

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: GEORGE FIRST RIDER
FOX SOCIETY
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: BLOOD RESERVE
CARDSTON, ALBERTA
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CARDSTON, ALBERTA
TRIBE/NATION: BLOOD
LANGUAGE: BLACKFOOT
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INTERVIEWER: J.C. HELLSON
INTERPRETER: DAVE MELTING TALLOW
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GEORGE FIRST RIDER

George First Rider of the Blood Reserve was born in 1904. He had no formal schooling but became an accomplished horseman and worked for a time on the rodeo circuit. After working as a farmer he ended up in jail as a result of alcoholism and theft. He attributes his reform to his conversion to Christianity.

He prides himself on his ability as a storyteller and on his knowledge of Blood culture, particularly the holy societies many of which he joined as a young man.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Origin of the Fox Society.

George First Rider: Okay, we are telling legends about the life that we have left behind. These are just the news that we heard, just the news that the Indians heard. White people got wise by writing and that is really true. Stories are told in a lot of various ways.

This Fox Society is not the life of the Bloods and the Blackfoot Indians; it came from the South Peigans. There are Foxes over there. The Fox Society on the Blackfoot Reserve, it doesn't go in with the All Comrades. In the Horn Society on the Blackfoot Reserve it doesn't go in with the All Comrade sacred properties; it's obtained in a different way. This Fox Society came from a legend and it formed into a society. This man, I (First Rider) don't know his name, they went on the

warpath, they scattered and fled and one of them was alone. He just had a knife. He had no weapons and he went home. He was crying, while he was walking, to have something to eat.

He saw some lairs; they were all old lairs. When he got to them he thought, "I'll sleep here." He knew that they were inhabited, so he slept there. A man told him, "As you came here, this is my home. What are you wandering around for?" He told him, "I am wandering around to have something to eat." The spirit man told him, "That's no problem. Tomorrow at dawn you will have something to eat." While he was still sleeping the man told him, "Now get up." They went. He went with him. As they quietly looked down from a hill along the river, buffaloes were all sitting there, all sitting there. All the buffaloes sat there; not one was standing, as it is very early in the morning.

When they saw the buffaloes, the fox -- those were foxes where he slept at the lairs -- the fox transformed into a human. He had a blue stone. He told the man, "This is my amulet. The stone is soft; a hole could be drilled through it." The stone had a hole in it. There was a sweetgrass, a whistle (it wasn't long in length) and a tied up little rock. It's the fox fur rolled and wrapped in a small buckskin. We'll say it's a rawhide. It's yellow ochred. The other item is the same; it's also wrapped. It's the sweet cicely.

The sweet cicely was unwrapped; the fox put it in his mouth. Before he had it in his mouth he made like as if he held his hand over a smudge. The fox told him, "You will burn incense with these sweetgrass and you will hold the sweet cicely over the incense four times and you will put it in your mouth and you will spray my amulet with it." A strip of thong was cut a little wide and the stone amulet was tied with it. They are yellow ochred; the stone was ochred with real paint, the rawhides were yellow ochred. He tied it around his head; the

stone amulet was in front. After he was dressed up he used red ochre on his temples. That's what the foxes look like. They have red spots on their temples, so that's how he painted his face.

The fox told him, "Just watch the buffaloes and say, 'That's enough.' Don't let what you are going to eat exceed." The fox lifted its head and the buffaloes saw the fox and they started to jump up and they were just staring at the fox and the real human was also looking down. The fox told the man, "Help me in singing," and the fox sang. The song is a fox song. They get their meals by that song. The words in the song are as follows: "Children, be cheerful. Tomorrow I will run the first dead buffalo I have taken home." That's the words in the song.

When he sang he swung his head to one shoulder and then to the other shoulder. He didn't dance, he was just nodding its head at the buffaloes and he sang the song. When he sang the song

he worded it, "My children think cheerful. I will come home with the first dead buffalo." If we say all the words in the song, when the fox is coming out of the tipi the words are, "My children, think cheerful. Tomorrow I will run. I have gone home with the first dead buffalo." When he made a use of it, when he was going to get something for the man to eat, he sang, "Think cheerful. I have gone home with the first dead buffalo." So that is how he nodded his head; he nodded his head very hard.

When the buffaloes looked they laughed. As they looked, as they looked at the fox who nodded its head, he looked real funny. He had the stone on his forehead and a sweetgrass was attached to it, a whistle and some sweet cicelies and a small rock tied up just the way the sweet cicely was tied. They used the sweet cicely to deceive and to make a curse, they are just like a tranquilizer. When he used the sweet cicely the buffaloes laughed. The first buffaloes that started laughing fell down; they died of laughing. The rest started to laugh and they fell down. It was said there were young bulls and yearlings; there were no calves. When the man had what he wanted he told the fox, "That is enough."

They got up and they spread their robes and the buffaloes stampeded. They walk up to the dead buffaloes. The fox told him, "Now just take what you want to eat from the dead buffaloes, and my children will eat the rest." So that's how he got something to eat and he walked away. When he slept the fox reapproached him. The foxes increased in number. He saw them how they danced. The dance was just not a dance. It doesn't sound good the way the story is going to be told; I (First Rider) am not going to illustrate that yet.

The man killed a fox. When he came home, he told his story to the people. He told them, "This is what the Fox Society is." The fox pelt, there will be nothing wrong with a person and he approaches the man. The man ties the neck. The man is not even sick, he is healthy. He just tied a thong around the fox's neck and he tightened the thong slowly and the person fell; he was dead. When the people saw him that he was dead he took the same fox pelt and the wiped the face of the dead man with the fox's tail and the person sat up. When he performed a lot of miracles with the fox, the miracles that he performed were successful and the people considered it holy. They told the man, "You will please give us something like that so that we will go on the warpath with it."

We camped again by a river in the south (U.S.A.); I (First Rider) saw this river. When they camped there the people that were asking for the fox to be transferred to them increased. When they camped there, "Okay, we are going to have a transferral ceremony. The foxes are going to be transferred." The man painted the faces of the people and he instructed them, "This is how you'll transfer the fox." Others, the amulet, the headpiece, the Foxes have headpieces. They build a shelter in a circle with willows and that is a lair. The owner of the fox

sat at the back. All of them had headdresses; they made headdresses with the fox pelts. So they are scalp headdresses. They are not buffalo scalps, they are bonnets. Fox skins are cut in strips and they are sewn to the bonnets. Some had weasel tails on each side. The strips of fox skins hung down the back and bells attached to them and they are put close to the doorway. The fox headdresses that were transferred are not all headdresses. They're 10-14.* Those were transferred by the amulet owner and the Foxes increased.

Some just wore them around the neck. All those had their faces painted with yellow ochre. They painted themselves yellow, that is their style. They painted the corners of their eyes with red ochre and they used black ochre at the corners of their mouths. They painted the corners of their eyes with red ochre and the corners of their mouths with black ochre. Others just wore the fox around their necks. Some had fox claw wristlets; some dressed with cloths hanging down their backs, as foxes have long tails. They don't dance continually, they have holy ceremonies with them. They chase each other for the female fox and they deceived each other by her. When the people became Foxes they also deceived the others with their wives into the Fox Society.

*10.14 is 14 in the Blackfoot count.

They sang the song with the words that the amulet owner got something to eat. I (First Rider) know these fox songs. The fox songs are 10.14 were transferred to the number. I know all the words in the songs; 10.14 were transferred to the number of the Foxes. There are some owls included, two owls. They also sang too. That made fourteen songs. That is why there are fourteen Foxes. They worded their song, "Heaven is Holy." When they're going to paint their faces, they paint their faces in hailstones (dots); it's from heaven. When they are going to paint their faces they sing about the ground. They paint their faces with the soil; that's the owls.

The owl songs are sung with the fox songs. I (First Rider) will illustrate all these some day. There they are, they didn't dance. There they are, they invited one another for the woman. When the woman was used, you know that the foxes just have skins. They have no robes and when they chase each other for the woman, the woman also had no clothing. That's what kind of a transferal it is. The songs. We know the Foxes had no drums and they didn't drum, they didn't use rattles, they just sang. I (First Rider) can't tell the story plainly the way it was illustrated. When I am given the permission to tell the story plainly then I'll tell the story plainly and whoever is going to listen will listen to it. They numbered that many when they started and big sickness came and a few of the Foxes survived. So that is the end of the Fox Society.

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