



No. 11
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Among the “queer spots” in the vicinity of Butte the Cree Indian village must occupy a place of decided interest. Most Butte people going for a drive out on the flat give the Cree Indian camp a wide berth, seeing little that is likely to prove of interest in the representatives of the “noble red men” who have fixed their habitation near Butte. But the Crees, dirty, ragged and poor though they may be, are nevertheless an interesting people.

As you drive along the road past the cemeteries toward the east, stretching out toward the city dump lies one of the camps. For the most part it is made up of common wall tents, eight or ten in number, but several conical tepees can also generally be seen. Another camp of the Crees is located a little farther south, up

a short distance on the side of Timbered butte [sic]. Here there are not more than four or five tents. One or two families may occupy a tent, and as the Indians are constantly coming and going, it is almost impossible to ascertain their exact numbers; probably 50 would not be far out of the way.

Not Clean

These homes are not very imposing from the outside, surrounded as most of them are by piles of bones, rubbish and filth, and often the interior is even less inviting. Some of the people have a faint idea of cleanliness, while others are dirty in the extreme. The ground is generally covered with old pieces of carpet, oilcloth or blankets, and close to the walls are packed the blankets for sleeping and the clothing. From the poles may hang moccasins or meat in the process

of drying. In the wall tent there is always a stove or something which answers the purpose of a stove. It may be an old metal wash tub or something of the kind, and it is always furnished with a stovepipe. In the tepee there is no stove but a tripod crane from which a kettle is suspended. There is no stovepipe; the flaps are so arranged that the smoke draws out of the top of the tepee.

In The Tepee

The half of the tent nearest the door belongs to the women and children, the far side always being reserved for the men. This custom is pretty generally observed by all Indians. When entering the tent, if you are a man, you are greeted with “Os-tum-pe-to-ge” (Come back inside). Should you come at meal time, you would find the whole family sitting on the floor around the fire with tin plates in their hands and a cup of tea beside them. Their spread is not varied; boiled meat is the principal dish at all meals; it may be beef, calf’s head or fish. The bread is usually cooked in a frying pan and eaten without butter. They all have good appetites and seem to enjoy their food.

Holidays

If your visit happens to be on New Year’s day or during some other celebration, the Crees would have out their holiday goods. The tea would be replaced by



beer and plenty of it. The rest of the meal would likely consist chiefly of dried blueberries cooked with meat, making a greasy, unsavory mixture of which the Indians are very fond. The berries are kept in a sack made of the entire skin of a very young calf, looking when filled with the berries, like a toy dog stuffed with sawdust. Some of the children, on these occasions, may be seen sticking their fingers in a jar of jam and licking them off like a bear cub.

Civilization

Some of the Crees are good Indians and get drunk only twice in the year—New Year’s day and the Fourth of July. Others are not so good and are drunk about all the time. But these are in the minority. They have no trouble whatever in obtaining liquor whenever

they want it, notwithstanding the strict laws prohibiting the sale of liquor to Indians.

Cree Attire

As a rule the Crees dress in “store clothes” and almost everything they have is of white man’s manufacture. In the fall they lay in a supply of buckskin, most of which is made into moccasins which are often worn out before the next hunting season opens, and so you will find many of the Indians wearing shoes. They generally keep a pair or two of beaded moccasins, which they reserve for festal occasions. A few of the older men, however, still cling to the leggings, breech cloth and blanket. Most of them have Indian “togs” which they keep carefully wrapped up and wear only as their Sunday best, not, however, to go to church in. The women wear calico dresses, moccasins and blanket; baby boards are not used. The mother leans over, lifts the baby onto her back and then draws the blanket tightly around their backs. Thus the child is held very securely in a fairly comfortable position. Occasionally one may see a “buck” who is condescending enough to tote his offspring around squaw fashion.

Fashions

The men as a rule wear their hair long and braided, the front hair being combed straight back and tied, not parted, as with the Sioux and Crows. The

children in general wear anything they can get. On a cold winter’s day, when the ground is covered with snow, little boys and girls are to be seen clothed only in calico shirts and dresses, barefooted, playing around and apparently enjoying themselves as much as the bundled-up white children.

Peculiarities

Like all plains Indians, the Cree is fond of horses, and unless he is very poor, he will have five or six head. He also generally owns a wagon and numerous dogs. The dogs are used for various purposes. The Indian does not, as the white man is reported to do, turn his extra dogs through the sausage machine, but he turns them into soup. The squaw puts them to another use. She hitches them to the travois and is often seen returning from the dump, the dog patiently trotting along under the weight of the load. The dog travois was the primitive vehicle of the plains tribes, while in the far North the sledges play an important part.

Pagan Customs

Although the Crees are nominally members of the Catholic church, many of them are in reality pagans, especially the old women, who are very conservative and the last to surrender old customs and the superstitious beliefs of their heathen ancestors. Many of the old dances, songs and ceremonies are still

retained. It is not uncommon to find in the fireplaces within the tents a little pile of ashes and a few pieces of sweet grass remaining unconsumed which have been burned as incense for a sweet savor to the spirits.

Fear The Camera

It is not an easy matter to secure photographs of the Crees. Many object to being photographed, thinking that it takes vitality from them and they are more liable to die. While pointing the camera at one of the tents old Mrs. Lo came out and protested so vigorously that the camera had to be turned in another direction. She would not even allow her dog to be taken, because as the old man who interpreted put it: "She say if the dog taken, he dead. Damn fool, he got to dead some time anyway; can't always life." One old Indian on being photographed crossed himself devoutly several times.

The Modern Chase

The Montana Cree, as did his wild ancestors, gets his living by hunting, but in a different manner. Instead of making for the woods or mountains he generally heads for the city dump, slaughter houses or the back doors of hotels and restaurants. As he is a good hunter, patient and wary, he rarely goes home empty handed. If he is especially energetic he may haul firewood into Butte, which he sells for \$5 a load. Some money is made



by selling beadwork and curios, but perhaps the chief industry is preparing and selling "buffalo horns." Lo goes to the slaughter house, picks out some good, symmetrical cows' horns, takes them to his tent, fully polishes and mounts them on a board covered with plush. Then he goes to Butte and sells them. Many easterners buy the horns to send to friends who have not been so fortunate as to travel west and see "real buffalo horns."

Casino

Another chief occupation of the Cree is playing casino, or, as he calls it "sweep." He is very fond of this

game and will play for hours at a stretch. He also plays checkers with men and boards of his own manufacture, 16 men each being used instead of 12, and in other details the game differs from the white man's game. Another game, purely Indian, is called "o-shan-noh" (bones). Two Indians face each other, having in each hand a piece of bone about two and one-half inches long by three-quarters of an inch wide, one being plain and the other wrapped around the middle with a rag. One of the men passes the bones back and forth quickly through his hands while the other tries to guess which hand contains the plain bone. Thus taking turns they keep up their guessing until one player loses all his stake. Each man has his retainers, who occupy the space back of him and generally keep up an incessant chanting while the game is in progress.

The Cree names all have meanings. They call Butte "spiet-e-now" or "spiet-e-now-ow-tan-now," meaning "high hill." The word for Anaconda is "wah-sah-has-kaw," meaning "valley in the mountains." Deer Lodge is called "ki-poh-ho-to-we-kah-nik." Americans are called "zie-chu-mo-ko-mon," meaning "big knives," the name arising from the swords used by the United States cavalry. Their word for Indian is "ne-he-o-wok."

Although considered ignorant, the Crees have an alphabet of their own and a written language in which books are printed and which nearly all the men and



older boys can read. They also carry on correspondence among themselves, although they may not be able to read or write English. Only the older Indians know

sign language, the younger generation taking little or no interest in the old ways.

Frequent Guests

The Crees are not the only Indians who visit Butte; they come occasionally from all directions, Shoshones, Flatheads, Bannacks, Chippewas and others. But the Crees are the only ones who are with us the year round.

The Montana Crees must not be taken as the best type of their race. They are but a small band of renegades, fugitives from the Canadian government, having left their reservation for various reasons. Land troubles with the government and the agents are given among the reasons and the Crees also say that they cannot make a living in Canada so easily as here. They don't like the agents who make the work too hard. Perhaps the chief cause of their first wandering was the Riel rebellion. After that rebellion many of the Crees moved over into the United States, where they have been homeless wanderers ever since. They have often been rounded up and sent back to Canada, but only to cross the border to this country once more.

From Canada

The main body of the Crees live in Canada, and they are much superior to their relatives in the United States. They make their living chiefly by hunting, trapping and fishing for the Hudson Bay company. The more southern bands do some farming and cattle raising. Altogether the Crees in their various branches number in the neighborhood of 15,000.

Butte's Crees may be reckoned among its most peaceable inhabitants, and in general it may be said of the Crees that they are a peaceable, law-abiding people. Their progress towards civilization is slow. They are almost entirely self-supporting, receiving little or no aid from the government, but while they engage so extensively in hunting and fishing, little advance can be expected. When these resources for a livelihood have been exhausted they will be forced to settle down, cultivate lands, care for their cattle and learn to walk the white man's road.

Sun Dance in Silver Bow:

Urban Indian Poverty in the Shadow of the Richest Hill on Earth

Nicholas Peterson Vrooman

1: Piyak

It's midsummer, just past dawn. You walk out into the first rays of sun. All that's on your mind is your responsibility for the couple of hundred folks stirring about. You've led your charges over the last two months from Great Falls to Havre, down to Helena, and now here. Some have horses, but most walk. Wagons are few; tipis, wall tents, and what minimal goods there are among you are hauled on travois—just as in the old days. In this place, you truly hope your decision will help ease the suffering of those with you. You look up the hill from where you're camped; you search all your languages for words to describe the scene, and only Cree makes sense. Yet your mother tongue falters; there is no vocabulary to speak such newness that surrounds you. Just old terms come to mind that name this place, terms from your father's stories of camping and hunting on this very hillside. In those days, your people ranged free from the North Saskatchewan to the Snake River and over to Red River. This was common hunting ground in the time of your youth.

This is the third time this summer you've asked your people to make this sacrifice, outside of time-



Cree camp, Butte area, Montana, 1906. Frank E. Peeso, photographer. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (Image No: NA-1431-14).

honored tradition. But you have a chance to put together enough goods and money to help them through the next few months. So, you agree to do it again, now here in Butte. Most of your band winters here, and perhaps by building this Medicine Lodge, holding this ceremony in this place, the newcomers will understand a little more and not be so hard on your people. Perhaps, if you pray hard enough, even the mercy of Gishay Manitou will shine upon you and the misery will all go away.

The crowd is amassing. You pull yourself together. OK, here you go. *Meowasin. Paypiitegway.* All's good. Come on in . . .



Imassiise, Little Bear, son of Mistahimaskwa, Big Bear, ca. 1905. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, Linderman Collection, The University of Montana (Image No: 007(VIII):418).

Little Bear, our protagonist, knows that those who have pledged to dance are already exhausted, not only from the summer's travels but from the past couple of days' work in the woods gathering materials for constructing the Big Lodge. They are good and loyal people. They too hope for mercy. They walk out into the morning from the all-night sing, where they sang, smoked pipe, prayed, and blew on their eagle bone whistles from dusk to sunrise. One of them, an older man in skins, dressed beautifully with quill and beads, fringe hanging in sway, walks to the tip of a trimmed tree on the ground. He nestles himself into the top end of a twenty-some-foot aspen ritually chosen and hauled in from the surrounding forest. He settles securely amid the huge bundle of willow shoots and berry branches tied to the three-prong crotch that is the Eagle's Nest of the Thunder Pole. A rattle in his right hand, he sounds the eagle call and begins to sing.

A handful of men stand at the pole base. Two other fork-tipped lifting poles of equal length are firmly wedged beneath the crotch, with men at the butt ends. The three teams begin to push the tripod toward the man in the nest. Slowly, the center rises as apogee. The holy man straightens, extending upward, reaching to the heavens—rattling, singing—as the heel of the main pole is moved to the hole dug to receive its base. The lifting poles push the Thunder Pole fully erect. Rattle held high, the man's song calls the spirits of ancestors,

and all of nature, to the people gathered. The Thunder Pole is wedged and tamped into place, solid as the key architectural element of this millennium-old yet ephemeral structure. Construction of a Medicine Lodge of the Nehiyaw Pwat has been performed once again, repeating the blend of belief, knowledge, tradition, and technology synthesized into one holistic human endeavor that ceremonially symbolizes the relationship of aboriginal humans to this very piece of earth and all that it comprises.¹

A fire pit is dug close to the base, on the south side of the Thunder Pole. The fire-keeper brings coals from the last embers of the all-night-sing lodge, transferring the life flame and accumulated prayers to the Medicine Lodge. It will stay alight for the duration of the ceremony.

One fork-tipped aspen post as tall as a man's arms lifted high is planted in a hole directly to the north of the Thunder Pole at a radius length equal to the Eagle's Nest loft. Then, completing a circle around the Thunder Pole, twelve other similar uprights are set evenly. Crossbeam logs tie the posts together, securing a wall frame enclosing the inner space of the Thirsty Dance Lodge. Using bark-strip lashing, rafter poles are laid and sashed tight at the outer frame with the pole ends at the uprights; the tops are laid over one another to nestle and lock in the zenith of the center pole, tying the Medicine Lodge together as one solid structure.



Raising of Thunder Pole, Sun Dance Priest in Eagle's Nest, 1912. This is a Nehiyaw Pwat Thirsty Dance as it occurred in Montana's urban circumstance. Frank E. Peeso, photographer. Courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, Linderman Collection, The University of Montana (Image No: 007(VIII):225).

Aspen saplings are next propped against the frame of the outer wall, leaning against the bond-beam and filling in the space between the uprights to enclose the whole structure. The opening between the two uprights facing south remains uncovered, forming the entrance of the lodge.

Inside the lodge, a railing about waist high and about a body length in from the perimeter is constructed from stripped saplings, much like a smaller version of the outer wall. The fence has a second parallel tie running around its bottom. It is filled in with willow shoots woven to create a barrier and stall area in which the Sun Dancers reside throughout the ceremony, separated from the community seated around the inner part of the lodge. Colored prayer cloth is attached to stick rods and suspended as banners—spirit offerings—from the rafters. A bolt of red fabric is hung from the Thunder Pole, draping down to represent the flow of community lifeblood.

Every action and the smallest nuance in the construction of the lodge are imbued with sacramental meaning. The very act of “putting up” the lodge is itself a critical component of the ceremony. The Medicine Lodge is a palimpsest of the universe, a fleeting “woodhenge,” where humans ritually enact their place in a world beyond their power to control.

The singers situate themselves inside the lodge to the northeast side of the Thunder Pole and begin. They

beat a dry and stiff buffalo hide. Dancers line up. The medicine man—with lifted eagle wing fans entreating the heavens with caresses and with bone whistle rhythmically matching the beat of the buffalo hide—begins the procession. With right shoulders toward the lodge, the dancers encircle the exterior four times then enter, continuing in clockwise. Pipes and offerings are placed to the north end of the lodge, forming an altar, as the male dancers file past behind the rail and settle into their stalls on the sunset side of the lodge. The women do the same to the sunrise side of the lodge. The singers work the dancers. With every beat, the dancers, straight bodied, flex their knees in rhythm, blowing on their eagle bone whistles, beat by beat, breath by breath, hyperventilating, thirsting, fasting, and exhausting themselves to create a physical and mental condition within this ancient, time-refined ritual environment that sheds the peripheral and temporal, inducing a super-reality of infinite consciousness and an embodiment of eternal unified existence.

They dance because they have a purpose: to promise to behave in a certain way on behalf of their family, loved ones, and community. They dance to seal that promise through sacrificing all each one has in the end to give in the name of their love: their life energy, food and water, and the very flesh of their bodies. The sacrifice is to show the extent each is willing to go in seeking mercy—that their promise to fulfill their

purpose may be attained. Thus begins four days of ritual giving, supplication, and sacrifice.

2: *Niso*

This scene differs little from those occurring elsewhere, in distinctive tribal variation, across the northern plains, with elements of the ceremony dating back to the last ice age. The primary difference is that it's taking place in Butte, Montana, in 1894, with paying white spectators, who are titillated by witnessing the famous "torture" rites of the savage Plains Indians, literally in the shadow of the Richest Hill on Earth, at the foot of a brand-new, Victorian-era, Chicago/Pittsburgh hybrid-style, U.S. industrial revolution city then exploding from a mountainside in the remote Northern Rockies. The juxtaposition and irony of images is immense: a singular, fleeting Paleolithic ceremonial structure—whose central architectural element is a Thunder Pole and open hearth carrying prayers of hope and renewal in direct conduit to the heavens to create balance in nature—existing side by side with towering, mass-production brick smelter stacks spewing smoke skyward, billowing dreams of wealth, power, and dominion over the landscape in testament to human advancement in architecture and technology.

Two epochs framing the span of human history from the stone age to the industrial age pooled as one

that summer of 1894 in Butte. The recombinant image also represents the distance in that human community at that time between the winners and the losers, the wealthiest and the most poverty stricken, the privileged and the dispossessed—the expanse between the American robber barons and Montana's first generation of homeless Indians. Although the ritual enactment was a spectacular entertainment for the whites, in no way does that remoteness between worlds lessen the meaning, significance, and value of the Medicine Lodge and the very real hope of those Sun Dancers that summer—or the power of the whites to dominate the existence of that community.

Today, here's the viewshed: Butte, Montana, out a mile and a half east of the current smelter, in the southeast part of town, close to where the old dump was, just over where the old racetrack used to sit.

Marcus Daly's racetrack was built in an area of Butte which is now a residential neighborhood south of the Berkeley Pit and the Weed Concentrator. The working class neighborhood that grew up around it actually became known as the Racetrack neighborhood. The location was east of Clark's Park (still there today) and generally between where the Greeley Elementary school and East Junior High School (Grand

Avenue) now stand. . . . It was close to what was known as Parrot Flat where . . . Indian camps were located.²

From there, looking back up the hill, “the Pit” and uptown are what you see; it is 115 years later, and the National Folk Festival is in Butte, highlighting in part Indian culture in Montana. How much has transpired can be recounted; how much has changed is a worthy question. In the Indian way, that Racetrack neighborhood, where the Sun Dance was held, remains forever sacred ground.

3: *Nisto*

In early 1900s, people from the eastern United States were fascinated with the “West” and the “Frontier Epic,” which was already mythological as the origin story of America’s birthing. A generation earlier, it had been Charlie Russell and Frank B. Linderman who came to Montana, embodying the boyish wonderment that fused Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn as the archetype for any red-blooded American youth worth his salt to follow. This time, in 1905, it was a young Frank E. Peeso who moved from New York State to Butte to work in the mines as an engineer. Engineering was his job, but he chose Montana for other reasons. He sought Indians and their way of life. As a boy growing up in Syracuse, he had learned that



Smallboy family, Cree, Butte area, Montana, 1906. Front row, l-r: Maggie Smallboy; Paul Smallboy; John Smallboy; Bobtail or Chief Robert Smallboy, leader of Smallboy’s Camp. Back row, l-r: Mary Smallboy; Marie Isobel (Coyote) Smallboy, wife of Peter (Pierre) Smallboy. Frank E. Peeso, photographer. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (Image No: NA-1431-9).

his community inhabited the ancestral homeland of the Onondaga Hodenosaunee (Fire Keepers of the Longhouse People). As a youngster, he had spent time with Onondaga. Later, he studied anthropology and American Indians at the University of Pennsylvania.³ To the benefit of Montana history, Peeso also enjoyed photography. His images of Indians in Butte remain one of Montana’s best records of the early years of the state’s historic first urban Indian population.

Peeso wrote that Butte's Indians were Cree, and refugees from the Riel Rebellion in Canada.⁴ They subsisted by "cutting wood, collecting horns from which they made novelties for sale, and making beaded moccasins and other items popular with the whites." Many spoke "pretty good English."⁵ He recognized that they had "mixed to a considerable extent with the Assiniboin, Saulteaux [mixed Chippewa from Sault Ste. Marie] and French."⁶ Although an amalgam of primarily Cree, Assiniboine, Chippewa, and Métis (known in the aboriginal world as the Nehiyaw Pwat, meaning Cree-Assiniboine), in Montana they also included related Kootenai, Nez Perce, and Shoshone and were all grouped together as "Cree" by non-Indian society.⁷

Butte's Cree were not an aboriginal circumstance unique to Silver Bow County or Montana. Rather, they were part of a broad swath of dispossessed fur trade-era refugees from various backgrounds who had been left out of the reconfiguration during the switch from aboriginal to Anglo society in both the American and Canadian West in the late nineteenth century. They were an unreconciled remnant aboriginal population from the preceding economic era of North American history and the Indian Wars, which excluded them from participating in the new economic era of resource extraction, agriculture, and mercantilism. In the lifetime of Little Bear, the acknowledged chief of those



Andrew Valler [Valier?], half-breed Cree with Kootenai wife and two children, ca. 1910. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, Linderman Collection, The University of Montana (Image No: 007(VIII):197).

Montana “Cree” bivouacked at Butte who were Sun Dancing for mercy, his people went from being part of one of the most formidable and wealthy aboriginal confederations on the continent to crashing as a culture, pitiful, penniless, and persecuted.

A scholar of Montana’s mixed-blood peoples, Elizabeth Sperry, draws connections that show how broadly dispersed displaced peoples were in Montana at that time.

Similar to the “Road Allowance” Métis settlements in Canada, many of the Métis, Cree and Chippewa in Montana survived at the fringe of white settlements on public or county land, or along the railroad right-of-way. These types of communities are illustrated by permanent settlements such as Hill 57 in Great Falls and Boushie Hill in East Glacier, but also include the temporary camps located near various towns throughout Montana. These temporary camps were utilized primarily during the winter months when travel was not practical and employment on farms and ranches was not available. Fringe settlements were located all along the Front Range and throughout the intermountain region near the communities of Garrison, Deer Lodge, Anaconda, and

Butte. Fringe communities were also located near communities along the Highline, such as Havre and Wolf Point.⁸

Adding Missoula, Helena, and Billings to the scenario, this wider group of aboriginal people represents a third (concealed) sector of Montana’s society, along with the dominant white community and the reservation-separated, federally overseen Indians. Known now as the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians, they remain that third class of Montana and U.S. citizens today, the remaining group that lingers outside any legitimate status as American citizens, unrecognized and homeless within their own traditional historic homeland. They are Montana’s historic urban Indian community.

Today, most of America’s four million Indians live in urban centers throughout the country. Unlike most other urban Indian communities, which arose as a consequence of the federal Indian policy era following World War II that was called Termination and Relocation, Montana’s urban Indian communities are largely a consequence of a dispute between the United States and Canada following (strangely) the Minnesota Sioux Uprising of 1862. Many Dakota (Sioux) from that Minnesota resistance fled to Canada and were given sanctuary. The United States wanted them extradited and held on trial. Canada refused, giving them reserves

instead. Canada also hesitated to extradite Sitting Bull and his band, who had fled there following the Battle of the Greasy Grass (Little Big Horn) in 1876. After the Riel Resistance in 1885, even when many Montana citizens petitioned the government to rid the state of these “Cree” renegades, the United States refused (initially) to deport the “Cree” back to Canada as a tit for tat.⁹

The notion of who “belonged” to either Canada or the United States is a false construct when applied to aboriginal peoples. The scheme of nation-states did not pertain to the aboriginal world but was superimposed on it by the Anglo federal governments. The Nehiyaw Pwat inhabited the Silver Bow country from the period of the Cree-backed Blackfeet war with the Shoshone (circa 1680–1825) to the Rocky Mountain fur trade following the Corps of Discovery (1806 to the 1840s) to the Hudson’s Bay Company Fort Hall (1830s–1850s; now Pocatello), the Johnny Grant Métis Colony in the Deer Lodge Valley (1840s–1860s; now the Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site), and over to Fort Owen (1850s) in the Bitterroot Valley, and even included in the Stevens Blackfeet Treaty of 1855. The diagonal from Winnipeg to Saskatoon to Edmonton, with trails from each point down to Pocatello, were well-traveled routes, funneling Cree, Assiniboine, Chippewa, and Métis consistently back and forth. The collapse of the bison economy changed everything.

4: *Niyo*

The decade following the last herd in the Judith Basin (in 1882–83) and the trauma of cultural collapse, with nowhere to go and nothing to do, forced the excluded peoples to scavenge at the periphery of the newly forming white society. Slowly and then regularly, reports of Indians in Montana cities became recurring newsprint fodder, denigrating them in their poverty as contrasting proof of white superiority and privilege.

On November 28, 1892, a white rancher, Thomas O. Miles, wrote the Butte *Semi-weekly Inter-Mountain* to ask: “Why is it that we cannot get rid of these Cree Indians. About a year ago they were into camp near here and right on our range with some 160 to 200 head of horses.” An early statement of protest in Butte, Cree horses were eating the hay that ranchers wanted to harvest. Miles wrote Governor J. K. Toole and talked with U.S. Attorney Elbert Weed and U.S. Senator T. C. Power, complaining for the need to send the Cree to Canada. “It would seem strange,” wrote Miles, “that after a full and amicable agreement between the United States and Canadian authorities that these pests are still permitted to go where they please and Indians of the United States are . . . on a reservation.”¹⁰ U.S. Attorney Weed wrote to the secretaries of state and war, on behalf of Montana, about the “renegade Crees” in Silver Bow and Deer Lodge counties.

Their presence here is very offensive to all the settlers who are unfortunate enough to live in the vicinity of their camps. It is the habit of these renegade Indians to wantonly destroy all game, without regard to local laws or regulations, to steal stock of the settlers, and, generally subsist by larceny and plunder. They have no business whatever here, and should be immediately removed to the British Possessions, where they belong.

Weed went on to say that if the federal government did nothing, there would be “serious difficulty between them and the white settlers.”¹¹ People didn’t understand who the “Cree” were and how they came to such condition. Weren’t all those of red races supposed to be set apart on reservations and kept from interfering with white communities? This was the first generation of white appropriators to take over the land of the aboriginals. They were not about to countenance social conscience in claiming their newly commandeered territory and its resources. Apartheid was surely the best way to protect Indians from trouble. With the complaint fresh in the thoughts of the editors and readers alike of the local newspaper, another piece was printed a week and a half later condemning the Cree for destroying game in the surrounding area.¹² A stone was cast into society’s pond; its ripple continues to this day.



Cree band, horse with travois, moving through town [Butte?], ca. mid-1890s. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, Linderman Collection, The University of Montana (Image No: 007(VIII):222).

On May 8, 1893, scarlet fever hit the Cree camp in Butte, where about seventy people lived in lodges. The camp was quarantined, and scant provisions were brought to those confined. Anti-Cree sentiment trumped humanitarian morality and social services. Children died. Through the end of 1893, officials around

the state actively petitioned the federal government to send the Cree north.¹³

What was occurring in Butte was also happening in Helena, Great Falls, and other Montana cities. With the overt push to rid Montana of the “Cree,” the Nehiyaw Pwat started to organize and seek the advice of an attorney. They sought citizenship and a reservation of their own. The district attorney of Chouteau County made headlines saying that the Indians were “Not Desirable Citizens” and advising the “Clerk Not to Issue Any More First Papers to Crees.” All further requests by the Indians for citizenship were denied. The impetus from the white community was nonaccommodation. Any energy spent on the Indian problem was intended to purge them from Montana.¹⁴

5: *Niyānan*

Destitution set in. Hunting in the nearby forests, selling trinkets, working odd jobs, and scavenging the discards of white communities weren't enough to sustain the Nehiyaw Pwat. Whether it was Chief Little Bear's idea, gained from his connection with his old cohort Michif leader Gabriel Dumont (who traveled with the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show as the Halfbreed military leader of the Northwest Rebellion), or that of white promoters, a public Sun Dance was scheduled for June 14–16, 1894, in Great Falls. The idea was to capitalize on the popularity and money-

making formula of William Cody. The scheduled date fell during the traditional time for the annual renewal ceremony. Putting up a Medicine Lodge requires resources. The people needed the stabilizing effects of the Thirsty Dance to help offset the trauma they were living through. Charging admission would cover their costs while giving the whites a romanticized, albeit prurient, view into their lives. Little Bear also thought that if whites understood them more fully, life for his people would get better. The event was supported by the chamber of commerce.¹⁵

The promoters wanted to tour “the show” throughout Montana, copying the success of Buffalo Bill. Protestants went into an uproar. It would turn “loose several hundred idle, lazy, shiftless barbarians in the city and is a queer way of ‘promoting its prosperity.’”¹⁶ The governor, John E. Rickards, prohibited the event with an official proclamation. Little Bear and his band moved to Havre, where the ceremony was staged. Assiniboine and Gros Ventre from Forts Belknap and Peck, and other Nehiyaw Pwat from Canada, came to dance and support the ceremony; the local Anglo community attended as audience.¹⁷

Based on the publicity the episode generated, Helena decided—Great Falls controversy be dashed—that it wanted Little Bear's band to come to the capital and perform for the Fourth of July festivities at the Lewis and Clark County fairgrounds.¹⁸ Little Bear

was pleased to snub the governor in his hometown.¹⁹ Helena's hit event was then desired by Butte.²⁰

Performing at the Marcus Daly Park Racetrack in Butte that summer, Little Bear had to put survival before honor in agreeing to exploit the sacred ceremony of his people one more time for the entertainment of whites. As a true leader of his people, he had to give them hope. The only door open in the new world in which they found themselves following the disappearance of the buffalo was through engaging the white society; they had nothing of interest to offer the whites but the curiosity of their traditional culture. If they did this, *something* would happen that would again bring fulfillment; *some* good would come from it. He had to devise a way to avoid despair and to create a strategy that put volition and consequences in their own hands—hence the Sun Dance in Silver Bow, in the shadow of the Richest Hill on Earth.²¹

The purpose, promise, sacrifice, and plea for mercy of Little Bear's people did not curtail their ostracism and exploitation by whites. Even as the Progressive Era took hold, and worker's rights and social services began integrating into white industrial society, oppression of the Nehiyaw Pwat escalated.

Frank B. Linderman, the great Montana author, worked for a period as an assayer in Butte. Linderman initially met the Cree at the exact moment in 1886

when both he arrived in Montana and Little Bear's band entered the state in the Swan Valley following the Northwest Resistance and the Riel debacle. His books provide some of the Northwest's earliest record of Indian oral literature. He tells us that one day in 1895, while he was walking around the city,

just across the valley near the foothills I saw four Indian lodges, looking white against the brown background. The sight of them thrilled me more than anything I had lately seen. The day was fine. The mountaintops laid shadows upon the four lodges that seemed to belong to another world altogether. I walked to the camp, not guessing what Indians were there. Imagine my delight when I was greeted by my old friend, Muskegon, the Cree, who had told me so many tribal folk tales in the Flathead.

Times were growing hard for the Crees, he told me. Game in the open country was scarce. They had been gathering buffalo bones and selling polished buffalo horns in town. They were now working their way back to Flathead country, where there were many deer and elk in the forest. Muskegon looked dejected. His cloths, ragged portions of white men's apparel, seemed to have

lowered both his morale and his personal appearance. He was a changed man. Yellow-face, another Cree friend who was in this camp, was more cheerful. However, he was a much younger man, and still wore leggings and breechclout. We visited for hours. They could not understand why I, as a hunter, came to be in Butte. And by the same token, I was at a loss to explain their presence so near the big mining camp. I did not then suspect that the wandering band of Crees and Chippewas, numbering about three hundred men, women, and children, to which these four lodges belonged, would someday become a charge of mine. However, when I went to work the next morning I saw that the four lodges were gone. Several years were to pass before I again saw a Cree.²²

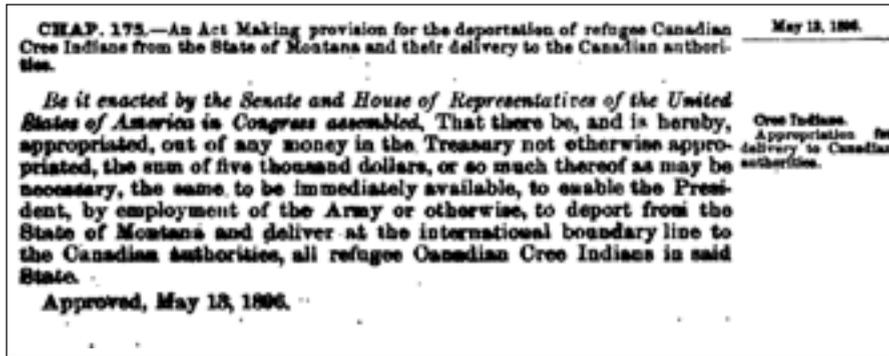
Linderman's allusion to those who "would someday become a charge" of his is a reference to his truly heroic work as the single most important Montanan to bring about a sea change for "vagabond" Indians of the state. But that story comes later in this narrative.

6: *Nikotwāsik*

The success of the 1894 Butte Sun Dance, as well

as Helena's, became a promoter's dream. In 1895, two Montana businessmen created "Montana's Wild West Show." Little Bear's Cree were the attraction. They were "featured [as] the Cree Indians who had taken part in the Canadian Riel rebellion." The band was advertised as the "only people in the United States without a country."²³ Leaving Montana in April 1895, incredibly, the troupe played Joliet, Chicago, New York, and New Orleans. When they got to Cincinnati, their promoters, two wily and scurrilous characters from Helena named Beverage and Davenport, absconded with all the tour's proceeds and left the Cree stranded.²⁴ The band was actually camped across the river in Bellevue, Kentucky, when the scoundrels took off. Cincinnati felt for the plight of the Montana Cree. The famed Cincinnati Zoological Gardens invited the Cree to camp on their grounds until they could earn enough money to get back to Montana. In a picture almost too surreal to bear, our band, who had Sun Danced in Butte less than a year earlier, were now an exhibit next to the elephants, giraffes, and tigers at the Cincinnati Zoo. The Montana Cree were such a success at the zoo that a band of Sicangu Sioux was invited to follow as an exhibit, replacing the Cree when they left town.²⁵

Over the year that a portion of Little Bear's band was on tour, white outrage toward Montana's first urban homeless class produced a hot political issue as increasingly vehement calls for how to get rid of the



*The Cree Deportation Act of 1896.*²⁷

“Cree” mounted. Pressure from state authorities for the U.S. government to act caused an event that remains one of Montana’s most shameful affairs.

While the Cree were yet a zoo exhibit in Cincinnati, the U.S. Congress fell to the pressure of Montana’s businessmen and politicians, passing the Cree Deportation Act of 1896. The act fit neatly into the sense of Anglo exceptionalism, which at the time also included the more well-known Chinese Exclusion Act of 1896. Montana cities were bent on cleaning up their towns of left-over riffraff from the former Frontier Era.

The U.S. Census Bureau (in 1890) and Fredrick Jackson Turner (in 1893) had recently proclaimed the frontier to be over and America to be officially complete. Settling this land for Anglo America had

been ugly business. Now that the job was done, it was time to sweep the remnants under the new-order social rug. The burgeoning American middle class was taking center stage, and blue-collar workers were being promised that industrial wealth would trickle down to them. A high-horse attitude toward those living at a city’s dumps and feeding off its refuse held no compassion or

attempt to understand the circumstance, condition, or why and wherefore of the Indians. To the contrary, it served to deeply separate the newcomers from the first peoples of Montana.

The demoralized Nehiyaw Pwat continued to disperse and circulate throughout Montana, forming other encampments in Missoula, Helena, Great Falls, Chinook, Glasgow, Augusta, Choteau, Dupuyer, Billings, and Lewistown. But Butte was home to the largest number of lodges, forty, representing between 160 and 240 people. Butte also possessed the strongest political sway. They would have their way.²⁶

Before the ink was dry from signing the Cree Deportation Act, the U.S. Army out of Fort Assiniboine, near Havre, mobilized. As soon as those Cree in Cincinnati made it back to Havre later that

spring of 1896, they faced an assault on their dignity and human rights. Beginning in June, and completing their task in August, a full complement of Buffalo Soldier cavalry, led by a young Lt. John J. Pershing, either shipped in cattle cars or herded well over five hundred “Crees” to Alberta, Canada. They were dispatched to reserves throughout the province. Many immediately snuck back across the border into Montana and hid out. To this day, at Hobbema, in Alberta, there remains a group of Nehiyaw Pwat called the Montana Band, descendents of that legacy.

The Cree Deportation Act was a pogrom of premeditated violence directed at destroying the way of life of the Nehiyaw Pwat in Montana. It took the form of a human cattle drive—an actual roundup and forced march—of these people to Canada. Other tribes were kept securely apart on reservations; Montana would not suffer Indians on the loose, especially those including among them mixed-bloods and half-breeds, the product of (in Victorian-era terms) a scorned lawless and immoral time in the nation’s history.

Most of the deported Nehiyaw Pwat made it back to the state, hiding out in the coulees, draws, and canyons, mixing in with relatives on reservations, or continuing to press their luck around their old haunts, camping at the dumps, and forming refugee camps—including Moccasin Flat, Buckskin Flat, and Breedtown—around the state. That was the status

quo for the next few years. White communities were resigned for the time being to this underclass.

7: *Tīpakohp*

Some serious work to accommodate the difference between Indian and non-Indian society did occur. In 1900, Fort Shaw Indian School, west of Great Falls on the Sun River, brought its boys football team to Butte. The headlines declared: “Indians Saw the Town, The Boys of Butte Treated Them Nicely.” Students at the Fort Shaw Indian School numbered about 330 at the time and came from Wyoming, Nevada, Idaho, and North Dakota, as well as Montana. The superintendent of the school, F. C. Campbell, provided what he believed to be constructive diplomacy in describing to the Butte community the benefits to white society for supporting Indian education. He said that it “was to their interests to have the Indian civilized and brought into the circle of citizenship, for then the vast acreage of the reservations will be thrown open to settlement and the education of the Indian will bring its own reward.” Campbell’s words had a dual significance: a true conviction in the benefits of education but also the self-serving interests of manipulating Indian society in order to acquire their land. Campbell promised to bring to Butte the following March the school’s Indian band and mandolin club as proof of how Indians can be civilized.²⁸ It was easier to talk about the Indian

problem with a group who was disciplined to conform to white standards, à la football, and who did not live at the margins of one's own community.

The local Indians did not receive the same consideration, however. Reservation Indians who went to school under the controlled obedience to white leadership were a horse of a different color from Indians encamped at the garbage pit on the edge of town. The following spring, Butte was mocking a wedding that "was celebrated with pomp at the city dump," as if it were discussing the upper-crust social registry. A derisive attitude toward the Nehiyaw Pwat Indians in Butte was exactly the social force that cultivated the marginalization of Indian people.

The bride was given away by her grand aunt, who is a boarder at the offal pile at the slaughter house, and the best man was Jim Crow, the tin can collector of the band. The dame of honor carried a bouquet of mountain daisies and a gunny sack across her shoulders. The wedding feast was spread at the west end of the city dump and the menu contained evidences of several grand feeds in the city a week or more ago.

Mr. and Mrs. Bull Horn will tour the southern part of the county in search of mavericks and recreation. The groom received a

magnificent plug of tobacco from his friends of the Tripe club, and the bride was charmed with a presentation by her squaw friends of a pair of brass martingale rings [horse tack]. They will be at home at pile No. 47 on the city dump after Arbor day.²⁹

The reality was, in fact, anything but humorous. The scene in Butte that April of 1901 was repeated in Helena, Great Falls, Missoula, and elsewhere around the state where bands of the Nehiyaw Pwat were isolated in smaller contingents for survival. No one dump pile or trinket and odd-job market could sustain the whole tribe in a single place. Elizabeth Sperry, in her valuable addition to the story of "Montana's Landless Indians," offers a succinct understanding of the issues involved.

Survival in Montana depended upon a complex system of kin networks between diverse groups of Métis, Cree and Chippewa [i.e., Nehiyaw Pwat, including Assiniboine and other nonstatus Indians]. The historical processes of increasing white settlement, the formation of an international boundary line dividing the United States and Canada, the creation of Indian reservations, and the demise of bison herds required a

reorganization of the social, economic, and political activities of those who came to be known as Montana's Landless Indians. . . .

One element of landless Indian history in Montana is their utilization of city dumps and slaughterhouses. While this aspect of landless Indian history signifies the realities of their starvation and poverty, these areas provided items that were essential to the Indians' economic survival. Landless Indians utilized items discarded by the dominant society and transformed them into something they could use or resell. For instance, the "Cree camp stove" was constructed out of old washtubs, which was efficient because it was a commonly discarded object that was easy to find and they "threw heat well." The slaughterhouses were likely the source of cow horns, which landless Indians collected, polished, and sold to tourists in a variety of forms. This alertness to useable objects in their environment ensured the landless Indians' long-term economic viability and survival.³⁰

The disparaging sentiment in Butte toward the nascent urban Indian population had festered for over a decade by that time. The local condition directly affected the larger political perception of Indian affairs



"Be It Ever So Humble, There's No Place Like Home." Cartoon caricature of Butte Cree Indian. Artist unknown. Courtesy of the Montana Historical Society Research Center. Published in Anaconda Standard, May 12, 1901.

nationally. On December 8, 1901, the *Anaconda Standard* wrote in critique of the federal Indian commissioner William Arthur Jones's statement that "the Indians must be made to recognize the dignity of labor." Once again, mockingly, the article challenged Jones to "by all means make the Indian recognize this particular brand of dignity when he meets it. There are the Crees, for instance; teach them the dignity of labor for starter. Let Commissioner Jones take the job himself and work at it until he has succeeded or wiped out the Crees. There will be a lot of Cree funerals."³¹

In other words, the opinion existed that bringing Butte's Indians into the fold of the American economy (to say nothing of the society as a whole) was a futile cause. What no one in white society recognized at the time was that urban Indians were in actuality already fulfilling a viable economic niche in the burgeoning new municipal centers of Montana, however demeaning. Sperry's work emphasizes a bias and makes clear that

the various types of work Montana's landless Indians were involved in are often presented in culturally distancing terms [i.e., scavenging], and . . . much of what has been written about American Indian wage labor comes from the perspective of their unemployment or lack of paid work. While landless Indians worked as wage

laborers, small commodity producers, or sellers of crafts and other handiwork, these types of economic livelihoods have not been considered as actual work. For this reason, Native labor was often distanced from the larger economies in which it was nested, and was relegated to a world outside of the emerging dominant economy.³²

Called, among many disparaging names, the "Ishmaelites of the Prairie" (referring to a descendent of Ishmael, the son Abraham sent away following the birth of Isaac—that is, Arabs), the Nehiyaw Pwat in Montana remained linked to Louis Riel and to a fear of rebelliousness still projected onto aboriginals that continued to threaten the guilt-ridden mind-set of both Anglo Canada and the United States. The Nehiyaw Pwat were perceived as

refusing to accept the bounty of either nation [and] hovered around the borderline, living on stray cattle and whatever they can find loose on the prairie. The "range calf gone astray" is the particular prey of these gipsies of the Northwest. [The public was reminded that just a few years earlier the state made an attempt to] . . . deport these undesirable nomads to Canada. . . . Cree

Indians were rounded up from all over the state and escorted across the border, where they were expected to remain. . . . But they refused to be deported. . . . [T]hey swarmed back almost as soon as their escorts were out of sight. . . . Occasionally reports of their depredations are heard of, but the Cree question remains unsettled.³³

This particular reportage in the local paper was really about assigning blame to a new outbreak of smallpox in Montana. The sentiment of the time was that whites were close to eradicating the disease but that the Cree made it impossible. “Thriving on filth,” the account continues, “constantly moving from place to place, as a disseminator of disease he is a howling success. . . . That man will win the gratitude of the people who will make a satisfactory disposition of this vulture of the garbage pile, who breeds microbes and disturbance and refuses to be governed.”³⁴ The Montana urban Indians had become the state’s “untouchable” caste.

8: *Ayinānīw*

By 1902, there arose another call, supported in Butte, for the general deportation of Montana’s Cree to Canada. The rationale this time was for the “protection of game and also for sanitary purposes. . . . There are 2,000 Cree Indians in the state and they slaughter as

much game as is killed by all the white inhabitants, in addition to the loss and the great amount of trouble which they occasion the stockmen by their thieving and pilfering.”³⁵ Wild game had evidently become the provenance of solely the white society.

A second grouping of Indians “wandering” Montana wasn’t so easy to write off, however inaccurately, as Canadian. Although it made no difference to the white populace that wanted them all gone, they complicated matters for the government. When the roundup of 1896 occurred, many of the people herded told the officials repeatedly that they were neither Cree nor from Canada (although, aboriginally speaking, that is a moot point). While some protested that they were Shoshone, Nez Perce, and Kootenai, most of the people were of Chippewa heritage within the Nehiyaw Pwat, with a pathway into Montana that trailed back to the Turtle Mountains and Pembina in North Dakota.³⁶

Little Shell was the leader of the Chippewa band in Montana. Although his people, too, had been well represented in Montana continually since the 1830s, as part of the larger Nehiyaw Pwat Confederacy, his group was closed out of the reservation negotiations back on the Turtle Mountains in 1892. This band was in reality a mixed Cree Assiniboine Chippewa Michif group of the Nehiyaw Pwat.³⁷ They roved mostly Montana’s Hi-Line and North Dakota, sometimes hooked up

with Little Bear's band. Little Shell and his band were back at Turtle Mountain in 1901 when he died. Stone Child, also known as Rocky Boy, assumed leadership of a portion of the band, which was forced to return to Montana because "the supplies intended for them especially designated, as now what is sent here [to Turtle Mountain] has to be divided among so many that it is impossible to give them the help which their condition requires."³⁸ Elizabeth Sperry ably recounts Rocky Boy's entrance to the scene.

The earliest account of Rocky Boy's band occurred in 1902, when Flathead Agent William H. Smead discovered Rocky Boy's band living near Anaconda, Montana, with a large group of Indians Smead identified as "Canadian born Crees." In 1908, Indian Inspector Frank Churchill identified Rocky Boy's band as belonging to "the roving Indian group" in Montana, which also included Little Bear and his band of fifty persons and numerous other Indian groups living in the state. According to Churchill this landless Indian group lived throughout Montana in smaller groups, and while they had intermarried to a considerable extent they "knew very little about each other and the relationship existing between families."

This observation implies that these groups maintained a high level of social and geographical distinctiveness; however, rather than suggesting that the Indians lacked knowledge of each other, this observation could signify an effort among the various groups to conceal their interrelationship and/or Cree heritage from outsiders to avoid being deported to Canada or denied rights in the United States based upon a stigmatized "Canadian" Cree heritage.³⁹

In actuality, the groups were closely interrelated. Little Bear was married to Rocky Boy's sister, and one wife of Little Bear's father, Big Bear, was a sister of Rocky Boy's wife.⁴⁰ The band had relatives among all the Nehiyaw Pwat tribes and bands across the Hi-Line. Yet the change in leadership created a huge confusion that yet muddies the story of who are the Little Shell Tribe in Montana and the process of federal recognition of the Little Shell to this day. The appearance of Rocky Boy's band has always been treated as if a whole new and separate band of Indians showed up in Montana. From the time Rocky Boy became leader of the Chippewa among the Nehiyaw Pwat in Montana, Chippewa Cree, as an amalgamated group, started to take on a new conception by whites. Little Bear's "Cree" and Rocky Boy's "Chippewa" became fused. The use of

the term *Little Shell Band* disappeared until resurfacing in the late 1920s as the group taking form from which today's Little Shell are comprised.

One way the Butte community worked to manage the Indian population was by promoting the ideal they wanted the larger local Indian community to grasp. When, for example, Mrs. Harry Denny died on February 6, 1904, the paper took advantage of the fact by writing an article entitled "Death of a Good Indian . . . Mother of Nine Children, a Cree, Goes to the Happy Hunting Grounds." The article tells that Harry Denny and his wife

were exceptions in the Cree tribe, for they had lived together quietly for many years, and always discountenanced the indiscriminant marriages which have been the rule among members of the tribe. They reared a family and all the children held their parents in high regard. Denny hauls wood and does odd jobs, and manages to provide for his children. . . . Two of the daughters are married and have been seen in the city often, both neatly garbed and one of them carrying a papoose on her back.⁴¹

The most interesting bit of information in this piece is the statement that, as of 1904, the Dennys

had lived in Butte, albeit quietly, for many years. This strongly indicates at least a portion of the non-reservation-based Indian society was working to establish an ongoing permanent Indian community in Butte by that time.

9: *Kikā-mitātabt*

Not missing a chance to prove the superiority of white society by denigrating the failure of the Indian, the Butte community claimed that the "Silver Bow Crees Fake[ed] [the] Sun Dance" of 1904. Pressures from the oppressive circumstances of the Indians caused a response to eliminate the "torture features of the original sun dance." It was held that year between Butte and Anaconda at a place called the "Hump." A year earlier, the Medicine Lodge had been erected south of Silver Bow. The report states that, "like the feeble old beast, they must, sooner or later, relinquish their grasp and become reconciled to the conditions which surround them and yield to the inevitable—the ancient sun dance is not popular with the renegade Crees and their allies, the half-breeds." Apparently, only the

old bucks whose hearts throb at the sound of the tom-tom [whose] blood warms at the sight of their brothers in hideous array dancing in weird fashion, . . . in devilish glee [remained committed].

The half-breeds [Métis], and by the way, they are in the majority, do not favor the old custom. They counsel their blood relations to abandon it. The full-bloods heed them not. So there is a dance, a mere semblance of the ancient dance, and the half-breeds play cards and smoke in their tepees while the dance goes on. . . . There are about 100 in camp, and of that number there are at least 50 women and children, breeds, and 20 full-blood squaws and papooses. The others are Cree, Flathead, Chippewa and Lemhi [Nez Perce] bucks, with the Crees numbering two for one of the others. Chief Sitting Horse of the Cree squad managed the whole jumping match and he danced with only a breechclout on.⁴²

It is valuable to continue with this particular newspaper account because of its observations of the actual dance. Although denigrating the event overall, the reporter did get certain structural parts correct in the description.

The others affected the costumes of the cowboy. The squaws wore calico dresses and red paint. When they entered the arena they tossed their blankets on the ground and disappeared behind a hedge of cottonwood

boughs. The drum sounded and, each with a reed [eagle bone whistle] in his mouth, the dancers raised their heads above the hedge, shouting, and gradually drew themselves to an upright position. After rising by degrees to their full height they gave one shout in concert and the first movement was finished. Then they dropped out of sight behind the bushes, to rise again to the noise of the weird chant and the drum beat. A chief would exhort a bit, the drum and reeds would again split the air and the dance was resumed, and this is the way it went until the dancers got tired. Then another relay would take up the dance and so on till the chant of "Home Sweet Home" in sagebrush minor shivered the miniature sand dunes of the "Hump."⁴³

The anonymous reporter goes on to tell that an "admission fee was charged whites at the pavilion entrance." He also comments that there would have been a larger crowd in attendance if the Sun Dance had been held closer to the city.

Fourteen miles away is too far to travel overland to witness such a sensationless spectacle. The horde that got together was made up of such coarse grafters as to be out

of reach of the average visitor. They would not talk unless they got money for their pains. They would not impart a line of information without a tip and in order to make a photograph of one or a few a tip staggering in its size was demanded. Some had cow horns to sell, but the demand was discouragingly small. Some had beaded moccasins which were held at prohibitive figures. The English-speaking breeds were more persistent grafters than the full-bloods. The Crees are a shiftless lot, without ambition and pests this country wants to get rid of.

The congress will adjourn to-day and the Indians will return to their respective camps. The visiting tribes will return to their reservations and the Crees will come back to the city dump and be at home to anything handy that comes their way.⁴⁴

Finally, with this full-blown front-page article complete with photographs, we see the bias of the reporter. He named the ceremony a fake because he wanted to see the blood and torture. And, while he states that the Crees are “without ambition,” he is put off by the fact that they are using the ceremony as an entrepreneurial event to capture some economic benefit for their people.

The state’s sentient newspaper, the *Anaconda Standard*, railed not just at the local Indian problem in its pages. Highly critical of the federal government’s handling of the Indian question, on July 13, 1904, it ran another column ridiculing the U.S. commissioner of Indian affairs William A. Jones. This time it was for a “harebrained” idea of setting up an Indian agricultural school in the Prickly Pear Valley outside of Helena.

The Commissioner is said to have approved the Prickly Pear valley as a place in which to make his experiment. With the Flathead Indians on the west, the Crows on the east, the Blackfeet on the north and the Crees all around, to say nothing of the savages that infest Last Chance gulch when the legislature meets, it is doubtful if even the famed refinement of the metropolis of the Prickly Pear valley could permanently civilize the Indian.⁴⁵

The editorial goes on to chastise Jones’s logic on his choice for developing agriculture, stating that it is “extremely doubtful, if an Indian could be enthused over farming if he tried to raise crops in the Prickly Pear valley, ‘a ____ ____ prairie that a grasshopper couldn’t cross without packing rations.’”⁴⁶

10: Mitātabt

The years 1905 and 1906 bring back to the fore Frank E. Peeso and the unique visual documents he created of Butte's early urban Indian community. There's Rosie Denny in front of her lodge. Jimushas, a Shoshoni with the Butte Cree, shows the relationship that exists to this day between Montana's Chippewa Cree and the Fort Hall Shoshoni and Bannock Tribe. Monais's image expresses the desire to maintain critical elements of his traditional culture through choosing to wear his hair and pieces of clothing Indian style. The hodgepodge of blankets and canvas tell of less than optimum materials for living quarters.

The group photo of Oschasemas (Old Boy), Osememas (Young Boy), Too-way, Wahwahkeekat, and Joe Little Pine give us a look at five young men in their twenties. They are the first generation to come of age following the defeat of aboriginal resistance to Anglo American and Canadian expansion. Even in the squalor of their poverty, they exhibit a sense of self-pride in their appearance and demeanor. Their identity remains intensely Indian. The picture of the children and dog with travois is exceptional. The image is the Butte dump, where the boy and girl forage the grounds freely. The boy is in Euro-American clothing; the girl wears moccasins. Their dog is remarkable not only for the ancient travois but for the breed. It is an aboriginal American dog. The camp itself is interesting for

showing the mix of a wall tent with a woodstove next to a traditional lodge. Also notable is the placement of the domiciles, separated into singular private spaces rather than grouped in a communal circle. The social structure was changing.

Frank Peeso's image of Osememas and his mother (who was 105 at the time) shows a man with a strong bent toward the future and fitting into the new western society. His choice of identity is rural cowboy, not that of urban miner, which surrounded him in Butte.

The crowning Peeso photo is of Marie Isobel Smallboy and her children. Marie's husband was Pierre Smallboy. There is a story here that gives clues to the complexity of aboriginal relationships, revealing an insightful coupling of Montana to the wider culture region of aboriginal society.

Marie's grandfather was the famed Cree Chief Bobtail (Kiskayiwew). His brother was Chief Ermineskin (Sehkosowayanew). They were also known as, respectively, Alex Piche and Baptiste Piche (from Pichette, a *Canadien* at Fort Vermillion on the Saskatchewan River in 1809). They were mixbloods. Their bands were part of the Sahiya Xe Ya Bine (Mountain Cree People), referred to as Halfbreeds in Montana. They were deeply intermarried with the Salish, Pend'Oreille, and Kootenai. Marie's grandmother was Catherine Cardinal, a Cree



Rosie Denny, Cree, Butte area, Montana, 1906. Frank E. Peeso, photographer. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (Image No: NA-1431-1).



Group of Cree men, Butte area, Montana, 1906. L-R: Oschasemas, Old Boy; Osememas, Young Boy; Too-way; Wabwahkeekat; Joe Little Pine. Frank E. Peeso, photographer. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (Image No: NA-1431-10).



Cree children and dog travois at the dump, Butte area, Montana, 1906. Frank E. Peeso, photographer. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (Image No: NA-1431-11).



Osememas and his mother, Cree, Butte area, Montana, ca. 1910. Called Young Boy in English, he died in 1945. His mother was 105 at the time of the picture. Frank E. Peeso, photographer. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (Image No: NA-1431-8).



Bobtail or Chief Small Boy, Cree, Butte area, Montana, 1906. Frank E. Peeso, photographer. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (Image No: NA-1431-4).



“Indians near Butte. 1900.” An amateur photographer shot this picture from his wagon seat. Photographer note on the negative’s original envelope. John Babbist, photographer. Courtesy of Thomas Robinson, Historic Photo Archives, Portland, OR.

Métis (from Joseph Cardinal, her grandfather, also a *Canadien* at Fort Vermillion in 1809). Her aunt Josephite Cardinal married Antoine Blondion (Fair-haired), son of the Chippewa Chief Mukatai (Powder), who was the brother of the Mistahimusqua (better known as Big Bear, who became a chief of the Cree), the father of Little Bear, and the leader of the Butte “Cree.” Big Bear’s predecessor was Chief Broken Arm (Maskipitoon), the man who signed the Stevens Treaty of 1855 at the mouth of the Judith River. So Marie was

a cousin to Little Bear. Her lineage shows the deep connectedness to Montana of the Butte band camped at the dump in 1906.⁴⁷

Following her experience in Butte, Marie took her family back to more Cree-centered territory. The eldest boy in the picture, Bobtail (named after his great grandfather), grew up to become chief of the Ermineskin Band of Cree, who settled with the Montana Band, at Hobbema, Alberta, following their removal from Montana in 1896. Bobtail’s life, and his Butte residency, culminates this story.

The next year, in early June of 1907, Anaconda was the site of the Nehiyaw Pwat’s annual Sun Dance. Indians came from all over Montana and Idaho. There were around “200 braves and innumerable squaws and papooses” camped between Anaconda and Warm Springs on the William Fairweather Ranch. It was called a “Swell Affair” with the Indians “All In Gorgeous Toggery.” Chief Rocky Boy led the “performance,” while “visiting palefaces enjoy the scene. . . . The braves, smeared with paint and wrapped in bright blankets, circle about the lodge, uttering piercing yells. They keep up the performance until they fall exhausted. They never get out of their war togs from the beginning to the end of the dance.”⁴⁸

As in 1894, when the first documented Sun Dance was in held in Butte, the notion of Indians performing a spectacle that allowed outsiders to have access to the



Cree head chiefs at Hobbema, Alberta, ca. 1920. L-R: Ermineskin, (Ermineskin band); Charles Rabbit (Montana band); Joe Samson (Samson band). Ermineskin was the great-uncle of Marie Smallboy. Bobtail grew up to become chief of the Ermineskin band. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (Image No: NA-1223-21).

titillating, risky, savage, and arcane (though thoroughly controlled environment) was acceptable for the white community. Being spectators at an event where images of a mythic noble savage played out was very different from living daily with Indians in abject poverty.

Just two weeks later, a “tramp band” of about a hundred “Crees, Lemhis [Nez Percé], and Chippewas” were ordered by the Silver Bow County sheriff to get out of Butte. They were camped by the slaughterhouses on the south side of town for several

weeks, being a “dirty nuisance to the people of the southern section of the city.” He gave them “two sleeps” to pack it up and move on, threatening to kill their dogs, scatter their horses, and confiscate their provisions if they weren’t gone.⁴⁹

II: Piyakosāp

By 1912, the tenor of the discourse was changing. When Rocky Boy’s band was placed on the grounds of Fort Harrison in Helena to winter over, the special dispatch to the Butte newspaper used the term “homeless” to describe the Indians. The account reported: “There are 700 homeless Indians in Montana, divided into small bands, which are eking out an existence in camps near the larger cities.” Quoting Major A. E. MacFtridge, the agent in charge, the white community received a new message and context for how to make sense of urban Indians. “The Crees are not bad fellows,” said MacFtridge. “The younger members are anxious and willing to work. They do not like to be dependent upon government charity, nor do they wish to lead a nomadic life.” There was now compassion toward Indians in the voice of white authority. And for the Indians, a new generation had come of age, and they did not want the life of their parents. Somehow they had to find a way to engage the larger society. A new conversation began.⁵⁰



Little Bear negotiations for decommissioned Fort Assiniboine (Rocky Boy's Reservation), Placer Hotel, Helena, 1915. L-r, Little Bear, Kinnewash, William Boles (Publisher of the Great Falls Tribune), U.S. Secretary of the Interior Frank K. Lane, Jim Denny, Other Person, interpreter Pat Raspberry (LaFromboise), and Frank B. Linderman. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, Linderman Collection, The University of Montana (Image No: 007(VIII):48).

The following year, Frank B. Linderman, at the time acclaimed as the only white man to have been adopted into the Cree tribe, began working fervently for a reservation for his Cree family. Linderman set up a meeting in Helena with U.S. Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane. He had the support of William M. Boles, the publisher of the *Great Falls Tribune*. The conversation took place at the Placer Hotel. Little

Bear told the secretary that “God was taking care of us all right until the white man came and took the responsibility off His hands. Last winter our wives and our children lived on dogs and the carcasses of frozen horses to keep from starving.”⁵¹ Not shy in the face of power, Little Bear made his proposal. It was for a portion of the decommissioned Fort Assiniboine to be turned over to his people as their homeland in Montana. It was a good idea.

The following spring, Little Bear explained to folks in Butte that

my people need much; they need a home. We are not Canadians—we fought with Riel and we lost, but we came from the states of this country; some are Chippewas, some are Nez Perces, some are Shoshones, only some Crees. The Cree Indian came first to Montana with the Assiniboines away long ago; my father [Big Bear] was a Cree that lived on the Snake River [in Idaho] with Moose and Two Horns, and they came here—in Butte—long ago when we hunt buffalo and deer here on this hill, where now these big mines send black smoke to kill the game and the birds.⁵²

A year and a half later (in 1916), a reservation was carved out of the southern edge of Fort Assiniboine

for Montana's landless Indians. But Little Bear was right. His people had been part of the Silver Bow environs since the early eighteenth century. And they're still there today. Not all of them moved to the newly established Rocky Boy's Reservation. Some of the "Crees" had already established their own family niche that proved sufficient for them to stay in Butte. But that was the end of Sun Dances in Butte and in Montana's urban culturescape.

In 1881, Little Bear's father, Big Bear, the great Nehiyaw Pwat chief, was with his people in Montana as the buffalo were on their last pasture in the Judith Basin. It was before the Northwest Resistance and Louis Riel's martyrdom; in fact, Riel was also living in the Judith at the time. Big Bear did not take treaty with Canada. He was secure in his people's right to be in the Judith Basin, along the Missouri Breaks, and across Montana, reinforced by the knowing

that someone from his nation had signed a treaty with the Americans in 1855. This chief, named Eyes in the Front and Back [aka Maskepetoon, or Broken Arm], had even travelled to Washington to see the Great Father [Andrew Jackson in 1831] and to receive presents from him. . . . Big Bear also learned that Maj. John Young, the officer currently in charge of the huge Indian

reservation that occupied most of northern Montana, was sympathetic to his people. He considered the eastern part of the reservation to belong to the Gros Ventre, Assiniboines, Crees, River Crows and Sioux.⁵³

Big Bear still believed in the validity of his predecessor Broken Arm's role in the Blackfoot Treaty of 1855, when the United States first made a pact with the Upper Missouri tribes, including the Nehiyaw Pwat. Also, in 1881, the U.S. military yet held interpretation of that treaty as a continuing legal document.

By the time Little Bear assumed leadership of his father's band in Montana in 1886 following the Riel tragedy, things changed—hence this story of the first generation of urban Indian poverty in Butte and other Montana cities. Yet eventually, after much travail, Little Bear and his band, along with their relatives in the Little Shell/Rocky Boy's band, finally came to rest in 1916 on a reservation within their traditional historic homeland in the Bear's Paw Mountains of north-central Montana.

12: Nisosāp

But not all of the Nehiyaw Pwat in Montana were accommodated by the creation of the Rocky Boy's Reservation. Some are known today as the Gopher Clan of the Rocky Boy Chippewa Band, a distinct group that became separated from the larger settlement of Rocky

Boy's Reservation in 1916. They are centered in Great Falls. The other group is organized as the Little Shell Tribe, who are recognized by the State of Montana but not by the federal government. They still suffer from the stigma that a portion of their citizenry is "Canadian" and doesn't "qualify"; that they are not (as Nehiyaw Pwat Michif) in fact "Indian" enough and can't satisfy the criteria as a historically cohesive and distinct group of aboriginal people to be eligible as a tribe for federal recognition. These people continue to reside, as they long have, in Butte, Helena, and Great Falls, along the Front Range, in Lewistown, across the Hi-Line, and in numerous other communities throughout Montana. They are Montana's historic urban Indian population, part of Montana's urban landscape from the inception of city-culture in the state.

After World War II and the Termination and Relocation federal policy era, many tribal citizens from reservation-based Indian nations made their way into Montana's cities. Since the late 1940s and continuing today, representatives of all of Montana's tribal nations comprise an additional population within the urban Indian community. In the past generation, a third sector of Indians, highly educated and working in professional occupations, came to Montana cities from Indian country throughout America. More than a third of Montana's total Indian population lives in the state's urban areas.⁵⁴ Yet the presence of the historic urban

Indian groups of "landless Indians" in this geography, and their relationship to all the aboriginal peoples in this territory, is deeper and predates the nation-states of Canada and the United States of America in belonging to this land.

The importance of the early urban Indian experience in Butte cannot be overstated for Indian country. The story of one of Butte's early urban Indian residents plays out to this day with profound significance. In camp at the dump, Little Bear told many times the story of his father and their people camping on that very Butte hillside before the white people came, when all life was natural. Among Little Bear's audience was a young boy just the right age. He really listened. His imagination took hold, and the depth of meaning in Little Bear's words reached his core. That boy was Bobtail, son of Marie Smallboy, pictured with his brothers and sisters that 1906 day in Butte. For Peeso there must have been something else that stood out with that young boy, for he also had him pose singularly.

That image, in retrospect, holds incredible prescience. Of his siblings, Bobtail is the one still dressed in traditional Indian style. After moving from Butte with his family to the Bear Hills (now known as Hobbema) to be closer to relatives, he grew to become chief of the Ermineskin Band. By 1968, so disheartened with the continual suffering of his people and the

increase in substance abuse and social deterioration, he led his people off the government reserve, walking away from modern life, and trekked into the isolated Rockies to set up a traditional tribal community. It became known as Smallboy's Camp. There he washed away the devastation of a century, rejuvenated the Sun Dance of his youth and the full ceremonial calendar, and taught his people to hunt, forage, and again speak their native language. No more garbage dumps. No more cast-offs. No more middlemen between his people and the Creator.

Chief Bobtail Smallboy, a boy of old Butte, is a magnificent and legendary hero to aboriginal peoples across the continent. His story continues to resonate as a proactive model of how a group of people can reclaim their lives in the face of a larger society out of balance with nature. Smallboy's Camp survives to this day. Looking at Frank Pесо's boyhood photo of him in Butte—in which he can't be more than twelve years old—he emanates a determination, steadfastness, and pride that are already deeply set. He will not suffer the indignity of dominant society's poverty. He will not be

a victim.

Remembering the story of Little Bear's father, Big Bear, camping on the same Butte mountainside with his people as Otchipemsu'uk (they who own themselves), in contrast to the *unšika* (pitiful) camp at the Butte dump where the story was told, Bobtail found a way to embody again the wealth of culture that was his heritage and to offer it, once more, to his people. He would stand atop the Thunder Pole singing down the heavens, creating the condition of mercy for his people. He learned that resolve in Butte. Just as the American Indian population hit its nadir of 250,000 souls, a plummet from 20 million people at the beginning of mass European immigration, we see the astounding strength and beautiful obstinacy of Bobtail's stance as a boy in that ageless and awe-inspiring image. A greater legacy of the Butte dump than anyone ever imagined, that boy understood the poverty, there in the shadow of the Richest Hill on Earth, and made his promise. His purpose would be fulfilled. In the compost of that Butte refuse pile, a seed of renewal and hope for aboriginal people was sown.

- ¹ The Nehiyaw Pwat is an aboriginal confederacy comprised of primarily the Cree, Assiniboine, Chippewa, and Métis. The confederacy is a multiethnic society bonded by intermarriage and deeply integrated culturally, economically, politically, and militarily.
- ² George Everett, executive director, Mainstreet Uptown Butte, e-mail of October 29, 2008, on file with the author.
- ³ Olga W. Johnson, "Fred Peeso Collected Stories Related by Cree Indians," *Great Falls Tribune*, November 30, 1958, 16–17. See also F. E. Peeso, "The Cree Indians," *Museum Journal* (University of Pennsylvania) 3, no. 1 (March 1912): 50.
- ⁴ Also referred to as the Northwest Rebellion. From the aboriginal perspective, the conflict between aboriginal peoples and white businessmen and the Canadian government in 1884–85 was a resistance to invasion and occupation. The events of those years culminated at the Battle of Batoche and the trial of Louis Riel, a Montanan and U.S. citizen, for treason. He was hanged in Regina, Saskatchewan, in November 1885. Many aboriginal people fled for their lives from Canada to Montana and North Dakota following those events, to avoid the intense white retribution for their resistance.
- ⁵ Johnson, "Fred Peeso," 16.
- ⁶ Peeso, "The Cree Indians," 51.
- ⁷ Nicholas Vrooman, "Broken Arm: Cree Plenipo of the 19th Century Northern Plains," *Montana the Magazine of Western History* 58, no. 4 (Summer 2009), forthcoming.
- ⁸ J. Elizabeth Sperry, *Ethnogenesis of the Métis, Cree and Chippewa in Twentieth Century Montana* (master's thesis, University of Montana, 2007), 70. Copy given to the author by Ms. Sperry.
- ⁹ Raymond Gray, *The Cree Indians* (unpublished manuscript), WPA Federal Writers Project, 1941–42, 37, copy in author's possession.
- ¹⁰ Thomas O. Miles, letter to the editor, (Butte) *Semi-weekly Inter-mountain*, November 30, 1892. Cited in Gray, *The Cree Indians*, 16–17.
- ¹¹ Gray, *The Cree Indians*, 150–51.
- ¹² Gray, *The Cree Indians*, 17.
- ¹³ Gray, *The Cree Indians*, 17–18.
- ¹⁴ Gray, *The Cree Indians*, 19–20. The attorney's name was John Hoffman.
- ¹⁵ Gray, *The Cree Indians*, 27–32. Also Sperry, *Ethnogenesis*, 40.
- ¹⁶ Gray, *The Cree Indians*, 30.
- ¹⁷ "They Danced," *Havre Advertiser*, June 21, 1894.
- ¹⁸ "Last of the Sun Dances," *Helena Daily Independent*, July 8, 1894.
- ¹⁹ Gray, *The Cree Indians*, 40.
- ²⁰ Work Projects Administration, *Copper Camp* (Hastings House, NY: 1943), 101–3.
- ²¹ Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 106.
- ²² Frank B. Linderman, *Montana Adventure: The Recollections of Frank B. Linderman* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), 99–100.
- ²³ Gray, *The Cree Indians*, 32.

- ²⁴ Verne Dusenberry, *The Montana Cree* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 36.
- ²⁵ Susan Labry Meyn, "Who's Who: The 1896 Sicangu Sioux Visit to the Cincinnati Zoological Gardens," *Museum Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (June 1992): 21.
- ²⁶ Gray, *The Cree Indians*, 6–8. Most lodges held four to six people per household.
- ²⁷ *Statutes at Large of the United States of America from December 1895, to March 1897, and Recent Treaties, Conventions, and Executive Proclamations*, vol. 29 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1897), 117.
- ²⁸ *Anaconda Standard*, December 9, 1900.
- ²⁹ "Wedded on City Dump, Sad-Eyed Annie and Bull Horn Are One," *Anaconda Standard*, April 29, 1901.
- ³⁰ Sperry, *Ethnogenesis*, 28, 38–39.
- ³¹ *Anaconda Standard*, December 8, 1901.
- ³² Sperry, *Ethnogenesis*, 38–39.
- ³³ *Anaconda Standard*, June 16, 1901.
- ³⁴ *Anaconda Standard*, June 16, 1901.
- ³⁵ *Anaconda Standard*, February 6, 1902.
- ³⁶ The moot point of this being that, in aboriginal terms, the true eco-division between culture regions was from Pembina to the Big Bend of the Missouri, to the confluence of the Yellowstone, and over to the Front Range of the Rockies, rather than the 49th parallel.
- ³⁷ Gray, *The Cree Indians*, 223.
- ³⁸ Gray, *The Cree Indians*, 169–72.
- ³⁹ Sperry, *Ethnogenesis*, 94–95.
- ⁴⁰ Gray, *The Cree Indians*, 161; see also Dusenberry, *The Montana Cree*, 40.
- ⁴¹ *Anaconda Standard*, February 7, 1904.
- ⁴² *Anaconda Standard*, June 26, 1904.
- ⁴³ *Anaconda Standard*, June 26, 1904.
- ⁴⁴ *Anaconda Standard*, June 26, 1904.
- ⁴⁵ *Anaconda Standard*, July 13, 1904.
- ⁴⁶ *Anaconda Standard*, July 13, 1904.
- ⁴⁷ Heather Devine, "Aboriginal Naming Practices," *People Who Own Themselves* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004), <http://www.ualgary.ca/~hdevine/naming.htm>. Also, Catherine Anne Cavanaugh, Michael Payne, Donald Grant Wetherell, eds., *Alberta Formed, Alberta Transformed* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2006), 241. And Joachim Fromhold, *The Western Plains Cree* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, forthcoming), ch. 2. Manuscript highlights given to the author by Dr. Fromhold.
- ⁴⁸ *Anaconda Standard*, June 7, 1907.
- ⁴⁹ *Anaconda Standard*, June 22, 1907.
- ⁵⁰ *Anaconda Standard*, November 24, 1912. Even the title of the article, "Rocky Boy Band to Be Guests of Government," is an indicator of a sea change in attitude toward urban Indians.
- ⁵¹ Gray, *The Cree Indians*, 83.
- ⁵² "Sad Is the Story of the Crees," *Anaconda Standard*, March 30, 1913.
- ⁵³ Hugh A. Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 102.
- ⁵⁴ Seattle Indian Health Board/Urban Indian Health Institute, 2007, <http://www.uihi.org/the-weaving-project>.