

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: JIMMY AND CHARLIE CHIEF  
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ONION LAKE, SASK.  
INTERVIEW LOCATION: SEEKASKOOTCH RESERVE  
ONION LAKE, SASK.  
TRIBE/NATION: CREE  
LANGUAGE: CREE  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: JULY 18, 1973  
INTERVIEWER:  
INTERPRETER: ALPHONSE LITTLEPOPLAR  
TRANSCRIBER: JOANNE GREENWOOD  
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- This is a conversation between two brothers, the grandsons of Little Bear.
- Details of housing, transportation, etc. of former years.
- Games played by men. Games played by women.
- Story of a Cree raid on the Blackfoot.
- Death of Little Bear by hanging.
- Story of a bad medicine man (Wahsayhoos) who killed a storekeeper's son.

Jimmy: When you lived at Island Lake, what sort of houses did people live in? I have heard they lived in log houses, and they had cloth on their windows instead of glass. Is this true or did they live in tipis?

Charles: They lived in tipis before they had houses. Only the tipis were constructed of poles stood on end.

Jimmy: As a lad, I remember watching as a bunch of men worked on such a building.

Charles: These wooden tipis were warm and one could live in comfort when well constructed. An opening was left at the top for smoke to escape and all the openings were chinked with hay and bark. In the old days, I have heard the Plains Cree Indians lived in buffalo-hide tipis and to the north, the Bush Cree lived in birch bark houses. I have never lived in a birch bark house. I have never even seen one. Later, the Bush Cree built small houses of logs, there being no lumber around at

the time. These houses had no flooring. They spread hay on the floor.

Jimmy: A long time ago, our father used to go north to fish and once or twice I went with him. We saw many small log cabins with people living in them. These cabins had no flooring, and had a cloth on the window. The cloth had a small hole the size of a finger for looking out. I remember the small hole in the cloth was very dirty.

Was there a store here or did people have to go to Pitt when they needed to go to a store?

Charles: There was a Hudson's Bay store here but before that people did go to Fort Pitt to buy things. And they used to walk. A man named Little Elk used to tell this story. When I was young we lived one winter at Island Lake. One day an old man in camp ran short of tea and smoking tobacco. These two things the old man could not do without. I offered to go to Fort Pitt for him and get him the things he needed. The morning star was just coming up when I left our camp to go to Fort Pitt. It was long before daylight. It was winter time and the weather was very cold. But I was young and strong and I walked fast; sometimes I ran. Fort Pitt is a long ways from Island Lake and the trail went around by a place called Small Horse Lake which made the distance even greater. It was almost midday when I arrived at Fort Pitt. When I told the storekeeper what the old man wanted, he wrapped much tea and tobacco for the old man. Then he served me a meal. Also he gave me some food to take with me. Hudson's Bay storekeepers were very kind and were not stingy. Then I started back for Island Lake. The people at home were getting ready to go to bed when I arrived. People at the time were living in wooden tipis.

Jimmy: He made good time. It is a long road from Island Lake to Fort Pitt. Our uncle once walked from Loon Lake to Fort Pitt carrying a bag of fur to sell at Little Horse Lake. He met another trapper who was on his way home with a bag of fur. They sat down and visited for a while and also had a smoke. Then they challenged one another to a hand game using their furs for stakes. All evening they played. They were pretty evenly matched and when it became dark they cut wood for a campfire and continued to play. All night long they played and when daylight came, they decided to quit. The trapper went home and our uncle continued on to Fort Pitt. For his all night gambling he was several furs richer.

And when you lived at Island Lake, did the people have houses?

Charles: Yes. They lived in houses and they had lumber floors in them. Some of the men made their own lumber. I watched my brother-in-law and his father sawing lumber by hand. They made a scaffold for the logs. Then one would get on the scaffold and one stayed on the ground. Then they would pull back and forth on a saw. In this way they made lumber, but they made a poor job. The lumber was thicker on one side than the other.

Also, it would warp when it layed in the sun. They would mark the log to be sawn, then they would turn it over and mark the other side. And when they got sawing, the saw did not always follow the mark they had made.

Jimmy: Did someone show them how to make lumber?

Charles: No. Nobody showed them how. I believe they saw it done somewhere and came home and tried it, but they made very poor lumber and still they found uses for it.

Jimmy: Did you see the bob sleighs that were made entirely of wood? I have heard it said the only iron used in these sleighs was the draw bolt.

Charles: As a young boy, I drove oxen and we hitched the oxen to a sleigh such as you mention. The sleigh was constructed entirely of wood.

Jimmy: How many years ago would this be?

Charles: Ah, let me see. This is 1973, it would be about 60 years ago. Oh no, it was more than 60 years ago. It would be 70 or 71 years ago.

Jimmy: You are now 83 years old?

Charles: I am 85 years old or I will be 85 when the potatoes are big enough to eat, next month.

Jimmy: The Indian people had horses at the time. Why didn't they work the horse instead of oxen?

Charles: There were horses around at the time but they were very scarce. People who had horses did work them. For the road, horses were better than oxen. People would hitch a horse to a cart we called rolling wagon or seesaw wagon. Storekeepers would sometimes hire the Indian people to haul things for them on their seesaw wagons.

Jimmy: Our mother used to tell of the time her grandmother and her husband lost everything they had in a gambling game to some eastern people. They lost everything they owned including their horse and seesaw wagon. Late in the evening the woman from the east called around to collect her winnings. She hitched the horse to the seesaw wagon, then took the tipi down and loaded it on the cart. Our grandmother and her husband stood by and watched as the woman began to load the blankets. With their tipi gone and also their blankets, where were they to sleep? "Perhaps if we ask her she will leave us a blanket," Grandma said to Grandpa. The woman had just loaded up the last blanket when Grandma stepped up and said, "With our blankets gone, how are we to sleep? Perhaps you would leave us one blanket?" When the eastern woman heard this, she jumped on the back of the cart to hold the blankets down. She refused to give up even one blanket. Grandma then walked up to the horse and released the shafts. When she did, the shafts went up in the air and the back end of the cart hit the ground with a

thud, spilling everything on the ground including the eastern woman. Then Grandma told the woman to "get off the place because you are greedy and stingy. We will give you nothing," she said to the woman.

I wonder what kind of game they played?

Jimmy: I would think they played the hand game. Some time ago, some people came here to play hand games against us but it rained and the game was called off.

Charles: Hand game has been played from a long way back. It was played by men and boys. Women played a game called Chi-qwa-coh-nah (equivalent to dice). They also played another game called measuring stick. This game involved throwing sticks at the opposing players. Whoever caught the stick in the middle

or closest to the middle, was declared the winner. There was also another game played by the women. Two small bags were filled with buffalo hair and tied together with a thong leaving the two bags about a foot apart. It was played like hockey and called the testicle game (much laughter).

Jimmy: Our interviewer would be good at such a game.

(more laughter)

Jimmy: How many women played this game?

Charles: Any number of women could play. They had sticks and they passed the two little bags to one another and tried to score. It was like hockey and the little bags looked like testicles. And it was called the testicle game for that reason.

Interviewer: Maybe that is where the white men got the idea when they organized hockey.

Charles: There was one woman long ago who was so good at the game of measuring stick that no one would play against her and people called her Measuring Stick Woman.

Jimmy: My uncle Tee-ohm used to tell a story of a man who lost his breech cloth one day when he was running a race. Do you know the story and who the man was?

Charles: That was Tee-ohm's father and it happened in a horse race. It seems Tee-ohm's father was way ahead and was about to come in first when he suddenly come upon a bunch of women playing measuring stick. The horse shied and threw the rider amongst the women who had lost his breech cloth. Fortunately there was a blanket there which Tee-ohm's father grabbed and wrapped himself in it. Then he ran off and disappeared in some bushes. That was the last the camp saw of him for several moons. It was an embarrassing situation to be in. Tee-ohm's father's name was John Horse.

Jimmy: People in those days had no trouble finding ways to

entertain themselves. There was a game we used to play when we were children. I think it was called the rolling hoop game. I remember we used to have a lot of fun.

(End of Side A, Tape IH-028)

(Side B)

Jimmy: You mentioned people making their own stoves. How did they go about making them? Did they use only mud?

Charles: In making these stoves, people used to mix mud with hay, and stones were used. And the chimney was wood plastered over with mud. These stoves were handy for cooking and also for warming up the house at night. It also lighted up the room.

Jimmy: Was there a school at one time on the other side of where Nee-soot is living on top a small hill? Aye-choo used to tell of going to school there and getting into trouble for drawing buffalo. Once he drew buffalo mating. When the teacher saw this, he told Aye-choo to go home and not to come back. That was the end of his schooling. That is the reason Aye-choo could not speak English.

Charles: A lot of children went to that school. I went to school there with a boy named Os-kee-nee-kees and Ope-sin-now. Gladue Payis and Wee-soo also attended classes there. I forget the names of others who went to that school. White Head and Joe Littlewolf also were there and two brothers who were from Island Lake. Their names were Alex and Morse. Many more went to that school whose names I have forgotten.

Jimmy: Which school was built first? The Anglican or Catholic school?

Charles: The Catholic school was built before the Anglican school. When the school I was attending burned down, I was sent to the new Anglican school as were many other children.

Interviewer: Would you tell us about your grandfather who was hanged for his part in the 1885 troubles. What was his name?

Charles: His name was Apischaskoos.

Interviewer: Little Bear?

Charles: Yes. My grandfather's name was Apischaskoos. He was my mother's father. He was taken by the soldiers or police after the troubles in 1885. My mother used to say he did not kill anyone. He did fire at some but missed. He did not want to kill anyone. Someone standing behind him fired and killed a white man and grandfather got the blame for it. That was why he was hanged. Grandfather, it has been said, was a brave man. As he walked to the scaffold to be hanged, he sang a song. I

know the song. I will sing it for you. (Here Charles sings the death song of his grandfather.)

My grandfather went on many raids in the country of the Blackfeet. On one raid he was with a man named Kah-mah-kay-sees-wit (He is a Fox). Soon after entering Blackfoot country, they spotted some buffalo some distance away. They made their way toward the buffalo and were surprised by Blackfoot hunters who gave chase. Grandfather and He is a Fox ran. Grandfather was a very fast runner and He is a Fox kept falling behind. When this happened, Grandpa would stop and fire at the Blackfoot to slow them down. And He is a Fox would catch up to Grandpa. On and on they ran. Then grandfather noticed his friend was stark naked and his face and chest were covered with blood. He is a Fox had taken his clothes off one at a time as he ran and he threw them away and from running so hard, his nose began to bleed. At last the Blackfeet turned back and went home. Grandpa then made a breech cloth for his friend from some long grass growing nearby. The day was chilly and He is a Fox asked Grandpa to start a camp fire that he may warm up. Grandfather soon had a good fire going and He is a Fox stood by the fire warming himself. Then a gust of wind came up and He is a Fox's breech cloth caught on fire. Now he was in need of clothes as well as medical attention. Grandpa doctored him up as best he could and loaned him some of his clothes and they made their way home. Many old people of long ago knew my grandfather. Once, when I was a young man, I visited friends at Hobbema. One day an old man named Me-kwa-nah-kase asked me who my grandfather was. When I told him he said he was on a raid once when Apischaskoos was in the party.

Interviewer: And then he was hanged?

Charles: Yes. He was hanged. He was not scared. He walked to the gallows singing a song. It is said seven others were hanged at the time. Also he said a few words just before he was hanged and also sang till the trap was sprung. That was the end of my grandfather.

They are buried there at Battleford. I never saw the grave but it is said they are buried beside the river. I do not know the exact spot. They were hanged. Although I did see the fort and some of the buildings.

Interviewer: You can now tell us the story you were going to tell.

Charles: The story was told to me a long time ago by my uncle. His name was Andrew Okemasis. Years ago he used to come to Onion Lake to visit friends. One day he visited me and this is

the story he told me. "Son, I am going to tell about my grandfather who was a very powerful medicine man and a great hunter. His name was Wahsayhoos. Because of his medicine power, Wahsayhoos was a much feared man. When going on a hunt, storekeepers would outfit him. They would give him traps, ammunition and food. He would pay for these goods with fur on

his return. When people killed buffalo, Wahsayhoos would always be given the choice cuts of meat. Now and then some one would give Wahsayhoos a prime pelt. People did this because they were afraid of Wahsayhoos and his bad medicine. One day the Hudson's Bay storekeeper hired some Indians to freight some merchandise away to the north where he had another store. Wahsayhoos was one of the Indians hired by the storekeeper. About this time the storekeeper's son arrived from the east. He had never seen Indians and asked his father if he could go north with the Indians who would be leaving the next morning. His dad said he could go if he so wished. When they were ready to leave the next morning, the storekeeper handed his son a half-gallon of whiskey saying it was for Wahsayhoos and pointed him out to his son. And so the party headed north with the provisions. After camping out many nights, they arrived at their destination. There the storekeeper's son gave Wahsayhoos the half-gallon of whiskey. Wahsayhoos drank and gave some to his friends to drink. They soon had it drunk up and Wahsayhoos asked the boy for more. When he was told there was no more, Wahsayhoos was not pleased. "When we get back to my father's store, I will get you some more," the boy told the old man. But Wahsayhoos was mad as they got ready to go back home. On the way home Wahsayhoos would now and then ask for whiskey and always he got the same answer, "There is no whiskey for you." He was getting madder as they neared the trading post. They were not very far from the store when Wahsayhoos sneaked up behind the storekeeper's son and split his head open with a small axe, killing him instantly. There were policemen at the trading post and they arrested Wahsayhoos and kept him in jail. Sometime later a scaffold was built outside the jail where Wahsayhoos was to be hanged. One morning Wahsayhoos was led to the scaffold to be hanged...."

(End of Side B, Tape IH-028)

(End of Tape)

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