptiste LaPierre and Louise LaFromboise. Both are from Montana but both families originated in what is now Manitoba and are descended from the Red River Métis. Despite the fact that the Métis are a "new people" developed out of the fur-trade history of European men partnering with Native women, within my family (based on my research) we have always been French-Indian Métis partnering with French-Indian Métis.<sup>9</sup> I can say that on my father's side of the family they have been Métis since the 1700s. If there was such a thing as full-blood Métis I could probably consider my father one. Numerous books have been written about the

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<sup>8</sup>I wrote three brief articles about the Blackfeet side of my family, one on my grandmother, "Blackfoot Botanist: Annie Mad Plume Wall," *Montana Naturalist*, Fall 2005; and one on my great-grandfather Aimsback in "From the Natural to the Supernatural: Discovering the Piegan People's World View," *Montana Naturalist*, Winter 2009/2010; and one on names, "What's In A Name?" *Montana Naturalist*, Spring/Summer 2015.

<sup>9</sup>Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S.H. Brown, eds., *The New People: Being and Becoming Métis*, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985.



Red River Métis and there are even published genealogies, so I will not go into any greater detail, except to say that some Métis moved to what is now Montana in the mid-nineteenth century and have a long and interesting history. The LaPier side of my family has been in Montana since the 1860s.<sup>10</sup>

Again, why does this matter? Because in today's world, let's be frank, people lie. They lie about who they are, they lie about belonging to Native peoples that they do not belong to, they lie about who their families are, or sometimes they simply exaggerate, and they often just don't tell the whole story. Because of this in today's world some scholars of Native peoples "require" that people identify their social position. Personally, I think that if someone states that they are Native, they should be prepared to "prove" it. I know that I can. I can recite my family tree. Pay me a few pennies and I will tell you.

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<sup>10</sup>I wrote two book chapters about the Métis in Montana, part of which is a history of my family: "Métis Life Along Montana's Front Range," in *Beyond ... The Shadows of the Rockies: History of the Augusta Area*, Augusta MT: Augusta Historical Society, 2007; and "Between Hay and Grass: A Brief History of Two Métis Communities in Central Montana." in William Furdell, ed., *Proceedings of the International Conference of Metis History and Culture*. Great Falls: University of Great Falls, 1997. I also wrote a magazine article: "Métis Miskihkiya: Métis Life in Montana," *Montana Naturalist*, Winter 2013-14, 4-5.

## **Validation**

The next question that almost invariably gets asked is to what extent was the data used for this study valid? Was it created by "outsiders" or "insiders"? Did the "outsiders" exploit the "insiders"? Or somehow not allow the insiders' voices to be heard through the cascade of "colonial" translations of oral interviews collected at the turn of the last century? Was this information potentially tainted by "alien linguistic and interpretive frames" as religious scholar Howard Harrod suggests?<sup>11</sup> Did they actually record the stories that the Piegan wanted "recorded for the record" as anthropologist John C. Ewers claims?<sup>12</sup> Is it ever possible for an outsider to retell the story of an insider? Contemporary scholars often question the ethnologists of the past. Some argue that it is the role of Native peoples to both "re-write" and "re-right" their community histories because these early ethnographers got it wrong.<sup>13</sup>

The Piegan are unique among other tribal groups because

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<sup>11</sup>Howard L. Harrod, *The Animals Came Dancing: Native American Sacred Ecology and Animal Kinship*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000, xx.

<sup>12</sup>John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>13</sup>Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 2nd ed., Zed Books, 2012, 28.

ethnologists recorded a significant amount of material during the early reservation period. It is not complete by any means. But it does provide scholars a foundation from which to begin to understand how the Piegan viewed their world. I argue that this ethnohistoric data is not only valid but extremely useful to contemporary historians and Native communities.

The ethnographic materials collected from the 1880s to the 1910s, and those collected in the early 1940s, have intrinsic value. Each storyteller from the buffalo days told stories from their life and drew upon their own experiences. The Piegan's understanding of the world was drawn from the experiences of their lives on the prairies. In addition to practical knowledge came a deeper understanding of the way they believed the world worked.

When the "buffalo Indians" settled onto the reservation their land base shrank and their lives became increasingly controlled by outside forces. However, these Piegan could control the information they left behind. They told the stories that they wanted recorded and that they viewed as important for future generations.

Because my research explores what people believed, I am interested in what religion scholars have said about the issue of using ethnographic data to uncover people's belief

systems. The religion historian Mircea Eliade argued that it was possible for scholars to use written ethnographic documents to reveal the inner life. He recognized that, "[The historian of religion] knows that he is condemned to work exclusively with historical documents, but at the same time he feels that these documents tell him *something more* than the simple fact that they reveal historical situations."<sup>14</sup> Eliade acknowledged that scholars can find value in ethnographic documents and that, "by attempting to understand the existential situations expressed by the documents...the historian of religions will inevitably attain a deeper knowledge of man."<sup>15</sup>

### ***Fact or Fiction?***

Some contemporary Native peoples are offended by the use of the words "myth" or "legend" to describe their "oral traditions." They sometimes view these words as condescending or even derogatory. Anthropologist Peter Nabokov commented that, "One often hears Indian old-timers and intellectuals grumbling that characterizing their

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<sup>14</sup>Mircea Eliade, "The Quest for the 'Origins' of Religions," *History of Religions*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (Summer, 1964): 169. My emphasis.

<sup>15</sup>Mircea Eliade, "History of Religions and A New Humanism," *History of Religions*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (Summer, 1961): 3.

indigenous histories as 'mythology' or 'folklore' suggests fabrication or simple-mindedness, and furthers the stereotype that they had no sense of history or that they made things up."<sup>16</sup> The problem as Nabakov describes it occurs because some Native people believe their stories to be true whereas scholars (or those studying Native peoples) believe their stories to be metaphor or fiction.

What did the Piegan think of stories? The Piegan recognized that there were different types of stories. Clark Wissler and David Duvall observed that in addition to "mythology" there was also "historical, military, adventurous, ceremonial, and other forms of narratives."<sup>17</sup> But what distinguished what Wissler called "mythology" from other types of stories? Wissler and Duvall observed that:

The attitude of the Blackfoot people toward these [mythological] narratives is difficult to reduce to accurate statement, but one gets the impression that they are often valued more for their aesthetic factors than otherwise. Yet the active elements of this mythology seem to function in mythical characters so firmly fixed in folk-thought, that each may be regarded as a reality. One also gets the impression, after some

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<sup>16</sup>Peter Nabokov, *A Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 53.

<sup>17</sup>Clark Wissler and D.C. Duvall, *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians. Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*. vol. 2, part 1. New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1908, 17. Wissler was an ethnographer from the American Museum of Natural History, who along with his Piegan collaborator David Duvall recorded more stories than any other early chronicler.

familiarity with the serious life of these people, that mythical characters are generally accorded the same reality as pertains to a deceased friend.<sup>18</sup>

In this dissertation I will use the word story (and sometimes history) to define narratives that most scholars would call "myth." Most of these stories would be considered "mythology" in the academy because they tell stories with supernatural elements. When Wissler explained that the Piegan viewed "mythical characters" as a "deceased friend," it should be noted what the Piegans believed about human death. They believed that a human's body dies and decomposes but their essence (soul) lives on. Referring to a dead ancestor does not mean the person is "dead and gone," it instead implies that the body is gone but the individual's essence lives on in another part of Piegan territory. Therefore what did the Piegan believe about their stories? They believed they were true stories of life in this universe. And therefore I will treat them as "true," as their version of what happened in the past. This may seem disconcerting to academic scholars to (presumably) suspend critical analysis. But that is not what I intend to do. Similar to acknowledging a Christian's belief in the Holy Trinity, without debunking their belief as "untrue," I will

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<sup>18</sup>Wissler and Duvall, *Mythology of the Blackfoot*, 17.

address Piegan stories in a similar vein, as part of their belief system and their historical record. It is their truth.

One final comment regarding phraseology. Some scholars such as A. Irving Hallowell do not use the word supernatural but instead prefer phrases like "other than human persons."<sup>19</sup> I find the phrase "other than human persons" too cumbersome and it fails to describe what the Piegan meant. Others, such as, Father Emile Legal framed reality using the words "visible" and "invisible."<sup>20</sup> Whereas the Piegan used prefixes that translated as "real" and "not real," the true meaning is more complicated than the translations. In an effort to avoid too much conflict and because they are easier to use, I will use the words "story," "natural" and "supernatural."

### ***Exploiting Grandma!***

One question that scholars argue over is whether it is possible for a researcher studying her own community to be

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<sup>19</sup>A. Irving Hallowell, "Ojibway Ontology, Behavior and World View," in *Culture in History* (ed. Stanley Diamond), New York: Columbia University Press, 1960.

<sup>20</sup>Father Emile Legal, O.M.I. *1885 Field Notes on Customs, Legends and Other Stories among the Blackfoot People*, trans. Maurice Goutier, O.M.I., Oblates of Mary Immaculate Papers, Provincial Museum of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

objective. So am I studying my own community? The answer is both no and yes. I would argue that I am not studying my own community. I am studying the community of my grandmother and grandfather and their parents. Histories often quote the L.P. Hartley phrase, "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there."<sup>21</sup> In this case I would argue that for my grandparents the past was a known country and the present became for them a foreign country. And for me it is the opposite. For me the Piegan past is a foreign country, a different world and not my community. When my grandparents grew up they spoke a different language, practiced a different religion, ate different foods, and had different customs than they had in the modern world. When I look at their past I am truly looking at a foreign world. So am I studying my own community? I would argue that I am studying the past of my community. And that past is a vastly different place than the present.

Throughout this dissertation I will include brief vignettes of my family's stories, mostly taken from recorded interviews with my grandmother. I have heard many of the stories over and over throughout my lifetime. So some of the stories will be from my own memory. I paid my grandmother

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<sup>21</sup>L.P. Hartley was a British novelist who wrote this phrase at the beginning of his 1953 novel *The Go-Between*, New York Review Books Series, 2002, 17.



each and every time I interviewed her as that is the appropriate thing to do. The Piegan believe that knowledge can be and should be bought and sold. Similar to the "sacred economy" that historian William Farr accurately describes regarding religious knowledge, the Piegan also believed in an economy of pedestrian knowledge.<sup>22</sup> Then regarding the question am I "using" or "exploiting" grandma? Revealing her "sacred knowledge?" The answer is no.

***What is the historic time period of study?***

Time is an essential component in the study of history. However, time in Piegan society is a complex concept and different from the western concept of time. This should not imply that the Piegan did not have a concept of the passage of time.<sup>23</sup> However for my purposes, there are essentially two "time periods" that this dissertation addresses: one is the time from about the 1880s to the 1910s; and the other is the time when the stories (used in this study) might have occurred.

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<sup>22</sup>William E. Farr, "Troubled Bundles, Troubled Blackfeet: The Travail of Cultural and Religious Renewal," *Montana the Magazine of Western History*. (Autumn 1993): 2-17.

<sup>23</sup>Clark Wissler, "Reckoning Time," in "The Social Life of the Blackfoot Indians," *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*. vol. 7, part 1. New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1911, 44-50.

The time period from the early 1880s to the 1910s could be considered the early reservation era for the Piegan. The bison disappeared from the northern Great Plains in the early 1880s. In the winter of 1883/84 the Piegan suffered a brutal blow to their society with the starvation of hundreds of citizens. As a signpost of Piegan history the "starvation winter" as it was called stands out as a critical moment. From that time on, with the loss of bison and loss of population, the Piegan would never be the same. At the other end of this time period is the 1910s. Although this time period roughly coincides with the Progressive Era, much of what occurred on the Blackfeet reservation for the typical tribal citizen is separate from elements of American history. Modern American history intersected with Piegan history in 1910 with the creation of Glacier National Park. The Park changed the Blackfeet reservation dramatically on several levels, including economically and culturally, and it marks the beginning of a new era of Piegan history.

The primary data for this dissertation are the stories collected by the early chroniclers of Piegan life. These stories were collected primarily from the 1880s to 1910s and in the 1940s. The early chroniclers of Piegan life focused their attentions on one type of interviewee or collaborator - an individual who had lived most of his or her life during

the days of the buffalo. These early chroniclers of Piegan life were not interested in recording the lives of individuals who were born and raised on the reservation with no knowledge of a nomadic lifestyle. From the 1880s to the 1910s a variety of people came to the reservation to record Piegan experiences of the past. These chroniclers were not recording experiences of the present (such as reservation life) but they wanted to know what life was like during the buffalo days and before. Even John C. Ewers, who came in the early 1940s, only interviewed people who he viewed as having that unique historic experience of life out on the northern Great Plains. So although the time period under consideration here is the 1880s into the 1910s, my focus during these years is on the memories of a select group of individuals. Those who came of age before the reservation era began, and told their stories to the chroniclers who came to visit them, and to their children - my family members - are at the center of my historical narrative.

The second time period of this study, and the most difficult to define, is the actual time when these stories provided by the "buffalo Indians" may have occurred in the past. Most of these first person narratives often do not speak of chronological time but speak instead of the ancient past or the ancient Piegan. These narratives include

historical accounts, life histories, mythical stories, descriptions of daily life and songs. On many occasions the collaborators were answering a specific question of the researcher. On other occasions they were just telling stories. It was not until the mid-twentieth century with the ethnohistoric work of John C. Ewers that there was a sustained questioning of individual Piegan about a wide variety of topics. Religious scholar Howard Harrod, who first came to the Blackfeet reservation in the summer of 1963 to work on his dissertation, also struggled with this issue of time and evidence. He also used some of the same primary source data that I am using for this study. In his last book, *The Animals Came Dancing*, Harrod commented that:

These memories were recorded by anthropologists and other observers.... These memories sometimes connect to traditions that may be deeper than the time frame of this study. For example, those who were alive in 1910 and who were sixty years old were born in 1850. These people lived during the last stages of the buffalo days and learned the traditions of their parents, who, if they were thirty years old in 1850, would have been born in 1820. If the grandparents were alive in 1820 and they happened to be sixty years old or older, they would have been born in the 1750s or 1760s. It is evident that the chain of memory and transmission of oral traditions could be even older.... What is sedimented in the ethnographies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then, are oral traditions that have been reduced to texts.... mediated through the alien linguistic and interpretive frames of European observers.... Nevertheless, these early memories, captured in texts, provide a rich resource for reconstructing a portrait of past cultural

meanings.<sup>24</sup>

For the most part the Piegan did not render their stories in chronological time. But that does not mean that they did not understand the passage of time and use it as a measurement between events or activities. There are many examples to choose from that express this idea. Beaver bundle owners kept a yearly calendar of wooden sticks decorated with notches with each notch representing a day.<sup>25</sup> Prominent men kept a yearly record of their lives painted on buffalo robes called winter counts.<sup>26</sup> Within their documented narratives specific historic events also became guide posts for telling about when an event occurred. However, mythologies and other stories usually did not have specific historic time beyond stating that it was from the ancient past or that it was a story of the ancient Piegan. Harrod concluded, in *Renewing the World: Plains Indian Religion and Morality*, that, "In the final analysis,

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<sup>24</sup>Howard L. Harrod, *The Animals Came Dancing: Native American Sacred Ecology and Animal Kinship*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000, xix-xx.

<sup>25</sup>John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958, 89.

<sup>26</sup>L. James Dempsey, *Blackfoot War Art: Pictographs of the Reservation Period, 1880-2000*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007, 25-63.

however, we do not need to know with certainty the age or the evolutionary trajectory of the traditions which we confront in the mid-nineteenth century in order to appreciate their depth and symbolic power."<sup>27</sup>

### ***Place, Space, Bio-region?***

The next question to address is what place will be studied. As with time there are different concepts of place depending on the perspective. For the Piegan place was not necessarily a physical space. Place for the Piegan existed in multiple realms of reality. These ideas of place are discussed in greater detail throughout this dissertation. However, the Piegan did have an idea about geopolitical territory and its boundaries, and so did their neighbors. It was their neighbors who defined for the United States government in the Fort Laramie treaty of 1851 where the Blackfoot claimed their territory to be. A few years later the U.S. government sent representatives into the heart of Piegan territory to negotiate a peace treaty with the various branches of the Blackfoot, resulting in Lane Bull's treaty in 1855.

For the purposes of this dissertation I am examining

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<sup>27</sup>Howard L. Harrod, *Renewing the World: Plains Indian Religion and Morality*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987, 20.

the Piegan as they existed in the mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Therefore the territorial boundaries of Blackfoot country as they were outlined in the Fort Laramie treaty and Lane Bull's treaty provide an adequate definition of place for the purposes of this study.<sup>28</sup> (See map in Appendix A.) Various treaties and agreements during the latter half of the nineteenth century shrunk the Blackfoot homeland to its final boundaries of the current Blackfeet reservation outlined in 1896. By the time of my study the U.S. defined the Piegan and their territory as what would be considered a geopolitical "state." And the U.S. treated the South Piegan like a nation state.

So far I have described "place" in relation to the people who live there. However, the Piegan of the mid-nineteenth century lived in what is now called the northern Great Plains, which is an ecologically diverse region of North America with a long environmental history. The Piegan

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<sup>28</sup>"The territory of the Blackfoot Nation, commencing at the mouth of Muscle-shell River; thence up the Missouri River to its source; thence along the main range of the Rocky Mountains, in a southerly direction, to the head-waters of the northern source of the Yellowstone River; thence down the Yellowstone River to the mouth of Twenty-five Yard Creek; thence across to the head-waters of the Muscle-shell River, and thence down the Muscle-shell River to the place of beginning." Article 5, Treaty of Fort Laramie With Sioux, Etc., Sept. 17, 1851, in Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Vol. II*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904, 595.

referred to themselves as the *Saokio-tapi* or the Prairie People, which reveals something of where they believed their place to be within this region. Although their territory could be examined as a bioregion, by the mid-to-late-nineteenth century both the landscape and the people were survivors (and continued to be victims) of a century-long assault on their existence.<sup>29</sup>

### ***What is in a name?***

The first question that most people ask in relation to a study like this is - what do you call "them" - Blackfeet or Blackfoot? It is a common question. And it has a relatively easy answer. The key word here is relatively. Most scholars of the *Blackfoot* use the term "Blackfoot" to describe the entire confederacy of four contemporary tribal groups: the Siksika (or Blackfoot), the Kainai (or Blood), the Apatohsi Pikuni (or north Peigan) and the Amskapi Pikuni (or south Piegan or Piegan). To add a bit of confusion the north Peigan and the south Piegan spell their names differently, Peigan in Canada versus Piegan in the U.S. Some scholars argue that these two contemporary groups were once

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<sup>29</sup>"Bioregion" considers looking at places via their "deep time, cross-cultural, environmental histories." Dan Flores, "Place: An Argument for Bioregional History." *Environmental History Review* 18(Winter 1994): 1-18.



one group, others believe they were always two groups. For my purposes I will treat them as two separate but related groups. Today the international boundary between what is now Canada and the United States splits these four groups, with three now in Canada and only one in the U.S. This dissertation will primarily address the Amskapi Pikuni or South Piegan who live in what is now the United States.

In the past, the Blackfoot divided themselves into smaller groups called bands. Bands were autonomous groups of 200-300 people, usually related to each other but not necessarily. They were exogamous. Because of this a family could have relatives or kinship relationships with multiple bands. For example, my maternal grandparents were products of an arranged marriage, which was common in the old days. My grandfather's family were members of the Skunks band and my grandmother's family were members of the Never Laughs band. And their parents were members of different bands. Chroniclers of Blackfoot life in the late nineteenth century documented between 15 and 25 different bands in each of the four main tribal groups that made up the Blackfoot.

Therefore, although scholars usually spoke of the Blackfoot as a monolithic group (and they still do today), in reality in the nineteenth century they represented between 60 and 100 separate autonomous bands. These bands

lived within Blackfoot territory across the northern Great Plains. Viewed this way there was much greater diversity of peoples than if they are viewed as one large group. It is easier for most scholars to over-simplify these dynamics of tribal relationships and band identification and just call everyone "Blackfoot." Since I am researching only one group - the *Amskapi Pikuni* - also called the South Piegan or Piegan or now the Blackfeet, and not all of the Blackfoot, I will center my terminology on this one group.

However, when John C. Ewers wrote his book *The Blackfeet: Raiders of the Northwestern Plains* in the 1940s, he asked the tribal council which name he should use - Blackfeet or Piegan. Ewers noted that most of the tribal council wanted to call themselves by their ancestral name, "Piegan." However, they concluded that since their new constitution stated that their official name was the "Blackfeet," Ewers should use the name Blackfeet in the title of his book.<sup>30</sup> At that time, the South Piegan had only recently voted to officially change their ancestral name to the Blackfeet with the passage of their Indian Reorganization Act constitution in 1935.

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<sup>30</sup>John C. Ewers, Series XIV, Box 1, December 2, 1943, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

Still, the question remains: which name should be used, Blackfoot or Blackfeet? For the purposes of my dissertation I will use several names. Since this dissertation explores life mostly before 1935, I will use the name they used at that time which was the *Amskapi Pikuni* or South Piegan or Piegan. I will use the word "Blackfoot" to describe the entire confederacy of all four tribal groups known during the nineteenth century and the individual tribal group names when necessary. I will use individual band names when known. Finally, I will use the word "Blackfeet" to describe the reservation and its people within the United States.

### **What Scholars Want to Know!?**

Academic scholars concern themselves with exploring different interpretations of historical events, people, places or times. They are interested in new knowledge and new interpretations. Fortunately, the Piegan are one of the most studied tribal groups in the United States, which means there is a lot of great stuff written about the Piegan. And unfortunately, the Piegan are one of the most studied tribal groups in the United States, which means there is a lot of bad stuff written about the Piegan. There are numerous published and unpublished books and manuscripts and archival materials for scholars to use as sources from first contact

to the present.<sup>31</sup> Contemporary historians use these materials to write new histories of the Blackfoot or to reinterpret what has already been written. I will be doing the same.

Despite the fact that probably hundreds of dissertations, manuscripts, articles and books have been written about the Piegan - none has focused on their unique view of nature and the environment. I will not argue that this dissertation is a new interpretation of previous scholarship. However what it does reflect is the uncovering of missed or mis-interpreted information recorded about the Piegan. In this dissertation I explore Piegan beliefs about nature and the environment. The Piegan believed they could "change" and/or "control" nature to suit their needs, with the assistance or alliance of the supernatural. The Piegan did not believe they had to "adapt" to nature, they made nature adapt to them. How do we know this? They told us in their stories.

The Piegan began telling outsiders stories from first contact. But these stories were not systematically recorded until the late 1800s and early 1900s. One common theme that

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<sup>31</sup>Hugh A. Dempsey and Lindsay Moir, *Bibliography of the Blackfoot*. Native American Bibliography Series, No. 13. Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 1989. Of course, scholars have written a lot more in the last quarter century.

all these stories share is that nature does not work the way westerners think it works. Set against this is another story: by the early 1900s the Piegan were suffering within a reservation system where they did not control the economy, the educational system or even their own religion. The Piegan did have control over one thing, the stories they told, of a life, a past where they did have control - over nature. And interestingly, even in these most devastating of times, they adapted to their new circumstances and continued to exert control over nature.

I rely primarily on information collected at the turn of the twentieth century by ethnologists or other chroniclers of Piegan life. The majority of these individuals relied on Piegan interpreters who either interviewed knowledgeable Piegan people or who were knowledgeable themselves. Although my dissertation focuses on Piegan beliefs, I also examine the historical context of when chroniclers of Piegan life collected their information(during the Progressive Era), the role of the ethnographers in tribal communities (the storytakers) and the Piegan interpreters (the storytellers.) In addition to this I also include short vignettes of family stories, of life during the beginning of the twentieth century and life on the reservation. I believe that it is difficult to fully

understand Piegan history without understanding how the  
Piegan understood the invisible supernatural world and how  
they, as humans, interacted with this reality and  
simultaneously with the visible natural environment.

## Chapter Two

### THE PIEGAN RESERVATION IN 1910

*My grandmother's mother Minnie was born in 1889, a year after the Piegan signed an executive agreement to sell the Sweet Grass Hills, the eastern portion of their original homelands, to the U.S. government.<sup>1</sup> This was the same year that Montana gained statehood. Unlike her ancestors and the previous generation Minnie grew up in a new land. Minnie grew up in America. Her family knew her only as Iko'tsimiskimaki.<sup>2</sup> She received her name from her grandfather Spotted Bear. He named her after one of the supernatural objects in his medicine bundle. However, she became known as Minnie to others.*

*Much like an immigrant to a new land Minnie learned*

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<sup>1</sup>"An act to ratify and confirm an agreement with the Gros Ventre, Piegan Blood, Blackfeet, and River Crow Indians in Montana, and for other purposes," May 1, 1888, in Charles Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904. And also in Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 304. More than 200 Piegan men signed the executive agreement in February, 1888, to sell the Sweet Grass Hills, an area of strategic political value and religious significance.

<sup>2</sup>Her name is often translated as *Red Shell Woman*, but a more literal translation is Salmon-colored supernatural fossilized shell woman. See my article on names, "What's In A Name?" *Montana Naturalist*, Spring/Summer, 2015.

*about America at school. Minnie attended the Methodist Willow Creek School on the reservation as a child. She became a part of the first generation of Piegan children to learn to read, write and speak English. At home, though, she continued to speak Piegan. At school she learned about life in America, patriotism and Victorian values. She learned to celebrate the Fourth of July and George Washington's birthday.*

*She left the reservation to attend Fort Shaw Indian School for high school. There she learned a new set of skills to carry out her new American identity. She learned to garden and grow vegetables, to can fruit and to cook new American foods like bread. She learned how to use a sewing machine to make her own clothing. She learned how to crochet and embroider. She looks young, confident and contemporary with her long hair upswept in a bun wearing a crisp sailor-inspired school uniform in her school photo taken just after the turn of the century.*

*The hope of her school teachers, for her to begin an American family after finishing school, grew to be her hope as well. Not long after she returned home from boarding school she married Elmer Mad Plume. Father J.B. Carroll officiated at the Holy Family Mission on the Two Medicine*



river.<sup>3</sup> Both of their large extended families lived on the south side of the reservation where Elmer and his brothers were farmers. Together they embodied the new Piegan citizen, educated with American values and living the newly acquired American agrarian lifestyle. They were now part of the first generation of Piegans to begin using first names, Elmer and Minnie, and a last name, Mad Plume. Within a few short years they started their family.

A cherished family photo taken around 1910 exemplified their transformation. Minnie, still confident, appeared vogue in an overflowing lace blouse, long wool skirt and a stylish hairdo of the times. Next to her is her husband Elmer looking dapper in his modern suit, shirt, tie and dress shoes. His hair was cut short and slicked back. Their two young children appear healthy and happy. Their daughter Ella was wearing a frilly dress with stockings and boots. She was holding a china head doll with blond curly hair. Their son Philip, with his hair cut short, was wearing another frilly dress, one of his sister's (as the family story goes) because his suit got soiled. As their photo demonstrates, gone were any outward vestiges of a tribal heritage. By the early <sup>twentieth</sup> century the modern American

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<sup>3</sup>Roxanne DeMarce, ed., *Blackfeet Heritage, 1907-1908*, Browning: Blackfeet Heritage Program, 1980, 162.

world was calling and many Piegan tried their best to adhere to that call.

Unfortunately tragedy struck, in 1915 Minnie died in childbirth. Her newborn son Andrew died soon after. She was only 26 years old. She left behind several young children that her husband Elmer would be unable to take care of. Various family members would adopt and raise her children. Her husband Elmer meanwhile remarried not long after.

My grandmother's maternal grandmother Not Real Beaver Woman and her great-grandmother Big Mountain Lion Woman adopted her. She was only one and a half years old. Her two grandmothers' old-time Piegan ways replaced Minnie's modern American ways. In her grandmothers' home modernity was nowhere to be found. Her grandmothers wore hand-made moccasins, modest calico dresses, thick leather belts off of which hung their various tools, wool shawls and their long braids tied up and covered with colorful scarves. They rode horses. They lived in tents most of the year and spent most of their days outside. They hunted and gathered their food in the mountains in the summer. They processed and dried their provisions in the fall. They moved down river after they cut enough wood for the winter. They moved indoors into a cabin without running water or electricity during the cold months of the winter. They celebrated the beginning of the

*Piegán new year in the spring with the Thunder-pipe ceremony. Then they started the whole cycle again.*

*As my grandmother grew up she understood that the life of her mother Minnie and the lives of her grandmothers were dramatically different. Unlike her mother before her, my grandmother never quite made the transition to assuming American values or lifestyle. How could she? But she did learn one thing, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July was the biggest day of the year.*

#### **Fourth of July, 1910**

By 1910 an entire generation of Piegán had been born, raised and lived into adulthood on the reservation. It had been more than 25 years since any of the old men had gone bison hunting or since any of the old women made objects from fresh bison hides. The older generation's transition to life on the reservation had not been easy. Adam White Man told John Ewers that "the Piegán were still buffalo hunters and the bands had not settled down" until after the demise of the bison and sale of the Sweet Grass Hills in the mid-1880s.<sup>4</sup> However reservation life was the only life that

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<sup>4</sup>John Ewers interview with Adam White Man, interpreted by Louis Bear Child, Sept. 7, 1951, "Blackfeet Political Organization #1, Piegán Bands," Series XIV, Box 4, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution,

their children knew. As the older Piegan settled into reservation life they learned that their lives would become increasingly controlled by outside forces.

In the 1910 issue of *The Indian Sentinel*, the annual periodical of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, Father J.B. Carroll wrote a scathing attack on the religious persistence of the Piegan people titled "The Fourth of July Dishonored."<sup>5</sup> In his article Carroll described how the Piegan had co-opted the Fourth of July and incorporated within this patriotic celebration of "national greatness" the "darkest days of heathenism and bloodshed."<sup>6</sup> Carroll fervently wrote that the Piegan had been using the Fourth of July festivities as a way to also celebrate their outlawed annual *O'kan* or medicine lodge ceremony.<sup>7</sup>

The *O'kan* was the Piegan's annual summer gathering that was both secular and religious. The Piegan had held it for generations in the late summer, usually in August or

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Washington, DC.

<sup>5</sup>Father J.B. Carroll married my great-grandparents at Holy Family Mission.

<sup>6</sup>J.B. Carroll, S.J., "The Fourth of July Dishonored," *The Indian Sentinel*, New York: Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, 1910, 28. In this article Father Carroll correctly called the Blackfeet, "the South Piëgan Indians."

<sup>7</sup>*O'kan* is often translated as "sun dance" or "medicine lodge." However, neither phrase is a literal translation.

September.<sup>8</sup> However this gathering and other religious activities had been controlled or curtailed by the U.S. government in the late nineteenth century and during the early reservation years. With the introduction of the Fourth of July as a national holiday sanctioned by the U.S. government the Piegan moved their annual gathering from the late summer to mid summer without risking significant governmental resistance.<sup>9</sup> Carroll saw through this ruse. He angrily wrote that the Piegan "way of celebrating the Fourth of July [was] one of the greatest obstacles to Christianity and true civilization."<sup>10</sup> Instead of placing all the blame with the Piegan however, Carroll believed that "the Government [was] greatly responsible" for allowing the situation to occur in the first place.<sup>11</sup> Carroll argued that the U.S. government, which was trying to "civilize" the Piegan, actually contributed to the perpetuation of their

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<sup>8</sup>The most complete study of the *O'kan* is found in Clark Wissler's, "The Sun Dance of the Blackfoot Indians," *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, vol. 16, part 3, New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1918. He conducted his research on the *O'kan* beginning in the summer of 1903.

<sup>9</sup>Wissler commented that in the past the *O'kan* was held, "'when the service berries are ripe', perhaps August, instead of Fourth-of-July week, as in recent years." Wissler, "Sun Dance," 1918, 231.

<sup>10</sup>Carroll, "The Fourth of July Dishonored," 29.

<sup>11</sup>Carroll, "The Fourth of July Dishonored," 32.

religious activities by not restricting their existence. Carroll also pointed out their two different roles, the government was to civilize, and the Catholic church was to convert. The local businesses made money during the celebration so they had no desire to end it either.

The U.S. government did not introduce the Fourth of July to the Piegan until after the 1880s when the Piegan stopped hunting bison in the summer. Beginning in 1882 the Piegan stayed put on the reservation, occasionally leaving to raid for horses, but the whole community never left again for hunting.<sup>12</sup> In the summer of 1880 the government agent used the Fourth of July holiday as a time to distribute rewards to individual Piegan for completing civilization projects such as building log cabins and starting small family gardens. However, even though there were efforts to stop the practice, the agent in 1880 also reported that the Piegan still conducted their *O'kan* in August.<sup>13</sup>

The new town of Browning embraced the annual Fourth of July and the *O'kan* celebration because the traders enjoyed its economic boom. Piegan from all across the reservation

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<sup>12</sup>United States, *Office of Indian Affairs Annual report of the commissioner of Indian affairs, for the year 1882*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1882, 98-100.

<sup>13</sup>United States, *Office of Indian Affairs Annual report of the commissioner of Indian affairs, for the year 1880*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880, 105-107.

and Canada came to town to partake in the celebration. Father Carroll even commented that, "The town puts on a very lively appearance. The streets, stores, hotels, and other public places are alive."<sup>14</sup> The Browning Mercantile sold 100 loaves of bread per day and dozens of cases of fresh fruit during the week of celebration.<sup>15</sup> With the business people happy, including the railroad that was transporting goods from the west side of the mountains and Washington state, the U.S. government was not going to challenge the character of the celebration.

Father Carroll lamented the inability of the U.S. government to create cultural change within this economic boom. Ironically, that same summer the U.S. government, through the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE), a branch within the Smithsonian Institution, sent out a government paid linguist to photograph and record the stories of the *O'kan* and to document the language of the Piegan. Dr. Truman Michelson arrived in Browning, the agency headquarters, in mid-June and stayed until mid-July.<sup>16</sup> His mission was to

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<sup>14</sup>Carroll, "The Fourth of July Dishonored," 29.

<sup>15</sup>Browning Mercantile Company records, 1907-1927, Box 1, Manuscript Collection 230, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana.

<sup>16</sup>Truman Michelson Papers, MS 2823, 2826, and 2827, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

conduct a survey of all the Algonquian languages within the United States for the BAE. The Piegan represented one group within his survey. He hired a local translator and interviewed various old people, those who had lived when the bison still roamed the Great Plains. During his month of research he was able to collect a significant number of stories and songs.

Michelson though was not the only scientist or interested outsider to come that summer. As Carroll observed, "train loads of...white people...flow[ed] into Browning...to see the Indians dance."<sup>17</sup> Among those were the Dutch linguist C.C. Uhlenbeck, who came for the entire summer of 1910 with his graduate student J.P.B. De Josselin De Jong, to also document the Piegan language.<sup>18</sup> Railroad tycoon Louis W. Hill sent Chicago artist Joseph Scheuerle to

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<sup>17</sup>Carroll, "The Fourth of July Dishonored," 30.

<sup>18</sup>They published over a dozen articles and manuscripts on the Piegan language (see bibliography) from the summers 1910 and 1911 field work including Piegan stories based on interviews with the Piegan, including: C.C. Uhlenbeck, *Original Blackfoot Texts from the Southern Piegans Blackfoot Reservation, Teton County, Montana*, Verhandelingen Der Koninklijke Akademie Van Wetenschappen Te Amsterdam, 1911; C.C. Uhlenbeck. *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts from the Southern Piegans Blackfoot Reservation, Teton County, Montana*, Verhandelingen Der Koninklijke Akademie Van Wetenschappen Te Amsterdam, 1912; and J.P. De Josselin De Jong, *Blackfoot Texts From the Southern Piegan Reservation Teton County Montana with the Help of Black-Horse-Rider Collected and Published with an English Translation*, Amsterdam: Johannes Muller, 1914.



paint portraits of the pre-reservation Piegan and natural scenes from the newly created Glacier National Park for his "See America First" campaign for the Great Northern Railroad.<sup>19</sup> And the summer before in 1909 the famed photographer Edward Curtis and anthropologist A.C. Haddon came to photograph and interview the Piegan.<sup>20</sup> In the summer of 1910 the Piegan were fortunate to be able to relive the old days and sell their stories, songs and portraits to this odd variety of people converging on the reservation.

Carroll viewed the *O'kan* as more than a tourist attraction. He saw its pernicious potential. He complained that the federal government did not stop the Piegan from "publicly parad[ing] their devilish idolatry and superstition for the admiration and amusement of a large audience of white people."<sup>21</sup> Looking back from the twenty-first century Carroll's commentary may seem ethnocentric or even racist, however his observations of Piegan life were essentially correct. Despite 25 years of reservation life and U.S. government control of their affairs, the church and

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<sup>19</sup>Jennifer Bottomly-O'Looney, "Sitting Proud: The Indian Portraits of Joseph Scheuerle," *Montana The Magazine of Western History*, Autumn 2008, (Vol. 58, No. 3): 68.

<sup>20</sup>Mick Gidley, ed., *Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indian Project in the Field*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003, 71-72.

<sup>21</sup>Carroll, "The Fourth of July Dishonored," 30.

the government were only beginning to change the inner life of the Piegan.

And unlike these temporary sojourners into Piegan country it was Carroll who lived with the Piegan every day for years who better understood their character. Carroll had seen the *O'kan* practiced many times and he knew that it served multiple purposes. In many ways the *O'kan* was like a Passion Play. It was the enactment of several stories that tell the larger story of the history of the *O'kan* itself. These stories described the relationships and kinships between humans and supernatural deities. Its fundamental purpose for individual Piegan, though, was "blessing the people."<sup>22</sup> Individuals or families gave offerings to the "sun priests" who in turn made "appeals to the sun," the greatest of Piegan deities, to "promote well-being."<sup>23</sup> Ethnohistorian Clark Wissler pointed out correctly, that "There was a feeling that an annual sun dance was, from a religious and ethical point of view, *necessary to the general welfare*" of the community.<sup>24</sup> Carroll though saw it as usurping the Church's authority to "bless" people which

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<sup>22</sup>Wissler, "Sun Dance," 1918, 259.

<sup>23</sup>Wissler, "Sun Dance," 1918, 260.

<sup>24</sup>Wissler, "Sun Dance," 1918, 232. My emphasis.

carried the weight of God's favor.<sup>25</sup>

Ultimately Carroll tried to express that the *O'kan* did something else as well, it told a story of the past, when the Piegan (with the help of the supernatural) had control of their own destiny.

### **Creation of the Reservation**

The U.S. government created the Piegan reservation in what is now Montana during the late nineteenth century with a series of executive orders. Prior to the reservation Blackfoot territory consisted of the majority of what is now Montana and what is now the province of Alberta in Canada.<sup>26</sup> The U.S. recognized that the territory of the Blackfoot confederacy extended from the North Saskatchewan river in the north to the Yellowstone river in the south and from the Rocky Mountains in the west to the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers in the east.<sup>27</sup> Within this vast territory emerged four distinct groups, the Siksika,

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<sup>25</sup>Patrick Morrisroe, "Blessing," *The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 2*, New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907. <<http://www.newadvent.org/>>.

<sup>26</sup>The Blackfoot or Blackfoot confederacy is the term used when referring to the four tribal groups, the Siksika, Kainai, Pikuni, and the Inaxix.

<sup>27</sup>Charles J. Kappler, ed., "Treaty with the Blackfeet, 1855," *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Vol. II*, Washington : Government Printing Office, 1904.

Kainai, Pikuni, and the Inaxix. They were affiliated by a common language, as well as political, social and religious practices.<sup>28</sup> No one knows for sure how long these groups existed as distinct groups before contact. Archaeologists argue that Native peoples have lived on the Northern Great Plains for thousands of years.<sup>29</sup>

First contact with European men occurred in this region in the seventeenth century. However significant demographic change and dislocation did not occur until the nineteenth century with the arrival of Americans. Throughout this time relationships with other tribal groups were just as detrimental as those with Europeans and Americans.<sup>30</sup> The most devastating was when the Crow tribe annihilated the Inaxix during an inter-tribal war in 1846. The few Inaxix who survived became incorporated into the other Blackfoot

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<sup>28</sup>George Catlin, *North American Indians*, New York: Penguin Books, 2004, 51. In "Letter No. 8" during the summer of 1832 artist George Catlin identified four distinct groups, the "Pe-a-gans, Blackfoot, Blood and Small Robes."

<sup>29</sup>Jack Brink, *Imagining Head Smashed In: Aboriginal Buffalo Hunting on the Northern Plains*, Edmonton: Athabaska Press, 2008.

<sup>30</sup>Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001. And Theodore Binnema, "Allegiances and Interests: Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) Trade, Diplomacy, and Warfare, 1806-1831," *Western Historical Quarterly* 37 (2006): 327-49.

groups.<sup>31</sup> The Pikuni or Piegan split into two separate groups, one group settling in what is now Canada and the other in the U.S. around this time. By the signing of the 1855 Lame Bull treaty, the U.S. recognized four distinct groups, the Siksika, Kainai, and north Peigan in Canada and the south Piegan in the U.S.<sup>32</sup>

The 1855 Lame Bull treaty with the Blackfoot was not a treaty for land. It was primarily a treaty to define the boundaries or territories of tribes in what would become Montana, to negotiate peace between these groups and to allow safe passage for American troops. The 1855 Lame Bull treaty defined Piegan land in the U.S. as west of the Rocky Mountains, north of the Musselshell and Missouri rivers, and up to the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel.<sup>33</sup> However after lines were drawn on paper it provided the U.S. an opportunity to begin to diminish Piegan territory and acquire land.

The territory defined in the 1855 treaty was a large

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<sup>31</sup>Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 188.

<sup>32</sup>Charles J. Kappler, ed., "Treaty with the Blackfeet, 1855," *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Vol. II*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904. And Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 212. Lame Bull's treaty was the last in a series of treaties negotiated by Washington Governor Issac Stevens in 1855. As a group they are often referred to as the Stevens treaties.

<sup>33</sup>Charles J. Kappler, ed., "Treaty with the Blackfeet, 1855," *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Vol. II*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904.

expanse of land on the northern Great Plains that encompassed a wide variety of ecosystems including dry and arid prairies, fertile river valleys, rich prairie oases like the Sweet Grass Hills or the Bear Paw Mountains, the foothills of the Rocky Mountains and the alpine of the Rocky Mountains. The Piegan used all of these places to acquire the animals, plants and other natural elements they needed to live their lives. Unfortunately as the nineteenth century progressed and with each treaty and executive order the Piegan lost land within their traditional homelands. With the loss of land and corresponding rich natural resources the Piegan had to adjust to an ever shrinking landscape and develop a new relationship with nature and the environment.

Not long after the Stevens treaties, trespassing miners found gold in the "common hunting grounds," that treaties had set aside. This precipitated a quick move towards Montana becoming a territory in 1864 and the rush of miners into the region. In 1865 the U.S. government negotiated a treaty with the Blackfoot confederacy to acquire the lands in the "common hunting grounds." This treaty was never ratified. Again, in 1868 the U.S. government negotiated the same treaty for the same lands. And again, the treaty was not ratified. By then the region included Montana

Territory's three largest towns, of Bannock, Helena and Virginia City. Even though the U.S. did not ratify the treaties Americans nonetheless illegally occupied the land. But from their perspective the Piegan thought they had signed two treaties and they expected to be paid.<sup>34</sup>

Within the next few decades the Piegan lands continued to shrink. And although they were never removed from their traditional homelands their territory became smaller and smaller. The U.S. next reduced Piegan lands from the south with an Act of Congress in 1874.<sup>35</sup> With this Act the U.S. moved the reservation boundary north from the Musselshell and Missouri rivers to Birch creek and Marias rivers. (The boundary had been previously moved to the Teton river in the 1860s with the two unratified treaties.) This created the southern boundary of the current reservation. In 1877 the Canadian government signed Treaty 7 with the Canadian Blackfoot tribes. By 1878 this left only the "Southern" Piegan living in the U.S.<sup>36</sup>

With the extinction of the wild bison on the northern

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<sup>34</sup>Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 241, 245.

<sup>35</sup>The U.S. stopped making treaties with tribes in 1871. After this most land cessions were one-sided deals.

<sup>36</sup>United States, *Office of Indian Affairs Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian affairs, for the year 1878*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1878.

Great Plains and the corresponding "starvation winter" of 1883 and 1884 the Piegan became confined to their shrunken land base in north central Montana.<sup>37</sup> After the discovery of gold and the influx of illegal miners to the Sweet Grass Hills, in the winter of 1888 the U.S. returned for the eastern portion of Piegan lands. The U.S. moved the eastern reservation boundary from just east of the Sweet Grass Hills all the way west to Cut Bank creek. Although the Piegan referred to themselves as "the Prairie People" they now lived pushed up against the Rocky Mountain Front.<sup>38</sup>

Finally in 1896 the U.S. returned to negotiate for the western portion of Piegan lands, again believing that they would find gold and minerals in the mountains. (Part of this land eventually became Glacier National Park.) With this last executive order the U.S. fixed the outside modern day boundaries of the reservation when the boundary moved from the continental divide east to the foothills of the mountains. Although the exterior boundaries of the reservation would remain the same throughout the twentieth century, the U.S. reduced the communally held lands again

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<sup>37</sup>United States, *Office of Indian Affairs Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian affairs, for the Year 1884*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1884.

<sup>38</sup>United States, *Office of Indian Affairs Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian affairs, for the Year 1886*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1886, 171.



with the allotment of farm and ranch lands to individual tribal members from 1907 to 1912.<sup>39</sup>

It was no coincidence that the government negotiated settlements removing land from Piegan ownership roughly ten years apart from the 1850s to the 1910s. Each agreement (except allotment) included a stipulation that the U.S. would pay the Piegan over a ten-year time schedule. The U.S. paid the Piegan each year for ten years with goods and services for the land they ceded. But with each successive agreement, from the 1850s to 1860s to 1870s to 1880s and finally in the 1890s, the economic self-sufficiency and stability of the Piegan became more precarious. They simply needed the commodities provided in exchange for the sale of their lands in order to survive.

### **New Economy**

Beginning with the 1855 Stevens treaty the U.S. agreed to pay the Blackfoot each year for 10 years for peace on the prairies. The U.S. did not pay the Blackfoot with money. They instead paid the Blackfoot with goods, such as fabric or blankets, or with services, such as a teacher for the children. These were called annuity payments because the

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<sup>39</sup>Ewers, *The Blackfeet*. 273, 306, 313, and 318. And Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*.

U.S. government paid them on an annual basis. After the 1855 treaty the U.S. government began to make annuity payments on the Missouri river at the mouth of the Judith river.<sup>40</sup> This was one of the first disruptions to the seasonal cycle of the Piegan. Instead of being out hunting or gathering in preparation for winter, they now had to stop at Judith Landing in the fall of each year to pick up their payment. In the 1860s the U.S. made annuity payments at Fort Benton further up the Missouri river. And by the 1870s the U.S. made annuity payments at reservation agency headquarters, first on the Teton river and then on Badger creek.

Initially members of all four Blackfoot groups came for their share of the payment. Piegan leader Three Calf described to ethnohistorian John Ewers that these payments were not given out to individuals; instead, they were "issued to the band chiefs and they gave it out to the heads of families."<sup>41</sup> James Willard Schultz estimated that there were 48 bands in the nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup> The early annuity

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<sup>40</sup>Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 227.

<sup>41</sup>John Ewers interview of Three Calf, translated by Rueben Black Boy, November 10, 1943, Series XIV, Box 11 and "Rations," Series XIV, Box 17, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>42</sup>J. Willard Schultz, "Life Among the Blackfeet," *Forest and Stream*, Vol. 21, No. 18, November 29, 1883, 343-344. (More on bands in Chapter 5.)

payments consisted of American food items such as flour, rice, sugar and coffee. They also included household objects and weapons such as blankets, calico, flannel, knives, axes, guns and the most coveted item of all, tobacco.<sup>43</sup> Many Piegan took their American food items, which they did not eat but which they knew had value, and traded them at the trading post in Fort Benton.<sup>44</sup> Three Calf told Ewers that the Piegan also bartered their food items to the "white men who married into the tribe" in exchange for food they would acquire in the future.<sup>45</sup> Beginning with the 1855 Stevens treaty the collection of the yearly annuity payment became a time when all of the Blackfoot gathered together in one place that was not for their annual *O'kan*. The collection of annuity payments in the fall and then trading or bartering some of them to traders or white relatives developed into a new economy for the Piegan.

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<sup>43</sup>Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 230.

<sup>44</sup>Unknown author, "Fort Benton Journal," (kept primarily by Andrew Dawson and Alexander Rose) 1855-1856, Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Company Records, Manuscript Collection 4, Box 1, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena, MT.

<sup>45</sup>John Ewers interview of Three Calf, translated by Rueben Black Boy, November 10, 1943, "Rations," Series XIV, Box 17, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

## **Transition to the Reservation**

In 1875 the U.S. government moved its Piegan agency headquarters from the Teton river north to Badger Creek. The purpose of the agency was to provide oversight of Piegan resources, to provide protection from outside influences and to issue annuity payments. By 1875 the government agent reported that only 50% of the subsistence economy came from hunting, the other 50% came from collecting annuities.<sup>46</sup> With their annuity money the Piegan paid for the majority of the services that the U.S. government provided, including the salary of the Indian agent. When the agency moved from the Teton river to Badger creek it needed to be completely rebuilt. The Piegan paid for the wood to build the agency and even provided the workers. Piegan women helped build the agency headquarters because men deemed it improper that they do such manual labor.<sup>47</sup>

The local Indian agent decided how to distribute the Piegan monies. One way he did this was by distributing "tickets" to families to be exchanged for their annuities.

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<sup>46</sup>Copy of *Annual Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1875*, Series XIV, Box 1, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>47</sup>John Ewers interview of John Old Person, May 11, 1942, Series XIV, Box 1. John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

However even though the Piegan owned the annuities and the annuities were supposed to be distributed to each member of the tribe, that was not what happened. Those families that were physically able were forced to work for their tickets. Those who were infirm were not required to work but there was an expectation that someone in their family should work for their tickets. This system of working for something that they already owned became a sore spot for many Piegan leaders. As food became scarce on the Northern Great Plains these annuity "tickets" became worth more than money and the Piegan began to sell, trade and barter their tickets to each other.<sup>48</sup>

The Piegan went on their last communal buffalo hunt to the Judith basin in 1879.<sup>49</sup> After this they retreated to what was left of their lands in the west and the Piegan began to settle along its creeks and rivers. Living along the Rocky Mountain front consistently throughout the year was new to the Piegan. For the next few years only small groups of individual men went out east to find what was left

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<sup>48</sup>Michael F. Foley, *An Historical Analysis of the Administration of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation by the United States, 1855-1950's*, Report for Indian Claims Commission, Docket Number 279-D, 1974, 75.

<sup>49</sup>John Ewers interview of Richard Sanderville, no date, Series XIV, Box 1, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

of the wild buffalo. The last buffalo hide tipi was made in 1881 and it required 14 hides.<sup>50</sup> The Piegan killed their last four wild buffalo in the Sweet Grass Hills in 1884.<sup>51</sup>

In the fall of 1883 the Piegan leader Three Suns warned the federal government of their impending doom, "You see how poor we are; there [are] no buffalo; we are on the verge of starvation."<sup>52</sup> Three Suns was correct. As the winter of 1883 began the only food that arrived to the reservation agency was sugar.<sup>53</sup> The Piegan government agent John Young issued a mere 1 ½ pounds of beef per person per week at the beginning of the winter from the tribally owned cattle herd. By mid-winter he had cut that to ¼ pound per person per week.<sup>54</sup> Cut

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<sup>50</sup>John Ewers interview of Richard Sanderville, no date, Series XIV, Box 4, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>51</sup>John Ewers interview of Richard Sanderville, no date, Series XIV, Box 2, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>52</sup>United States, *Subcommittee Report*, 48<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, *Senate Report 238*, 1883-1885, 233.

<sup>53</sup>Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 292, and copy of C.H. Howard, Special Report on the Condition of the Blackfeet Indians, November 16, 1883, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>54</sup>Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 292-293. And United States, *Office of Indian Affairs Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian affairs, for the Year 1883*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883.

off from their ancient sources of food and resources and with inadequate provisions from the U.S. government, death from starvation and disease followed. Not all families were impacted in the same way. The fortunate families, those who maintained a subsistence lifestyle, survived on small game, roots and berries. Some survived by “stripp[ing] the bark from the saplings that grow along the creeks and ate the inner portions to appease their gnawing hunger.”<sup>55</sup> My grandmother’s father Elmer Mad Plume was only 8 years old at the time and his entire family survived.<sup>56</sup> However, for some families the impact was greater. In some families two-thirds of the people died.<sup>57</sup> One Piegan leader, Almost-A-Dog, kept a record of Piegan deaths by putting a notch in a willow stick, he recorded 555 deaths that winter.<sup>58</sup> Historian Paul Rosier described the aftermath of the “starvation winter” as one of “the most rapid demographic declines of full-blood Indians on the Great Plains.”<sup>59</sup> This not only precipitated a

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<sup>55</sup>Letter from Reuben Allen to Commissioner of Indian Affairs. April 9, 1884. Indian Office Records. 151.

<sup>56</sup>DeMarce, ed., *Blackfeet Heritage*, 162.

<sup>57</sup>Howard L. Harrod, *Mission Among the Blackfeet*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971, 47.

<sup>58</sup>Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 294.

<sup>59</sup>Paul Rosier, *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation, 1912-1954*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001, 14.

loss of tribal leadership it also began to break apart the band system. Life would never be the same again for the Piegan. The reservation era began and it began inauspiciously with widespread starvation and disease.

In terms of daily survival the next few years were probably the most difficult in Piegan history. Starvation, malnutrition and disease continued to create social turmoil. Bands and families had to regroup, choosing new leadership and adopting orphans. This was a time elders said that bands began to get "mixed up" or reorganize because of lost membership.<sup>60</sup> Religious leaders also had to reorganize and restructure the membership of religious societies. Living in close quarters allowed for communicable diseases including small pox to occur on a regular basis further weakening Piegan families. Diseases not only affected humans they also impacted their horses and cattle. An epidemic of mange infected Piegan horses and many died. Families began to travel to the agency headquarters with dog travois instead of horse travois to collect their weekly rations.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>John Ewers interview of Adam White Man, translated by Louis Bear Child, September 7, 1951, "Blackfeet Political Organization #1, Piegan Bands," Series XIV, Box 4, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>61</sup>John Ewers interview of Reuben Black Boy, July 31, 1947, Series XIV, Box 6, John C. Ewers Papers, National



One of the government agent's primary roles was to oversee the management of Piegan resources and distribute the funds made from those resources. In those early reservation years the main natural resources were grass, timber and minerals. However, the government agent struggled to keep control over the vast reservation. Miners began to illegally mine in the Bear Paw, Little Rockies and the Sweet Grass Hills in 1885, even though all of these places were on the Piegan reservation. Several companies were illegally cutting down timber and selling it off-reservation and large cattle ranches were illegally bringing their cattle to graze on the reservation prairies.<sup>62</sup> Incompetent agents with limited administrative skills became the norm on the Piegan reservation. Outside businesses knew that they could take advantage of the situation and they did.

By the winter of 1887 the Piegan were desperate. Commissioners from Washington, D.C. arrived in "sub-zero weather" in February to negotiate the sale of the eastern portion of the reservation in exchange for 10 more years of payments for food and services. The Piegan monies were going to be used to purchase, "livestock, agricultural implements,

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Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>62</sup>Foley, *An Historical Analysis*, 74, 76, 79-81.

clothes, subsistence and education" plus "Agency buildings, medical care, mechanical shops."<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately the Piegan were not able to purchase an honest agent.

The Piegan leader White Calf charged that their agent took their annuity goods and sold them to the local white population for a profit and also sold their annuity payments back to them for furs. White Calf noted, "'If he [the agent] should remain, before that time elapsed he will steal us blind and starve us to death.'"<sup>64</sup> Although the agent's role was to purchase goods with Piegan money for their welfare, the agent often purchased lower quality merchandise and livestock and sometimes did not even distribute what was purchased. When the agent did not give the Piegan the horses they purchased after the mange epidemic and lied to them, Eagle Flag commented, "'See this reservation how big it is, but Old Tomorrow [the agent] has filled it with lies.'"<sup>65</sup>

Because the various agents, traders and businesses seemed to all be profiting from the resources on the reservation a group of Piegan leaders went to Washington, D.C. to protest in 1891. They were especially upset that the

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<sup>63</sup>Foley, *An Historical Analysis*, 93.

<sup>64</sup>Foley, *An Historical Analysis*, 104. As quoted from a letter of George Bird Grinnell, Sept. 25, 1888.

<sup>65</sup>Foley, *An Historical Analysis*, 107. As quoted from a letter of George Bird Grinnell, Nov. 30, 1888.

Great Northern Railroad was cutting hay and timber on the reservation and taking land for its depots without compensating the tribe. White Calf, facetiously asked the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, "We wish you would give us some key there to lock up the reservation."<sup>66</sup> Bear Chief added that, "We wish to keep our ground," but that the big off-reservation cattle ranchers kept, "steal[ing] the grass." Little Plume also protested that the agents made the Piegan work for their own annuities which were part of their payment for the Sweet Grass Hills.<sup>67</sup> Protesting usually resulted in hiring a new agent and not a solution to their problems.

The headquarters of the Piegan agency moved permanently to Willow creek and the new town of Browning in 1895.<sup>68</sup> Local residents and officials commented that moving the agency headquarters even further north to one of the most "dreadful locations" on the reservation was a mistake. The inspector for the Indian office reported that, "A more dreary, bleak, desolate spot would be hard to find. The buildings stand in the prairie, in a valley, where wind

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<sup>66</sup>Foley, *An Historical Analysis*, 131.

<sup>67</sup>Foley, *An Historical Analysis*, 132.

<sup>68</sup>John Ewers, Series XIV, Box 2, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

sweeps with great power to and from the mountains about 9 days in the week. There is no grass, no shade, 'no nothing.''"<sup>69</sup>

What the Piegan did not fully appreciate was that the U.S. gave the agents significant control over their lives. For example, in 1883 the same year that the Piegan suffered through the starvation winter, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior approved new regulations to engender greater social change. The Secretary of Interior gave the reservation agents permission to enforce, "Punishment by withholding of rations, fine, imprisonment, or hard work for [the offense of]...participating in [a] sun dance...plural marriages, [and] practice of the medicine man."<sup>70</sup> One agent even threatened to imprison women who did beadwork.<sup>71</sup> This precedent set a new low of punishing the Piegan by withholding their own money.

As the end of the ten-year cycle of annuity payments was approaching, the U.S. government returned in 1895 with a final request for land. Local businessmen believed that

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<sup>69</sup>Foley, *An Historical Analysis*, 205. As quoted from Inspector Province McCormick's August 1895 report.

<sup>70</sup>Copy of Annual Report, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1888, xxi, in Series XIV, Box 2, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>71</sup>Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 311.

there was mineral wealth in the mountains and they wanted to mine the region. The Piegan wanted a guarantee that they would receive enough money to pay for their transition into the American economy. Little Dog contended that, "Those mountains will never disappear. We will see them as long as we live; our children will see them all their lives, and when we are all dead they will still be there....Those mountains will last forever; the money will not."<sup>72</sup> Little Bear Chief restated their previous protests, that, "The money we received from the last treaty has been wasted."<sup>73</sup> (In the end the Piegan only received half of what they asked and the U.S. government took twice as much land as the Piegan were willing to negotiate.) White Calf and the other Piegan leaders reluctantly agreed out of economic necessity. For 20 years White Calf "complained of the encroachments of whites, and the taking away of the fairest portion of their reservation,"<sup>74</sup> to no avail. By 1895 White Calf declared, "in the future we don't want the Great Father to ask for

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<sup>72</sup>Foley, *An Historical Analysis*, 190. As quoted from the 1895 negotiations.

<sup>73</sup>Foley, *An Historical Analysis*, 188. As quoted from the 1895 negotiations.

<sup>74</sup>Copy of Annual Report, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1875 in Series XIV, Box 1, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

anything more.'"<sup>75</sup> The government no longer asked, they just took charge.

In his 1902 annual report the reservation agent James Monteith reported that there were two populations on the reservation: those born on the reservation and those born before the reservation. Monteith reported for the first time that a new citizenship was emerging. Those born and raised on the reservation were different than those born and raised on the prairies. There were the obvious physical and visible differences. He noted that the majority of the younger Piegan had short hair and wore western clothing. The older men were another matter. They all wore their hair long and in braids. Monteith noted that it was "inadvisable" to "get after" the older men to cut their hair. His solution was to wait for them to pass away, and with them their Piegan habits.<sup>76</sup> This seemed to be a common sentiment. Only a few years earlier the agent stated that, "'as long as the present generation lives'" they will continue to practice their beliefs and use the "native medicine men."<sup>77</sup> At the

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<sup>75</sup>Foley, *An Historical Analysis*, 193. As quoted from 1895 negotiation.

<sup>76</sup>Foley, *An Historical Analysis*, 307.

<sup>77</sup>Copy of Annual Report, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1898 in Series XIV, Box 2, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

beginning of the twentieth century the government agent recognized two different groups; one had no intention of changing.

One ancient custom that agent Monteith attempted to change, though, caused great community upheaval. The new Commissioner of Indian Affairs W.A. Jones, acting on national policy, believed that rations promoted dependency and he ordered the local agent Monteith to stop them. The Piegan protested. The *Great Falls Tribune* reported that Monteith threatened the elderly leader of the Piegan, White Calf, with jail if he could not control his angry tribal members. The *Tribune* aptly described the situation with the headline, "Piegans are in Open Revolt."<sup>78</sup> Little Dog replied, "'if you dare to arrest White Calf, his people will bind you [Agent Monteith] with ropes and throw you ahead of the next passing train.'"<sup>79</sup> Monteith did not arrest White Calf. And he partially acquiesced to the Piegan leader and continued rations for the elderly, infirm and families with young children. The Piegan viewed the weekly rations in a different way. On the one hand the Piegan leaders reminded Monteith that "'our rations are not a gratuity - they are

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<sup>78</sup>Foley, *An Historical Analysis*, 273.

<sup>79</sup>Foley, *An Historical Analysis*, 274.

bought with our own money.'"<sup>80</sup> The weekly rations reflected to the older generation a time when the band leaders provided for the community from the fruits of their labors. In this case it was redistributing weekly rations "bought with our own money" that they negotiated from land exchanges.

One year later, in 1903, White Calf returned to Washington D.C to protest the inefficiency of the local agent and the poor conditions on the reservation.<sup>81</sup> He became ill and went to the hospital. White Calf knew that he was dying. He sang his own "Death Song" while he was in the hospital just before he passed away. He had been the leader of the Skunks Band and he was considered the last true leader from the buffalo days. Twenty years before he died Father Peter Prando converted him to Catholicism and gave him a pipe as a gesture of friendship between the Jesuit Fathers and the Piegan.<sup>82</sup> After his death officials took White Calf's pipe and pipe bag to the Bureau of American

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<sup>80</sup>Foley, *An Historical Analysis*, 294.

<sup>81</sup>John Ewers, "White Calf," Series XIV, Box 11, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>82</sup>Howard L. Harrod, *Mission Among the Blackfeet*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971, 58-60.



Ethnology at the Smithsonian.<sup>83</sup> Ethnohistorian John C. Ewers argued that the death of White Calf marked a transition from "traditional leadership" to a new kind of governance on the reservation.<sup>84</sup>

### **Final Say**

The older generation of Piegan had grown into adulthood on a large expanse of land. In the latter half of the nineteenth century the Piegan lost the majority of their territory to the U.S. government. The destruction of the bison in the 1880s, also by outside forces, destroyed the Piegan economy and dealt them a devastating blow. With the loss of land and the loss of bison the Piegan could no longer gather the rich resources of the prairies. Their long time economy changed permanently and a new economy emerged. It included collecting an annual payment for their sold lands, which in time turned into a weekly redistribution for the most needy.

Unbeknownst to the Piegan the U.S. government would ultimately control how all the Piegan monies were spent. The

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<sup>83</sup>John Ewers, "White Calf," Series XIV, Box 11, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>84</sup>Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 317.

U.S. used the Piegan money to build their own government buildings, to hire farmers to teach the Piegan about agriculture, to build schools and hire teachers to teach Piegan children. In 1895 the U.S. government set up their new (and what would become final) headquarters in the town of Browning to manage the affairs of the Piegan. The old time tribal leadership struggled to maintain a sense of control over their own affairs during the early years of the reservation. There were numerous battles, mostly over how the U.S. government spent Piegan monies. It was a battle that the Piegan lost again and again. A final blow came to the Piegan when one of their last old time leaders, White Calf, died from an illness while in Washington, D.C. in 1903 protesting yet again the mismanagement of tribal funds. The Piegan would never have control over their own economy. Attempting to maintain control over their cultural life was another matter.

In the summer of 1910 when Father Carroll wrote his scathing report on Piegan religious persistence, Father A. Soar, a representative of the Catholic church, also expressed the Church's continued frustration at its inability to completely convert the Piegan to Christianity. Piegan homes, he wrote, still contained "sweet incense burning in honor of the sun" and "medicine bags, otter-

tails, bear-paws, medicine pipes . . . pack[ed] away with herbs in ornamental sacks in a place of honor."<sup>85</sup> It was discouraging to the Church that the Piegan whom they thought they initially converted developed a new syncretic belief in both "the Holy Church and the medicine-man."<sup>86</sup> Somehow the Church did not recognize that just as the Piegan incorporated the Fourth of July into their annual summer festivities, they also incorporated the Holy Church into their world view. In the Catholic world-view there was simply not room for both.

The summer of 1910 witnessed an odd variety of scholars and tourists who came to experience and record the last days of the Piegan and their ancient celebration the *O'kan*. Linguist Truman Michelson hoped to record the Piegan language as an academic exercise for the use of future scholars. In the process though he was able to record in his writings and in his audio recordings the voices of many different Piegan people who all had a common story to tell. Instead of expressing dissatisfaction with their economic situation - the job of the band leaders to do in Washington DC - they instead told stories that they wanted recorded for

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<sup>85</sup>Al. Soer, S.J., "The Piëgans," *The Indian Sentinel*, New York: Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, (1910): 18, 19.

<sup>86</sup>Soer, "The Piëgans," 22.

future generations. A common theme emerges from these stories. They attempted to explain to America how they experienced the world. The Piegan believed that they had a unique relationship with the natural world that was both practical and divine. Based on their ancient experiences they had control and say in the final outcome of their lives.

### Chapter Three

#### STORY-TAKERS: ETHNOGRAPHERS VISIT THE PIEGAN

*Grandma Gretchen was my grandfather's aunt. Her Piegan name was "Holds Together Woman." Aimsback, my grandfather's father, married her two half-sisters, Calf Woman and Hollering In The Air Woman. It was common in those days to have more than one wife and to marry sisters. When Gretchen got older she helped take care of her sister's grandchildren. My uncle Gilbert was one of her favorites. She kept special treats for him in her old cupboard. When he went over to her house he would walk straight to her cupboard and ask for the candy or sweets that he knew she hid there for him. When she died he was too young to understand and Grandpa Sam just told him that Grandma went away, she was not at home.*

*Grandma Gretchen was born in the 1870s and raised before the end of the buffalo days. She knew something of the oldtime ways because she was in her early teens when those days came to an end. My family only remembers her as an old woman, because that is how they knew her. She did not wear contemporary store bought clothing but wore homemade calico dresses. And instead of homemade moccasins (like most*

women her age wore) she wore old men's dress shoes. No one is sure when she got into that habit. Similar to those of her generation she married several times. Unfortunately, she never had biological children. Instead she took in children and raised them as her own.

Apparently one of the skills she learned as a child was how to do porcupine quillwork. Before the Piegan had access to trade beads they decorated their clothing, especially their religious clothing, with dyed porcupine quills that the women flattened with their teeth and interwove into elaborate designs on hides or robes. There was not much call for this type of work within the new reservation economy. Ethnographer Clark Wissler commented in 1910 that Piegan quillwork had "almost become a thing of the past."<sup>1</sup>

Wissler knew that finding a quillworker would be difficult. He knew that doing quillwork was a long laborious process. In the winter of 1905 he asked his Piegan collaborator to find someone who could create a quilled blanket band for the American Museum of Natural History in New York. He wrote, "I should like to have in porcupine quill work, sewed with sinew one of those large blanket

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<sup>1</sup>Clark Wissler, "Material Culture of the Blackfoot Indians," *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, vol. 5, part 1, New York: American Museum of Natural History, (1910): 55.

*bands....In choosing the colors I wish you would try to get the old ones used before the white people came among your people."*<sup>2</sup>

*Two years after he asked, Wissler finally received his request, "One quill worked blanket band for a man's blanket. Made in old style."<sup>3</sup> A blanket band was approximately 4 feet long. It took almost two years to complete because first the materials for the blanket band had to be collected and then the band made. His collaborator (David Duvall) explained that, "quill work is much harder than beed [sic] work. She put in four months work on it and about five hours each day."<sup>4</sup> Upon seeing the band Wissler commented that it was "a fine piece of quill work."<sup>5</sup> In the winter of 1906 and 1907 Grandma Gretchen, then a woman in her mid-30s, created a masterpiece of Piegan woman's craftwork. "She asked...\$60.00*

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<sup>2</sup>Clark Wissler to D.C. Duvall, December 9, 1905, Accession Records, Donor D.C. Duvall, 1905, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

<sup>3</sup>Accession Records, Donor D.C. Duvall, 1907, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

<sup>4</sup>D.C. Duvall to Clark Wissler, May 9, 1907, Accession Records, Donor D.C. Duvall, 1907, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

<sup>5</sup>Clark Wissler to H.C. Bumpus, June 3, 1907, Accession Records, Donor D.C. Duvall, 1907, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

for it."<sup>6</sup>

### **New Economy and Story-Takers**

Hold Together Woman had an extraordinary talent. She learned the difficult tasks of taking the quills from a porcupine, dying them into beautiful colors and using them to create exquisite ornamentation on everyday objects. In the days before the Piegan had access to commercial glass beads and other man-made embellishments, Piegan women used elements from nature such as porcupine quills to decorate their robes, clothing and household items. Quillwork was one of their ancient art forms.<sup>7</sup> In the pre-reservation days girls like Hold Together learned quillwork from older women. The Piegan believed that quillwork was a "sacred craft."<sup>8</sup> Although this was an ancient craft, Hold Together Woman would be putting her skill to a new use. Hold Together Woman was not making this particular blanket band for herself or her family or to exchange or give as a gift.

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<sup>6</sup>D.C. Duvall to Clark Wissler, May 9, 1907, Accession Records, Donor D.C. Duvall, 1907, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

<sup>7</sup>Archaeologists have uncovered quillwork objects on the northern Great Plains from the sixth century. See Julia M. Bebbington, *Quillwork of the Plains*, Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1982, 6.

<sup>8</sup>John C. Ewers, *Blackfeet Crafts*, Washington, D.C.: United States Indian Service, 1945, 29.



She knew that it would not be attached to any robe or blanket. It would never be worn by a person. She was making this object to sell for money.

By 1910 an unintended economy emerged after the Piegan settled onto the reservation. Dozens of individual Piegans, like Holds Together Woman, could now make a modest living selling objects, telling stories, singing songs, posing for photographers or painters for money. Similar to Gretchen they usually did this in exchange for a fee. Some of the workmanship that had gone unused for many years was useful again. While the U.S. government had spent the previous 25 years punishing people for practicing their old ways, in 1910 the Great Northern Railroad hired individual Piegan to lure tourists to the newly created Glacier National Park. All the while recorders of Piegan history came to the reservation to record Piegan ancient knowledge.

Between 1880 and 1910 James Willard Schultz, George Bird Grinnell, Walter McClintock, Charles Stephens, Edward S. Curtis, Clark Wissler, Truman Michelson, C.C. Uhlenbeck and others worked independently of each other to produce the majority of ethnographic materials that all scholars of Blackfoot history use today.<sup>9</sup> However these recorders of

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<sup>9</sup>Although all these men were studying the South Piegan in Montana, their work is used by scholars who study one or all of the four tribal groups who are part of the Blackfoot

Piegán life did not do this alone. They worked with a wide variety of collaborators. There was not one collaborator, there were dozens. In most cases we know their names because these recorders of Piegán life left behind records of their transactions, of who they interviewed, collected songs or stories from, and from whom they purchased objects. Although in the published record many of these collaborators become unnamed anonymous voices, as was the practice of the day, within the archival records their names and genders emerge.

Today we might think of these relationships as exploitative. Perhaps they were. After all these early recorders of Piegán life were entering a poverty stricken community desperate for a cash economy (and not more debit or credit at the local mercantile). However, many records, such as the correspondence between Holds Together Woman and Wissler, show that negotiation on the part of Piegán individuals did occur regarding the price of their services. With each proceeding recorder from the outside, Piegán individuals were learning the value of their knowledge. Telling stories therefore were not a one sided transaction, with outsiders asking questions and the Piegán blindly answering. Whether it was a story or song or object - the Piegán learned what price they could ask and what price

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confederacy.

individuals or museums were willing to pay. There is one example of an elderly woman negotiating for several years to get the price she wanted for an object.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps what these recorders of Piegan life were not fully aware of at the time was that the Piegan had a long history of both "buying" and "selling" stories, songs, objects and knowledge within their own communities.<sup>11</sup> The recorders of Piegan life were all interested in interacting with one type of person, what John C. Ewers called a "buffalo Indian," or a person born and raised in the time when the Piegan still lived a nomadic life and hunted bison. From the 1880s to 1910s a large number of "buffalo Indians" continued to live within the community. After that their numbers declined, and by the 1940s and 1950s only a small handful of very old "buffalo Indians" continued to exist. Because of this from the 1880s to the 1910s there was a steady stream of people interested in recording Piegan life and this activity slowed down from the 1920s to the 1950s. The stories of the "buffalo Indians" exist today because of

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<sup>10</sup>D.C. Duvall to Clark Wissler, Correspondence, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

<sup>11</sup>William E. Farr, "Troubled Bundles, Troubled Blackfeet: The Travail of Cultural and Religious Renewal," *Montana the Magazine of Western History*, (Autumn 1993): 2-17.

the consistent activity of a variety of recorders, some educated, some not, but all interested in the unique experiences of the Piegan. The Piegan told them stories that they wanted to tell. The majority of these stories, and even the objects they created, have a common theme of describing a sublime world. To fully understand the place of these stories and the Piegan storytellers first we need to know something of the recorders of Piegan life - the story-takers.

#### **James Willard Schultz, 1880s**

One of the first outsiders to record Piegan knowledge could be considered more of an insider as he had intimate knowledge of Piegan practices. James Willard Schultz came to Piegan territory in 1877 at the age of 17. He got a job in Fort Conrad on the Marias River working as a clerk for a trading company. At that time the primary language spoken in the region was Piegan and he learned to speak the language fluently. Within two years he married Fine Shield Woman, a 15 year old Piegan girl. They had a son a few years later. They remained married for almost 25 years until her death in the winter of 1903.<sup>12</sup> Schultz was not a trained ethnologist

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<sup>12</sup>Warren L. Hanna, "Forward," in James Willard Schultz, *Recently Discovered Tales of Life Among the Indians*, ed. Warren L. Hanna, Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing

or even college educated, but he was one of the most prolific authors of the life of the Piegan.<sup>13</sup>

Schultz's articles, beginning in 1880, are the earliest published records of South Piegan life. He published the first of these in *Forest and Stream* magazine, a national weekly magazine for men that focused on outdoor activities. They were drawn from his own personal experiences on the prairies and in the mountains. His early articles in the magazine went under the column heading of "The Sportsman Tourist."<sup>14</sup> A few years after his wife died in 1903 he moved to California and the majority of his writing turned from non-fiction to fiction.<sup>15</sup> He published his most well known book *My Life Among the Indians* (fiction based on fact) in 1907. He remained a professional writer throughout his life producing dozens of articles and books.

Schultz was in a unique situation. He lived in Piegan

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Company, 1988, xi-xviii.

<sup>13</sup>Hugh A. Dempsey and Lindsay Moir, *Bibliography of the Blackfoot*, Native American Bibliography Series, No. 13, Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 1989. Dempsey and Moir list 78 separate articles or books written by Schultz.

<sup>14</sup>J. Willard Schultz, "Life Among the Blackfeet," *Forest and Stream*, Vol. 21, No. 18, (November 29, 1883): 343.

<sup>15</sup>James Willard Schultz and Michael Kennedy, "Return to the Beloved Mountains," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, Vol. 7, No. 3, National Parks Issue, (Summer, 1957): 27.

territory for more than 30 years, he learned to speak the language and he married into the tribe. George Bird Grinnell, the editor of *Forest and Stream* magazine, wrote of Schultz that, "It is most unusual to find anyone...mingling in daily intercourse with Indians, who has the intelligence to study their traditions, history and customs, and the industry to reduce his observations into writing."<sup>16</sup> In his earliest articles Schultz wrote about his adventures with Ph-nuk-wi-um or Seen From Afar.<sup>17</sup> Within his writings he often delineated the first person voice of Seen From Afar or others by indenting or italicizing their words.<sup>18</sup> Schultz attempted to explain their world view and life on the prairies. These are probably the first stories printed using the voice of "buffalo Indians." However, unlike successive researchers, Schultz did not appear to be specifically trying to tell the story of "buffalo Indians" but instead was telling his own autobiographical story with the Piegan.

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<sup>16</sup>George Bird Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales: The Story of a Prairie People*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003, xxx. (Originally published, 1892).

<sup>17</sup>James Willard Schultz, "The White Buffalo Cow," *Forest and Stream*, April 21, 1881. This is the original phonetic spelling of Schultz.

<sup>18</sup>For examples see, James Willard Schultz, "The White Buffalo Cow," *Forest and Stream*, April 21, 1881 and James Willard Schultz, "The 'Piskan' of the Blackfeet," *Forest and Stream*, June 1, 1882.

When Schultz wrote his fourteen part series "Life Among the Blackfeet" in *Forest and Stream* he wrote in the objective anonymous tone of the day and he no longer identified his friends or relatives by name.

Schultz probably gleaned ethnographic information from his in-laws and from his son's in-laws on a daily basis without a structured process. Schultz's wife Fine Shield Woman was the daughter of Potato Woman and Pulling Down Lodge (also known as Bull Head). Schultz relied on these in-laws as well as Fine Shield's three brothers, Sam Yellow Wolf, Boy Chief and Louis Champagne for information.<sup>19</sup> The Schultz's lived with Fine Shield's extended family, spending most of their time with her uncle Yellow Wolf.<sup>20</sup> Schultz also relied on his son's family for information. His son Lone Wolf or Hart Schultz married Margaret Eagle Head, the half sister of David Duvall.<sup>21</sup> Unlike the writers who would follow, Schultz's experience was unparalleled as Grinnell

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<sup>19</sup>DeMarce, ed., *Blackfeet Heritage*. 62, 286. Fine Shield's maternal grandparents were Diving Round Woman and Buffalo Painted Lodge and her paternal grandparents were Bird Tail Woman and Double Coming Up the Hill.

<sup>20</sup>Paul Dyck, "Lone Wolf Returns to That Long Ago Time," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, Vol. 22, No. 1. (Winter, 1972): 18-41. Hart Schultz recounted his childhood memories of growing up on the Blackfeet reservation.

<sup>21</sup>DeMarce, ed., *Blackfeet Heritage*, 231. Margaret Eagle Head and David Duvall had the same mother, Yellow Bird. Margaret's parents were Yellow Bird Woman and Eagle Head.

described. Schultz lived with the Piegan for many years during the final years of the wild bison on the prairies and the early years of their transition to life on the reservation. Unlike other non-Piegan who lived with the Piegan, such as the Holy Fathers or government employees, Schultz did not have an intention to change Piegan society. And, like his in-laws, he too was adapting to the new economy learning to make a living selling these stories.

### **George Bird Grinnell, 1890s**

The man who purchased many of Schultz's stories was George Bird Grinnell. Grinnell first came to Montana and Piegan territory in 1885 while he was the editor of *Forest and Stream*. In 1892 Grinnell wrote several articles on Piegan life in *Science*, the *American Anthropologist*, and *Scribner's Magazine*. That same year he also published the first comprehensive work on the South Piegan, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales: The Story of a Prairie People*. The book was based on his own research among the Piegan and on the vignettes that James Willard Schultz published in *Forest and Stream* from 1882-1884.<sup>22</sup> Schultz allowed Grinnell to

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<sup>22</sup>Between 1882 and 1884 Schultz wrote a series of fourteen articles about the South Piegan in *Forest and Stream*. Some of these articles were reproduced in Schultz, *Recently Discovered Tales of Life Among the Indians*.



incorporate his writings within *Blackfoot Lodge Tales* freely.<sup>23</sup>

Grinnell had been visiting the reservation on a regular basis since 1885 and during that time he was able to interview a variety of individuals for the purpose of writing a book. Grinnell stated that he, "endeavored to show how Indians think and feel by letting some of them tell their own stories in their own fashion." He added that, "I give the Blackfoot stories as they have been told to me by the Indians themselves."<sup>24</sup> Grinnell could not speak Piegan. He had two main interpreters, William Jackson and William Russell, both educated mixed-blood Piegans.<sup>25</sup> "Most of the stories," though, he credits to fourteen different men some who had passed on by the time the book was published.<sup>26</sup>

Throughout *Blackfoot Lodge Tales* Grinnell attributes certain stories or events to these various men or to others,

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<sup>23</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, xxix-xxx. Although no one has ever done a word for word analysis, Grinnell did include a significant portion of Schultz's writing within his own.

<sup>24</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, xxvii.

<sup>25</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, xxx.

<sup>26</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, xxx-xxxii. These included: Red Eagle, Almost A Dog, Four Bears, Wolf Calf, Big Nose, Heavy Runner, Young Bear Chief, Wolf Tail, Rabid Wolf (or Mad Wolf), Running Rabbit, White Calf, All Are His Children, Double Runner, and Lone Medicine Person.

which helps provide some provenance to the stories and the storytellers. But in others he does not. Grinnell divided *Blackfoot Lodge Tales* into four sections. The first three sections tell of the mythological stories and origins of the Piegan. The fourth section tells of the daily life of the Piegan. Grinnell wrote that he wanted the Piegan to "explain in their own way how they look at the every-day occurrences of their life, what motives govern them, and how they reason."<sup>27</sup> What Grinnell learned and what he published was that the Piegan were "intensely religious."<sup>28</sup> *Blackfoot Lodge Tales* exemplifies what the Piegan believed as the most important aspects about their lives, the mythological world.

#### **Charles H. Stephens, 1890s**

A year before Grinnell published *Blackfoot Lodge Tales* the private collector Charles H. Stephens, an artist from Philadelphia, came to the reservation for the entire summer of 1891. Stephens had a lifelong interest in Native American life and collected artifacts from around the country. He came to interview individuals, photograph daily life and acquire objects of tribal material culture for his private collection. He never published his field notes and his

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<sup>27</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, xxvii.

<sup>28</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, xxviii.

collection did not become public until his family gave it to the University of Pennsylvania later in the twentieth century.<sup>29</sup> He stated in a letter after his trip that he "visited each of the several villages on the reservation with an interpreter."<sup>30</sup> Surprisingly he does not give the name of his interpreter, but it might have been William Russell, the official agency interpreter at the time. He interviewed a variety of individuals and took more than 300 photographs. His photographs are valuable today because he identified almost everyone in them.<sup>31</sup> He kept detailed records showing the purchase price and provenance of each and every object that he bought. He purchased more than 200 Piegan objects from over 30 different people.<sup>32</sup> The most

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<sup>29</sup>Pamela H. Jardine, "Cultural Change in the Early Years of the Blackfeet Reservation: The Fieldwork of Charles H. Stephens in 1891," University of Pennsylvania, 2007. Ph.D. Dissertation.

<sup>30</sup>Jardine, "Cultural Change in the Early Years of the Blackfeet Reservation," 126. Quoted from letter of Dec. 11, 1891.

<sup>31</sup>Jardine, "Cultural Change in the Early Years of the Blackfeet," 129-130.

<sup>32</sup>To give an example of just how many different people that he purchased items from, here is a list of some of the people: Last Bull, Nosey (a woman), Four Horns, Yellow Wolf's wife (he does not give her name), Red Crow, Big Beaver, Chief Coward, Young Brocky, Crow Eyes, Wild Gun, Wild Gun's wife (he does not give her name), Shorty White Grass, Running Crane, Three Suns (also known as Big Nose), Old Bear Chief's daughter (he does not give her name), Eagle Ribs wife (he does not give her name), Wolf Tail, Chief Bull

expensive object that he purchased was a quilled buffalo robe that had the value of \$105.00 and the least expensive was an eagle wing for fifty-cents.<sup>33</sup> Although Stephens did not publish any of his field work, he is mentioned here to show an emerging pattern of economic opportunity for a wide variety of individual Piegan, both men and women, to share their knowledge with or make material objects for outsiders. This emerging economy involved even those individuals who came to the reservation with no official affiliation or scholarly quest. Later many Piegan sold objects directly to tourists and visitors to the area. Anthropologist Ruth Philips, in *Trading Identities*, has written about the growth of the trade in tourist items that developed in Indian country as they lost land and resources and their economies were destroyed in the eastern United States.<sup>34</sup> For the Piegan at the turn of the twentieth century this trade included not only material objects, but immaterial objects

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Shoe's wife (one of them anyway, also not named), Tooth (the wife of Running Rabbit), Three Sun's son (not named), Medicine-Tied Woman, Crow Eyes, Jappy (Takes Gun), Wild Gun, Many Butterflies (also called The Dreamer), Weasel Fat or Buffalo Fat (Stephens was not sure which name was correct), Eagle Rib's wife (not named), and Big Beaver.

<sup>33</sup>Jardine, "Cultural Change in the Early Years of the Blackfeet," Appendix.

<sup>34</sup>Ruth B. Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998, 4.

such as stories and songs which the Piegan always viewed as having monetary value.

### **Walter McClintock, 1890s to 1910s**

After the publication of *Blackfoot Lodge Tales* and the numerous articles about the Piegan in popular magazines many different outsiders began to arrive on the Piegan reservation. Walter McClintock came out to Montana from Philadelphia in 1896 because of a personal illness. His family believed that a trip out west would bring him back to health. From that time on he became a frequent visitor to the reservation. He interviewed individual Piegans, recorded their songs and took hundreds of photographs. He never learned the Piegan language and relied on various translators during his years of study. McClintock published his first article, "Four Days in a Medicine Lodge" in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1900. Within the next decade he published his seminal work *The Old North Trail: Life, Legends and Religion of the Blackfeet Indians* in 1910. He based this book on his relationship with the elder *Siyeh* or Mad Wolf, who adopted him as his son. Similar to Schultz he relied on his Piegan family to provide the majority of the information in his work. Unlike many recorders of Piegan lives of that time McClintock identifies almost every person

that he interviewed within his publications. However he does not clearly state that he had to rely on a Piegan translator, William Jackson, for these transactions. Much later in life McClintock published a series of articles in the Southwest Museum's magazine that essentially rehashed his original experiences with *Siyeh* and his family.

In addition to writing about the Piegan McClintock took hundreds of photos of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Piegan life. McClintock's photos continue to captivate people around the world. Fortunately most of McClintock's research survives, including his photographs, recorded songs, correspondence, typed notes and manuscripts. Like many recorders of Piegan life of that time McClintock only came to the reservation during the summer time and often only during the annual *O'kan* (or sundance). He did correspond with his Piegan family. He wrote in English and they translated their letters into English. Unfortunately this correspondence reflects a complicated relationship between himself and his adopted Piegan family and shows that he never truly understood Piegan ways.

### **Edward S. Curtis, 1890s to 1910s**

The photographer Edward S. Curtis came to photograph and interview the Piegan during the summers of 1898-1900 and

again in 1909 for his monumental epic on Indians in North America. He attended the *O'kan* and interviewed several Piegan men. As with those who came before him, he paid people to photograph them. In a newspaper article about Edward Curtis's work among the Piegan, the San Francisco *Sunday Call* commented, "'There isn't any mystery about the methods of Mr. Curtis. The average Indian will neither be cajoled nor bullied into posing. Mr. Curtis does very little urging. His rule is an old one - 'money talks.''"<sup>35</sup> He published a chapter on the Piegan in his multi-volume series, *The North American Indian: Being a Series of Volumes Picturing and Describing the Indians of the United States and Alaska* in 1911. His chapter on the Piegan provides an important overview of their religious life and views. Today popular writers and advertisers continue to use Curtis's romanticized photographs of the Piegan as the quintessential images of the Plains Indian.

### **Clark Wissler and David Duvall, 1900s to 1910s**

Franz Boas, probably the most influential figure in modern anthropology, sent his student Clark Wissler, a

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<sup>35</sup>Quote from a reprint of the October 1900 newspaper article in the San Francisco *Sunday Call* in Mick Gidley, ed., *Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indian Project in the Field*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003, 58.

recent graduate of Indiana University and Columbia University, to study the Piegan in the summer of 1903. He was the first trained academic to systematically document Piegan lifeways. At the time Wissler worked for the American Museum of Natural History. He never learned how to speak the Piegan language, which was unusual for Boas's students. Instead he worked closely with a South Piegan consultant and interpreter David C. Duvall.<sup>36</sup>

Wissler published his first work *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians* in 1908. He listed David Duvall as a co-author. However it was the one and only time that he would list Duvall as co-author. Wissler published five other major works on South Piegan ethnohistory relying heavily on Duvall's field notes. Wissler's other monographs based on the field notes of Duvall included: "Material Culture of the Blackfoot Indians" in 1910, "The Social Life of the Blackfoot Indians" in 1911, "Ceremonial Bundles of the Blackfoot Indians" in 1912, "Societies and Dance Associations of the Blackfoot Indians" in 1913, and "The Sun Dance of the Blackfoot Indians" in 1918. The work done by Wissler and Duvall is by far the most extensive collection

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<sup>36</sup>Duvall's mother was South Piegan and his father was non-Indian so he grew up bi-lingual. David Duvall also served as an interpreter for Walter McClintock and linguist Truman Michelson.



of ethnographic materials ever produced on the Piegan.

Not much is known about David Duvall. We do know that he attended Carlisle Indian Industrial Institute and learned to be a blacksmith. He had a small shop in Browning. In addition to this he also worked as a translator for other researchers. Duvall relied primarily on his own relatives or on his in-laws for interviews. His methodology in recording stories was thorough. Duvall would interview individual Piegan, translate the interviews into English, and Wissler then edited the English version. If Wissler had questions he asked Duvall for further clarification. As Wissler noted, "Mr. Duvall read the descriptive parts of the manuscript to well-informed Indians, recording their corrections and comments, the substance of which was incorporated in the final version."<sup>37</sup> Wissler had to rely on Duvall because he suffered from a debilitating disease which made it difficult for him to travel.

Their collaboration ended abruptly in 1911, when because of a domestic dispute, Duvall committed suicide. Oddly George Bird Grinnell just happened to be in Browning the day that Duvall killed himself. Grinnell wrote a letter to Wissler giving him the unfortunate news. Wissler

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<sup>37</sup>Wissler, "The Social Life of the Blackfoot Indians," 1911, 3.

proceeded to publish over the next several years all of the field notes that Duvall had collected.

### **Truman Michelson, 1910s**

Truman Michelson was a linguist and an ethnologist. He received his doctorate from Harvard University in 1904. He also studied privately with Boas from 1909 to 1910 before beginning his career at the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) at the Smithsonian Institution.<sup>38</sup> Beginning in his first year with the BAE in 1910 he conducted a survey of Algonquian languages. The Piegan language was classified as Algonquian and so he came to the South Piegan reservation in northwest Montana for the summer. He only spent one month on the reservation and there is no evidence that he ever returned. However, he published five articles of his visit, three on Piegan folklore and two scientific discussions of Piegan as an Algonquian language.

Michelson strove to document the language so that scientists who had no working knowledge of it could read the words he wrote out and pronounce them correctly. He was critical of other linguists who produced texts that other scholars could not reproduce later without intimate

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<sup>38</sup>John M. Cooper, "Truman Michelson," *American Anthropologists*, New Series, Vol. 41, No. 2. (Apr. - Jun., 1939): 281.

knowledge of the language.<sup>39</sup>

Of all the stories that Truman Michelson collected he only published about a half dozen. In his article "Piegan Tales" he wrote that collecting the stories "was merely incidental to obtaining first-hand knowledge of the [Piegan] language."<sup>40</sup> Michelson was aware of the collection already published by Clark Wissler and David Duvall on Piegan mythology in 1908 and saw no need to duplicate it. His goal was to study the Algonquian language. In the process though, the Piegans who Michelson interviewed left behind a record of the stories that they considered important.

#### **Cornelius C. Uhlenbeck, 1910s**

Linguistics professor C.C. Uhlenbeck and his graduate student J.P.B. De Josselin De Jong came from Holland to conduct in-depth research on the Piegan language during the summer of 1910. They stayed at the Holy Family Mission on Two Medicine river and relied on a few individuals for their study. Uhlenbeck returned again in the summer of 1911 for more research. Uhlenbeck was the most prolific scholar of

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<sup>39</sup>Truman Michelson, "Review of *Original Blackfoot Texts* by C.C. Uhlenbeck," *American Anthropologists*, New Series, Vol. 13, No. 2, (Apr. - Jun., 1911): 326-330.

<sup>40</sup>Truman Michelson, "Piegan Tales," *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 24, No. 92, (Apr.-Jun., 1911): 238.

the Piegan language. In 1911 he published *Original Blackfoot Texts from the Southern Piegans* and in 1912 *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts from the Southern Piegans*. His student De Josselin De Jong published *Blackfoot Texts From the Southern Piegan Reservation* in 1914. Uhlenbeck's most comprehensive linguistic study was his dictionary series, *An English-Blackfoot Vocabulary: Based on Material of the Southern Piegan* and its corresponding volume *A Blackfoot-English Vocabulary: Based on Material of the Southern Piegan* both published in 1930. The linguistic work conducted by Uhlenbeck is invaluable. Contemporary scholars continue to value the first person narratives and stories that he and De Josselin De Jong collected.

### **Others in the 1920s and 1930s**

After this productive time of the 1880s to 1910s scholars or museums undertook only a few systematic studies of the South Piegan. After the 1910s many of the pre-reservation Indians who scholars wanted to interview were passing on. In 1921 the Milwaukee Public Museum sent S.A. Barrett to conduct field work. His research resulted in five short articles and a collection of artifacts, paintings and photographs at the Milwaukee Public Museum. In 1924 William Wildschut from the Museum of American Indian Heye Foundation

in New York came to collect artifacts and stories. He published two brief articles and the Heye Foundation collected materials for its museum. In the 1930s the Works Progress Administration Federal Writers Project sent out local Piegan people to collect stories. Cecile Black Boy collected a variety of origin stories of lodges or tipis, which the Museum of the Rockies published decades later in 1976 in a John C. Ewers edited volume, *Blackfeet Indian Tipis: Design and Legend*.

#### **John C. Ewers, 1940s to 1950s**

With each year more and more people died from disease and old age and with each year recorders of Piegan life knew that there would be fewer "buffalo Indians" for them to record. By the 1940s few existed. In the early 1940s ethnologist John C. Ewers came to the Blackfeet reservation to work for the Indian Arts and Crafts Board at the Museum of the Plains Indian in Browning. Ewers set out to interview as many pre-reservation Indians as he could find. He systematically created a list based on the census and the local government agent's knowledge. He then tried to interview each person on the list. His work produced two seminal studies on Piegan life: *The Horse in Blackfeet Culture* in 1955 and *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the*

*Northwestern Plains* in 1958, as well as numerous articles and monographs. His extensive field notes of his interviews with the last "buffalo Indians" and the material objects he collected are in the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC and its facilities in Suitland, Maryland.

### **Claude Schaeffer, 1950s**

In the late 1940s and early 1950s anthropologist Claude Schaeffer was the last scholar to attempt to interview pre-reservation Indians while he was the director of the Museum of the Plains Indian in Browning. Ewers moved on to the National Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution and Schaeffer remained at the Plains museum for seven years, from 1947-1954.<sup>41</sup> Using the list created by Ewers he set out to continue to interview the same individuals that Ewers had interviewed but found that most had passed away.<sup>42</sup> Despite his opportunity to interview people while he lived in the community, Schaeffer only wrote a few articles on the Piegan. One stands out from his

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<sup>41</sup>Hugh A. Dempsey, "Claude Everett Schaeffer, 1901-1969," *American Anthropologist*, 72 (1970): 1409-10.

<sup>42</sup>John Ewers correspondence with Claude Schaeffer, 1947-54, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

interviews with these very old elders, his study on bird knowledge of the Piegan.<sup>43</sup> His extensive field notes are now in the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta.

**"From very ancient times"**

The recorders of Piegan life came to Montana from the 1880s to the 1950s in their effort to record the stories and songs and collect objects from the "buffalo Indians." The majority of these documents and objects that contemporary scholars consider the most valuable were collected from the 1880s to the 1910s. Scholars consider the field notes of David Duvall and published manuscripts of Clark Wissler during this time period as the most comprehensive. There was additional activity between the 1920s and 1950s despite the declining number of "buffalo Indians" to interview. Scholars consider the unpublished field notes and published manuscripts of John C. Ewers the most important. Taken together, all the productivity of the various recorders of Piegan life since the 1880s, the "buffalo Indians" of the Piegan left behind a rich source of materials for contemporary scholars.

Within most of their field notes the recorders of

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<sup>43</sup>Claude E. Schaeffer, "Bird Nomenclature and Principles of Avian Taxonomy of the Blackfeet Indians," *Journal Washington Academy of Sciences*, 1950, 40(2): 35-46.

Piegán life left behind information about an unintended economy that evolved during the early reservation years. Some like Wissler or Stephens left behind detailed ledgers with lists of names of people or lists of objects and their corresponding fee or cost.<sup>44</sup> Others mentioned these transactions within their correspondence. Dozens of individual Piegán, like Holds Together Woman, knew that they could make money telling stories, recording their songs, being photographed, being painted, and making objects to sell to museums and others. And they did. They were not innocents being taken advantage of, but active participants making the best of a bad economic situation.

However the dealings between the recorders and the recorded, the story-takers and the story tellers, was more than a simple transaction for money. The Piegán did not create objects for sale or tell stories that were devoid of their cultural meaning. They infused their objects, stories and songs with the cultural knowledge that they viewed as important and necessary to tell. The Piegán told Grinnell in *Blackfoot Lodge Tales* that, "The stories here told come down to us from very ancient times," imparting their importance

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<sup>44</sup>Someone could do an entire dissertation just on the economy created by these early recorders of Native American life. I do not intend to go into detail beyond stating that these documents do exist.



to him.<sup>45</sup> When Holds Together Woman created a blanket band it was not just a pretty object for a museum. It was also a mnemonic device that told a story of the history of the universe.

Holds Together Woman told this story with great care. Elk Horn told Wissler a few years before Holds Together Woman made her blanket band that creating a blanket band was a more complex process than just sewing it together. Elk Horn said that the women who created these bands had to follow proper religious protocol everyday while working on one. Elk Horn stated that, "In conferring the power to put the band on - [the designer was required to] paint face red all over - [with a] black dot on each cheek."<sup>46</sup> The face paint design had a specific meaning that paralleled the meaning of the band. Elk Horn explained that the "black spots" on her face represented the major deities of the Piegan. She painted the Sun on her forehead, the Mistaken Morning Star on her chin, the Moon on her left cheek, and the Morning Star on her right cheek. A smaller dot on her

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<sup>45</sup>George Bird Grinnell, *Blackfeet Indian Stories*, Helena: Riverbend Publishing, 2005, v. (Originally published 1913).

<sup>46</sup>Clark Wissler interview of Elk Horn, unknown translator, "Blackfoot Field Notes, 1903-1905," Clark Wissler, 1870-1947, Misc. Box, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

nose represented "the stationary star" or North Star.<sup>47</sup>

Elk Horn further explained that even though a blanket band had a specific symbolic meaning, "The color and design [of the band] may be anyway" depending on the designer.<sup>48</sup> A Piegan woman created a blanket band as a separate object and then sewed it across the middle of a robe or blanket that a person wore to public occasions. In this way, if a robe became old or worn the band could be removed and attached to a new robe. A typical blanket band was approximately 4 feet long, 4 inches wide with 4 6-inch disks or circles placed evenly across the band. The result looked something like this: ●■●■●■●. The disks on a blanket band represented from left to right the four major deities of Piegan religion, the Sun, the Moon, the Mistaken Morning Star and the Morning Star.<sup>49</sup> Quillworked blanket bands reflected the Piegan cosmology.

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<sup>47</sup>Clark Wissler drawings, "Blackfoot Face & Body Designs," Clark Wissler, 1870-1947, Misc. Box, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

<sup>48</sup>Clark Wissler interview of Elk Horn, unknown translator, "Blackfoot Field Notes, 1903-1905," Clark Wissler, 1870-1947, Misc. Box, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

<sup>49</sup>Clark Wissler interview of Elk Horn, unknown translator, "Blackfoot Field Notes, 1903-1905," Clark Wissler, 1870-1947, Misc. Box, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

Even though the Piegan lost control of their economic system in the late nineteenth century and they struggled to gain a foothold in the early twentieth century, they did not lose control of the ability to tell stories to themselves and to others. From the earliest recordings of Piegan life, the Piegan told others through their stories and the objects they created about their unique world view. In their telling they maintained an alliance with the supernatural and their ancient landscape.

## Chapter Four

### INVISIBLE REALITY - THE PIEGAN UNIVERSE

*My grandmother told me many stories of her own life and adventures of two grandmothers and their husbands. It was rare when she told a story of sorrow or suffering. Many stories were of daily life, of moving from place to place, hunting, berry picking, looking for medicine, and cooking and eating. She told a lot of stories about cooking and eating. "Oh, happy times," she would say.*

*But interwoven within these stories of daily life were different stories about people, animals and beings that the Piegan shared space with and often encountered. For example when she talked about picking berries along the Badger - Two Medicine she would often talk about the supernatural horses who lived in the small mountain lakes. These horses lived underwater and they swam underwater between lakes. Some of these horses she said swam from the small lakes on the east side of the mountains underwater and under the mountains to the west side and Flathead Lake.*

*Other times she told stories of her family's interactions with the supernatural. Once her grandfather Spotted Bear was near a creek and he stopped to water his*

horse. He saw a supernatural beaver and her children. But unlike normal animal beavers he recognized immediately that these were supernatural beavers. The mother beaver was standing on her hind legs like a human on the shore of the creek singing a song. Her children were doing the same and they were dancing in the sand. Spotted Bear watched them for a while until the mother beaver saw him. Suddenly the beaver threw her children into the water and they swam away.

This type of thing happened on an occasional basis in the past. The Piegan felt blessed to observe the lives of the supernatural. And they often named people as a memory of the experience. Later in life Spotted Bear named one of his relatives "Holy Beaver Woman" for the mother beaver. My grandmother had a lot of stories like this, of the benign observation of the lives of supernatural entities.

But she had other stories that were not so benign, stories where the supernatural actively pursued human interaction. In one story she told about an incident that occurred with one of my grandfather's ancestors. It was about a young man who went out hunting alone. While he was out he was captured by a supernatural eagle. The eagle took him way up high in the mountains to his nest and left him there. If the young man squinted his eyes he could see his village way far below in the prairies. He knew that no one

would look for him because he had headed out alone. The eagle then started bringing him food to eat. "How nice," the young man thought. The eagle brought rabbits and deer. He had more meat now than if he had gone hunting himself.

Finally the young man realized that the eagle intended to eat him - after he had fattened up. The young man realized he had better start planning his escape. He waited for the right opportunity to attack and kill the eagle. He dismembered the eagle but saved all its body parts. Using one of the deer skins he fashioned himself a flying cape with the various parts of the eagle. He then jumped off the mountain. When he landed he untied the eagle's wings, its tailfeathers, and head. He wrapped them all up in the deer hide and made a bundle. He then walked back to camp. At the end of this story my grandmother would exclaim, "That was really true about those old time Indians, a real story. You can write it down."

"Real stories" to her were about the supernatural. I began to realize that when I asked her to tell a story, to her that meant "a real story," a story about the supernatural and not just one of daily life. Once a group of researchers from the University of Lethbridge came to interview my grandmother. On the phone they told her that they wanted to hear stories of the old days. But when they

*arrived they asked her about life on the reservation (and they asked in chronological order; tell us about the 1920s, tell us about the 1930s, tell us about the 1940s, etc.). At the end of the session my grandmother was exasperated, she asked "I thought they wanted to hear real stories?"*

*"Old timers" like my grandmother saw a distinction between the "real" world that was full of supernatural beings, animals, rocks, trees, and other elements and the one of our daily existence. The old time Piegan lived in a multi-layered reality where the extraordinary experiences of the Piegan with the supernatural were interwoven with the natural.*

### **"Real Stories"**

The vast majority of stories collected by the early recorders of Piegan life were what my grandmother would call "real stories" or stories that portrayed the relationship between the Piegan and the supernatural. In his attempts to understand the North Peigan in the late nineteenth century Father Emile Legal reflected that it was a "natural instinct in all of us to believe in the existence of invisible realities."<sup>1</sup> He recognized that at the essence of Piegan

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<sup>1</sup>Of the four tribes within the Blackfoot confederacy, the South Piegan and the North Peigan are the most closely

life was the belief that "the visible [was] really only a manifestation of the invisible."<sup>2</sup> From their earliest recordings the Piegan told others about their unique view of the history of their people. They emphasized that the Piegan believed that the invisible dimension was the real world and the visible dimension was a partial expression of this world. Like the modern day metaphor "the tip of the iceberg," the Piegan believed that the visible dimension was only a small part of their total reality. Most of their reality lay within the invisible dimension, unseen but known. The Piegan told Schultz, McClintock, Grinnell, Wissler, Duvall, Ewers and other recorders of Piegan life hundreds of stories of what Father Legal described as the "invisible reality" of the Piegan.

It was no surprise then that the first publications on the Piegan included a significant number of "real stories" including the early articles by James Willard Schultz's in *Field and Stream*, George Bird Grinnell's *Blackfoot Lodge*

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related, because they were probably one group before the nineteenth century. In this case I will use observations made by an early recorder of Piegan life that is not of the South Piegan, but the North Peigan.

<sup>2</sup>Father Emile Legal, "1885 Field Notes on Customs, Legends and Other Stories among the Blackfoot People," trans. Maurice Goutier, Papers of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, 4.



*Tales*, and Clark Wissler and David Duvall's *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians*. Wissler and Duvall learned that the stories they collected fell into, "four groups, - Tales of the Old Man, Star Myths, Ritualistic Origin, and Cultural or other Origins."<sup>3</sup> Grinnell found a similar division. Wissler and Duvall recognized that the majority of stories they collected were from the last category. These stories described the origins of just about every relationship the Piegan had with the supernatural. These stories also described why things were the way they were in Piegan society. These early recorders of Piegan life, like the recorders from the University of Lethbridge who came to interview my grandmother, learned that "real stories" or stories of supernatural relationships formed the basis of Piegan history - their version of history - which included both the seen and unseen.

### **World View**

The Piegan told the recorders of Piegan life that they divided the universe into three dimensions, which they called the Above world, the Below world and the Water

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<sup>3</sup>Wissler and Duvall, *Mythology*, 7.

world.<sup>4</sup> The Piegan believed that these three dimensions were parallel dimensions, existing side by side and separate. But they were also interconnected and permeable. The Piegan understood that within the earth, the water, and the sky reside a great variety of natural and supernatural beings. Within the Piegan universe lived not only the *Niitsitapi* ~ the original people but also the *Ksahkomitapi*, the earth beings, the *Soyiitapi*, the underwater beings and the *Spomitapi*, the sky beings.

The Above world consisted of all the celestial bodies, stars and constellations, including what the Piegan consider their holy trinity, *Naató'si*, the Sun and his wife *Ko'komíki'somm*, the Moon, and their son *Iipisówaahs*, the Morning Star.<sup>5</sup> The Above world was considered a separate dimension where beings lived out their lives, in their own homes and where animals and plants also lived. It included forces of nature such as Thunder who controlled thunder, lightening and rain. Other Above world supernatural beings included as Raven or Spider Man who lived east of the North

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<sup>4</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 259. The Piegan told George Bird Grinnell that their "religious system includes a number of minor deities or rather natural qualities and forces, which are personified and given shape. These are included in the general terms Above Persons, Ground Persons, and Under Water Persons."

<sup>5</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 258-60.

star and used his web to help people travel between the Above world and the earth. There are also animals such as eagles or geese who lived here on earth but were considered part of the Above dimension. There were, of course, restrictions for humans against eating animals from the Above realm.

The Water world consisted of the *Soyiitapi* or underwater beings. Similar to the Above world the beings who lived in the Water world also had their own villages, homes, animals and plants. Supernatural beings such as the underwater buffalo, underwater bears, underwater dogs and underwater horses also lived in villages among their own people within the Water world. It included forces of nature such as Wind Maker, who lived under the water in upper St. Mary's lake in present day Glacier National Park, and who controlled the wind. There were also underwater monsters. There were also animals such as beavers, otters, fish and turtles who lived here on earth but were considered part of the Water dimension. There were, of course, restrictions for humans against eating animals from the Water realm.

The Below world consisted of the *Niitsitapi*, the original people or humans. Similar to the Above world and Water world, the Below world consisted of humans who lived in villages and homes with animals and plants. There also

existed the *Ksahkomitapi*, the supernatural earth beings which include giants and little people and certain animals, plants, insects, rocks, shells and fossils. There were monsters, lots of monsters, and, of course, forces of nature such as Cold Maker, who lived to the north and controlled snow, ice and winter.

Some of the supernaturals found in the three worlds have numerous stories told about them, others have only a few. Some have notorious reputations, while others were considered more benevolent. There were no supernaturals that are all good or all evil. Their personalities represent all the variations found within humankind.

In addition to the distinct natural and supernatural beings, deities and forces in each of the three dimensions there are some who transcend these worlds such as *Napiwa*, *Katoyissa* and *Paie*. *Napiwa* or Old Man is a supernatural being who as far as was known has lived forever. He was foolish, petty and greedy. He lived life in the extreme, always wanting too much and thinking too little. *Katoyissa* or Blood Clot was a super hero who traveled the Below world ridding it of monsters to make it safer for the *Niitsitapi* or humans to live. And *Paie* or Scar Face played a similar role in the Above world. He became a super hero for his role in traveling the Above world ridding it of evil beings to

make it safe for the beings in the Above world to live.

If one were to look at these three worlds in the Piegan universe and assume a hierarchy, the Above world would contain beings, deities and forces with the most supernatural power, the Water world would be a close second and the Below world would contain the least amount of supernatural power (because humans live here). Within this hierarchy human beings did not have any supernatural power of and by themselves. Instead they needed to seek out supernatural power from those beings who had it. The Piegan believed that humans had to create an alliance with a supernatural to live life to the fullest. And the only way to live life to the fullest was to attempt to control the natural world around them. The Piegan told the early recorders of Piegan life that it was rare for a Piegan to *not* have an alliance with a supernatural entity and thus control of their environment. An essential part of being Piegan was having a relationship with the supernatural world.

### **Creating Alliances**

The Piegan told the early recorders of Piegan life that there were three ways to acquire supernatural power. The first was for a supernatural entity to seek out an

individual, speak to that person and transfer some of its supernatural power to him or her, thereby creating an alliance. Wissler and Duvall noted that, "The Blackfoot theory is that there functions in the universe a force (natoji = Sun power) most manifest in the Sun but pervading the entire world, a power (natoji) that may communicate with individuals making itself manifest in and through any object...Such manifestation is through speech...at the moment of speaking the object becomes for the time being 'as a person'... The being conferring power...formally transfer it to the recipient...This is regarded as a compact between the recipient and the being. [The relationship therefore is]...solely between one individual and the being who gave it."<sup>6</sup> In one story a Piegan man explained to Duvall and Wissler that his horse talked to him and told the man that the horse would give some of his supernatural power to the man. The man then pointed out a distinction. He stated to Duvall and Wissler that, "This story is not an account of a dream, but a statement of things that really happened."<sup>7</sup>

The Piegan differentiated between interacting with a

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<sup>6</sup>Clark Wissler, "Ceremonial Bundles of the Blackfoot Indians," *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, Vol. 7, Part 2, New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1912, 103.

<sup>7</sup>Wissler and Duvall, *Mythology*, 94.

supernatural in the visible realm versus interacting with a supernatural in a "dream" state. The second way to acquire an alliance was for a human to go out and search for supernatural assistance, through a dream. It was often through or within dreams that the Piegan interacted with the supernatural. George Bird Grinnell observed that the Piegan, "were firm believers in dreams. These, they say, are sent by the Sun to enable [them] to look ahead, to tell what is going to happen. A dream, especially if it is a strong one, - that is, if the dream is very clear and vivid, - is almost always obeyed."<sup>8</sup> The early recorders of Piegan life wondered if the Piegan really differentiated between reality and dreams or the visible and invisible dimensions. Walter McClintock stated it this way, "The old generation....lived in a sort of dream world of myth and legends and ceremonies."<sup>9</sup> Clark Wissler stated it more bluntly in a letter to Franz Boas, "Psychologically these people are 'dream mad.'"<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 263.

<sup>9</sup>Walter McClintock, "The Tragedy of the Blackfoot," *Southwest Museum Papers, Number Three*. Los Angeles: Southwest Museum, 1930, 4.

<sup>10</sup>Clark Wissler to Franz Boas, 9 July 1903. Accession Records, Donor Clark Wissler, 1903. Department of Anthropology, Archives. American Museum of National History, New York, New York.

The third and easiest way to create an alliance with the supernatural was to "purchase" supernatural power from another human who had already acquired it from any of the three methods. With this last way, a human could "purchase" all or part of the supernatural power and the human (the "seller") would transfer their knowledge and ability to the purchaser.<sup>11</sup> This was probably the more common way to create an alliance with the supernatural. So much so that Wissler published the 200+ page field notes of Duvall in "Ceremonial Bundles of the Blackfoot Indians" which explained in great detail how the Piegan "bought" and "sold" supernatural power.<sup>12</sup>

Overarching this system of individual Piegan developing alliances with the supernatural was a larger understanding of the history of the relationship between humans and the supernatural. Most of this history was public knowledge, some was known only to a few. The Piegan, though, had limited written accounts of their history.<sup>13</sup> Instead the

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<sup>11</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 69-279.

<sup>12</sup>Contemporary historian William Farr also explained this process of "buying" and "selling" supernatural power in his article, "Troubled Bundles, Troubled Blackfeet: The Travail of Cultural and Religious Renewal," *Montana the Magazine of Western History*, (Autumn 1993: 2-17.

<sup>13</sup>There were bison robes with pictographs of warriors' activities or winter counts with pictographs of annual events and other types of recordings.



Piegán surrounded themselves with and relied on mnemonic devices. Their landscape was one mnemonic narrative. Each place they traveled reminded them of their history and at each place they retold the stories of the adventures of the various supernatural beings in their three worlds. They also carried mnemonic devices or objects with them that reminded them of the stories of these supernatural beings and the relationships that humans formed with them.

### ***Niitóyis***

Tipis were one public place where the Piegán wrote their history for all to see. Painted on the outside of these "real dwellings" was a story that not only told the Piegán history of the universe but also of their relationship with the supernatural.<sup>14</sup> As they traveled around they took their stories with them. Their account placed humans and nonhumans, natural beings and supernatural beings, in interconnecting and often kinship relationships. For the Piegán this narrative functioned as a framework for a distinctive Piegán experience of the world; their stories

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<sup>14</sup>Donald G. Frantz and Norma Jean Russell, *Blackfoot Dictionary of Stems, Roots, and Affixes, Second Edition*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995; The word for tipi is *niitóyis* (singular form) or *niitóyiistsi* (plural form) which combines two word stems *niit+moyís* or real+dwelling.

and their symbols were a part of their everyday lives, predictable and regular, painted on their *niitóyis* for all to see, know and remember.

The Piegan told the early recorders of Piegan life of the stories painted on the sides of their tipis and the mnemonic methods they used to remember these stories. Some of the recorders of Piegan life published the information they learned from the Piegan, including George Bird Grinnell's article "The Lodges of the Blackfeet," Clark Wissler and David Duvall's chapter "Painted-Tipis," C.C. Uhlenbeck's article "The Origin of the Otter-Lodge," S.A. Barrett's article "The Painted Lodge or Ceremonial Tipi," McClintock's series of articles "The Blackfoot Tipi" and "Painted Tipis and Picture Writing of the Blackfoot Indians," and others.<sup>15</sup> In most published articles,

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<sup>15</sup>George Bird Grinnell, "The Lodges of the Blackfeet," *American Anthropologist*. New Series, Vol. 3, No. 4. (Oct.-Dec., 1901): 650-668; Clark Wissler, "Painted-Tipis," *Ceremonial Bundles of the Blackfoot Indians*, Anthropological Papers, vol. 7, part 2, New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1912, 220-241; C.C. Uhlenbeck, "The Origin of the Otter-Lodge," *Festschrift Vilhelm Thomsen*, Leipzig, 1912; S.A. Barrett, "The Painted Lodge or Ceremonial Tipi," *Milwaukee Public Museum Yearbook for 1921*, (1922): 85-88; Walter McClintock, "The Blackfoot Tipi," *The Masterkey*, Los Angeles: Southwest Museum, Vol. X, No. 3, (May, 1936) 85-96; Walter McClintock, "The Blackfoot Tipi," *Southwest Museum Leaflets*, No. 5. Los Angeles: Southwest Museum, 1936; and, Walter McClintock, "Painted Tipis and Picture Writing of the Blackfoot Indians," *Southwest Museum Leaflets*, No. 6., Los Angeles: Southwest Museum, 1936.

manuscripts or books, the recorders of Piegan life muted the identity and voices of the individual Piegan they interviewed. However the majority, but not all, of these recorders left behind field notes or unpublished records that identify the Piegan they collaborated with or interviewed. With these notes it is sometimes possible to reconstruct and find the voices of Piegan storytellers.

They told the recorders of Piegan life that they painted the top of a tipi black representing the night sky or the Sky world. On the back facing west and left unpainted or white in the shape of a Maltese cross was *Iipisówaahs*, Morning Star, the son of *Naató'si*, the Sun and *Ko'komíki'somm*, the Moon. On the northern smoke flap were six circles, left unpainted or white, representing the constellation of *Mióhpokoiksi*, the Lost Children (Pleiades). And on the southern smoke flap were seven circles, also left unpainted or white, representing the constellation *Ihkitsíkammiksi*, the Seven Brothers (Ursa major).<sup>16</sup>

They said they usually painted the bottom of the tipi red representing the earth or the Below world with either rounded forms representing the prairies or triangular forms

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<sup>16</sup>Clark Wissler, "Painted-Tipis," *Ceremonial Bundles of the Blackfoot Indians*, Anthropological Papers, vol. 7, part 2, New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1912, 220-241.

representing the mountains extended around the tipi base. Within this red area were circles left unpainted or white representing *Kakato'si*, a star child who fell to earth. This design was considered the basic universal design that any Piegan could paint on their tipi.<sup>17</sup> This design was the communal history of the Piegan and the supernatural.

In addition to the universal design, sometimes a tipi design also had a supernatural being, animal or object painted on its sides representing the individual tipi owner's own personal relationship with a supernatural entity. If so, the owner would paint a representation of the animal or entity on both sides of the tipi. Both images would be painted facing east toward the door and the rising sun: the male representation painted on the north side and the female representation painted on the south side.

My grandfather's parents Aimsback and Hollering In the Air had an unique tipi design called the "Big Rock" tipi.<sup>18</sup> Instead of having two separate male/female images, this tipi design had only one large round figure painted on the east

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<sup>17</sup>The basic design only included elements of the Sky world and Below world. A representation of the Water world was not painted onto the tipi unless it was related to the individual tipi owner's personal design.

<sup>18</sup>The Montana State University Archives has both photos and a lithograph of this tipi recorded at the 1943 O'kan (sundance) at Heart Butte.

side of the tipi facing the rising sun. The one image of the "Big Rock" embodied both the male and female essence of the supernatural entity. The Piegan told Grinnell that, "The paintings on the lodges represent sacred animals or objects which possess protective power...to insure good fortune.... The paintings thus require no special explanation and need be accounted for by no elaborate theory."<sup>19</sup> The Piegan told Duvall and Wissler that the individual tipi designs were the sole property of the owner. Thus it was up to the owner to decide if they wanted to share the story with others.

The universal design though consisted of communally held stories that everyone knew. My grandmother told these stories to me throughout life. The characters of these stories were well known members of their community. The Piegan told Duvall and Wissler that, "Mythological characters [were] so firmly fixed in folk-thought, that each may be regarded as a reality."<sup>20</sup> The Piegan had limited restrictions on by whom or when these publicly held stories could be told. The Piegan told Duvall and Wissler that, "So far as we know there are no restrictions against the telling of myths at certain times of the year. There is no detailed

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<sup>19</sup>George Bird Grinnell, "The Lodges of the Blackfeet," *American Anthropologist*. New Series, Vol. 3, No. 4. (Oct.-Dec., 1901), 650-668.

<sup>20</sup>Duvall and Wissler, *Mythology*, 17.

myth which can be narrated only to select audiences.... Neither are their myths peculiar to women or men, as the case may be, any one being at liberty to render any myth whatsoever."<sup>21</sup> (This was not the case with individually held stories.) Because anyone could tell these stories the early recorders of Piegan life recorded multiple versions of the same story and they worried about the accuracy of the stories they collected. One Blood man told Duvall and Wissler, "The parts of this weed all branch off from the stem. They go different ways, but all come from the same root. So it is with the different versions of a myth."<sup>22</sup> The universal design painted on a tipi represented several public stories of Piegan history which were altered (but not changed) with each storyteller, because this history was known by all and could be retold by anyone. I am going to retell them too, but I will focus on the versions told by the Piegan from the turn of the twentieth century.

### **Top of Tipi: Story of Morning Star and Mistaken Morning Star**

The Piegan painted a representation of Morning Star on the back or west side of their tipis. It was in the shape of a Maltese cross. Although there are multiple stories about

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<sup>21</sup>Duvall and Wissler, *Mythology*, 17.

<sup>22</sup>Duvall and Wissler, *Mythology*, 5.

Morning Star the one that is most associated with its place on a tipi is the story of his friendship with a human named *Paie* or Scar Face.<sup>23</sup> This first story that is part of the universal tipi design of the Piegan describes a close friendship that develops between Morning Star, a being from the Sky world and *Paie*, a human, and also the relationship that developed between Morning Star's parents the Sun and Moon and *Paie*.

The story of Morning Star and *Paie* is long and complex with multiple sections which will not be recounted here. However, the basic storyline tells of *Paie*, a poor young man, traveling east to ask the Sun to remove an unsightly

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<sup>23</sup>*Paie* is often translated as "Scar Face" but the literal translation is "Ridge." The scar on *Paie*'s face looked like a ridge on the landscape, see C.C. Uhlenbeck's *Original Blackfoot Texts*. (Verhandelingen Der Koninklijke Akademie Van Wetenschappen Te Amsterdam, 1911): 50-57. Other versions of *Paie* are found in: Edward S. Curtis, *The North American Indian: Being a Series of Volumes Picturing and Describing the Indians of the United States and Alaska*. Seattle, 1911, vol. 6, 59-69; Jessie Louise Donaldson and James Willard Schultz, *The Sun God's Children*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930, 71-76; Duvall and Wissler, *Mythology*, 61-65; George Bird Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, Williamstown, Mass.: Corner House Publishers, 1972, 93-103; J.P. De Josselin De Jong, *Blackfoot Texts From the Southern Piegan Reservation Teton County Montana with the Help of Black-Horse-Rider Collected and Published with an English Translation*, Amsterdam, Johannes Muller, 1914, 80-82; Walter McClintock, *The Old North Trail: Life, Legends and Religion of the Blackfeet Indians*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999, 491-505; and Wissler, "Sun Dance," 269-70.

scar from his face. *Paie* has many adventures as he travels east across the prairies, over the mountains and finally to a big lake. Across the lake and up in the Sky is the Sun's lodge. Along the way Morning Star befriends *Paie*, the son of the Sun and the Moon.

Morning Star brings *Paie* home to meet his mother while his father is away. At night the Sun returns from his travel across the sky and he notices upon reaching the door of the lodge the smell of a human, which is disagreeable to the Sun. The Sun asked the Moon to make a smudge with *Ohkiniimo* or cedar leaves (*Thuja plicata*) to cleanse the lodge. Humans learned in this story the process of smudging to clean a person, place or object before interacting with a supernatural, such as the Sun.

The Sun welcomed *Paie* to the Sky world and told *Paie* that he could go anywhere but warned him to avoid the west as it was dangerous. Ignoring this advice (of course it would not be a myth if the young hero actually heeded the advice of an elder) *Paie* set off to see the far west. He immediately encountered the wicked cranes (*Grus canadensis*). Morning Star also warned *Paie* and reminded him that - these were the cranes who killed all the children of the Sun and Moon - leaving one child, Morning Star. *Paie* balked at the potential danger, took his spear and fought the cranes to



the death, killing all seven of them one by one.

The Sun and Moon were overjoyed at the destruction of the cranes and in gratitude the Sun transferred some of his supernatural power via various objects to *Paie* who in turn gave them to the humans in the Below world. (This part of the story used to be told and acted out as part of a 10 day ceremony.) The Sun also performed a ritual to remove the scar from *Paie's* face. The Sun did this by performing four sweat-lodges in a row. With each sweat *Paie's* scar began to fade. By the last sweat the scar was removed and the Sun made *Paie* look like Morning Star. So much so, that the Moon actually mistook *Paie* for her own son. Thereafter, the Piegan knew *Paie* or Scar Face as the Mistaken Morning Star. The Sun then instructs *Paie* on how to best communicate with the Sun, "'When you return to your people and wish to make an offering to me, you must first build a sweathouse and there make your offerings. Then I will hear your prayers and accept them.'"<sup>24</sup>

At the end of his adventure up in the Sky world, including ridding the Sky world of the evil cranes and other creatures, *Paie* returned to the Below world with the help of Spider Man. *Paie* brought back the knowledge of a great many things that he taught to the humans below. He also gained

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<sup>24</sup>Wissler, *Sundance*, 270.

status as a deity. His symbolic representation was added to all Piegan iconography, along with the Sun, Moon and Morning Star. Morning Star was honored for his friendship with a human who made the Sky world safe with his representation of the Piegan tipi. It was Morning Star's friendships and relationships with humans that created a lasting bond between supernaturals in the Sky world and humans in the Below world.

### **Bottom of Tipi: Story of the Star Child**

The Piegan painted white circles on the bottom of their tipis that represented the Star Child, a star who came to earth. The Piegan told the early recorders of Piegan life the story of *Soatsaki* or Feather woman a human who married a Sky person *Iipisówaahs*, the Morning Star and their son the Star Child.<sup>25</sup> In this story a human married a Sky person and they had a child who returned to the Sky world as a star thereby creating an everlasting kinship relationship between humans and the Sky world. The Star Child in turn provided

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<sup>25</sup>The story of *Soatsaki*, Feather Woman is sometimes called "The Girl who Married the Star" or the story of "The Fixed Star" and can be found in J.P. De Josselin De Jong, *Blackfoot Texts From the Southern Piegan Reservation Teton County Montana with the Help of Black-Horse-Rider Collected and Published with an English Translation*, Amsterdam, Johannes Muller, 1914, 95-97, and Duvall and Wissler, *Mythology*, 58-61.

assistance to humans both as a star and as its physical earthly representative.

This story began when two young women decided to sleep outside of their lodge on a hot summer night. They woke up before dawn and looked up to see the stars in the sky. One of the girls, *Soatsaki* looked up and proclaimed upon observing *Iipisówaahs*, the Morning Star or Early Riser as he was also known that she would like to marry him because he was the brightest star. As it would happen, she forgets that she made this statement.

Later when she was alone collecting wood away from camp *Iipisówaahs* appeared in human form and stopped *Soatsaki* from returning to the camp. *Soatsaki* did not recognize him and she did not like his intrusion. She asked him why he was stopping her. He replied that he was *Iipisówaahs* and she had pledged to be his wife. After a moment she remembered and acquiesced and agreed to go with him to the Sky world.

His parents *Naatos*, the Sun and *Kokomikisomm*, the Moon were happy with his human wife. The Sky world was similar to the Below world with different landscapes, animals and plants and other types of natural life. After she had been there awhile *Kokomikisomm* provided her daughter-in-law with a root digger and instructed her on how to dig roots. *Kokomikisomm* told her daughter-in-law that she could go

anywhere in the Sky world but *Kokomikisomm* warned her daughter-in-law not to dig up the forbidden prairie turnip.

Time passed and *Soatsaki* continued to live in the Sky world. Eventually her and Morning Star had a child. However she never overcame her curiosity about the forbidden prairie turnip. One day she decided to dig it up believing that no one would find out. She immediately learned that when she removed the prairie turnip it opened a hole in the Sky world through which she could see the earth below. She saw her village, her friends and family and she became very lonesome for her old life. When she returned back to her lodge *Ipisówaahs* knew what she had done.

He knew that she would never be happy in the Sky world again. And so he instructed her to return to the Below world with the Spider Man's web. She brought her son and her new digging stick. Piegan women claim that they learned to dig roots from *Soatsaki* who learned it from the Moon.

*Ipisówaahs* warned his wife about not letting their son touch the earth. *Soatsaki* abided by this warning until one day when she allowed an old grandmother to watch the Star Child while she did her chores. The old woman did not understand the severity of the prohibition and allowed the Star Child to get off the bed. When *Soatsaki* returned she discovered that the Star Child had turned into a puffball

fungus. Later that night she looked up into the sky and there was a new star in the hole left by the turnip. The Star Child had turned into the North star (Polaris).<sup>26</sup>

The Piegan called the North star and the prairie puffball by the same name, *Kakató'si*. The North star was an important star to the Piegan for several reasons. The North star helped the ancient Piegan travel across the Northern Great Plains. The Piegan also used the movements of the constellation *Ihkitsíkammiksi*, the Seven Brothers (Ursa major) to tell time with the North Star. They watched the Seven Brothers as they moved around the North Star during the night.<sup>27</sup> The Piegan also calculated the seasons by the movement of these nightly stars. For the Piegan the North Star remained an important supernatural being, half human and half Sky-person, a distant relative who helped them tell time and move across the landscape. The Star Child's earthly representative was the prairie puffball which provided medicine and tinder. The Star Child was painted on the base of their tipis as a daily reminder of the kinship relationship between the Sky world and the Below world.

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<sup>26</sup>Duvall and Wissler, *Mythology*, 60.

<sup>27</sup>Clark Wissler, "Reckoning Time," *The Social Life of the Blackfoot Indians*. Anthropological Papers, vol. 7, part 1, New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1911, 44-50.

## Top of the Tipi: Story of the Lost Children

The Piegan painted six white circles representing the constellation *Mióhpokoiksi*, the Lost Children (Pleiades) on the north smoke flap of their tipis. The story of the Lost Children began during the spring when the Piegan first went out to hunt bison.<sup>28</sup> At that time the Piegan were still using *pishkun* or buffalo jumps.<sup>29</sup> In this particular season a group of poor children asked the bison hunters for the fresh yellow hides of the young bison calves so that they could make themselves new robes. However the men said they were too busy and they ignored the children's plea's for help. Year after year these poor children asked the hunters for new robes. And year after year the hunters ignored their plea.

Finally the children grew tired and decided to leave camp and set out on their own. But then they argued about what to do and where to go. One said, "we have no where to go." Another said, "where can we go?" The oldest among them knew what to do. He told the others that they should go join

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<sup>28</sup>Joseph Tatsey, "The Bunched Stars," in Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 112-113, also Wissler-Duvall, *Mythology*, p. 71-72 and McClintock, *Old North Trail*, p.490.

<sup>29</sup>Buffalo jumps were steep cliffs that the Piegan used to kill bison. The Piegan pursued the bison toward the cliff and then the bison "jumped" (technically fell) to their deaths. See Brink, *Imagining Head Smashed In*.

the Sky people. "They will take pity on us and take care of us," he said. The oldest then took the hairs of a weasel and sprinkled it on each of the children. And he took some of the weasel hair in his mouth and rubbed it on his hands. He blew the weasel hair up into the sky and the children arrived up in the Sky world.<sup>30</sup>

The next they knew they were at the home of the Moon and the Sun. They told the Moon and Sun their pitiful story of misfortunate and rejection. The Moon immediately took pity on them and took them in. However the children also wanted to seek their revenge on their former camp, which they could only do with Sun's help.

The children asked the Moon to ask the Sun to dry up all the water on the earth for seven days. It took some coaxing but the Sun finally acquiesced to the Moon's request. The humans down on earth began to suffer from this retaliation. They asked their dogs to help them find water. The dogs went out to the dry river bed and dug for fresh water springs. When this was not enough, the dogs dug for more. Eventually even the dogs were tired of the drought. On the seventh day the dogs prayed to the Moon (they howled) to

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<sup>30</sup>The Piegan believe that the weasel is a transformative supernatural animal. The Piegan believe it can help humans change form. See John C. Ewers. "Notes on the Weasel in Historic Plains Indian Culture," *Plains Anthropologist*. Vol. 22, (1977): 253-62.

bring back the water. On the eighth day the water returned with a great rain storm.

The Moon told the children to remain in the Sky world and they became the constellation. The Lost Children, or Pleiades. The Sky world became a refuge for humans when other humans were not behaving in an acceptable way. And humans suffered the wrath of other humans' anger via a supernatural being. Now The Lost Children are seen every Fall in the night sky. But in the Spring when it is time to hunt they are nowhere to be found, because The Lost Children are reminding the Piegan of their uncharitable behavior. Although the majority of Piegan stories do not have a "moral to the story" some encourage the Piegan to behave in socially appropriate ways. The Piegan painted the constellation the Lost Children on their tipi's as a reminder of their moral duty to take care of the least within their society, especially children, and the continuing relationship between the Sky world and Below world.

#### **Top of the Tipi: Story of the Seven Brothers**

The Piegan painted seven white circles representing the constellation *Ihkitsíkammiksi*, the Seven Brothers (Ursa major) on the south smoke flap of their tipis. The story of



the Big Dipper is a long complex story of an evil woman with supernatural power and her impact on her family.<sup>31</sup> It began with two women, an older sister and a younger sister. The elder sister had been taking evening walks where she met a bear who became her secret lover. Her mother was worried about where her daughter went in the evening. She asked the younger sister to follow the older sister to uncover the truth. When the younger sister revealed the situation to her family their father got together a group of the men from the camp to kill the bear.

After the bear was killed the elder sister convinced the younger to go retrieve a piece of the bear's body. Unbeknownst to the younger sister the bear was supernatural. The younger sister got one of the bear's paws and returned it to the older sister. (It is well known in Piegan stories that supernatural beings can be regenerated with the smallest bit of their flesh. To kill a supernatural a person would need to completely incinerate the being or learn their secret weakness.) With this one bear paw the elder sister acquired the supernatural power to turn herself into a bear. She then sought revenge on those that attacked her lover and

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<sup>31</sup>Julia White Swan told her version of "The Woman Who Turned Into a Bear" to David Duvall who translated it for Truman Michelson. It was rare that the recorders of Piegan life ever interviewed women and fortunately Michelson published her version in "Piegan Tales," 244-246.

headed to camp to kill the villagers. Her younger sister pledged to be her eternal servant if she spared her life.

Meanwhile the sister's seven brothers returned from a hunting trip to find everyone in the village killed. They found the younger sister, who explained the whole sordid situation. The seven brothers then asked the younger sister to find out the secret of how to kill the elder sister. Feigning concern for the older sister's safety the younger sister tricked the sister-bear into telling the younger sister her weakness - the sister-bear could be killed with an awl. The seven brothers then scoured the camp for awls. The younger sister scattered these outside of their lodge. One evening the younger sister tempted the elder sister into chasing her outside of the lodge where the sister-bear stepped on an awl. Her powers became weakened and the seven brothers jumped on her, killed her and set her on fire. Unbeknownst to them a small piece of her finger blew away and she was able to resurrect herself.

The elder sister grew into a large and angry supernatural bear. She was set on killing her seven brothers and younger sister when the middle brother took out a feather with supernatural ability. He blew the feather up into the Sky world and with the feather's assistance the seven brothers and sister escaped. Once there they

transformed into the stars. The younger sister carried her youngest brother and placed herself nearest to the North Star. The eldest brother moved next to her. The siblings then spread out from oldest to youngest to form the Seven Brothers or the Big Dipper.

Once again the Sky world provided refuge for humans leaving the Below world. In this case they sought safety from an evil Below world supernatural being who killed their entire village, pursued them and tried to kill them. The humans were fortunate that they escaped and found sanctuary in the Sky world. The Piegan painted the Big Dipper on their tipis for several reasons. First, it provided the Piegan with powerful evidence that the universe in which they lived was endowed with supernatural power. Especially at times when it seemed that they had no control over it. However in the end that they could acquire either the knowledge or the power to overcome the natural or supernatural entities and live a good life. Second, it provided assistance to the Piegan because the Big Dipper along with the North Star could be used to tell time during the night, to tell the seasons of the year and to help them navigate their way across the prairies.

### **Distinct Reality**

The early recorders of Piegan life interviewed dozens of people at the turn of the twentieth century in an attempt to understand Piegan life and lifeways. All of these individuals told similar stories; the Piegan had a unique view of the universe that included having well established relationships with the supernatural. They created alliances with the supernatural and accessed supernatural power for a variety of purposes. The supernatural provided a place for friendships, kinship and even sanctuary. The Piegan told the recorders of Piegan life that the "invisible" realm was not only real to them, but omnipresent. It structured not only their views of the universe, but much of their social behavior. It permeated their daily lives and they created mnemonic devices to remember and share their stories about it. Duvall and Wissler noted that, "mythical characters are.... regarded as having made at least some important contribution to the welfare of the people."<sup>32</sup>

The Star Child covered the hole in the sky left after his mother Feather Woman dug up the forbidden turnip. He then became the North Star which created a visible reminder of the kinship relationship between the Sky world and the Below world. Every night he was there for all to see. And every day his earthly representation, the puffball fungus,

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<sup>32</sup>Duvall and Wissler, *Mythology*, 17.

and their symbol, the circle painted on the bottom of the tipi were also there for all to see.

The visible symbolic representations served as reminders to the Piegan of the role of their own history, stories, family, community, and the humble place of humans in the larger unseen universe. But it also represented who they could contact when they need assistance to alter the natural world. For the Piegan the unseen was just as real or even times more real than what they saw in everyday life. Father Legal recognized from his first interactions with the Piegan. He observed that they believed in an invisible dimension which took on "a completely distinct reality."<sup>33</sup> It defined their existence.

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<sup>33</sup>Legal, "1885 Field Notes," 4.



## Chapter Five

### VISIBLE REALITY - THE SAOKIO-TAPI (PRAIRIE PEOPLE)

*My grandmother's maternal great-grandmother Big Mountain Lion Woman (poorly translated as Big Tiger Woman) was born sometime in the 1850s when Fort Benton was the center of life in the northern reaches of a vast territory extending across the Great Plains claimed but not yet organized by the United States. In her late sixties and seventies she helped raise my grandmother. She entertained my grandmother with exciting stories of her youth on the Northern Great Plains. She married a man named Spotted Bear and many of her stories were of their life together. And others were of his supernatural ability to transcend reality. Big Mountain Lion Woman told my grandmother of happy times traveling to Fort Benton to trade, picking roots and plants along the Missouri river and using the ferry (instead of fording) to cross the river to go south to raid the Crow. There were also unhappy memories as well, like "starvation winter" when her husband Spotted Bear traveled for miles off the newly created reservation to trade for food to feed his family.*

*My grandmother's great-grandparents were accustomed to*

a lifestyle that included significant travel. Similar to other Piegan they were also accustomed to living in various places throughout their historic territory. The reservation changed that. After 1875 when the U.S. government set up a permanent headquarters within reservation boundaries they expected and demanded that the Piegan follow suit. My grandmother's great-grandparents, Spotted Bear and Big Mountain Lion Woman, moved onto the reservation and set up a permanent home on Little Badger creek on the south side of the reservation along with other members of their band, the Never Laughs band.

They attempted to continue their previous lifestyle, moving on and off the reservation getting the resources they needed to live. But they also learned to move within the reservation. They would move up to the mountains in the summer, living in tents or tipis, where they gathered roots and berries and hunted. Sometimes they even worked as hunting guides for non-Indian adventurers. They returned back downstream to their log cabins during the winter with their dried provisions. When my grandmother came to live with them this became her life as well. Although essentially restricted to the reservation this movement back and forth between mountain and river valley in summer and winter became a part of their new lives. My grandmother remembers



*caching their supplies in a pit at the end of each summer season in the mountains. They returned the next spring to dig up their supplies, picking up where they left off. Her grandmothers allowed her great freedom. Riding her horse in the foothills along the Rocky Mountain front became my grandmother's favorite pastime and memory.*

*The Piegan, though, continued to view places off the reservation as part of their territory. My grandmother's family taught her about these places even though she would never see most of them. They remembered the places where they used to go hunting. They remembered the places where they had collected bitterroot, prairie turnips, berries and medicines. They remembered the places where they forded rivers. They remembered sacred sites and religious areas.*

*Despite the changes in their lifestyle, memory of the past was something they could maintain and teach to their grandchildren. They remembered the uses and environmental knowledge of these places. And they shared that knowledge with their grandchildren. My grandmother said one of the things they missed the most on a day to day basis was the plants they used for both food and medicine. Some of the plants they were accustomed to using could now only be found far off the reservation. They were now restricted from returning to some of these places. Others were too far to*

travel without spending several days camping. And with new American settlers to contend with they could not camp in their usual places.

My grandfather's family shared a similar experience. My grandfather's father Aimsback and his grandfather Calf Looking also moved onto the reservation and set up a permanent home on Blacktail creek on the south side of the reservation. Adjusting to this smaller landscape took time. However, like my grandmother's family, hunting for deer and elk (instead of bison) was a less difficult transition than trying to find all the plants they used. One time my grandfather's parents Aimsback and Hollering In The Air took the train over 500 miles east to Fort Berthold, North Dakota for a community celebration. They traveled with a group of other Piegan families. While they were at Fort Berthold the women took advantage of the opportunity to collect a large quantity of prairie turnips which could be found in abundance on the central plains but not near the mountains. They returned home with bags of turnips to dry for future use.

My grandparents' families did not always have to travel that far to gather plants. Their days of traveling to Fort Benton and the Missouri river were pretty much over once they settled on the reservation. However my grandfather's

mother used to also travel 100 miles south down to the Sun river near Fort Shaw to gather plants such as yucca which they valued for its medicinal qualities. These and other plants became more highly prized as they became more difficult to acquire. And now these women added these plants to the items they traded with each other.

Both of my grandparents' families thought of themselves as fortunate. In the early reservation years the Piegan lost control of their mobility. However my family continued to travel to some of the places off the reservation when they could to gather the plants and other resources important to their lives. These excursions provided the women with happy memories of returning to a place they had once frequented. And a time when they had freedom of choice. After thousands of years living on the prairies they were beginning to learn how to live in a new place close to the mountains. Despite their loss of mobility my grandmother and grandfather heard their stories of the past, their prairie life and their freedom. This gave them the strength and the knowledge to shape their own lives.

### **Story of a Prairie People**

Unfortunately in contemporary America most people forget that reservations are usually the remnants of once

larger homelands of American Indian tribes and that their earliest residents had to make significant adjustments to live. Many younger tribal members themselves forget this as well and believe that their ancestral homelands and sacred sites are confined within reservation boundaries. One name the Piegan once called themselves was the Saokio-tapi or the Prairie people. Their ancient name signifies their recognition of their place on the northern Great Plains. The early recorders of Piegan life noted this in their writings. George Bird Grinnell for example subtitled his 1892 book *Blackfoot Lodge Tales - "The Story of a Prairie People."*<sup>1</sup> James Willard Schultz nearly 10 years earlier wrote that, "The Blackfeet are pre-eminently a prairie people," stressing that, "On the prairie... from the Saskatchewan to the Yellowstone, there is not a streamlet or slough by which they have not pitched their lodges."<sup>2</sup> Piegan understanding of and relationship to nature and the environment emanated from their knowledge of this place of North America.

However what we know of their ancient knowledge also emerged from a particular time period within global history

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<sup>1</sup>This book is about the Southern Piegan in Montana and not about the entire Blackfoot confederacy.

<sup>2</sup>J. Willard Schultz, "Life Among the Blackfeet - Third Paper," *Forest and Stream*, Vol. 21, No. 20, (December 13, 1883), 383.

known as the "Little Ice Age."<sup>3</sup> During that time the Piegan drew on many different ecosystems within the northern Great Plains to gather the resources necessary for daily life.<sup>4</sup> Because of their use of numerous ecosystems the recorders of Piegan life sometimes made harsh assumptions about the nomadic lifestyle of the Piegan, such as stating that the Piegan "roamed" from place to place without any awareness. Recent scholarship by environmental historian Theodore Binnema and archaeologist Jack Brink describe the complex understandings that the Piegan had of both plant and animal ecology which informed their strategic use of these resources.<sup>5</sup> One other reason we know that the Piegan did not "roam" is because they told us in their stories.

*Kainaikoan* was one such storyteller. As far as we know

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<sup>3</sup>Brian Fagan, *The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History, 1300-1850*, New York: Basic Books, 2002, and James Earl Sherow, *The Grasslands of the United States: An Environmental History*. ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2007, 307.

<sup>4</sup>The early recorders of Piegan life collected stories of life on the prairies that were marked by longer and colder winters and wetter summers with occasional hot, dry or drought periods. However some recorders did not understand that they were documenting through the lens of this era of global climate shift. As we are entering a new era of climate change on the northern Great Plains and globally, we do not know how the Piegan would live on the prairies today. And we cannot take their knowledge of the past and use it in today's new world.

<sup>5</sup>Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, and Brink, *Imagining Head-Smashed-In*.

*Kainaikoan*, a fifty or sixty something year old Piegan man, could not speak English when he told his stories of Piegan life to linguist C.C. Uhlenbeck.<sup>6</sup> In his published writings Uhlenbeck did not provide his collaborator's complete English name but he was probably Jim Blood, a full-blood Piegan born in the 1850s.<sup>7</sup> Joseph Tatsey or *Istχkyáχtso* served as *Kainaikoan's* interpreter. Mr. Tatsey was a mixed-race Piegan who was about the same age as *Kainaikoan*. *Kainaikoan* told Uhlenbeck several stories of his life and his family's history.

It is difficult to calculate the age of stories that the various Piegan individuals told Uhlenbeck. We do know that for the most part individuals learned history and stories from their families. Contemporary scholars such as the late Howard Harrod tried to figure out the age of such stories. (See pages 39-40.) Using Harrod's methodology, if *Kainaikoan* was born in 1850s, and his father in 1820s, and

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<sup>6</sup>C.C. Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, Verhandelingen Der Koninklijke Akademie Van Wetenschappen Te Amsterdam, 1912.

<sup>7</sup>The translation of *Kainaikoan* should be Many Leaders Man, for: *Kainai* - Many Leaders and *koan* - Man. The *Kainai* are one of the groups of the Blackfoot, now located in Alberta, Canada. However in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Canadian government did not translate *Kainai* as Many Leaders, they translated it as "Blood" which stemmed from the fact that the *Kainai* people painted their faces with red ochre. The Americans then translated *Kainaikoan* name (now his surname) to "Blood" and probably gave him the first name Jim.

his grand-father in 1790s, and his great-grand-father in 1760s, then *Kainaikoan's* oral historical knowledge stretches back to the mid-eighteenth century. This would be about the time when the Piegan first acquired horses.

The story that *Kainaikoan* told Uhlenbeck titled "How the Ancient Piegan Lived" probably described the story of his grandfather's band, the *Aápaitapì*, and it was probably a life that *Kainaikoan* experienced along with his family when he was a child and young man.<sup>8</sup> Jim Blood's grandfather was *Nínaistako* or Chief-Mountain (now called Mountain Chief), one of the leaders of *Aápaitapì* or Blood-people band of the South Piegan and a long time knowledgeable leader.<sup>9</sup>

*Kainaikoan's* story is significant because it documented the annual movements of one Piegan band for one year on the northern Great Plains. Unbeknownst to Uhlenbeck no scholar had documented this process before even though it was a well known aspect of Piegan life. This story provides contemporary scholars with insights into the "visible" world of the Piegan, their empirical knowledge about land and the use of it's natural resources during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The following sections will retrace *Kainaikoan's* and the *Aápaitapì* band's steps.

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<sup>8</sup>Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 1-38.

<sup>9</sup>De Jong, *Blackfoot Texts*, 120-121.

## **Social Organization**

The Piegan, similar to the other prairie peoples, organized themselves into what *Kainaikoan* called *kaiyok'kowõmmostĩijaw* or bands, which consisted of several related families living and traveling together.<sup>10</sup> Since first contact Europeans and Americans recognized that the Piegan and the other groups of the Blackfoot organized themselves into these smaller units from within the larger political structure of the Piegan tribe. No one documented the total number of bands within the Blackfoot until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century after the bison were gone and the early reservation years had arrived. In 1883 James Willard Schultz documented 21 Piegan bands, 15 Kainai bands, and 12 Siksika bands (48 total).<sup>11</sup> A few years later ethnographer George Bird Grinnell documented 24 Piegan bands, 13 Kainai bands, and 8 Siksika bands (45 total).<sup>12</sup> These numbers however do not include the Inaxix (or Small Robes) who were almost annihilated by the Crow in 1846. Despite this, contemporary scholars have regarded these numbers as representative of

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<sup>10</sup>Clark Wissler, "Bands," *Social Life of the Blackfoot Indians*. Anthropological Papers, vol. 7, part 1. New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1911, 18-22.

<sup>11</sup>J. Willard Schultz, "Life Among the Blackfeet," *Forest and Stream*, Vol. 21, No. 18, (November 29, 1883): 343-344.

<sup>12</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 208-210.



the number of bands in earlier historic and even ancient times.<sup>13</sup> However we do not know what life was like on the Great Plains before the horse. Therefore we can only extrapolate and use information gathered during the reservation period.<sup>14</sup>

Historically the Piegan tribe divided itself into numerous bands of related families who lived and traveled together. If Schultz enumerated 21 bands and Grinnell 24 bands by the end of the nineteenth century we can safely assume there were around two dozen bands in the mid-nineteenth century. Although scholars often described them as nomadic, Piegan travels throughout their territory were not haphazard but strategic. They usually did not follow animals, instead they went to places where they knew animals to be or to places they created by altering the landscape. They hunted large game such as bison, elk and deer, and gathered berries and fruit, plants and roots and other

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<sup>13</sup>Scholars often use sources and evidence primarily collected during the reservation period to tell us about Piegan life in prehistoric times. And scholars also often use only Piegan sources to extrapolate about all the Blackfoot in general.

<sup>14</sup>There are of course many references to the Piegan and other Blackfoot tribes in first contact records. However these are minimal and from the fur traders' or priests' perspectives. The information gathered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a systematic effort to collect Piegan perspectives.

natural resources at these specific places.<sup>15</sup> The only agriculture that the Piegan practiced was the raising of tobacco. The Piegan chose a particular site to grow tobacco and returned to it throughout its growing season.<sup>16</sup>

Ethnohistorian John Ewers estimated that Piegan bands usually consisted of 20 to 30 lodges with one family living in each lodge. Such a band would consist of about 120 to 180 people.<sup>17</sup> In addition, he estimated that the Piegan had as many as 10 horses per lodge, with some families having more.<sup>18</sup> On average each band traveled with 200 to 300 horses.<sup>19</sup> Each band lived separately and traveled separately within Piegan territory. They traveled within their territory, throughout prairies, grasslands, wetlands, and sometimes into the mountains, moving to different places to

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<sup>15</sup>Brink, *Imagining Head Smashed In*.

<sup>16</sup>Schultz, "Tobacco Planting," *The Sun God's Children*.

<sup>17</sup>Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 9.

<sup>18</sup>John Ewers interview of Chewing Black Bones and Rides at the Door, translated by Reuben Black Boy, March 1, 1943, "Family Use of Horses," XIV, Box 7, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. "A family of 6, say a man and wife with four children would need: 2 horses to carry lodge poles; 1 to carry the lodge; 1 horse for the travois; 2 horses for packing parfleches -- it would take a good ten head for a purposes for such a family. NOTE -- The ten would include 4 riding horses for hunting and general use of the family."

<sup>19</sup>Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfeet Culture*, 20-21.

acquire specific resources. During the winter individual Piegan bands settled in designated river valleys. In the spring they moved to specific sites to hunt and gather berries or roots. Late in the summer all the Piegan bands traveled to a specific location for the annual gathering of the *O'kan*.<sup>20</sup> It was the only time during the year when all the bands of the Piegan came together. In the fall the bands separated and moved to continue hunting and gathering to prepare for winter. As winter approached they would return to the river valley designated as their own.

### **Before Moving**

Historically the Piegan divided their year into two seasons - winter and summer.<sup>21</sup> During the winter a band typically stayed in one place for about 6 months and

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<sup>20</sup>Each year a different woman sponsored the *O'kan*. Each year Piegan bands traveled to within the designated site selected by the woman to participate in the *O'kan*. The woman announced her intention to sponsor the *O'kan* in the early spring when the *Okonok* or service berry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) was in bloom. The woman's band sent runners to each band to announce her intentions and invited the bands to the designated place. When the *Okonok* or service berry was fully ripe in the late summer the Piegan held the *O'kan*. See Wissler, *Sundance*.

<sup>21</sup>J. Willard Schultz, "Life Among the Blackfeet - Fourth Paper," *Forest and Stream*, Vol. 21, No. 21, (December 20, 1883): 405. And Wissler, *Social Life*, 44. Wissler wrote that the concept of four seasons and Spring and Autumn were introduced to the Piegan by the "whites."

throughout the summer they traveled to gather the resources they used. *Kainaikoan* recounted that the *Aápaitapì* band moved 14 times in one year. They began and ended their year in the same place called *Itsipútsimaup* or Battle Coulee, on the *Kyúiesisaxtaii* or Bear River (now called the Marias River) a tributary to the Missouri River.<sup>22</sup>

Most Piegan bands did the same and many wintered in this same area along the Marias River.<sup>23</sup> In the winter of 1875 an agency employee, wrote, "When I made a visit to Marias this last winter [1874] I found the Indians camped along the river for 38 miles on either side."<sup>24</sup> John Ewers described that, "elderly Piegan informants recalled the Marias valley as a favorite winter location. They said the several bands were spread out, at distances of several miles apart, from near the junction of Cut Bank and Two Medicine Creeks forming the Marias to the big bend of the Marias."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 1-38. The spelling of all Piegan words within this story remain the same as those in Uhlenbeck's.

<sup>23</sup>The *Kainai*, *Siksika*, and *Inaxix* wintered along different rivers in the northern Great Plains.

<sup>24</sup>Copy of Agency Detective Andre Dusold letter from National Archives, in "Blackfoot Habitat - Winter 1875," Series XIV, Box 1, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>25</sup>John C. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfeet Culture*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology

If there were approximately twenty-four (24) different Piegan bands as Grinnell recorded, then there would have been between anywhere from 480 to 720 lodges, 2,880 to 4,320 people, and 4,800 to 7,200 horses, wintering along the Marias River.

*Kainaikoan* tells us that the *Aápaitapì* stayed at the place called Battle Coulee on the Marias until the end of the Piegan winter (late spring) after their horses fattened up and had finished shedding their winter hair.<sup>26</sup> At this point they were ready to make the summer journey. If there were 24 different bands of the Piegan as Grinnell calculated, and they all moved 14 times in the summer as *Kainaikoan* remembered, that would mean the Piegan moved to 336 different places during their summer on the northern Great Plains. This represents a vast understanding and knowledge of the landscape of this region.

### **Moving Camp: Springtime**

At the end of the Piegan winter (end of spring and the beginning of summer) *Kainaikoan* said that the *Aápaitapì* made their first move north to the *Katoyísiks* or Sweet Pine

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Bulletin 159, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955, 125.

<sup>26</sup>Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 1-38.

Hills, now known as the Sweet Grass hills, near the border of present day Alberta, Canada. Weasel Head an elder who told John Ewers stories in the 1940s said that each time a band moved, "It was a noisy time, horses whinnying, dogs yelping, people shouting."<sup>27</sup> With more than a hundred people and horses all moving at the same time it could seem like mass chaos. However, Cecile Black Boy another elder who spoke with John Ewers said that moving was an orderly activity where, "People could tell which way camp was to move by watching the extended back pole of the tripod on which the medicine pipe bundle rested. This back leg of the tripod pointed in the direction of the day's march."<sup>28</sup> This kind of march marked the beginning of the fourteen moves the *Aápaitapì* would make in a summer.

*Kainaikoan* told Uhlenbeck that the *Aápaitapì* stopped first at the Sweet Pine Hills to hunt buffalo bulls. However, in ancient times the Piegan did not always hunt first, instead they planted tobacco, before going after

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<sup>27</sup>John Ewers interview of Weasel Head, translated by Reuben Black Boy, "Piegan on March," March 6, 1943, Series XIV, Box 7, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>28</sup>John Ewers interview of Cecile Black Boy, "Medicine Bundles," August 25, 1951, Series XIV, Box 4. John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

bison. The Piegan leader White Calf told George Bird Grinnell about the ancient tobacco ceremony that by 1897 had become inactive. White Calf described an elaborate process where women worked together to clear a site using fire alongside a fertile river bed or creek bed. In the freshly cleared and fertilized area the men mixed animal dung with dried service berries (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) and the tobacco seeds (*Nicotiana quadrivalvis*) and proceeded to plant the mixture with a root digging stick.<sup>29</sup> White Calf explained that everyone in the community-men, women, and even children were expected to work, even though Piegan religious leaders oversaw the planting which they regarded as a ceremonial activity. White Calf explained to Grinnell, "After seed has been planted. They leave it and go off after buffalo!"<sup>30</sup> *Kainaikoan* did not list tobacco planting as part of his family's yearly activities probably because this ceremony fell into disuse by the end of the nineteenth century when the Piegan began to exclusively purchase

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<sup>29</sup>Tobacco seeds are very small. They are smaller than the size of poppy seeds. The Piegan probably created this mixture because the seeds were so small to plant alone and this mixture served as a natural fertilizer.

<sup>30</sup>George Bird Grinnell interview of White Calf, October 25, 1897, Grinnell Diary, 1897, #327, George Bird Grinnell Papers, Southwest Museum, Pasadena, CA.

commercial tobacco.<sup>31</sup>

Going to the Sweet Pine Hills to hunt for bison was an activity that the Piegan did for millennia.<sup>32</sup> It is also something many different tribes did during the spring. Like all Northern Plains tribes the Piegan hunted different types of bison, different genders or ages, at different times of year and for different purposes. It was a complex process. Clark Wissler noted that the Piegan told him that, "Buffalo bulls were regarded in the best condition at about June of our calendar."<sup>33</sup> Bison bulls were used for fresh food after a long winter of eating primarily dried meat and other dried foods. The Piegan also used Bison bulls for a wide and odd variety of purposes. For example one Piegan men told David Duvall that they used the scrotum of bulls to cover their

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<sup>31</sup>Commercial tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*) of the nineteenth century was originally cultivated from South America and had a high nicotine content. The tobacco (*Nicotiana quadrivalvis*) the Piegan grew had a low nicotine content. Joseph C. Winter, "Food of the Gods: Biochemistry, Addiction, and the Development of Native American Tobacco Use," in Joseph C. Winter, ed., *Tobacco Use by Native North Americans: Sacred Smoke and Silent Killer*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000, 305-328.

<sup>32</sup>Jack Brink explores how the prehistoric peoples of the Northern Great Plains hunted buffalo in *Imagining Head-Smashed-In: Aboriginal Buffalo Hunting on the Northern Plains*, Athabasca University Press, 2009.

<sup>33</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 41.



stirrups.<sup>34</sup> They used a Bison bull's thick hide for objects such as war shields which they had been using for centuries.<sup>35</sup>

Weasel Head told Ewers that there were strict community standards that everyone followed regarding communal bison hunting. Weasel Head said when a band moved their camp near the Sweet Pine Hills and herds of buffalo were sighted, "the chief sent the herald through camp announcing 'We don't want anybody to go off hunting buffalo until we are all ready to go.' Anyone who breaks this rule and goes out alone and kills a buffalo, will be followed by the soldiers. They would take the buffalo from him, also his weapons and tear up his clothes."<sup>36</sup> Weasel Head said that public humiliation and losing property were sanction enough to keep most people from breaking this rule.

Their next stop was further north at *Aiiχ'kimmikuyi* or the Cypress Hills, which is now within the present day Provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, to hunt for more

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<sup>34</sup>Stirrups, of course, were only developed after the Piegan started using horses. Wissler, *Material Culture*, 93.

<sup>35</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 163.

<sup>36</sup>John Ewers interview of Weasel Head, translated by Reuben Black Boy, "Hunting Buffalo," March 9, 1943, Series XIV, Box 16, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

bison bulls. *Kainaikoan* said that at the Cypress Hills the *Aápaítapì* band dried their meat and made new parfleche containers out of the thick hides of the bulls.<sup>37</sup> It is not surprising that they would stop to make new parfleche first. They used the parfleche containers, shaped like rectangular boxes, to hold all of their supplies which they would gather in the next few months. They used these containers for their winter camp supplies and throughout the year.<sup>38</sup> One of the most important food items that the Piegan made and processed for winter use was pemmican, a mixture of dried meat, berries and fat. Wissler wrote that to make pemmican, "the best cuts of buffalo were dried in the usual manner. Then they were pounded on a stone until fine.... Marrow and other fats were heated and mixed with the pounded meats, after which crushed wild cherries were worked into the mess. Often, a few leaves from the peppermint plant were added in order to give flavor to it. The whole was then packed into parfleche."<sup>39</sup> Pemmican was a major food source for the Piegan and the surplus was used as a trade item with other tribes.

From the Cypress Hills they moved south to *Paχká'χkeyi*

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<sup>37</sup>Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 1-38.

<sup>38</sup>Wissler, "Parfleche," *Material Culture*, 79-82.

<sup>39</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 22.

or Pakoki Lake, which is now within present day southern Alberta. Pakoki Lake is a large shallow lake half way between the Sweet Pine Hills and the Cypress Hills. The area is out in the wide open prairie with no trees and tall prairie grass. *Kainaikoan* said that the band hunted bison in this area and used the bison skins to make tipi lodge covers. Wissler wrote, "Formerly, tipis were covered with buffalo skins, soft dressed without the hair. Twelve to fourteen skins were regarded as necessary to the making of a tipi cover, though the number varied with the size of the tipi."<sup>40</sup> If the band's size was as Ewers claims from 20-30 lodges and if each family needed a new tipi covering, they would have needed between 280 to 420 new bison hides.

After hunting bison *Kainaikoan* said they moved next to a place called *Akaii'niskuyi* or Many Berries out on the open prairie along a tributary leading into Pakoki Lake. At Many Berries *Kainaikoan* said that they gathered a wide variety of berries, including, service berries, goose berries, and red willow berries. They dried the berries for winter use and to add to the pemmican. *Kainaikoan* said that they also used this place to start processing their bison hides into lodge covers. Wissler wrote, "During the berry season, the Blackfoot camps were shifted to favorable localities where

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<sup>40</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 100-101.

the women and girls worked industriously gathering the fruit into rectangular rawhide bags."<sup>41</sup> Part of the processing that occurred was to dry the mass quantities of berries to use throughout the year. By moving to a location in the middle of the plains without trees, exposed to the sun and in a place with high winds, the berries would be processed at a quicker rate.

*Kainaikoan* said that from there they moved north to *Einiótoká'nisi* or Buffalo-Bull's Head to pick chokecherries. Buffalo Bull's Head is a hill shaped like a bison head on the western side of the Cypress Hills. *Kainaikoan* said the band both picked and processed the chokecherries here for winter use.<sup>42</sup> The Piegan told Wissler that chokecherries were "gathered when ripe and pounded on a stone until the fruit with its pits was reduced to a thick paste. This was dried and packed away in bags or used to make pemmican."<sup>43</sup> The Piegan also used chokecherry for its wood. Chokecherry is a hard wood and so the Piegan used it for a variety of tools. Stakes made from chokecherry wood were used to hold down the edges of tipis.<sup>44</sup> The Piegan also used chokecherry

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<sup>41</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 21.

<sup>42</sup>Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 1-38.

<sup>43</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 21.

<sup>44</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 104.

wood as part of their water buckets. The Piegan stretched a bison rawhide around a wooden hoop, this became their portable water bucket. The Piegan made different size buckets, large ones held as much as 5 gallons of water.<sup>45</sup>

*Kainaikoan* said that after completing their gathering of berries for the winter they moved further north to *Iχ'kitsíkitapiiks* or Seven Persons to hunt for elk and to process the hides. The Piegan used elk hides, horns and teeth for a variety of purposes. Piegan women used elk hides to make women's dresses because the hide was thinner than bison.<sup>46</sup> Oftentimes the Piegan used bison and beaver fur for their winter clothing and hides like elk without fur were used in the summer. Elk clothing was eventually replaced by trade cotton cloth and wool robes.<sup>47</sup> They also used elk teeth to decorate both girls and women's dresses.<sup>48</sup> The Piegan men used elk horns for making parts of their saddles and quirts.<sup>49</sup> They used elk raw hide for their quivers.<sup>50</sup>

The Piegan of course also used elk meat for food and

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<sup>45</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 201-202.

<sup>46</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 125.

<sup>47</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 123.

<sup>48</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 125.

<sup>49</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 92, 96.

<sup>50</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 158.

boiled down its bones and marrow to collect the fat. After the fat was collected it was stored in parfleche bags for future use.<sup>51</sup> However the hunting and use of elk had an added dimension to Piegan society. The Piegan told Wissler that, "The dressing of skins was an important household industry.... [a woman's] worth and virtue were estimated by her output."<sup>52</sup>

*Kainaikoan* said that after they finished at Seven Persons they moved back south to *Aiiχ'kimmikuyiu* or the Cypress Hills to cut new poles for their tipis (*Pinus contorta*). Out on the relatively treeless and dry prairies the Cypress Hills are an oasis and one of the few places to find lodge pole pine. They used lodge pole pines for both their tipis and travois.<sup>53</sup> The Piegan told Wissler that, "As the tipi is made and owned by the woman, it is she who cuts the poles and prepares them."<sup>54</sup> The women "carefully selected, cut and hauled home from the foothills of the mountains, then peeled off their bark, set up as a frame for a tipi and left to season."<sup>55</sup> Similar to elk hides the

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<sup>51</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 23.

<sup>52</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 63.

<sup>53</sup>Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 1-38.

<sup>54</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 99.

<sup>55</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 99.

Piegán told Wissler that, "A set of well-seasoned poles is looked upon as a valuable asset and is not to be parted with for trifles."<sup>56</sup>

The *Aápaitapì* band was now half way through their seasonal stops. *Kainaikoan* said they moved west to *Inokímists* or Long Lake, but he did not describe the activities that they conducted at this place.<sup>57</sup> It is possible that they participated in religious activities. One other reason that they may have stopped in this location was to care for their horses. Weasel Head told Ewers that,

In warm weather (ie. not winter camp) - in late afternoon or early evening herds were driven to water and then to some place away from camp, a valley or coulee, then one horse taken home and tied in front of the tipi by a tie around legs. That horse was used to go after the horse herd next morning. In morning the person caring for the horses would go after them early, water them, then drive them to a place where there was good grass, watch them a while and then return home. About noon the horses were watered again. The horses were watered again. The horses were watered 3 times a day in all. There was no all day herding. For watering

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<sup>56</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 99.

<sup>57</sup>Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 1-38.

they were driven to a nearby lake or stream. If a man had a family the liveliest of the boys would care for the horses.<sup>58</sup>

Short Face added that boys were often hired by the owner to watch their horses because of predators. Depending on where they were in their journey, wolves, bears or mountain lions might kill colts and horses.<sup>59</sup>

After their stay at Long Lake *Kainaikoan* said that the *Aápaítapì* band headed to *Mátokeks omá'nis támóai otsítskitaxpiaú* or Women's Society Left Their Lodge Pole to hunt stray bison bulls. Usually at this point in the year the bison separated into smaller groups that were easier to hunt on an individual basis. They moved next to *Á'χkomonoàsiu* or Green Lake to process the hides. The women made more parfleche containers, rawhide for their travois, string from the sinew, and rope from the hair on the buffalo's head.<sup>60</sup> A lot needed to be completed, as this was

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<sup>58</sup>John Ewers interview of Weasel Head, translated by Reuben Black Boy, March 8, 1943, "Daily Care of Horse Herds," Series XIV, Box 6, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>59</sup>John Ewers interview of Short Face, no date, Series XIV, Box 6, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>60</sup>Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 1-38.



one of their last opportunities to prepare for winter.

From there the *Aápaitapì* band headed south to *A'isinaixpì* or Writing On Stone on the Milk River. They collected their last chokecherries along the Milk River and dried them for winter use. One other item they found along the Milk River was cottonwood trees. Cottonwood was used for a wide variety of purposes including making bowls and plates. It was also used for horse gear. Weasel Head stated that, "Stirrups were made in late summer. At that time of year cottonwood could be easily bent into stirrups without breaking, or heating or anything else."<sup>61</sup>

*Kainaikoan* said that the *Aápaitapì* band then moved west up along the Milk River to *A'kekoksistakskuyì* or Women's Point to hunt antelope. The Piegan used antelope hides to make a wide variety of clothing and a lot of different useful objects. One of the reasons the Piegan liked using tanned antelope hides was because they were thin and soft.<sup>62</sup> Men's shirts were made out of two uncut antelope hides.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>John Ewers interview of Weasel Head, translated by Reuben Black Boy, March 8, 1943, Series XIV, Box 6, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>62</sup>Although not in the written record, it was well known that the Piegan used tanned antelope hides for underwear.

<sup>63</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 120.

And women's leggings were often made of antelope.<sup>64</sup> The Piegan used the neck hide of a young antelope to create tobacco bags for men to carry their tobacco and pipes.<sup>65</sup> The Piegan also made bags out of the feet with the dew claws attached for women.<sup>66</sup> My grandmother made these types of bags throughout her life and well into her 80s. These last couple of stops in their summer travels reflect the organized preparation required to make new objects and repair old before winter.

They next moved further west up the Milk River close to the mouth of *Ponákiksi* or Cut Bank Creek, in what is now Glacier National Park. They moved up into the mountains to cut more lodge pole pines for their tipis and to complete the sewing of their buffalo lodge covers for winter use. It was now fall and they made their final preparations for their winter camp. *Kainaikoan* said they stayed in the mountains until the first light snow.<sup>67</sup>

With the first snow the *Aápaitapì* band followed the Cut Bank Creek down river to the where it flowed into the Two Medicine River to become the *Kyúiesisaxtaii* or Bear River.

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<sup>64</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfeet Lodge Tales*, 196.

<sup>65</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 72.

<sup>66</sup>Wissler, *Material Culture*, 74.

<sup>67</sup>Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 1-38.

They returned to the same area of their previous winter camp and they set up their winter camp again.<sup>68</sup> Tom Spotted Eagle said the area of the Marias from near its source (by the junction of Cut Bank and Birch Creek) and Willow Rounds, an area of steep sides and narrow canyon like valley, was known to the Indians as "Bottom Trunk." That section was not used for winter village sites. Willow Round was the first broad valley on the Marias below this "Bottom Trunk" section that the Piegan used for winter camp.<sup>69</sup> The various Piegan bands then made winter camp from that area down to the Missouri river.

The Marias (Bear) river valley was a favorite place to winter horses. Weasel Tail stated that, "In the fall of the year the men looked for localities to feed horses where grass was still green."<sup>70</sup> Three Calf's added that the Piegan chose the Marias (or Bear River) because there were several

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<sup>68</sup>Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 1-38.

<sup>69</sup>John Ewers interview of Tom Spotted Eagle, translated by Louis Bear Child, no date, "Blackfeet Political Organization #2 - Winter Camps 1870's," Series XIV, Box 4, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>70</sup>John Ewers interview of Weasel Tail, translated Reuben Black Boy, "On Grass Use for Horses," August 7, 1947, Series XIV, Box 6, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

types of grass that they could find there that their horses liked to eat. Three Calf's said, "On [the] side hills on the Marias in fall the Indians would find what they called, 'jingle grass.' ([It] had little seeds on it that made noise when shaken.) [The] horses loved it. [There was] another grass, white but looked like sage, [it was] called 'weasel grass,' [it] grew down on [the] Marias. [It was] especially good for horses. [There was] another grass, called 'blue stick.' [The] horses liked it very much....Also on the Marias (below Shelby and down river) was a sort of white clay streaked with yellow which horses loved."<sup>71</sup> Because of the Piegan's reliance on horses by the nineteenth century there is limited written information (although there is some archaeological) where the Piegan gave stories of their winter village sites before the horse.

*Kainaikoan* reported that once the *Aápaitapì* set up their winter lodges, they built a corral for their horses and continued to hunt the local bison near the river valley. At this time of year they preferred to hunt 2-4 year old bison. They dried this meat for winter use and made winter robes for their families. When they could they augmented

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<sup>71</sup>John Ewers interview of Three Calf, translated by Reuben Black Boy, "Horses Feed," August 13, 1947, Series XIV, Box 6, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

their preserved berries and meat with foods they found locally, which were usually collected in late autumn, such as tree cambium, roots, black alkali, rosehips, silver berries, and bullberries.<sup>72</sup>

After the first big snow the women would collect all their winter wood. The women preferred the old dry cottonwood found along river valleys. Andre Dusold, the agency detective, stated in 1875, that the Piegan "only use small dry sticks and brush" for firewood.<sup>73</sup> He added that "there were no adequate supplies [sic] of firewood on any streams between Teton and Marias and Birch Creek for winter fuel - so Indians didn't camp there in winter."<sup>74</sup> Jim Walters stated that his grandmother told him that, "they did not worry about cold so long as they had plenty of fuel and meat. They did not suffer from cold in their tipis."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 1-38.

<sup>73</sup>Copy of Blackfeet Agency Detective Andre Dusold letter from the National Archives, 1895, "Blackfoot Habitat - Winter 1875," Series XIV, Box 1, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>74</sup>Copy of Blackfeet Agency Detective Andre Dusold letter from the National Archives, 1895, "Blackfoot Habitat - Winter 1875," Series XIV, Box 1, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>75</sup>John Ewers interview of Jim Walters, "Shelter -- nineteenth century tipi," January 20, 1943, Series XIV, Box 4, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives,

Once the *Aápaitapì* had all of their provisions for the winter, their horses corralled, meat, berries and other plant foods preserved, and wood collected, the leaders allowed the men to return to the prairies to hunt bison for robes and other animal fur to trade.<sup>76</sup> The families set up time for family fun. The boys and girls made sleds out of large rib bones of the bison.<sup>77</sup> *Kainaikoan's* story of the life of the *Aápaitapì* reveals that the fur trade played a minimal role in this bands society and the band leaders did not allow hunting for trade items until they were fully provisioned and returned to their permanent winter camp.

### **End of the Story, End of a Way of Life**

I was fortunate to have spent the summer of 2004 driving the entire route of the *Aápaitapì* band with North Peigan cultural leader and language instructor Shirlee Crow Shoe.<sup>78</sup> Using *Kainaikoan's* story as our guide, I read the

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National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>76</sup>Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 1-38.

<sup>77</sup>Wissler, *Social Life*, 54.

<sup>78</sup>We were both working on a project for the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, which eventually became the lexicon, *Blackfeet Vocabulary Terms for Items of Material Culture*, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, 2005.

story out-loud in Piegan while she attempted to understand my bad pronunciation and American accent.<sup>79</sup> We drove on both gravel and paved roads throughout northern Montana and southern Alberta, with two separate gazetteers. We tried our best to travel as close to the sites as possible, given the fact that we were traveling by car, and ended up going down several incorrect roads. I was able to photograph each site (or what we thought was the site). These photographs along with my notes of *Kainaikoan's* story were put together in a presentation for the Montana Historical Society annual history conference and that talk was later published on-line by the Glenbow Museum's *Niitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life* website.<sup>80</sup> Throughout the drive we realized how huge and varying the landscape was that these Piegan traveled. Some places were as dry as a moonscape, others were a rich green oasis. We also imagined the magnitude of work done each year by the women and men of this one band. Essentially these Piegan went northeast for the summer, then zig-zagged around

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<sup>79</sup>Although Shirlee Crow Shoe is a first language N. Peigan speaker, she could not read written Piegan very well, especially Uhlenbeck's orthography. But once someone read it out-loud she quickly figured out what was written and the translation.

<sup>80</sup>Rosalyn LaPier, "Relationship with the Land - Seasonal Round," *Niitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life*, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta, 2006, [www.glenbow.org/blackfoot/teacher\\_toolkit/pdf/Land\\_SeasonalRound.pdf](http://www.glenbow.org/blackfoot/teacher_toolkit/pdf/Land_SeasonalRound.pdf).

the region, then moved west to the mountains before winter, and returned south to their winter village. With each stop these Piegan carried more and more food and objects for winter. We had a difficult time doing it in a car.

The story "How The Ancient Peigans Lived" stands out regarding Piegan understanding of their own life on the prairies. It was unintentionally recorded in the summer of 1911 by linguist C.C. Uhlenbeck. That summer Professor Uhlenbeck returned to the reservation with a graduate student to continue documenting the language of the Piegan. He had been there the previous summer. Like the recorders before him he was primarily interested in interviewing individuals with pre-reservation linguistic abilities and societal knowledge. In the process of recording the Piegan language, they told him stories of their life on the prairies in the Piegan language. He recorded these stories and later translated them into English. Although he initially set out to conduct an academic linguistic study, the byproduct of his work was that he recorded substantial history of pre-reservation Piegan life. Even though Uhlenbeck recorded these stories during the early reservation years, contemporary scholars use them to help



understand the lifeways of prehistoric prairie peoples.<sup>81</sup>

*Kainai*koan's story of the *Aápaitapì*, along with David Duvall, Clark Wissler and John Ewer's collected stories, provide us with important images of life of one Piegan band in the late nineteenth century. It is representative of the thousands of different places that the Piegan, North Peigan, Kainai and Siksika and other allied bands traveled to each year and knew intimately. Despite their loss of territory in the late nineteenth century the Piegan, especially the "buffalo Indians," continued to have extensive knowledge of their old territory. And some, like my great-grandparents, even continued to use these places. "In later years," Adam White Man said, "his band (Lone Eater's) went down to the Marias River only for berry picking."<sup>82</sup> Once the

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<sup>81</sup>C.C. Uhlenbeck, "How the Ancient Peigans Lived," *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 1-38. Although a South Piegan man recorded this information in 1911, museums and scholars use this information to tell the story of all Blackfoot people in prehistoric times. The Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta created a map within their permanent exhibit "Nitsitapiisinni: The Story of the Blackfoot People" based on this story. They also publish the map in, *The Blackfoot Gallery Committee's Nitsitapiisinni: The Story of the Blackfoot People*. Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2001. Most recently Jack Brink's *Imagining Head-Smashed-In: Aboriginal Buffalo Hunting on the Northern Plains*, AU Press, 2009, used this story to help "reimagine" prehistoric life at Head-Smashed-In buffalo jump in Alberta.

<sup>82</sup>John Ewers interview of Adam White Man, translated by Louis Bear Child, September 7, 1951, "Blackfeet Political Organization #2 - Winter Camps 1870's," Series XIV, Box 4, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives,

reservation was established the *Aápaitapì* settled on the far south side of the reservation near Birch Creek. After the Sweet Grass hills were sold with an Executive Order in 1888 the various bands on the reservation began to reorder themselves. The *Aápaitapì* who initially lived near Birch Creek moved closer to Heart Butte and then they split. Some of their group moved north to Cut Bank creek while the remainder stayed near Heart Butte.<sup>83</sup> This was common during that time for bands to separate and move to different areas of the reservation.

Today most Americans, including many Piegan themselves, believe that the Piegan have always lived near the mountains and on the reservation. However it was not until the late nineteenth century that the Americans concentrated the Piegan to this far western edge of their ancestral territory. *Kainaikoan's* story of the *Aápaitapì* reminds us that the Piegan of the early reservation years remembered their time on the prairies, where their knowledge of the environment and ecology of nature formed. They could not always use those skills near the mountains on the

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National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>83</sup>John Ewers, "Blood Band," Series XIV, Box 4, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

reservation. But they could tell (and sell) stories about their lives to the early recorders of Piegan history.

This activity provided them a semblance of control over their lives. It also kept alive their relationship with their surrounding environment, even in absentia. It not only reminded them of the power they had to control their environment, but through storytelling, songs and ceremony, it kept that power alive. They were able to do this in part by telling their stories to those who came to the reservation to collect them, and in part by adapting their ceremonial schedule to the new (to them) American calendar.

## Chapter Six

### STO-YE, THE "CLOSED" SEASON

*My grandmother along with her sisters and brothers attended Holy Family Mission, the on-reservation Catholic boarding school. Holy Family Mission was located on the Two Medicine river just east of the main road running north and south across the reservation (now Highway 89). It stood pretty much at the geographic center of the reservation. The Catholic church acquired the land from White Calf, a convert, who gave his own land along the Two Medicine river to the church. Holy Family Mission existed from 1890 to 1940.*

*Many of the children who attended Holy Family lived at the mission year round. Others, like my grandmother, were there only during the academic year. Catholic holidays during the school year, like Easter, provided an opportunity for families to come together and see their children. When my grandmother was growing up the Catholic Church held a week-long Easter celebration at the Holy Family Mission. Holy Week began on Palm Sunday and lasted until Easter Sunday. It commemorated the Resurrection of the Christ Jesus and his ascent into Heaven. People from around the*

reservation would travel by wagon to the Mission to set up tents nearby and along the Two Medicine river valley for the entire week. The church allowed the children to camp with their families. My grandmother remembered getting small presents from her grandmothers, including new ribbons for her long hair, at their Easter camp. She also remembered that it often snowed, the final snow storms of the year, during Holy Week. She remembered the nuns hiding eggs in the snow for the children and how odd this seemed to her grandmothers.

However, at the same time that the Piegan were celebrating Easter with the Catholic Church, they were also gathering for another purpose. The Piegan celebrated their own sort of holy week. For generations the Piegan celebrated the end of winter with numerous religious rituals to renew their relationships with their supernatural allies. In my grandmother's childhood, the community came together to conduct these rituals at the same time as the Easter Holy Week at Holy Family Mission. In their tent villages the community "opened" their bundles and pipes and prayed to their own holy trinity, the Sun, Moon and Morning Star. As David Duvall explained, "The Blackfoot expect[ed] long life, health and happiness," if they properly maintained their

*supernatural relationships.<sup>1</sup> The Piegan learned to incorporate their end of winter rituals within the Catholic Church's Holy Week celebrations, much like they incorporated the O'kan within the 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations.*

*The Church holds Easter near the vernal equinox.<sup>2</sup> This was close enough for the Piegan to readjust their rituals to the Catholic Holy Week. The Piegan historically held the Thunder pipe rituals at the sound of the first thunder of the spring, which signaled the return of the Thunder from the south to the north. They historically held the Beaver bundle rituals after the ice on the rivers melted, which signaled the safe return of the beavers to open waters. And other rituals had similar seasonal triggers. My grandmother remembered singing and praying occurring in the tents often with snow all around.*

*In the early <sup>twentieth</sup> century many people on the reservation lived along rivers and creeks with their band relations (although, the band system was beginning to disintegrate). The Easter gathering was often the first time*

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<sup>1</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 276.

<sup>2</sup>Easter is held the first Sunday after the first full-moon after the vernal equinox, which can happen anytime from March 22nd to April 25th. Herbert Thurnston, "Easter Controversy," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909).

*since the previous summer that extended families got together. Their first gathering of the year centered on renewing relationships with the supernatural, as well as renewing relationships with family. My grandmother remembered these gatherings as a happy and carefree time with all the generations of her family together.*

## **Two Seasons**

The Piegan divided their year into two seasons, winter and summer or Stô-yç and Nâ-pôs.<sup>3</sup> In the winter the numerous Piegan bands camped along river valleys, each band usually camped in the same place every year. In the summer they traveled to a dozen or more places, also usually returning to the same places year after year. The Piegan usually divided their seasons evenly spending about six months in their winter village and six months living on the northern Great Plains. Although scholars often describe the Piegan as "nomadic," they lived a semi-sedentary lifestyle. The story "How the Ancient Blackfoot Lived," that *Kainaikoan* told C.C. Uhlenbeck in the summer of 1911, described this lifestyle for one band of the Piegan.

Not surprisingly the Piegan viewed their religious life

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<sup>3</sup>J. Willard Schultz, "Life Among the Blackfeet - Fourth Paper," *Forest and Stream*, (December 20, 1883): 405.

as having two seasons, one "open" and one "closed." This referred to the status of their religious "bundles," which they "opened" and "closed" during the change of seasons. A "bundle" was the material object that contained the Piegan's religious iconography which formed the basis of a religious ritual. David Duvall and Clark Wissler began using the word "bundle" to describe these religious objects, large or small, of the Piegan. They explained, "We have used the term bundle for all objects associated with rituals because...the owner keeps them wrapped up in various pieces of cloth."<sup>4</sup> The Piegan also used this word in their own description of religious objects, such as the Beaver bundle or "beaver-bundled-up."<sup>5</sup>

After the Piegan settled into their winter villages, they "closed" their religious bundles for the season. "Opening" and "closing," of course, were metaphors. Each time there was a religious ritual the bundle, large or small, was physically opened (unwrapped) and then closed (re-wrapped). The Piegan used the words "opened" and "closed" to imply that the relationship with the supernatural power(s) changed during these two religious seasons.

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<sup>4</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 246.

<sup>5</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 169.



## Super Natural

The Piegan believed that they possessed two types of knowledge: material knowledge learned from long-time experience or observation of the environment and immaterial knowledge gained from developing a relationship with a supernatural ally. The "real stories" told by the Piegan to the early recorders of Piegan life reflected their understanding of immaterial knowledge. The story of *Kainaikoan* provided one example of material or environmental knowledge of the Piegan landscape. The Piegan used these two types of knowledge together in their everyday life. The Piegan considered it unwise or even foolish to live life with only one type of knowledge. *Siksika* elder Crooked Meat Strings told anthropologist Jane Hanks in 1938 that only the "Poor go to war without holy protection [they go] with own bravery."<sup>6</sup> Going it alone was not a part of the Piegan philosophy.

The Piegan learned the environmental knowledge of their landscape over generations of time.<sup>7</sup> However this knowledge

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<sup>6</sup>Jane Richardson Hanks interview of Crooked Meat Strings, translated by Mary White Elk, Box 1, File 6, Manuscript 8458, Jane Richardson Hanks Papers, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, AB. Crooked Meat Strings added, "This is not done by the rich. The rich purchase holy objects."

<sup>7</sup>Binnema, *Common and Contested Land*, 65-68, 74. Binnema stated that, "the historic Blackfoot people developed from the Old Woman's phase." Old Woman's (archaeological) phase

came from a deeper past. The Piegan descended from Indigenous people who had lived on the northern Great Plains and learned its intricacies for millennia.<sup>8</sup> The Piegan learned the ethnobotany of plants on the northern Great Plains. They relied on this knowledge for daily health needs, food, shelter and fuel. The Piegan also learned "bison ecology" and the complexities of bison behavior to be able to hunt year round.<sup>9</sup> The Piegan learned how to live in a dry and arid environment.<sup>10</sup> However for the Piegan learning about and understanding their environment and the natural world was only half of the equation. The Piegan understood that not everything in their environment was "natural" some of it was "super-natural." In their complex universe and world view using their age-old environmental knowledge would not solve all the problems that arose. The Piegan believed that with the assistance of supernatural allies they could resolve important concerns. Their biggest issue was what to do when "nature" did not behave the way

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emerged 1,200 BP and expanded 1,200 BP to 800 BP.

<sup>8</sup>Brink, *Imagining Head Smashed In*, xii. Brink argues that humans have lived on the northern Great Plains for 12,000 years.

<sup>9</sup>Brink, *Imagining Head Smashed In*.

<sup>10</sup>Rosalind Grace Morgan, "Beaver Ecology/Beaver Mythology," Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Alberta, 1991.

they wanted.

### **'Power of the Waters'**

Academically trained recorders of Piegan life such as Clark Wissler and Truman Michelson asked David Duvall to carry out a particular process when gathering stories from the Piegan people.<sup>11</sup> First, Duvall interviewed everyone in the Piegan language. He wrote down most of their stories in Piegan. He then wrote out a literal word-for-word translation of these stories into English. Wissler asked Duvall to write out a free translation into English before returning it to Wissler. However, in the case of Michelson at least, Michelson wrote out a free translation from Duvall's translation into standard English. The result was that they often created three versions of a single story.<sup>12</sup> Finally, to make sure that the stories were correct Duvall read the English texts back to the Piegan storyteller in the Piegan language. Duvall thereby re-translated his own

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<sup>11</sup>We know that Duvall also provided translation for Walter McClintock, but McClintock was not a trained scholar and was not attached to a museum until after his time spent with the Piegan. David Duvall Papers, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

<sup>12</sup>Michelson Papers, MS 2823, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

interviews, from Piegan to English then back to Piegan. Duvall then made corrections for the final draft of their texts.<sup>13</sup> It was a tedious process to get the stories right, and it often took months.<sup>14</sup>

One set of stories that every recorder of Piegan life collected were the stories about Beaver "medicine." Duvall and Wissler wrote that the Piegan used the word, "*saam*, which we have translated as medicine" to describe objects with supernatural affinity.<sup>15</sup> The early recorders of Piegan life collected the Beaver "medicine" stories because the Piegan believed they were the "oldest ritual" from which all other Piegan religious rituals emanated.<sup>16</sup> There are

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<sup>13</sup>Michelson Papers, MS 2823, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, and David Duvall Papers, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

<sup>14</sup>In the case of Wissler, Duvall sent Wissler his handwritten English translations. Wissler's editorial assistant Miss Bella Weitzner typed up the notes and she did the first edit into standard English. Wissler then read them, added questions into the margins, and mailed them back to Duvall to read to the people he interviewed. Duvall re-translated them back into Piegan and asked the clarifying questions. They were re-sent back to New York City for a final edit by Weitzner and Wissler. See Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 70, and correspondence between Duvall and Wissler, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

<sup>15</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 69.

<sup>16</sup>Duvall and Wissler, *Mythology*, 14.

multiple versions and numerous stories surrounding Beaver medicine within the four different tribes and dozens of different bands of the Blackfoot. Duvall and Wissler published four different versions of the basic Beaver medicine story, one from each of the tribes of the Blackfoot, in *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians*.

The story of Beaver medicine begins in winter. Winter was a time of learning by listening. The many versions of this story have a common pattern.<sup>17</sup> As The Boy told Duvall before recording his version, "There are many ways of telling the story of the beaver medicine, but this is the way it came to me."<sup>18</sup> The basic story-line featured an interaction between a human and the most powerful being in the Water world, Kitiaksísskstaki the Not Real Beaver.<sup>19</sup>

In the basic story-line a beaver and his family invite a human to live an entire winter in their lodge. In most

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<sup>17</sup>The versions of the story of Round-cut-scabby-robe can be found in: Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 117-124; McClintock, *Old North Trail*, 103-112; Duvall and Wissler, *Mythology of the Blackfeet Indians*, 81-83; De Josselin De Jong, *Blackfoot Texts*, 86-91; Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 72-92; and unpublished in Duvall papers, "Blackfeet Notes," Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

<sup>18</sup>Duvall, "Blackfoot Notes," Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY, and Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 190-191.

<sup>19</sup>In most stories the human was a young man, in some a young woman and in one an old woman.

versions this was because the human was shamed by his or her community and left, in others it was by pure happenstance. During that winter the beaver taught the human a great deal of new knowledge and introduced him or her to new natural elements such as the tobacco plant. And when the human returned to the Below world the following spring the beaver "transferred" this supernatural knowledge and material objects to the human, who in turn shared them with other humans. Duvall and Wissler outlined this process, "The being...offers or consents upon request to give power [to a human]....The being conferring power...transfers it to the recipient....This is regarded as a compact between the recipient and the being...and each is expected to fulfill faithfully his own obligations. The compact is a continuous relationship."<sup>20</sup> Duvall and Wissler pointed out that, although the supernatural power being transferred may benefit an entire community, the ownership and transfer of the power "is in every case still a matter solely between one individual and the being."<sup>21</sup> The principal ability the Kitiaksísskstaki, the Not Real Beaver, transferred to that human was "the power of the waters."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 103.

<sup>21</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 103.

<sup>22</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 169.

## Beaver Medicine

The first person to be considered a "Beaver man" was the person who came back from a winter spent with the beavers.<sup>23</sup> His first obligation was to build a Beaver "bundle" of symbolic objects that represented the lessons and knowledge he had learned from the beaver. Some people say that the first bundle included the hides of all the animals and skins of all the birds. (Kind of like a Noah's Ark, except in this case one hide per creature.) It also included all of the creatures' corresponding songs and movements.<sup>24</sup> That original human then transferred the "title" of ownership of the original Beaver bundle to a married couple and the proceeding generations.<sup>25</sup> The Piegan

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<sup>23</sup>As stated earlier some stories have a female lead. In all of the stories the human who lived with the beavers "transferred" his or her knowledge to the next human man. Thereafter the term "Beaver man" was used to refer to the owner of a Beaver bundle even though it was owned by a married couple.

<sup>24</sup>J. Willard Schultz, "Life Among the Blackfeet - Fourth Paper," *Forest and Stream*, (December 20, 1883): 405. Schultz wrote that the Piegan believed that all the animals and birds had their own languages, songs and dances.

<sup>25</sup>John Ewers interview with Cecile Black Boy, August 25, 1951, "Remaking of Ceremonial Objects", Series XIV, Box 4, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Cecile Black Boy preferred using the word "title" to explain the exchange of ownership of a bundle. The title of the person is not what is being exchanged but the title of ownership of the object, the Beaver bundle.

understood that each "title" transfer, from couple to couple, represented the original transfer from supernatural to human. In essence, each transfer was not from human to human, but a transfer of supernatural power from the original supernatural to the new humans. Duvall and Wissler explained that, "The ritual, to the Blackfoot is in reality an assumed faithful reproduction of the original transfer."<sup>26</sup>

Inside of any "bundle" were the various material objects used within a ritual. These varied from a few objects to dozens contained in one or more wrappings. Duvall and Wissler explained that the objects in a bundle, "symbolize[d] some concept of power."<sup>27</sup> Each object represented the power of a living or non-living entity (to western minds that is). For example a skin of a loon represented the supernatural power of a living loon. Duvall and Wissler said that rituals included, "a narrative, one or more songs, an object and accessories, and in many cases, certain requirements [or protocols of behavior] of the person concerned."<sup>28</sup> The Piegan used these objects similar to the designs on the outside of a tipi, as mnemonic devices

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<sup>26</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 103.

<sup>27</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 146.

<sup>28</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 101.



to remember the narrative, songs and movements within a ritual.

The Piegan saw a difference between the material object within a bundle and the supernatural power it represented. The supernatural power existed separate from the object. Cecile Black Boy explained this to John Ewers to help clear up a misunderstanding, informing him that a religious object could be remade.<sup>29</sup> Black Boy explained that, "to the Indian it was unimportant if the object had been remade or not, so long as the person who remade it possessed the 'power'."<sup>30</sup> Ewers wrote, "for the Indian the 'religious power' of the article is of primary importance, for the white it is...the material object itself." Ultimately what was important to the Piegan was the relationship between the human and his or

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<sup>29</sup>John Ewers interview with Cecile Black Boy, August 25, 1951, "Remaking of Ceremonial Objects", Series XIV, Box 4, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. John Ewers was asked to step in and explain to the Denver Art Museum Piegan concepts of "ownership" because of a misunderstanding. The Denver Art Museum thought they had purchased the "one and only" version of a painted tipi. But in the mind of the Piegan owner, the museum purchased the physical object devoid of religious meaning. After the purchase the owner painted another identical tipi for himself, which retained its supernatural power.

<sup>30</sup>John Ewers interview with Cecile Black Boy, August 25, 1951, "Remaking of Ceremonial Objects", Series XIV, Box 4, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

her supernatural ally that the object represented. (Selling or transferring the supernatural power was another matter altogether.)

The Beaver bundle was considered the oldest, largest and most expensive bundle of all of the medicine bundles owned by the Piegan. Besides the personal expense of purchasing the "title" to the bundle, acquiring it also came with numerous protocols (taboos) that restricted daily behavior and were time consuming. If purchasing the bundle seemed too expensive, sometimes the new owners would ask others to invest in one part of the bundle.<sup>31</sup> The new owners, the husband and wife, then had to learn hundreds of songs, prayers and movements (hand movements and dances) related to each of the objects within the bundle. There was no expectation that the new owners learned the songs immediately. They usually continued to pay the former owners for song lessons. Twice a year the new owners also paid for a large community feast to correspond with the "opening" or

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<sup>31</sup>David Duvall interview of Japy Takes Gun On Top, "Blackfoot Notes," 206-300, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY. Japy Takes Gun On Top told Duvall that sometimes the new owners sought out others to invest in the bundle. These individuals paid for individual hides or skins and their corresponding songs. This lessened the overall burden of the large purchase price.

"closing" of their bundle.<sup>32</sup> With a bundle this expensive it would seem that most people would not want to own one, and they didn't. But those who did viewed it as an investment - one that provided many benefits.

### **Seeds of Change**

In the various stories of Beaver medicine that the Piegan told, the supernatural beavers spent their winter with their human guest teaching him how to plant, cultivate, harvest, and process *Pisstááhkaan* or tobacco (*Nicotiana quadrivalvis*). The beavers also taught their guest how to conduct the rituals related to growing tobacco. At the end of the winter the beavers gave the human a small container of tobacco seeds to bring to the Below world along with the knowledge to cultivate it, and they transferred the rituals used in the tobacco planting ritual.

Tobacco was the only plant that the Piegan cultivated in a garden before the reservation period. Despite their significant travels in the summer the Piegan took the time to plant, cultivate and harvest tobacco. However by the time the early recorders of Piegan life came to the reservation the Piegan no long planted tobacco. White Calf, the elderly

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<sup>32</sup>David Duvall interview of Japy Takes Gun On Top, "Blackfoot Notes," 206-300, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

leader of the Piegan, told George Bird Grinnell in 1897 that he had seen tobacco planted once in his life but he had never seen it grow.<sup>33</sup> The stories about tobacco recorded at the turn of the century were what the Piegan remembered or heard about growing tobacco and not direct experiences. By the turn of the century the Piegan used commercial tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*), originally from South America, for all of their rituals and social activities.<sup>34</sup> Many medicine bundles continued to hold tobacco seeds (*Nicotiana quadrivalvis*), a species native to the west coast of North America, but the bundle holders did not plant these. They were kept as religious relics. The story of tobacco's introduction to the Piegan through the beavers though was well known by all.

Two of the roles the Beaver bundle owners had within the community were to store tobacco seeds and leaves from season to season and to direct the community's planting and harvesting efforts.<sup>35</sup> Both White Calf, who spoke with

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<sup>33</sup>Grinnell Diary, 1897, #327, October 25, 1897, George Bird Grinnell papers, Southwest Museum, Pasadena, CA.

<sup>34</sup>Joseph C. Winter, "Food of the Gods: Biochemistry, Addiction, and the Development of Native American Tobacco Use," in Joseph C. Winter, ed. *Tobacco Use by Native North Americans: Sacred Smoke and Silent Killer* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 305-328.

<sup>35</sup>The story of tobacco can be found in: Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 169-170; Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 268-

Grinnell in 1897, and Three Bears, who spoke with Duvall in 1910, gave similar accounts of the tobacco planting ritual. At the beginning of winter and the "closing" of the Beaver bundle, the Piegan placed the next season's seeds and their supply of dried tobacco leaves into the bundle. The Beaver bundle owners left the tobacco seeds and leaves in the bundle throughout the winter where the tobacco remained consecrated.<sup>36</sup> The Piegan viewed everything surrounding tobacco, from storing it, planting it, cultivating it, harvesting it, to finally using it, as serious activities.

White Calf told Grinnell that in the spring time, after the ice on the rivers began to melt and the last snow storm, the owners of a Beaver bundle held a feast to announce their intentions of planting tobacco. Planting tobacco was a community-wide activity and they needed everyone.<sup>37</sup> The Beaver bundle owners selected a particular place for

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271; Alex Johnston, *Plants and the Blackfoot*, Occasional Paper No. 15. Lethbridge: Lethbridge Historical Society, 1987, 52-53; James Willard Schultz, *Blackfeet and Buffalo: Memories of Life Among the Indians*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962, 344-346; and Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 200-204.

<sup>36</sup>After the Piegan stopped growing tobacco, they placed commercial tobacco in the Beaver bundle, which then became consecrated during the winter.

<sup>37</sup>Wissler noted that historically the only two rituals "carried out by the whole tribal organization," were the O'kan and planting tobacco. Wissler, *Sundance*, 229.

planting along a river valley near cottonwood trees for the new tobacco field.<sup>38</sup> Three Bears told Duvall that, "to prepare the ground...a lot of brush is gathered by every man, woman and child," and then, "at the four corners of this place a fire is started." After they burnt the field, "each and everyone make a little brush broom and sweeps the place off clean."<sup>39</sup>

The Beaver men combined the tobacco seeds with pulverized animal dung, service berries and water.<sup>40</sup> Three Bears said that they then divided the field into sections, one for each Beaver bundle owner. All the men of the community were expected to help, not just the owners, to plant the tobacco. The Piegan viewed this process as a ritual. They used long sharp sticks to punch individual holes into the ground and drop in the seed mixture. White Calf said that each time they put one small ball of seed mixture into the ground they sang a song. The Blackfoot were reported to have had over 200 different tobacco planting

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<sup>38</sup>Grinnell Diary, 1897, #327, October 25, 1897, George Bird Grinnell papers, Southwest Museum, Pasadena, CA.

<sup>39</sup>David Duvall interview with Three Bears, "Blackfoot Notes," 302-306, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

<sup>40</sup>Tobacco seeds are extremely small, smaller than poppy seeds. Mixing them in dung fertilizer seems like an easy way to plant them.

songs.<sup>41</sup> After they planted the tobacco, they held a feast and the community was free to leave. The tobacco field was then left alone all summer, without fencing and without any daily oversight by the Piegan.

One of the benefits of being a Beaver bundle owner was the important supernatural allies that came to your aid. Growing tobacco was one of those activities that the Piegan did not leave to "nature." The Piegan viewed tobacco as a special plant from the Water world that required special attention. After the manual labor provided by the humans to plant the tobacco, the actual cultivation of tobacco was left up to the supernatural world.

The Beaver bundle owners did not need to watch their fields because the Ni-wax-saxs, the little people did this for them.<sup>42</sup> The Piegan believed that there were little people who were about one foot tall who guarded and

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<sup>41</sup>Alexander Johnston wrote, "Amos Leather, also called "Berry-eater," died in 1969. Much Blackfoot Indian culture was lost with his death. The 72-year-old elder was the sole custodian of many songs, rituals and dances of the Blackfoot nation of Alberta and Montana....He knew all 230 songs of the Tobacco Planting ritual, a spring festival from the time when the Blackfoot raised tobacco as a crop. This collection of songs died with Mr. Leather." Alexander Johnston, *Plants and the Blackfoot*, 2.

<sup>42</sup>David Duvall interview with Three Bears, "Blackfoot Notes," 302-306, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY. Three Bears told Duvall that tobacco plants were little people, which Ewers referenced as well.

protected their tobacco fields.<sup>43</sup> The little people were benign supernatural beings who were part of the Below world. The little people came to aid the Beaver bundle owners, if the owners asked for their assistance and if they were given gifts for their help. At the end of the tobacco planting ritual, Piegan women made little moccasins, little shirts, digging sticks and small bags of food. They left these in the field before they left for the summer.<sup>44</sup>

The little people worked tirelessly on the behalf of the Piegan to maintain the tobacco crop. Periodically throughout the summer the Beaver men gathered together in their camps to sing songs for the tobacco. As they sang their songs, the men hit the ground with their planting sticks symbolically killing insects, grasshoppers and worms. Meanwhile the little people simultaneously killed the insects in the field.<sup>45</sup> This symbiotic supernatural relationship allowed the Piegan to travel to a dozen or more places throughout the prairies without returning to fields.

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<sup>43</sup>My grandfather used to regale us with the adventures of the little people. I spent many hours of my childhood looking for them.

<sup>44</sup>John Ewers collected replicas of little people objects and clothing that are now held in the material object collections of the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>45</sup>Grinnell Diary, 1897, #327, October 25, 1897, George Bird Grinnell papers, Southwest Museum, Pasadena, CA.



However throughout the summer at least one Beaver man returned to the tobacco crop to see how the fields were doing. If the Beaver men did not feel that there had been sufficient rain for the tobacco, he did something to change the situation. Another major benefit to being a Beaver man was that he had access to supernatural power that would change different aspects of "nature" on his behalf. If there had not been enough rain the Beaver man went to his bundle and asked the otter for his assistance and his power over water. The Beaver man took the otter skin from the Beaver bundle and sang the individual otter's song, "Water is my medicine. Rain is my medicine." Three Bears said, "Shortly after the singing is done a heavy rain storm follows and soaks the ground and especially the tobacco crops."<sup>46</sup> The Piegan believed that they did not need to rely on "nature" for their crops to succeed. Instead the Piegan relied on their supernatural allies to help them manage their crops and even change the weather, if needed.

White Calf said that at the end of the summer the community returned to the tobacco field, to harvest their tobacco crop, hold a thanksgiving feast, and sing and pray again before they collected their seeds for the next season.

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<sup>46</sup>David Duvall interview with Three Bears, "Blackfoot Notes," 302-306, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

But before they did this, they took a little bit of the tobacco, with a new set of little mocassins and digging sticks and left them in the center of camp. Just the way the beavers told them to do.<sup>47</sup>

Both Grinnell and Duvall recorded several Piegan who told stories about the tobacco planting ceremony, which the Piegan no longer practiced by the twentieth century. The Piegan told them stories about a relationship with their supernatural allies and their ability to help the Piegan. These relationships were complex. Similarly complex was the Piegan's knowledge of horticulture on the northern Great Plains. The ability to cultivate a plant in a dry and arid landscape required intimate knowledge of the environment and the climate. Tobacco was not a plant that had edible or medicinal properties. It was used primarily for smoking. It was not necessary for their physical survival. However, the Piegan believed they had an obligation to the supernatural to cultivate tobacco. The quid pro quo was that tobacco would help provide what the Piegan wanted, control over the rest of nature.

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<sup>47</sup>Grinnell Diary, 1897, #327, October 25, 1897, George Bird Grinnell papers, Southwest Museum, Pasadena, CA.

## Holy Smoke

Before the introduction of commercial tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*), the Piegan grew and used their own tobacco (*Nicotiana quadrivalvis*).<sup>48</sup> Historically the Piegan used tobacco in all their rituals, large or small, and in daily prayer. In the past when the Piegan smoked for pleasure, they often smoked other plants such as *Kakahsiin* (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) and *Omahksi-kakahsiin* (*Chimaphila umbellata*), and not true tobacco.<sup>49</sup> The Piegan viewed smoking true tobacco as something that was done to communicate with the supernatural when seeking aid.

The Piegan smoked, burned as incense, or offered dried tobacco leaves to the Sun and other supernatural beings at each religious ritual. They also treated tobacco seeds and sometimes the ashes after smoking with great care and reverence.<sup>50</sup> Tobacco brought all three worlds together. Tobacco came from the Water world when the Beavers transferred it to the Below world. Humans utilized it as a

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<sup>48</sup>*Nicotiana tabacum* was originally from South American and *Nicotiana quadrivalvis* was originally from the west coast of North America. Joseph C. Winter, "Food of the Gods: Biochemistry, Addiction, and the Development of Native American Tobacco Use," in Joseph C. Winter, ed., *Tobacco Use by Native North Americans: Sacred Smoke and Silent Killer*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 305-328.

<sup>49</sup>McClintock, *The Old North Trail*, 528.

<sup>50</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 69-282.

method to communicate with the Above world. Using tobacco either created new relationships or cemented old ones between humans and the supernatural. Tobacco served as a key ingredient that the Piegan utilized to communicate with other supernatural entities.

However, by the time that the early recorders of Piegan life were interviewing the Piegan from the 1880s to 1910s, everyone used commercial tobacco and had probably used commercial tobacco for decades if not longer. Ewers noted that since the late eighteenth century the Blackfoot leaders (not necessarily the Piegan) conducted "a long and tedious ritual" of smoking each time they traded with Europeans.<sup>51</sup> However by 1858, Ewers noted that the Piegan asked the U.S. government to purchase 2,660 pounds of tobacco as part of their annuity payment.<sup>52</sup> And by the time that *Kainaikoan* recounted his story of "Ancient" Piegan life, they were already purchasing tobacco from American traders, four (4) plugs of tobacco for one bison robe.<sup>53</sup> Contemporary

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<sup>51</sup>Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 30. Similar to maintaining internal personal behavior, the Piegan smoked with outside groups to encourage honest relationships.

<sup>52</sup>Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 230. The U.S government purchased 2,660 pounds of tobacco for 460 lodges. This would amount to 5.78 pounds of tobacco per lodge per year, or a little less than ½ pound per month.

<sup>53</sup>Uhlenbeck, *A New Series*, 14.

scientists tell us that *N. quadrivalvis* (native tobacco) has the lowest nicotine content of any domesticated tobacco.<sup>54</sup> In comparison, commercial tobacco (*N. tabacum*, the same used today) has a highly addictive level of nicotine. It is impossible to know how much native tobacco the Piegan used before contact. But it is easy to see how they became addicted to commercial tobacco.

Previous to the introduction of commercial tobacco the Piegan used their own native tobacco for specific purposes. Although the Beaver bundle owners oversaw the planting and cultivating of tobacco, and held the tobacco and tobacco seeds throughout the winter, the entire community benefitted from its cultivation. At the end of winter the Beaver bundle owners divided the tobacco up within the community.

The Piegan used tobacco, by smoking it or challenging someone to smoke it, as a method of social control. Duvall and Wissler wrote that if people in the community believed that someone were lying, they would challenge them to smoke. "The sun is called upon.... when a man tells an improbable story he may be asked if he will smoke upon its truth."<sup>55</sup> The community used the same method if someone was behaving badly, trying to hurt or even kill someone. They would ask

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<sup>54</sup>Winter, "Food of the Gods."

<sup>55</sup>Wissler, *Social Life*, 51.

that person to make an "oath" or "pledge" to change their behavior and then smoke, which the Piegan considered a "binding" contract.<sup>56</sup> The contract was not between the community and the person. The contract was between the Sun or other supernatural and the person. If the person did not modify or alter his or her behavior the supernatural would serve appropriate punishment for the broken contract. This method of social control also provided a buffer within the community against humans enacting inappropriate judgement or punishment on each other and social relationships could be maintained.

### **Got bison?**

James Willard Schultz was the first to write about how the Piegan divided animals into three "classes." "First, Spũhts'-ah-pçk-sçks or 'above animals,' including everything which flies; second, Sô-ôhts'uh-pçks-sçks or 'beyond animals,' including all strictly land animals; third, Kse-ôhts-uh-pçk-sçks or 'under animals,' including fishes, lizards, crabs, 'pollywogs,' turtles and the beavers and otters."<sup>57</sup> Schultz did not entirely explain in his 1883

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<sup>56</sup>Wissler, *Social Life*, 51.

<sup>57</sup>J. Willard Schultz, "Life Among the Blackfeet - Fourth Paper," *Forest and Stream*, (December 20, 1883): 405.

article that these divisions represented the three worlds of the Piegan universe. Or that the Piegan recognized a hierarchy of supernatural power and strength between these three worlds and the animals within them. The Piegan had heard stories about this imbalance of power their entire lives.

The supernatural beaver, from the Water world, told the humans that they could have power over the bison, from the Below world.<sup>58</sup> The Beaver men assured the Piegan that they would never go hungry in times of need because they could use the power of the Beaver to change and control bison behavior. Japy Takes Gun On Top told Duvall that, "When Buffalo have drifted far away and in the winter and the snow being very deep and people cant [sic] very well get to the Buffalo, the people call on the beaver bundle owners to get back the buffalo."<sup>59</sup> They did this with a religious ritual. Rituals were one sure way of communication with the supernatural.

In the ritual to call the bison, the Beaver bundle

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<sup>58</sup>According to Piegan stories, the bison originated in the Water world as a supernatural underwater being and came to the Below world as an animal. Uhlenbeck, *Original Blackfoot Texts*, 6-12.

<sup>59</sup>David Duvall interview with Japy Takes Gun On Top, "Blackfoot Notes," 206, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

holders invite "old men and women" to attend and sing songs to the various supernatural entities. It was an intricate process that required communication with the various supernatural beings of all three worlds. They first sang songs to the Piegan holy trinity, the Sun, Moon and Morning Star. Next they sang about the bison and their lives out in nature. Next they sang songs to the birds, including the Raven, asking its assistance in locating the bison. They then sang songs for the people in attendance. Japy added, "Now these songs which come next are the Beaver bundle men's most powerful and greatest songs and are used to handle the buffalo as they wish to....These songs are called Charming the Buffalo songs."<sup>60</sup>

At this point in his narrative Japy Takes Gun On Top clarified that "charming" the bison was something that was done only on rare occasions. The Piegan took their power seriously and did not use it on trifles. The Beaver men did not sing these songs on a daily basis or even when they held their regular bundle opening or closing rituals. The Piegan only sung the "Charming the Buffalo songs" when they were "very hard up and are about starving, when very much in need

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<sup>60</sup>David Duvall interview with Japy Takes Gun On Top, "Blackfoot Notes," 211, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.



of food."<sup>61</sup> The next set of seven songs included one imploring the wind to help find the bison. It was only with the help of the weather that the bison would change their position. Japy said that, "When this is done the wind will come from the one direction in which the Buffalo are, and a very cold snow storm will come with the wind, which will drive the buffalo towards the camps."<sup>62</sup> The last set of seven songs directed the bison to their village. As the snow storm pushed the bison to the Piegan village, the Beaver medicine pulled the bison, as well. Once the bison arrived, the Beaver man's final act was to change the weather "into a warm chinook which melts all the snow and making it more comfortable for the butchers."<sup>63</sup>

The Piegan were able to attain much of what they needed based on their knowledge of the natural environment. But in difficult circumstances, or just to make life easier, they could call upon supernatural allies to provide them with

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<sup>61</sup>David Duvall interview with Japy Takes Gun On Top, "Blackfoot Notes," 211-12, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

<sup>62</sup>David Duvall interview with Japy Takes Gun On Top, "Blackfoot Notes," 212-13, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY. Japy added that, "If this is done in the summer time rain and hail storms may be expected."

<sup>63</sup>David Duvall interview with Japy Takes Gun On Top, "Blackfoot Notes," 215, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

control over aspects of the environment such as weather or animal behavior that they needed to temporarily change to ensure the communities survived or increase their wealth.

### **Winter Time**

The Piegan tell us that they recorded time in their own way. They recorded time from night to night, new moon to new moon, and winter to winter. Big Brave told Duvall that in prayer the Piegan included the phrase, "'We are looking at the snow,'" which implied that, "they will all live to see the next winter."<sup>64</sup> According to the Beaver medicine stories the beavers introduced counting or keeping track of time to the Piegan. Within the community the duty of keeping track of time and monitoring the weather fell to the Beaver men.

The supernatural beavers gave the humans counting sticks to keep track of time. Counting the new year started at the beginning of each winter when the Beaver bundle owners "closed" their bundles for the year. Duvall and Wissler argued that since the Beaver men kept track of time, and since the number seven (7) was sacred to them, they recorded that each winter lasted seven months and the summer

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<sup>64</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 128.

five.<sup>65</sup> The Beaver men kept these counting sticks with their Beaver bundle and they included sticks for days, months and sometimes years. To keep track within one-day, "the time of day was noted by the sun and the night by the position of Ursa major, the Seven Stars."<sup>66</sup>

Tom Kiyo told Duvall that the Beaver men, "are credited with good memories (perhaps because the [Beaver] ritual is so long) and formerly kept count of the days and months. For this purpose sets of sticks were kept in bags. They claim twenty-six days for a moon and four days during which the moon is invisible (dies, or covers itself) making a period of thirty days. It is the duty of each bundle owner to keep tally of the days, also to note signs [of the Moon] for forecasting."<sup>67</sup> Watching the sky each night, counting each day and observing each new moon afforded the Beaver men significant knowledge of the seasons. The Piegan had a word for this type of knowledge, *sopoksistoti* which means "knowledge through observation." Not everyone in the community had this knowledge but the supernatural beavers assigned this duty to a small number of people in the

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<sup>65</sup>Wissler, *Social Life*, 45. However, it is possible that this practice began during the Little Ice Age, when winters could have lasted seven months.

<sup>66</sup>Wissler, *Social Life*, 44.

<sup>67</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 171.

community, the Beaver men.

Related to their duty to keep track of time was their duty of keep track of and ultimately predict the weather. Three Bears told Duvall that the "Beaver men are noted for forecasting the weather." Three Bears added that, "They keep track of each day of the year and can tell when a storm is to come on and when good weather can be expected. They have good memory and by using their counting sticks can easily tell each day and month of the year." Instead of looking at a calendar the members of the band just went to the Beaver men to ask what day of the month it was, or even when spring would be coming. They accomplished this by daily observation. Three Bears added, "The Beaver men usually take good notice of the new moon in winter." The Piegan believed that understanding the variations of the nightly moon and especially the new moon helped them predict coming weather patterns, particularly storms in winter.<sup>68</sup>

However forecasting the weather was not the same as changing or controlling the weather. But the Piegan believed that the Beaver men had *sopoksistoti*, "superior knowledge about an activity through one's experience."<sup>69</sup> Their

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<sup>68</sup>David Duvall interview with Three Bears, "Blackfoot Notes," 300-301, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

<sup>69</sup>Frantz and Russell, *Blackfoot Dictionary*, 218.

knowledge of weather patterns based on daily observation over long periods of time informed their ability to help make community decisions. They knew that the weather would give them a sense of control in the material world. The Piegan went to the Beaver men to ask about potential weather concerns before embarking on community activities such as hunting or gathering plant foods. On a daily basis the Beaver men did not alter the weather, but there were rare occasions, such as when the bison were scarce, when they used their supernatural powers to ask the weather to change (not always for the better) to assist them.

### **Satisfaction**

The Piegan believed the Beaver bundle owners had a direct connection to the powerful supernatural beavers and related beings who could and would change nature to improve the human condition (if asked correctly). The Piegan believed that the connection between the original human and Kitia-ksísskstaki, the Not Real Beaver, remained unbroken over time and just the ownership "title" transferred. The Piegan told Duvall that, "they do regard a bundle as a good investment because of its absolute indestructible nature."<sup>70</sup> The Piegan believed that even if a bundle was lost, stolen

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<sup>70</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 277.

or even sold to a museum, the owners could rebuild it piece by piece. What was important to the Piegan was not the material object but the "relation, or rapport, between the supernatural source and a single individual."<sup>71</sup>

The primary benefit of owning a Beaver bundle was that it worked. Japy Takes Top Gun told Duvall that, "A man owning a [Beaver] bundle generally has good luck, raises his children up to manhood or womanhood. It brings him in clothen, [sic] food and horses. [If] he follows the rules of the bundle and prays frequently to it."<sup>72</sup> It also benefitted the community. The beavers introduced the tobacco which was necessary for humans to communicate with their supernatural allies. Japy added that, "The Beaver bundle is considered as great medicine and very holey [sic] and when one prayes [sic] to it for help generally gets some satisfaction."<sup>73</sup>

The Piegan believed that humans learned a great deal from the beavers during that one fateful winter. With their great ally and "the power of the waters," humans were now able to change and control the natural world, the behavior

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<sup>71</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 272.

<sup>72</sup>David Duvall interview with Japy Takes Gun On Top, "Blackfoot Notes," 294, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

<sup>73</sup>David Duvall interview with Japy Takes Gun On Top, "Blackfoot Notes," 290, Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY.

of animals, and the weather. The Piegan only used these powers when necessary and not on a daily basis. But with their power the Piegan learned that they did not need to suffer. They could change nature when they needed with the help of a supernatural ally.

## Chapter Seven

### NA-POS, THE "OPENED" SEASON

*My uncle Gilbert enlisted in the Marines during his junior year of high school at Flandreau Indian School, a government operated boarding school in Flandreau, South Dakota. He entered the Marines in August of 1966. He completed two tours of duty in Vietnam both in combat. The worst part of the war did not come until his second tour of duty. Gilbert served as a Forward Observer.*

*In early 1968 the North Vietnamese began an artillery barrage that continued for several weeks at Khe Sanh when two divisions of North Vietnamese soldiers surrounded the Americans. The Marines were trapped on a hill and resupplied entirely by air. They engaged in some of the most difficult hand-to-hand combat of the entire war. In an infamous ambush on February 25, 1968 the Vietnamese almost decimated an entire Marine platoon. On that day Gilbert successfully directed mortar fire at the enemy, administered first aid to other soldiers, and when his platoon leader was fatally wounded Gilbert carried him several hundred yards to a defensive position instead of leaving him behind. He received the Bronze Star with Valor for his actions. He came*



home one of the most decorated Vietnam veterans from Montana earning two Purple Hearts and many other medals. (I did not hear this story about Khe Sanh from him. I read about it in books.)<sup>1</sup>

Gilbert rarely spoke of his experiences of the war to his family except on the rare occasion when he pulled out his slide show of the photos he took. All of his slides were from combat positions and included dozens of photos of his friends. Most died in the war. He knew every one of their life stories. Each time he told their stories they grew to be old family friends. His "war stories" were of his friendships and the exotic places they came from: New York City, Texas, and California.

At this time in my life I was living with my grandparents. They lived in a two-room tar paper lean-to, one room was the kitchen and livingroom and the other room was the bedroom. We used a wood stove, water from the creek or well, and an outhouse. Every morning before dawn my grandfather made a fire and then sang old Piegan songs for my uncle Gilbert's success and safe return. He sang what the

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<sup>1</sup>Gilbert was interviewed about his experiences at Khe Sanh in two books. Eric Hammel's, *Khe Sanh: Siege in the Clouds*, New York: Crown Publishers, 1989, and John Prados and Ray W. Stubbe's, *Valley of Decision: The Siege of Khe Sanh*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991.

*Piegan called "going to war" and "return to camp" songs. My grandfather also made my uncle Gilbert small reel-to-reel tape recordings and mailed them to Vietnam for Gilbert to play every day.*

*After my uncle Gilbert went to war my grandmother sought out old Tom Many Guns.<sup>2</sup> She wanted to buy his father's name - Aakainaamahk or Many Guns.<sup>3</sup> The Piegan view names a personal property. The name "Many Guns" gave him supernatural power to overcome his enemies, to survive and to live well into old age. (This is why everyone eventually called him "old man" Many Guns.) By acquiring this name my grandmother hoped that Gilbert would also acquire the same supernatural powers. She believed that Gilbert would die in the war if he did not have supernatural protection with him.*

*When my mother was a child her paternal grandmother Hollering In The Air blessed her grandchildren every day. She did this by smoking her pipe and asking the supernatural to allow them to have healthy and long lives. Some people*

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<sup>2</sup>Tom Many Guns, *Pinto Horse Rider*, Browning: Blackfeet Heritage Program, 1979.

<sup>3</sup>Many Guns was a member of the Never Laughs band, which was my grandmother's father's band. One of Many Guns' brother's was Under Mink (Tim No Runner) and one of his sister's was Singing This Way. Tim No Runner was my grandmother's maternal grandfather, Singing This Way was her paternal aunt. Uhlenbeck, *Blackfoot Texts*, 124-125.

called these "women's pipes" because they were for daily use and not associated with ritual uses. Each day she undertook the same routine. Before she smoked her pipe she blew smoke into her hands and "washed" each of her grandchildren with the smoke. She then "washed" herself. Then as she smoked she spoke to the supernatural. The tobacco smoke both purified and blessed my mother and her siblings.

The old time Piegan believed that creating an alliance with the supernatural gave a person protection and control over their destiny. My grandparents believed that their children grew up blessed because my grandfather's mother purified them and asked the supernatural for blessings each day. When my uncle Gilbert went to war and was in a situation of real danger he brought these blessings with him, along with my grandfather's songs and the name of Many Guns. The old time Piegan believed that daily prayers, songs and names provided supernatural connection and power. They had power to protect a person from harm. They had power over a person's enemies. They had power to provide a person a safe journey home. They had power to give a person long life. The old time Piegan believed that supernatural power was necessary for everyday life.

## **Weathering Changes**

Historian Theodore Binnema described the northern Great Plains as a place that had a "fierce climate of violent contrasts."<sup>4</sup> The summers could be exceptionally hot and dry and the winters fluctuated from arctic freezes to the occasional reprieve of a chinook. Binnema summarized that "the nearly ceaseless wind [made] the climate of the northwestern plains what it is, subjecting the region to the most sudden weather changes on the globe."<sup>5</sup> Looking back from the twenty-first century it would seem that the ancient Piegan lived a life of uncertainty and that the intense and unpredictable weather of the plains directed their lives. However despite the fluctuations of the weather Schultz learned that the Piegan only divided their year into two seasons, winter and summer. *Kainaikoan* reported that in the winter they stayed in one place, creating semi-permanent villages along sheltered river valleys. In the summer they moved a dozen times or more across the northern Great Plains replenishing their supplies and renewing their relationship with the supernatural. Each year seemed to have been a predictable pattern of settlement, movement, hunting, gathering, trading and ceremony.

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<sup>4</sup>Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 17.

<sup>5</sup>Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 18.

The "sudden weather changes" of the plains did not appear to have impacted the Piegan the way that it seems it should. That was because the Piegan believed that the weather was not a "natural" phenomenon but "supernatural." The Piegan viewed different kinds of meteorological conditions as stemming from different supernatural entities. Because of this the Piegan did not believe that they needed to adapt to or endure the weather. They believed they could transform or change the weather and other elements of their environment when they pleased with the help of supernatural power.

The early recorders of Piegan life learned of a few of the names for the weather. The Piegan told George Bird Grinnell about "Wind Maker" a supernatural entity who lived underneath upper St. Mary's lake, within what is now Glacier National Park. The Piegan told Grinnell that the "Wind Maker" created the wind from underneath the water. The Wind Maker then pushed the wind up from underneath the water and onto the earth's surface. This is the reason, the Piegan said the wind blew mostly from the mountains out onto the prairies.<sup>6</sup> The Piegan told McClintock that the Wind Maker was a large bull elk that lived under the water at St. Mary's lake. And that when it moved its large head and

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<sup>6</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 259.

antlers the wind blew.<sup>7</sup> The Piegan believed that the Wind Maker created wind as a deliberate action and it was not done in passing. Because of this, Schultz explained that instead of saying, the wind was blowing from the west, the Piegan would say the wind was blowing toward the east.<sup>8</sup> They believed that the Wind Maker created the wind and it was being directed somewhere on purpose.

The Piegan told Grinnell that "Cold Maker" lived in the north country where everything was white. Similar to the Wind Maker, his actions were deliberate. He sent winter storms down from the north toward the south without mercy.<sup>9</sup> Mad Wolf told McClintock about the Cold Maker's home the "Snow Tipi." In Mad Wolf's story an individual named Sacred Otter created an alliance with the Cold Maker to temporarily stop blizzards when the Piegan thought it was necessary.<sup>10</sup> In his story Cold Maker reminded the Piegan that, "It is I

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<sup>7</sup>McClintock, "The Home of the Wind Maker," *The Old North Trail*, 60-62.

<sup>8</sup>Schultz, "Life Among the Blackfeet - Fourth Paper," *Forest and Stream*, Vol. 21, No. 21, (December 20, 1883): 405.

<sup>9</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 260.

<sup>10</sup>McClintock, "The Legend of the Snow Tipi," *The Old North Trail*, 133-138. McClintock used both the name "Cold Maker" and "Maker of Storms and Blizzards" as the overarching supernatural entity. The Piegan recognized that within winter there were multiple weather patterns.

who bring the cold storms, the whirling snow and the biting winds from the north, and I control them at my will.'"<sup>11</sup>

The Piegan did not view weather as being part of the natural environment. They believed that the weather were supernatural entities that intentionally challenged the Piegan. When the Piegan spoke with the early recorders of Piegan life about these forces, they often spoke of their fear and reverence. McClintock explained that, "the presence of the mysterious Cold Maker... filled everyone with awe and dread of His Power."<sup>12</sup> The Piegan did not view weather as a benign presence, but as something that they should try to both change and control, or they would live at its mercy. One of the most powerful forces that the Piegan both feared and respected was the "Thunder Maker." Thunder ruled over summer.

### **Thunder Maker**

The Piegan told Grinnell that "Thunder is one of the most important [deities].... He brings the rain. He is represented sometimes as a bird, or, more vaguely, as in one

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<sup>11</sup>McClintock, "The Legend of the Snow Tipi," *The Old North Trail*, 133-138.

<sup>12</sup>McClintock, *The Old North Trail*, 139.

of the stories, merely as a fearful person."<sup>13</sup> The Piegan also told Grinnell that "Thunder Maker" lived on Chief Mountain on the current U.S./Canadian border and controlled several natural phenomena, including the thunder, lightning, hail and rain. When Thunder Maker left in the fall for his home in the south, he took the thunder, lightning, hail and rain with him. The sound of the first thunder in the early spring marked his return and the beginning of summer.<sup>14</sup> "Napos," the open season began with the return of Thunder.

The Piegan believed that the Thunder controlled one of the key factors of summer time weather - the rain. In the arid to semi-arid northern Great Plains annual rain fall determined much of life. Binnema wrote that the arid climate "determined primarily by the ratio of precipitation to evaporation" defined the northern Great Plains landscape and its resources.<sup>15</sup> Snowfall in the mountains determined the level of water in creeks and rivers, and rainfall determined the abundance of resources on the plains. Binnema noted that "By late summer, especially in dry years, many water sources in the dry prairie had disappeared."<sup>16</sup> Developing and

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<sup>13</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 259.

<sup>14</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 277.

<sup>15</sup>Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 21.

<sup>16</sup>Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 42.



maintaining a relationship with the Thunder Maker was essential to Piegan existence.

According to the stories that they told the early recorders of Piegan life, there was an ancient time when the Piegan had no relationship with the Thunder. Instead they lived in fear of its deadly power and ability to withhold rain if it chose. However the Piegan told Grinnell that they created a truce with the Thunder. This, they said, happened "Long ago, almost in the beginning."<sup>17</sup> Several Piegan told the early recorders of Piegan life similar stories of the creation of a relationship between the Thunder and the Piegan.<sup>18</sup> However, a local school teacher on the reservation in the 1890s, Miss Cora M. Ross told Grinnell a version of the Thunder story that was widely accepted.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 113.

<sup>18</sup>Early scholars of Piegan life recorded different versions of Thunder or the origin of the Thunder pipe story. In 1884 James Willard Schultz wrote about his first person experience attending a Thunder pipe ceremony in "Life Among the Blackfeet - Eighth Paper," *Forest and Stream*, Vol. 21, No. 25, (January 17, 1884): 492. George Bird Grinnell wrote the "Origin of Medicine Pipe" in 1892 *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*. 113-116, and re-wrote the same story in 1913 as "How the Thunder Pipe Came," in George Bird Grinnell's *Blackfeet Indian Stories*. Helena: Riverbend Publishing, 2005, originally published 1913, 53-59. Also McClintock, *Old North Trail*, 425, and Uhlenbeck, *New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 65-66.

<sup>19</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, xxx. Miss Ross was not Piegan.

Piegian translator Joseph Tatsey described the Thunder to C.C. Uhlenbeck in 1910 as an other-worldly creature that "did not belong to this country."<sup>20</sup> Tatsey described a supernatural bird, "Its feathers were all of different colors, its bill was green-coloured, its legs were coloured the same."<sup>21</sup> Its most important feature to the Piegian though was that, "When it opened its eyes, then it flashed lightning. When it flew, then the thunder roared."<sup>22</sup> The multi-colored bird-like creature lived on the top of Chief Mountain in a stone lodge.<sup>23</sup> Clouds and rainbows were its tools for travel and for controlling the rainstorms.<sup>24</sup>

Thunder Maker's story began according to Miss Ross when the all-powerful Thunder kidnaped a Piegian man's wife. The man became distraught and went looking for her. As he traveled he asked each of the animals for assistance and

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<sup>20</sup>Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 65-66. Tatsey was half-Piegian and he worked as a Piegian-English translator for Uhlenbeck and others on the reservation.

<sup>21</sup>Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 65-66.

<sup>22</sup>Uhlenbeck, *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, 65-66.

<sup>23</sup>McClintock, *The Old North Trail*, 519-520. The Piegian gave McClintock the same description of a rainbow colored bird with green claws in the 1890s as Uhlenbeck got in the 1910s.

<sup>24</sup>McClintock, *The Old North Trail*, 487. McClintock wrote that the Piegian called rainbows - rain lariats or "rain-ropers."

guidance. However the animals all feared the Thunder, too, so they did not want to interfere in this dispute between the human and the Thunder. Finally the man stumbled upon the home of the Raven. The Raven was also a powerful supernatural entity. The Raven invited the human in and heard his sad story. The Raven empathized with him and then told him that it was impossible for a human to go up against a supernatural entity without supernatural power. Moved by the man's story the Raven decided to help.

The Raven gave the human two kinds of devices that contained supernatural power, the wing of a Raven and an arrow shaft made with an elk horn. The human then set out to find the home of the Thunder and retrieve his wife. Upon finding the Thunder's lodge a test of supernatural power ensued. After a time the Thunder conceded that the human, with the help of Raven, had "great medicine." The Thunder and the man made a truce. After returning the man's wife, the Thunder gave the man and his wife a pipe to use in the springtime. The Thunder told the couple, "'I bring the rain which makes all things grow, and for this you shall pray to me, you and all the people.'"<sup>25</sup>

Beginning with that first couple, the Piegan held a

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<sup>25</sup>Grinnell, "Origin of the Medicine Pipe," *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*. 113-116, and re-wrote the same story as "How the Thunder Pipe Came," *Blackfeet Indian Stories*, 53-59.

"Thunder-pipe" ceremony as instructed by the Thunder each spring.<sup>26</sup> According to the Piegan the Thunder Maker gave the humans one "Thunder pipe," which the Piegan passed down from owner to owner since the beginning.<sup>27</sup> Schultz was the first recorder of Piegan life to write about his experiences attending a "Thunder-pipe" ceremony. He wrote in 1884 that the Piegan still feared the power of the Thunder and its ability, through lightning, to kill humans. The couple who owned the Thunder pipe performed the ceremony as instructed by the Thunder in a effort to appease and remind the Thunder of their pact between the supernatural entity and humans.

For the Piegan a new year began with the sound of the first thunder in the spring.<sup>28</sup> At the sound of the first thunder the Piegan called the community together and then held their "Thunder-pipe" ceremony. At this ceremony the Piegan utilized nothing fresh. But instead they used foods and materials that they saved from the previous year, dried tobacco, dried sage, dried berries, and dried meat. After Thunder Maker returned to its summer home in the north and after the Piegan performed their annual ceremony, Thunder

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<sup>26</sup>Schultz, "Life Among the Blackfeet - Eighth Paper," *Forest and Stream*, Vol. 21, No. 25, (January 17, 1884): 492.

<sup>27</sup>Wissler and Duvall, *Blackfeet Mythology*, 89.

<sup>28</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 115-116.

Maker brought the rain to grow new plants. Part of the ceremony included praying to the Thunder for an abundant berry crop and the participants all planted one dried berry for the coming year's crop. The Thunder pipe ceremony was both a celebration of the new year and the renewal of life on the northern Great Plains.

The Piegan believed that the Thunder Maker was the most powerful of all weather phenomena because of its ability to kill humans with lightning, its ability to make humans suffer through drought and its ability to generate new plant life. Although it may seem to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that winter was the worst season to endure on the northern Great Plains, the Piegan viewed the summer as the most difficult. In the summer the Piegan had to deal with Thunder Maker. Since the "long ago" time individual Piegan developed relationships with multiple allies to do just that.

### **Bull Child**

Clark Wissler met Bull Child in the summer of 1903 at the Piegan *O'kan*. Franz Boas, from the American Museum of Natural History, had sent Wissler on an expedition to Montana to study the "symbolism" of the tribes of the northern Great Plains. Wissler arrived near the end of June just as the community was preparing for the annual *O'kan*

which now corresponded with the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Wissler learned at his first *O'kan* that Bull Child was one of the venerated religious leaders of the Piegan. From 1903 until his death in 1908 Wissler and Duvall interviewed, corresponded and collected materials from Bull Child.<sup>29</sup> The ability that fascinated Wissler the most was Bull Child's power to change and control the weather.

Bull Child was born sometime in the 1830s and was probably in his seventies when Wissler first interviewed him.<sup>30</sup> By 1903 Bull Child was a well known and well respected ceremonial leader.<sup>31</sup> He lived throughout the mid-nineteenth century at a time that scholars, such as John Ewers, considered the high point of Piegan history. He was probably in his twenties when *Lame Bull's* treaty was signed in 1855. He was in his thirties and forties when the region grew into Montana territory. He did not experience the near extinction of the bison until he was in his fifties. He had four wives and only two children who survived into

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<sup>29</sup>David Duvall interviewed many people from his own family or from his wife's family. Bull Child was Duvall's wife's paternal uncle (her father's brother), which makes him my great-grandmother's uncle.

<sup>30</sup>DeMarce, ed., *Blackfeet Heritage*, 50-51.

<sup>31</sup>McClintock, *The Old North Trail*, 310.

adulthood.<sup>32</sup> Bull Child lived most of his life and adulthood on the prairies. This was exactly the type of person Wissler loved to interview, a true "buffalo Indian."

The Piegan who lived through this time period were unique. They experienced two important time periods in Piegan history. At mid-century they enjoyed the high point of significant political power, a large land base and diverse economic resources. By the end of the century they endured the loss of their land base to the Americans, the loss of bison, numerous famines and diseases to survive into the twentieth century. Those who survived retained the knowledge of their former life on the northern Great Plains. Theirs was the knowledge that the early recorders of Piegan life competed to record.

### ***O'kan* (or Sundance)**

Near the end of the summer the Piegan held one of their most important ceremonies - the *O'kan*. The *O'kan* celebrated the relationship between humans and their supernatural allies. The *O'kan* was a multi-day ceremony made up of

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<sup>32</sup>DeMarce, ed., *Blackfeet Heritage*, 50-52. When the U.S. government conducted a census for the 1907-1912 allotment, all four of Bull Child's wives had died. It is unclear from the records if he had multiple wives at one time or he was married four times in a row. He probably was polygamous as that was common in his time.

several individual rituals.<sup>33</sup> A significant part of each of these rituals was a re-enactment of its original story. These told of their introduction into the Piegan "visible" world from the "invisible" world. These re-enactments were not merely to remember the original event as it **was** in the past, but to create a new relationship in the here and now.<sup>34</sup> To insure that each *O'kan* was a success a "Weather Man" presided over the entire celebration. Bull Child was one of the most well known contemporary "Weather Men."

Walter McClintock had met Bull Child years before at an earlier *O'kan*. He photographed Bull Child and told the story of their meeting in his book *The Old North Trail*.<sup>35</sup> He described Bull Child as one of three "prominent medicine men." As part of the *O'kan* the Piegan built a "booth" within the *O'kan* lodge for the Weather Men to stay in throughout

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<sup>33</sup>The most complete discussions of the *O'kan* are found in Clark Wissler's "Ceremonial Bundles of the Blackfoot Indians," *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, vol. 7, part 2. (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1912); and "The Sun Dance of the Blackfoot Indians," *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, vol. 16, part 3. (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1918).

<sup>34</sup>To the Piegan these were not re-enactments or re-tellings, the purpose of the rituals were to experience the original experience for the first time.

<sup>35</sup>The majority of McClintock's photographs are now on-line at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, website. There are seventeen (17) photos that identify Bull Child.



the ceremony. Their role was to keep the Sun, as deity and natural element, physically present and visible throughout the *O'kan*. And to keep the Thunder Maker and Wind Maker away. The Piegan built the booth out of cottonwood and juniper boughs for the Weather Men to live in throughout the *O'kan*. Both of these plants have supernatural origins with stories of their own. The Piegan used the earth taken from where the center pole was dug for the floor of the booth and spread white clay over this.

The Weather Men decided how many days to continue the *O'kan* based on how many days they wanted to keep the weather fair. Making "medicine" for several days in a row was hard work. The Weather Men also prayed for and blessed individual community members as part of their role at the *O'kan*. Women brought their children to Bull Child for "his blessing" that, "they might be endowed with power and have an abundance to eat throughout their lives."<sup>36</sup> A lifetime of acquiring supernatural allies and control over the weather placed Bull Child in this prestigious position.

### **Receiving Power**

Bull Child told Wissler and Duvall that he first received supernatural control over the weather when he was

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<sup>36</sup>McClintock, *The Old North Trail*, 316.

still a young man. He told them that he went up on Heart Butte, a small mountain on the southern part of what would become the reservation, where he "fasted and prayed for seven days."<sup>37</sup> He probably did this in the late 1840s or early 1850s.<sup>38</sup> Bull Child said that after seven days, "'The Sun appeared before me as a very old man, [he] gave me a drum and one song. He explained to me that this drum and the song were to be used in making clear weather.'"<sup>39</sup> With a supernatural ally such as the Sun, Bull Child could begin to change his own fortunes as a young man and use his new abilities to change the weather for going on raiding parties and for hunting. The Piegan believed that it was foolish to attempt to go on raids, travel or hunt without some small ability to change the weather.

A story from Weasel Tail's youth provides a good comparison.<sup>40</sup> Weasel Tail told ethnologist John Ewers that

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<sup>37</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 72.

<sup>38</sup>In the 1840s and 1850s the Piegan lived primarily in central Montana and not up near the Rocky Mountains. It was not until the 1870s and 1880s that the Piegan lived near the mountains.

<sup>39</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 72.

<sup>40</sup>Weasel Tail was a "buffalo Indian" interviewed by John Ewers in the early 1940s. Weasel Tail eventually became a very well known warrior, who like Bull Child survived into the twentieth century. Ethnologist John Ewers recorded his life story. "Weasel Tail" file, John C. Ewers Papers. National Anthropological Archives. National Museum of

the first time he went on a raiding party he was only fifteen years old. Weasel Tail stated that he was anxious to make his mark and set out with a group of older men to raid the Crow. However he soon learned that he could not keep up with them and they left him behind. Weasel Tail was then caught in a snow storm and after the snow settled he got snow blindness. He was blind and lost when a group of Cree or Métis Indians came upon him. They took pity on him and helped him find his way home. He was humiliated. Weasel Tail learned from his first attempt at going to war, a lesson that many young Piegan understood, to never go without supernatural assistance and especially without some power over the weather.<sup>41</sup>

Bull Child was fortunate that he had access to a supernatural ally from a young age. As the years passed Bull Child's fortunes grew as he acquired more supernatural allies. The various major deities of the Piegan, such as the Sun, Moon, Morning Star and Thunder, visited Bull Child and gave him various objects of power. The Sun returned to Bull Child and gave him a shell necklace which gave him the additional power to make the rain go away. Bull Child

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Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>41</sup>"Weasel Tail" file, John C. Ewers Papers. National Anthropological Archives. National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

stated, "'Since this time I have kept the shell and have exercised my power over the weather, and at the time of the sun dance I keep the rain away.'"<sup>42</sup> The Sun returned another time and gave Bull Child a headdress made out of a running-fisher (*Martes pennanti*) hide and other objects. This too was for directing the weather.<sup>43</sup> The Piegan believed that each alliance and corresponding object gave an individual some control over nature but not total control. Over the years if a person was fortunate, like Bull Child, they acquired multiple alliances and multiple objects, which added up to a larger amount of control.

### **Sun Power**

Clark Wissler and David Duvall attempted to explain why the Piegan believed that certain objects held supernatural power in their first published manuscript *The Mythology of the Blackfoot* (1908). Based on their interviews with Piegan men they reported that, "The Blackfoot theory is that there functions in the universe a force (natoji = Sun power) most manifest in the Sun but pervading the entire world, a power (natoji) that may communicate with individuals making itself

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<sup>42</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 73.

<sup>43</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 74.

manifest in and through any object."<sup>44</sup> Schultz explained this in another way, "Nä-to-yé....The word means 'of the Sun' and is generally translated as 'medicine,' not physical but spiritual."<sup>45</sup> Wissler and Duvall explained that humans can acquire a supernatural ally, and its corresponding power, when the object with "Sun power" communicated with the person. This was usually done through speaking, in the material world or in a dream.

Wissler and Duvall observed that "at the moment of speaking the object becomes for the time being 'as a person.'"<sup>46</sup> Because the Sun endowed the object with supernatural power, it transformed into both a "person" or entity with whom humans could communicate and a vessel for the Sun's supernatural power.<sup>47</sup> Wissler and Duvall further explained that after the object was endowed with power from the Sun, the human had access to that power once the object

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<sup>44</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 103.

<sup>45</sup>Schultz, *Forest and Stream*, Vol. 29. No. 5, August 25, 1887. 82.

<sup>46</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 103.

<sup>47</sup>This process was similar to "transubstantiation" and the "totality of the presence" found within Catholic theology, in which God both transforms and is present within an earthly object. The material object remains but its essence becomes supernatural. Joseph Pohle, "The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5, New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909. <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05573a.htm>>.

"transferred" the knowledge of its power to the human. Thus the process was in two parts: the Sun transferred supernatural power to an object and the object transferred the knowledge to use the supernatural power to the human.

Wissler and Duvall explained that this final step was "regarded as a compact between the recipient and the being."<sup>48</sup> It created a relationship that was "solely between one individual and the being who gave it."<sup>49</sup> Individuals such as Bull Child could accumulate dozens of objects endowed with supernatural power that had various uses that only he could use and own.

Individuals could acquire objects with supernatural power in three ways. The first was for a supernatural entity to seek out an individual and "speak" to that person through an object as explained by Wissler and Duvall. The second way was for a human to go in search of supernatural assistance, usually by going to a place near the home of a supernatural and then suffering through physical depravation until the supernatural entity took pity on the human. The third and easiest way was to "buy" supernatural power from another human who had already acquired it from any of the three methods. With the third way, an individual could "buy" all

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<sup>48</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 103.

<sup>49</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 103.

or part of an object with supernatural power and the "seller" would transfer their knowledge and ability to the purchaser.<sup>50</sup> The Piegan believed that the relationship between the supernatural and an individual remained intact, even with each new owner.

Once an individual "owned" an object, no matter how they acquired it, they could "sell" the object to another and "buy" other objects. Individuals bought and sold dozens of these supernaturally endowed objects throughout their lives. Historian William Farr described this process of buying and selling objects as a "sacred economy."<sup>51</sup>

### **Power Begets Power**

Although the Piegan could use supernatural allies and power for a variety of purposes, one of their main functions was to change the natural environment in the Below world. Changing and controlling the weather played a key role in the Piegan belief system. The Piegan believed that humans existed in a universe where supernatural power trumped other supernatural power and to impact these weather systems the Piegan needed stronger supernatural power.

Individuals like Bull Child understood this system. As

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<sup>50</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 69-279.

<sup>51</sup>Farr, "Troubled Bundles, Troubled Blackfeet."

a young man Bull Child used his growing collection of supernatural objects to increase his status within the community and his own wealth. In addition to benefitting from using the objects himself, he also "rented" them out to younger men who had yet to acquire objects or older men without sufficient supernatural allies. These men used his objects to change the natural world for hunting or for going to war. If the men were successful, Bull Child would get a share of their profits.<sup>52</sup>

As Bull Child got older his stature as a man connected to the supernatural grew and he acquired even more supernatural objects. He added the hide of a red-winged blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) from the Thunder that had "powers over the weather."<sup>53</sup> He also added a powerful robe design from the Thunder. Bull Child told Wissler and Duvall that the Thunder came to him in a dream and told him "when wearing this robe, no matter how bad the weather may be, it will clear up. If the weather should be clear and you desire it to rain...it will rain."<sup>54</sup> Bull Child created the robe design as specified by Thunder Maker using first a bison robe and later a wool trade blanket. Bull Child eventually

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<sup>52</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 100.

<sup>53</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 100.

<sup>54</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 74.



assembled a large array of objects until he was entirely covered from head-to-toe with a headdress, hair ornaments, bison robe, clothing, jewelry, accessories and almost full body paint.

Bull Child also purchased the powerful robe owned by Brings Down the Sun, a well known North Piegan religious leader of the late nineteenth century. McClintock recorded the stories of Brings Down the Sun in his book *The Old North Trail*. Brings Down the Sun told McClintock that he went to the highest peak on the Porcupine Hills in what is now southern Alberta along the Rocky Mountain front and spent ten days and ten nights fasting. While fasting the "Spirit of the Mountain" came to him and gave him the robe design, which was "endowed with wisdom and supernatural power."<sup>55</sup> The Mountain gave Brings Down the Sun the "design and instructions" to use the robe.<sup>56</sup> McClintock claimed that by the time that Bull Child owned it, the robe was "famous among the Blackfeet."<sup>57</sup>

The Piegan recognized Bull Child both "for his power as

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<sup>55</sup>McClintock, *Old North Trail*, 429.

<sup>56</sup>McClintock, *Old North Trail*, 519.

<sup>57</sup>McClintock, *Old North Trail*, 310.

a doctor" and as "a prominent medicine man."<sup>58</sup> Wissler claimed that it was unusual for a person to be both. Wissler explained that the Piegan saw a difference between the two: a "doctor" was someone who healed physical illnesses, while a "medicine" man was someone knowledgeable of supernatural relationships. Wissler stated that two different types of people performed these duties in the community, and many doctors were women who used herbs to heal.<sup>59</sup>

Bull Child's main role among the Blackfoot, by the time that both McClintock and Wissler visited, was as the primary "Weather Man" for the annual *O'kan*. Each year before the *O'kan* the family sponsoring it selected a person who possessed special powers over the weather to keep storms, wind and rain away, and guarantee sunlight throughout the ceremony. This person was known either as a Weather Priest, a Weather Dancer, or a Weather Man.<sup>60</sup>

Wissler witnessed for himself the power of Bull Child's role as a Weather Man. Wissler wrote, "In 1903 there was a contest between a number of rival medicinemen some of whom conjured for rain, others for fair weather: strange to say,

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<sup>58</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 98, and McClintock, *Old North Trail*, 312-314.

<sup>59</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 270.

<sup>60</sup>Wissler, *Sun Dance*, 259, and McClintock, *Old North Trail*, 314.

clouds would threaten and then pass away during these days."<sup>61</sup> Wissler was impressed with Bull Child's ability to win the duel over the others. Bull Child recounted another story for Wissler of his ability to control the weather. Using his original drum and song given to him by the Sun (which by then were at least fifty years old), he told Wissler that, "On the fourth of July, 1902, while our people were in camp preparing for the sun dance, there came a great rain which threatened to flood the whole camp. I beat my drum and sang my song which kept the water away from my tipi."<sup>62</sup> However he added that, "'I made up my mind to cause the water to drown out the tipi of my rival... and forced him to move.'"<sup>63</sup>

**'I have great power.'**

By the time that Wissler met Bull Child, Bull Child was either in his late sixties or early seventies. Bull Child's role as a Weather Man at numerous *O'kans* solidified his place in Piegan society.<sup>64</sup> Similar to other Piegan at the turn of the twentieth century, Bull Child decided to sell

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<sup>61</sup>Wissler, *Sun Dance*, 259.

<sup>62</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 72.

<sup>63</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 72.

<sup>64</sup>Wissler, *Sun Dance*, 258-260.

his objects - but not their supernatural power. In the summer of 1904 Bull Child sold all the objects that he owned related to his abilities as a "Weather Man" including his robe, headdress, necklace, whistle, drum and other items to Wissler and the American Museum of Natural History.<sup>65</sup> Wissler and Duvall documented the stories and recorded the songs related to these objects. They regarded Bull Child as "absolutely sincere" in his efforts to document and explain his belief system.<sup>66</sup> We do not know why Bull Child decided to sell his objects to the American Museum of Natural History. But we do know that he maintained an ongoing relationship, through visits and correspondence, with Wissler until his death in the spring of 1908.<sup>67</sup>

The type of power that Bull Child possessed would have had many uses during his lifetime and since he did not sell his power he would continue to maintain this power until his passing. However after the Piegan settled onto the reservation its primary uses were at the annual *O'kan* and asserting one's strength among rivals.

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<sup>65</sup>Correspondence between Duvall and Wissler, 1904, Box 2, File 1, XVI, Department of Anthropology Archives. American Museum of National History, New York, NY.

<sup>66</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 71.

<sup>67</sup>Wissler Papers, Department of Anthropology, Archives. American Museum of National History, New York, New York.

Wissler used the items that he collected from Bull Child to feature in his representation of Piegan religion at the American Museum of Natural History. They are still there today. Wissler commissioned a full-size mannequin of Bull Child and used it to display Bull Child's various objects. It was Wissler's final tribute to his close acquaintance. Wissler described him in this way:

The figure represents Bull Child, a prominent Blackfoot shaman, whose supernatural power gave him the ability to control the weather. Except for his robe, which was purchased from another shaman, all of his paraphernalia were made in accord with instructions received from supernatural beings in visions. His headdress of otter skin, his shell necklace, and his drum were given by the Sun and had the power to turn away rain or bring clear weather; his finger pendants symbolize control over the weather; and his robe had the power to cause rain or sunshine. The blue spots painted on his face represent stars; the crescents symbolize the moon; and the lines on his arms are rainbows. The eagle-wing wand in his left hand belongs to his medicine bundle; the right hand wand of the magpie, peacock, and dyed chicken feathers represent the moon. Bull Child also had supernatural protection against smallpox and

bullets and the ability to prevent child bearing.

When the early recorders of Piegan life first came to the reservation at the turn of the twentieth century to document and record the Piegan past, they were told stories of a different reality. It was a reality in which the Piegan had access to supernatural power through relationships with the forces of nature and supernatural entities. When the Sun told Bull Child, "'This medicine lodge is ours [the Sun and Moon], the weather is ours, and when you wish the weather to be good ...you must give me what I ask for,'"<sup>68</sup> the Piegan obeyed.

Despite living in a vastly inhospitable landscape on the wide open prairies, and despite popular conceptions about American Indians to the contrary, the Piegan believed that they did not have to "live in balance with nature" or "adapt to their environment." Not only did they believe that they could change and control the visible natural world, they thought it was necessary for their survival. The Piegan believed there existed three separate dimensions and from each of these dimensions came specific elements that the Piegan could utilize to impact their earthly existence. Bull Child's power came from all three.

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<sup>68</sup>Wissler, *Ceremonial Bundles*, 73.

In history we use the word "agency" to describe the proactive behavior of American Indians within social and political situations. However, for the Piegan we could also use the word "agency" to describe how they viewed their relationship with the supernatural dimension and their understanding of their environment. This understanding gave them confidence. As Wissler observed, "Once, it was told, that [Bull Child] became enraged at the power making the weather bad, shouting out, 'Now, you go ahead, if you want to. I have great power and can stop you when I will.'"<sup>69</sup>

And he did.

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<sup>69</sup>Wissler, *Sun Dance*, 259.

## Chapter 8

### 'CONTROL OF HUMAN AFFAIRS'

*My mother was born in 1940. She was the third child and third daughter of my grandparents Annie Mad Plume and Francis Aimsback.<sup>1</sup> They lived with my grandfather's parents, Aimsback and Hollering in the Air on the southside of the reservation on Blacktail creek. Within the next year my uncle Francis would also be born, he was the first son and grandson. Aimsback and Hollering in the Air never called my grandfather "Francis." They called him Iòkimau and he went by this name his entire life. Iòkimau is a shortened form of the word Ixtáìòkimau which means "to make pemmican."<sup>2</sup> Since his parents adopted my grandfather when they were in their late 40s, they raised him more like a grandchild than as a son. And by the time my mother was born her grandparents were considered ancient.*

*My mother remembers living with her grandparents, even*

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<sup>1</sup>After his parents died my grandfather started going by his "Irish" name, Thomas Francis Wall. He was probably named by his birth family after the famous Irish nationalist Thomas Francis Meagher.

<sup>2</sup>Uhlenbeck and Van Gulik, "An English-Blackfoot Vocabulary," 157.



though they would pass on while she was still young. Aimsback and Hollering in the Air did not learn to speak English and were not converted to Christianity. My grandfather Iòkimau learned to speak English at Holy Family Mission, the Catholic on-reservation boarding school. He did not attend Holy Family until he was a young teenager and he attended only a few years. Like all the male students at Holy Family, he spent two thirds of his day out on the mission farm in order for the Mission to sustain itself. He also learned to play in the brass band at Holy Family, which was a common assimilationist tactic for male students. They even played in front of John Philip Sousa once, or so the family story goes.

In the old days it was common for the youngest child in the family to live with their parents as their parents aged. My grandfather played that role in his family, apparently much to the chagrin of my grandmother. (She has many stories of living with her in-laws.) Aimsback and Hollering in the Air were both religious leaders on the south side of the reservation. My grandfather and grandmother assisted their activities. My grandmother assisted Hollering in the Air with her role as a holy woman, especially at the annual O'kan. My grandfather learned all the songs of the various religious ceremonies and sang for his father. My mother and

*her siblings attended these events along with their parents. Aimsback and Hollering in the Air owned the "Big Rock" tipi, which they put up at various religious events, and a medicine bundle.*

*Aimsback named all of his grandchildren with Piegan names, he never used their English names. Each one of the names that Aimsback selected for his grandchildren was taken from events in his own life. To older Piegan, like Aimsback and his wife English names held no meaning, they were just words. Piegan names, instead, were rich with meaning and significance. Piegan names carried with them, and carried forward into future generations, the history of a person. Names and history to the Piegan were intertwined and interwoven with stories of relationships between humans and the supernatural world. Told collectively these names constituted a continuous narrative of the people, places, events and history of the Piegan.*

*Aimsback named my mother Sépistaki or Owl Woman. It seems like a simple name. However, the Piegan did not view owls as birds or part of the natural world. They believed that owls were the reincarnation of powerful religious leaders (humans) who had passed on. In the afterlife these religious leaders became owls, both natural and supernatural, who could communicate with humans when they*

chose. The Piegan viewed communicating with an owl as a fortunate event. Some people think that owls can give humans the power to heal, to be lucky in war, the ability to acquire wealth or the ability to change nature itself.<sup>3</sup>

### **A New Kind of Indian**

Historian Paul Rosier, in his study of Piegan politics *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation*, recounted how the Piegan from 1885 to 1915 "had become poor, hungry and neglected, living in the margins."<sup>4</sup> Rosier described how the tribe created a "syncretic Blackfeet political culture," that blended Piegan methods of decision making with new Western political structures.<sup>5</sup> In the same time period, a similar process was taking place in terms of individual economy. At the turn of the last century, the "old system" was gone and the Piegan were learning how to navigate the new economy. The Piegan learned to blend the new methods of farming and ranching with the old methods of hunting and gathering, albeit confined to a much smaller landscape. Even with this

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<sup>3</sup>Clark Wissler collected objects with either owl feathers, owl skins or owl heads, now at the American Museum of Natural History, described in, "Personal Charms and Medicines," *Ceremonial Bundles*, 91-100.

<sup>4</sup>Rosier, *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation*.

<sup>5</sup>Rosier, *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation*, 6.

new American system the Piegan did not prosper, they continued to suffer through periods of disease, malnutrition and starvation well into the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the U.S. sponsored programs the Piegan also found other methods of gaining a living.

In 1912 Chicago hosted the United States Land and Irrigation Exposition. Louis W. Hill of the Great Northern Railroad hired ten Piegan to help promote his business concerns at the annual Land Show. He already hired Piegan people to help entertain wealthy tourists at the lodge he owned in East Glacier Park. He brought these individuals to the land show at the suggestion of a Chicago advertising agency. Its publicist argued that Indians would benefit the promoters by attracting the public's attention and at the same time provide advertising for the newly established Glacier National Park.<sup>7</sup>

The Piegan included, "John Two Guns White Calf, Medicine Owl, Lazy Boy, Fred Big Top, Jim Big Top, Long Time Sleep, and Fish Wolf Robe." They traveled to Chicago by train, stopping in Minnesota along the way. Once at the Land

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<sup>6</sup>Senator Lane, Congressional Hearing, 1914.

<sup>7</sup>Kline, "From the Other Side of the Lens," 267-68; Your Indian Friend [Fred Big Top] to H.W. Gleason, November 28, 1912, File 4708, Great Northern Railway Co. President's Subject Files, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

Show they participated in various promotional activities around Chicago and in full regalia "performed Pikuni songs and dances, gave speeches, [and] sold their photographs."<sup>8</sup> A Great Northern publicity agent hoped to photograph them riding a buffalo at the Lincoln Park Zoo. But someone at the home office was concerned that this might conflict with another group's publicity, and they also wondered "What would happen if we killed an Indian."<sup>9</sup>

Hill brought these Piegan Indians to Chicago for a larger purpose. He brought them primarily to attract attention to the hall where the Great Northern lecturers extolled the virtues and opportunities for settlement in the regions bordering Great Northern's route from Minnesota to the Puget Sound. Hill invested fifty thousand dollars in making moving pictures in the summer of 1912. These films were shown continuously in the lecture hall, where the Indians pitched their camp and a cowboy band from Helena, Montana, played.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Kline, "From the Other Side of the Lens," 268-69.

<sup>9</sup>Hoke Smith telegram to Bob Mills, Louis Hill, W.P. Kenney, 3 December [1912], including penciled-in comments, File 4708, Great Northern Railway Co. President's Subject Files, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

<sup>10</sup>Hoke Smith press release, attached to note to Louis Hill and William P. Kenney, 30 November 1912, File 4708, Great Northern Railway Co. President's Subject Files, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

Shockingly within these promotional films, one Piegan man can be seen holding up a "homestead sign" advertising land for settlement and another a sign for Glacier Park. Much of the homestead land they were advertising was on former Piegan lands that they had only recently ceded, in the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>11</sup> The *Chicago Tribune* advertised that the purpose of the Land Show was "to give every homeseeker in the United States the clearest, most practicable idea of America's available land." The *Tribune* also described how "the beholder forgets the busy avenue outside and imagines himself striding over broad acres of his own 'in God's Country.'"<sup>12</sup> Ironically, the Piegan working at the Land Show in 1912 were doing so because they had lost their land base and its economic stability. The Piegan had begun their participation in the cash economy in an effort to regain some control over their economic conditions.

In the summer of 1910 David Duvall interviewed Mountain

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<sup>11</sup>Your Indian Friend [Fred Big Top] to Mr. Jones, Minneapolis Journal, 28 November 1912; Your Indian friend [Fred Big Top] to Louis Hild [sic -- Hill], 28 November 1912, both in File 4708, Great Northern Railway Co., President's Subject Files. Original of latter in General Correspondence, 1 October 1912 - 23 December 1912, Louis Warren Hill Papers, all at the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

<sup>12</sup>Chicago Tribune, November 20, 1910. Full-page advertising by the Chicago Tribune, a sponsor of the Land Show.

Chief about the history of the Piegan. Mountain Chief told Duvall a story that his father had told him about an old man predicting the future of the Piegan. Mountain Chief stated that, "When his father was a young man he saw a very old man with a cane walking in a circle about a lodge, foretelling the future. [The old man] said that the Piegans would soon die out." Mountain Chief's father said that the old man predicted that a transformation would take place in the future and out of this transformation would emerge, "A different people, a new kind of Indian, they would sit in the branches of trees."

By the beginning of the twentieth century Mountain Chief's father's stories were coming true. "A new kind of Indian" was emerging. With the demise of the bison, the loss of land and resources, disease and starvation, the "buffalo Indians" who survived into the twentieth century faced numerous challenges. Adapting to the new economy was their biggest struggle. However, they also had to readjust their relationship to the land.

### **Aimsback**

Aimsback, my great-grandfather, was what historian John C. Ewers called a "buffalo Indian." Aimsback was born sometime around 1860. He grew up on the prairies when his

family hunted bison, gathered plant foods and worshiped near the Sweet Grass Hills. He belonged to the Skunks band like his father Calf Looking. Aimsback married two sisters, which was common in his time. However, one of the sisters died and he remained married to the other for the remainder of his life.

Aimsback and other "buffalo Indians" suffered through the transition from the loss of bison on the prairies, to relocating west to the mountains, through starvation and disease, to living a sedentary life on the reservation. It is possible that because of these extreme experiences in Aimsback's life that he could not have children. Instead he adopted. Aimsback was in his 50s when he adopted my grandfather around 1915.

Aimsback worked hard to adapt to his situation. What else could he do? He learned to become a farmer as the U.S. government expected of all the Piegan. He attended the "farmers' institutes" held in the near by village of Heart Butte. He became a leader of his band and community, which the government reorganized in the early twentieth century under farming cooperatives. In the spring of 1921 the U.S. government conducted a survey of these farming cooperatives. They reported that Aimsback had broken and seeded ten acres



of wheat and was planning a one acre garden.<sup>13</sup> The Piegan did not have a word for farming. There was a word for "wheat" or *napaiininsinna*, which translated as "white man's garden plant (not a wild plant)" as C.C. Uhlenbeck recorded it in 1910.<sup>14</sup>

The U.S. government had divided the reservation into four agricultural districts. However, Fred Campbell the new agency superintendent in 1921 expanded the number of districts to twenty-nine "chapters."<sup>15</sup> Unbeknownst to him, he essentially reauthorized the Piegan band system overnight. Campbell started the Piegan Farming and Livestock Association and a "Five Year Industrial Program" in an effort to focus on subsistence or self-sufficient level farming and not large scale farming.<sup>16</sup> Many Piegan families, especially those living on the south side of the reservation had continued to live in communities centered around their

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<sup>13</sup>Blackfeet Industrial Survey, compiled 1921 - 1921, Record Group 75: Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1793 - 1999, National Archives and Records Administration, Denver.

<sup>14</sup>C. C. Uhlenbeck and R.H. Van Gulik, *An English-Blackfoot Vocabulary: Based on Material of the Southern Piegan*. Verhandelingen Der Koninklijke Akademie Van Wetenschappen Te Amsterdam, 1930, 90, 244.

<sup>15</sup>Campbell Family Papers, MC 67, Box 1, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.

<sup>16</sup>Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 320, and Rosier, *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation*, 34-35.

old band affiliations, now they could do it with government sanction.<sup>17</sup>

The "Five Year Industrial Program" encouraged the Piegan to diversify and grow different crops and animals. They held competitions and harvest fairs to encourage and reward participation. Aimsback participated in the competitions between the chapters. In their competitions they had a list of positive traits of being a farmer and got points for each. They also got demerits for continuing traits of their former life, like owning too many dogs.<sup>18</sup> Aimsback's father Calf Looking had been the leader of the Skunks band and Aimsback grew to be the leader of the Aimsback chapter of the Piegan Farming and Livestock Association.

Although this new system to make the Piegan into farmers was regarded as a success by the U.S. government, it was a success for complex reasons. First, for the most part, the participants had limited choices. Where else were they going to get food if they did not grow it themselves? And second, at this point any able bodied Piegan did not receive

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<sup>17</sup>John Ewers, "Blackfeet Political Organization," Series XIV, Box 4, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>18</sup>Great Northern Railway Co. President's Subject Files, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

rations from the agency, even though the Piegan continued to pay for the rations with their own money. Lastly, the U.S. government did not recognize that the Piegan did have experience with dryland farming, with their centuries of growing tobacco.

The other effort at social change directed by the U.S. government was to change the religion of the Piegan. This effort did not work on Aimsback. He never converted to Christianity. There are no family stories or official records of him ever participating in church activities. He continued to participate in Piegan religious activities and the community viewed him as a religious leader. In 1944 two professors from Montana State University, Olga Ross Hannon and Jessie Wilber of the Art Department, photographed Aimsback and Hollering in the Air's tipi at the annual Heart Butte O'kan. Jessie Wilber later created a color silk screen of their tipi.<sup>19</sup> John C. Ewers also attended that same O'kan with the two professors.<sup>20</sup> He later wrote that, "These tipis

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<sup>19</sup>Aimsback tipi, Object Identifier: X76.35.05, Montana State University Library, Special Collections, Bozeman, MT.

<sup>20</sup>Sun Dance Encampment at Heart Butte, Series XIV, Box 7, John C. Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. "I [JCE] visited the encampment on July 5, 1944, in company with Mrs. Hannon and Miss Wilbur of Montana State College. It was a small encampment of but 13 lodges and a larger number of tents. Only four of the 13 were painted (Albert Mad Plume's, Aimsback's, Swims Under's and

were of religious significance, being a part of a complex of sacred objects and rituals and taboos surrounding the Indian owners as long as they possessed the tipis."<sup>21</sup> The Piegan during this time period were not afraid to share information about Piegan religious belief, as Mad Wolf told McClintock, "I will reveal many things in order that you may know there is nothing harmful in our worship. You can then explain our religion to the white people, for we know you are straight and will speak the truth."<sup>22</sup>

### **Give me good luck**

Aimsback believed that the Piegan lived in a universe with three inter-connected worlds. He believed that on earth lived both supernatural and natural beings. He taught his son these same beliefs. He believed that humans could find supernatural allies that would help them live a prosperous life. He thought it was foolish to do otherwise. Aimsback believed similar to Mad Wolf's observation that, "The Blackfeet are firm believers in the Supernatural and in the control of human affairs by both Good and Evil Powers in the

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Running Crane's)." "

<sup>21</sup>John C. Ewers, *Painted Tipis of the Blackfeet Indians*, Museum of the Rockies, Montana State University, 1976, forward.

<sup>22</sup>McClintock, *The Old North Trail*, 174.

invisible world."<sup>23</sup>

The most important belief that Aimsback taught my grandfather was that the Piegan believed that with supernatural allies they could have some semblance of "control over human affairs," over the natural world and ultimately over their own destiny. It made them hopeful and courageous. In the old days the Piegan used supernatural rocks such as worm rocks that controlled insects that might be harming their edible plants, oyster rocks to cross over rivers, copper rocks that made humans stronger and resilient, and buffalo rocks to entice buffalo to their deaths. Aimsback owned a sacred rock which he carried with him until he died. Then my grandfather owned it.

Aimsback maintained relationships with several supernatural allies. He named his grandchildren for these relationships. Aimsback had a relationship with an owl that lived on Blacktail creek. Whenever Aimsback rode his horse along Blacktail creek the owl talked to him and gave him advice. Aimsback and the Piegan believed that owls were the "spirits of people long dead." He believed that if an owl hooted, a person should "request the owl for help," asking,

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<sup>23</sup>McClintock, *The Old North Trail*, 167.

"Father, help me! Give me good luck in the future."<sup>24</sup>

Aimsback lived to be over 80 years old, an anomaly even in the best of times. When they talked the owl reminded Aimsback that he was not alone and of their long-time relationship by simply stating, "we are the ones that take care of you."

Aimsback was a "buffalo Indian" but he saw that the coming generations were part of the new. He knew that his grandchildren's lives would differ immensely from his. He also believed, however, that even though life had materially changed for the Piegan, the supernatural allies that they relied upon for millennia had not abandoned them. Even as he resurrected the band system within the United States agricultural policy, he had maintained the powerful relationships with the supernatural that gave him control and his place within the world. He gave his heirs the gift of maintaining those relationships, and he reminded them that he had given them that gift through their names.

At the dawn of the atomic age, Aimsback named my mother Sépistaki to remind her and all who knew her name that he also had a connection to the larger universe.

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<sup>24</sup>Claude Schaeffer, M-1100-144, Blackfoot Bird Lore - Misc. Notes - [ca. 1934-1954], Glenbow Museum, Calgary, AB.

## Chapter 9

### THE DOGS SEPARATE

*Brings Down the Sun recognized the changing times at the turn of the last century, when he observed, "At one time animals and men were able to understand each other. We still talk to the animals just as we do to people, but they now seldom reply, except in dreams."<sup>1</sup>*

Both of my maternal grandparents were born in the 1910s on the Blackfeet reservation in northwest Montana. They were both raised by extended family members. Their own parents could not raise them due to a variety of factors, primarily the changing economy and its impact on family structure. They were both raised by people much older than their own parents. In my grandmothers case she was raised by two old women, her maternal grandmother and her great-grandmother. My grandfather's was adopted by two older family members who were the age of his grandparents. This older generation was in the process of experiencing a dramatic transition. Most lived into their young adulthood as part of the Piegan's familiar nomadic lifestyle of hunting, gathering wild plants

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<sup>1</sup>McClintock, *The Old North Trail*, 476.

and living out on the prairies before the demise of the bison. Now the U.S. government expected them to be farmers, plant gardens, herding cattle and staying in one place.

The older generation's life experiences were different from their children's or their grandchildren's who were born on the reservation. At the beginning of the twentieth century the Piegan were undergoing a rapid social and economic shift. Although the bison disappeared almost 25 years before my grandparents were born, the effects of that collapse in social and economic lifestyle were still being felt on the newly created reservation community. For the older generations, those who lived into adulthood before the reservation, it was still a difficult transition, from the nineteenth century nomadic life they enjoyed, to the twentieth century sedentary lifestyle. They were accustomed to a close and intimate relationship with their prairie environment, not one where they had limited connection to the natural world. Their understanding and views of nature were shaped by their experiences of life on the prairies.

While this dramatic shift was occurring on the reservation, modern America discovered these old time Indians. They believed that Indians, like the bison, would soon be gone. Dozens of museum curators, academics, government officials and amateurs flocked to the reservation



to gather information and collect material culture. With them a new economy emerged on the reservation. Old timers learned they could make money selling old stories, old songs and even their old clothing and moccasins. Instead of going bison hunting for a living, now old men told stories about bison hunting. Instead of sewing bison hide tipis, now old women told stories about how to design a bison hide tipi. Selling the nostalgia of the past became a part of their present day lives.

The stories they told were not always the types of stories that these early chroniclers of Piegan life were expecting. George Bird Grinnell described this difference in his preface to *Blackfoot Lodge Tales* in 1892 titled "Indians and Their Stories." He observed how non-Indians wrote about Indians as if they were non-Indians without taking into account how Indians might represent themselves. He added that, "the feelings which lead an Indian to perform a particular action are not those which would induce a white man to do the same thing."<sup>2</sup> He noticed that the Piegan were motivated by their belief system. He pointed out that, "The Indian is intensely religious. No people pray more earnestly nor more frequently. This is especially true of all Indians

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<sup>2</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, x.

on the Plains."<sup>3</sup>

At the foundation of the Piegan belief system was a different perception of everyday reality. This concept was directly informed by their understanding of how nature worked. Anthropologist David Dinwoodie explored a similar concept in his book *Reserve Memories* with the Chilcotin in rural British Columbia, "[T]here is a sort of discrepancy between material reality and conceptual reality as these are given in any particular moment between, the planes of 'things-as-they-appear-to-objective-observers' and 'things-as-they-are-to-locals,' between, in a sense, the intimacy of the past and the overabundance of the present."<sup>4</sup> When Grinnell interviewed the Piegan the 1880s he recorded a belief system of that last generation of "prairie people" and their ideas of "material reality" and "conceptual reality."

The 1880s to the 1910s was a complex time for the Piegan. The older generation, the ones who lived into their adulthood before the reservation, were struggling with disorientation. They learned that their past environmental knowledge was of little use within the current reservation

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<sup>3</sup>Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, xii.

<sup>4</sup>David Dinwoodie, *Reserve Memories: The Power of the Past in a Chilcotin Community*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002, 7.

economy. This dissertation sought to explore the transition of these "old timers" to life on the reservation, when their once intimate knowledge of their prairie environment became a thing of the past, the role of outside scholars who recorded information about their knowledge, the information that was recorded, their belief system and how it informed their understanding of nature.

*At the end of a story the Piegan say, "ki ánetòyi imitáiks," which translates "and the dogs have separated."*

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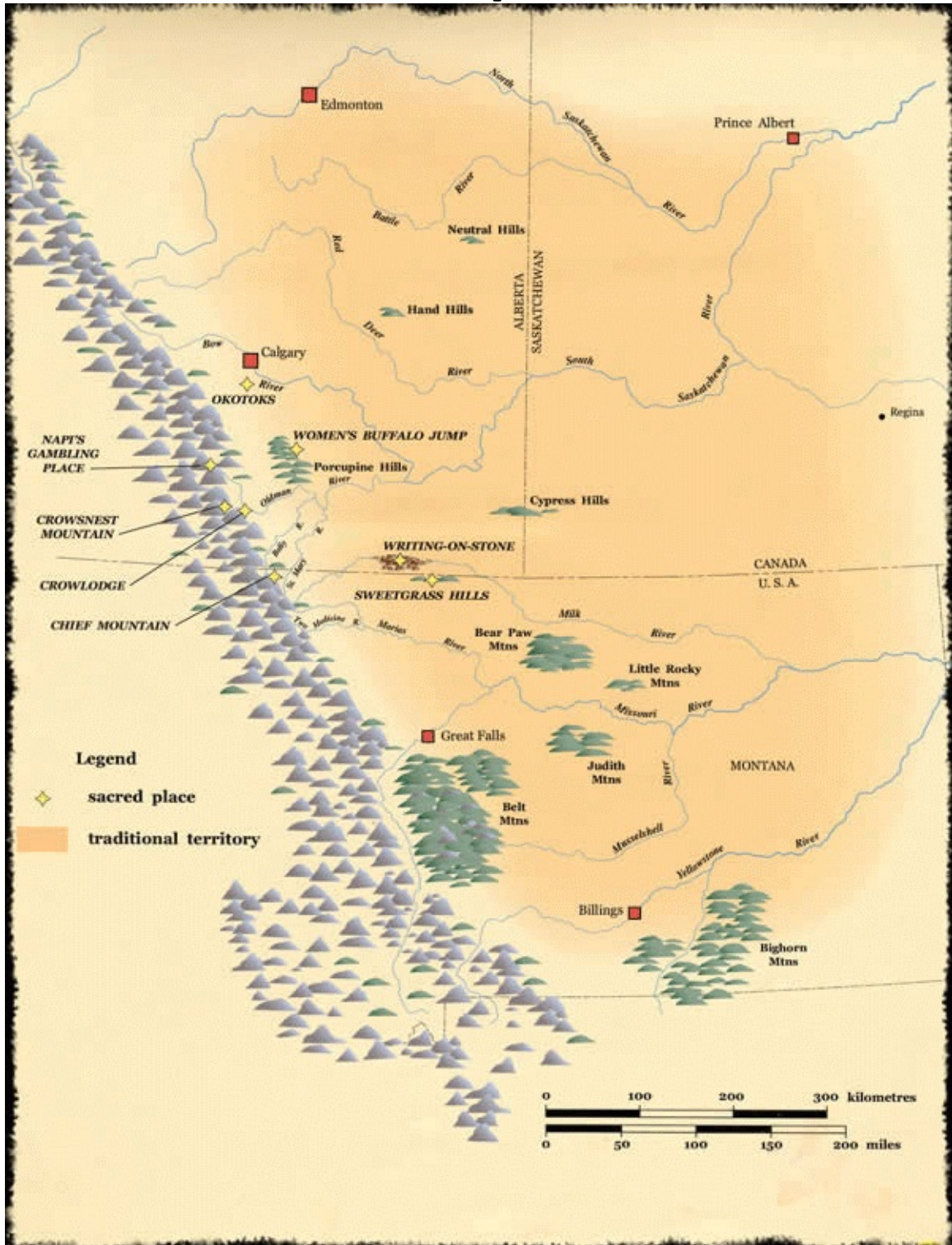
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APPENDIX A  
Map of Historic Blackfoot Territory  
Glenbow Museum - Niitsitapiisini Teacher Toolkit



([http://www.glenbow.org/blackfoot/teacher\\_toolkit/english/culture/territory.html](http://www.glenbow.org/blackfoot/teacher_toolkit/english/culture/territory.html))