

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: BOB BLACK PLUME  
FUNCTION OF PIGEON SOCIETY  
OF THE BLOOD INDIAN  
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: BLOOD RESERVE  
CARDSTON, ALBERTA  
INTERVIEW LOCATION: BLOOD RESERVE  
CARDSTON, ALBERTA  
TRIBE/NATION: BLOOD  
LANGUAGE: BLACKFOOT  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: MARCH 3, 1968  
INTERVIEWER: J.C. HELLSON  
INTERPRETER: DAVE MELTING TALLOW  
TRANSCRIBER: JOANNE GREENWOOD  
SOURCE: PROVINCIAL MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES  
OF ALBERTA  
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Describes the functions of the Pigeon Society.  
Joe Gambler: They give each other a share and they pay for them. That's how it is.

Participants: (Indistinct)

John: What I like to, Diane, now there is the sun, the moon and the sun dogs, the next seven stars over there and what's this one in the corner?

Brown Chief Calf: These are also drawn on tipis. The seven stars and the group stars. They are drawn on the ears of the tipi.

Diane: I don't know those stars gathered together. I don't know the name of them.

John: What we'll do... some of the altars I've seen are just cloth but this one is painted.

Diane: He says he saw an altar with just a cloth.

Brown Chief Calf: Yes, I gave him an altar before.

Diane: Yes, these are better.

Bob: How I came to know the history of the Pigeon Society is

when I joined the society. The ones that joined the Pigeon Society are called the Gray Horse Owners. They were my friends. We're all of the same age. Our leader owned the coyote. He wears the coyote on his back and there is the rattle; those two are our leaders.

The two Yellow Pigeons are First Rider and Long Time Crow (Paul Melting Tallow). Those are the Yellow Pigeons. They are next higher in rank.

Then there are the Muddy Mouth Pigeons. They are called the Bear Pigeons, myself (Bob Black Plume), Coming Over the Ridge (Nick Striped Wolf), and Left Unburnt (Emil Good Rider). We have two leaders. One packs a coyote on his back and Star (Dan Chief Moon) and Owns Holy White Horse (Jim White Moon). Star (Dan Chief Moon) took the coyote, a tanned hide. He packs it on his back and Owns Holy White Horse (Jim White Man). Obstinate (Sam Hairy Bull) took the smearing staff. The bundles were transferred to us. The transferal started. The transferal was like a high-class transferal. We paid in every item. We were into the bundles. We took and prayers were said by the grandparent. The grandparent is the one that is going to transfer the bundle. For example, a former member of the

Pigeon Society will transfer the bundle of our leader (Dan Chief Moon), the one that packs the coyote on his back. The rest of the bundles are transferred in the same manner. Besides the Yellow Pigeons and the two leaders there is Crow Spreading His Wings Standing, Bob Tail (Ambrose Shouting in the Middle), Slanted Horn Bull (Joe Young Pine). Wailing in the Bush (Ben Brewer) just joined in with his bundle from the former society into our new society. We didn't reject him. We were glad to have him as our friend.

The Pigeon women were painted. Our transferals were next and they told us that we were to stay at the tipi four days. We didn't go home. We stayed in the tipi four days and four nights. We all took our bedding to the centre tipi. This was at the Sundance. We had our transferals.

After the transferal we all went out in the open to dance. We sat in a circle and we sang some songs. We sang a Pigeon song. We were drumming on our bows using our arrows for drumsticks.

The drummers are Little Weasel Calf, White Calf (Charlie Good Rider) Bear Forearm (Tom Morning Owl) and Red Boy (Billy Heavy Runner), making four drummers.

Our older friends were our drummers. They each had a Pigeon Bundle that were transferred to them, and they sang a song.

SONG, NO WORDS IN THE PIGEON SONG.

At the end of the song we imitate the coos of pigeons. I just sang one song. The singing lasts a little longer. The Bear Pigeons imitate and act like real bears. We all lay down on the ground covering ourselves with our robes. The robes for

the Bear Pigeons are cow hides.

There are three of us. There's Bear Coming Over the Ridge (Nick Striped Wolf), Left Unburnt (Emil Good Rider)... That was the time I got the name Black Plume. The Bear Pigeons are leaders as well. The drummers will start drumming and singing. Then we would get up on our knees and imitate the motions of a bear that is about to charge.

All the little boys and girls stood behind us and as we got up they started throwing things at us, anything that won't hurt us.

SONG, NO WORDS IN THE SONG.

This performance is done four times and we shoot our arrows to the ground. They sang four songs, stopping at the end of every song. We would get up on our knees and perform the same way as we did before.

SONG, NO WORDS IN THE SONG.

Then we would go down again; that's two performances. Okay. When they start singing again we would get up again and perform just like real bears. We would act like as if we were going to charge at somebody.

SONG, NO WORDS IN THE SONG.

Then we would go down again. Every time we are up to perform the little children would throw something at us and we would act like as if we are going to charge like a real bear. And the fourth song.

SONG, NO WORDS IN THE SONG.

They stop singing. We all got up and started to dance, imitating a bear, aiming our arrows in all directions. Then the rest of the Pigeons will get up and dance too.

We all started dancing westward where the sun sets. We did our performance inside of the circle encampment. There was a big crowd; people wanted to see us. This was early in the morning before the sun rose over the horizon. The first dance was right after the transferal. The second dance was early in the morning. So we started dancing.

SONG, NO WORDS IN SONG.

We chased the Pigeons. We were dancing behind them aiming our arrows at them. We danced in a hopping-like manner.

The owner of the rattle and the owner of the coyote were just walking behind us, and when these two make a round about turn we would all turn around and start dancing in the direction where we started from. The owner of the rattle and the owner

of the coyote, if these two should never make a round about turn we would keep on dancing, even if we have to dance ten miles before they make a turn. These two are the leaders in dancing. When they turn around we would all turn around too and start dancing in the opposite direction. We will dance

four times one way and four times the other way and then we would sit down. There is no other dancing song. The same dancing song is sung all the time.

SONG, NO WORDS IN SONG.

After we have danced four times we would all sit down. We never slept for three nights. We would sit up all night in our tipi. We would pray now and then and telling jokes and enjoy ourselves. On the third day we came out to dance.

SONG, NO WORDS IN SONG.

After we had finished dancing we all sat down and the Horns came out to dance. Big Sorrel Horse had the Swan Staff that time. These Horn Society members are called the High Hats. The Horns were dancing and us Pigeons we were dancing too. They had their dance in front of their tipi like they always do. After the Horns sat down a whole beef was brought to the centre. It was cut in four quarters. The Horns were going to feed this to the people. The meat wasn't cut yet into small pieces. They unloaded the beef. After the beef was unloaded Little Weasel Calf told us, "Now you will go and snatch some of that meat. Take whatever you think is the best part of the meat. If anybody tries to hold you back the Bear Pigeons will shoot the man that is trying to stop you from snatching some of the meat."

We use the blunt arrows for shooting, not the sharp arrows. So we got up. We went first, us Bear Pigeons. There were three of us, me (Bob Black Plume) and Bear Coming Over the Ridge (Nick Striped Wolf) and Left Unburnt (Emil Good Rider). The two Yellow Pigeons followed us and the owner of the smearing staff\* followed behind the Yellow Pigeons. The smearing staff is also used as a weapon. If anybody refuses to give us the food that we wanted to snatch, the food will be smeared with the smearing staff and the food will have to be disposed of because it will not be fit for eating.

We got up and our older friend, Little Weasel Calf was encouraging us to go to the Horns. We respect the Horn Society and we think that they are holy. A non-member of the Horn Society cannot just walk up to the Horns while they are performing. If a non-member should walk up to the Horns,

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\*This staff is used to encourage slow dancers to keep up or move faster. The staff has a wad of cloth on the end and human excrement is applied to the wad of cloth.

misfortune will come to him. That's what will happen to a non-Horn Society member.

We got up and started walking. I felt shy. I thought, "What if I get hit across the face with a stick." They say if you want to refuse a Muddy Mouth (Bear) you will hit him with a stick across the face. So we started. The Horns had their tipi pitched in the centre of the circle encampment. I went around the other way. I was a crazy guy. That time I was leading the others. I had no shame. Our friend told us, "Just take what you want." They were unloading the beef. We walked up to them and my partners told me, "Which part shall we take?" I told them, "We will take this hindquarter." The Horn members were just watching us.

There was Wolf Child and Chief Owl, his other name is Big Sorrel Horse; he owned the Swan Staff. These two men were the leaders of the Horn Society. The Horn members stood in a circle while the beef was being unloaded. I walked up to them and I took the hindquarter. I grabbed it by the joint. I told my partners to lift it and when they did I let go of my hold. So we started walking, following the way the sun goes from the east to the west.

We went back to the Pigeons. As we left, the Horns said, "Those damn Pigeons." The Horns couldn't stop us and they knew the rules of the Pigeons. It is known that a Pigeon will snatch food; that's how we snatched. We carried the hindquarter to our tipi. We went back to our places and we sat down. Little Weasel Calf and Forearm said, "That is the way to snatch food." White Calf (Charlie Good Rider), Red Boy (Billy Heavy Runner), these four were our older friends. They give us orders and advice. They knew the rules of the Pigeons. After we sat down the drummers started singing.

As we sat down a Blackfoot Indian approached us. His name was Maniac. He told us, "That is not the way the Pigeons dance. I will show you the way the Pigeons dance."

After he had spoken he sang and danced away. His back was curved like the letter "U". He was looking at his back. He was dancing one way and then the other way. He was dancing real hard and he had his robe over his arm. He was teaching me how to dance. He wasn't even looking where he was dancing. He was just looking back over his shoulder. He told us, "That is

how the Pigeons dance." We were waiting and watching him while he was dancing. When he walked away from the centre the drummers started singing.

SONG, NO WORDS IN THE SONG.

We dance westward and we're always watching the man that owns the rattle. When he turns around we'd all turn around too and dance the other way.

If the owner of the rattle and the owner of the coyote never turn around we will keep on dancing in one direction. All the boys danced in the same manner as the Blackfoot Indian taught them how to dance. They were not even looking where they're dancing. They were all looking back over their shoulders.

We had fun. We enjoyed ourselves. We laughed. We had a great time after Maniac had taught us how to dance. Maniac is a Blackfoot Indian. So we sat down and we sang a song.

SONG, NO WORDS IN THE SONG.

This is going to be our fourth dance. After the dance we will go and attend to the meat that we snatched from the Horns. The drummers started singing.

SONG, NO WORDS IN THE SONG.

We didn't sit down. We all went to our tipi. We all went to our tipi. We all went inside. The meat was all cut up and rationed out amongst us by the two Yellow Pigeon members. We danced for four nights but we didn't dance steady. Sometimes we would sit and pray. We danced out in the open and after our dance we went back into the tipi. We sat down. We didn't do anything. Sometimes we would pray. When night came we sang some songs; the same song that we sang before.

SONG, NO WORDS IN SONG.

That is all.

Participant: The transferal took place at the Sundance.

Bob: Yes, that's where we had our transferals.

Participant: The only time you perform is at the Sundance.

Bob: Yes, that is the only time when we perform is at the Sundance.

Participant: Did you perform at any other Sundance?

Mrs. Black Plume: No.

Bob: The only time we danced was after the transferal. Our older friends were not very interested in the society. We still can dance if we wanted to at the next Sundance. We could do it.

Participant: I guess the only time is at the Sundance.

John: Bob is a member.

Participant: You are a member.

Bob: Yes, a bundle was transferred to me. I think Mrs. Amy White Man has still got the rattle. The owner of the rattle is

dead, but if the rattle is still at his home I could take it.

Participant: Who owned the rattle?

Bob: Owns Holy White Horse (Jim White Man).

Participant: When did you join the Pigeons?

Bob: It's a long time ago -- I don't remember the year. Is long ago; it must have been forty years ago.

Mrs. Black Plume: Forty years ago.

John: When did they last dance, the Pigeons, the last Sundance?

Participant: When was the last dance the Pigeons had?

Bob: The first and last dance we had was after the transferal and we never had a dance after that.

Participant: Just once?

Bob: Yes, just once. Our leaders were supposed to keep us formed but they didn't care.

John: The Blackfoot had it at Gleichen? Sichike. (Blackfoot).

Participant: Did the Pigeon Society come from the Blackfoot?

Bob: Yes, that's where it came from. It was transferred to here. That is why Maniac knew how to dance the Pigeon Dance.

The Pigeon Society came from the Blackfoot Reserve. The Bloods asked for the Pigeon Society to be transferred to them and the Pigeon Society was transferred to the Blood Indians.

Participant: Yes, that's where it came from, the Blackfoot.

#### INDEX

INDEX TERM	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
BUNDLES				
-transfer of	IH-AA.044	PIGEONSOCTY	50	3,7
SOCIETIES				
-Horn Society (Blood)	IH-AA.044	PIGEONSOCTY	50	5,6
SOCIETIES				
-Pigeon Society (Blood)	IH-AA.044	PIGEONSOCTY	50	2-9