

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: AUGUSTINE YELLOW SUN,
JOE POOR EAGLE 2
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: BLACKFOOT RESERVE
INTERVIEW LOCATION: BLACKFOOT RESERVE
TRIBE/NATION: BLACKFOOT
LANGUAGE: BLACKFOOT
DATE OF INTERVIEW:
INTERVIEWER: ALLAN WOLF LEG
INTERPRETER: ALLAN WOLF LEG
TRANSCRIBER: JOANNE GREENWOOD
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Land rights under Treaty #7.
- Trade of furs for goods.
- Dispersal of the Blackfoot people and eventual return to the Blackfoot Reserve under Crowfoot.

D - TREATY MONEY

Yellow Sun: I would wonder what the five dollars (the present amount of treaty money) is for?

Poor Eagle: Well

Yellow Sun: The way I heard it, is that they (treaty money) were used to keep us from fighting. The Tall White Man treated with us, so we stopped having battles and fighting. They gave us the twelve dollars as a form of a peace. It (peace offering) was presented to us - Crowfoot settled down after.

When Sitting Bull was fighting the Blue Coats, he gave some bullets and a tobacco to a runner (messenger). The runner headed north. He was also told to give these gifts to Crowfoot and that he will know what the gifts mean. The runner reached North Camp (of the Blackfoot) and presented his gifts to

Crowfoot. The runner was a Sioux from the United States. Crowfoot asked the runner, "What is it you want?" The runner replied, "Sitting Bull sends a message for you to help him in battle with the Blue Policemen" (U.S. cavalry or Blue Coats). Crowfoot answered, "Yes, I have settled down in peace. I have done away with my battles. I am living here and wouldn't move again."

Now the Sioux messenger went home again empty-handed and reported to Sitting Bull, "He has settled down. He has received the money."

That is what I was told, that the treaty money was used as a token of peace to us at the treaty.

Now, the question of the land, I don't know or heard, what it has to do with the money...

Poor Eagle: (Burst out laughing) (To Yellow Sun and Poor Eagle the question of the land and money as a link in the treaty seemed ironic.) Remember at our last Indian dance, White Horse Rider (Mr. Davis Bull Bear) announced in public, "Is it about time that we started to look into the land that we lost, it is a large territory - before I am too old." (Burst out laughing again.)
Yellow Sun: That is how it is.

Poor Eagle: Yes, the people have knowledge of it.

Yellow Sun: Yes.

Poor Eagle: Our ancestors.

Yellow Sun: Yes, they all know about it.

Poor Eagle: They all know our land. (Here they discussed the houses of the railroad people).

Yellow Sun: That is how it is at the first treaty payments. Now, in the future if you happen to turn it on (the tape recording of this discussion) some people would say, "He said it very good." Then there will be people who would say, "This is where he said the wrong thing." This is how it was told to me.

Poor Eagle: Yes, everything you said was the truth.

Yellow Sun: These people told me the stories, you know them, Crow Eagle, Bare Back Sitter, and Old Woman Beaver....

Poor Eagle: Yes, I knew them. They were quite elderly.

Yellow Sun: O.K. I also heard Many Swans. He was a Blood Indian and (was registered on the Blackfoot Reserve as a Blackfoot) later on became a Blackfoot. I told you about him. (Yellow Sun directed this to Joe Poor Eagle. Here they discuss who was Many Swans).

E - Two Feet of Topsoil

Interviewer: Ask him if he has any knowledge of the question of the topsoil that was sold (or surrendered), regarding the measurement of two feet. Also the question of the material under the two feet of soil. How did he understand it?

Poor Eagle: O.K., the ground - let's say for now the ground that was sold - was it two feet that was sold?

Yellow Sun: This land...

Poor Eagle: Yes, this land. Two feet was sold. The surface was used for farming. The ground under (the two feet) was not sold. Now, how do you understand this matter?

Yellow Sun: Yes, the first chiefs such as Me-Ne-Bo-Ka, Calf Robe, my father and others. Those first chiefs loaned the land out over at the hill (southeastern portion of the Blackfoot Reserve No. 146). The way I heard it, they (the first chiefs) said it was one foot. One foot. The land that was loaned out was one foot. Now later on, Rabbit Carrier was chief then. I heard Chief Calf said, "Now, the one foot is measured by the shield (the blade of the plow is called a shield. If measured, it would be approximately one foot vertically)." If the blade is turned upside down, it would be one foot. That is how deep the plow blade is. And if a person were to plow deep, they usually go as deep as six inches. You did some plowing you know?

Poor Eagle: Yes, I did some plowing, too...

Yellow Sun: Six inches is how deep you go. Six inches was allowed to white man for post holes. The rest of the soil was not loaned out.

I also heard Chief Calf; his father was also a chief who related incidents and stories to him. I heard them say, "Today, we only loan out one and two foot. White man would dig post holes for their fences. The ground underneath we did not loan out."

That is why we received money (oil royalties) from the oil that was found on Jimmy Dew's land (this person apparently bought reserve land that was sold without mineral rights). He just loaned the top two feet of the land, but the rest was still ours. That is why we received forty dollars each. I think it was 1955. It was around that year. That is how we got to Edmonton when Sitting at the Door was there (Charles Camsell Hospital). It was issued in Gleichen, at the show hall. A war show was on. We each received forty dollars. That is how it is, that is what I was told. It wasn't too long ago, less than ten years. One foot was allowed for plowing and an additional foot was added to make it two feet, so they could farm on the first foot of topsoil by plowing and the additional foot was for post holes for their fences. That is

what I was told. It wasn't long ago. That is how it is.

Interviewer: Ask him if the Indians who signed the treaty had any knowledge of minerals and if any, didn't they understand? Or if there was any mention of minerals in the treaty?

Poor Eagle: You mean the money?

Interviewer: No, the iron under the ground.

Poor Eagle: Now, the first people who signed the treaty, did they know about this thing called iron?

Yellow Sun: Who?

Poor Eagle: Our ancestors.

Yellow Sun: Before the first treaty payments and further back?

Poor Eagle: Yes.

Yellow Sun: Well, the way I heard it was, let's say our ancestors hunted game and when they had enough skins, they would say Reddish Hair (a descriptive Blackfoot name for one of the fur traders that dealt with the Blackfoot) is here. We call this trading bush-buying (It was called bush-buying because the Indians had to go up north into the bush country to trade). They would go to the bush around the area of the Big House (City of Edmonton). That was another place we are familiar with. Now, Reddish Hair was there. I once told Old Woman Beaver, "How come this person called Reddish Hair was very popular, what was he?" She answered, "It was those kind of white man that had a very light brown or reddish hair. After he stayed for a while, he was talking like us. He was one of those halfbreeds that interpret for us." Now, in the past we would go on a bush-buying trip. We would have to float the skins across the river and then rest them inside (placing the furs inside the fort on arrival).

Today we would say that the payments for the skins would be the same thing as wages after we have done some work for a person who hired us. The wages in the form of a cheque. Our ancestors didn't know anything about iron (currency in the form of silver or copper was described, in Blackfoot, as iron, too, the Blackfoot word for any metal object was referred to as iron also). They would stress to exchange goods with the skins. Money was placed in front of Reddish Hair and he would be writing and counting. What he was counting was money of which we didn't understand. After he had counted the money, he would say, "O.K. now take what you need." The Indians would take such

things as blankets, tobacco, ammunition, gunpowder. The Indian gets a lot of goods for his skins. Maybe the skins were valuable? This trading takes a long time. That is why sometimes they had to camp near the fort. And when they had finished trading, they would start for home again.

It is one year before they go trading again, around spring

time. Now in those days, if a person realizes that he is short on some goods such as ammunition, he could send a messenger to his friend (the trader at the fort (Edmonton)). The messenger would tell the trader "Your friend so and so said to give him ammunition." The trader would say, "Yes, take what he needs."

The Indians, our ancestors, had a year's credit. It was like saying, "Charge it up." Today, life is different. Our grandfathers, in the past, had one year credit. He would get ammunition, maybe a gun, knife. Maybe they know them by name.

(Here Mr. Yellow Sun and Mr. Poor Eagle discuss the trading of furs at Fort Edmonton).

Yellow Sun: Yes, now the matter of signing...

Poor Eagle: Yes, our ancestors didn't know the meaning of signing for anything or what it means. They would be told, "O.K., sign here." Maybe they would sign without asking any questions first.

Yellow Sun: Yes, they didn't know...

Poor Eagle: They didn't know. Now today it is different. If an Indian is asked to sign something, he would ask, "Why am I signing this?"

Yellow Sun: Yes, this business of signing is a new thing (here Yellow Sun is referring to the signing of the Treaty No. 7). A white man place a piece of paper on the table and ask the Indian through an interpreter, "Now, sign here." The Indian would reply, "I don't write." The white man will tell the Indian that he will give him goods and money if he signs. Just touch the pen. Now when the Indian touches the pen, it is the same as giving his holy word (promise). Later on, it changed a little where Indian people mark their own X's. Before that time we didn't know how to use a pen so we just touched the pen signifying that we agree with the matter that we are dealing with. After an Indian makes his mark, the white would say, "Well, he has touched the pen. Now we will make finish the deal; he has agreed."

Yes, up to today, we used the marking of an X a lot. Now, today as I understood it, by making or using the X, we have lost a lot of things that we could make use of today. On the other hand, not too many X's assist us to improve our lives. I was telling my wife about this and asked here, "Will you understand this?" She replied, "Yes, both of us are Indians. I understand."

It means on that day, November 4th (I understand that this date referred to the signing of the Treaty of 1877. Mr. Yellow Sun mentioned the month in English even though he didn't know the month), we were brought forward and told, "Don't name yourself, just mark your X here." Now, we used the X mark a lot, but we also suffer from it too. Now, even if we put our hands to the agent (request for assistance), we wouldn't get anything. Even if I made my X too.

(Here both Poor Eagle and Yellow Sun burst out laughing again).

Today we still use the X mark to elect councillors.

(Here Augustine Yellow Sun discusses welfare with Poor Eagle. They also discuss the coal mines on the Blackfoot Reserve).

H - Disappearing of Artifacts/Indian Understanding of the Treaty

Interviewer: Now, in the past, there existed let's call them (minerals) metal, such as oil as we call them today. In the past, did they classify metal (minerals) and herbs as one? And did the Indian people give them away? Ask him.

Poor Eagle: To white man?

Interviewer: Yes.

Poor Eagle: Now, in the past at the time of the first treaty payment and later on, did we give away such things as medicine (herbs), things that we use from the land as medicine, material for pipes, ritual material that we use from land and O.K. to the white man?

Yellow Sun: The way it is today is that we are losing half of them to white men. Now, the Medicine Pipe has two names. Let's just say pipes. The pipes for dances are nearly all gone. Now, the ceremonial pipes are going too to white man. The pipes we use now are disappearing too. . . (Here they discuss the disappearance of the pipes to the white man. They also discuss herbs for use as medicine. Mr. Yellow Sun misunderstood the question.)

Interviewer: Did the Indians of the past understand what they were signing?

Poor Eagle: The way they understood it was to stop fighting now that they received the \$12.00. That is how they understood it.

Yellow Sun: Now, it means that a person, a tall person . . .

Poor Eagle: That is why I told you, Indians didn't understand too many things like Buckskin (Here they refer to two Blackfoot Indians who used the coal mines in two different ways) using the coal mines for his profit. Now, First Wing loaned the other coal mines of which everybody profited. In the past, we didn't understand the treaty. Now the land, we didn't have any knowledge of selling it.

Yellow Sun: Yes, we have no knowledge of it . . .

Poor Eagle: All we understood was that the \$12.00 was for us to stop fighting.

It is the same thing as how Buckskin and First Wing used the coal mines. The people didn't understand what was going on. This is why I question there. (Here they discuss the coal mines again).

Poor Eagle: Now, in the past, we would settle a piece of land. We claimed it as our land. We claimed it as ownership to it. Now, if a person were to come along on our land, we would tell him, "That's mine, this land is mine." Now, we didn't know the band own it (the idea of ownership to the land became different when it was called as an Indian Reserve. Before, it was a territory, now a reserve).

Yellow Sun: Now, we Blackfoot own this land called our home (reserve).

Poor Eagle: Yes. Now we understand, today. In the past, they still practise the Indian concept of land ownership even when the reserve system came into being. Now a person would live on a piece of land and we would say, "Now that is where Tall Eagle (used Tall Eagle as an example) lives," or if a person were to come in on your land to cut grass, you would tell him, "Don't cut here, this is my land." All the people would know that that piece of land belongs to Tall Eagle. We would respect his ownership. Now everybody on reserve owns the land. In the past, if we are using the land, we would use it as long as we needed it. And when we are finished with it, we would move and let the next person use it.

These are things I'm asking you now if you would explain to him (interviewer).

(Here they discuss the Cave Dwellers of the past. These cave dwellers were living on the plains and disappeared without a trace).

I - American Treaty with Blackfoot Nation

Yellow Sun: Now, I was also told that the Blackfoot people who live on the east side of the Blackfoot Reserve, were the people who were living in United States, and received treaty payments also. Around the Yellow Stone. It is quite far around the Yellow Tail, Crow Agency, and around to the Yellow Stone. That is where Blackfoot lived for five years. He was given treaty money. We treated with the U.S. white man. He was given rations of food.

Now when Crowfoot had the treaty (of 1877 with the Crown), we settle down for the treaty. Here we were given treaty money and the Ash Wagon (CPR) people gave us food. How is it that after the treaty payment we became poor? We had nothing to eat. All of a sudden we were restricted to hunt game. Some of the people of the Blackfoot band went east, to the new government people in Toronto, or was it Regina?

Poor Eagle: Yes, that is where it is (Regina).

Yellow Sun: Yes, at the place we call Indian Head. Now this

new governor in Toronto (Regina) received the Indians who travelled there. They told the government that they were people of Crowfoot. The government said, "Yes, settle here, and we will look after you and feed you." That is where some of the Blackfoot went. The others went to the United States, to the Yellow River (Missouri River). Here (the Blackfoot people made the best use of the treaties with the Crown of 1877 and with the U.S. of 1855) they received food rations at the U.S. Many Houses. Crowfoot stayed behind. Now, when five years elapsed, Crowfoot sent messengers to call back the Blackfoot people who had moved south, for them to settle down. Crowfoot said, "We are going to be fed. All we have to do is count our fingers for each passing day to our next food ration." Now we understand it as four days after Sunday, let's say Thursday, ration day.

Now, everybody came back - those people that went south. That is why we have land at the Yellow River. It was the Blackfoot Nation's land. Now, before the people who were living on the west end of the reserve went up north to the bush, we treated along with Bobtail. Some of the Blackfoot people lived with Bobtail for a while.

Some went south, and some went north to the bush for survival.

Now everybody came back, even the people who went east came back. (Here they discuss the people who moved north to live with Bobtail and then came back).

Yellow Sun: The people who moved north were known as the North Camp when they came back to settle the west part of the reserve. And the people who moved south were known as "South Camp" when they came back to settle the east end of the reserve.

If we talk about the past, we would never run out of stories, we would keep going for a long time.

Interviewer: Now, did anybody tell you how the encampment was laid out at the signing of the treaty?

(Here discussion was on the encampment at the signing of Treaty No. 7 of 1877 at the Blackfoot Crossing).

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