

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: QU'APPELLE AGENCY #4
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: QU'APPELLE AGENCY

INTERVIEW LOCATION: QU'APPELLE AGENCY

TRIBE/NATION: CREE
LANGUAGE: ENGLISH
DATE OF INTERVIEW: JULY 10, 1934
INTERVIEWER: DR. D.G. MANDELBAUM
INTERPRETER: ANDREW GORDON
TRANSCRIBER: HEATHER YAWORSKI
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TAPE NUMBER: IH-DM.17
DISK: TRANSCRIPT DISC #135
PAGES: 5
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Brief discussion of certain marriage taboos.
Informant - Watceu (no meaning)

I met the old man of the Pasqua reserve at Sam Seer's house where we had arranged a meeting. There were four present, all of whom said they were Cree. This reserve as a whole, however, contains a very liberal admixture of Soto. As a matter of fact the old men spoke Soto. The other of the three reserves, the Muscowpetung, is almost pure Soto and I did not visit it.

At the time of the treaty, watceu's father, pas-kwa, "Prairie", was chief. He was a Cree and his father had been ukimau before him, makiesis, "Fox." Fox's father was also a chief called nextcetokihwup, "Many Sitting Eagles." They all were wapucwayauuk. Kakiwistahau was an older brother of makiesis. Pas-kwa was an older brother to okinis.

In Fox's day the wapucwayauuk went east to Winnipeg to trade, north to Fort Pelly, west to Cypress Hills and south to the border. In those days the Sotos travelled with the wapucmayauuk but when they encamped each would take one side of the circle. When it was thought that an enemy was near the Soto chiefs would call their men together.

What he evidently meant by this last statement was that it was when the warriors had to be assembled that tribal grouping stood out most sharply. At other times the differentiation was not very evident. I would not get any band names for the Soto, except that they came from the northeast.

Informant - Sam Seer

This was the oldest of the group, about 70, yet he had no native name since his parents had been converts. He accounts himself a pagan however.

He too spoke what sounded to me like Soto (i.p. kawi for uimoya) but called himself a Cree (kiuistius however, not uehiawuk!) His father was a Cree but his mother was a Soto. Her parents had come down from the Fish Lake region (Fisher River) on the west side of Lake Winnipeg. They migrated because they were attracted by the buffalo of the Plains.

He said that there was much more open prairie than there is now. In his memory, this very region was all open bushless country at the time of the Rebellion in '85, the only wooded part in the whole region being where South Qu'Appelle now is. I have heard this from several informants before and it well may be so. Perhaps the buffalo helped keep the shrub and tree growth down.

I asked him about the Piapot reserve. He said that they were Nehiapwat, "Cree Sioux", who hunted from Cypress Hills south to the boundary. The Cree word for Assiniboines is Opwisima, "Sioux Talk," the Soto word is Asinibwauuk, "Stone People."

I tried then to find out why the name "Rabbit Skins," and the answer surprised me. In Andrew's words, it was because they all belonged to a "brotherhood of the Rabbit" and accounted each other as brother and sister and would not marry each other. Further questioning revealed a strong totemic father sib. concept with exogamous rules. These were observed across tribal lines so that a Cree boy of the Bear gens could not marry a Soto girl of the same gens. The inheritance of the totem was through the father but the offspring could not marry into the mother's totem either.

These restrictions were observed a hundred years ago. The missionaries continually taught these ideas so that (according to the informants) when the treaty was signed the restrictions had already broken down to a considerable extent. Today they are not observed at all. Andrew, a man of 54, had never heard of them.

Some of the totem animals were Bear, Duck, Eagle, Crane, Thunderbird, Rattlesnake. In a camp circle the totem relatives would camp together. There seemed to be no punishment for breaking the exogamous rule except that the names of the pair would be known in every camp. Everywhere they would be pointed out as brother-sister marriage. There were no special rituals or ceremonies attached to each totem. The word for it is uto-tem.

Sam's paternal grandfather was a Cree of the Duck totem. His maternal grandfather was the Owasi (some amphibian creature) totem.

Watceu's father was of the cicikweuw, Rattlesnake totem. Note that if so this makes the whole Rabbit Skin line of chiefs, from makiesis down, members of the Rattlesnake totem.

All the informants were very positive that these totems were possessed by all the Cree. However, men were at liberty to go and come under the leadership of any ukimau regardless of totem affiliation. But all had totems except the halfbreeds. This seems not to invalidate my notions of the loose third organization of the Plains Cree. It seems peculiar that I have not heard of this totem concept heretofore, especially when I

asked Jack Fisher and others about marriage restrictions. There are two possible explanations. One that the concept broke down so long ago that it does not readily come to the mind of the informant. Or else that it was non-existent among the other Cree and cropped up among these because of their close nexus with the Soto. There was no religious connotation to the totem.

My informant at this agency, Andrew Gordon, is quite a remarkable person. He is a halfbreed. His father was a deserter from the U.S. cavalry by the name of Jordan. He married a Soto girl. Andrew accounts himself an Indian and is one of the most prosperous of the Cree. He has a large farm (section and a half) and a large family (eleven).

He has a good vocabulary and seems to be very clever. He is quick to tell you that he is a pagan and hates the clergy, especially the Catholic priests. Andrew gave me a talk on pagan theology. First he put the skids under the Catholic dogma of eternal damnation for a mere span of a few score years of living. Then he ridiculed the fallacy of preaching of a God of mercy in one breath and of a God of vengeance in another. (These are Andrew's own terms.)

According to Christian teaching, Andrew said, the body is responsible for the soul. How ridiculous, that a lowly thing should be responsible for a higher. According to our ancient belief, the body and soul are one and we pray to the Great Spirit to give us long life here and not in some unknown hereafter.

I could not get much out of the older men as to their beliefs.

They said that it was not their custom to talk of these things lest it seem that they were boasting of their spirit power. They said that I could get the information up north where the Indian belief had not been so sorely harrassed by the missionaries.

A few bits of data were: The power of Mamaxtawiyuu, "Medicine Man" is a supernatural gift and cannot be taught. That of Maskikiwiyuu, herb doctor, is handed down from generation to generation.

Before the Sundance, the elders assemble to smoke a pipe and pray. The ceremony is called Pixtwa-wiu and lasts a whole night. The mitewiu is not practised here any more.

I asked them about the arm raising ceremony that Dodds told of. It turns out to be a new religion, which is the familiar

melange of Catholicism and paganism. It started with Patcapic at Moose Mt. They have the symbol of the cross. It is practised at Piapot and Muscowpetung but as yet not on the Paskwa reserve. I must get more information on this. The house in which I worked was Sam's. It was a government structure with a second story. The place was relatively well furnished.

I wrote on a round table; there was a stove in the centre, two beds, a bureau, photographs framed on the wall, a picture of Christ, a sewing machine, flower cans on the window sill.

Three of the men wore braids, Sam and Andrew have their hair cut short. Andrew wore shoes. The others wore beaded moccasins, with the exception of Sam, whose moccasins were decorated with an instep band of horse hair in three colors.

I noted one of the men here as I noted several other Indians, (especially the blind man at Crooked Lake) caressing the arm of the chair with finger play, i.e., following along the lines of the surface with the finger and especially round projections.

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